

Thura NewsViews

Politics

Bombs hit Rakhine town ahead of Daw Suu visit

Three small bombs were detonated in a Rakhine town on the day of a visit by State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. No one was injured in the December 19th blasts, which went off in the town of Manaung, on an island south of Sittwe. However, the incident highlights the ongoing unrest in the conflict-ridden state.

“There were three explosions, but no casualties,” Win Myint, spokesperson for the regional government of Rakhine, told AFP.

The state counsellor went ahead with the trip, during which she attended a solar power plant opening. According to local media, the bombs had been planted by the side of a road a safe distance from the event Aung San Suu Kyi attended. No group has claimed responsibility for the explosions, but a possible culprit could be the Arakan Army (AA), a separatist group that claims to seek greater rights and autonomy for Rakhine Buddhists. The AA has conducted guerrilla-style attacks in recent months and taken scores of hostages. The prisoners include National League for Democracy MP U Hawi Tin, who has been held for more than six weeks. However, the AA claims it is only interested in military personnel, and most of the hostages it has taken have been freed.

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January Highlights

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development ranks Myanmar 126th out of 152 in latest B2C E-commerce Index.

JICA and Myanmar government sign agreement to launch US \$3.6 million project to boost agricultural management.

Thai gvt to grant US \$280 million to its neighbors Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia to build four new transnational roads.

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Companies & Investments

Hot news regarding investments in Myanmar



Major oil and gas block enters first development stage

Dec 19, 2019
An initial deal has been inked to exploit Myanmar's A-6 offshore block. The development stands



Genocide accusations threaten deal of Myanmar Beer partner

Dec 19, 2019
Myanmar's global political woes have become a thorn in the side of a major foreign investor. A

Upcoming Events

Digital Learning Myanmar Conference 2020
January 19, 2020

TEDxYangon 2020: The Big Questions
February 2, 2020

Mobile Money & Financial Inclusion Summit
February 18, 2020 - February 19, 2020

International Conference on Future Computer and Communication
February 26, 2020 - February 28, 2020

International Conference on Computer Applications
February 27, 2020 - February 28, 2020

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Highlights

Vietnam PM in state visit in Myanmar
December 19, 2019



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There has been less violence involving the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), a Rohingya Muslim armed group. But that organization has returned to the media spotlight in recent weeks. Before the bombings, Aung San Suu Kyi detailed the ARSA threat before the International Court of Justice last week to argue that the Rohingya refugee crisis was the result of a legitimate military conflict rather than a systematic ethnic cleansing.

Regardless of who was behind the attack, unrest in Myanmar's West continues to be a thorn in the side of the NLD government, driving away tourism and foreign investment.

■ Christmas eve protests fight Rakhine internet blackout

A small crowd of ethnic Rakhine activists took to Yangon's Mahabandoola Park on Christmas eve to demand an end to an internet blackout in parts of Rakhine State. The blackout has been in place in some degree since June, but critics say it has wrongfully harmed civilians living in conflict zones.

In June, the government suspended internet services in nine townships across Rakhine and Chin States in order to hamper the communications and intelligence of the Arakan Army, a Rakhine Buddhist separatist group. Ministry of Transport and Communications Permanent Secretary U Soe Thein argued that the measure was to "maintain the stability and law and order in these areas." Although the ban has been lifted in five townships, Ponnagyun, Mrauk-U, Kyauk Daw and Minbya are still mostly without internet, save for a few upscale hotels. In addition to the tremendous inconvenience for ordinary people, local media outlets claim they are not able to accurately and efficiently spread information that is vital to civilians living in conflict zones. Aid organizations, too, claim they have not been able to communicate with people in need of relief, especially the tens of thousands living in refugee camps.

"It's so hard for us to get timely information from the IDP camps," U Khaing Kaung San, founder of the Wan Lark Foundation, a local NGO, told Frontier magazine. "Before the internet shutdown in June, the committees at the camps could constantly update us about their needs, whether for medicine or food."

■ UN condemns human rights abuses in resolution

The United Nations General Assembly has passed a resolution condemning what it calls "human rights abuses against Rohingya muslims" in Myanmar. The move adds weight to recent genocide accusations brought before the International Court of Justice and legitimizes a previous UN call for a boycott against military linked business.

