

Ethnic delegates seeks Indian support for tripartite dialogue

Mizzima News (www.mizzima.com)

November 28, 2007 - The Indian government has been urged by the Ethnic Nationalities Council to use its influence over the Burmese military and help kick-start the process of national reconciliation through a tripartite dialogue. The Council is an umbrella group of Burmese ethnics in exile.

A four-member ENC delegation, visiting India's capital New Delhi, said during their meetings with Indian leaders they highlighted the need for a tripartite dialogue between the Burmese military junta, pro-democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and ethnic leaders to resolve Burma's long political impasse.

"We believe Burma's political crisis can be best solved through the process of tripartite dialogue," Dr. Lian H. Sakhong, General Secretary of the ENC said.

The ENC delegates, who are on a three-day visit, from November 25 to 27 to India at the invitation of the Indian Parliamentary Forum for Democracy in Burma (IPFDB), met Indian leaders including members of Parliament, civil societies, journalists and human rights activists.

The delegates said they briefed Indian leaders of the importance of supporting Burma's process of dialogue and argued that India's interest would be better served by a federal democratic system in Burma.

In response to the ENC delegates' request, Indian parliamentarians said they would highlight the Burma issue at the next parliamentary session.

"We have discussed with some of the Indian Members of Parliament the Burma issue and they agreed to take it up as a Parliamentary debate in the next session," Harn Yawngwe Director of Euro-Burma office and Adviser of ENC said.

India was one of the few countries that had in the past maintained a hard-line stance against the current Burmese military generals, when they came to power after brutally suppressing the students-led pro-democracy uprising in 1988.

Reportedly, the Indian embassy in Rangoon had sheltered Burmese student activists when the junta randomly cracked down on them and even suggested the activists flee to India for refuge.

However, Indian foreign policy on Burma took a U turn in the late 1990s, with Indian policy makers claiming the need to engage the Burmese generals in their national interest, which included countering Chinese influence on Burma.

"The Indian government should not compete with China for favours from the Burmese junta basically because of two things. Both India and China have a different political system. While India is a democracy, China is a Communist state. India should think of its long term interest, and maintaining a relationship with the junta will only hamper its image," Sakhong said.

The ENC leaders said India's national interests as well as the interest of regional countries could only be best served with a genuine solution to Burma's long political stalemate.

Sakhong said, Burma's political crisis can only be genuinely resolve with a tripartite dialogue that will bring an end to military rule, restoration of democracy and establishing a genuine federal system of government based on the1947 Pang long agreement, initiated by Burma 's independence hero Bogyoke Aung San.

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