

NEW BUSES ON THE WAY

Yangon BRT system launches with 18 buses first on 9 Feb

Yi Yi Myint & Ohmar Thant

A FLEET of 18 new buses of the Public Bus Company is set to operate public transport services on two routes as of 9 February, according to a press conference in Yangon yesterday.

Pyay and Kabar-Aye Pagoda roads are set to be used for the bus service as the two routes are popular with Yangon commuters, said Dr Maung Aung, chairman of the company.

Despite the original plan to begin the service with 65 buses, only a fleet of 18 buses will be in service first as buses are being delivered from different countries, added the chairman.

“Another 45 buses will arrive at the end of February.”

The Public Bus Company began its business with K10 billion worth of shares by the government and K15 billion worth of shares by public companies.

According to the press conference, bus fare is set at K300 per head for buses with air conditioning system and staff will be deployed at every bus-stop.

The first bus route has 23 stops running from Htaukkyant to Alanpya Pagoda Road via Pyay Road and Bogyoke Aung San Road and the second has 27 stops running from Htaukkyant to Pyay Road via Kabar-Aye Pagoda Road, Bogyoke Aung San Road, Botahtaung Pagoda Road, Strand Road and Phonegyi Road.



Bus stops at downtown Yangon are crowded with people during rush hours. PHOTO: AYE MIN SOE

INSIDE



Man, 21, arrested on suspicion of murdering 22-year-old woman

PAGE 4



Oil wells drying up along Rakhine State coastline

PAGE 2

Govt treasury bonds to be sold through bidding system

THE Central Bank of Myanmar is planning to sell its government treasury bonds through the competitive bidding system, according to the CBM.

The CBM has a plan to issue long-term treasury bonds in addition to current 2-year, three-year and 5-year government treasury bonds.

Regarding the issue, officials of the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank of Myanmar held a workshop in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

Experts from the Asia Development Bank and the Asian Bonds Market Initiative also participated in the workshop.

The CBM issued 3-year and

5-year Government Treasury Bonds in ten thousand and one hundred thousand kyats on 1st December 1993 in Yangon and 1st January 1994 in Mandalay in order to promote public saving.

A 3-year Government Treasury Bond of one million kyats was issued on 1st April 1996 and a 5-year Government

Treasury Bond of that denomination was issued on 1st January 1997.

Starting from 1st January 2010, a 2-year Government Treasury Bond of ten thousand kyat, one hundred thousand, one million and ten million have been extensively issued to public.— GNLM



Oil wells are seen at Rakhine coastline near Kyaukphyu.
PHOTO: MYITMAKHA NEWS AGENCY

Oil wells drying up along Rakhine State coastline

ACCORDING to oil well workers working along the Rakhine coastline of Kyaukpyu, the volume of crude oil they can extract using machinery has diminished by around fifty per cent since the middle of 2015, the start of Myanmar's rainy season.

During the summer months of 2015 prior to the rainy season, an average of two barrels of oil could be extracted from an oil well every three days. Now however, the extraction capacity of oil wells is just half that volume, one barrel every three days. Local

oil well workers suspect the Chinese and Korean Shwe Gas project could be the cause of the diminishing of oil supply.

"It can be analyzed that the decline in the amount of oil which can be extracted is a resulting factor of disturbances to the layers of earth under the ground, caused by extraction of the Chinese oil and gas plants. Since not even one barrel of oil can be extracted in two days of labor, how will families have enough food to eat?" said a local independent oil worker, U Maung Shwe Mra.

An oil well worker can expect to earn a daily wage of 4,000 kyats (approx \$3). Normally, three workers are hired to dig an oil well of between 300 – 400 feet deep which usually takes one or two months to dig, with incurred machinery and labour expenses ranging between 200,000 – 400,000 kyats (approx \$155 – \$310), while it is known that the average lifespan of an oil well lasts between 5 and 7 years.

The Kyaukpyu coastline boasts over 2,000 oil wells in six different work sites in the area

as of Mala Kyun, Leinhkamaw, Yaynantaung and Kyaung Wa. The majority of local residents make a living from the inherited family tradition of oil extraction more than traditional forms of livelihood such as agriculture and fishing.

According to the statements of local oil well workers, the golden age of oil enterprise along the Kyaukpyu coastline was back between 1995 – 2000 when a whole barrel of oil could be extracted from an oil well daily.—Myitmakha News Agency

Condo sales expected to go to foreign buyers

FOREIGNERS are likely to make purchases of large numbers of condominium, rather than renting them to live in, said a market analyst.

The country's real estate market is expected to come alive with the emergence of the Condominium Law that permits foreigners to own up to 40 per cent of the total number of rooms in a condominium, said Managing Director U Nay Min Thu of iMyanmarHouse.com.

The 40 per cent foreign ownership can spur demand for real estate market, attracting potential investments from foreign homebuyers, he added.

Realtors and developers in the country's property market have welcomed the new law, predicting that not only real estate but also construction sector will boom in the years to come.

Compared to previous years, the market will come alive with an increase in both sales and rentals, said the managing director who has a bright outlook on the property market in 2017. — Soe Win-MLA

Yangon-Mandalay express passengers allowed carry-on baggage

THE Ministry of Rail Transportation announced yesterday that passengers can carry hand baggage to the Yangon-Mandalay No (5) up train and No (6) down train.

Myanmar Railways recently launched its new Yangon-Mandalay express service with China-made diesel electric locomotives and carriages that have air cushion suspension system.

A free baggage allowance of 41.25 kg is set for upper class passengers and 57.75 kg for ordinary class passengers, said U Kyaw Soe Lin, MR's assistant general manager.

Passengers are allowed to carry personal items only in their carry-on baggage, added the assistance general manager.

According to the official, some personal items like packed

mattress can be kept in the guard carriage free of charge.

Train fares remain unchanged and tickets cost K4, 650 for ordinary seats and K9, 300 for upper class seats, he said.

According to the present train schedules for Yangon-Mandalay railroad section, departures of No (1), (3), (5) and (11) up trains from Yangon station are at 4 a.m, 5 p.m, 3 p.m and 6 a.m.

Following the replacement of old carriages with new ones for Yangon-Mandalay express service, there has been an increase in the number of train passengers.

According to the ministry, six more locomotives and 11 carriages imported from the People's Republic of China arrived at Myanmar International Terminals Thilawa on 31 January.— Soe Win-MLA

New drain construction underway in Amarapura Township



New drain is under construction in Amarapura.
PHOTO: AUNG THANT KHAING

CONSTRUCTION of a new drain was started as of 26 January in response to calls from Shwe Kyet Yet village and nearby villages which are suffering from the impact of water pollution in Amarapura Township, Mandalay, according to the Water Resources Utilisation Department.

The drain is being built with the contribution of the additional budget of Mandalay Region government following the report of the Amarapura Township representative in Parliament.

Regarding disagreements over the drain construction by farmers from Yintaw village, U Toe Aung Lin, staff officer of the department, said that the department aims to benefit local people. "Our livelihoods depend on lands which are situated in the area of the drain construction," said U Myo Myint, a farmer from the village. — Aung Thant Khaing

Early signs of El Nino already evident as water shortages hit Shan State

THE National League for Democracy's environmental conservation committee for Shan State will dig an artesian well for villagers living in the proximity of Heho township's Let Maung village in a bid to supply them with water after they have been hit by shortages, it is known.

A shortage of water availability started to become apparent in the area on 11 January, and while it is not the first time locals have faced a shortage of water in the area, they have said water has run out much earlier this year than in years previous.

"We've heard that about five villages around Let Maung village are suffering from water shortages. We will travel to the region and attempt to connect the villages with a water supply. We will also conduct tests to see if it's possible to dig an artesian well, and will then dig one should tests to prove it to be viable," explained U Maung Maung Sein, chairperson of the aforementioned NLD committee.

Villages in the water scarce villages are currently relying on drinking water donated by donors.

"Over roughly 300 households have been hit with this water shortage. We are financially supporting efforts so that those people have enough access to water, working together with youth groups to give assistance. We're sourcing the water from the Heho dam," said Ko Aung Hsan, general



Villagers fetch water from a lake at a village in Heho Township.

PHOTO: MYITMAKHA NEWS AGENCY

secretary of the Taunggye literary and culture association from Heho.

Healthcare awareness is being conducted in the water shortage affected region in a bid to mitigate harm to the health of local residents.

Weather forecast experts have analysed that a weather front, known as El Nino, is to hit Myanmar with much more strength in 2016 than in previous years, which will cause water shortages and extreme heat.—*Myitmakha News Agency*

Purified water producers need FDA permits before business licenses in Mandalay

PURIFIED water producers in Mandalay will be given business licenses after receiving a permit from Food and Drug Administration Department (FDA), according to Mandalay City Development Committee (MCDC).

The MCDC's announcement came after suspending licenses of 10 purified water businesses in Mandalay recently.