The General Assembly passed the resolution in a 134 to 9 vote with 28 abstentions. In addition to condemning military actions in Rakhine State, the resolution called on the Myanmar government to take steps to fight racist attitudes against several minority ethnic groups. The statement follows formal charges of genocide brought before the ICJ by the Gambia in December. State Counsellor and historic human rights icon Daw Aung San Suu Kyi travelled to the Hague to address the charges.

Myanmar's ambassador to the United Nations Hau Do Suan called the resolution "another classic example of double standards [and] selective and discriminatory application of human rights norms."

Myanmar in Figures

GDP (PPP): \$330.88bn (2017)

GDP (official ex.rate): \$59.5bn (Jan 2018)

GDP growth rate: 6.2% (2018)

Population: 54.22 mn people (Apr 2019)

Inflation: 7.1% (2018)

Foreign trade: \$35.9bn (2017-2018)

FDI: \$80.9bn (30/06/2019)

International reserves: \$5.2bn (Jan 2018)

CBM rate Kyat/\$ = 1,471K/1\$ (02/01/20)

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The resolution is another geopolitical black eye for the NLD government. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi has fielded international blowback for her perceived tolerance of the military operations which have displaced more than 750,000 Rohingya Muslims since 2017. However, the actual economic impact remains to be seen. Myanmar has managed to preserve key international economic partnerships despite its damaged reputation, and has renewed ties to non-Western nations, especially China.

- **Arakan Army seeks to collect taxes**

The Arakan Army (AA), an armed separatist group in Rakhine State, has announced the formation of a taxation agency in its occupied territories. The new “Rakhine Peoples’ Authority”, as it is called, will collect funds for its political and military operations in a move to establish itself as a political body.

The move came in stark contrast to the Arakan Army seizing a river ferry and taking 16 passengers, who were members of the Road Transport Administration Department, hostage on New Year’s Eve. Although hostages were released the following day, they were merely the latest of hundreds of hostages captured this year as the armed group has ramped up hostilities against the Myanmar military and civilian government.

Several of these hostages have been killed in the crossfire between the AA and the Myanmar Army (Tatmadaw). One recent casualty includes national MP U Ye Thein, who had been captured by the AA and died when a Tatmadaw artillery shell hit his holding cell. The AA says it seeks to detain only military personnel, not civilian hostages, and that the Myanmar military cares little for preventing collateral damage. But the Myanmar government claims the group uses hostages as human shields and has little regard for their safety.

The AA is a native Rakhine group that ostensibly seeks greater rights and autonomy for ethnic Arakan Buddhists. It is separate from the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, whose actions the government blames for the human rights crisis on the western border..

Economy

- **Garment tycoons optimistic despite strike**

Myanmar’s garment industry is on track to meet its goal of USD 10 billion in exports by 2024, according to the Myanmar Garment Entrepreneurs Association (MGEA). The statement comes despite ongoing strikes and protests from Myanmar’s garment industry is on track to meet its goal of USD 10 billion in exports by 2024, according to the Myanmar Garment Entrepreneurs Association (MGEA). The statement comes despite ongoing strikes and protests from garment workers.

The USD 10 billion target was set in 2014. Yet, soon after, garment workers helped usher in Myanmar’s first minimum wage, a move that worried garment investors. However, since then, the industry has only grown. The Ministry of Commerce (MOC) reports that in the 2018-2019 fiscal year, the industry had reached USD 4.6 billion in export revenue. The MOC expects that number to reach USD 5 billion by the end of next year. Europe, Japan and South Korea are Myanmar’s main textile buyers, according to the Myanmar Times.

Meanwhile, unrest has been growing among industry workers. It has been nearly one month since workers went on strike at the Hua Meng garment factory in Patheingyi, Ayeyarwaddy Region. On the Sunday before Christmas eve, roughly 1,000 workers took to the streets to demand better working conditions and stricter enforcement of industry laws for employers.

