

Myanmar china electric vehicle market

Myanmar's drivers are shifting to electric vehicles, a move that underscores the military junta's growing ties with China, where most of the EVs and component parts are manufactured.

Industry experts in Myanmar suggest China's affordable vehicles will continue to dominate the EV market because the ruling junta has banned importing EVs made elsewhere. The prohibition extends to luxury models.

The experts also said that international sanctions have made it difficult for the regime to obtain the hard currency it needs to buy imported gas or diesel fuel that powers internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles.

And while young Burmese view EVs as "iPhones on wheels," because of their user interface and driver-assistance features, a larger swath of would-be buyers sees the push for EVs as unrealistic given the lack of charging infrastructure and persistent power outages

The outages have been a problem since the February 1, 2021, coup staged by the military, which made unsubstantiated claims of fraud in an election dominated by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and the governing National League for Democracy (NLD) party.

Last year, Myanmar launched a one-year EV pilot project that led to a more than six-fold increase in EVs within a year, according to Myanmar's Road Transport Administration Department.

An EV industry analyst based in Myanmar, who asked to remain anonymous to avoid attracting the regime's attention, told VOA Burmese via Zoom on March 15 that the trend was boosted by China's oversupply of EVs and the military government's prohibition against importing high-end luxury EVs.

Electric cars, along with lithium batteries and solar panels, were named by Chinese President Xi Jinping as "pillars of the economy" in his New Year's address. Beijing sees these sectors as driving a manufacturing export boom designed to offset flagging domestic demand, which still has not recovered from draconian pandemic lockdowns.

China is accused by the European Union and others of selling EVs at below the cost of making them to drive out competitors. Beijing's official Global Times said it is increased international competition in the sector that has pushed prices down while a decline in the value of the yuan has made Chinese vehicles more economical.

China denies dumping. Liu Pengyu, spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy in Washington, said, "Chinese cars are popular in the global market because of their innovative features and high quality coming out of fierce competition rather than the so-called low-price dumping."

He continued, "The leapfrog development of China's auto industry has provided cost-effective products with high quality to the world. Every one in three exported automobiles from China is an electric car, which contributes significantly to the world's green and low-carbon transition."

The Myanmar-based analyst said Chinese-made EVs are the only option for those wanting new cars. ... People are turning to EVs due to new fuel-run motor vehicle import bans."

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