The businesses will be allowed to resume operating after they are given the green light by FDA for their operations, said Dr Thwin Kyaw Kyaw, one of the committee members.

As a matter of prioritising public health, business licenses

released before the FDA permits previously to avoid delays in starting their businesses will be awarded after completing the steps to be taken for the FDA permits, added the committee member.

There might be delays in

checking their products as the testing process is being carried out nationwide, said an official, adding that works are underway in cooperation with the MCDC to complete the process as soon as possible.—*Min Htet Aung (Mann)*



Yangon Region Chief Minister U Myint Swe, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Myanmar H E Mr Hong Liang and dignitaries enjoy a performance at a reception to mark the new year festival of China in Yangon on 2 February, 2016. PHOTO: MNA

Correction

Please read U T Khun Myat in line-9 of our story "Second Pyithu Hluttaw begins' on front page of February 2 issue.—ED

President sends message of felicitations to Sri Lanka PM

ON the occasion of the 68th Anniversary of Independence Day of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka which falls on 4th February 2016, U Thein Sein, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, has sent a message of felicitations to His Excellency Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.—*Myanmar News Agency*

President sends message of felicitations to Sri Lanka counterpart

ON the occasion of the Anniversary of Independence Day of the Democratic Socialist of Sri Lanka which falls on 4th February 2016, U Thein Sein, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, has sent a message of felicitations to His Excellency Mr. Maithripala Sirisena, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.—*Myanmar News Agency*

FM sends message of felicitations to Sri Lanka counterpart

ON the occasion of the 68th Anniversary of Independence Day of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka which falls on 4th February 2016, U Wunna Maung Lwin, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, has sent a message of felicitations to His Excellency Mr. Mangala Samaraweera, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Appointment of Ambassador agreed on

THE Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has agreed to the appointment of H.E. Mr. Mohsen Mohammadi as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar with residence in Bangkok in succession to H.E. Mr. Hossein Kamallan.

Mr. Mohsen Mohammadi was born on 23rd October 1961 in Tehran, Iran. He received a Bachelor's Degree majoring in Political Relations from the Faculty of International Relations of the Foreign Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1990. He can speak English, Turkish, Arabic, French and Russian.

Mr. Mohsen Mohammadi was a political expert at the Directory for West Asia of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran from 1991 to 1993. He also served as a political expert at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Tashkand from 1993

to 1997. He also served as a political expert at the Directory for Common Wealth and Caucuses from 1997 to 1998 and as Deputy Director for Common Wealth and Caucuses from 1998 to 2001. He also served as Deputy Head of Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Helsinki from 2001 to 2004. He then served as a political expert at West Europe Directory of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran from 2004 to 2006, and at the Directory of Disarmament and International Security from 2006 to 2008. He then served as a legal and international expert at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Berlin from 2008 to 2011. He then served as an expert at the National Authority for Disarmament Conventions from 2011 to 2013. He has been appointed as Director of Second Directory for Common Wealth and Caucuses since 2013. He is married and has two children.—*Myanmar News Agency*

MI to compensate insured Mingalar market fire victims in February

ARRANGEMENTS are being made to compensate insured shops that were burned in a fire at Mingalar Market in Yangon as soon as possible, according to Myanma Insurance (MI).

Four insured shops were totally destroyed in the fire while seven others were damaged, said the MI.

The scrutinising process is underway to compensate the shops during this month, said U

Aye Min Thein, MI managing director, adding that the number of shops to be given compensation is higher than in the 2010 fire.

But, the MI pointed out that only 70 out of more than 4,000 shops in the market are insured against fire.

The MI allocated K28 million to compensate four shops for their losses in the 2010 fire.—*Ko Moe*

Central Level Instructor course opens in Mandalay

A CENTRAL Level Instructor course to train the teachers who will, in turn, reinstruct others to teach kindergarten students with the use of new curricula during the 2016-2017 academic year kicked off at the No 4 Basic Education High School in Mandalay on Friday.

Mandalay Region Chief Minister U Ye Myint made an opening speech and greeted the attendees before inspecting the teaching/learning aids.

Present at the ceremony were members of the Mandalay Region government, the director general of the Institutes of

Teachers Training, officials from the Mandalay Region Education Department and a total of 500 trainee teachers from across the country.

Work on the new curriculum for kindergarten began in 2013.

The new curriculum features several pillars: writing and reading, ensuring physical and mental well-being for being able to learn the knowledge including Mathematics with enthusiasm, moral development, interaction, exploring Basic Math, art and creation, environmental observation. —*Thiha Ko Ko (Mandalay)*



Teachers attending the Central Level Instructor course.

PHOTO: THIHA KO KO (MANDALAY)

Visitors daily observe Gokhteik Viaduct in Nawnghkio



Gokhteik Viaduct. PHOTO: KO NAY

CROWDS of local and foreign visitors continue to flock to the bridge over the Gokhteik Viaduct every day, despite the prohibition against tourists crossing the bridge, according to a spokesperson for the Gokhteik Railway Station.

The Gokhteik Viaduct is the highest bridge in Myanmar and was the largest railway trestle in the world when it was completed. It is situated in Nawnghkio Township in northern Shan State, approximately 100 kilometres northeast of Mandalay.

Generally, the Gokhteik Viaduct receives over 200 people per day. The number occasionally rises to 700, especially on weekends and holidays. "Around 500 visitors passed over the viaduct every day before the prohibition was announced. Some visitors behaved unsafely on the bridge and broke the rules set by the authorities," a local resident said.

One official said: "To protect the bridge from natural forest fires, we already prepare a 4,000-gallon tank to put out a blaze on bridge, should it occur."

Myanma Railways has a plan to operate a small car-cum-train between the Gokhteik Railway Station and the bridge at a fair price. The authorities have allowed people to visit the safe part of the viaduct, where they are allowed to take photos. "The wide part of the Gokhteik Viaduct needs to be maintained," a visitor said.

Visitors have suggested that the authorities put up a billboard to inform visitors about the background history of the bridge in both English and Myanmar languages. —*Ko Nay*

Crime News

Police arrested gamblers in Tachilek

POLICE arrested ten people who were allegedly playing a gambling machine in Yan Aung Myay ward, Tachilek on 31 January. The police searched the gambling room owned by one Ah Phan alias Ah San, 32, and found a small amount of narcotics, documents and materials related to gambling. Local police have filed

charges against Ah Phan alias Ah San, 32, Ma Nge Nge Aung alias Sandar Aung, 37, Maung Soe alias Sai Aye San, 33, Kyaw Myint, 20, Ah Wai alias Shone Wai, 26, Dar Yay La, 20, Kyaw Kyaw alias Kaung Myat Kyaw, 29, Ther Latt, 19, That Tun Lin, 23 and Lwin Myo Oo, 28. — *Myint Moe (Tachilek)*



Opium sized in Phakant

AN anti-drug squad in Phakant seized 4.1 kilos of opium from a car heading from Seikmu village to Tarmakhan Village on 29 January. Charges have been filed against one Hla Myint Oo, the driver of the car and Win Naing, his passenger.

Police further arrested one Myo Min Naing and Soe Min Naing driving a Dina truck which was parked at Hmawshan ward-1, Bumbara road. The men are being charged under the anti-Narcotic law. — *Ko Ye*

Man, 21, arrested on suspicion of murdering 22-year-old woman

A 21-year-old man has been arrested in connection with murdering a 22-year-old woman, said police yesterday.

The suspect named Thu Htet Naing alias Thura Aung was arrested on 29 January, one day after the police found the body of Ma Myat Thin Kyu abandoned on the roadside of Okkala Road between Insein and Mayangon townships.

The police discovered that the victim made a phone call to the suspect before she was killed.

According to mother of the victim, Ma Myat Thin Kyu talked to her boyfriend, the suspect, over the phone at around 7 pm on 26 January.

Police arrested the suspect on 29 January on suspicion of murder.

During interrogation, the suspect said they had met on Facebook in August last year and fell in love.

He admitted that he called her around 5 pm on 26 January and picked her up in his car.

While chatting near the Shwenyaungpin Bus Stop on Yangon-Pyay Road, the victim reportedly urged him to marry her.

He denied the demand, giving the reason that he planned to attend a model training



Thu Htet Naing alias Thura Aung. PHOTO: MPF course.

After he was struck by Ma Myat Thin Kyu during the quarrel he assaulted and suffocated her.

He abandoned the body of the victim on the side of Okkala Road and threw her mobile phone into a drain in Dagon Myothit (North). Charges have been filed against the suspect — *GNLM*

Two men charged with two counts of mobile phone theft

THE police have filed a lawsuit against two men on suspicion of mobile phone theft as they failed to identify that the mobile phones belonged to them.

The police arrested Pain Thu Chit (a) U Be, 17, and Sithu Aung, 17, in Chanmyatharzi township, Mandalay region on 31 January.

