

Burma

Myanmar's Ties With Russia Deepening Since Coup: Military

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Myanmar's bilateral relations with Russia have reached a new level since the February coup, said the regime's spokesman Major General Zaw Min Tun.

"The two countries maintained good relations under the National League for Democracy government but relations with Russia are deeper now. Russia plays the central part in Myanmar's air defense systems, followed by China. And the cooperation between the air forces is expanding," said the spokesman.

Maj-Gen Zaw Min Tun praised Russia for its advanced weapons technology. The junta wants a world-class Russian air defense system, he added.

A military delegation from Myanmar, led by General Maung Maung Aye, chief of the general staff, was in Moscow to attend the International Military Technical Forum "Army 2021" and participate in the International Army Games. The general met Russian deputy defense minister Alexander Fomin on Monday.

The two sides discussed military and technical cooperation and ways to deepen military relations, according to the Russian media. The deputy minister called Myanmar a reliable ally and strategic regional partner.

Gen. Maung Maung Aye, one of the military's rising stars, will reportedly inspect Sukhoi Su-30 fighters which Russia is yet to deliver to Myanmar, Orlan-10 drones and the Pantsir-S1 air-defense missile-gun system. Myanmar ordered six Sukhoi Su-30SM fighter jets in a contract worth about US\$204 million in 2018.

During his two-day visit to Naypyitaw in January, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu pledged to sell air defense weaponry to Myanmar. Some of the weapons have already reportedly arrived in Myanmar and training has begun for military personnel for the equipment.

Since the coup, Fomin visited Myanmar in March and coup leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing attended the international security conference in Moscow and visited several places, including arms factories, in Russia.

Other high-level military delegations from Myanmar have visited Russia. Gen. Maung Maung Kyaw, the air force chief, also visited Moscow.

The regime is reportedly planning to send civilians for scholarships in Russia, besides its military trainees.

Political analyst Dr. Khin Zaw Win said Myanmar had moved back into the influence of Russia and China since the coup, and away from western countries. Myanmar will become a pariah again, like under former military dictator Senior General Than Shwe, he said.

“The military regime can only rely on China and Russia now. The regime also gets help from India and Thailand as secondary sources. Russia has become the main country that helps the junta. It recognizes the regime, continues to help and sell it weapons,” Dr. Khin Zaw Win said.

“Russia will grab the market from China. The Russian navy wants access to the Indian Ocean. Russia has a big navy but struggles to reach it. China and the US already have forces in the ocean,” he added.

While the international community has been cautious in engaging the military regime, Russia has been publicly cooperating with the junta. Analysts say Russia primarily wants a market for its weapons.

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