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Russian Military Delegation Secretly Visited Myanmar Ahead of Junta Leader's Moscow Visit – Reports

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A Russian delegation led by two Navy officers secretly visited Myanmar ahead of its junta leader's trip to Russia last month, the independent Myanmar Now news outlet reported Tuesday, citing a document it said it had obtained.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's multiple-day visit to Moscow followed an air force chief's trip to the capital in May as well as a Russian deputy defense minister's attendance of Myanmar's military parade in March. Human rights activists have criticized Russia for "legitimizing" Myanmar's "brutal and unlawful attempted coup" as the two countries continue to deepen military cooperation.

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Myanmar Now reported that a 20-member Russian delegation, led by the Navy's deputy commander-in-chief Vladimir Kasatonov and its head of communications Vladimir Zemskov, visited Myanmar's capital and its commercial center on June 13-19.

It added that a person from state arms exporter Rosoboronexport — which Min Aung Hlaing visited on June 22 — also accompanied the Russian delegation.

Russia is the second-largest military exporter to Myanmar after China.

Myanmar Now said the purpose of the Russian delegation's secret visit was not known. Neither country has commented on the trip.

The commander-in-chief of Myanmar's navy reportedly met Russian Navy commander-in-chief Nikolai Yevmenov and attended the International Maritime Defense Show in St. Petersburg while accompanying Min Aung Hlaing during his Russia trip with other senior coup officials.

Myanmar has been engulfed in turmoil and nearly 900 protesters are estimated to have been killed since its military overthrew the country's democratically elected leadership in February.

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