Further investigations led to

another theft of a mobile phone they committed in Chanmyatharzi township last week. The local police have taken action against them. — *Ko Ye*

Singapore seizes bank accounts as part of 1MDB probe

SINGAPORE — Singapore has seized a large number of bank accounts in recent months as part of an investigation into possible money-laundering linked to Malaysian state investment fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), authorities said on Monday.

Singapore is cooperating with authorities in Malaysia, Switzerland and the United States who are investigating 1MDB, said the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) and the Commercial Affairs Department, the city-state's white-collar crime agency.

"In connection with these investigations, we have sought and are continuing to seek information from several financial institutions, are interviewing various individuals, and have seized a large number of bank accounts," the two agencies said in a joint statement.

"Since the middle of last year, the Commercial Affairs Department and the Monetary Authority of Singapore have been actively investigating possible money-laundering and other offences carried out in Singapore," they said.

The statement did not offer

any further details. In July, local police said they had only frozen two bank accounts linked to the 1MDB probe.

The statement comes a week after Switzerland's chief prosecutor said a criminal investigation into 1MDB had revealed that about \$4 billion appeared to have been misappropriated from Malaysian state companies.

In a statement issued late on Monday, 1MDB said it had not been contacted by Singapore authorities.

"As we have previously stated, 1MDB has not been contacted by any foreign legal authorities on any matters relating to the company," it said, adding that 1MDB remains committed to fully cooperating with any lawful authority and investigation.

1MDB, whose advisory board is chaired by Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, has been investigated by Malaysian authorities following accusations of financial mismanagement and graft. 1MDB has denied these allegations.

Last week, Malaysia's attorney general cleared Najib of any criminal offences or corruption, declaring that \$681 million deposited into his personal bank ac-



Singapore has seized "a large number of bank accounts" as part of investigations into controversial Malaysian state fund 1MDB, authorities said, vowing not to let the city-state become a refuge for illicit funds. PHOTO: REUTERS

count was a gift from Saudi Arabia's royal family and no further action needed to be taken.

The Monetary Authority of Singapore has been in touch with Malaysian regulators since last year, when Malaysia's government said 1MDB had redeemed \$1.1 billion from the Cayman Is-

lands and placed it in the Singapore unit of Swiss private bank BSI. BSI has declined to comment.

The Wall Street Journal reported last year that investigators had traced nearly \$700 million from an account at Falcon Private Bank in Singapore to accounts in

Malaysia they believed belonged to the prime minister. Falcon Private Bank, a Swiss private bank owned by Abu Dhabi sovereign wealth fund International Petroleum Investment Company, has said it is in contact with Singapore's central bank and will cooperate with authorities.—*Reuters*

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Thailand's 1st inheritance tax in decades enters into effect

BANGKOK — Thailand's first inheritance tax law in 72 years came into force on Monday with the aim of broadening the tax base and boosting revenue, but many analysts remain doubtful over how effective it will be in reducing inequities in the country.

The military government of Thai Prime Minister Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha, which announced plans to reintroduce the inheritance tax just months after it came to power in a May 2014 coup, expects it to bring in 1-2 billion baht (\$28-56 million) in revenue annually.

"Social inequity" has been stated as the main reason, with the military government aiming to collect the money from wealthy heirs to "develop the country and upgrade the living of underprivileged people."

The tax only applies to the inherited assets worth above 100 million baht, with lineal ascendants being charged 5 per cent and 10 per cent for others.

However, it is uncertain whether the goal could be achieved as tactics and loopholes are widely available for tax avoiders, namely those with

legal and financial knowledge that could allow them to end up paying little or nothing.

Nonarit Bisoryabut, a research fellow at Thailand Development Research Institute Foundation, told Kyodo News that the inheritance law is a symbolic gesture of the military government to differentiate itself from the previous civilian governments by showing that it "cares" for the underprivileged and is determined to eliminate the social imbalances.

"The inheritance law itself does not have any practical effectiveness, nor does it truly reduce the social inequities," Nonarit said, noting that less than 10,000 people country-wide are expected to be affected.

"The law will mostly distress (members of) the upper middle-class who does not have knowledge or financial planners to look after their assets like the billionaire families do."

Nonarit said Thai military leaders realize this, but are banking on the "psychological effect" of the move to mitigate criticism of staging the coup to

gain power.

A 31-year-old heir to a construction material business in Bangkok who does not want to be named told Kyodo News that his family decided to move their assets to Britain after learning the military government intended to impose the inheritance law.

"Thailand's political uncertainty is our main concern. Our assets are more secured and receive higher investment returns there," he said.

Thailand introduced its first inheritance tax law in 1933, a year after a revolution that replaced the country's absolute monarchy with a constitutional monarchy.

The inheritance tax was short-lived, however, having been terminated in 1944 partly as it was judged to be an ineffective means of collecting tax.

Since then, numerous governments, including that of Thaksin Shinawatra who was ousted as prime minister in 2006, had tried to reintroduce the inheritance tax but never succeeded as the law was widely criticised and opposed by stakeholders.—*Kyodo News*

World's longest 3-rope cable car system inaugurated in Viet Nam

HANOI — The world's longest three-rope cable car system was inaugurated in Viet Nam's northern Lao Cai Province yesterday.

With the total length of 6,292.5 metres, the system was recognised by Guinness World Records as world's longest three-rope cable car route, and the world's biggest height gap between its departure and arrival stations of 1,410 metres.

The system, connecting Muong Hoa Valley and Fansipan Mountain in Lao Cai, some 250 km northwest of capital Hanoi, has a capacity of 2,000 passengers per hour with each cabin accommodating 35 people.

The system shortens the travel time to the peak of the 3,143-metre Fansipan Mountain, which is dubbed the Roof of Indochina, to 15 minutes. Construction of the cable car system began in November, 2013.

The cable car system is expected to help boost the number of tourists to Lao Cai's Sa Pa town by 30 per cent to 40 per cent every year, reaching around 3 million by 2020, Viet Nam's state-run news agency VNA reported.—*Xinhua*

Australian PM Turnbull weighs early poll to break political deadlock

SYDNEY — Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull yesterday raised the possibility of dissolving both houses of Parliament and calling an early election to break a political deadlock that has stymied the government, government officials aware of the matter said.

Turnbull, who deposed former Prime Minister Tony Abbott in a party coup last year, told a private meeting of his Liberal Party that he expected the government to run a full term but had not ruled out a so-called double-dissolution election.

A double-dissolution election is rarely used in Australia and allows for snap elections for all the seats in both houses to break an impasse.

“He said a double-dissolution was a live option, which would have to be weighed up,” one official told Reuters, on condition of anonymity, discussing the closed-door meeting.

“Addressing the topic of timing of the election, he said that we can reasonably expect an election to be at the normal time in the August to October period, but that is not set in stone.”

A second government offi-



Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. PHOTO: REUTERS

cial with knowledge of the briefing confirmed the account.

A spokesman for Turnbull declined to comment on speculation about when the election will be held.

Attempts by Abbott to push

his conservative agenda on entitlement, higher education and industrial reforms through the divided upper house Senate were blocked by independent senators and the centre-left Labour Party, helping lead to his ouster.

Turnbull held out the possibility of dissolving parliament if the Senate refuses to pass a bill reinstating an industrial relations watchdog disbanded by the Labour government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard, the Australian

Broadcasting Corporation reported.

Australian governments are elected for three-year terms. Lower house MPs must contest their seats in every election, while senators serve for six years, with half their membership contesting every three years.

Turnbull became Australia's fifth prime minister in as many years when he ousted Abbott last September, contributing to a growing sense of political instability in the country.

He has enjoyed a strong polling edge against his chief rival, Labor Party leader Bill Shorten, and any talk of an early election could be aimed at exploiting that perceived weakness to win the government more room to push its agenda. There have been six double-dissolution elections in Australian history, but not all have gone well for the governments that called them.

In 1983 Liberal Party Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser called a double dissolution in which he lost power to the Labour Party, led by Bob Hawke. Four years later Hawke used the same tactic, but was still unable to win a majority in the Senate.—Reuters

US foundation says HK still world's freest economy

HONG KONG — Hong Kong still has the world's freest economy, but Beijing's undermining of Hong Kong's rule of law remains a worrying factor for the semiautonomous territory, the US-based Heritage Foundation said yesterday.

Hong Kong scored 88.6 on a 100-point scale in the 2016 Index of Economic Freedom, down one point from a year ago yet still enough to top the index for the 22nd year running. Singapore clinched the second spot with a score of 87.8 points, down 1.6 points.

“Beijing's ongoing efforts to erode the power of Hong Kong's judiciary and Legislative Council and to intervene in the economy could undermine the rule of law,” the report said. “At least for now, however, the efficient and capable judiciary remains independent, and private property rights are well protected.”

