33 killed in airstrike near market in Myanmar's Rakhine

BANGKOK, Sept 28 (AP)

AN AIRSTRIKE carried out by Myanmar's military near a market in territory controlled by a powerful rebel group killed at least 33 people and wounded 36 others on Monday, the group and a rescue official said.

The attack in western Rakhine state was the latest in a series of deadly airstrikes against pro-democracy resistance forces and ethnic armed groups across the country.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1, 2021, triggering widespread opposition. After security forces suppressed peaceful protests with lethal force, many opponents of military rule took up arms, plunging large parts of the country into conflict.

Monday's attack occurred in Kyauktaw township, about 340 kilometres west of Mandalay, the country's second-largest city, according to the Arakan Army, a powerful ethnic armed group based in Rakhine which controls Kyauktaw. It said a fighter jet dropped two bombs near a local market around noon, killing 33 people, including vendors, shoppers and pedestrians.

The group said 36 other people were injured and warned that the death toll could rise.

Wai Hun Aung, a senior rescue official in Rakhine, confirmed the casualties to 'The Associated Press', citing rescue workers at the scene. He said the market was the region's main wholesale centre, drawing traders and shoppers from across the State.

"This is one of the most severe airstrikes in Rakhine," he said.

Photos and videos posted on social media showed buildings on fire, damaged vehicles and parts of a nearby bridge destroyed.

The military did not immediately comment on the attack. It has previously said it strikes only legitimate military targets and has accused resistance groups of terrorism.

The Arakan Army is the well-trained and well-armed military wing of a movement seeking autonomy for Rakhine's ethnic minority from Myanmar's Central Government. It launched an offensive in Rakhine in November 2023 and has since captured a strategically important regional military headquarters and 14 of the State's 17 townships.

The military has imposed severe restrictions on trade routes since fighting intensified in Rakhine, worsening food shortages.

In December, a military airstrike on a hospital in Rakhine's Mrauk-U township killed at least 34 people and wounded 80 others.

DRDO, CSIR to develop lightweight bulletproof glass for armoured vehicles

KOLKATA, Sept 28 (PTI)

THE Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has joined hands with CSIR-Central Glass and Ceramic Research Institute (CSIR-CGCRI) as technology partner for a Rs 50-crore project to develop indigenous advanced lightweight bulletproof glass for armoured vehicles.

The four-year project, being executed with DRDO laboratories including the Naval Materials Research Laboratory (NMRL) in Maharashtra and TBRL in Chandigarh, is at an advanced stage and seeks to take the technology from laboratory development to large-scale manufacturing with an industry partner to be selected by DRDO.

The technology is aimed at replacing imported transparent armour while reducing its weight and thickness by up to 50 per cent.

"The Rs 50-crore project is aimed at developing advanced indigenous bulletproof glass technology for defence applications and aligns our R&D capabilities directly with national strategic requirements," CSIR-CGCRI Director Bikramjit Basu told PTI.

The project is focused on developing advanced transparent glass-ceramics that can provide multi-shot ballistic protection while being substantially lighter and thinner than conventional transparent armour used in armoured vehicles, the Kolkata-based government research lab officials said.

"The primary objective is to deliver robust multi-shot ballistic protection capable of withstanding direct AK-47 rifle fire from a distance of 100 metres with a defined velocity as per the standard test methods for BIS V and VI," said Atiar Rahaman Molla, Scientist-F, Specialty Glass Division, CSIR-CGCRI and project leader.

"Crucially, our technology aims to achieve a 30-50 per cent reduction in both weight and thickness compared to conventional imported options, which will significantly enhance vehicular mobility and payload capacity," he said.

El Nino threatens Rabi crops, says Agri Secy

NEW DELHI, Sept 28 (PTI)

Atish Chandra

THE upcoming rabi (winter) crop season is likely to be challenging for rain-fed areas due to the El Nino weather pattern, and foodgrain production could be affected, Agriculture Secretary Atish Chandra said on Monday, highlighting that the challenges of climate change have become a reality.

Addressing a two-day national conference on preparedness for the rabi crop season, Chandra said the kharif crop season was also very challenging, particularly in rainfed areas. Several States struggled first to achieve crop coverage and later to ensure that the crops survived.

"We are seeing that in the coming season, production is likely to be affected to a large extent. And the rabi season will also be challenging for the rainfed areas," he said.

India, UAE agree on timely implementation of local currency settlement, payment system integration

MUMBAI, Sept 28 (PTI)

INDIA and the UAE on Monday agreed to take steps for the timely implementation of initiatives relating to settlement of trade in local currency, integration of payment and messaging systems, and central-bank digital currencies. These issues are important as they have the potential to make bilateral trade and investment more efficient, accessible and resilient, the Commerce and Industry Ministry said in a statement.

