



Malaysian ship Nautical Aliya, carrying aid for Rohingya, prepares to set sail for Myanmar, in Port Klang, Malaysia yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

## UN accuses Myanmar of 'ethnic cleansing'

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photographs of bullet and knife wounds, burns, and injuries resulting from beatings with rifle butts or bamboo sticks.

The plight of the stateless Rohingya, of whom some 1.1 million live in apartheid-like conditions in Rakhine, has long been a source of friction between Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Myanmar, a mostly Buddhist country where Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi is de facto leader, has denied almost all allegations of human rights abuses in northern Rakhine and says a lawful counterinsurgency campaign is underway.

In Yangon, the spokesman for

President Htin Kyaw's office, said the government had not yet seen the report.

"We will review the report from the UN and we will respond, either in an official statement or in an individual response (to questions)," Zaw Htay said.

While denying observers and independent journalists access to the conflict area, officials have accused Rohingya residents and refugees of fabricating stories of killings, beatings, mass rape and arson in collaboration with insurgents who they say are Rohingya terrorists with links to Islamists overseas.

Zeid called for a robust reaction from the international community

and said Myanmar must accept responsibility for committing grave human rights violations against its own people.

The report said the attacks on the Rohingya "seem to have been widespread as well as systematic, indicating the very likely commission of crimes against humanity".

Bangladesh is determined to relocate Rohingya Muslims fleeing violence in Myanmar to an island in the Bay of Bengal, a Bangladeshi minister said on Wednesday. Critics say the island is uninhabitable. The minister said the move was temporary and Myanmar would ultimately have to take the Rohingya back.

## Land without history

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change under the young government of Aung San Suu Kyi, which took power nearly a year ago.

"History at school was a kind of government propaganda," Patheon University lecturer Than Htiike Aung told AFP.

"The textbooks don't give real historical accounts... You cannot read about how the junta seized power in 1962, the 1988 uprising and the 2007 Buddhist-led (Saffron) revolution."

Myanmar's former royal family was a primary target of the junta's historical whitewash.

A cloak of silence was thrown over the monarchy by successive military leaders who also seized on a campaign, started by the colonial British when they exiled King Thibaw in 1885, to cast the monarch as a drunken monster.

His brief reign was barely mentioned in text books.

But at the ceremony in India in December Myanmar's vice president and military chief stood side-by-side with his descendants -- the first time they have been allowed to publicly remember their ancestor at his resting place.

It followed an inaugural event at Mandalay's Golden Palace the previous month, where the surviving scions of King Thibaw's Konbaung dynasty marked his exile.

"I don't see how people can really have a creative view of the future... unless they have this more critical understanding of the past," said historian Thant Myint U.

**FAKE HISTORY**  
But the generals' rewriting of history has taken deep root in Myanmar's

education system and wider society.

School pupils today still learn by rote from junta-era textbooks, taught to repeat a narrative centred around the dominant Bamar ethnic group.

History has been so debased as a discipline only the worst-performing students study it -- the more successful ones are funnelled into medicine and engineering.

This year not a single person applied to read history at the prestigious Yangon University.

"History has been so politicised and tampered with it has got to the point that people stopped caring," said Alex Bescoy, who has made a documentary about the royal family.

Skewed history is exacerbating Myanmar's ethnic conflicts, experts say.

Groups such as the Kachin and Karen have long complained the histories of their people taught at government schools are incomplete, oversimplified or plain incorrect.

For Myanmar's most hated minority, the Rohingya, the distortions now threaten their future under the new civilian government.

In December, the Ministry of Religion and Cultural Affairs announced plans to publish a "true" account of the Muslim group to prove they are illegal immigrants and write them out of the country's history.

Their treatment highlights the complexity of owning the national narrative in a country scored by conflict and division.

"When students believe simple stories about the past... they can more easily demonise other groups," said Rosalie Metro, adjunct professor of

education at the University of Missouri.

**'CRITICAL SKILLS'**

She has spent a decade creating a new textbook for school students that takes a more critical perspective using material considered too sensitive under military rule, including speeches by former ruler General Ne Win and colonial documents.

International bodies, including the Asian Development Bank and the Japan International Cooperation Agency, are also working with the government to help reshape what is taught in school.

Lecturer Than Htiike Aung said he now brings in his own materials to teach events outside the curriculum, something he would have been too scared to do under the junta.

Meanwhile the explosion of social media since 2011, when the military ceded power, has given Myanmar's youth new access to information and an avenue to challenge official accounts.

