

Frontier Fridays: The Top Stories in Myanmar this Week

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Welcome to Frontier Fridays. This week China indicated that it's warming up to the military dictatorship, Aung San Suu Kyi was hit with a new corruption case as she prepares to face trial for other charges, a military plane crashed in Mandalay killing a prominent monk and at least 11 others, and the National Unity Government faced some backlash in Rakhine for pledging to support Rohingya citizenship.

China warms up to junta

China edged increasingly closer to recognising Myanmar's military regime, having previously avoided explicitly choosing a side in the political crisis.

First, on Saturday, junta leader Min Aung Hlaing and his foreign minister Wunna Maung Lwin met Chinese ambassador Chen Hai, sparking fresh controversy when the Chinese embassy's Facebook [statement](#) identified the senior general as the "Leader of Myanmar". Chinese state-run media outlet Global Times also made the shift, referring to Min Aung Hlaing as the "Myanmar leader" in an [article](#) on Sunday. The comment section of the post was understandably flooded with angry messages from Myanmar users who don't see Min Aung Hlaing as their leader at all. "Utterly disgusting to see. CCP is trying hard to legitimize terrorist leader MAL for their business interests," wrote one user. Wunna Maung Lwin then subsequently [attended](#) a special ASEAN-China Foreign Minister's meeting in Chongqing, where he also took part in a Mekong-Lancang Cooperation meeting and had a one-on-one informal rendezvous with Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi.

Myanmar's state-run Global New Light of Myanmar said the pair discussed the "advancement of the existing Pauk Phaw relations" and the "implementation of Myanmar-China bilateral projects", lending more strength to the idea that the junta may have agreed to speed up Chinese development projects in Myanmar in exchange for political support. "They also discussed for closer collaboration between the two countries in both regional and multilateral contexts, particularly the ASEAN and the United Nations," the article continues, which is likely a reference to China shielding Myanmar from any international consequences or pressure due to the coup. Hammering the point home, GNLM said the two ministers discussed ASEAN's role in resolving the "political developments" in Myanmar, with an emphasis on "non-interference".

Meanwhile, Wang [assured](#) his counterpart that China will always support Myanmar in choosing its own developmental path and friendly relations between the two countries have not been affected by recent developments. Of course, Myanmar did not choose this path - a handful of generals did at the expense of millions, who have emphatically rejected military rule. During the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation meeting with other foreign ministers from the Mekong region, the bloc approved 22 projects worth \$8 million to be implemented in Myanmar, according to state media. It's not immediately clear if these are the [same 22 projects](#) already agreed to in 2020, for which China pledged \$6.7 million in funding.

“The Chinese government should take note that the State Administrative Council established by Min Aung Hlaing does not represent the people of Myanmar, and that efforts to legitimize it as the government of Myanmar risk undermining people to people relations between the two countries,” the National Unity Government warned in a statement.

Corruption charges filed

Deposed State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi was hit with a corruption charge on Wednesday, taking her number of alleged offences to seven. The only real surprise though is that it took so long for the charge to be announced, given the junta began pushing this corruption narrative back in March.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been charged under section 55 of the Anti-Corruption Law over allegations that she took bribes and rented state land at reduced prices in Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw for the Daw Khin Kyi Foundation, a charity organisation set up in the name of her mother. She faces up to 15 years in prison, which is basically a formality at this point given the other six charges levelled against the 75-year-old would easily see her put away for the rest of her life anyway. Deposed Nay Pyi Taw Council Chairman Myo Aung, his deputy Ye Min Oo, and Nay Pyi Taw Development Committee member Min Thu were also charged under section 55. They all stand accused of facilitating Aung San Suu Kyi’s alleged transgressions.

Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint and Myo Aung all appeared in court on Monday to discuss case management in a separate hearing for five charges against the state counsellor. The judge ruled that the hearings should be completed within 180 days because they are “simple cases”. To most, they are simple in the sense that they are obviously politically motivated and should be dismissed immediately, but we suspect the junta-controlled courts won’t feel the same way.