Of all 10 measuring components, freedom from corruption, fiscal freedom, business freedom and labor freedom recorded a dip in Hong Kong's scoring while property rights, monetary freedom, trade, investment and financial freedoms were all unchanged. Only government

spending recorded a higher score.

“Government spending amounts to 17.6 per cent of GDP. Public debt is virtually nonexistent, and a budget surplus has been consistently maintained. The overall entrepreneurial environment remains one of the world's most transparent and efficient.”

“The peg between the Hong Kong dollar and its US counterpart has served the territory well,” the report said. The Hong Kong dollar has been pegged to the US dollar since 1983.

Chief Secretary for Administration Carrie Lam said in response to the foundation's ranking that she is “pleased” with the outcome.

“The determination of the (Hong Kong) government to safeguard economic freedom in Hong Kong is beyond doubt, for free market principles are the cornerstones of our sustained economic development and prosperity,” Lam said. But she did not address Beijing's interference and concerns over the rule of law mentioned in the report.

The government said in a separate statement that it “will also continue with our best en-

deavors to uphold the rule of law and an independent judiciary.”

Singapore earned the second spot because “economic growth has slowed...but the city's openness to global trade and investment continues to provide a solid basis for economic dynamism.”

New Zealand claimed third place, followed by Switzerland, Australia, Canada, Chile, Ireland, Estonia and Britain, among 178 economies rated, with North Korea coming last.

Japan was 22nd with 73.1 points, dropping two spots from last year. The report said Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has boosted defence spending but “failed to generate the international confidence necessary to win support for defence reforms that would allow Japan a larger regional role.”

Enduring financial market volatility and an economic slowdown, China ranked 144th with 52 points, down from 139th last year. “Deep-seated structural problems, including continued overreliance on public investment and exports for growth, a state-controlled financial sector, and regulatory inefficiency, have become more acute (for China),” the report said.—Kyodo News

Malaysian ex-minister seeks court review of decision to clear PM

KUALA LUMPUR — A former Malaysian law minister yesterday applied to the Kuala Lumpur High Court to review the attorney general's decision not to prosecute Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak over the nearly \$700 million that was found in his private bank account.

Zaid Ibrahim is also seeking a judicial review of Mohamed Apandi Ali's order to the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission to close its files on Najib.

“I have been forced to initiate these proceedings as I am rightfully concerned about the dire consequences to the rule of law in this country if the decision of one man cannot be questioned, regardless of the facts and the circumstances of the case,” Zaid said in a statement.

“As far as I have been advised, there is nothing known in law as the concept of ‘absolute discretion.’ The notion of such unfettered discretion is in fact contrary to the rule of law and it is for this reason I am compelled to act,” he added.

Zaid was the country's law minister until 2008, when he resigned over policy differences, and was subsequently sacked as a member of the ruling United Malays National Organisation over claims he was “pro-opposition.”

On 26 January, Apandi cleared Najib of any wrongdoing in relation to graft allegations involving nearly \$700 million that

was found in his bank accounts. Apandi denied news reports that the money came from companies linked to beleaguered state investment fund, 1Malaysia Development Berhad.

Instead, he said it was a “personal donation” from the Saudi royal family.

Apandi's decision was greeted with widespread skepticism, especially when the MACC announced the following day that it was seeking a review of the decision. Unidentified MACC sources have been quoted in the media as saying that it recommended charges of “criminal misappropriation,” but Apandi rejected these due to insufficient evidence.

Apandi, however, has said that it is illegal to question his decision. He cited Article 145 (3) of the Federal Constitution which, he said, gives him the sole discretion to decide on any criminal proceeding. “That is my standpoint. Anyone who does not agree with this is free to seek an interpretation of my decision in the Federal Court,” the online news daily Malaysian Insider quoted him as saying last week.

Apandi's appointment as attorney general came under controversial circumstances. His predecessor, Abdul Gani Patail, was the head of a special task force investigating the “donation” scandal in July, but barely two weeks into the job he was fired and replaced by Apandi.—Kyodo News

Republican Cruz beats Trump in Iowa race, Clinton and Sanders tie



US Republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz speaks, with his wife Heidi Cruz by his side, after winning at his Iowa caucus night rally in Des Moines, Iowa, on 1 February. PHOTO: REUTERS

DES MOINES — US Senator Ted Cruz soundly defeated billionaire Donald Trump in Iowa's Republican nominating contest on Monday, upending the party's presidential race and creating a three-way competition with establishment candidate Senator Marco Rubio.

A conservative lawmaker from Texas, Cruz won the first state Republican contest with 28 per cent of the vote in Iowa compared to 24 per cent for businessman Trump. Rubio, a US senator from Florida, came in third with 23 per cent, making a stronger-than-expected finish.

On the Democratic side, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and US Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont came in deadlocked, both receiving roughly 50 per cent in a race that was too close to call. Sanders, a self-described democratic socialist, declared the result a "virtual tie."

Cruz's win and Rubio's strong showing could dent the mo-

mentum for Trump, whose candidacy has alarmed the Republican establishment and been marked by controversies ranging from his calls to ban Muslims temporarily from entering the United States to promising to build a wall on the US-Mexican border.

"Tonight is a victory for courageous conservatives across Iowa and all across this great nation," Cruz, 45, said during a victory speech lasting more than 30 minutes. An uncharacteristically humbled Trump, 69, congratulated Cruz and said he still expected to win the Republican nomination. Opinion polls show Trump leading nationally and in New Hampshire, which holds the next nominating contest.

"I'm just honoured," Trump said.

Unusually large crowds poured into schools, churches and other venues for the so-called caucuses, in which voters gather together to select a candidate.

Cruz's well established get-

out-the-vote effort helped overcome the enthusiasm from large crowds that have shown up for Trump's rallies. Trump skipped the last Republican debate before the caucus because of a dispute with host FOX News. A Trump adviser said his second-place finish was expected.

Iowa has held the first contest in the country since the early 1970s, giving it extra weight in the electoral process that can translate into momentum for winning candidates.

Rubio, 44, may benefit from that momentum as much as Cruz, who was buoyed by evangelical support and thanked God for his win. The Florida lawmaker established himself as the mainstream alternative to the two front-running rivals.

"Rubio has staying power. He weathered \$30 million in negative ads and late deciders broke his way due to his upbeat and optimistic close," said Republican strategist Scott Reed.—*Reuters*

Britain and EU strike deal on nations blocking unwanted new laws

LONDON — Britain has reached an agreement with European Union officials on a mechanism to block unwanted EU legislation, a source in Prime Minister David Cameron's office said yesterday, in a deal that meets one of Cameron's four main reform targets.

European Council President Donald Tusk later yesterday will publish a draft proposal for reforms to the EU designed to satisfy a series of demands made by Britain ahead of a planned referendum on the country's mem-

bership in the 28-country bloc.

Included in the draft text, which still needs to be agreed by all member states, will be a legally binding provision to allow a group of 55 percent or more member states to either stop EU legislation outright or demand changes, the source said.

Cameron has promised to reform Britain's ties with the EU and hold a public vote on membership before the end of 2017. He hopes to finalize the reforms at a 18-19 February summit.

British Foreign Secretary

Philip Hammond said the discussions had been encouraging but a final deal would need further negotiations. "It may be that the document is so good that we say: 'Yes brilliant'. But I rather doubt it," Hammond told reporters in Rome late on Monday.

"I suspect that the document will be the basis of further work that we need to do in the run up to the Council. But we will see." He said if Britain did get a deal at the February summit of EU leaders then Cameron could call a referendum for 23 June.—*Reuters*

NEWS IN BRIEF

China's top nuclear envoy arrives in North Korea

PYONGYANG — China's top nuclear envoy, Wu Dawei, arrived in North Korea yesterday, as the UN Security Council discusses imposing additional sanctions on Pyongyang following its fourth nuclear test last month. Wu's arrival at Pyongyang's international airport in the afternoon was confirmed by Kyodo News. Both China and North Korea have yet to announce his visit.

This is the first known visit by a senior Chinese diplomat to North Korea since the nuclear test on 6 January.

Diplomatic sources said Monday that Wu and Sung Kim, US special representative for North Korea policy, secretly met in Beijing late last week.—*Kyodo News*

Passengers evacuated after bomb threat on local Portugal flight

LISBON — A bomb threat on a plane preparing to leave Faro airport in Portugal's southern region of Algarve for Lisbon forced the evacuation of its 38 passengers early yesterday, a spokesman for the country's flag carrier TAP said.

"There was a bomb threat and the plane was handed over to the authorities for inspection. The passengers have been removed," he said, declining to provide details on how the threat had been delivered. Police had no immediate comment.

The flight had been due to take off at 6:05am (0605 GMT), but was still being searched at 0840 GMT.

The airport in the region popular with tourists was put on the second-highest "orange" alert, but the flights timetable showed no further delays for arrivals and departures.—*Reuters*

Vucic: EBRD to present 'showcase Serbia' at London conference

BELGRADE — Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic has announced that he will at the end of this month in London attend an EBRD conference on the region, based on what has been done in Serbia. "Showcase Serbia" will be presented at the conference, he said.