The government too has formed a historical committee to help re-evaluate accounts propagated under the junta -- though some fear this is also laden with dangers.

"Experts will put these true stories of Myanmar down as a record for future generations," said Aung Myint, of the department of historical research.

Still, experts warn it will take a long time for people to come to terms with the past.

"What's just as important as giving people material is giving people the critical skills to deal with it, and that's something that only comes over years and years," said Bescoy.

## Khulna

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and later shifted to Khulna Medical College Hospital where doctors pronounced him dead.

It could not be ascertained whether the victim died of bomb or bullet wounds, said Asaduzzaman.

The reason for the attack could not be known immediately, but police suspected that Jony's rivals might have carried out the attack.

## Schoolboy

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missing on Thursday night. His body was found in a field in Sholabaria yesterday morning.

Criminals hacked him to death and dumped the body in the field, the OC said, adding that the motive behind the killing could not be known immediately.

Police were investigating the incident to find out the culprits, he said.

Victim's father filed a murder case with Ataikula Police Station.

## US warns

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weapons program, according to the US think-tank 38 North.

North Korea's actions have prompted the United States and South Korea to respond by bolstering defences, including the expected deployment of a US missile defence system, known as Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), in South Korea later this year.

The two sides reconfirmed that commitment yesterday.

China, however, has objected to THAAD, saying it is a direct threat to China's own security and will do nothing to bring North Korea back to the negotiating table, leading to calls from some South Korean opposition leaders to delay or cancel it.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang reiterated China's opposition, which he said would never change.

South Korean Defense Minister Han Min-woo said Mattis' visit to Seoul - his first trip abroad as defence secretary - sent a clear message of strong US support.

Once fully developed, a North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) could threaten the continental United States, which is about 9,000 km (5,500 miles) from North Korea. ICBMs have a minimum range of about 5,500 km (3,400 miles), but some are designed to travel 10,000 km (6,200 miles) or more.

Former U.S. officials and other experts have said the United States essentially has two options when it comes to trying to curb North Korea's fast-expanding nuclear and missile programs - negotiate or take military action.

Neither path offers certain success and the military option is fraught with huge dangers, especially for Japan and South Korea, US allies in close proximity to North Korea.

## Machete

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suicide bombers from the Islamic State jihadist group attacked bars, restaurants, a concert hall and the national stadium in Paris on November 13, 2015, killing 130 people.

And last July, a Tunisian extremist rammed a lorry through crowds celebrating Bastille Day in Nice on France's south coast, crushing 86 people to death.

In November, French police broke up an alleged jihadist terror ring which was thought to be planning to attack Paris.

Friday's incident came on the very day that Paris was submitting its formal bid dossier to host the 2014 Summer Olympics.

The Louvre was already suffering from a fall in visitor numbers after the series of attacks in France.

Over the last two years, numbers are down about two million, casting doubt on its claim to be the most visited museum in the world.

Last year, there was a 15-percent slump in visitors compared to 2015, to around 7.3 million.

## Fight against

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Speaking on the occasion, Noor said if festivals are not observed or any cultural activities are not organised in the country, communalism and fundamentalism will gradually reign over humanity.

He urged the people to carry on their fight against communalism to save the Bangalee culture from extinction, saying, "Communalism cannot enter the minds that are enriched with culture."

Liz wells, a professor at Plymouth University; Hengameh Golestan, a prominent photographer from Iran; Liaquat Ali Lucky, director general of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy; and Shahidul Alam, director of the festival; were also present among others.

Two Bangladeshi photographers -- Nasir Ali Mamun and Saida Khanom -- received Lifetime Achievement Awards during the ceremony.

The two-week-long event will be open for all from 11:00am to 8:00pm till February 16. The venues are Bulbul Academy of Fine Arts, Northbrook Hall Auditorium, Beauty Boarding and Shilpakala Academy.

## Hero honoured

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student at Emory University's Goizueta Business School in the US, refused to leave his friends behind and was eventually killed by the militants.

His friends Abinta Kabir, a Bangladesh-born US citizen and a student at Emory University, and Tarishi Jain, an Indian student at the University of California, Berkeley, were also among the 20 hostages killed.

"On July 1 during the terrorist attack at the Holey Artisan Bakery Faraaz refused to abandon his friends. When Faraaz stood by his friends that night, refusing the terrorists' offer to flee, he stood with courage, he stood for friendship, and he stood for humanity," said Faraaz's older brother Zaraqif Ayaat Hossain at the programme.

