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MEI Event: Egypt Today

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On Wednesday 27 February 2013 the Middle East Institute, New Delhi (MEI@ND) organized a Round Table on ***Egypt Today*** at the India International Centre. The talk by HE Khaled el-Bakly, Ambassador of Egypt in India served as a curtain raiser for the upcoming India visit of President Mohamed Morsi. Ambassador Bakly delved into a number of issue including domestic social, political and economic developments in Egypt, relations with the neighbouring countries and the bilateral relations with India.

Ambassador Khaled el-Bakly highlighted the political, economic and social challenges facing Egypt. As the society is changing, youth that comprise the majority wants freedom, economic growth and accountable governance. The government of President Morsi faces an uphill task of delivering on the expectations of the people while simultaneously evolving a political system which is inclusive. Egypt, he said, has a civilizational and cultural heritage that distinguishes it from other countries in the region. It is a plural society with hues of ethnicities and faiths and a mosaic of ideologies that co-habit the land of pharaohs and Nile since historical times.

However, in the current scenario political polarization is at its peak, admitted Ambassador Bakly. The people who have come to power after the revolution are new to the system and decision-making process. They have faced prosecution at the hands of earlier rulers, but they remain organized and active which helped them garner popular support in the elections. On the other hand, the opposition is divided and unorganized but do not want the agenda of one party to be imposed on the entire populace. He also mentioned that the perception that Islamists are united in their agenda is slowly bursting as differences emerge between various hues of Islamist groups.

Ambassador Bakly said that Egypt faces challenges of development. Its economy is diversified and is the second largest economy in Africa has prospects for more growth. Apart from that it confronts the challenges of security sector reforms, improving the human rights record and the problem of influx of weapons and terrorist elements due to regional instability. He argued that one single party cannot take the responsibility of taking Egypt forward and a collective effort is required to deal with the challenges facing the country. The ambassador observed that the region is going through a critical and painful phase.

On the bilateral relations, the ambassador said that India and Egypt share phenomenal historical relations since time immemorial. The two countries share emotional bonding and pioneered the non-alignment movement. He however said that in the changing circumstances and in a globalised world, political rhetoric do not serve the purpose of improving relations rather it has to be based in trade and economy. He argued that despite a large bilateral trade and economic relation there is scope for further enhancing cooperation and improve the two-way flow of investments.

In response to Ambassador Khaled el-Bakly, Ambassador (Retd.) Ishrat Aziz said that the trajectories of Indo-Egyptian relation would be decided by India's economic growth and Egypt's emergence from the Arab Spring. On the domestic developments in Egypt, he said that a political process has to evolve through democratic means and if the political churning is allowed then things can work towards a positive direction. He suggested that India and Egypt should look forward to enhance cooperation in the area of security.

In the question-answer session, a host of issue pertaining to the domestic developments in Egypt, Indo-Egyptian relations, situation in Syria, Israeli-Palestinian issue, rise of political right and religious forces inside and outside the region came to the fore leading to an engaging discussion. The session was chaired by Ambassador (Retd.) Chinmaya R Gharekhan and Dipanwita Chakravorty from the MEI@ND gave the vote of thanks.

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Pictures taken during the event is available at:

<http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.398526603577592.1073741825.288759447887642&type=1>

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