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## Myanmar: Lull in Communal Rioting in Rakhine State.

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By B.Raman

Since the afternoon of October 26,2012, there has been a lull in communal rioting between the Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in the Rakhine State (Arakan ) of Myanmar.

2. The rioting broke out on October 21,2012, reportedly following demonstrations by some Buddhists against allowing the OIC to open a humanitarian relief office in Yangon. The Rohingya Muslims wanted the office to be opened.

3. Despite opposition from some Buddhists, the Government of President Thein Sein has continued to accept humanitarian relief from the OIC countries for distribution to both the communities. It has been reported that two planeloads of humanitarian relief material arrived at Yangon from Turkey on October 25.

4. According to Government sources, when the rioting broke out on October 21, the security forces found themselves to be inadequately numbered and had difficulty in controlling the situation. Reinforcements have since reached the State and the security forces are now in a better position to deal with the situation.

5. While official statements continue to estimate the total number of fatalities as about 60, the local "Irrawaddy Journal" and the Xinhua news agency of China have estimated the total number of fatalities till the evening of October 26 as 112.

6. According to local sources, the steep increase in fatalities is partly due to the security forces repeatedly opening fire on the rioting mobs from both the communities. It has been reported that nearly about 2600 houses have been burnt down.

7. Following expressions of concern by Western and UN sources that if the riots continued it could threaten the process of reforms initiated by President Thein Sein and weaken his position, the National League of Democracy (NLD) of Aung San Suu Kyi, which was maintaining a discreet silence till now on the situation, has bestirred itself and urged the Government to send more reinforcements to the affected areas of Mrauk U, Minbya, Rathedaung, and Kyauktaw townships, north of the state capital of Sittwe, and southern Rakhine's Kyauk Phyu city and Mebyon.

8. A member of the "Committee of the Rule of Law and Tranquility," which is chaired by Suu Kyi, proposed at the Lower House in Naypyidaw on October 26 that the situation be discussed in Parliament. Following a debate, Parliament approved a proposal to deploy more security forces to the region.

9. The Chinese have been concerned over the spread of the violence to Kyauk Phyu, where a Chinese company has been constructing a port and a gas/oil pipeline to Yunnan to reduce China's dependence on the Malacca Straits for energy supplies to China. Chinese officials have expressed the hope that the Thein Sein Government will be able to maintain stability in the area. So far, there are no reports of any threats to the Chinese working in the Rakhine State for oil and gas exploration, port and pipeline construction and the construction of a railway line to Yunnan.

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