Myanmar’s minimum wage was introduced in 2015 and stands at MMK 4800 per day, one of the lowest in Asia. Garment industry investors led the fight against the minimum wage and continue to lobby against proposed increases. They argue that raising the minimum wage would lead to mass layoffs and reduced benefits for workers. However, if official data is accurate, it appears the industry is doing well despite the pay minimum.

- **Kyat begins new year high**

After a long season of inflation, the Myanmar kyat ended 2019 at its highest level for the year. The currency strengthened to 1479 kyat per one US dollar after spending most of the year in the mid 1500s.

A Myanmar Times analysis attributes the bump to new regulations on imports passed on Christmas eve. The report pointed out that Myanmar’s trade deficit dropped from USD 3 billion to 1.1 billion over the 2018-2019 fiscal year.

That figure implies that Myanmar people are buying more local goods and therefore using more local currency. U Maung Maung Lay, vice chair of the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry argued that the latest boost for the kyat is due to lower interest in the manufacturing sector, which contains a high level of foreign investment.

In the long term, the strengthening kyat may simply be a bounce-back from an inflation surge in the summer 2018, when the kyat to dollar value rose past the 1500 mark from around 1300. The value of the kyat took another hit in 2019 after rumors of an unpaid debt crisis caused mass withdrawals at local banks and skyrocketing demand for both foreign currencies and gold.

- **New law aims to reduce imports**

The Myanmar parliament has passed legislation designed to limit foreign imports, boost domestic manufacturing and strengthen the Myanmar kyat. The new law calls for the formation of a new Committee for Preventing an Increased Quantity of Imports (under the Ministry of Commerce) as well as new tariffs and limits on import volumes. “Uncontrolled imports can damage domestic production. The passing of legislation to manage the quantity of imports is needed to help the country’s economic development. The new law will be especially helpful for small and medium enterprises,” the Myanmar Times quoted Myanmar Industrial Association chair U Aung Thein as saying. He continued that the new law would “curb unnecessary imports into the domestic market,” thereby strengthening domestic manufacturing and demand for domestically-produced goods. However, he added that a thorough investigation by the new committee would be necessary before the specific measures could be decided on.

The new law is merely the latest in a series of actions to reduce Myanmar’s trade deficit to a target of USD 500 million. The deficit for the 2018-2019 fiscal year was USD 1.1 billion, although that number was down from USD 3 billion when the year began. The kyat, too, closed out 2019 at its highest value of the year: 1479 kyat to one US dollar.

- **New liquor import law brewing**

Foreign liquor may soon be legally imported. A draft of a law that will allow for the legitimate import of hard liquor has been written and submitted before the attorney general for approval, according to the Myanmar Times.

Importing popular foreign brands like Absolut Vodka and Johnnie Walker for Myanmar store shelves would be a lengthy (and probably expensive) process requiring approval from the General Administration Department, the Ministry of Home Affairs and a new Excise Policy Committee. However, it could be the first step in legitimizing a massive grey market industry that has thrived since 1995, when the military regime banned imported liquor outright. Hotels and airport duty free shops have been the notable exceptions to this ban, and have in turn supplied foreign liquor under-the-table to smaller dealers.

Wine imports were legalized in 2015, however beer remains on the banned imports list. Yet foreign brewers, including Carlsberg, Tuborg, Kirin, Heineken and, most recently, Thai beer giant Chang have managed to set up operations within Myanmar itself. Imported spirits, however, would be more likely to affect the night life and fine dining industries rather than over-the-counter liquor sales, as imported drinks would be vastly more expensive than locally-made offerings, large bottles of which can be purchased at practically any convenience store for only a few thousand kyat.

Companies and Investments

- **Korean power project comes amid desperate supply gaps**

A South Korean company will build a new 40 megawatt power plant in Bago, the company said, becoming the latest foreign firm to answer Myanmar’s desperate call for new power projects.

The firm, MCM Power Company, will invest USD 35 million in a new gas-fired power plant as well as distribution infrastructure in Pyay Township, Bago Region, according to the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA). When it opens in April, 2020, the plant will begin with 40 megawatts of generating capacity, but

may eventually increase to 80 megawatts, said Finnish manufacturer Wärtsilä, which is supplying engines for the project.

