

Burma

China Again Seeks Myanmar Regime's Assurances on Oil, Gas Pipelines Security

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China has reportedly requested a meeting with Myanmar over growing concerns about the security of its oil and natural gas twin pipelines project after ethnic armed groups in northern Shan State warned the military regime they would resume hostilities if its brutal killing of anti-coup protesters continued.

Multiple sources in Naypyitaw, the capital of Myanmar, confirmed to The Irrawaddy that Chinese officials are continuing to pressure the military regime to reinforce security measures for the twin pipelines, particularly in northern Shan State, where clashes with ethnic armed groups would be most likely to occur.

The project spans nearly 800 kilometers, comprising twin pipelines running in parallel from the port of Kyaukphyu in Rakhine State on the Bay of Bengal through Magwe and Mandalay regions and northern Shan State before entering China. The crude oil pipeline is designed to transport 22 million tons annually, while the natural gas pipeline is designed to carry 12 billion cubic meters of gas.

A recent warning from three ethnic armed groups that they are considering a resumption of fighting and joining forces with anti-coup protesters is seen as putting Beijing's interests at risk, including the pipelines. Anti-Chinese sentiment has grown in Myanmar since the coup, with many people suspecting Beijing of supporting the military. China has repeatedly blocked efforts at the UN Security Council to take action against the Myanmar coup leaders. Anti-coup protesters have not only urged a boycott of all China-made products, but also called for the targeting of Chinese investment projects.

Among the vast number of China-backed projects, the oil-and-gas pipelines project has been in the spotlight, as it is the largest in the country and has been a source of controversy since 2013, provoking opposition among the affected communities and environmental organizations.

When the military regime's forces intensified their deadly crackdown on anti-coup protesters in late February, Chinese officials held an emergency meeting with Myanmar officials from the Home Affairs and Foreign ministries.

During the meeting, China asked the military regime to tighten security measures for the pipelines, saying the project is a crucial part of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Myanmar, according to a leaked document.

It also warned that any damage to the pipelines would cause huge losses for both countries and undermine confidence among foreign investors.

In March, Chinese mouthpiece Global Times claimed Myanmar protesters were responsible for

attacks that damaged 32 China-backed factories in Yangon's Hlaingtharyar Industrial Zone. Protesters denied the allegations, however, saying the attacks were a plot by the military to justify harsher crackdowns on protesters.

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<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-post-coup-death-toll-tops-540-thursday.html>

Chinese Troops Gather on Myanmar's Border to 'Protect Pipelines'

Several sources on the Chinese border reported that troops were gathering in Jiegao, opposite the Shan State border town of Muse.

Many Chinese soldiers and military trucks have arrived at the border in previous days.

Sources from ethnic armed groups said China was sending a warning signal to Myanmar.

TVBS News in Taiwan reported that Chinese troops are there to protect the natural gas pipeline without suggesting how.

In early March, the Chinese asked Myanmar's military regime to protect the oil and gas pipelines following the emergence of anti-Chinese sentiment and protesters threatening to blow up the pipelines.

The 800-km twin pipeline project runs from Kyaukphyu in Rakhine State on the Bay of Bengal through Magwe and Mandalay regions and northern Shan State to China.

China has repeatedly insisted that the armed forces' seizure of power from the democratically elected government is an internal affair, including at the United Nations Security Council and UN Human Rights Council.

In February, the Chinese Embassy in Yangon faced daily protests, demanding Beijing stop support for Myanmar's military. Moreover, anti-Chinese sentiment has emerged in Myanmar, including boycotts of Chinese products.

On Monday, the tripartite Brotherhood Alliance of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, Ta'ang National Liberation Army and Arakan Army (AA) condemned the military junta after the civilian death toll rose to over 500.

The three groups warned the military that they would collaborate with other ethnic armed organizations and pro-democracy supporters to defend civilians from the regime's brutal crackdowns. All three armies are based along the Chinese border and the AA also has substantial forces in northern Rakhine State, bordering Bangladesh. They can all challenge Myanmar's military and have close relations with China.

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