The matters came up for discussion during the 14th meeting of the India-UAE High Level Joint Task Force on Investments (HLJTFI) here. The task force was set up

The bilateral trade has reached USD 101.25 bn in 2025-26. The non-oil trade touched USD 76.2 bn last year

in 2013 to promote trade, investment and economic ties. It acts as a forum to resolve issues faced by investors of the two countries.

It was co-chaired by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and Managing Director of Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) Sheikh Hamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. "The co-chairs reviewed the progress made by the central banks of the UAE and India on initiatives relating to local-currency settlement, the integration of payment and messaging systems, and central-bank digital currencies. It was noted that these initiatives have the potential to make bilateral trade and investment more efficient, accessible and resilient. The two sides agreed to take steps to work together to support their timely implementation," it said. The areas where two-way investment flows can be enhanced include energy, industry, logistics, infrastructure, technology and artificial intelligence, space, food security, agricultural innovation and the startup ecosystem.

"Civil aviation cooperation between Abu Dhabi and India was also discussed at the meeting, with the aim of enhancing air connectivity to support the broader economic relationship," it said, adding investment opportunities and collaboration in developing an aviation and logistics hub in Dholera (Gujarat) were also explored.

The bilateral trade has reached USD 101.25 billion in 2025-26. The non-oil trade touched USD 76.2 billion last year. The two nations have implemented a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in May 2022.

Iran offers to reopen Strait of Hormuz on sixth day of proposed 7-day plan

WASHINGTON, Sept 28 (IANS)

IRAN has offered to reopen the Strait of Hormuz on the sixth day of a proposed seven-day plan and resume nuclear negotiations with the United States on the seventh, but Washington rejected the proposal because it demanded sanctions relief and access to frozen assets at the outset.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Tehran would open the vital shipping passage if the United States ended the conflict, removed its blockade, released Iranian assets and allowed the country to sell oil.

"Our proposal is very clear. We are ready to open the Strait if certain things are done by the US," Araghchi told NBC's "Meet the Press" on Sunday.

"We want our moneys, our assets, which are illegally frozen, to be released. We want, you know, to be able to sell our oil," he said.

Araghchi said the steps sought by Iran could be completed within four or five days.

"If they want—if they are serious that they want a deal to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, now there is the possibility," he said. "We have offered this seven-day plan."

US-China tariff plan covers $30 bn each way

WASHINGTON, Sept 28 (IANS)

THE United States and China have approved lists of goods worth roughly $30 billion on each side for possible tariff cuts, according to documents released after President Xi Jinping's visit to Washington. The lower tariffs have yet to take effect.

US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said the proposed treatment could improve access to China for American agricultural products, medical devices.

On US side, the published list includes household goods, toys and other consumer products imported from China. "As a direct result of the strong relationship between President Trump and President Xi, the US and China, under the auspices of the new Board of Trade, have recommended $30 billion of trade in non-sensitive goods on each side.

Trump asked Xi if he wants to buy American arms: US envoy

Move Comes As Taiwan Awaits $14 Billion Arms Package From Washington; White House And State Dept Deny Any Such Plan

Chidanand Rajghatta | TNN

Washington: MAGA supremo Donald Trump has spent much of his presidency telling allies and partners, including India, to buy more American weapons. At his meeting with Xi Jinping, America's top arms salesman apparently decided to extend the same customer-service offer to Washington's principal military rival, China.

In a significant disclosure, the fallout of which American mandarins are scrambling to contain, US ambassador to China David Perdue has revealed that President Trump offered to sell arms to China, since Washington sold weapons to many other countries around the world. "He actually asked President Xi, would he like to buy some, at one point," the ambassador told Fox News Sunday amid a clattering of jaws to the floor across much of the world which sees China as a US adversary, and is looking to Washington's leadership to meet challenges from Beijing.

The state department promptly applied diplomatic varnish to the bombshell, asserting that "US law prohibits arms sales to China and there is no offer or plan to sell arms to China." The White House likewise said there were no plans for such a sale, but the clanger rippled across the diplomatic world despite Trump's reputation as a maverick who adopts unorthodox ways and means of diplomacy.

Countries from Japan to Aus to India would be affected by any policy pivot that results in arms sales to China, but the stakes are particularly high in Taiwan

Perdue himself reeled back from the implication that Trump is ready to throw Taiwan under the Chinese bus.

"President Trump has already sold 50% more arms to Taiwan than any other president since 1979, and so I don't accept the premise that he's not doing all that we should be doing for Taiwan," he said in a follow-up post on X. Four Republican senators last week separately urged the administration to uphold US defence commitments to Taiwan.

