

Democracy and Human Security

[Mohiuddin Ahmad presents paper]

Dr. Mike Hayes:

“Okay we’ll just take a couple of questions regarding this paper. Are there any questions from the audience? Okay, well I’ll start with a question: when you look at this view of democracy from the bottom in Asia, it’s a rather depressing picture that you paint, and I was wondering whether there is any good news with democracy in Asia?”

Mohiuddin Ahmad:

“I forgot to mention because I was hurrying actually but I cited an example here, a positive example. I see hope and if you follow the recent incidents in Nepal—Nepal had people power once in 1990 and then again in 2006. This time, they decided it’s not civil society or the political parties—it was the people who led this uprising. And the political parties had to follow the people because political parties had always been compromising. And this is the first time in the history of Asia in which I’ve seen conventional, constitutional monarchies, political parties, and the communist Maoists forge an alliance. For the first time, they decided to abolish monarchy, they decided to abolish the issue of class and caste on a constitutional level, and there are regional disparities so they’ve decided that they will have a federal structure so that regional disparity can be resolved. Of course there are still conspiracies going on. Among the Maoist rank and file I have seen there are thousands of girls, women and thousands of [inaudible] from the low-caste population. This is a unique feature, because in the England communist movement, they never addressed the issue of caste, they always addressed the issue of class. But in the Indian context, and larger South Asian context, the caste system is a very important factor, addressed for the first time in a very systematic way by the Maoists in Nepal. Thus I see a lot of hope unless there are conspiracies by the world power brokers, led by the US and the monarchy in Nepal. And there are some power brokers in China and India who follow this principle of so called non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries like the [inaudible] about the Burmese situation because they have been plundering their oil, gas, and timber. So I’m not sure – perhaps they would like to see Nepal as a buffer state between India and China. But the people of Nepal have shown the way they can take to the streets and dictate the terms. Today’s Nepal is a very good example for all of us across Asia. I’m not comparing Nepal with Venezuela, it’s completely different because it’s the people. Thank you.”

[Eersa Sami Ahuja presents paper]

Dr. Mike Hayes:

“We have time for maybe one or two questions if there are specific questions. It was an interesting paper that looked at the genealogy of the current problem pre-partition. We turn to look at Pakistan’s problems of religion and regionalism and the military aspect as being post-partition, but here, we hear an argument that involves a much longer history, much deeper roots.”

[R. Ramakumar presents paper]

Dr. Mike Hayes:

“Because we’re so short on time we’ll have to have the last paper being presented immediately. We’ll have to go over by about ten minutes or so—we’ll have the last paper and then we can have questions directed at the last two papers.”

[Ketut Gunawan presents paper]

Dr. Mike Hayes:

“We’ll have maybe five minutes of questions. I know that lunch is starting and I don’t want to get you off to lunch after everything is eating but there are probably some questions on the last two papers on terrorism and the other on Dalit and the success of the communist state governor of Kerala. Any questions or comments for these last two papers?”

Dr. Mike Hayes:

“The question is about with the Dalits 6% of the population own only 3% of the land so which Dalits own land and which Dalits don’t?”

R. Ramakumar:

“Sorry, there was a slide that I skipped in between because of the time constraints. This slide had the data that you are looking for. Basically as I said the most important benefit for them was through homestead land distribution. All the Dalit households had homestead land, though in different sizes of course. I must say here that there are some Dalit households that have very small homestead plots, and some that are a little bit higher, but most are all around the average. My data shows that 50% of the Dalit households have roughly a quarter of an acre as the size of their homestead plot. Less than five cents, less than .05 acres, that is whom we could consider as that land could provide housing but not cultivation, any form of commercial cultivation – there are only five Dalit households like that in the whole village who had less than .05 acres of land. There was a group like that for five households but it was very small as you can see. Part of the reason of the smaller land rulings is also because of the population increase and subdivision of holdings that have taken place within the Dalit community itself. Even those who had slightly higher holding sizes got divided over time. It’s been a generation

now after land reform. So there has been a significant decline in average holding size, but on the whole landlessness among Dalits is a matter of the past.”

