

[MUSIC PLAYING]

SANA AIYAR:

Hello, and welcome to the Starr Forum. I'm Sana Aiyar, Associate Professor of History at MIT, and I will be moderating this webinar today. In November last year, while here in America all eyes were on the US presidential elections, the National League for Democracy, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won the national parliamentary elections in Myanmar in a landslide victory. Almost immediately, the Burmese military-- Tatmadaw, as it's called-- began to question the legitimacy of the elections, accusing the NLD of election fraud.

On the 1st of February, just as the new parliamentary session was about to open, the military affected a coup, detaining Aung San Suu Kyi, declaring a year-long emergency, and arresting a number of NLD MPs. Since early February, pro-democracy activists and anti-military protesters have been in public confrontation with the military. The military has been violently trying to shut down protests, which show no sign of abating. More than 700 civilians have been killed, and 3,000 have been detained.

To help us understand the challenges of democratization in Myanmar, the authoritarian hold of the Tatmadaw, and the resulting refugee crisis, we are joined today by a panel of experts and practitioners, who I'd like to briefly introduce in the order in which they will be speaking. We will first hear from Jonathan Saha, Associate Professor of History at Durham University in the United Kingdom. Professor Saha is a historian of British imperialism in Burma in the 19th and 20th centuries.

His first book, *Law, Disorder and the Colonial State, Corruption in Burma circa 1900*, was published in 2013. His second book, *Colonizing Animals-- Interspecies Empire in Myanmar*, is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press and will be published by the end of this year or early next year. Professor Saha has been among several academics in the UK and the US who have been amplifying voices of the protesters and activists of the civil disobedience movement on the ground in Myanmar today. He will help us excavate the past and the present by bringing a historical perspective to the crisis.

Next, we'll hear from U Harn Yawngwe, founder and executive director of the Euro-Burma Office, an organization established in 1997 to fund ethnic and civil society organizations that have been mobilizing to demand rights for a number of minority groups in Burma. Having spent almost half a century in exile in Canada for his advocacy and the support of ethnic rights groups in Burma, U Yawngwe has been involved in peace negotiations with the government to end armed civil conflict in the country. He brings to this panel decades of experience in protest in exile and in conflict resolution to reflect on the successes and failures of negotiating with democratic and military regimes.

The National League for Democracy formed a democratic government in Myanmar in 2015. This was a hard-won victory after decades of military rule. But the limits of this victory, the challenges of democratization, and the continuing power of the Tatmadaw became visible in 2017, when the military perpetrated what the International Court of Justice at the Hague has called a genocide against the Rohingya in the Rakhine State. Since then, more than 800,000 Rohingya refugees have fled their homeland.

Speaking from the perspective of the Rohingya, our next speaker represents a new generation of activists. Miss Yasmin Ullah was born in the North Rakhine State. Her family fled Myanmar for Thailand in 1995 when she was just a child. Miss Ullah is a Rohingya social justice activist and has served as president of the Rohingya Human Rights Network, an advocacy group based in Canada, where she has been living since 2011.

She has written extensively in the international media, including in her advocacy for the Rohingya, other persecuted groups in Myanmar, including the Kachin, Shan, and Karen. Miss Ullah is also a poet, and I wanted to share with you a poignant quote from her poem titled "The Unfamiliar Home." She writes, I quote, "I keep missing a place I barely know," end quote.

When Miss Ullah left her homeland in 1995, it was during the NLD's tenure that the largest number of Rohingya were violently pushed out of Myanmar by the military. They are currently residing in refugee camps in Bangladesh and India. Since the coup in February, Myanmar refugees have been crossing the over 900-mile long border Burma shares with India.

A final speaker today is Ambassador Gautam Mukhopadhyaya, who will address the regional dimension of the crisis in Myanmar from the South Asian perspective. Ambassador Mukhopadhyaya has had a long career in the Indian Foreign Services and served as India's ambassador to Syria, Afghanistan, and Myanmar, where he was hosted between 2013 and 2016. He is currently a senior visiting fellow at the Center for Policy Research in New Delhi.

After we hear from our panelists, we will take questions from the audience. Please use the Q&A tab to enter your questions and comments. So let's begin. Professor Saha, the floor is yours.

JONATHAN SAHA: Thank you, Sana, for that introduction, and thank you, everyone, for coming along today. I'm going to give a quite general historical overview of Myanmar over the last 150 years to provide some longer historical context, but not-- I hasten to add-- not to reduce the current events to its historical precedents. We're in a moment with Myanmar where history is still very much in process, and what's going to unfold and happen is still up for grabs. The future is very much up for grabs. And so I don't want anything that I've said to sound like it's limiting the scope of what's happening there or of the possibilities that could come out of the current moment.

What I'd rather do is identify two traditions which are present in our current moment, two contrary traditions. One is a long tradition of liberatory popular politics in Myanmar, and the second is a longer tradition of repressive military counterinsurgency. And whilst you may be able to trace these things further back than I will today, I'm going to start with 1885 and the incorporation of what remained of the independent Burmese Empire ruled by the Konbaung dynasty into British India. And in the very inception of British rule in Myanmar, you can see these two traditions emerge.

You had, almost immediately from the fall of the final Burmese dynasty, a widespread uprising against British rule that started off in the heartland of the former empire and spread down to the delta and eventually out as well into the ethnic minority areas, as they're often referred to today, and lasted for more than a decade, and in some of those parts of the country, such as the Shan States, remained in some form of conflict with British rule up until the early 20th century.

The way that the British responded to this started a pattern of repression that we can trace through to today, which was through military crackdowns and using collective punishments and extrajudicial killings as a way of establishing their authority, as well as putting in place a set of quite restrictive legal apparatus that was lifted largely from their experiences in British India. And in fact, the Indian Penal Code was directly moved over into Myanmar and still serves as the basis for much of the restrictive legislation that is being used to combat the democracy movement in Myanmar today.

So those traditions continue through the early 20th century, particularly in the 1920s, '30s, and '40s. But the Burmese movement for independence really took off from the 1920s onwards and was launched in large part by student politics. Now, this remains an element of that liberatory popular politics, that first tradition which I identified. And this student politics was oriented towards getting greater range of freedoms for Burmese politicians, Burmese nationalists in that time, as well as trying to get more freedoms for students and educators to be able to learn beyond the strictures of what the colonial regime wanted them to.

