China-Backed Mines In Myanmar Fuel Thailand's Severe Pollution Crisis

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Many of the mines responsible for the contamination are linked backed to Chinese investors

Following a trilateral meeting of representatives from China, Myanmar, and Thailand in Bangkok on Tuesday, China has agreed to help combat the pollution crisis Thailand currently faces. This comes after investigators uncovered that the severe arsenic and heavy-metal contamination in multiple Thai rivers stems from unregulated rare earth mining upstream, in Myanmar's northeastern Shan State – a region predominantly financed by Chinese investors.

Beijing has long dominated the rare earth industry worldwide, accounting for roughly 69% of mining and 91% of processing capacity in 2026. War-torn Myanmar, which is one of the world's main sources of heavy rare earths, largely relies on financial and technical support from China.

Against this background, Bangkok has urged Beijing to help halt mining operations in northeastern Myanmar for at least six months, as well as assist in tracing the companies involved, noting that Chinese firms have played a central role in the pollution crisis.

Guo Jiakun, spokesperson for China's Foreign Ministry, stated that Beijing will dispatch experts to actively participate and provide technical

support in combating the crisis. Though this suggests aid in countering the effects of pollution, it falls in line with China's reluctance to hold accountability for the impacts of its mining in the past.

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