Countries from Japan to Australia to India would be affected by any policy pivot that results in arms sales to China, but the stakes are particularly high in Taiwan. Xi's Washington visit came as Beijing was pressing Trump to halt arms sales to the island, while Taiwan awaits a $14 billion US package that Trump has described as a "very good negotiating chip" in dealings with China. But the episode has inevitably raised questions in Taipei and among Washington's China hawks about whether Taiwan's security can become a bargaining chip in a Trump-Xi transaction.

For US allies and partners, who have been building their defence strategies around the assumption that Washington regards China's military power as a rival and a threat, Trump's suggestion that Beijing might be a customer for American weaponry would create an extraordinary strategic contradiction, notwithstanding the legal obstacle his administration would face in funnelling arms to China. US has maintained restrictions on arms exports to China since the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. Current federal regulations place China under a policy of denial for defence articles and services, while the statutory framework suspends licensing for exports of US Munitions List defence articles, subject to narrow exceptions.

The last substantial US military sales to China date to the 1980s, before Tiananmen, and they included 24 Sikorsky S-70C helicopters, F-8 fighter avionics modernisation, artillery-locating radars, Mark 46 anti-submarine torpedoes and assistance for ammunition production. Washington suspended the military relationship after the 1989 crackdown.

Perdue himself is far from a China hawk. Before politics and diplomacy, he was a corporate executive steeped in manufacturing in and sourcing from Asia. He worked in Singapore and Hong Kong and ran Asian operations for Sara Lee, sourcing from China and Hong Kong, before senior roles at Haggar and Reebok, which sourced all its production from Asia.

The larger question, though, is whether the episode represents merely Trump's characteristic negotiating theatre or something more consequential. His foreign policy has repeatedly emphasised deals, leverage, money and personal relationships. Many experts have warned that treating alliances and strategic commitments as negotiable assets risks making long-standing friends wonder whether their security ultimately has a price. Such concern is especially relevant for India, according to officials who spoke on background. If arms to China can be floated as a commercial proposition, however casually, America's willingness to supply weapons to other countries — including Pakistan, should Washington's currently warming relationship with Islamabad deepen — could increasingly be viewed through a transactional rather than strategic lens.

No stay on MDR but SC asks under what law was it imposed

Govt: Won't Get A Penny, It's Just A Service Charge

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New Delhi: Supreme Court Monday asked the Centre, RBI and National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to explain under which provision of law the merchant discount rate (MDR) on UPI transactions was imposed, even though it refused to stay its implementation from Oct 15.

"Is it a tax or a fee? If it is not a tax or a fee, then what is the executive scope of making this expropriation on transactions? What is the character of this expropriation?" asked a bench of CJI Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana while hearing a PIL that argued that MDR charges on UPI transactions would make people revert to cash dealings, which would encourage accumulation of black money.

iStock

A PIL argued that MDR charges on UPI transactions would make people revert to cash dealings

Additional solicitor general N Venkataraman (ASG) said MDR is not a tax or a fee, nor an expropriation as govt will not get even a paisa from it. It is akin to service charges levied by banks on transactions done earlier through credit and debit cards, though MDR's scope is much more restricted. He said that 96% of the transactions are exempted from MDR, while from within the balance 4%, essential services will attract a flat charge of Rs 5. For the rest, transactions above Rs 75,000 will attract a maximum MDR of Rs 300. Justice Bagchi asked, "What is this service charge? Please file an affidavit and explain. It cannot be through executive fiat."

Explaining the operation of credit and debit cards, the predecessors of the UPI mode of transferring money, and the service charge attached to such transactions because of the involvement of banks and the aggregator, Venkataraman said there is no difference between UPI and the previous system, and it involves a service charge payable to banks and aggregator NPCI, which facilitates the transactions. "Govt does not take a rupee from it," he said.

Justice Bagchi said, "When it is a charge in terms of provisions of the Income Tax Act, on whose hand is it an income?" Venkatraman said the provision of the Income Tax Act cited by the court is an enabling provision which recognises UPI money transfers as a valid transaction, nothing more, nothing less.

When the bench asked who takes the MDR amount, the Centre said it will be the banks and the aggregator, like for credit or debit cards. It has nothing to do with law as it is purely an administrative mechanism, the ASG said.

CJI Kant said, "It appears more technical than law. It would be better if the govt, RBI and NPCI file their affidavits explaining the entire issue." Referring to full-page advertisements in Monday newspapers explaining the MDR, the CJI said, "We have read your advance arguments in the newspapers. Yet, you file a detailed affidavit." The petitioner's counsel sought a stay on the imposition of MDR, a plea Venkatraman opposed, saying it will come into force on Oct 15. The bench brushed aside the plea for a stay and asked the Centre, RBI and NPCI to file affidavits in four weeks.