

# NEWSIN brief

## Japan's Abe heads for Trump summit

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe headed to Washington yesterday with a massive investment package for Donald Trump, possibly designed to inoculate his country against presidential criticism. Abe will dangle proposals linked to the creation of hundreds of thousands of jobs in the US, ranging from high-speed rail projects to private cash from Japanese companies.

## Syria rebel fire kills 3 in Red Crescent centre

Rebel fire on an aid distribution centre in Syria's Aleppo city has killed three people, including a Red Crescent volunteer and a child, a monitor said yesterday. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross confirmed the volunteer's death in Wednesday's incident. Syrian Rights monitor identified those two killed as a woman and a child.

## S Korea's ruling party changes name

The embattled ruling party of South Korea's impeached President Park Geun-Hye has picked a new name -- Liberal Korea -- officials said yesterday, as it seeks to distance itself from a sprawling corruption scandal. The Saenuri, or New Frontier, party was formed from a merger of several centre-right parties in 1997 and known as the Grand National Party until 2012.

## 32 killed in Yemen port clashes

Thirty-two combatants were killed Wednesday in the battle for a key coastal town in western Yemen between government forces and Shia Huthi rebels, officials said. The deaths occurred as forces loyal to President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi advanced into neighbourhoods of Mokha and Huthis retreated to northern and western parts of the town, military sources said.

## Somalia's ex-PM elected president

Former Somali prime minister Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, who holds joint American citizenship, was elected president on Wednesday, vowing to crack down on corruption and Al-Shabaab militants. The 55-year-old former premier, whose hails from the Darod clan and who goes by the nickname "Farmajo", won after incumbent president Hassan Sheikh Mohamud acknowledged defeat in a second round of voting by lawmakers.



Myanmar Minister for Social Welfare Relief and Resettlement Win Myat Aye (L), Malaysian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Reezal Merican (behind Win Myat Aye in suit) and Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak following the arrival of a Malaysian ship carrying aid for Rohingya Muslims in Yangon's Thilawa port yesterday. Inset, an anti-Rohingya hardline Buddhist group, together with Buddhist monks, rallies outside the port.



# Nasheed to stand for polls

Exiled Maldives leader declares he would return home, calls for int'l pressure on govt to allow him to run

The exiled former leader of the Maldives yesterday announced he would return to run for election as president of the troubled Indian Ocean nation, despite facing jail after a controversial conviction on terror-related charges. Mohamed Nasheed became the Maldives' first democratically elected president in 2008, but was narrowly defeated in 2013 elections by President Abdullah Yameen. Nasheed was later jailed on terrorism charges he says were politically motivated. He has lived in exile for the past year after Maldives authorities gave him leave to travel to London for medical treatment. But yesterday he announced he would contest the 2018 presidential elections, following talks this week in Colombo with his Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). "We have decided that the MDP will produce a candidate. I am hopeful to be that candidate," the 49-year-old told reporters in Colombo after talks with party leaders living in exile in the Sri Lankan capital.

Nasheed urged the international community to engage more robustly with Yameen's government and said a number of countries were working behind the scenes, reports Reuters. "We will continue to work with our international partners to see how they may be able to impress upon President Yameen the need to have an all inclusive elections," he said. Nasheed is almost certain to be arrested on return to the Indian Ocean archipelago, whose reputation as an upmarket honeymoon destination has been battered by years of political unrest. He would be able to contest party primaries from outside the country, but would need to return to Male for the election, reports AFP. The Maldives constitution bars Nasheed from being a candidate because of a 2015 criminal conviction. But the former leader expects the restriction to be lifted in response to international pressure. A UN panel has ruled that Nasheed's imprisonment was illegal and ordered the regime to pay him compensation.



