

## **Rights group details lead-up to Myanmar attacks on Rohingya Muslims**

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The Rohingya face official and social discrimination in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar, which denies most of them citizenship and basic rights because they are looked on as immigrants from Bangladesh, even though many settled in Myanmar generations ago.

**The report, based on extensive interviews, said that the Myanmar army began confiscating knives and other items that could be used as weapons or for self-defence after a group of Rohingya attacked police outposts in October 2016. (File Photo)**

**Bangkok:** The Myanmar military has systematically prepared for attacks on Rohingya Muslims, confiscating knives and other sharp-edged tools, arming and training non-Muslim civilians and forcing Rohingya families to remove protective fencing from around their homes, the independent group Fortify Rights said Thursday.

The report by the Southeast Asian human rights group documented evidence that authorities prepared for a crackdown on the minority group living mostly in the country's western Rakhine state before a radical Rohingya group attacked Myanmar security force posts in late August 2017. That attack was followed by what the United Nations and U.S. officials say is an ethnic cleansing campaign by the Myanmar government that has led about 700,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh under harrowing and violent conditions.

The report, based on extensive interviews, said that the Myanmar army began confiscating knives and other items that could be used as weapons or for self-defence after a group of Rohingya attacked police outposts in October 2016. That prompted army-led attacks on dozens of villages that forced more than 94,000 people from their homes, it said.

The army also tore down or forced villagers to tear down fencing around their homes. It also trained and provided weapons to non-Rohingya living in Rakhine, suspended aid supplies and access by humanitarian groups to impoverished Rohingya communities, the report says. "Taken together, these measures demonstrate a level of preparation not previously documented with respect to the Myanmar army-led clearance operations," it said.

The report said the civilians who participated in attacks on the Rohingya were not vigilantes but were trained by the army, though they killed many unarmed Muslim men, women and children. "There are reasonable grounds to believe that the crimes perpetrated in all three townships of northern Rakhine state constitute genocide and crimes against humanity," it said.

The report says top military and police officials should be held responsible. The Myanmar military did not immediately comment on the report. It has denied committing atrocities and blames the violence on Rohingya insurgents.

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- AP