In any event, it seems the process will now speed up, with hearings expected to be held twice a week, on Mondays and Tuesdays. Next Monday, the court will begin to hear from the plaintiff in the case against Aung San Suu Kyi, Win Myint and Myo Aung. It seems the 180-day period starts from some time in February, as her lawyer, Khin Maung Zaw, said the prosecution will present its last arguments by June 28, while the defence must present their last arguments by June 26.

As a reminder, Aung San Suu Kyi is facing a charge under section 67 of the Telecommunications Law (for possession and use of walkie-talkies without a licence), one charge under the Import and Export Law (for illegally importing walkie-talkies), two charges under section 25 of Natural Disaster Management Law (for allegedly violating election campaign rules) and one incitement charge under section 505(b) of the Penal Code. A more serious charge (alongside the new corruption charge) under section 3(1)(c) of the Official Secrets Act is being heard separately at the Supreme Court, with a hearing scheduled for June 23.

Plane crashes and burns

A military aircraft crashed in Pyin Oo Lwin Township, Mandalay Region on Thursday, although there are still some conflicting reports about the incident. Military-run TV reported that 12 people were killed and two survived, while some other reports claimed that 13 of the 14 passengers were killed. The Irrawaddy reported that two monks, five military officers and five donors were killed when the plane crashed at 8am during landing after traveling from Nay Pyi Taw. Other outlets said six military personnel were killed.

Nationalist monk Bhatanda Kavisara, who was planning to visit a monastery under construction, was the most prominent victim. According to [The Irrawaddy](#), the monk has been close to military leaders since the days of the previous dictator Than Shwe. Mizzima and some other outlets reported that he

was the first monk to receive Min Aung Hlaing after the coup, meeting with him on February 2.

The Irrawaddy said a sergeant and a child of one of the donor's survived, but Myanmar Now [reported](#) that the child was the only survivor, and that the victims included two majors, two captains and two sergeants, while the civilians were businessman Win Ko Ko, his wife and their other son.

The military statement did not reveal what caused the crash, only saying the airplane lost contact with air traffic control before the accident. The aircraft was a Beechcraft 1900D, the same model that crashed in 2016, also killing military personnel. A resident who lives close to the airport [told RFA Burmese](#) the plane landed on the "wrong terrain", and said the "engines were functioning well". Another resident said a "quake-like vibration was felt", along with a loud explosion. Soon after the crash, the site was shut down by the security forces while rescue workers started to collect the debris and bodies.

In normal times it would be considered a tragedy, but many seemed to celebrate the accident - both because it killed some military personnel and because it has the trappings of a bad omen, which could rattle the superstitious military leadership.

NUG trouble in Rakhine

The National Unity Government's promise to recognise Rohingya citizenship has sparked a backlash in Rakhine State, underscoring the delicacy of the parallel government's position as it tries to woo both international support and ethnic solidarity.

Pe Than, a senior official from the influential Arakan National Party, [criticised](#) the decision to accept the Rohingya and abolish the citizenship law as "rushed moves". He said the decision was "not a workable solution for Rakhine State" and would likely "do more harm than good". A spokesperson for the (very) minor armed group, the Arakan Liberation Party, also criticised the move, [accusing](#) the NUG of "leaving out Rakhine leaders" in its decision-making. "They must consult with the Rakhine leaders, Rakhine revolution organisations and Rakhine civil society groups if they are to touch the Bengali issue," a spokesperson for the armed group told RFA Burmese, using a derogatory term for the Rohingya.

While a signatory to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, the ALP has few soldiers and little political capital. The ANP, on the other hand, is the most popular political party in the state and has a lot of influence. Still, the party has collaborated with the junta since the coup, and while its leadership recently said they would reconsider its involvement in the regime, it has not formally terminated the relationship. So it's a bit rich for any major players in Rakhine to expect the NUG to cater to their whims, when most have either sided with the junta or remained neutral.

Given the country is heading towards armed revolution rather than a new election, most are waiting to see what the most powerful armed group, the Arakan Army, thinks. The AA, which has claimed to respect freedom of religion, has avoided the Rohingya issue in recent years and will likely continue to maintain a level of ambiguity in order to avoid tarnishing its reputation internationally or domestically. On the ground though, the Rakhine hypernationalism it has whipped up in recent years is likely to make reconciliation with the Rohingya much more difficult.

The NUG's human rights minister Aung Myo Min