With his act, Faraaz made it clear that those terrorists didn't represent

Bangladesh and the values of Islam, Zaraqif added.

"The values which were instilled in Faraaz throughout his life were values he had acquired growing up. I believe that this humanitarian award is also recognition of the values that you, mama, have raised us with," said the bereaved brother to his mother.

A short video clip featuring snippets of Faraaz's life and comments by his loved ones was screened at the event.

Earlier, PepsiCo Global launched the annual Faraaz Hossain Courage Award from 2016 by setting up a fund of \$200,000. The fund will support a \$10,000 prize to be awarded to individuals of extraordinary courage annually for the next 20 years.

He was also posthumously conferred the Harmony Foundation's Mother Teresa Memorial International Award for his bravery on November 20 last year at a ceremony in Mumbai.

## Cancer cure

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individual but "understanding the molecular cogs that make cancer cells different to normal cells and therefore developing drugs personalised to the cancer" would allow "personalised, precision medicine".

"What it would do is suppress the cancer and convert cancer into a long-term chronic disease," Professor Sikora said.

"Most patients with cancer tend to be in their 50s or 60s. If they live another 20 or 30 years, they would effectively live a normal lifespan."

Professor Sikora suggested this medical revolution would happen "in the next five to 10 years".

"There will be, not a cure-all, but a much better predictive way of knowing which drugs to give to which patients," he said.

**'THIRD-HAND' SMOKE HARMS INFANTS: STUDY**

The first solid evidence that smoking causes cancer came in the 1950s, followed decades later by revelations that "second-hand" smoke also harms health.

Yesterday, scientists issued a warning about what they call "third-hand" smoke (THS) -- the sticky residue from tobacco puffing that clings to walls and furniture.

In mice, at least, exposure to these toxic leftovers causes lower infant weight and alters counts of blood cells

associated with the body's immune system, they reported in the Nature journal Scientific Reports.

"Evidence is mounting that the residue lingering on indoor surfaces could be just as harmful -- if not more -- than second-hand smoke," said the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, which took part in the study.

Researchers from the United States and China tested the biological response of mice to THS in lab conditions designed to mimic exposure in a smokers' home.

Based on what they found, there could be reason to fear for the safety of infants who can pick up toxins from floors and carpets they lie or crawl on, and walls, curtains and furniture they touch, the team said.

"Small children are a particularly vulnerable population who are exposed to THS toxicants through inhalation, ingestion and dermal contact," they wrote.

Previous research had shown that THS toxins caused DNA damage to human cells in petri dishes, and harmed sperm and the organs of lab mice.

An earlier study of THS toxins in house samples warned of a potential cancer risk to children.

But it was not known how THS exposure would affect infant health.

## Dhaka still 'high-threat'

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Bangladesh. It urges the US citizens who travel to Bangladesh to exercise appropriate cautions and maintain a high level of vigilance in light of the recent violent attacks.

Although thousands of US citizens visit Bangladesh every year without any incidents, the US has asked its citizens residing in or travelling to Bangladesh to exercise caution while in the country.

"The US government assesses that the terrorist threat remains real and credible, and further attacks are possible," the report adds.

On other areas of concern, it says the Bangladesh government is sensitive to travelling in the Chittagong Hills Tracts.

About crime threats in Bangladesh, the report further says financial scam, vehicle theft and petty drug crimes

comprise the majority of criminal activities in Dhaka and other major cities.

However, there is no indication that foreigners have been or are being targeted because of their nationality, the report observes.

About transportation safety situation, it says there is very little enforcement of traffic laws, which leads to daily traffic congestion and overall gridlock in urban areas. Drivers must be vigilant, aware and patient. It is not uncommon to see vehicles travelling the wrong direction or commuters hanging out of buses.

According to the report, the US Federal Aviation Administration has assessed Bangladesh's Civil Aviation Authority as not being in compliance with the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) aviation safety standards for oversight of its air carrier operations.

## Democrats in thorny resistance war against Trump

AFP, Washington

Two weeks after Republican Donald Trump took the oath of office, Senator John Cornyn deplored the "mindless obstruction, foot-dragging and delay" by Democrats over the US president's nominations for vital posts.

"I hope soon our Senate Democrats will start working with us and not against us," the Republican told Senate colleagues Thursday.

