

## World News Roundup

## Myanmar

## 'Fall from grace'

## Genocide charge dents halo of laureate Suu Kyi

BANGKOK, Jan 27, (AP) — When Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi walked into the International Court of Justice last month, she gambled the remaining shreds of her hard-won international reputation on a rebuttal of accusations that her country's military committed genocide against minority Rohingya Muslims.

The court was not persuaded. This past week, it ordered Myanmar to take all possible measures to prevent genocide against the Rohingya.

Suu Kyi's willingness to defend human rights abuses on the global stage was a move more likely aimed at burnishing her nationalist credential at home rather than swaying the court.

For her former admirers, Suu Kyi's defense only underlined her responsibility for failing to at least speak out in defense of the Rohingya.

"With this ICJ ruling, she has suffered a spectacular fall from grace," said Bill Richardson, a former US congressman and UN ambassador. "She has gone from a Nobel Prize champion of democracy to just another dictator wanting to maintain her power by defending military repression, genocide, and the banishment of the Rohingya."

After taking the helm of Myanmar's nascent pro-democracy movement in 1988, Suu Kyi's brave defiance of military rule, at high personal cost, made her the object of worldwide adulation. She won the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, cited for being "one of the most extraordinary examples of civil courage in Asia in recent decades."



Suu Kyi

## Struggle

When her nonviolent struggle finally paid off in 2015 with a smashing election victory by her National League for Democracy party, there was optimism that Myanmar had finally turned a corner after decades of military rule.

Former president Barack Obama commended Suu Kyi for "her tireless efforts and sacrifice over so many years to promote a more inclusive, peaceful, and democratic Myanmar."

Then came the crackdown. In 2017, Myanmar security forces launched a counterinsurgency operation in western Rakhine state that, compelling evidence shows, involved mass rape, killings and the burning of entire villages. More than 700,000 Rohingya fled to neighboring Bangladesh, reluctant to return until their basic rights including citizenship are guaranteed.

As the magnitude of the Rohingya tragedy emerged, 1984 Nobel Peace laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu felt compelled to appeal to Suu Kyi.

"My dear sister: If the political price of your ascension to the highest office in Myanmar is your silence, the price is surely too steep," the South African wrote in an open letter.

"We pray for you to speak out for justice, human rights and the unity of your people. We pray for you to intervene," he wrote.

Richardson is less diplomatic in expressing his dismay.

He had accepted Suu Kyi's invitation to join an advisory board on the Rakhine crisis. But in early 2018, when he suggested to Suu Kyi that two Reuters reporters arrested for exposing abuse by the security forces be released, she reacted furiously. Disillusioned, he quit the board.

"I could see the reformer and former champion of democracy ... turning into a power-loving and entrenched leader," he said. "She was becoming an apologist for the military so she could hold onto her power and get reelected. She simply could not tolerate any dissent, even from her longtime friends and supporters like myself."

Myanmar's government spokesman Zaw Htay rejected multiple phone calls Saturday seeking comment on the criticism.

Ahead of this week's court ruling, Suu Kyi wrote an op-ed in the Financial Times newspaper in which she said "international condemnation" had a "negative effect" on efforts to make progress in Rakhine.

## Civilian

"It has undermined painstaking domestic efforts to establish co-operation between the military and the civilian government," she wrote. "It hampers our ability to lay the foundation for sustainable development in a very diverse country."

Political realities play an important role in Suu Kyi's position. Despite her party's landslide election victory, the military retains huge influence in government due to clauses inserted in the constitution. She has no direct control over the security forces.

To exercise real power, her party must mobilize popular and electoral support.

After she led her country's delegation at the initial hearings last month at the International Court of Justice, she returned to Myanmar to cheering crowds lining the streets.

"Undoubtedly, ahead of an election year, her decision to personally defend the case, making it about her, and using it as an opportunity to whip up nationalism, has boosted her public support ahead of an election year," wrote Burma Campaign UK, a lobbying group that had been her ally against military rule.

There's also a more personal aspect to Suu Kyi's predicament, some expert say.

Her father, Gen Aung San, was the country's independence hero. She was only 2 years old when he was assassinated by political rivals in 1947, a year before freedom from Britain.

"Although she talks a lot about democracy, I think she has a more messianic concept of her present and future role, based on her father's reputation," David Steinberg, a professor of Asian Studies at Georgetown University, said in an email interview last month.

Suu Kyi entered Myanmar's politics in 1988, when she returned from a life spent mostly abroad to nurse her dying mother. She became swept up in a popular revolt against military rule, and shot to fame as her father's daughter with a speech to hundreds of thousands of people.

"Her moral authority in Myanmar is predicated on the aura of her father and what he represents, and in the fact that she came in to 'save the country' in 1988 and endured so many years under house arrest," said Jane Ferguson, a senior lecturer in anthropology at The Australian National University.

Asked once in a BBC interview about her reputation as a saintly figure, Suu Kyi replied: "I am just a politician. I am not quite like Margaret Thatcher, no, but on the other hand, I am no Mother Teresa either. I have never said that I was Mahatma Gandhi, actually, was a very astute politician."