This time period also saw a rise in workers movements, particularly trade union-led workers movements, that really particularly took off in the 1930s and a series of strike waves in the early and late 1930s that brought a number of imperial companies almost to their knees in how they were operating. And it required the power of the state to come and break those strikes, as it did the power of the state to come in often onto campuses and break the student movements.

Parallel to some of these things happening, although not fully connected to them, was a peasant uprising in 1930, often referred to as the Saya San Rebellion, which was a huge rebellion that's at its highest point was impacting nearly every division of Myanmar. And as with the rebellions that came with the initial colonization of Myanmar, this touched as well the ethnic minority regions and in the border worlds of Myanmar.

Now, all of this-- if we're going to give it a broad brush title-- all of this anti-colonial politics was tarnished and materially limited by tendencies within it which were racist or xenophobic and exclusionary, often directed towards Indian populations, but also in an organic confusion of colonial categories, also towards the Muslim population of the country, not all of which were Indian. And indeed, many of those who were identified as Indian ascriptively may have been living in the country for generations.

So that's a sort of limited liberatory politics which emerges in the early 20th century. State repression was also something that was really sort of developed. There was a tendency with which the colonial states treated the population as a set of enemies, of common enemies. So I've talked already about the repressive laws, which entailed also censorship and sweeping police powers.

But during the Saya San Rebellion I mentioned before, the military were called in in order to suppress that revolt. Indeed, the colonial regime in Myanmar tried to get martial law imposed and requested the use of the air force in order to restore order. Those things were denied by the government in India, but that was the attitude that the government in Burma took to it. And they used collective punishments and-- I think what I want to pick up on particularly-- terror tactics to try and suppress that particular movement, in this case using decapitations as a way of trying to scare the populace from joining with the rebels.

So in 1940s, you do see something of a shift caused by the Second World War. And that shift is partly to do with a destruction, really, of the state's capacity. So the British retreats following a Japanese invasion from 1942, and they leave with something of a scorched Earth policy. And so they don't want to leave anything to the incoming Japanese forces. The Japanese rule for two years before the British try to reoccupy.

But in truth, by that point, their authority in most of the country is never really reestablished. And in the vacuum that is left, you have an emergence of a variety of different armies. Now, these armies were forged really in, first of all, the fall of the British, where a small number of Burmese nationalists joined with the Japanese to establish a Burmese army that could push the British out, but then also in resistance to the Japanese, in ethnic minority areas in particular, with support from the British and other allies establishing their own armies to resist the Japanese occupation.

Now, when the Burmese nationalists turn on the Japanese, and those Burmese armies join with those ethnic minority armies, and with the British and other allies again, you get a brief period of time where there is a joint collaborative effort in trying to establish a new regime in Myanmar, particularly as it starts to seem that British rule in the country is not going to be a long-term picture. Now, that collaboration, that cross-community collaboration, is never fully realized. It doesn't manage to bring on all the ethnic minority groups within the country. But it is something of a high point in the country's history, of that cross-community attempt to unify the country in bringing about a more democratic regime.

The regime that does emerge from 1948 when the British do leave is hamstrung from the very start by civil wars, by its own lack of legitimacy, and its own lack of capacity to actually govern large parts of the country. And so this period of democracy is in many ways never materially realized in people's lives. And an obsession that continues through of governments within Central Myanmar of holding all of the country to a unified state structure is also something that hamstrings this government in terms of its legitimacy.

Those traditions I talked about of liberatory popular politics and repressive military counterinsurgency are still sort of present in this time. But those politics are also quite dispersed, distributed-- what's the right word?-- fractured at this moment. And military capacity of the state is also weakened. And these things start to change from the late '50s and particularly from the '60s.

In 1958, you have the first military coup, which leads to a two-year caretaker government under the rule of Ne Win. But the return to civilian government does not last long after 1960. And a one-party state is established by Ne Win from 1962, which runs on until the '80s.

Now, this is not taken without protest. You have resistance, again, led by students, workers, peasants, and ethnic minority groups, although not always operating in concert. And then you have moments of outbreaks of rebellion again happening in 1975, and again at a greater extent in 1988. And in these moments, you have a wider coming together of a variety of liberatory movements, including in the ethnic minority areas, and, again, aligned with students and, to a lesser extent in these periods of times but still importantly, workers. And these movements are crushed with brutal state repression, operating on along many of the same lines that I indicated the colonial regime.

The fallout of the '88 revolution was the collapse of Ne Win's regime, but, unfortunately, a return to military rule after a promised Democratic transition did not happen. The '90s saw continued resistance, but the scale of state repression suffocated any major mass movement happening during that time period.

The northeast saw a shift in the military's assessment of how it saw itself and how it wanted to restructure the constitution. And there was another uprising in 2007, which some people may remember being referred to as the Saffron Revolution, which was a monk-led uprising that, again, was crushed by the military. But quickly following on the heels of it was the 2008 Constitution, and from 2010, a disciplined democracy, as they like to see it, which offered limited democratic participation and a constitution that was heavily weighted to the military remaining in key elements of power.

But it did open up an element of civil space that had two sides to it, both a space in which racism and xenophobic sentiments were popularly expressed, particularly around the Rohingya genocide, but also a space in which brave, critical voices for more inclusive politics could emerge and be heard and trade unions could operate. And it is on that basis, that growing, more inclusive political liberatory movements, that have been at the forefront of the resistance to the 2021 coup.

And this is where I think these traditions that I've spoke about have become more marked. The liberatory movements, I think, are more liberatory and more inclusive than they ever have been. And it looks more like the foundations of a social revolution in Myanmar. You've got LGBTQ+ actors, women's movements, youth and ethnic minority areas pushing them beyond where they've previously worked in relation with the military.

But at the same time, the state repression has taken a harder form than it has done in many previous regimes. And it remains to be seen exactly how that is going to play out. But there is a lot of hope, at least in my heart, that this liberatory politics that has emerged signals a significant change in Burmese politics. So I'm going to finish there. I hope I haven't run on too long.

SANA AIYAR: Thank you so much, Professor Saha. That was really a wonderful broad, sweeping overview of these-- it's very helpful, the way in which you identified these two traditions of liberatory popular politics and repressive military counterinsurgencies. And I did wonder about a third tradition of the politics of religion, and perhaps we can return to that in the Q&A. We'll next hear from U Harn Yawnghwe.

HARN YAWNGHWE: Thank you. Thank you for inviting me to participate. And I also want to thank Jonathan for doing a very good job on a very difficult subject, trying to bring everything together. But I am from the minority Shan group, so I would like to bring in a different perspective to the history, because generally, people think of Burma or Myanmar as one nation. And Burma has actually been only one nation from 1948, or about 70 years ago.

