



## Part E: Political Developments

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### Dictators Cannot Bury Democracy

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Burma appears to be calm and in a vicious cycle. The military crack-down on Buddhist monks, the devastation caused by Cyclone Nargis, the refusal of the junta to accept humanitarian assistance in the face of millions of deaths, the systematic violation of human rights for decades, the brute force used in refusing to restore democracy in terms of the mandate of 1990 Election - all these tragedies seem to have never happened. The desperate attempt to earn respectability and legitimacy continues. Unfurling a Constitution defying all norms and making a show of acceptance in an equally fraudulent referendum were only signs of the junta's bankruptcy. The junta is running out of options. Fixing 2010 as the time to hold elections is the last card. The day of democratic reckoning is inevitable.

History will repeat itself, as it did in respect of the 1974 Constitution. It was inherently anti-people. It collapsed in spite of Dr. Maung Maung's desperate attempt to save it by an amendment. The SPDC's Constitution is also inherently anti-democratic and no façade of democracy can save it on the day of reckoning. In Pakistan, a country long plagued by military dictators, constitutional rule came and fell. Military dictators seized power and tried to prevent the restoration of constitutional rule notwithstanding the fact that some of the dictators did set up a façade of constitutional rule. Pakistan is a classic case study where the military dictators abysmally failed to bury democracy. The dictators in Burma may ignore this but to the activists the case is a source of great inspiration.

On January 30, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi publicized her new initiative within the framework of an on-going "dialogue process". The occasion was the outcome of the visit by the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy last October after the crackdown of the Saffron upheaval. The Envoy's effort to bring about reluctant and subsequent talks with Daw Suu Kyi speaks volumes of her undying relevance to the democracy movement in Burma. Than Shwe agreed to start a "dialogue process" and a liaison officer to engage with her was subsequently appointed. Democratic activists long disillusioned about Than Shwe's trickery dismissed it as an empty gesture aimed to diminish the external pressure on the junta. But the significance ought not to be missed, namely Daw Suu Kyi met her NLD associates and told them that she had asked the liaison officer to convey her



message to Than Shwe that the dialogue has to be facilitated at the "highest" political level. Her proposal in essence was that she has to meet the decision-maker/policy-maker to bring about any substantive progress in the ongoing "dialogue process", "time bound" with no "prior conditions from both sides". The purpose of this new initiative was to test for the SPDC's real game plan and at the same time to quicken the pace of a negotiated settlement of the basic democracy issue. The political context of the initiative is as important as its substance. The message is clear that nothing can move within the parameters of the road map that the junta has laid down. The question has to be answered, what happens to the long labored exercise that the junta has produced in placing a Constitution before the country? Will the junta give it up and go for talks which eventually will dislodge it from the seat of power? Not likely. The only option that the activists have is to patiently build in the minds of the people that rule of law will triumph. Frustration and fatigue have to be prevented, adventurism must be avoided and people's faith in ultimate victory promoted. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has taken a new initiative. She has asked for talks only at the highest level and refused to meet the liaison officer and UN Envoy. It is for the people to build up resistance to erode the junta rule.

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