# AID FOR ROHINGYAS

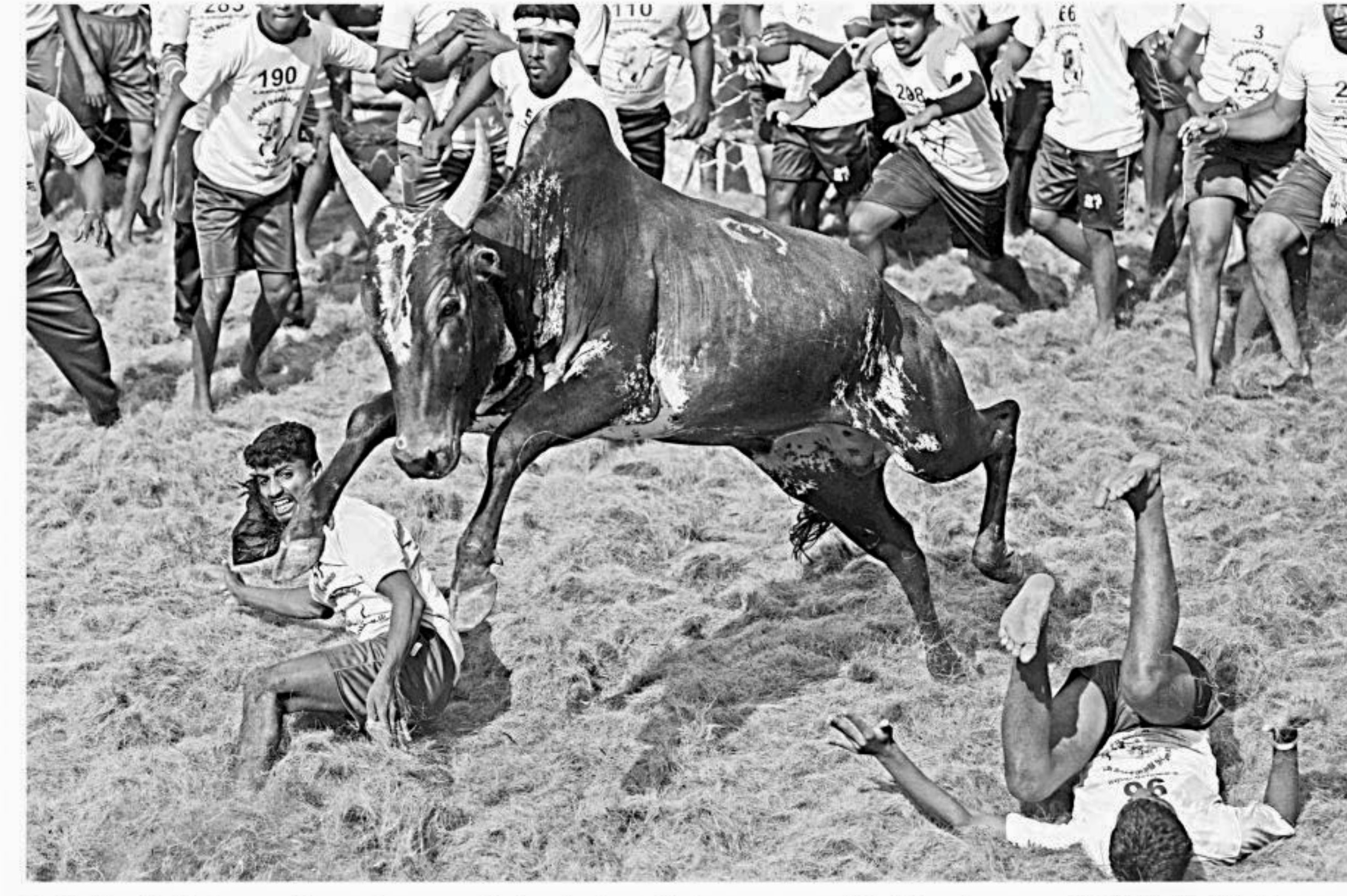
## Malaysia ship arrives in Myanmar port

