

Press Release

AT the invitation of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, Mr Don Pramudwinai, U Than Swe, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, attended an informal discussion on Myanmar, held on 18-19 June 2023 in Pattaya, Thailand, along with the Foreign Ministers, Special Envoy, Ambassadors and representatives from ASEAN Member States: Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, the Philippines and neighbouring countries: China and India.

The Union Minister expressed his appreciation to friends of Myanmar for organizing an informal discussion on Myanmar while welcoming suggestions to overcome challenges faced by Myanmar. At a time when correct information on Myanmar was blocked and one-sided news was spread by biased media, progress was analyzed making reference to the ASEAN five-point consensus, he briefed the meeting on the development in Myanmar, particularly the implementation of three main tasks of the ASEAN five-point consensus; namely the cessation of violence, inclusive political dialogue and provision of humanitarian assistance as these tasks complement Myanmar's Five-Point Road Map.

The Union Minister elaborated on peace efforts by undertaking all necessary measures for the cessation of violence. Like many other countries in the region, Myanmar experienced insurgency during the Cold War era. By 1974, it has managed to bring tranquillity to 90 per cent of the country's inland areas. In order not to damage the friendship with neighbouring countries, Myanmar exercised utmost constraints in managing the insurgency in border areas. Gentleman agreements were reached with almost all ethnic armed organizations in the post-Cold War era basically agreeing to carry out border development programmes and peace processes, and vowing not to commit offensive attacks and not to make new recruitments. Successive governments have been pursuing the peace process for more than 33 years. Ceasefire in 1990 allowed 17 big EAOs and 17 small EAOs to operate in special zones covering about three per cent of the border areas. As the dedicated Ministry was formed for the development of those areas, some EAOs traded arms for peace for good and about 10,000 armed personnel were transformed into Border Guard Forces-BGF and they are joining hands with the government ensuring peace and stability in respective areas. As of today, there are 18 EAOs and 10 of them signed the NCA and eight are non-NCA signatories who continue to participate in peace negotiation. A to-

tal of 106 rounds of peace talks were held under the current government. As of now, peace talks are organized more than 5,000 times. Important agreements were reached particularly for the building of a Federal Union through a multiparty democratic system as well as for sharing of power and resources. Tatmadaw strictly follows the peace agreement not undertaking first strikes and not intruding on demarcated zones. Only in cases of NCA violation, intrusion into government control areas, expansion of bases in resource-rich areas and imposing threats to the public, counter-attacks are carried out with maximum restraints and in line with the Rule of Engagement in the Vienna Convention. Myanmar people value lives and never go to extremes. Despite the existence of armed struggles for 75 years since 1948, the gun death rate is the lowest in the ASEAN region.

The Union Minister explained that some EAOs take advantage of the political instabilities in the past two years by training and equipping vulnerable and emotional youth in the post-COVID-19 period as the PDFs even in the areas where stability was enjoyed for the past five decades. They do attack security forces but they aim at soft targets by killing and bullying unarmed people, members of opposition parties, public services personnel and veterans and destroying public properties. Those armed groups emerged only after the announcement of the ASEAN five-point consensus. So-called NUG ministers order PDFs for terror activities against those who do not follow the instruction for school and office closure by supporting arms and ammunition to PDFs. To date, 5,846 innocent lives were claimed by PDFs including 187 young children, 77 teachers, 69 members of the Sangha, 807 village and ward administrators and 148 other public services personnel, 17 medical service personnel, members of opposition parties, veterans. Such kind of brutal acts are not acceptable in any civilized society. Being responsible to protect its people, the government has to counter the attacks by PDFs. As an institution systematically organized with rich experience and capability, Tatmadaw can easily eliminate ordinary armed groups. However, it exercises utmost restraints not to hurt its own citizens. Government open its door for peace in order to solve domestic issues in an amicable manner. Amnesty is also announced giving pardons except to those with records of serious crimes such as rape and murder. All are allowed to participate in the political process after coming to legal-fold. Political parties are also allowed to be formed and registered. As all the doors

are opened for the cessation of violence and inclusive political dialogues,

The Union Minister explained that some EAOs do not cooperate wholeheartedly in peace processes as they don't wish to relinquish the benefits they are gaining from illegal businesses of drug and armed smuggling. Also, some did not join the elections all three times. As drug production becomes synthetic chemical-based, eliminating drug issues becomes more challenging. Therefore, he stressed the need to promote cooperation with neighbours and the ASEAN Member States.

On the humanitarian front, the Union Minister underlined that the government will continue facilitating the works of the AHA centre. With regard to the repatriation of displaced persons in Rakhine state, the government has been expediting the early implementation of the pilot project. Although there are some delays in the commencement of the repatriation process as some potential returnees were threatened by some groups on the other side, Government will continue its efforts in cooperation with all relevant parties.

As the government has to address the issue of one-sided media attempting to destroy the country's image while blocking the true information in Myanmar, Union Minister called for greater cooperation from friends of Myanmar. Only through communication and engagement at all levels in ASEAN, ASEAN Member States can effectively support Myanmar to overcome challenging situations through proper analysis and judgement.

The Union Minister continued to explain that there are some NLD members who wish to stay peacefully in the country in line with the rules of law. Any democracy would not accept election fraud of this scale, 29 per cent, as experienced in the 2020 general elections. Findings were disclosed to media and diplomats. NUG fail to solve the political issue through lawful and peaceful means by engaging in destructive activities. Myanmar had experienced a similar organization, the National Coalition Government of Union of Burma (NCGUB) 30 years ago. Although such groups raised funds and earn international support by claiming for the cause of democracy, none of those people returned to the country during the 10 years of democracy and not even at the time of the NLD administration. Most of those people merely aim for gaining refugee status, they don't consider much on the benefit of the people and gradually fade away from politics.

He highlighted that all enabling environments, such as granting amnesty and allowing party registration, are

in place, anyone with a sincere will to bring about benefits to the people can seek peaceful solutions by participating in political processes while denouncing terrorist activities.

He informed that the current government is carrying out all its duties and all the records of its activities under its administration are systematically kept for a systematic handover of the state responsibilities to the winning party after general elections.

The Union Minister continued to explain that the country's peace efforts over the past 33 years were done through dialogues rather than armed conflicts. During that period, some EAOs delayed the peace process as they are not willing to relinquish high profits gained from illegal businesses including drugs. Successive governments are pursuing peace patiently. Now a day, rates of armed attacks and drug smuggling are declining due to collaborative efforts of the government with the neighbouring countries. Some are returning to legal-fold.

Despite Myanmar being a resource-rich country surrounded by five neighbours with 31 billion people and the country being situated at the hub of the world's biggest market with high development potential, it continues to experience hardship for a long period due to external interference. Due to its geo-political and geo-strategic locations, successive Myanmar government has been upholding the principle of "peaceful co-existence" without interfering with the internal affairs of other countries and has no issue with any countries in the world. The Union Minister said Myanmar stands ready to receive good advice and suggestions from and promote cooperation with friends of Myanmar who realize the real situation in Myanmar and the challenges of biased media on Myanmar.

The Union Minister concluded by expressing the government's readiness to cooperate with all countries who can understand the real situation in the country as opposed to the wrong image portrayed by some biased media and disinformation campaigns.

Participants at the informal meetings expressed their adherence to non-interference in the internal affairs of Myanmar and their readiness to support Myanmar for peace, stability and inclusive political dialogues. They expressed their willingness to avoid the ASEAN-minus formula looking forward to strengthened cooperation with Myanmar.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Nay Pyi Taw
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