The project comes amid a scramble for new power generation. Myanmar has always endured a seasonal power shortage during its dry months, when demand for electricity is highest and Myanmar's rivers (which generate more than half of Myanmar's power via hydroelectric dams) are at their lowest levels. The city of Yangon could not meet the demand for power last spring and was forced to impose rolling blackouts. This summer, the Ministry of Electricity and Energy doled out five emergency tenders worth a total of USD 500 million to create 900 megawatts of new installed capacity. Four of these tenders were awarded to Hong Kong-listed VPower Group.

In the long term, the government aims to provide 100 percent of its population power by 2030, a goal that will require an investment of USD 20-30 billion. Currently, only around 60 percent of Myanmar households are connected to the national grid.

■ **Japanese beer giant struggling**

Japanese beverage giant Kirin has said it will conduct a "further examination" of its Myanmar presence after its Tatmadaw ties threatened an unrelated deal in the United States. The affair could show that things are heating up for international investors who choose to do business with the United Nations-maligned military.

The controversy began last month as Kirin was finalized a deal to buy employee-owned American brewer New Belgium. Two American-based organizations representing refugees from Myanmar penned an open letter urging New Belgium employees to reject the deal because of Kirin's stake in Myanmar's dominant beverage company, Myanmar Brewery, which it shares with the Tatmadaw-owned Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings. In August, the United Nations called for a boycott of all military linked business, claiming that dealing with the Tatmadaw directly financed ongoing human rights abuses against Rohingya Muslims settled on the western border. Indeed, Myanmar Brewery made three donations of USD 30,000 to the military at the height of the 2017 "clearance operations" that the UN has now labeled genocide.

Kirin has not heeded the UN boycott recommendation. However, the New Belgium deal came just as Myanmar returned to the global media spotlight as State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi defended the country before the International Court of Justice against charges of genocide. Kirin's partnership with the Tatmadaw proved to be an un-gainly footnote to the otherwise successful deal.

"We are aware of the difficulties in operating our business in a frontier market and we are continuing to make efforts to deepen our understanding and improve our system," the company said.

■ **Solar powers up with potential new contracts**

Amid a push for new power sources, the Ministry of Electricity and Energy (MOEE) has announced talks with two companies for potential solar contracts. According to a press release, MOEE officials met with executives from Victory Radiance Trading Co Ltd., a Myanmar-registered company, and Chinese firm Power China Company. They discussed new solar policies, the role of solar in Myanmar's planned energy mix and a proposed solar power generation project in Magway Region.

Although solar has made relatively little headway in Myanmar's power sector development, the talks could indicate that the MOEE is warming up to the renewable source. Hydro power currently accounts for more than 60 percent of Myanmar's power, and the country will turn to liquid natural gas as its secondary power source as the government works towards total nationwide electrification by 2030. However, some industry experts predict that solar may gain momentum in coming decades. According to this year's SolarPower Europe Emerging Markets Task Force's Myanmar research report: "Myanmar has incredible potential for solar energy: the International Growth Centre has estimated Myanmar's solar potential to be 51.973 TWh (terawatt-hours) annually."

In addition to its value as a clean, renewable power source, solar panel networks can provide electricity to remote communities without access to the national grid. Private solar networks already supply power to many rural populations in Myanmar. Indeed, small solar grids are commonly used to power remote cellular towers, and their operators occasionally donate the excess electricity to local communities as part of their corporate social responsibility activities.

■ **MOEE OK's another gas fired plant amid LNG push**

A Japanese-backed liquid natural gas (LNG) plant and terminal will be the latest in a series of LNG investments that aim to fill Myanmar's short-term power gaps.

The terminal and 1250-megawatt plant, planned for the Thilawa Special Economic Zone, will be a wide-ranging partnership of Myanmar and Japanese companies. These include MAPCO, Eden Group, Myanmar Edible Oil Industrial Public Corporation Limited and Myanmar Agriculture and General Development Public Limited on the Myanmar side, and Marubeni, Sumitomo and Mitsui on the Japan side. Construction will begin this March.

