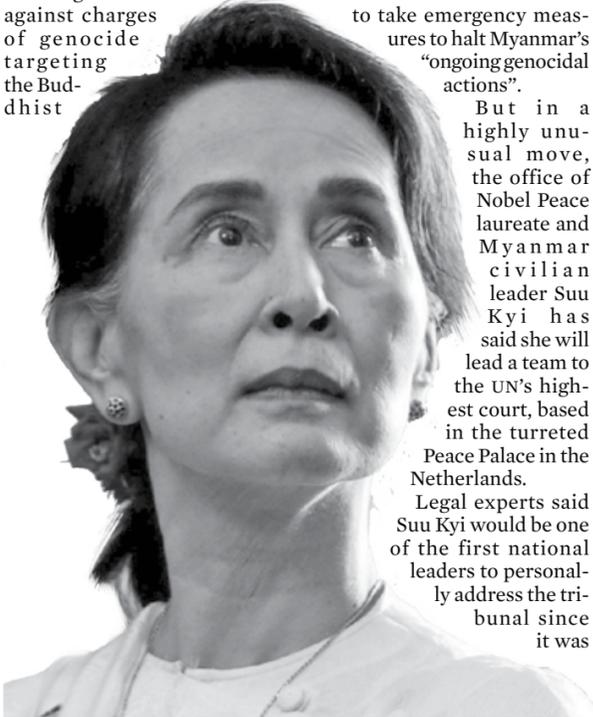


Suu Kyi set to make history in Hague

The Hague

Former democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi is set to make legal history when she defends Myanmar in The Hague this week against charges of genocide targeting the Buddhist



state's minority Rohingya Muslims.

The tiny west African state of Gambia, acting on behalf of the 57-nation Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, will ask the International Court of Justice to take emergency measures to halt Myanmar's "ongoing genocidal actions".

But in a highly unusual move, the office of Nobel Peace laureate and Myanmar civilian leader Suu Kyi has said she will lead a team to the UN's highest court, based in the turreted Peace Palace in the Netherlands.

Legal experts said Suu Kyi would be one of the first national leaders to personally address the tribunal since it was

set up in 1946 after World War II to rule in disputes between countries.

Her plan to appear before the court's judges for the three-day hearing starting Tuesday was "unprecedented and also very unwise", Cecily Rose, an assistant professor in international law at Leiden University, said.

"States never ever send politicians to lead legal teams at the ICJ," she said.

Although Oxford-educated Suu Kyi's background was "impressive, she has no legal qualifications and would be completely at sea before the court," Rose added.

'Defend' Myanmar's interests

Around 740,000 Rohingya were forced to flee into camps in Bangladesh after Myanmar's military launched a violent crackdown on the group in 2017, which UN investigators concluded amounted to genocide.

The case will be the first international legal attempt to bring Myanmar to justice over the crisis, and is a rare example of a country suing another over an issue to which it is not directly a party.

Muslim-majority Gambia's case alleges that Myanmar has breached the 1948 UN Genocide

Convention. It is seeking the special measures pending a future decision by the court on whether to take on the wider case.

Any final judgment could take years.

Suu Kyi has said she is heading to The Hague in order to "defend the national interests of Myanmar".

Myanmar is expected to argue that the court has no jurisdiction, that its military operation was targeting Rohingya militants and that its own investigations into alleged abuse are adequate.

However, Suu Kyi's international reputation has been tarnished by her response to the crisis, with critics saying she is acting as an apologist for the same military that kept her under house arrest for many years.

'Personally responsible'

Experts say Suu Kyi now risks being in the legal firing line herself.

"It's highly unusual for top leaders to go to the ICJ themselves to defend their countries," said Willem van Genugten, professor of international law at the Netherlands' Tilburg University.

"What you often see is that they come to The Hague when a case is launched to attract extra

publicity," he added, for example when then-Bolivian president Evo Morales came to The Hague for a ruling on a border dispute with Chile.

Myanmar faces other legal challenges, including an investigation by the International Criminal Court -- another Hague-based tribunal set up in 2002 to probe war crimes -- and a lawsuit in Argentina.

This week's case will be only the fourth in the ICJ's history invoking the genocide convention, after two involving the 1990s Balkans wars and another one between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda in 2002.

ICJ judges have only once ruled that genocide was committed: the 1995 Srebrenica massacre of 8,000 Muslim men and boys in Bosnia.

"What might be seen as unusual about Aung San Suu Kyi leading the Myanmar delegation is the fact that she is viewed as personally responsible at some level for Myanmar's alleged wrongdoing," Mike Becker, assistant international law professor at Trinity College in Dublin, said.

"Suu Kyi is not personally on trial at the ICJ... but her presence will be remarkable."