A small group of protesters greeted a ship from Malaysia when it docked in Myanmar yesterday carrying aid bound for the troubled state of Rakhine, where many members of the stateless Rohingya Muslim minority live. The ship docked on the outskirts of the commercial hub, Yangon, where it was due to unload 500 tonnes of food and emergency supplies, with the rest of its 2,200 tonne cargo bound for southeast Bangladesh. Almost 69,000 Rohingyas have fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh in the past four months from a security force crackdown. The aid shipment from mostly Muslim Malaysia has stirred opposition in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, where many see the Rohingyas as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Malaysia has been an outspoken critic of Myanmar over the crisis in Rakhine state, which erupted after nine policemen were killed in attacks on border posts on Oct 9 claimed by Rohingya militants. UN officials working with refugees in Bangladesh have told Reuters the death toll in the Myanmar security sweep could be more than 1,000. Refugees have given journalists, human rights groups and UN investigators detailed accounts of troops firing on civilians, burning villages, beatings, detention and rape. The Myanmar government, led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, has rejected the reports of abuse, saying many were fabricated. It insists the strife is an internal matter. Underlining the controversy surrounding the aid for the Rohingyas, several dozen Buddhist monks and nationalists demonstrated outside the port terminal yesterday.

# 9/11 attacks were America's fault

Alleged plotter tells Obama

The self-proclaimed mastermind of the September 11 attacks wrote to former president Barack Obama to tell him 9/11 was a direct result of American foreign policy and the deaths of innocent people it has caused. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's 18-page letter was addressed to "the head of the snake, Barack Obama," leader of "the country of oppression and tyranny." Defense attorney David Nevin provided a copy of the letter, which has not yet been posted on the US military's website for Guantanamo proceedings. He told AFP that Mohammed began writing it in 2014. The letter is dated January 8, 2015, but reached the White House only two years later in the last days of Obama's presidency, according to news reports, after a military judge ordered the Guantanamo prison camp where Mohammed is held to deliver it. "It was not we who started the war against you in 9/11; it was you and your dictators in our land," he wrote. He says God was on the side of the hijackers on that fateful day when airplanes were guided into the Twin Towers in New York, the Pentagon and a field in Pennsylvania. "Allah aided us in conducting 9/11, destroying the capitalist economy, catching you with your pants down, and exposing all the hypocrisy of your long-held claim to democracy and freedom," Mohammed wrote.



An Indian bull charges through a crowd of onlookers during an annual bull-taming event "Jallikattu" in the village of Palamedu on the outskirts of Madurai, Tamil Nadu yesterday. Lawmakers in India's Tamil Nadu state passed an emergency order on January 23 allowing bull-taming festivals to resume after a court ban on the traditional events led to mass protests.

# Abducted Pak blogger breaks silence

A Pakistani activist abducted last month has broken his silence on his weeks-long disappearance, but is refusing to point fingers in a country where criticising extremism or the security establishment can make you a target. Ahmad Waqass Goraya was among five activists who vanished in Pakistan in early January. Human Rights Watch opposition lawmakers and Pakistani activists have said their near simultaneous abductions pointed to government involvement in a country with a history of enforced disappearances. Goraya was freed at the end of January along with at least three others and swiftly fled back to the Netherlands, where he has lived for the last decade. "I felt I would never come back, I would never see my son and family," the 34-year-old IT worker told AFP during a phone interview in which he frequently became agitated. Goraya, who like the other activists criticised religious extremism and the military establishment, refused to say anything about his captors or describe what happened during his ordeal, which began after he was abducted on January 4 shortly after leaving his family home in Lahore. But he angrily rejected accusations that he was a traitor for daring to be vocal about alleged abuses of power in Pakistan, insisting he was a true patriot. "Nothing was against Pakistan, nothing was against Islam, I was critical of policies because I want to see a better Pakistan," he said, adding in a later message: "We want a Pakistan with rule of law". Goraya also said he fears that a virulent ultra right-wing campaign to paint him as a blasphemist while he was missing has followed him to Europe.

