Federalism in Burma: A Special Issue

This is a special issue of *Legal Issues on Burma Journal* about federalism, while federalism itself is a special issue for Burma. This publication is intended to be a contribution to a broad-ranging discussion on governance options for the country. During the last century, Burma has undergone several regime changes: from British colonial rule and Japanese fascist rule to constitutional rule and military rule. However, unfortunately, misrule has eventually been the common fate of the people of Burma. The search for good governance continues but has yielded no results. A new consciousness over the years has grown in the feasibility of federal options.

*Legal Issues on Burma Journal* has invited a group of authors with expertise on Burma—and on good governance—to examine the question of federalism from various points of view. The historical circumstances, the dominance of ethnicity models of federalism that might apply to the preconditions for a valid democratization process, are all discussed in this issue. Our purpose is to pave the way for international understanding in facilitating a viable constitution for Burma. Hopefully the present articles will stimulate further discussion to help foster a stable, democratic governing structure. The people of Burma, after too many generations of misrule and abuse of power, are in desperate need of a way to govern themselves in a constitutionally decentralized structure that will take into account the needs for both local and ethnic autonomy.

*Legal Issues on Burma Journal* is bringing this special issue on federalism at a time when historical talks have been going on for democratic transition. Dialogue should be promoted, while at the same time the moment for a new constitution has come. Notwithstanding Burma’s ethnic diversity, there is an enduring sense of Burmese identity. The attempt to exercise centralized power associated with the Burman ethnic majority has created an atmosphere of dissidence and resistance. This has been heightened by four decades of military rule, as the armed forces are heavily
dominated by the Burman ethnic group.

Federalism may be an effective instrument for the management of ethnic and other cleavages. It disperses conflicts, promotes empowerment to local level, and unleashes the forces locked in prejudice and mistrust. The released forces can become creative forces to rebuild the Burmese society. Federalism will generate a consensual process of constitution-making, involving the main interested parties. It will play a critical role in the construction of a new constitutional order in Burma. Hopefully this special issue of the Journal will provide a balanced perception on the core issue facing Burma’s transition.