Prior to that, for centuries, we had competing civilizations or kingdoms. Some came from China. Some came from India, Tibet. And some came from the Mon-Khmer tradition. So Burma has sort of been a conflict area for many hundreds of years. And that is also at the basis of the current struggle, so I just wanted to flag that.

And the competition amongst the different kingdoms and civilizations ended in the 19th century, when the British came. So in a sense, they stopped one conflict but then created a different kind of conflict. And both of these conflicts are continuing today. That's why it's so complicated to try to come up with any solution for Burma.

And I would like to say that the repression-- yes, the colonial movement actually introduced a lot of that. But I think we cannot ignore the fact that when the independence movement started, the Burmese Independence Army was actually trained by the Japanese Imperial Army. And we have also seen how the Japanese Imperial Army behaved in China. We know about the Nanking Massacre, all the other atrocities.

And very much today, a lot of the Tatmadaw, the military's, tactics, traditional strategies are based on that training. They have continued. General Ne Win was one of those trained by the Japanese Imperial Army. So I think that is another factor to be thought about.

And Jonathan was very kind to say that there was this ethnic joint effort with the majority to try to form a new nation in 1947. But he didn't touch-- he didn't want to touch on-- why, the why. Actually, what happened before independence in 1947 was the Panglong Conference. And they came up with the Panglong Agreement, which actually called for equality amongst the different states in Burma and to form a federal union. That was the concept.

That did not happen at independence. And what happened instead was to Bamar majority treated the other components of the union as their colony. And I think that is another base-- because they have learnt the lesson from the British, and they will carry out the same policy, but with the other ethnic people. So that is where the conflict started. Since independence, there has never been any peace in Myanmar.

And just to touch on the fact about the Muslims and the Rohingya-- well, the thing is that the Burmese independence, yes, there is prejudice against the Indian or the South Asian continent. But without the participation of the Indians and the Muslims in Myanmar, we could never have had independence. They were part and parcel of the independence movement. Actually, every year, there is the Martyrs' Day celebration that includes the Muslims too. But everybody has forgotten that. So anyway, I just wanted to bring that up.

And after independence, another complicating factor was that, not only was this problem with colonization and resentment and resistance from the ethnic people, but the Communist Party of Burma declared that the independence they got from the British was not violent. So they launch a revolution. So on top of all the other conflicts, we have this communist revolution, which actually continued until 1989, when the Communist Party itself collapsed. So we have all these conflicts one layer on top of the other, and different interests, different patterns, which really makes the situation very complex and unpredictable in Burma.

Then on top of that, after the military took over in 1962, the problem internationally was that we had the Cold War going on. And actually, the West welcomed General Ne Win and his military dictatorship because they saw that as a great defense against communism. So when we were trying to promote democracy in the '60s, '70s, '80s-- nothing. Nothing.

We couldn't get anywhere until, I would say, the '90s, because in 1989, you had the Tiananmen Square uprising in China. You had the end of the Cold War. And you had the end of apartheid in South Africa. All of that really helped us in the movement for democracy in Myanmar.

But it is hard to imagine today, since we have so much going on in social media, internet, everything. But in those days, one of the hardest things for us was information. How do we get information from what is happening in the ground? How do we disseminate that information to develop a movement? How do we get the international community to change their mind? We now knew that democracy was on the rise after the end of the Cold War, but we needed to find a way to consolidate, to make use of that.

And one of the biggest advantages we had was we were able to set up the Democratic Voice of Burma radio in Norway. And that became the key instrument for disseminating information, keeping people in touch, giving the people of Burma information about democracy, training, trying to provide training online, and getting people ready for transition back to democracy.

And although I do not support the military, and I've been fighting them my whole life, the opening in 2011 was really, very, I would say, helpful. And that opening did not come about because we are so strong or because the sanctions were so effective. But it came about because the military themselves saw that they were being limited. They couldn't continue. The economy couldn't continue to grow if they didn't change. They wanted to be accepted in the international community, but they couldn't because people saw them as this military regime.

So they actually introduced the transition to democracy. Yes, they said it was a transition to a disciplined democracy. And they were still going to be in control. The military had 25% seats in the parliament. And they also had this party called the Union Solidarity Development Party, USDP. The idea was that you have 25% military, and the USDP would win at least 25% of the seats. So you have at least 50%. Then you are in control.

On top of that, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Defense, and Ministry of Border Security were all under the military. It was not under the president. So they had a number of safeguards.

But to my surprise, I was invited back in 2011. To my surprise, they really went ahead with the reforms. They went ahead with three different reforms. One was economic reform from a command economy to an open economy. The peace process went, instead of trying to put down the ethnic armies by force, they would use negotiations. And a third was the democratic transition.

And one of the biggest benefits we got from that democratic transition was what we have today. It used to be that to get a SIM card, you had to pay \$1,000. Now, who can afford that? Nobody. When I was invited back, I needed it. But by then, the price had come down to \$500 a SIM card. I paid it.

But today, before all this happened, do you know how much it costs to get a SIM card? \$1. That really is what is fueling the civil disobedience movement today. Everybody can afford it. Everybody can afford a phone. And that was a really, really great thing that happened.

Then in 2016, when the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi came to power, we were all very hopeful. I was very happy. I thought, this is it. We have been working for this moment. And now we can really implement democratic change. Unfortunately, it did not happen.

One of the key things that did not happen was, instead of doing away with repressive laws that were created by the British and other repressive governments, the NLD kept all of them. And on top of that, they said everything has to be done according to the law. So when you have repressive laws and you say you have to do everything according to the law, well, what do you get? It was really bad, in the sense that press freedom became even more restricted. Political parties were restricted.

Civil society organizations were restricted. Under the previous regime, civil society could function without any registration, without asking for permission, everything. But with the democratic regime, you had to be registered, or you're not legal. Secondly, you have to get permits to have rallies or meetings. That became very bad. So in a sense, the democratization stopped five years ago.

And that is also another problem for the democracy movement right now, because are we demonstrating to bring back the NLD? Nobody wants the military. But what are we demonstrating for? What do we want? People are not saying, we want the military, but they're also not saying, we want the NLD. They want something better.

Now, they have never tasted freedom until 10 years ago, and they don't want to give that up. That is very clear. And that is something-- the difficulty now, of course, is you have the military on one side. You have the CRPH, which is the committee representing the NLD competing as the government. And you have the civil disobedience movement, which is neither, really.