# Live cockroach pulled out from woman's skull

It's the stuff of nightmares -- a cockroach crawls up your nose in the middle of the night, burrows in and drives you mad with scratching behind your eyes. But for one Indian woman, this horror story proved all too real. The 42-year-old had a painful crawling sensation behind her eyes when she woke up, so rushed to a local clinic where her nose was flushed and she was sent home. But the sensation didn't subside, and it wasn't until a specialist explored her nasal passages with an endoscope that she learned the awful truth. "I saw some tiny legs moving inside," M N Shankar, an ear, nose and throat specialist at Chennai's Stanley Medical College Hospital, told AFP on Wednesday. "I looked further in and almost five centimetres from the tip of the nose I saw something unusual. "I realised I was actually looking at the bottom of a cockroach." The invasive critter had burrowed deep inside her nose, almost to the base of the skull, and was still alive after roughly 12 hours, Shankar added. Using an instrument akin to a vacuum cleaner, Shankar managed to extract the cockroach from her skull intact -- still alive and kicking.

# China villages cheer Robin Hood-like hero in festival

Carrying the golden statue of a revered ancient general, villagers in eastern China dash wildly through waterlogged fields in a mud-spattered celebration of a local rebel adored for stealing from the rich to give to the poor. Spurred on by the roar of firecrackers and cheers of families crowded on muddy banks, teams of men splash through the quagmire, in a centuries-old ceremony that is part of the lead up to China's Lantern Festival on February 11. It is a time for colourful ceremonies in the coastal province of Fujian, where the Hakka people have held on particularly strongly to their folk traditions. At the centre of the celebrations is the solemn-faced gilded effigy of Guan Gong, a Chinese general who lived nearly 2,000 years ago during the Eastern Han dynasty and has been granted god-like status. But he is not the main focus of the festivities. For villagers here Guan Gong acts as a stand-in for a local rebel king named Zhang Lian, akin to a Robin Hood figure, who looted riches and helped the poor. He rose up in 1560 against the corrupt Ming empire, which used its massive army to impose heavy taxes on local peasants. After two years of fighting, the government crushed the insurrection, leading the hero to flee to Indonesia, where legend has it he eventually became king of the southeastern island known today as Sumatra. Seeking to honour him without upsetting the emperor, Ming dynasty peasants paid tribute to an image of Guan Gong instead. Local families pray to the statue, light incense and sacrifice chickens, before carrying it down to the field.



# Nepal extends deadline for war crimes probe

Nepal yesterday extended the mandates for two commissions tasked with probing crimes committed during the bloody civil war, hours before a deadline was due to lapse without a single case being investigated. The commissions had been given two years to look into the murders, rapes and forced disappearances perpetrated by government forces and Maoist rebels during the decade-long conflict, which ended in 2006. Their mandates were set to expire at midnight yesterday, leaving thousands of victims in limbo, but in an eleventh-hour decision Kathmandu agreed to extend the investigation period. "The term of the two commissions have been extended by a year," Information Minister Surendra Kumar Karki told AFP.

# Qatar okays draft law for domestic workers

While the World Cup 2022 host -- battered by international criticism of its human rights' record -- has announced several key reforms governing the rights of labourers who help build stadiums and infrastructure for football's biggest tournament, domestic staff have not yet been protected by legislation. Initial response to the draft law was positive. Campaign group Migrant Rights said on social media that the reform was "very promising news". It also called on Qatar to include domestic staff in the Wage Protection System, a measure introduced in 2015 to ensure the country's vast migrant labour workforce receive their salaries on time. Amnesty's deputy director of global issues, James Lynch, said it would be waiting to see the details of the proposed law. "The Qatari government has been promising a law on domestic workers for years. Good that it's back on the table - the content will be key," he tweeted.