The project is the latest in a series of LNG partnerships and investments and Myanmar seeks to fill its short-term energy gaps. In December Korean firm MCM Power Company announced a new USD 35 million gas-fired power plant planned for Pyay Township, Bago Region. Also in December, an initial deal was finalized to exploit Myanmar's A-6 offshore oil and gas block, paving the way for ASEAN's first ultra-deepwater development. These new LNG plans come in the wake of five emergency LNG supply tenders issued last summer, four of which were awarded to Hong Kong-listed VPower Group.

Although industry experts criticized those tenders as demanding too much in too little time, the Ministry of Electricity and Energy is exploring every possible avenue to fill electricity supply gaps in time for Myanmar's hot season, when demand for power will be at its peak. Although it appears the country will see yet another power shortage (and potential blackouts in Yangon) in 2020, the upcoming LNG projects could go a long way towards ensuring a sustainable power supply in the coming years.

Events

Name	Details	Organizer/Ministries	Contact Information
Digital Learning Myanmar Conference 2020	Venue: Chatrium Hotel Royal Lake, Yangon Date: 19 Jan 2020	Zabai Myanmar	Nyein.chan@zabai.no +95 794395606
TEDxYangon 2020	Venue: Dulwich College (Star City Campus), Yangon Date: 02 Feb 2020	TEDxYangon	tedxyangon@chilli.agency +95 (0)95096881 https://www.tedxyangon.org/
Mobile Money & Financial Inclusion Summit	Venue: Park Royal Hotel, Yangon Date: 18–19 Feb 2020	Magenta Global Pte Ltd	enquiry@magenta-global.com.sg +65 6846 2360
International Conference on Future Computer and Communication	Venue: Yangon Date: 26–28 Feb 2020	Science and Engineering Institute (SCIEI)	info@sciei.org
International Conference on Computer Applications	Venue: Novotel Yangon Max, Yangon, Myanmar Date: 27-28 Feb 2020	University of Computer Studies Myanmar	ucsy.admin@ucsy.edu.mm +95 01 610655
International Conference on Management, Economics & Social Science	Venue: Best Western Chinatown Hotel, Yangon Date: 28–29 Feb 2020	Researchfora	info@researchfora.com +91 8895 188531
Myanmar Franchise Expo	Venue: Myanmar Expo, Yangon Date: 6-8 Mar 2020	ALT Exhibitions SDN BHD	support@altexpo.my +60 1233 45696
International Hospital & Healthcare	Venue: Sedona Hotel Yangon, Yangon Date: 7-8 Mar 2020	Dagon Exhibitions	dagonexhibitions@gmail.com +959 450098008
Food & Hotel Myanmar	Venue: Myanmar Expo, Yangon Date: 3-5 Jun 2020	Informa Markets - Myanmar	informamarkets@informa.com

Tenders

■ Ministry of Electricity and Energy: Invitation for Bids

1. The Department of Power Transmission and System Control (DPTSC) has allocated the financing towards the cost of the DPTSC intends to apply a portion of the funds to eligible payments under the contract for which the bidding is issued.
2. The Department of Power Transmission and System Control (DPTSC) invites sealed bids from the eligible bidders for the **Design, Supply, and Installation of 132kV Upper Kengtawng - Namsang Transmission Line (37) miles and 132kV Switch Bay (1) No Extension at Namsang Substation** (“the Facilities”). The facilities are all located within Shan State.
3. The eligible nationality of the bidder shall be Myanmar in the case of single, in case of a joint venture, such joint venture will be eligible provided that the nationality of lead partner is Myanmar and other partner shall be nationality from the eligible countries in Section 5.
4. International competitive bidding will be conducted in accordance with the Single - stage: Two-envelope bidding procedure and is open to all eligible bidders from eligible countries as described in the bidding .
5. Only eligible Bidders with the following key qualifications should participate in this bidding:
 - Participation in at least two contracts as main contractor that have been successfully completed within the last ten years and that are transmission line and substation contract, where the value of the bidder’s participation exceeds USD 9.6.
 - For the above or other contracts executed, a minimum experience within the last ten years in the following key activities.
Overhead transmission line contract of 110kV or higher shall not be less than 45km route length including Engineering, Procurement, Installation on Turkey Basis in outside bidder country as main contractor that have been successfully completed.
 - Minimum average annual turnover of USD 10 million calculated as total certified payments received for contracts in progress or completed within the last 3 years.