And then you have the ethnic armies. Now, they were in the process of negotiating peace, and everything is suspended now. What happens? Do they join one side or the other? But neither has given them what they want. So what do you do?

So everything is in limbo at the moment. And the outcome, as far as I can see, whether the military wins or loses is not good. Because if the military wins, it means they would have cut down all the democratic institutions, all the energy of the people that really were wanting democracy.

That would have used such repression that the military won't be able to leave within a year. To leave within a year after killing everybody, they would endanger themselves. So it means at least another 5 years, 5 to 10 years, of military rule, which is not what we want at all. We would like to go back to some kind of a transition.

But if the military loses, what happens? The military will not lose. It is a very strong institution. It is actually a state within a state in Myanmar. And they have everything. But if the military were to lose, it means the military will have to split into different factions. It would have to fight each other.

So on top of the civil disobedience movement, where you have localized civil defense forces, you will have different armies, and you have the ethnic armies, who will also try to get more territory. And you will have a really terrible situation, chaotic. And will the neighbors sit back and just watch? I don't think so. So we will have a Syria-like situation, where you have so many different international actors intervening.

And out of the 21 million population, 600,000 have already been killed. 800 million are internally displaced. 5 million refugees in different countries. Is that what we want? Definitely, I don't want that, and I don't want the military back in power either. So what is the option?

And that is the dilemma for everybody right now. What do we do? What can be done? And right now, as far as I know, the different ethnic armed groups that have been engaged in the peace process are saying, can we try to use the peace process? Because the peace process was not meant for the ethnic armies alone. It was meant for the country as a whole. And they actually agree that in the 10 years of negotiations that the solution for Burma should be a federal, democratic nation.

OK, how do we do that? But the thing is to use the principle of the nationwide ceasefire agreement, because the principle there is that you don't solve political problems with force, by force. You solve it through negotiation. So how do you bring the different factions in Myanmar to the table?

That is the key question, and that is the key problem right now, because the military thinks, we will crush everybody. And the resistance is saying, we will get rid of the army. We don't want them. So can you do it? What will happen to the country? So let's hope that there will be a more positive way out, that somehow we can get negotiations going. Thank you.

SANA AIYAR:

Thank you very much, Harn, for that. And I really appreciated your bringing together the internal conflicts as well as the international context within which we have to place the current crisis in Myanmar. And in a way, the solution is also going to be both internal as well as global and international. I was really struck by what you pointed out, this idea of disciplined democracy, which has within it a sense that, well, dissent will be treated as indiscipline and therefore punished, and that we see that in even the making of that democratization process.

But as you said towards the end, really, the federal solution, federalism, means acknowledging diversity and finding solutions that are inclusive. And certainly, I think the information revolution and social media that has been at the forefront of the current civil disobedience movement in a way is stunning to that in sort of bringing in not just the contemporary protest against the coup, the February coup, but also being very thoughtful about including the rights movements that have proceeded that.

And in a way, this sets us up very nicely. Your comments really set us up nicely to bring in Miss Yasmin Ullah. Belated Eid Mubarak to you. And please, go ahead.

YASMIN ULLAH:

Thank you very much for the summary. And thank you very much for your kind introduction earlier. And I would like to thank the organizer for actually inviting me to join this very, very important conversation.

I would like to bounce off of what U Harn had mentioned earlier about the uncertainty that is very much felt across the country, and perhaps all over the world, in terms of people in the diaspora of various different ethnic communities. The uncertainty, I think, had been the theme of our lives for a very long time, at least for those in the ethnic areas that have been subjected to violence and various human rights abuses.

So there are different challenges that Rohingya have faced, but it could be summarized into two things. First is that Rohingya have been basically subjected to the disempowerment within the community, and that is through various different disempowering tactics by the military. And then those same tactics have been reproduced in a larger political landscape of the country. We also have issues around actualizing our self-determination.

And these two challenges that Rohingya community face becomes the frame of the human rights violations that not only applies to the Rohingya situation, but it also extend to the wider population in the country as well. And as the previous panelists have already mentioned, the military strategy has been divide and conquer all along. And it's rooted in the legacy of the colonial history. But the key factor is accumulation by dispossession. And those are not only to displace people, but instill fears in the communities, in various different communities in Myanmar, so that the military institution can embolden itself and then establish the supreme power of the land.

Now, most of these dispossessions have been taking place in areas that are framed as basically having more ethnic conflicts. And those conflicts can be convoluted from time to time because of the power dynamic. Now, for Rohingya specifically, a very, very important document or very important legislation that embody the disempowering tactic is the 1982 Citizenship Law.

And basically what it did was not only stripping us of citizenship or marginalizing us or making us foreign to our own homeland. But it is a document that actually strip us off of the rights to own land, which becomes a really, really important and recurrent theme within the tactics that have been employed by the military.

And in the massacre, in the crisis of 2011 and '12, and then the genocidal acts, the clearance operation, the military campaign in 2017, these are clear campaigns of sexual- and gender-based violence specific in order to subdue the community and instilling fear within the community, so that the institution would then succeeded in forcing the idea of displacement deep within us, for us to not be able to, first of all, leave our homes, and then not being able to come back because of the fear of retaliation or the fear that the same crimes, the same violations, would then happen again.

And that has a lot of gender-specific elements, because women are basically the carrier of trauma within the family and the gender dynamics within the community as the result of some of the military's tactic of basically instilling fear and intimidation within the community, but very, very specifically attacking women and girls so that the community remains fearful of what the military is capable of. And then these are very, very successful tactics that have been able to force us to leave the country, some of us continuously displaced within our own country in the internment camps. And this also sort of chipped away at the family values and the sense of community within the context of the Rohingya community and other ethnic communities as well.

Now, the 2017-- specifically 2017-- clearance operation, this all happened under an existence of the civilian government. And the leadership unfortunately had compromised. And I'm not saying this, in a sense, to be critical, that the NLD has any other options or had any other options at that point in time. The compromise might have seemed viable in eventually pushing out the military from the power.

But unfortunately, that same compromise had caused and actually had made the NLD, or the civilian government, a shield to the widespread of the human rights violations. And that shield also emboldened the culture of impunity within the country down the path. And as foreign investments were coming in, the democratic transition was becoming inflated and basically used as a front to every other human rights violations that have been going on in the country.

