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Myanmar: Full Scale Civil War Going on in Rakhine State:

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By S.Chandrasekharan

The situation in the ethnic front is rather grim, with a full scale civil war going on in Rakhine state where the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army are engaged in heavy fighting resulting with the civil administration coming to a stand still within two months of the ongoing conflict.

The Myanmar Army on the other hand has already indicated that it will not be extending the four months' ceasefire it had declared and is due to end by end April. Major Gen. Soe Naing Oo declared that they have the fighting ability to carry on (indefinitely?) as it is meaningless to extend the ceasefire if there is no prospect of formal results beyond four months.

An arrogant statement indeed when the Myanmar Army is having heavy losses in the Arakan Front. Soon in a week the United State Wa Army is going to display its full military might to celebrate thirty years of cease fire with the Myanmar Army and imagine China sending its top representatives from Yunnan to attend the celebrations that would extend for three days. Representatives of all other Ethnic Armed Organisations are going to attend in full strength. So much for the repeated declaration of the Chinese that they will not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries.

Indeed, the Chinese are holding all the cards and one should return their favourite phrase back to them- "hegemony" The Army Chief was in Beijing for three days and he faithfully praised China as an "eternal friend" and thanked it for countering international pressure on Rohingya crisis.

Soon, towards the end of the month, Suu Kyi will be visiting Beijing with a large delegation to attend the second BRI Conference to be attended by many countries. She will have a tough time in balancing the Chinese demands with the overwhelming disapproval of her

ministers not to go too far in getting involved in the BRI of China. The Deputy Planning and Finance Minister U Aung said that the projects under the BRI should be “genuine, inclusive, transformational economic growth”.

The Army Chief declared China as a strategic Partner- and the CMEC Corridor from Yunnan- to Yangon and then to Kyakphyu running for 1700 Kms is meant to meet the strategic needs of China and not that of Myanmar. For example- the Railway project of a high speed Railway line from Muisse on the Chinese border to Mandalay has only strategic value to China and not the other way.

Of special concern to India is the heavy fighting going on in the Rakhine state in the area around which the Indian project multi modal transport to Mizoram through Sittwe is located. Indeed the project will benefit Mizoram, a state with talented people, but unfortunately geographically isolated.

The following points on the situation in Rakhine State should be of interest.

1. Having invited the Arakan Army Representative as part of the Northern Alliance in the meeting on 21st March, it was thought that in the meeting the Representatives of NRPC will be conciliatory. Dr. Tin Myo Win the Myanmar official repeatedly declared in the meeting that an armed group in the East (meaning AA) posed a threat to peace and security. He threatened that he will not allow any ethnic group to have its headquarters in the East- Rakhine State.
2. On 10th of April, the AA attacked three of the artillery positions of the Security forces near the Mrauk-U township and over 20 soldiers were killed and many taken prisoners. A week earlier, the Army incurred heavy casualties near Buthidaung township and large number of weapons including RPGs were recovered.
3. The Myanmar Army is said to have resorted to artillery barrages, strafing by jets and helicopters resulting in heavy damage to some historical structures around Mrauk-U township. This has angered the local people.
4. Official figures say that there are over 26,000 internally displaced persons while the AA websites say that over 30000 have been displaced. It could be more.
5. Increased fighting between the Myanmar Army and the Arakan Army has created a general panic in the townships of the province. There have been mysterious disappearances and open assassinations of officials in Sittwe, Myebon and Mrauk-U townships.
6. Support for the Arakan Army from the public appears to be stronger than ever and some households were seen to be openly displaying AA flags in their houses
7. The Government's serious efforts to maintain order has only fueled a deeply felt resentment and anger. There is said to be total

paralysis of local government in some places.

8. It is not clear why the Government is so angry with the Arakan Army alone and this is complemented by people from Rakhine who call the Myanmar army as the “Bamar Army”. It is said that the local people have refused to talk in Burmese.

These are not good signs and the Government and the Tatmadaw will have to talk to the AA at some stage or other for a cease fire and start a dialogue just as it had done with other ethnic outfits. If the UWSA is allowed to blatantly display its military might inside Myanmar with foreigners attending the celebrations, surely the AA has a cause to be listened to and allowed to have a base in the East.

(It is suggested that Readers should see the documentary of Al Jazeera on Myitsone dam and also a paper by Prof. David Ludden on the "Rohingya Crisis and the violence of National Territory- A short summary can be seen in the Daily Star of Bangladesh)

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