Vucic said that reforms are the reason why he has decided for early parliamentary elections and that he wants to ensure a full term to the government to enable it to complete the reforms by 2019 or 2020.

"We are going to elections because it is important for Serbia to have an uninterrupted course of serious and tough reforms that we need to complete in 2020. I am making no promises to anyone that we will join the EU at that time, but we will do everything to make that happen," the prime minister said on a Happy TV talk show.

Vucic said that for him it is very important that Serbia achieves certain standards and becomes an orderly society, with stable public finances and entrepreneurial spirit.

The upcoming elections will be tough and with an uncertain outcome, the prime minister said.—*Tanjug*

32 injured by gas cylinder explosion in Albania

TIRANA — A total of 32 people were injured on Monday evening after a gas cylinder exploded in a bar in a village in southeastern Albania, local media reported yesterday.

According to the reports, the injured people were customers and the gas cylinder was used for heating.

Twenty three of the injured were sent immediately to the Central Hospital in the capital city Tirana for specialised treatment. Doctors said on Tuesday that two of the hospitalized are in serious conditions.

Police said the owner of the bar, 20 years old, has been arrested for his negligence.—*Xinhua*

Nine migrants including two babies drowned off Turkish coast

ISTANBUL — The bodies of nine people, including two babies, were found drowned off the coast of western Turkey yesterday, after a boat carrying people to Greece partly capsized, the Turkish coast guard said in a statement. The fibreglass vessel partially capsized at 0535 local time (0335 GMT) off the coast of Seferihisar in Izmir Province, close to the Greek Island of Samos. Two people were rescued swimming to the shore, the coast guard said.

A crackdown on illegal crossing and the dangerous winter conditions have failed to deter tens of thousands from boarding flimsy boats and attempting to cross the Mediterranean waves in the first few weeks of the year.—*Reuters*

OPINION

Control the road spillover

Khin Maung Aye

THE crowded downtown roads and streets and the sidewalks near the big markets and bazaars are being encroached upon by the expansion of the roadside vendors. As a consequence, there is always a traffic jam either during the rush hours or on holidays and weekends. The problems is not just concerned with the vehicles; it also causes a greater number of traffic accidents. Both the cars and pedestrians are being faced with the danger of road accidents particularly in the evenings when the roadside vendors intrude onto the roads and streets.

Those living on the main roads and streets are using the open spaces in front of their flats and apartments as parking space. Besides, the roadside vendors are occupying both the sidewalks and the

open spaces to make their make shift shops or stalls. In the evenings, the shopkeepers from the markets and bazaars become intrusive, selling their goods not inside the markets but on the roads and streets in front of their markets.

As known to all, the roads and streets are built for vehicles and pedestrians to use, not for the roadside vendors and/or shopkeepers from the markets and bazaars. Similarly, they are paved not for undisciplined parking. Their invasion is narrowing the roads for the cars to drive on and blocking the sidewalks, forcing the pedestrians to walk on the roads, rendering them vulnerable to road accidents.

Nowadays, more and more tourists are coming to Myanmar to visit places of attraction. When the tourists see these things, the national image can be adversely effected. They will come to think that Myanmar citizens are not law-abiding. And when the national image is affected, it will be difficult to attract tourists to visit our country.

This sort of road intrusion can be attributed not only to the roadside vendors, the shopkeepers from the big markets and bazaars and those who are using the

open public spaces as their own parking lots but also to the regulations of the City Development Committee and the authorities concerned. And what is more, the reckless drivers and the unruly pedestrians are also accountable for the outbreak road of accidents.

This being the case, the *Global New Light of Myanmar* would like to urge the authorities concerned to reconsider the permitting of the vendors to sell things on the roads and streets and to take deterrent action against illegal or undisciplined parking of the cars.

Write for us

We appreciate your feedback and contributions. If you have any comments or would like to submit editorials, analyses or reports please email khinmaungaye@hotmail@gmail.com with your name and title.

Due to limitation of space we are only able to publish "Letter to the Editor" that do not exceed 500 words. Should you submit a text longer than 500 words please be aware that your letter will be edited.

What type of federal system in Myanmar?

Nehginpao Kipgen

THE question of federalism is an important historical issue which unified and divided the country since before the country's independence in 1948. The idea of forming a Union government that would give equal status to all citizens brought together different ethnic groups at the Panglong conference in February 1947.

The same issue divided the country psychologically and emotionally when the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), the first elected government after independence, failed to fulfill the political aspirations of the country's non-Burman ethnic nationalities.

When the non-Burman ethnic groups (the frontier people) pushed for autonomy or federalism, coupled by the weak civilian government at the center, the military leadership under General Ne Win staged a coup d'état in March 1962. The military hierarchy was anathema to federalism though it was incorporated in the 1947 constitution.

The successive military governments had construed the use of the word 'federalism' as anti-national, anti-unity and pro-disintegration.

Until as recent as 2011 when the State Peace and Development Council military government allowed the Union Solidarity and Development Party government led by President Thein Sein, who himself was a military general, to form a quasi-civilian government, one could land into jail for advocating federalism.

With a gradual democratization process, the Thein Sein government accepted the concept of federalism. And this has been one of the core principles of the ongoing peace process with the

country's ethnic armed groups.

As a pro-democratic party, the NLD has been supportive of a federal government. But nobody really knows what type of federalism Myanmar would eventually have, not even the ethnic minorities that have championed the cause for the past several decades.

During my visit to Myanmar in 2014, I asked the former Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt, who introduced the seven-step road map toward a 'flourishing and disciplined democracy', as to what type of federalism Myanmar should adopt. His response was that the country needs a federal democracy that best suits the country.

What type of federalism would best suit the country and its people? Is the American type of federalism or the quasi-federalism practiced in India? The 2008 constitution neither follow America nor India, the two biggest democracies of the world.

For example, in American federal system, the citizens cast ballots for a slate of members of the electoral college which then elects the president. And the president serves as the chief executive and commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Similarly, the Indian president is elected indirectly by the people and is a nominal head of the country and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. However, the day-to-day administration is under the leadership of the prime minister.

In Myanmar, the president is indirectly elected by the people through members of the parliament but he is not the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Since there is no role for prime minister, the president oversees the day-to-day administration.

One fundamental principle of federalism envisioned by eth-

nic minorities is that there should be equal status for all ethnic groups. Their argument is that despite their numerical majority, the Burman group should be treated as one ethnic group like any other ethnic groups of the country.

However, the irony is that there is no one particular Burman state or region or zone. The seven states are named after different ethnic groups while the seven regions are by default considered as the territory of the Burman people, despite the presence of multi-ethnic groups.

Given the sizeable majority, as well as their control over the government and the military institution, it would be very hard for the Burmans to accept the notion of equal status and equal opportunities in line with ethnic minorities.

Another major problem of building a genuine federal system is the dominance of the military. The military not only has 25% reserved seats in all legislatures, but also appoints one vice-president and holds three most important ministries - home, defense and border affairs.

The military also heads the National Defense and Security Council, which has the authority to declare national emergency for the military to take charge of all branches of the government - executive, judiciary and legislative.

One other basic universal element of federalism is that individual states should have power over their legislative affairs as well as electing their own governors or chief ministers. In the present system in Myanmar, states are deprived of these fundamental rights.

As the National League for Democracy begins to form a new government, it should explore all possible means to bring change in the system itself, starting with

amending or replacing the undemocratic or the unfederalistic constitution.

One such possible route would be through the peace process with ethnic armed groups, outside of the parliament. Another option, though the chance is very slim, is to gradually convince the military to reduce its role in politics through the legislative process. Despite the challenges and difficulties ahead, the type of federalism Myanmar needs to build is a system that guarantees equality of rights to all ethnic groups and decentraliz-

es or delegates power to state and local governments. The military and its institution must be accountable to a democratically elected civilian government.

Dr. Nehginpao Kipgen is an Assistant Professor at the School of International Affairs, O.P. Jindal Global University. He is the author of three books on Myanmar, including the forthcoming 'Myanmar: A Political History' by Oxford University Press.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

PAKISTAN and China are known as all weather friend. Every political party, politician, intellectual, administrator and media of the nation highly cherishes this relationship and speaks highly about it and feels proud. There is no harm in having a strong relationship with a major power and the nation should celebrate such strong friendship. However, from the perspective of an unbiased critical analysis, is it too unfair to raise the question that Pakistan as a nation is making herself vulnerable being so dependent on China for every single economic, strategic, military and diplomatic issue that she needs to often handle herself. No relationship is written on stone and geopolitical relationships changes with time and strategic importance of global superpowers. Did anyone in Pakistan ever think couple decades back that USA would abandon Pakistan for her national interest and changing geopolitical dynamics of South Asia? Pakistan always believed that USA has been a close friend and all that the na-

tion received was being used by the super power for their personal gains, wars and strategic dominance. What was Pakistan's gain in this relationship just few million dollars; probably a small price to pay for the degradation of the nation over time, failing administration, countless death and destruction, rising sectarian divisions within the nation and being engaged in unwanted perpetual tension with the adjacent neighbors. May be today Pak-China relation looks fabulous, but may be tomorrow it comes back to haunt Pakistan for their overwhelming dependence; as the nation has been suffering because of overwhelmingly close ties with the US in the past. The choice lies with the people to decide for the future. Pakistan should not be used by other nations for their personal benefits. All that looks so bright and shiny today may not prove to be so beneficial in the long term.