And so in order to understand these tactics or the challenges that Rohingya face and have faced for 70 years, we have to look at why it is so important that the military continuously disempower us and ensure that we do not have-- not only that our existence is questioned. But also, it continuously enforces the idea that Rohingya should not be able to actualize their own will or being able to actualize our self-determination. All of this comes back to the economic incentives. But it also goes deeper into the ideologies of the country.

Now, since the country reopened a decade ago, the neoliberalism and the capitalist system have basically been framed as the only way for democracy to be established, for the country to transition well into democracy. There is a piece of writing, a paper, on cultural relativism that Adamantia Pollis had written on the repressive regimes. She wrote that the repressive regimes contend that the cultural distinctiveness of their values differ from those in the West necessitate different standards.

So this is a very clear example of how the NLD government kept insisting on the narratives that the world does not really understand the complicated situation within Myanmar whenever concerns about human rights violations or abuses come up. And that is extremely-- basically, that's the embodiment of what happened in the Rohingya case.

Any time that a concern is raised about-- especially the 2017 clearance operation-- every single time, the narratives of like, oh, no, this is a conflict between two ethnic communities, or it's terrorism, or it's issues around illegal immigration of the people. We don't really have Rohingya here. You don't really know history well. All of these become repeated and reproduced over and over, because there's still this ideology that basically transcend the transition itself.

And Pollis further adds that the strong state's impact on human rights is of no concern. Economic growth is the highest good, while the negative economic effects on sectors of the population and the impact on life and security is not a consideration. So neoliberal democracies have been extremely particular about what is a priority and what is not.

So ideologies like this had made it possible for narratives or for folk devils or moral panic around threats of foreign entity, Islamophobia, and many other kind of prejudice and discrimination to flourish within the country, especially because many structural issues go unnoticed or go unresolved, even during the NLD reign. And critical thinking is not encouraged. So when it comes to Rohingya, it is much easier to marginalize us as the people whom the military junta erased and ensured the erasure of our cultural identity that would then tie us back to the larger Burmese culture.

This democratization process did not take into account the racial and ethnic divide-- sorry, the democratization process of the last 10 years. And it also ignored the layers and hierarchical structures within Myanmar that had been caused by years of disempowering tactics and the assurance of the military institution to remain in power, unchallenged and invincible.

So what would be the most challenging for the Rohingya to be included? Would be the challenge for the Rohingya to be included back to the table. After suffering all of these various different human rights violations and years of erasure, how do we go back to become part of Myanmar again?

I think that the answer is very much in educating people. But also, the education part would have to come after we weed out all of these different structural issues, the racial divides or the erasure that have been worked into the system and have been well established through the social hierarchy of the military, of the gender dynamics, of racism, Islamophobia, homophobia, all of these different issues that Myanmar is facing.

And it is through abolishing these ideologies, the very same ideologies that put us in this situation in the first place. And as I fortunately have been working more with different young people from within Myanmar to build alliance, I noticed that it was becoming more and more acceptable and more welcomed by young people to focus on building solidarity and understanding that we all have a common ground-- especially in the ethnic areas, specifically, to say this, that a lot of young people from ethnic areas understand that we have all undergone these heinous crimes and the destabilization of the community for the military to remain in power. And so in trying to undo the divide, we would then have to come together.

But the challenge is coming together and understanding that it is not just in the perception of unity that the democratization process will succeed, but in actually listening and having serious, serious dialogue and extremely difficult conversation around how we as a people or as individuals have actually contributed to these different structural issues. And that could be racism and how we might have reproduced those same ideologies, or how we have helped further the disempowering tactics in ethnic areas because of our lack of understanding.

And so it would require a lot of critical thinking skills, not just from the Rohingya part, but also from the rest of Myanmar. And perhaps the most important people to employ these critical thinking skills are the people that are now in the National Union Government to actually come up with not just legislations, but also a new set of standards that we all should live by. And not necessarily that it should be imposed on people dictatorship-style, but there needs to be a cultural shift in the society, in Myanmar in general, that impunity is no longer tolerated wherever it's produced, wherever it's reproduced, in all of our aspects of our lives.

And that is going to be the most difficult thing to do. And I think that the work in undoing or-- basically, in my humble opinion-- is taking down the system that did not work, and rebuilding the system that could eventually honor people, and understanding their lived experience and their personal struggles, and having more empathy worked into the system, and understanding that unless the society works equitably for everybody, we all will come back to this same moment again, sooner or later. And I will end it there. Thank you.

SANA AIYAR:

Thank you so much, Yasmin, for your conversation, for your comments. I was really struck by thinking about how we are at something of an inflection point, not dissimilar to the 1930s and '20s that Jonathan started with, in terms of a moment of allyship, a historical conjuncture where there is this sort of window, a little door opened into allyship.

Your comments really spoke to the limits of the liberatory popular politics, as there was a blind eye done to the Rohingya crisis that really sort of-- it doesn't just start in 2017. As you said, it sort of starts with the stripping away of citizenship, land alienation, human rights violations, and then sort of expulsion and erasure. But as you said, there is this assertion of state sovereignty to gloss over the human rights violations, which is not exceptional to Myanmar. South Asia is familiar with that mode of politics and conflict generation and resolution.

And so that's a good moment, I think, to bring in Ambassador Mukhopadhaya to bring us to a regional perspective on both the refugee crisis, but also, of course, the coup in the process of democratization and authoritarianism, which many countries in South Asia are familiar with.

GAUTAM

Thank you very much, Professor Sana Aiyar, for the privilege of participating in this very distinguished panel of **MUKHOPADHAYA**: scholars, activists, and speakers. And also, I'd like to thank them for their very thought-provoking interventions and highlighting aspects of history, ethnic politics, as well as the Rohingya issue.

I'm also very grateful that the focus of this particular webinar is Myanmar and South Asia, because very often, much of the discussion that takes place around Myanmar takes place in the context of its relationship with the West, or with China, or with ASEAN in Southeast Asia. And sometimes it's forgotten that perhaps the deepest and oldest historical and civilizational ties maybe were with South Asia-- not just India, but also Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, both through the land and through the sea, and that these historical ties were reinforced.

And in many ways, the contemporary history of both Burma and South Asia have been very deeply intertwined as part of the British Empire. And many of those issues, I think Jonathan referred to it, but it also came out in the other speakers, in [INAUDIBLE] Yawnghwe and Yasmin Ullah. But many of the problems that we are discussing have their roots very much during the colonial period.

