

# Ethnic cleansing claims are lies: Thein Sein

Myanmar President Thein Sein yesterday denied accusations of ethnic cleansing against Rohingya Muslims, saying the claims were part of a "smear campaign" against his government.

On a visit to Paris, Sein told France 24 television that his government was not guilty of the charges.

"Outside elements are just exaggerating, fabricating news, there is no ethnic cleansing whatsoever," he said.

"This is a smear campaign against the government. What happened in Rakhine was not ethnic cleansing."

In April, Human Rights Watch accused Myanmar of "a campaign of ethnic cleansing" against the Rohingya.

It cited evidence of mass graves and forced displacement affecting tens of thousands. The New York-based HRW said

Myanmar officials, community leaders and Buddhist monks organised and encouraged mobs, backed by state security forces, to conduct coordinated attacks on Muslim villages in October in the western state of Rakhine.

Communal unrest last year in Rakhine left about 200 people dead and up to 140,000 displaced, mainly Rohingyas, who are denied citizenship by Myanmar.

Dozens more people died in Buddhist-Muslim clashes in central Myanmar in March.

Thein Sein, on a European tour that took him to Britain and France, said the unrest had been contained and insisted authorities were looking to prevent further violence.

Thein Sein also said he is not preparing himself at the moment to contest the 2015 presidential election and has "no objections" to Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi running.



Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi pays her respects to her father General Aung San and eight other leaders who were assassinated on July 19, 1947, as Myanmar marks the 66th anniversary of Martyrs' Day at the Martyrs' Mausoleum in Yangon yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Navalny freed on bail after protests

Russia unexpectedly freed opposition leader Alexei Navalny on bail yesterday, bending to the will of thousands of protesters who denounced his five-year jail sentence as a crude attempt by President Vladimir Putin to silence him.

In a ruling that points to Kremlin uncertainty over how to handle Navalny's case and revived protests, a judge approved an unusual prosecution request to release him while he awaits the outcome of an appeal.

The anti-corruption campaigner's movements will be restricted to Moscow but he proclaimed the ruling, one day after he was convicted of theft, as a victory for people power.

"I am very grateful to all the people who supported us, all the people who went to (protest in Moscow's) Manezh Square and other squares," the 37-year-old said, rushing across the court to hug his wife after he was released from a glass courtroom cage.

"We understand perfectly well what has happened now. It's an absolutely unique phenomenon in Russian justice," he said in the court in Kirov, an industrial city 900 km northeast of Moscow.

People poured onto the streets of big Russian cities to protest on Thursday evening after Navalny was convicted of stealing at least \$494,000 from a timber firm when he was advising the Kirov regional governor in 2009.



Alexei Navalny hugs his wife Yulia after his surprise release.

## UN wants answers from Egypt over arrests

The UN is seeking answers from Egypt over the arrests of former president Mohammed Morsi and others following the overthrow of his government on July 3, a spokesman said yesterday.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of Islamists poured onto Egypt's streets yesterday demanding the reinstatement of ousted president Mohamed Morsi, despite warnings by the military of a crackdown on violent protests.

More than two weeks after Egypt's powerful military shunted the contested Morsi from office, there was still no sign of a possible deal to defuse the crisis, which has divided the world's most populous Arab state and alarmed its Western allies.

In his first address since taking office, interim President Adli Mansour promised on Thursday

night to fight people he said wanted to destabilise the nation.

"We are going through a critical stage and some want us to move towards chaos and we want to move towards stability. Some want a bloody path," he said in a televised address. "We will fight a battle for security until the end."

The spokesman for the UN's High Commissioner for human rights, Navi Pillay, said she had called in Egypt's ambassador in Geneva on July 10 and also written to authorities in Cairo for an explanation of events earlier this month.

Her spokesman said Pillay specifically requested a list of people arrested in connection with the events of July 3 and beyond, and if they are still in custody and on what legal basis. She also asked how many people were still currently being detained.

## Israel must agree on borders Say Palestinians

A stormy, high-level meeting of senior Palestinian leaders called to discuss US Secretary of State John Kerry's latest peace proposal ended with a decision early yesterday to demand guarantees that Israel agree on the general border of a future Palestinian state, officials said.

The demand casts a cloud of uncertainty over months of US mediation efforts because Israel is weary of agreeing to pre-conditions, arguing it has not led to successful peace talks in the past. Palestinian officials said they wanted guarantees to ensure peace talks would lead to fruition.

Hoping to push Israelis and Palestinians toward talks, US President Barack Obama asked Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, to work with Kerry "to resume negotiations with Palestinians as soon as possible," according to a statement released by the White House late Thursday.

## No functioning democracy in United States: Carter

THE HINDU ONLINE

The former US President, Jimmy Carter, struck a blow for Edward Snowden, the whistleblower, when he reportedly said at a closed door meeting in Atlanta: "America does not have a functioning democracy at this point in time."