The qualification criteria are more completely described in the bidding document.
6. To obtain further information, inspect the bidding document and submit the proposal, bidders should contact to the address below within office hours.
7. The bidding documents in English can be purchased with a non-refundable fees of purchase order (bank draft) with MMK 50,000.
8. Bids must be submitted at the address below on or before **10th February, 2020 at 01:00 p.m.** together with a Bid Security as described in the bidding documents.
9. Electronic submission is not allowed.
10. Technical bid will be opened in the presence of Bidder’s representatives, who choose to attend at the address above after **01:00 p.m. on 10th February, 2020.**
11. Any request for the extension of bid submission deadline shall not be allowed.
12. The address (es) referred to above is (are):
 Department of Power Transmission and System Control (DPTSC), Ministry of Electricity and Energy
 Address: Material Planning Department (DPTSC), Building No. 27, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar
 Telephone: +95-67-8104286, +95-67-3410209
 Fax: +95-67-8104286, +95-67-3410209
 Email: dg.dptsc@moe.gov.mm, dd1ptp.dptsc@moe.gov.mm, dirdesign.ptp@gmail.com, sedesign-tp.mepe@gmail.com

■ **Ministry of Electricity and Energy: Invitation for Bids**

1. The Department of Power Transmission and System Control (DPTSC) has allocated the financing towards the cost of the DPTSC intends to apply a portion of the funds to eligible payments under the contract for which the bidding is issued.
2. The Department of Power Transmission and System Control (DPTSC) invites sealed bids from eligible bidder for the **Design, Supply, and Installation of 230kV Min Hla - Athoke Transmission Line (101) miles and 230kV Switch Bay (3) Nos Extension at Min Hla Substation and 230kV Switch Bay (2) Nos Extension at Athoke Substation** ("the Facilities"). The facilities are all located within Bago and Ayerarwady Regions.
3. The eligible nationality of the bidder shall be Myanmar in the case of single, in case of a joint venture, such joint venture will be eligible provided that the nationality of lead partner is Myanmar and other partner shall be nationality from the eligible countries in Section 5.
4. International competitive bidding will be conducted in accordance with the Single - stage: Two-envelope bidding procedure and is open to all eligible bidders from eligible countries as described in the bidding .
5. Only eligible Bidders with the following key qualifications should participate in this bidding:
 - Participation in at least two contracts as main contractor that have been successfully completed within the last ten years and that are transmission line and substation contract, where the value of the bidder's participation exceeds USD 9.6.
 - For the above or other contracts executed, a minimum experience within the last ten years in the following key activities.
Overhead transmission line contract of 220kV or higher shall not be less than 120km route length including Engineering, Procurement, Installation on Turkey Basis in outside bidder country as main contractor that have been successfully completed.
 - Minimum average annual turnover of USD 33 million calculated as total certified payments received for contracts in progress or completed within the last 3 years.

The qualification criteria are more completely described in the bidding document.
6. To obtain further information, inspect the bidding document and submit the proposal, bidders should contact to the address below within office hours.
7. The bidding documents in English can be purchased with a non-refundable fees of purchase order (bank draft) with MMK 50,000.
8. Bids must be submitted at the address below on or before **6th February, 2020 at 01:00 p.m.** together with a Bid Security as described in the bidding documents.
9. Electronic submission is not allowed.
10. Technical bid will be opened in the presence of Bidder's representatives, who choose to attend at the address above after **01:00 p.m. on 6th February, 2020.**
11. Any request for the extension of bid submission deadline shall not be allowed.
12. The address (es) referred to above is (are):
 Department of Power Transmission and System Control (DPTSC), Ministry of Electricity and Energy
 Address: Material Planning Department (DPTSC), Building No. 27, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar
 Telephone: +95-67-8104286, +95-67-3410209
 Fax: +95-67-8104286, +95-67-3410209
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