And examples of this abound. But the parallels between the Burmese independence and the international arm that is often sort of forgotten, both of some kind of Japanese parentage and often militarist kind of orientation, is very interesting. And it's rather interesting that Burma and India pursued two alternative paths. In India, it was a path of civil, popular, vast resistance of the sort that Jonathan described. And in Myanmar, it took the course of a much more militaristic orientation. And sometimes one wonders whether this has not echoes and resonances back in the embittered tradition of Myanmar itself, in rulers in the Pagan dynasty, the Hanthawaddy, [INAUDIBLE], as well as [INAUDIBLE] in the Konbaung dynasty.

But be that as it may, I have been basically asked to speak on the international dimension of the February 1 coup, so I will really turn to that. And let me look at international reactions first. Internationally, what we see is that the US and the West in general have condemned the coup and imposed targeted sanctions against the Tatmadaw. Although, having shunned Myanmar since practically the 1960s, they have very little leverage over the generals.

On the other hand, you have Myanmar's neighbors, and most of the countries in Asia as a whole that have reacted a little more circumspectly. Almost all of them have expressed concern or, like Japan and India, deep concern, and have listed out much the same sort of concerns about the rollback of democracy, about the restoration of the election results, about the condemnation of the violence by the Tatmadaw, but stopped short of condemning the coup itself and actually naming the Tatmadaw in doing so. And they've been a little more circumspect in that.

And there are many reasons for that. But certainly, two reasons that will become very strong is that Myanmar, in the last 70 years, has been under military rule for 50 of those years. And therefore, almost any country or any company that has had interests or had a stake in Myanmar for any reason, whether it was security, or strategic, or economic, or ethnic, or political, or whatever have you, have been obliged to really deal with the government of the day.

And so in the process of developing these ties with the government of the day, they have also acquired sticks. And those sticks become very important in the resolution of the problem as well, as well as in keeping channels of communication open for a kind of negotiated settlement at any time in the future. But if I look at it, the reasons for this are both, in a sense, for reasons of principle as well as reasons of history.

And if I turn to the larger issue of values, what we see is-- I'm generalizing, of course-- but the West has prioritized values of democracy and human rights, while much of Asia and other parts of the world have prioritized stability, pragmatism, non-interference in internal affairs, dealing with that [INAUDIBLE] power, dialogue, consensus, et cetera, basically sort of exemplified in the approach of the ASEAN. And again, if we turn to historical factors I mentioned the engagement of the neighbors-- mandatory engagement of the neighbors with Myanmar.

But if you look at the West's reaction, there also historical factors why the West's reaction has been able to be much sharper and stronger. And one of them is that, really, after the 1950s, when the US still tried to open Myanmar into the Cold War into [? Seattle ?] and was basically fended off by the Prime Minister U Nu using [INAUDIBLE] relations conference, [INAUDIBLE] non-aligned movement, and so on.

Basically, once the 1962 coup took place, the West really lost interest. As Myanmar turned inwards and isolated and insulated, the West really lost interest in them. And that interest only resurfaced in the context of the pro-democracy and student agitation of 1988, the announcement of elections in 1990, the Saffron Revolution of 2007, all basically issues of democracy and human rights. And of course, the West responded with its core values on those issues, but without any tempering element of a kind of stake in the Myanmar government of the time.

And so the natural result of all that was a tendency towards sanctions, a rather sort of blanket and blank sanctions that hurt as much the people who they were meant to protect as the regime. And of course, the regime-- Burma is a very rich country. Myanmar is a very rich country that is massively endowed with natural resources. And the regime found it fairly easy to shrug off those sanctions, particularly with the help of China, the Chinese market, and the protection of China in the United Nations.

So I think that's the basic background for the difference in the international reactions that we largely see between Asia, and particularly, the neighbors, and the West. But having said that, sanctions remains a kind of part of the apparatus simply in dealing with the regime. And this time, the West has relied on more targeted and smarter sanctions. But if Myanmar could survive the broader and [INAUDIBLE] sanctions in the past with the help of the Chinese, it can withstand more limited sanctions now quite easily, so long it continues to have the vast market of China for its natural resources and primary agricultural products that the Tatmadaw has always counted on.

There have been a number of companies that have curtailed or terminated their partnerships. These will hurt to a point, but they will not make a very material difference. The West, of course, does have the options of turning and covering more core revenue-generating sectors in which Western companies have been involved, such as oil and gas, that directly feed into the national budget. But these are long-term investments and would be at some cost to its own companies.

And so the West has yet sort of moved to that kind of sanction, even though there is some pressure from the protest side. But it is doubtful even if these can bring the Tatmadaw to its knees so long as China then absorb the slack. So overall, there is a question mark on the utility of sanctions unless everyone joins in the sanctions effort.

So now having said that, I think if you look at India and other countries of South Asia, I think there are interesting differences between Sri Lanka and, let's say, India and Bangladesh. By and large, India and Bangladesh have remained committed to a kind of democratic path. Even though it might have stopped short at outright condemnation, they have said almost everything else.

But having said that, there have also been reasons why, say, a country like Bangladesh, which has serious issues with the Tatmadaw over the Rohingya issue, also attended the [INAUDIBLE]. And that is simply because I think they need to keep the dialogue open. India too has a number of security concerns, a number of issues. Foremost among them is, of course, the security issue relating to Indian insurgent groups in the northeast, which take shelter in Myanmar and which have been a reason for India to re-engage with the Tatmadaw of the 1988, when India took a much more strident position in favor of democracy.

But there are also concerns relating to China about Myanmar falling even more tightly with the people of China. But I think that's overstated, and perhaps in the current context, may even be overtaken. There is the question, an important question, of the nearly two million people of Indian origin who continue in Myanmar and who need some kind of moderate protection from India.

There are our development projects, which are, after all, ultimately attended to capacity building projects, [INAUDIBLE] projects, which are ultimately intended to benefit the people of Myanmar as well as our bilateral relations. And once again, one needs to work through the government of the day at the portal to which that can be done.

I mentioned to you the whole issue of keeping channels of communication, even if we were to actually engage the Tatmadaw to walk back from the February coup, and I think the scope for that remains. But also, if you see that basically it was a civilizational relationship, it remains very important for India to have doors and windows to Myanmar open so that it can reach the people. And therefore, one should expect that India would engage all parties, particularly since people-to-people relationship will be very important with the democratic forces as well.

Now I can then turn to some of the other relationships. I think China is a very important one. China had cultivated very good relations with the NLD and faced great criticism from Senior General Min Aung Hlaing himself over its long-suspected support for some of the ethnic armed organizations under its influence. But China too has been caught, actually, off balance once again and is still groping for some kind of response.

