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Myanmar: Army Extends Ceasefire at China's behest:

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In the last two weeks, two important events took place. First was, that Suu Kyi despite fears from the Kachins, did not give in on the Myitsone Dam in the recently concluded BRF Forum at Beijing. The second was that the Army- (Tatmadaw) extended the ceasefire for another two months – till 30th June to give some time for the Northern Alliance Groups consisting of TNLA, MNDAA, KIA and the AA to come to a positive understanding with the Government on a cease fire.

Unfortunately, despite the Arakan Army being a part of the Northern Alliance (NA-B), the Army has declared that it will not cover its Western Command which consists of Rakhine and Chin States. While it is being said that a ceasefire is not possible in the Rakhine State due to the presence of the Terrorist Group ARSA, the real reason appears to be to go ahead with the operations against the Arakan Army and crush them. The Government's stance continues to be to deny a permanent base to the AA in Rakhine State. Though there have been no major incidents initiated by the AA, the Army has continued to indulge in excesses in continuing to target the civilian areas. One instance of killing of 6 unarmed suspected AA prisoners has also come to notice. The Army has claimed that the unarmed prisoners tried to snatch away the weapons from the guards- usual justification proffered by the security forces when unarmed persons are killed!

It may be recalled that the Army had already announced that they would not extend the unilateral ceasefire beyond April (refer my prev. paper) and clashes have taken place in a big way between the Army and the KIA in the Shan region even before the expiry of the earlier cease-fire. The KIA was supposed to have given up many of its posts in that region.

It looks that the suggestion to extend the ceasefire had come from China. When the Army chief visited Beijing recently, he was requested by the Chinese authorities that they should extend the cease fire. The irony is that the Tatmadaw is willing to listen to China but not to its own

government. Incidentally, the Tatmadaw is not even represented in the NRPC that is the prime engine to carry forward the reconciliation process!

On 30th April Government Representatives met with the leaders of the Northern Alliance at Muisse on the China border. This was the third meeting, the earlier ones being held at Naypyitaw and Kunming.

The meeting was to focus on the mounting tension between the Military and KIA after several skirmishes in the Northern Shan State. The Second major issue was the return of the internally displaced persons. On the next day (1st May), the groups are said to have individually submitted proposals for a bilateral ceasefire to the Government negotiators.

From the Government side, the main demand appeared to be for the members to formally pledge themselves to sign the National Ceasefire Agreement. The Government Spokesman U Zaw Tay said that it has to be a two-step one- after the ceasefire- the first is the commitment to sign the NCA and then fixing the territories of respective insurgent groups.

Two issues do not appear to be clear. The first was the presence of a representative of the UWSA which heads the seven party alliance (FPNCC- Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee) of which the Northern Alliance is only a part. It is known that that UWSA which is backed by China has maintained that the existing bilateral ceasefire agreement with the Government would suffice without another on the NCA and has a totally different mechanism (different from the NCA route) to proceed further for political negotiations. Does it mean that it has the approval of the UWSA group also which means the backing of China for the commitment to sign the NCA eventually by the Northern Alliance? It is said that the Myanmar Government had already committed themselves to a bilateral cease fire agreement in the meeting at Kunming on February 25th.

The second is the position of the Arakan Army. While on the one hand the Army has vowed to crush the Arakan Army and has not extended the ceasefire to that area, would this commitment to go ahead for a bilateral ceasefire extend to the AA also?

Suu Kyi's China Visit for the Belt and Road Forum:

Amid fears that Suu Kyi may give in on the Myitsone dam during her visit to China for the Belt Road Forum, there was a major demonstration in one of the townships in the Kachin area where four thousand people had demonstrated against reviving the Myitsone dam.

On 26th of April, the Spokesman of the President's Office, Zaw Htay declared that the NLD will not make any secret agreement on a government to government basis on Myitsone dam leaving the people in the dark. He said "We will present to the people – how the government will do and how we will settle the issue in full transparency". In the meeting with the Kachin Humanitarian Concern Committee he continued that they would take into consideration public opinion and the national interest.

It is said that the Myitsone dam was never discussed by Suu Kyi either with the Chinese President or the Prime Minister (one cannot believe). In all, two MOUs and one Agreement were signed. Little noticed but of great significance not only to Myanmar but also to other smaller countries was that in one of the High level Meetings (Session 1), Suu Kyi boldly said that all Projects under the Belt & Road Initiatives **must win the confidence and support of the local people.**

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