Thanking you

Sincerely yours

Saikat Kumar Basu

Apt 6-409, 43 Street South,

Lethbridge AB Canada T1J

4B3

Demand for lemons high in Nay Pyi Taw



Lemon Seedlings seen at the plantation. PHOTO: AYE AYE MOE HLAING

THE demand for lemons is very high in Nay Pyi Taw as people have increasingly begun using lemons in place of limes, local farmers said.

"Lemons are in high demand as limes are very expensive in the market," the farmers said.

Farmer U Kyi Aung said: "Lemons are marketable because they are cheap and succulent. We can harvest lemons within eight months or one year after growing

trees. Brokers buy lemons at plantations. We export them to Tatkone, Pyinmana, Ahayathukha and Yezin markets."

"Currently, a two-basket bag of lemons is worth K12,000 (US\$9.18) at the plantation, and we get Ks 14,000 (\$10.71) when we export them to Tatkone. In April, we can get up to K30,000 (\$22.94)," he said.

Lemons and related fruits can be bought near Sae junction

in Zeyarthiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw.

People in the capital reportedly prefer lemons due to their health benefits. The fruit is traditionally used for treating throat infections, dental problems and high blood pressure. It also benefits hair and skin care. Lemons also help to strengthen the immune system and cleanse the stomach, the farmers said.—*Aye Aye Moe Hlaing*

Vietnamese Bank provides scholarships to Myanmar students

THE Bank for Investment and Development of Viet Nam (BIDV) offered scholarships to outstanding students from Yangon University of Economics (YUE) for the 2015-2016 academic year.

BIDV provided US\$100 each to 100 students at the scholarship award ceremony on Sunday.

Many Myanmar students enrol in education development programmes for university students to upgrade their education standards by pursuing masters' degrees abroad.

"Myanmar has conducted

education development programmes in connection with 29 international universities," said Dr Khin Naing Oo, the rector of the YUE.

Several foreign banks that have been allowed to open branches in Myanmar have offered scholarship awards to Myanmar students.

Present at the ceremony were Vietnamese Ambassador Mr Pham Thonh Dung, chief representative of BIDV Mr Ngo Duy Viet and officials from the Central Bank of Myanmar, as well as the rector and the pro-rector from the university.—*Kyemon (001)*



Students of Yangon University of Economics (YUE) pose for documentary photo at the scholarship award ceremony.

PHOTO: KYEMON (001)

WHO calls for preventive measures against Zika virus disease

NEW DELHI, 2 Feb—WHO South-East Asia Regional Director Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh is urging countries in the Region to strengthen surveillance and take preventive measures against the Zika Virus disease which is strongly suspected to have a causal relation with clusters of microcephaly and other neurological abnormalities.

WHO has declared the recent clusters of microcephaly and other neurological abnormalities reported in the Americas region as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

The Zika virus is of concern in the WHO South-East Asia Region as the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, responsible for its spread, is found in many areas and there is no evidence of immunity to the Zika virus in many populations of the Region.

In the past sporadic Zika virus cases were reported from Thailand and Maldives.

The Zika virus, first discovered in Uganda in 1947, is spread through bites from *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, the vector for dengue. The most common symptoms of Zika virus disease are fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis. The illness is usually mild with the symptoms lasting a week. There is no vaccine for Zika virus disease.

The Regional Director is recommending countries to build capacity of their laboratories to detect the virus and strengthen surveillance for cases of fever and rash, neurological syndromes and birth defects.

Countries should intensify their vector control program and prepare health services for managing Zika virus disease.

All sectors that can assist, should be engaged, and the public informed of the risks and preventive measures against Zika virus disease. People can protect themselves against mosquito bites by using insect repellent, wearing clothes that

cover as much of the body as possible, and using physical barriers such as screens, closed doors and windows. Everyone should help prevent breeding of mosquitoes by emptying containers that hold standing water in and around their houses.

Dr Khetrpal Singh urged countries to share information on suspected Zika virus disease to enable early detection and containment of any outbreak in the WHO South-East Asia Region. In the Region, WHO is providing support to countries to step up surveillance and preventive measures against Zika virus disease.

WHO has activated its new incident management system, established under the Organization's emergency reform programme. WHO is supporting countries to reduce the international spread of the disease and in countries where the disease has been detected, to help understand the potential link between the Zika virus and birth defects.—*WHO*

Inter-village bridge opened in Dekkhinathiri TSP

THE launching ceremony for the inter-village bridge linking Gwaydaukyo with Padaukkone village in the Kunalonese village-tract was held at the bridge on Friday.

Daw Tin Moe Myint, director of the Department of Rural Area Development (Head office) and officials of the Department of Rural Area Development of Nay Pyi Taw

opened the bridge which was constructed by the Ngwe Kyai Min Construction Company.

The bridge is a steel structure on reinforced concrete, 70 feet in length and 14 feet in width and was built with the use of the allotted fund of the Department of Rural Area Development for 2015-2016 FY.—*Ko Ko Rupa(Nay Pyi Taw)*



Opening ceremony of the Inter-village bridge in progress.

PHOTO KO KO RUPA(NAY PYI TAW)

UN announces start of Syria peace talks as government troops advance

GENEVA — The United Nations announced the formal start of peace talks for Syria on Monday and urged world powers to push for a ceasefire even as government forces, backed by Russian air strikes, launched their biggest offensive north of Aleppo in a year.

Government troops and allied fighters captured hilly countryside near Aleppo on Monday, putting a key supply route used by opposition forces into firing range, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group.

Rebels said the offensive was being conducted with massive Russian air support, despite a promise of goodwill steps by the Syrian government to spur peace negotiations.

The opposition has said that without a halt to bombing, the lifting of sieges on towns and freeing of prisoners, it will not participate in talks in Geneva called by the United Nations.

“We are here for a few days. Just to be clear,



A child carries a school bag near damaged buildings in Harasta, in the eastern Damascus suburb of Ghouta, Syria on 30 January. PHOTO: REUTERS

only a few days. If there (is) no progress on the ground, we are leaving ... We are not here for negotiations, we are here to test the regime’s intentions,” Monzer Makhous, an official from the Syrian opposition’s High Negotiations Committee, told Reuters Television on arrival in Geneva.

Still, opposition del-

egates met in Geneva for two hours with UN envoy Staffan de Mistura, who said this session marked the official beginning of peace talks.

The Syrian people deserved to see improvements on the ground and the opposition had a “strong point” in demanding goodwill steps, he said.

World powers, he said, should immediately begin talks on how to enforce a ceasefire: “There was a message ... that when the Geneva talks actually start, in parallel there should be the beginning of a serious discussion about ceasefires.”

The Geneva peace talks mark the first attempt in two years to hold

negotiations to end a war that has drawn in regional and international powers, killed at least 250,000 people and forced 10 million from their homes.

A senior US official returned from a fact-finding visit to northern Syrian territory held by Kurdish fighters, who have advanced against Islamic State militants with the help of US air support.

Opposition delegates agreed late on Friday to travel to Geneva after saying they had received guarantees to improve the situation on the ground. But the opposition says there has been no easing of the conflict, with government and allied forces including Iranian militias pressing offensives across important areas of western Syria, most recently north of Aleppo.

“The (latest) attack started at 2am, with air strikes and missiles,” said rebel commander Ahmed al-Seoud, describing the situation near Aleppo, once Syria’s biggest city and commercial centre, now partly ruined and

divided between government and insurgent control.

Seoud told Reuters his Free Syrian Army group had sent reinforcements to an area near the village of Bashkoy.

The British-based Observatory monitoring group said government forces were gaining ground in the area, and had captured most of the village of Duweir al-Zeitun near Bashkoy.

It reported dozens of air strikes on Monday morning. Syrian state television also said government forces were advancing.

The fighting has created a new flow of refugees. A Turkish disaster agency said more than 3,600 Turkmen and Arabs fleeing advancing pro-government forces in northern Latakia Province had crossed into Turkey in the past four days.

The death toll from an Islamic State suicide attack near Damascus on Sunday climbed to more than 70 people, the Observatory said.—*Reuters*

Nations gather in Rome to discuss anti-Islamic State push, Libya

ROME — Nearly two dozen nations gather on Tuesday to plot their fight against the Islamic State militant group in Syria and Iraq and how to choke off its rise in Libya.