India's Republic Day parade marches through Rajpath, the ceremonial boulevard in New Delhi, India on Jan 26. (AP)

## India celebrates Republic Day with military parade

Thousands of Indians converged on a ceremonial boulevard in the capital amid tight security to celebrate the Republic Day on Sunday, which marks the 1950 anniversary of the country's democratic constitution.

During the celebrations, schoolchil-

dren, folk dancers, and police and military battalions marched through New Delhi's parade route, followed by a military hardware display.

Beyond the show of military power, the parade also included ornate floats highlighting India's cultural diversity as

men, women and children in colorful dresses performed traditional dances, drawing applause from the spectators.

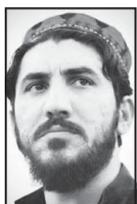
The 90-minute event, broadcast live, was watched by millions of Indians on their television sets across the country. Brazilian President Jair Messias

Bolsonaro was the chief guest for this year's celebrations.

He was accorded the ceremonial Guard of Honor by President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Rashtrapati Bhawan, the sprawling presidential palace. (AP)



In this Jan 24 photo provided by the New South Wales Police, wreckage is strewn at the crash site of a fire-fighter's air tanker near Numeralla, south west of Sydney. The bodies of three US flying fire-fighters and the cockpit voice recorder from the water bomber in which they died battling Australia's unprecedented wildfire crisis were retrieved on Saturday as their grieving families arrived in Sydney, officials said. (AP)



Pashteen



Dawar

## Subcontinent

**Pakistan arrests rights leader:** Pakistani security forces on Monday arrested the leader of a human rights group that has accused the military of committing widespread abuses in its war on terror.

**Manzoor Pashteen** was detained along with six others in a pre-dawn raid in the northwestern city of Peshawar, said Javed Khan, a local police official. He said Pashteen was arrested on charges of making anti-government speeches at rallies and inciting violence. He provided no further details.

Pashteen, 27, heads the Pashtun Protection Movement, which has emerged as a force among the country's Pashtun minority, drawing tens of thousands to rallies. The group contends that the military is waging a campaign of intimidation as it battles Islamist militants in the country's rugged border region near Afghanistan. The group says the army's heavy-handed tactics include extrajudicial killings and thousands of disappearances and detentions.

**Mohsin Dawar**, a lawmaker who is also a member of the group, confirmed Pashteen's arrest. He told The Associated Press that police were taking Pashteen to Dera Ismail Khan, a town in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan. He said Pashteen was apparently arrested on charges of attending anti-government rallies.

Pashteen's supporters condemned his arrest on social media, while others praised the police action, saying a "traitor" had been arrested.

A prominent Pakistani rights leader Afrasiab Khattak criticized the arrest, saying it "exposes the colonial type repressive state policy against Pashtun in general," as well as the people of the former tribal region of North Waziristan in particular.

Gulalai Ismail, a Pakistani human rights activist who recently fled the country to avoid harassment by security agencies, also denounced the arrest in a tweet. "We, Pashtuns, will remain non-violent in the face of the arrest of our movement's leader," she said, adding that peaceful resistance is "the major pillar" of the movement.

The military has used indiscriminate force as it hunts for Taliban hideouts in the tribal regions where the Pashtun dominate, impos-

## North Korea

## 'NKorea plans to build nuclear-able long-range missile'

## Kim's aunt re-emerges after 6 years

SEOUL, Jan 27, (Agencies) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's aunt made her first public appearance in about six years, state media reported Sunday, quelling years of rumors that she was purged or executed by her nephew after helping him inherit power from his father.

According to a Korean Central News Agency dispatch, the name of Kim Kyong Hui was included in a list of top North Korean officials who watched a performance marking Lunar New Year's Day with Kim Jong Un at a Pyongyang theater on Saturday.

North Korea's main newspaper also released a photo showing Kim Kyong Hui sitting near Kim Jong Un and his wife, Ri Sol Ju, at the Samjiyon Theater.

Kim Kyong Hui, 73, was once an influential figure in North Korea as the only sister of late North Korean leader Kim Jong Il, the father of Kim Jong Un. She had initially kept a low profile during the early part of her brother's rule, but Kim Kyong Hui later frequently accompanied him on his inspection trips after he suffered a stroke in 2008.

While taking up many top posts such as a four-star army general and a member of the powerful Politburo, she was also believed to have played a key role in grooming Kim Jong Un as the next leader. Kim Jong Un eventually took power after his father died of a heart attack in late 2011, in the North's second father-to-son power transfer.

Kim Kyong Hui's fate had been in doubt after Kim Jong Un had her husband and the North's No. 2 official, Jang

Song Thae, executed for treason and corruption in December 2013. His death was reported by the North and remains the most significant in a series of executions or purges that Kim Jong Un has engineered in what outside experts believe were attempts to remove potential rivals and cement his grip on power.