Coming close on the heels of comments by the Democrat that "the invasion of privacy has gone too far and I think that is why the secrecy was excessive", Carter's remarks were reported by German newspaper Der Spiegel, and were reportedly made at a meeting of the Atlantic Bridge, an organisation that promotes US-German relations.

While there were questions surrounding the identity of Der Spiegel's source and no other media outlets have reported on the event, Carter has been seen as "openly criti-



Jimmy Carter

cal of the NSA".

In an article for the New York Times last year, he warned the US would forfeit its moral authority if it continued to strip away the civil rights of its citizens. Carter was the 39th President of the United States, in office between 1977 until 1981, and the 2002 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, which he was given for his contributions to advancing human rights.

In prior comments to CNN news the former President said that although Snowden had violated US law he may have ultimately done good for the country. In his NYT article "A Cruel and Unusual Record," Carter reportedly criticised the Obama administration's use of drone attacks.

His comments became known even as Snowden continues to be held up in the international transit zone of Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport.

## Australia closes door to asylum seekers

AFP, Sydney

Australia yesterday announced that boatpeople will no longer be resettled in the country, unveiling a hardline policy to curb people smuggling that will see all unauthorised arrivals sent to poverty-stricken Papua New Guinea.

"From now on, any asylum-seeker who arrives in Australia by boat will have no chance of being settled in Australia as a refugee," said Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, announcing his harsh new border protection policy in an election year flanked by PNG counterpart Peter O'Neill.

Asylum-seekers arriving at Australia's far-flung Christmas Island will be sent to the

Manus Island processing centre on Papua New Guinea and elsewhere in the Pacific nation for assessment, with no cap on the number to be transferred.

Even if found to be "genuine refugees" Rudd said asylum-seekers would have "no chance" of settlement in Australia under the new policy and will have to remain in PNG.

Those whose applications are not successful would be sent back home or to third countries.

The Regional Settlement Arrangement, which was signed by the two leaders Friday, will initially be in effect for 12 months and reviewed annually. It will come into effect immediately.

## OLDEST LIVING PERSON

This picture taken on July 4, 2013 shows Fu Suqing in Shuangliu county, southwest China's Sichuan province. Fu, turned 116 year-old yesterday, received a bronze medal recently from Carry Flag World Records showing that she's the world's oldest living person, local media reported.



PHOTO: AFP

## NEWS IN brief

### UK heatwave kills 760 in nine days

TNN, London

A severe and prolonged heatwave is believed to have killed up to 760 people in England in the past nine days. Thursday was the sixth consecutive day with a recorded daytime temperature of over 30 degrees Celsius marking Britain's longest heatwave in seven years.

### Kashmir shuts down over BSF killings

AFP, Srinagar, India

Indian Kashmir largely shut down amid heavy security yesterday after troops shot dead four people during a protest over a paramilitary raid on an Islamic school.

Shops, banks, schools and most government offices were closed in towns across the region, after a separatist leader called a three-day strike to protest Thursday's killings.

### India gets new CJ

IANS, New Delhi

President Pranab Mukherjee yesterday administered the oath of office to Justice P Sathasivam as the Chief Justice of India (CJI). Justice Sathasivam, 64, is the 40th CJI. He will remain in office till April 26, 2014. He succeeded Altamas Kabir, whose last day in office was on Thursday.

### Abe set for win in Japan poll

AFP, Tokyo

After six years of political turmoil and a slew of short-term prime ministers, Japan looks set for stability if premier Shinzo Abe's ruling bloc wins this weekend's election, analysts say. Voters nationwide will Sunday elect half of the 242-seat upper house of parliament.

### Judge refuses to drop charge against Manning

AFP, Fort Meade

A US military judge on Thursday refused to dismiss a key charge that an American soldier "aided the enemy" by giving a trove of secret documents to WikiLeaks. Manning's defense lawyers had filed motions seeking the dismissal of the aiding the enemy count as well as a charge of computer fraud.

### Obama nominates Indian-American for key post

TNN, Washington

President Barack Obama on Thursday nominated Nisha Desai Biswal to head the South Asia bureau in the US state department. When confirmed by the Senate, Desai will become the first person of South Asian origin to head the bureau, which oversees US foreign policy in the region.

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## MID-DAY MEAL TRAGEDY 22 more students fall ill in India

IANS, Panaji

22 primary students from a school in Ponda were rushed to a hospital after they complained of stomach pain and vomiting after eating a mid-day meal yesterday.

An education department official said the students were eating a meal comprising vegetable and lentil curry at the St Joseph High School in Usdao in Ponda sub-district, 30 kilometres from Panaji.

The students are now out of hospital, but Education Director Swapnil Naik said the source of the contamination is being investigated.

The incident comes barely days after 23 school children in Bihar's Saran district died after eating contaminated food.

Meanwhile, authorities in the eastern Indian state of Bihar have ordered headteachers to taste all school lunches before they are served after 23 school-children died eating a lunch contaminated with pesticide.

Children across Bihar, one of the poorest states in India, have been refusing to eat free school lunches since the incident on Tuesday.

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