Now, China is very commonly seen by the protesters as the Tatmadaw's primary supporter. But it's actually probably Russia's steady support and the example of the Thai military next door that may have emboldened Senior General Min Aung Hlaing to take such a precipitous action. Russia may well have also played its Indo-Pacific card vis a vis the port through Myanmar. Russia, which has been out of the geopolitics of Myanmar, may well have done this.

Nevertheless, as far as China, the Tatmadaw are concerned. Tatmadaw would have taken Chinese support against the rest of the UN for granted. The Chinese will definitely extract what they can, particularly in terms of their strategic projects, which is the BRI and the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, utilizing the vulnerability of the Tatmadaw. And the Tatmadaw may buy Chinese support at the UN and other international forum.

But beyond that, the relationship will not be simple. Myanmar has always had a tradition of independence and neutral. And it is very loath to sacrifice that, even at the worst of times. And even in the '90s, when China was very deeply entrenched in Myanmar, it was Senior General Than Shwe who actually led the seven-stage process of the roadmap leading to the USDP government, which expanded its international relationships and kept China off balance, first through the suspension of the Myitsone Dam, but also through a number of other things, the engagement of Japan and the United States and the West in the peace process that Mr. Yawnghwe spoke about, and many other ways. And in fact, the one country that I've been able to see over my time that has managed to keep China off balance through and through, including now, has been Myanmar.

I've already spoken about Russia. So I think the most important element now that is left is ASEAN. There's no doubt that ASEAN has a very important role to play in the current crisis. As a member of the ASEAN family, it really falls upon them to be able to find a solution, rather than others stepping into the picture and complicating the geopolitics of and the regional politics of the region.

And I think, to that extent, that Indonesia has tried very hard. So has the chair. And I think they were able to achieve some success in the April 25 summit in Jakarta by bringing out this five-point plan for a roadmap for the future.

But I think positions are still very reconciliatory. And ASEAN itself, despite its four pillars that includes the people-to-people relationship, remains basically a very state-to-state and a very status quoist is organization, which gives a lot of primacy to the kind of values that I spoke about earlier-- non-interference in internal affairs and stability, a fear of what's sometimes called as too much democracy. And while the five points, including the cessation of violence, is very welcome and we hope reduces the level of violence, and while the provision for a special envoy as well as a constructive dialogue and for engagement has been opened up, the positions of the two sides are still very conciliatory. For one, we did not see any talk about the release of political prisoners and the restoration of democracy.

And on his return from Jakarta, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing talked about the roadmap of, once again, once order-- the Tatmadaw version of order is reestablished-- lethal violence has come down, but abductions, instilling fear in the population, various other forms of repression continue. Many of the controls, the legislation, have not been changed. Senior General himself has not shown signs of wanting to change.

Clearly, there are signs that the North will come to the term of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi or [INAUDIBLE] back into politics. They would still like to work through proxy parties and kin parties. And of course, they simply do not recognize the National Unity Government. At the same time, there have been a number of other developments, which others have described, so I won't go in in the interest of time.

But the long and short that we have is that positions are still very polarized, very intensely contested. And at this point of time, it is still very difficult to see the two sides being brought together on a common platform on which they can be able to engage a kind of roadmap back to democracy.

And this is the point that I want to come to about South Asia. To some extent, ASEAN is important. ASEAN centrality is very important. But at the end of the day, only three countries of ASEAN share borders with Myanmar. There are three other countries that are not part of ASEAN and share borders with Myanmar-- China, Bangladesh, and India.

And if, as it seems apparent, that this is going to be a long, long contest with the conflict spinning in many different ways, perhaps being atomized, perhaps many civil wars, then this conflict is going to spill over into neighboring countries. And neighboring countries, and sometimes ethnic elements of the neighboring countries, are in danger of being drawn in. And rather than South Asia being an afterthought in solutions to the Myanmar problem, I would think it would be in ASEAN's interest-- notwithstanding the difficulties of getting consensus around this, it would be in ASEAN's interest to engage China, Bangladesh, and India much more closely on all the issues that concern all these countries.

So we can still retain ASEAN centrality. Because otherwise, if it comes to refugee movement or conflict dynamics, the neighboring countries will in one way or the other [INAUDIBLE] foreign engagement. Sorry if I've taken a little more time than I should have. But thank you. [INAUDIBLE].

SANA AIYAR:

Thank you very much, Gautam. This has been such a full panel with so many different perspectives to think through. It has been really wonderful. So although we are running a little bit short on time in terms of the Q&A, I really appreciate all of your comments. And thank you for bringing, Professor Mukhopadhaya, the pragmatism of the day. There is this need in terms of geopolitics to work, as you said, with the government of the day.

But I also really appreciated your bringing back including South Asia in the roadmap. As you said, there are these civilizational, historical, and geographical, territorial entanglements of South Asia and Myanmar. But it's within those that we also have a lot of fault lines that have been alluded to, religious fault lines, ethnic fault lines, and also sort of those of conflict in India, in the northeast states, and in Myanmar.

As you've said, it's going to be a long, drawn-out, slow process of compromise, negotiation, and dialogue. Yasmin earlier also talked about the need to continue dialogue, to open dialogue, to have inclusive dialogue. And in that spirit, I want to bring in some of the audience questions that I have been skimming through as they've been coming in. And I think that, basically, there are three main themes.

One is about the current protests. And I think that our audience would like to know a little more about the student politics, the workers, the workers also joining the civil disobedience movement on the ground. To ask, does this have an actual impact on the actual apparatus of government formation, during colonial rule and today.

And also, another related question is, can we identify clear motivations that led to military involvement to the overthrow of the democratic process? Was it really sort of the indiscipline of democracy that led to the coup? And again, Ambassador Mukhopadhaya came back to the point of order. There's a sense of sort of establishing order before the popular liberation can occur. So I wondered if any of the panelists-- and please feel free to unmute yourselves-- if you'd like to sort of talk a little bit more about the protests themselves, the impact that they can have, and also a little more on the position of the military at the moment.

HARN
YAWNGHWE: In terms of the impact, definitely, the students, the workers, the civil servants, they really have an impact in the sense that this is very widespread in the country. And it could really tie down the military, for sure. How the military-- they thought that within a couple of months they could control everything. That's true and false. And they think now that they will be in control by July. I doubt it. So anyway, that that's the impact.

