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Myanmar: Peace Mission's Second Meeting with Northern Alliance- A Positive Step?

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By S.Chandrasekharan

In what could be described as a positive step, Representatives of the Northern Alliance consisting of TNLA, AA and the MNDAA met the Myanmar Peace Mission on 1st November and reached an agreement to reduce clashes in Kachin and Northern Shan States. They also agreed to meet again in December to discuss the implementation of the agreement.

The TNLA General Secretary Brig. Gen Tai Bone Kyaw said that the main thing is for the Non NCA Signatories to join the Peace Process , signing the National Cease Fire Agreement and joining the National Peace Process. Indeed, it is surprising that the three groups who triggered the clashes in November 2016 should now talk of joining the peace process and even signing the peace agreement, when the seven party alliance that includes them and led by the UWSA is for a totally different narrative for the peace process!

It was not long ago that both Myanmar Army- the Tatmadaw and the Government were against any deal with these groups and insisted that they should first lay down arms before signing the National Peace Agreement.

It was only due to intervention and insistence of China that they were allowed to be present in the Second Panglong Conference as Observers and in fact, the Representatives were airlifted from Kunming at the last minute.

What is it that has changed for the Government of Myanmar to agree to meet these very representatives now and talk seriously of even signing the National Cease fire Agreement?

Some important points to be noted in this meeting were-

1. The meeting was sponsored by China and held in Kunming- the capital of Yunnan Province.
2. This was the second such meeting arranged by the Chinese. The first meeting also arranged by China was on 5th September.
3. Though the two important and well-armed groups the KIA and the UWSA were not participating in the meetings, they were there as 'Observers' and this was possible only because the Chinese sponsored it.
4. Significantly, the Tatmadaw was not represented in both the meetings, though they may have been briefed before the meeting by the Peace Mission. As we had mentioned repeatedly, the peace process is like a four wheeled coach representing the Army, the Government, the Armed Insurgent ethnic groups and finally China, where all the four wheels will have to move in sync.to make progress. It is not clear whether the Tatmadaw was on board in these meetings as in the end it is the Army which has to cease hostilities if and when the agreement is to be implemented.
5. In the meeting it was decided that the Kachin Representatives will be invited for the next meeting in December and the focus will be, on reducing clashes in the ongoing operations by the Army in the Kachin Region!
6. The meeting also discussed the possibility of the three groups signing the Government's National Cease-fire Agreement and joining the national peace process.

The Peace Mission was represented by U Thein Zaw and Khin Zaw Oo, Vice Chairman and Secretary respectively.

It was clear from the beginning that it was a Chinese effort to bring the two groups together.

The clashes have been mainly on the China border. In Kachin area, it was the nexus and combined stakes of avaricious Myanmar Army Officers, the Smugglers, Drug peddlers and unscrupulous Chinese businessmen who thrived on the disturbed situation in the border areas of China and Myanmar that kept the conflict going.

It may be recalled that way back in 2015, the fierce attacks by the Kokang in Musse and other places near the Chinese border took the Myanmar Army and the Government by surprise as these were not in the interests of both Myanmar and China.

It was not understood then as to how China allowed in the first place for clashes to take place in a region where the bulk of the border trade between China and Myanmar was taking place.

What followed in November 2016 was even more surprising when a combined force of KIA and three other groups of Northern Alliance made unprecedented attacks on the Security and Civilian posts in the same area. Within 24 hours of the attack, the Chinese Ambassador in Yangon instead of condemning the attack by the Northern alliance, went on to urge all parties involved in the conflict to exercise 'restraint' and take "effective and concrete measures" for an immediate ceasefire. Soon after, a PLA General, Gen. Xu Fenlin Chief of staff of the PLA issued a warning that the PLA will not let anyone destroy the peace and stability of the border region.

It is known that the Chinese Military Intelligence has long-standing links with the MNDAA and also the strongest entity in the Northern Alliance -the UWSA.

The only explanation for these attacks could be that it served China's interests then to keep the border boiling since both the parties- the Myanmar Government and the Ethnic Armed Organizations who were supported by the Chinese will be dependent on China for making any progress towards peace and stability of the region

Now, that China has coerced Myanmar to agree on the China-Myanmar economic corridor that runs from Kunming to Mandalay, then on to Yangon and the Kyaukphyu deep water port on the Bay of Bengal and thus traverses through regions affected by the ethnic clashes, it is now in China's interest to get the parties together to bring some stability in the region to implement the BRI in Myanmar!

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