Good luck with that. Trump has moved at a blistering pace to fulfill various campaign promises, issuing a stream of executive orders warmly cheered by the Republican base.

But he needs the Senate to confirm his cabinet picks, and Democrats furious over the controversial executive orders -- not to mention his propensity to provoke longstanding US allies -- have hit the brakes.

Of the 15 people nominated to Trump's all-important cabinet, only four have been confirmed.

At this point in Barack Obama's administration, 12 cabinet members were in place. By February 2, 2001, all of George W. Bush's lieutenants were on the job.

This year is different. "These are not normal times, this is not a typical president," Senate Democrat Chris Coons told reporters.

"We're in a difficult place."

Anti-Trump demonstrators outside the US Supreme Court this week had a blunt message for Democrats: "resist."

Lawmakers appeared to be listening. Deep gridlock has seized the chamber: boycotts of votes, procedural road blocks, heated confrontations.

Senate Democrats, with new leader Chuck Schumer, have slow-walked all nominations.

"I've never seen a cabinet this full of bankers and billionaires, folks with massive conflicts of interest and such little experience or expertise in the areas they will oversee," Schumer said Thursday.

Angry Democrats have boycotted three nominees whom they have described as ethically flawed, refusing to show up for committee votes.

Republicans took the extraordinary step of changing committee rules in order to advance Trump's nominees for US Treasury, Department of Health and Human Services, and the Environmental Protection Agency, without participation by Democrats.

The three are expected to get final Senate confirmation votes next week.

With partisan tensions soaring, Democrats were forced to contemplate another nomination, one that could have far-reaching impact on the nation: Trump's pick to fill a vacancy on the US Supreme Court.

## Quiz them

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for interrogation in police custody for each of them.

The court also ordered the law enforcers to interrogate the arrestees in presence of policewomen.

Earlier, a team of Mohammadpur police arrested the 28 while they were holding a secret meeting on the second floor of a building on Nurjahan Road. The police also recovered leaflets, money receipts and monthly reports of Jamaat-e-Islami along with books authored by Ghulam Azam and Motiur Rahman Nizami.

In the case filed against the 28 under the Special Powers Act, Sub-inspector Yeahia, also the plaintiff, said the women gathered in the house to plan for subversive activities.

Biplob Kumar Sarker, deputy commissioner (Tejgaon Division), said acting on a tip off, the police conducted a drive on house No. 11/7 in the area.

Primarily it was learned that all of them were highly educated and "Rukon" members of Jamaat, he said in a media briefing at Mohammadpur Police Station yesterday.

Some of the women are doctors and teachers by profession, he added. "We also suspect some of the arrestees belong to the families of war crimes convicts."

The police have yet to trace the clear identities of the women, as they did not reveal anything, said Biplob, adding they would learn about it after interrogation.

## Chinese FM to visit Australia in wake of Trump tiff

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday announced that Foreign Minister Wang Yi will visit Australia next week, raising the prospect of stronger bilateral ties as US President Donald Trump unsettles the global diplomatic landscape.

Wang will travel to Australia and New Zealand from Tuesday to next Friday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said during a press briefing.

It will be Wang's first foreign visit following Chinese New Year, and Lu called the trip "a full demonstration of the importance China attaches" to relations with Australia.

Though such visits are often planned well in advance, the announcement coincided with the fallout from a phone call between Trump and Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

Australia has long been a close Washington ally and has supported the United States in most conflicts since World War II. But Sunday's call, in which Trump reportedly lambasted Turnbull over a refugee agreement before abruptly ending the conversation, suggested a rocky start to the relationship under the new American leader.

The clash could provide an opening for China as it eyes ways to take advan-

tage of shifting foreign relations under Trump.

With the US withdrawing from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Australia is among the countries that have expressed interest in an alternative, Beijing-backed trade deal.

While China is Australia's largest trade partner, relations between the two countries have been complicated by Australia's alliance with the US.

In July, a joint statement from the US, Japan and Australia urged China not to construct military outposts and reclaim land in the disputed South China Sea.

At the time, Wang condemned the statement and accused the three countries of "fanning the flames".

China and Australia signed a free trade agreement in 2015, after years of difficult negotiations.

## Russian envoy

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to sign -- hopefully in March this year -- an agreement especially on the spent fuel that will be taken back to Russia."

Ignatov said Russian energy company, Gazprom, is going to open its office in Bangladesh soon.

The Russian envoy also talked about bilateral and economic relations of the two countries, among other issues.