

Burma

Myanmar Regime Shores Up Ties With Two Powerful Northern Ethnic Armies (Wa and Shan)

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Senior officials of the Myanmar military regime recently met with two powerful ethnic Wa and Shan armed groups to cement relations with them.



The UWSA holds an event in 2019 to celebrate the 30th anniversary of its founding. / The Irrawaddy

The regime's peace committee went to Matmanseng and Wan Hai in northern Shan State on April 7 and 8 to meet officials from the United Wa State Army (UWSA) and the Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP), the political wing of the Shan State Army (SSA). The junta committee was led by Lieutenant General Yar Pyae and Lieutenant General Aung Zaw Aye, the commander of the No. 2 Bureau of Special Operations.

Though the trip was officially for the purpose of holding "peace discussions", The Irrawaddy has learned that committee members encouraged officials from the armed groups to maintain uninterrupted relations with the military and explained to them the reasons behind its Feb. 1 coup.

Of the 18 ethnic armed groups in Myanmar, the UWSA is the most powerful. It signed a ceasefire with the government in 1989.

It has remained silent on the coup, while other ethnic armed groups, including the 10 armies that signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement with the government, have denounced the military's coup and its killing of civilian protesters.

The regime's trip comes as other powerful ethnic armed groups like the Kachin Independence Army and Karen National Union have recently launched attacks on regime troops to show their opposition to the junta's murdering of protesters.

U Nyi Rang, a spokesperson for the UWSA, said he did not participate in the meeting and could not provide details about it.

"As far as I am concerned, they explained why the coup happened," he said.

Asked if the UWSA recognizes the regime as Myanmar's government, the Wa spokesperson said

simply: “We have longstanding good relations [with the military].”

For all its “longstanding good relations with the military”, however, Wa leader Bao Yu Xiang sent a congratulatory message to the Daw Aung San Suu Kyi-led National League for Democracy late last year upon its electoral victory.

On April 8, while on its way to the SSPP’s headquarters in Wan Hai by helicopter, the regime’s peace committee was attacked by members of the Shan armed group, leaving an official on board injured.

The armed group’s spokesperson confirmed the trip and the attack on the helicopter.

“Some troops on the ground mistakenly fired on it, sending them back to Lashio,” said Major Sai Phone Han.

However, the regime claimed during a press conference on Friday that the peace discussions between the military and the SSPP went ahead.

“They admitted to the shooting. But we were able to hold the peace discussion. I have to say it was a success,” said Brig-Gen Zaw Min Tun, the regime’ spokesperson.

The UWSA and the SSPP have long enjoyed good relations.

The Irrawaddy

P.S.

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