The meeting takes place as talks have begun in Geneva to try to end the five-year Syrian civil war, which has killed at least 250,000 people, driven more than 10 million from their homes and drawn in the United States and Russia on opposite sides.

Twenty-three nations from the wider Global Coalition to Counter ISIL will review their efforts to regain Syrian and Iraqi territory from the jihadist group and to discuss ways to curb its wider influence, notably in Libya, officials said.

While Washington has long said Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has lost the legitimacy to lead, it has made clear that its first priority is to try to rein in militants from the Islamic State group, which is also known as ISIL.

US officials said the Pentagon’s fiscal year 2017 budget will call for more

than \$7 billion to fight Islamic State, up roughly a third from the previous year’s request to Congress.

Tuesday’s meeting will cover stabilising areas such as the Iraqi city of Tikrit, which has been wrested from the group, as well as broader efforts to undercut its finances, stem the flow of foreign fighters and counter its messaging, officials said.

The potential spread of Islamic State to Libya, where rival factions are struggling to form a united government nearly five years after a Western coalition helped topple dictator Muammar Gaddafi, will feature prominently, a senior US official said.

“Where they control territory is where ... it gets on our radar screen,” he told reporters, saying the group was trying to seize parts of Libya, notably Sirte, and Washington would work with the Libyans and coalition partners to try to prevent that.

Despite the focus on Libya, Syria and Iraq remain the main theatres of action against Islamic State.

Syrian government troops and allied fighters captured hilly countryside near Aleppo on Monday, putting a key supply route used by opposition forces into firing range, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group.

Rebels said the offensive was being conducted with massive Russian air support, despite a promise of goodwill steps by the Syrian government to spur the peace talks, which UN envoy Staffan de Mistura declared had begun on Monday.

Opposition official Monzer Makhous accused De Mistura of overstepping by declaring peace talks had begun and said the government must within days declare its willingness to stop attacking civilians and allow humanitarian access.

“We are here for a few days. Just to be clear, only a few days,” Monzer told Reuters Television “If there (is) no progress on the ground, we are leaving. ... We are not here for negotiations, we are here to test the regime’s intentions.”—*Reuters*

US weighs options to speed Iraq’s fight to retake Mosul

WASHINGTON — The United States is willing to deploy Apache attack helicopters and advisers to help Iraq retake the city of Mosul from Islamic State as it considers options to speed up the campaign against the militant group, a top US general said on Monday.

US officials, including President Barack Obama, have said they want to accelerate the campaign against Islamic State militants, and have called on allies to increase their military contributions to efforts to destroy the group in Iraq and Syria.

US Army Lieutenant General Sean MacFarland, the head of the US-led coalition battling Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, said he is looking to retake Mosul as quickly as possible, but did not say whether he agreed with Iraqi estimates that it could be wrested from Islamic State control by the end of this year.

“I don’t want to put a date out there,” MacFar-

land said. “I would like to get this wrapped up as fast as I possibly can.”

Past steps to speed up the campaign have included the deployment of dozens of US special operations forces in northern Syria, and an elite targeting force to work with Iraqi forces to go after Islamic State targets.

It could also include deployment of more military and police trainers, including from the United States. MacFarland said the US-led coalition has trained more than 17,500 Iraqi soldiers, and about 2,000 police, with another 3,000 soldiers and police in training now.

MacFarland said the proposals he is drawing up do not necessarily require the commitment of more US troops, who have largely stayed away from the front lines of combat. Instead, coalition partners could contribute troops, he said.

“As we extend operations across Iraq and into Syria ... there is a

good potential that we’ll need additional capabilities, additional forces to provide those capabilities and we’re looking at the right mix,” MacFarland said.

The United States is also ready to send Apache attack helicopters and deploy advisers to help Iraqi and Kurdish forces retake Mosul if requested, MacFarland said. US Defence Secretary Ash Carter said in December that the United States was ready to send the advisers and helicopters if requested by Iraq to help in the fight to retake Ramadi, but Iraqi officials did not ask for the extra help.

Iraqi forces retook Ramadi, a provincial capital just a short drive west of Baghdad, late last year.

“We can’t inflict help on somebody, they have to ask for it, they have to want it, and we’re here to provide it as required,” MacFarland said. “Everything that the secretary said is really still on the table.”—*Reuters*

Oil falls on China economic woes, rising OPEC supply

SINGAPORE — Oil prices fell for a second session in Asian trade yesterday as worries about top energy consumer China and rising oil supply weighed on markets, although possible talks between OPEC and Russia on output cuts offered some support.

Brent for April delivery had dropped 56 cents to \$33.68 a barrel as of 0646 GMT, after settling down \$1.75, or 4.9 per cent, in the previous session.

The front-month contract for West Texas Intermediate (WTI) was down 53 cents at \$31.09 after falling \$2.00, or 5.9 per cent, the session before.

Despite the declines, US crude is still nearly 19 per cent above the more than 12-year low of \$26.19 hit in mid-January.

The fall in oil prices reflected the general negative sentiment in the Asia time zone, said Ric Spooner, chief market analyst at Sydney's CMC Markets.

"Stocks markets are down; oil is weakening. It all points towards negative risk sentiment across the board," he said.

MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan was down about 1 per cent, while Japan's Nikkei closed down more than 0.6 per cent.

The dollar index also slipped.

"(Prices) have just come back to reality a bit, although they are holding water above \$30 a barrel," said Ben Le Brun, market analyst at Sydney's OptionsXpress, pointing to concern over rising oil supplies and weaker economic data.

Oil prices could nudge below \$30 a barrel again if investors saw hopes fading of a deal between members of oil producers cartel OPEC and Russia on production cuts, he said.

Russia's energy minister and Venezuela's oil minister discussed the possibility of holding joint consultations between OPEC and non-OPEC countries in the near future, the Russian Energy Ministry said on Monday.

That came as Russia's oil output rose to 10.88 million barrels per day (bpd) in January, up from 10.83 million bpd in December, Energy Ministry data showed yesterday.

But Goldman Sachs said it was "highly unlikely" OPEC producers would co-operate with Russia to cut output, while also being self-defeating as stronger prices would bring previously shelved production back to the market.

Crude prices fell after China's purchasing managers index dropped to a three-year low in



Pump jacks are seen at the Lukoil company owned Imilorskoye oil field outside the West Siberian city of Kogalym, Russia, on 25 January. PHOTO: REUTERS

January, coupled with climbing oil supplies, ANZ said in a note yesterday.

"Rising supply also suggests further downside risk to short-term prices. Output from OPEC rose to 33.1 million barrels per day last month as Indonesia's

membership to the group was re-activated," the note added.

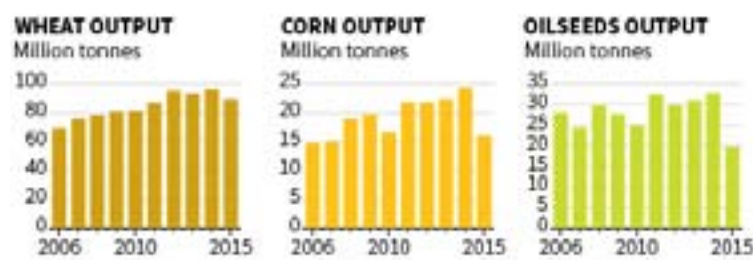
Investors are waiting on a slew of economic data, including US non-farm payroll and unemployment figures and producer prices from the euro zone, to give oil markets further direction, Le

Brun added. US commercial crude oil inventories likely rose by 4.7 million barrels last week to a new record high of 499.6 million barrels, a preliminary Reuters survey taken ahead of industry and official data showed on Monday.—Reuters

Food imports rise as Modi struggles to revive rural India

India's farm output

Two straight droughts for the first time in three decades have slashed output of wheat, corn and oilseed crops.



Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (India)

J. Wang, 01/02/2016

REUTERS

NEW DELHI — Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a late night meeting with food and farm officials last week to address falling agricultural output and rising prices, and traders warn the country will soon be a net buyer of some key commodities for the first time in years.

Back-to-back droughts, the lack of long-term investment in agriculture and increasing demands from a growing population are undermining the country's bid to be self-sufficient in food.

That is creating opportunities for foreign suppliers in generally weak commodity markets, but is a headache for Modi, who

needs the farm sector to pick up in order to spur economic growth and keep his political ambitions on track.

"The top brass is dead serious about the farm sector that is so crucial to our overall economic growth and well-being," said a source who was present at the recent gathering of Modi, his agriculture and food ministers and other officials.

Modi sat through presentations and asked the ministers to ensure steady supplies and stable prices, urging them to find solutions, the source said. Modi did not suggest any immediate interventions of his own.

The long term impact on commodity markets could be significant.