Days after Jang's execution, Kim Kyong Hui's name was mentioned in a KCNA dispatch as a member of a funeral committee for another top official. But she missed a state ceremony commemorating the second anniversary of Kim Jong Il's death days later. Her name had since never been mentioned in North Korean state media until Sunday's KCNA report.

## Media

Some North Korea monitoring groups in Seoul and foreign media outlets had speculated Kim Jong Un had his aunt executed or purged, or she died of health problems. Outside experts said Kim Kyong Hui had long suffered from liver and heart problems and high blood pressure.

It's extremely difficult to track developments in North Korea, the world's most closed country. Supposedly executed officials have later appeared on the North's state TV. Even South Korea's spy agency has had a mixed record on figuring out what's going across the border, but it previously dismissed speculation on Kim Kyong Hui's possible execution and said she was receiving medical treatment.

Analyst Cheong Seong-Chang at South Korea's private Sejong Institute

said Kim Kyong Hui's reemergence suggested Kim Jong Un was attempting to strengthen the unity of his ruling family as he's pushing to harden his position toward the United States in stalled nuclear negotiations.

Cheong, however, predicted that Kim Kyong Hui won't likely regain her political influence as she now has no position in the Politburo, which has already been filled with new figures.

Since Kim Jong Un's grandfather Kim Il Sung established the North Korean government in 1948, his family has carried on the veneration of royal blood, making the Kims the subject of an intense personality cult.

## Also:

**WASHINGTON:** The US Defense Secretary Mark Esper believes North Korea is trying to build a long-range ballistic missile that is able to carry a nuclear warhead.

"Well, they have an aggressive R&D (research and development) programme and test programme, to say the least, and we monitor it very carefully, very closely. We are conscious of what they're trying to do," he told reporters.

However, he said at a Center for Strategic and International Studies forum that the US believes a "diplomatic initiative" with Pyongyang is the "best way forward."

"At this point, we need to get back to the negotiating table and really figure out the best way forward to denuclearize the (Korean) Peninsula," he added.

ing collective punishments like bulldozing the homes of family members of suspected militants and punishing entire villages for extremist attacks.

The catalyst for the group's creation was the police killing in 2018 of Naqeebullah Mehsud, a 27-year-old ethnic Pashtun and aspiring model who was shot dead in the southern port city of Karachi. Many displaced Pashtuns have relocated there after being displaced by the military operations in the tribal regions. (AP)

**Nepal ends search for missing:** Nepalese authorities decided Thursday to end the search for four South Korean trekkers and three Nepali guides who were buried by an avalanche on a popular trekking route. Despite several attempts to locate them, in-

cluding digging deep through snow at several spots on the Mount Annapurna Circuit trail, crews have not been able to find any clues of their whereabouts, Nepal army spokesman Brig Gen Bigyan Dev Pandey said.

Rescuers have been searching since an avalanche swept the South Korean team and their guides on Friday. Fresh snowfall and smaller avalanches on the trail have made the operation difficult. Authorities had mobilized army experts, mountaineering guides and local villagers to help in the search.

Attempts were being made to pull out the rescue team from the avalanche site but weather conditions were delaying the effort. It could take weeks or months for the snow to melt and for the bodies to surface.

The missing South Koreans were two women in their 30s and 50s and two men in

their 50s, all teachers who were doing volunteer work in Nepal. (AP)

**Conflicting accounts on plane crash:** A passenger plane from Afghanistan's Ariana Airlines crashed Monday in a Taleban-held area of the eastern Ghazni province, local officials said.

Arif Noori, spokesman for the provincial governor, said the plane went down around 1:10 pm local time (8:40 am GMT) in Deh Yak district, which is held by the Taleban. Two provincial council members also confirmed the crash.

However, Ariana Airlines told The Associated Press that none of its planes have crashed in Afghanistan, according to Mirwais Mirzakwal, the company's acting director. The state-owned airline also released a statement on its website saying all its aircraft were operational and safe.

The conflicting accounts could not immediately be reconciled. The number of people on board and their fate was not immediately known, nor was the cause of the crash.

The mountainous Ghazni province sits in the foothills of the Hindu Kush mountains and is bitterly cold in winter. The Taleban control or hold sway over around half the country.

The last major commercial air crash in Afghanistan occurred in 2005, when a Kam Air flight from the western city of Herat to the capital, Kabul, crashed into the mountains as it tried to land in snowy weather.

The war however has seen a number of deadly crashes of military aircraft. One of the most spectacular occurred in 2013 when an American Boeing 747 cargo jet crashed shortly after takeoff from Bagram air base north of Kabul en route to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. All seven crew member were killed. The US National Transportation Safety Board investigation found inadequately-secured cargo had shifted during flight, causing damage to the control systems that "rendered the airplane uncontrollable." (AP)



Riot police aim their guns during a face-off with protesters in Hong Kong on Jan 27. Protesters gathered in Mong Kok, Kowloon district of Hong Kong, late on Sunday night, marking four years since activists faced furious crowds over a dispute about pop-up snack stands. (AP)