Dr. Mike Hayes:

“Alright, we have a question over here...”

Ketut Gunawan:

“Okay my question is that the case of terror attack, terrorism, or terror related issues are quite complicated. But with mainstream academics, there are still conflicting perspectives – they use [inaudible] and great issue. As you say there’s human security and also [inaudible] which is also including the grievances issue like structural problems, right? There’s a new approach using [inaudible]. So with this kind of contending perspectives I try to introduce another one – ideological matters. This doesn’t mean that ideology is the more important one but this kind of [inaudible] the new insides there is another factor that drives the [inaudible]. If you see, the rule of ideology, I think that now for insurgents in Thailand plays a very important role compared to insurgents in the past. From this one we will see that the ideology is important particularly in performing a role in threatening human security. So of course you’ll see threats from the human security discourse. I would like to see – what I try to explain is that some new factors will be introduced to explain the new phenomena. And I think that my perception of this new ideology is important particularly in Indonesia and in Thailand, where there are new insurgent groups. The situation is very complex, but I’ll try to focus on an approach where we attempt to deal with the ideology. Thank you.”

Dr. Mike Hayes:

“I’ll invite all the panelists to have a short comment at the end so we can close the session.”

R. Ramakumar:

“The answer to your question is very long but, to cut it short, I’ll answer as follows. [Inaudible] has a history of a large number of social reform movements among different caste groups, different backward caste groups. And these reform movements embraced modernity as it was understood at that time and it pushes women and others to get educated. These are women from within the community, from within the Dalits, from within the backward classes, from within, say, Muslims. These social reform movements encouraged women to attend schools. The community level of barriers to education and better health care started to be demolished very early in history there. What happened after that, due to the [inaudible] which was there, present movements came up. And these present movements were primarily left-led, or attached to the communist party of that time. And in 1957, when the first election took place, a communist government got elected on the strength of the present movement that it had led. It was this communist government that implemented land reform and invested heavily in education etc. If you look at history you will see that the present movement and the left movement flourished in a soil that was fertile due to the plowing by earlier movements. Am I getting the point across? The soil was fertile when the communists took over and it could be easily cultivated at that time. So the social reform movements had a major role to play and that

was true in [inaudible] of the promising traditions of the social reform movements by the present movements and later the communist party. Because such a body came to power, and it had the mass support, it could implement or fulfill the demands made by the present movement at that time, which included land reform, and other social requirements of different backward communities. In a sense this changing political regime, the character of the political regime, made a major difference. It set the agenda for the future of the state – a shift in political regime. This is what made a major difference.”

R. Ramakumar:

“I think the most positive phenomena across Asia is the solidarity factor and recently we have been watching it in the case of Burma – there has been a lot of solidarity support for that and I think we can implicitly challenge this chauvinistic forces through solidarity throughout the region. I think there is also a major negative aspect which I haven’t mentioned that civil society is becoming sharply divided. And it’s painful to see part of the civil society in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Thailand as they are collaborating with the army and the military junta. I think this is nonnegotiable – civil society should not be participating, they should work like watchdogs. About Kerala, I might have made some sweeping remarks but I think that Kerala cannot be generalized – it’s unique even in the context of India. We have seen thirty years of community [inaudible] but that is quite different. My last comment about this issue of terror group I think you tried to highlight the positive aspects of that but I’m not exactly comfortable with the term called terror or terrorist groups. This isn’t an official term but rather a term imposed by the US and who is official because Noam Chomsky says the US is the number one terrorist state so, when I was fighting a war against the Pakistan occupation army, I was branded as a terrorist but in my community I was a freedom fighter. Who is a terrorist and who is a freedom fighter?”

Mike Hayes:

“And I think we have another day and a half to answer those questions. Sorry, I think we have to finish this session now as we’re already half an hour over the limit. We’ll finish this session now because there will be no food left to take lunch. I apologize for taking your time and enjoy the rest of the conference.”