And going on to the motivation of the coup, everybody talks about the elections. But actually, that is not. The election is a sort of excuse. Part of the problem is that people see Aung San Suu Kyi cooperating with the military. Yes and no. In terms of the Rohingya, unfortunately, it was not a cooperation. She agrees with the military that the Rohingyas belong.

The other thing is that the way she was trying to deal with the military was that instead of using the people as a support, she was trying to do a private deal where the military will listen to her because the military was founded by her father. And the other thing is that she really did not want-- if the military would not listen to her, she was really trying to bring about a change where she wanted the military role in the government removed completely right away.

The military's plan was a gradual reduction, and they had already agreed in the peace talks that they would reduce gradually. Now, she could have used that. But she didn't use the peace talks. She used the parliament to try to bring about change right away. So that was really-- as I said, the military is very paranoid, and they felt they were losing control. I think that was the main motivation.

SANA AIYAR: Thank you. Go ahead.

GAUTAM
MUKHOPADHAYA: I think there's one point that is very important here. I think a lot of people wonder whether 2021 is going to be a similar fate as 1988, that in some way the Tatmadaw will be able to reassert and really impose its version of order. And I personally think that this time, it is different. Two things make it very different.

One is the 10 years of freedoms that people have experienced and tested since 2011. And that is political freedoms, media freedoms, social media freedoms, the IT revolution that Harn Yawng hwe spoke about. And I think a very important component of that is the kind of international connect, where the contact established with the outside world, which we see, for example, in the military alliance in Southeast Asia, which is a larger movement against authoritarianism.

And secondly, I think, in 1988, 1990, the Tatmadaw was able to organize, with the help of China, these individual ceasefires. This time, as Yasmin Ullah and others have pointed out, there are many cross-ethnic, cross-religious solidarities and sentiments that are coming up. Now, these sentiments may not be enough to overcome issues of federalism and centralization and distribution of power and resources. But at least they are a starting point.

And so this time, we are in the presence of a genuine revolutionary spirit. And while there are many, many obstacles on the way, I don't think-- the Tatmadaw has miscalculated time and again in the past. It miscalculated in 1990 about the NLD. It's miscalculated in 2015. It miscalculated again in 2020. And it is miscalculating again if it thinks that, by sheer use of power and force, it can suppress this student's agitation.

It's difficult to pronounce a victory for the revolution or for the protesters. And therefore, it's likely to be a much more prolonged tension. I have the sort of unfortunate, let's say, privilege of having been the ambassador in Syria and in Afghanistan. And I dread to think that February 2021 is that 1979 movement in Afghanistan or that Arab Spring moment in Syria, when the country will never be seen again.

And I really hope that-- geopolitics has somehow left out the ASEAN is able to act as a cushion and as a buffer for that and is able to bring the parties together. And for that, a very important point that Harn mentioned-- in 50 years, the only institution that is left in Myanmar is the military. If you eliminate that institution, you have an Iraq-like situation, where, post-Saddam, the entire military was removed, and you had absolute chaos. So this requires very careful political and social engineering, which is not going to be easy.

SANA AIYAR: Absolutely. As you were talking-- although we haven't mentioned Pakistan in the context of Myanmar and South Asia, I think that there is, again, a similar situation where the longest and strongest institution is the army. But again, there have been experiments with democratization-- imperfect, but they have been. So there are other examples in the region.

I'll ask one last quick question before we have to bring this to an end. But several folks have been talking about the international dimension, the sanctions, their usefulness. In fact, sometimes they, in fact, make the situation even worse because they punish those who are protesting civilians.

But a question that came up, which perhaps addresses the issue just raised in terms of what would victory even mean. It will be a compromise. Does the Western mode of democracy-- is that the only-- does this Western interpretation of governance represent in full what democracy must be and what democracy in Myanmar, or self-governance, to use [INAUDIBLE]. And perhaps we could hear from our panelists some last thoughts on that before we call this to an end.

YASMIN ULLAH: I think that the pursuit of actually chasing after that Western representation of democracy was the reason why the military or the institution has been able to actually exploit their position or their power for this long. I think that the Western type of democracy-- very, very specifically, the European Union, as well as North American democracies-- have always relied on complacency and relied on-- if it's quiet, we don't have to deal with it. And that's really debilitating. It's devastating for the people on the ground.

As Rohingya, we have been working on this issue for a very long time. But the reason why it took a genocide for the world to actually pay attention is because of that complacency. And unfortunately, the international legislations or various different moral and legal obligations that nation states have have not been upheld because of those non-intervention or diplomacy first type of strategy.

And I'm not saying that they're not useful at all. But I'm hoping that, in the future, or in the context of Myanmar, we can actually forego the understanding that the West have towards the Global South in general. And for Myanmar to actually be able to pick itself back up and rebuild as a country, it would actually need a new brand of democracy or a brand of democracy that it would create on its own, whatever works for the ethnic communities, whatever works for the country to actually remain cohesive.

And that might look like actually prioritizing collectivist type of ideologies, and really looking at the cultures and traditions and celebration of those differences, more so than having one monolithic identity of a person or of a group of people and working off of that, rather than going for individualistic, capitalistic type of ideals and concepts to rebuild the country, because it would not work. And like many panelists and the ambassador have said, it might mimic other countries that have already failed at least attempts.

JONATHAN SAHA: If I can add to what Yasmin is saying and bring in that question about sanctions to speak to it, and not just sanctions, but also civil society efforts for boycotts and divestment, as well as fundraising for things like National Unity Government. The types of community organizations beneath the national level, the types of forms of local government and organizing which are operating there, where the military has lost effective control on a day-to-day basis, is where we're going to see emerging new forms of democratic participation.

And sanctions and other forms of economic engagement with the situation, with the crisis, are not going to be a decisive blow, as Gautam has rightly pointed out. But what they can do is create greater space for activists to operate by limiting the capacity of the military in various ways and in various areas. And the point in which negotiations come and the evolution of whatever local forms of politics are emerging is going to be, I think, a crucial point in what comes after.

There's a revolutionary situation, as Gautam pointed out. And what that manifests in is difficult to say. But sanctions can be part, I think, of a form of interaction that can create greater space.

SANA AIYAR: Jonathan, Yasmin, Harn, and Gautam, thank you very much for your time and very engaging comments, as well as the last comments here. Thank you, the Center for International Studies at MIT and MIT India for organizing this panel for us. And thank you to our large audience, 72 of whom have remained right through the hour and 40 minutes or so. And thank you, and goodbye.

[MUSIC PLAYING]