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30,000 monks attend mass alms-giving in Myanmar

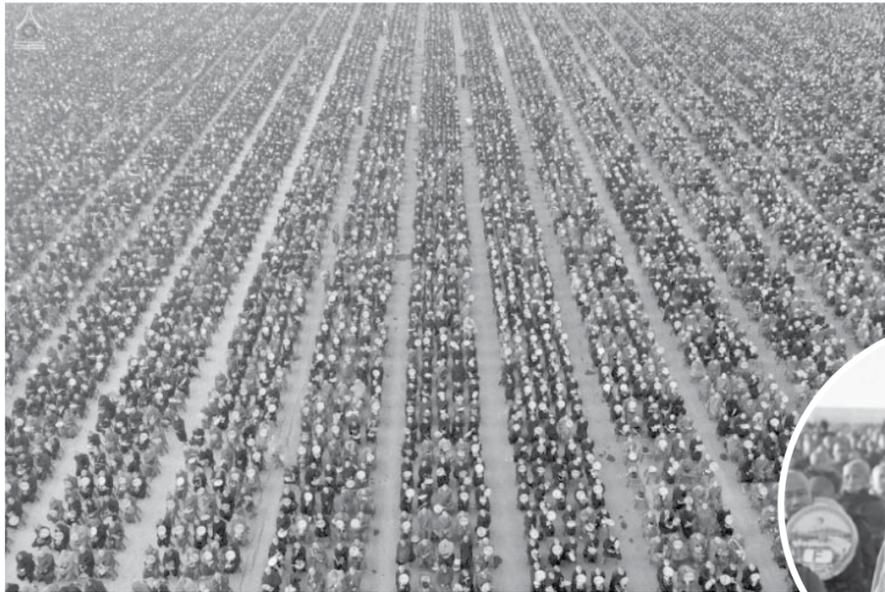
● The event was the third and largest of its kind since 2015

Mandalay | Myanmar

Thirty-thousand monks assembled in the early morning chill in Myanmar on Sunday for a spectacular alms-giving event, partly organised by a controversial mega-temple under scrutiny across the border in Thailand.

With many barefoot, Buddhist monks from Myanmar and Thailand and senior religious officials from a dozen countries collected alms next to an airport in the central city of Mandalay, that is also a heartland of the faith.

As the sun rose over the ancient town, a sea of saffron and maroon-robed monks assembled in an area the size of a football



As the sun rose over the ancient town of Mandalay in Myanmar, a sea of saffron and maroon-robed monks assembled in an area the size of a football field.

field.

They meditated, prayed and collected alms in an event meant to tighten the relationship of "monks and Buddhists between (the) two countries" and to "strengthen the monkhood" in the region, according to a statement.

"I hope we can continue to hold bigger events in the coming years," said U Thu Nanda, a 24-year-old Burmese monk.



The event was the third and largest of its kind since 2015 and comes as one of the organisers, the Thailand-based Dhammakaya foundation, attempts to bounce back from an embezzlement scandal more than two years ago.

The Dhammakaya temple's massive compound in northern Bangkok was under siege for two weeks in early 2017 as thousands of officers try to arrest the sect's spiritual leader.

Phra Dhammachayowho was accused of colluding in a \$33 million embezzlement scheme and was believed to be hiding somewhere on the temple's sprawling 1,000 acre grounds, an area twice the size of Monaco.

He was never found but the temple is still operational.

This year it also organized two large alms-giving events in Thailand in September and October attended by 10,000 monks to solicit donations for flood victims.

Russia not an enemy? Macron's Moscow strategy faces first test

Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron this week faces the first major test of his policy of directly engaging with Russia that has disturbed some European allies, as he hosts a summit seeking progress in ending the Ukraine conflict.

Joined by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Macron will bring together Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky for their first face-to-face meeting at an afternoon summit at the Elysee Palace in Paris today.

The stakes are high: this will be the first such summit in three years and while diplomats caution against expecting a major



French President Emmanuel Macron will host Russian leader Vladimir Putin in Paris today as part of his new strategy to directly engage with Moscow

breakthrough, a failure to agree concrete confidence-building steps would be seen as a major blow to hopes for peace and also Macron's personal prestige.

Macron, who is pressing ahead

with the summit despite crippling public transport strikes at home over contested pension reforms, has invested hugely in efforts to end the conflict in the east of Ukraine that has claimed

13,000 lives since 2014.

And he has also placed his bets on a risky strategy to deal directly with Putin, based on the assumption that one day Russia will understand it is in the national interest to see Europe as its long-term strategic partner.

"It is an important test for Macron and for the Europeans," said Michel Duclos, a former ambassador and senior fellow at the Institut Montaigne, a French think tank.

"He is already very isolated. And if he obtains nothing on Ukraine he is going to be even more isolated," he added.

'Threat but also a partner'

Macron has adopted an increasingly assertive presence on

the international stage in recent months, at a time when Germany is a less imposing diplomatic player as Merkel prepares to leave office.

His thoughts were summed up in an explosive interview with The Economist last month, when he declared NATO was brain dead and said Europe needed to have a strategic dialogue with Russia.

Examining Russia's long-term strategic options under Putin, Macron said in the interview that Russia could not prosper in isolation, would not want to be a "vassal" of China and would eventually have to opt for "a partnership project with Europe".

Macron notably described ex-

KGB agent Putin as a "child of Saint Petersburg", the former Russian capital built by Peter the Great as a window onto the West.

His comments disturbed newer EU members that want a tough line against their former master Russia like the Baltic States and, in particular, Poland.

But after a summit of NATO leaders in England earlier this month, Macron was unrepentant and categorical about his strategy of cultivating Russia.

"Who is NATO's enemy? Russia is no longer an enemy. It remains a threat but is also a partner on some subjects. Our enemy today is international terrorism and in particular Islamist terrorism," he said.