

## **Muslims in Burma are not for Separate State but strive for equal rights.**

Date : 2005-01-12

Suthep Chaviwan reporting from Bangkok, Thailand

Armed Arakan fighters massing in the jungles located in the Burma - Bangladesh boarder region. Bangkok, Thailand, 12 January, (Asiantribune.com): Armed Muslim groups of Burma, both in Arakan State bordering with Bangladesh and in the western side close to Thai border said that they do not demand for separated state from Burma, but only wanted equal rights similar to what people in other faiths enjoy.

They also said that Burma in the recent months, after the spy Chief Gen. Khin Nyuint was sacked, the political atmosphere in the country is good – it has the trend that Muslims in Burma will no longer be harassed or persecuted.

Vice President of the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB), an umbrella organization of the armed ethnic resistance groups in Burma, Col. Kyaw La, said: “Muslims in Burma were earlier subjected to atrocities by Buddhists and by the intelligence agents of the ruling junta under the ousted intelligence chief, Gen Khin Nyuint.” Col. Kyaw La added, “I have no habit of criticizing other people especially about the one who has fallen from grace. But in the case of Gen. Khin Nyuint, I would like to comment that this man was neither sincere in solving the problem in the country, nor was sincere to his colleague in the SLORC and SPDC, or even with the ethnic groups who tried to make peace with him or being lured to make peace with him .”

“Khin Nuyint remained in power for 20 years in Burma. With such power in his hand and with his autocratic authority, if he would have acted honestly he could have solved the entire problems the country faced. But he was not genuinely interested and never had the intention to do so,” Kyaw La pointed out.

“He ignored the problems and even allowed his intelligence men, the Na Ka Sa, and the combined force of military, and police along the borders with friendly counties to harass and persecute the civilians. These men were corrupt and they persecuted Muslims, destroyed their mosques, and Khin Nyuint was aware of all those atrocities let loose by his men, but he did not come forward to stop them,” said Kyaw La. Apart from being a Vice President of the DAB, Kyaw La is also the Chairman of Muslim Liberation Organization (MLO) and the Editor of the “Muslim Voice Burma”, a monthly Burmese language free paper targeting the Muslims in Burma.

“My Muslim Liberation Organization is an impassive resistance outfit. We are against all kind of terrorism, terror, violence intimidation and human abuses. We want to make peace and live in harmony along with the people of all other faiths in Burma” said Kyaw La.

He said that during Khin Nyunt’s period, Muslims were prevented from practicing their religion freely. Muslims were oppressed and were not even given jobs in the government services.

“It is good that Khin Nyuint was sacked and he all of a sudden he headlong fell from the grace. This man was not sincere to any one, not only to his own colleagues in the SLORC, SPDC, and cease-fire ethnic groups, but also to the Muslims of Burma,” said Kyaw La. Meanwhile, Chairman of the All Burma Muslim Organization (ABMU), Dr Abdul Razak, concurred with Kyaw La that no Muslim organizations in Burma wanted to create their own Muslim independent state inside Burma. “Although one of my Muslim friend, who leads an armed organization in Arakan (or Rakhine) State used to mention about the Muslim independent, a separate Muslim State, but in practice, he cannot do so,” said Razak.

The ABMU leader admitted that all armed Muslim organizations in Burma have very limited capacity to launch any hostile operation against the ruling junta and the said Muslim groups are merely petty militant organizations with limited firepower capacity by which they could only manage to annoy the SPDC," he said. According to Razak, ABMU's main aim is to live peacefully in Burma, living in harmony with the majority Buddhists and with other people who profess different faiths in the country. He added that they do not want to be persecuted by the SPDC or being harassed by majority Buddhists.

A general situation in Burma, according to Razak, at present it has improved to an extent. He added that Muslims are less persecuted, but it is difficult to predict about the future with junta.

According to an official record, there are about four percent of Muslim populations, out off over 44 million peoples, in the country.

Majority of the Muslims in Burma belongs to the Sunni sect.

However, over half a million of Rohingya Muslims in northwestern Arakan State are not included with the other Muslim population in Burma. Burmese government does not recognize Rohingya Muslims as Burmese citizens.

The political situation of Muslim rebel groups in Arakan State, it is reported that they are in dire strait.

Rohingya Muslims both the rebel groups and civilians are continuously oppressed and deprived of their fundamental rights.

"We are not welcomed by both Buddhist Burma and the Muslim Bangladesh," a senior Muslim rebel lamented through his satellite phone yesterday to this writer.

"Security forces of the two countries are tough with the armed groups and they are in full alert along the Kaladan River where the gas pipeline to Bangladesh and India are being constructed," he said. It is known that anti-Rangoon groups which are operating along the common border of the two countries, the one outfit run by Buddhist, Dr. Khin Maung, chief of the National United Party of Arakan (NUPA) and the Arakan Rohingya National Organization (ARNO) headed by Dr. Nural Islam are known to be facing many obstacles.

Both countries want to trade, have economic development, and easy communication in the new highways linking Arakan State, through Southeastern Chittagong over Naaf River. Both countries do not want any insurgent groups operating along their borders.

The two rebel leaders, Khin Maung and Nural Islam, used to tell this writer that they are in a difficult situation and it was even not easy for them to stay in the thick jungles of Burma and Bangladesh.

- Asian Tribune -