

Burma

Chinese Foreign Minister Assures Myanmar Junta It Has Beijing's Support

Bomb Explodes at Chinese-Backed Factory in Myanmar

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China's Foreign Minister told his Myanmar counterpart on Tuesday that Beijing is ready to work with his country, as China's policy toward its neighbor is "not affected by changes to Myanmar's domestic and external situation". The pair spoke on the sidelines of this week's ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Special Meeting in Chongqing.

"China has supported, is supporting and will support Myanmar in choosing a development path that suits its own circumstances," Wang Yi said to Wunna Maung Lwin during their meeting.

The Chinese foreign minister's comments came as its southern neighbor Myanmar remains mired in economic and political turmoil more than four months after the military seized power in a coup in February.

The US and EU have imposed sanctions against the junta leaders, while some Western companies have left the country in response to the regime's human rights violations, including the killing of more than 800 people during crackdowns on anti-regime protesters.

Given the current situation, Wang's latest comment has prompted speculation that Chinese investors may be gearing up to fill the void left by their Western counterparts.

The two foreign ministers also discussed ways to advance relations between their countries and "the continued implementation of Myanmar-China bilateral projects", among other issues, according to Myanmar's state-run newspapers.

"Of course they would be happy to jump in," said a China-Myanmar relations observer in Yangon, adding that the regime is now desperate for outside investment.

"They [regime] would be very responsive to requests for project approvals," he said, meaning projects previously agreed between Myanmar's ousted National League for Democracy-led government and China would likely get started soon.

During Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Myanmar last year, Beijing and the NLD government agreed to speed up bilateral economic corridor projects including the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone, the New Yangon City development in Myanmar's commercial capital, and economic zones in Shan and Kachin states near the Chinese border.

Despite the agreements signed during Xi's trip, none of the projects had moved to the actual implementation phase under the NLD government. The civilian government said it was carefully reviewing all the projects, especially their commercial viability and whether they were in line with Myanmar's national development plan.

However, in the wake of the coup, the regime has reorganized three crucial committees as it pushes ahead with plans to implement giant infrastructure projects in Myanmar that are a key part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The committees play a crucial role in engaging with Beijing on the implementation of BRI-related bilateral economic development projects, including determining key projects, signing memorandums of understanding and conducting government-to-government negotiations.

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Bomb Explodes at Chinese-Backed Factory in Myanmar

A bomb exploded at a Chinese-backed clothing factory in Ayeyarwady Region on Friday morning.

It is the latest attack on a Chinese-owned business in Myanmar after arson attacks on factories in the Hlaing Tharyar Industrial Zone in Yangon in March.

The blast in Patheingyi, the capital of Ayeyarwady Region, came less than a month after coup leader Min Aung Hlaing's assurance to Chinese-language Phoenix TV that the junta will protect all foreign investments.

Witnesses said the explosion occurred at Huabo Times Textile and Clothing Company. Details about damage and casualties are not known.

The security forces arrived shortly after the blast.

According to the junta-controlled Directorate of Investment and Company Administration, the factory registered to make clothing in Myanmar in 2016.

Three Chinese citizens are listed as company directors.

In March, during bloody crackdowns on protesters in Hlaing Tharyar, some Chinese-owned factories burned down.

The Global Times, a Chinese government mouthpiece, claimed 32 factories built with Chinese investment had been attacked, looted or burned, causing around US\$37 million (61 billion kyats) in damage. Beijing demanded that the junta act against the perpetrators and protect Chinese citizens and interests.

The junta blamed anti-regime protesters. Activists condemned Beijing's demands and denied the allegations, saying the arson attacks were a plot by the military to justify harsher crackdowns.

Min Aung Hlaing visited the destroyed factories in Hlaing Tharyar in April.

Late last month, 28 people were sentenced to 20 years in prison with hard labor by a military court for arson attacks on two Chinese-backed factories in March.

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Myanmar Junta Slaps Chinese Factory Arsonists With Heavy Prison Terms

A total of 28 people have each been sentenced to 20 years in prison with hard labor after the military regime found them guilty of arson attacks on Chinese-backed factories in Yangon's Hlaing Tharyar Industrial Zone.

The regime imposed martial law in Hlaing Tharyar Township following the factory fires, after Beijing demanded that the junta take immediate action against the perpetrators and move to protect Chinese citizens and interests.

Military-controlled newspapers claimed that two factories – Myanmar Rong Wei New Material Company Limited and Yuan Hong Garment Company limited – were set on fire in March by the 28 people.

Rong Wei New Material is a joint venture between a Chinese citizen and a Myanmar citizen, while Yuan Hong is jointly owned by two investors from Taiwan and Hong Kong, according to the government investment agency the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration.

Chinese government mouthpiece the Global Times claimed that 32 factories built with Chinese investment had been vandalized, looted and burned, causing around US\$37 million in damage. The Chinese Embassy in Yangon said that two Chinese employees were injured in the attacks.

But as the regime launched a deadly crackdown on anti-coup protesters in Hlaing Tharyar, pro-democracy protesters across Myanmar condemned Beijing's demands and denied the allegations, saying that the arson attacks were a plot by the military to justify harsher crackdowns.

Last month, coup leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing visited the damaged Chinese-backed factories in Hlaing Tharyar. He handed out sacks of rice to be distributed to workers and attempted to demonstrate that the factory zone has returned to normal, even though thousands of workers have fled the area since the junta's lethal crackdowns on protesters.

During an interview with Hong Kong-based Phoenix Television earlier this week, Snr- Gen Min Aung Hlaing said that he had urged the Yangon regional authority to exercise its responsibility for protecting Chinese-funded projects in the Yangon area.

Of the 28 people found guilty by the military court, 18 are still at large, according to military media.

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<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-slaps-chinese-factory-arsonists-with-heavy-prison-terms.html>