Last month, India made its first purchases of corn in 16 years. It has also been increasing purchases of other products, such as lentils and oilmeals, as production falls short.

Wheat and sugar stocks, while sufficient in warehouses now, are depleting fast, leading some traders to predict the need for imports next year.

"There's a complete collapse of Indian agriculture, and that's because of the callous neglect by the government," said Devinder Sharma, an independent food and trade policy analyst.

"Given the state of agriculture, I'm not surprised to see India emerging as an importer of a number of food items. Maize is just the beginning."

Agriculture contributes nearly 13 percent to India's \$2 trillion economy and employs about two-thirds of its 1.25 billion people.

Government sources said that boosting irrigation, raising crop yields and encouraging farmers to avail of a new crop insurance scheme unveiled in January will help address growing distress in the countryside caused by poor harvests.—Reuters

OPPO, Vivo snap at Apple's heels in China mobile market

HONG KONG — Beyond China few may have heard of OPPO or Vivo, but these local handset vendors are rising up the rankings in the world's largest smartphone market, using local marketing savvy and strong retail networks in lower-tier cities.

Industry experts say these cities — there are more than 600 of them and some are bigger than many European capitals — are the next smartphone battlefield as China's major cities are saturated.

International brands such as Apple (AAPL.O) and Samsung Electronics (005930.KS) have mostly not yet reached this part of the market — which accounts for more than 56 per cent of China's overall consumption, according to Beijing All China Marketing Research.

In an economy growing at its slowest pace in a quarter of a century, buyers in these smaller cities — with populations of up to 3 million — tend towards cheaper phones, which is good news for Guangzhou-based OPPO and Vivo, as well as Meizu Technology Co, an affiliate of Alibaba Group Holding Ltd (BABA.N).

"OPPO and Vivo have already overtaken Samsung and ZTE Corp (000063.SZ) in China, and are working to chase down the big three of Huawei [HWT.

UL], Xiaomi [XTC.UL] and Apple in 2016," said Strategy Analytics analyst Neil Mawston.

To be sure, these lower-priced newcomers lack the firepower of the premium brands, and operate on razor-thin margins or at losses. They need mass volume sales to keep going, the industry experts said.

OPPO sold 10.8 million smartphones, giving it a 9 per cent market share and a top-5 ranking, in the fourth quarter of last year, according to Strategy Analytics — even as the overall China market slipped 4 per cent.

OPPO's R7 smartphone, priced at 1,999 yuan (\$304), touts itself as a "selfie expert", with a bigger screen than the iPhone 6S and competitive camera resolution.

Vivo ranked fourth with 10 per cent market share, below Apple's 13 per cent.

The growth among these younger vendors comes as Apple, Xiaomi and others struggle to maintain momentum in a market swamped with smartphones and fading economic growth.

Analysts say the newcomers run eye-catching marketing gimmicks, including sponsorship with local TV shows, and have extensive retail networks in lower-tier cities.—Reuters

Bottled water is 'the new gold' in drought-hit Harare

HARARE — The joke in Harare these days is that more people per square metre are drinking bottled water here — in the drought-hit capital of Zimbabwe — than in wealthy Manhattan.

Harare has developed a huge appetite for bottled water. An estimated 300,000 litres change hands daily in this city of just over 1.6 million inhabitants, with Zimbabwe's finance minister, Patrick Chinamasa, saying that imports have reached "crazy" proportions.

Buyers include poor families as well as rich, and such is the upswing of demand that bottled water now outsells alcohol and soft drinks in some desperately thirsty neighbourhoods.

The reason for the boom is simple: what's coming out of the tap in many homes and businesses is increasingly undrinkable.

"Municipal water is smelly. Often we see visible dirty particles floating," Precious Shumba, chair of the Harare Residents' Trust, the biggest civic pressure group in the city, said in an interview with the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

As water quality declines, in part the result of worsening drought, some families who drink or bathe in what comes out of the tap are becoming sick with problems from rashes to typhoid, health authorities say.

The capital has grappled with problems providing clean water for most of a decade, but an extended



People buy water while waiting in a bus line to pay their respects to former South African President Nelson Mandela in Pretoria in 2013. PHOTO: REUTERS

drought, crippling power cuts, a cash-short municipal government and an exodus of qualified water engineers mean the city now produces only about 40 per cent of the water needed, Shumba said.

refrigerators are packed with containers of imported or local purified water.

In many homes, the city's municipal water is only used for bathing, gardening, laundry, or watering animals.

them to passersby near malls and restaurants, or to motorists stopped at traffic lights.

"Dirty municipal drinking water means big profits for me," Dezha from Epworth, one of Harare's poorest districts, said in an interview.

Her home-bottled water sells for a steep \$1.50, bringing in a healthy profit. "On a good day I can sell 100 bottles of water," she said.

"At first my neighbours jeered my business as shameful and deceitful," she said. But "I can afford to put my two children through secondary school. Now neighbours borrow money from me. On weekends I go around the community teaching women how to clean dirty bottles and sell fresh water."

As Zimbabwe strug-

gles with a hot, dry summer, a growing share of people have become part-time bottled water vendors. Ice cream sellers, security guards and school teachers all can be found hawking water as a side business.

"I stock and hide 30 tubes of bottled water in my office every day," admitted Rarami, a secondary school teacher in the city who asked that his surname not be used. "I sell to thirsty students for \$1.10 a tube. It's a marvellous secret profit."

"Water is the new gold in Harare," he said.

Supermarkets have opened new counters advertising "sweet drinking water by reverse osmosis science."

"Business is delightful. Bottled water sales outstrip alcohol on a scale of 3-to-1, at least in our store," said Naye Beta, a warehouse manager at a Pick n Pay supermarket, one of the country's biggest retailers.

But not all of the water for sale on Harare's streets is safe. Arnold Gokwe, a director for Still Waters Packaging, one of the water bottling companies in the capital, said touts refilling bottles with unclean water is hurting the image of companies like his.

"Fly-by-night sellers fill bottles with rain water and stick our brand across their bottles. This spoils our reputation," he said in an interview.

Jimmy Sabelo, an infectious disease doctor who runs the private Everjoy Medical Centre, said the city has seen an upswing in health problems as a result

of dirty water from taps and refilled bottles.

"Often I am treating over 10 patients with vomiting, abdominal pains and dysentery. Some of it is related to water issues, especially patients from the poorest suburbs like Mbare, east of the city," he said.

Consumers face a number of problems in determining what constitutes safe drinking water. In Harare, shelves teem with bottles of drinking water that bear the face of popular Pentecostal Christian spiritual leaders who draw up to 10,000 worshippers at their meetings.

"The prophet's drinking water is safe by faith. We don't need stupid tests to prove it!" one devout shop owner said in an interview.

Charity Jerayi, 30, a "street water entrepreneur", said many people who have lost factory jobs are selling unsafe water to make ends meet.

Gideon Shoko, the deputy secretary of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, said he understands what drives the deceit. "The unemployment rate is over 80 per cent. Anything sells for desperate people," he said.

David Coltart, a veteran lawmaker and former government minister, said reckless issuing of building permits has destroyed natural wetlands that once helped purify the city's water. "Most families in the capital cannot pay for bottled water. This often has dire consequences for their health. It's tragic," he said.—Reuters

Cambodia gets about 320m USD investment from ASEAN last year

PHNOM PENH — Cambodia attracted the fixed asset investment of 319.4 million US dollars from its ASEAN member states in 2015, up 56 per cent from a year earlier, according to a government report yesterday.

The figure for 2014 stood at 204.8 million US dollars, said the report of the Council for the Development of Cambodia.

Among the ASEAN countries, Singapore was

the largest investor in Cambodia last year with a promised investment of 101 million US dollars, followed by Vietnam with 89 million US dollars, Malaysia with 74.7 million US dollars and Thailand with 54.7 million US dollars, it said.

Chea Vuthy, deputy secretary-general of the Council for the Development of Cambodia, said the increase truly reflected the country's investment

potential for investors.

"Those investment projects have been focused on four sectors, namely infrastructure, industries, agriculture and tourism," he told an investment promotion forum in Phnom Penh.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.—Xinhua

Gov't set to revoke tour operator's bus license over fatal crash

TOKYO — The transport ministry yesterday informed the company involved in a fatal bus crash last month of its plan to revoke its license to run a tour bus business, after a post-accident inspection found a number of safety regulation breaches.

The penalty that Tokyo-based ESP faces is the strictest administrative disciplinary action that the transport ministry can impose. The ski tour bus operated by the company

careened off a road in the central Japan prefecture of Nagano on 15 January, killing 15 people on board.

"We urge (the company) to take this seriously and express remorse (over the accident)," Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Minister Keiichi Ishii said at a press conference.

After conducting a special inspection of ESP following the fatal crash, the ministry found the company had failed to en-

sure that the bus drivers involved in the accident received regular checkups, among dozens of other neglected safety steps.

The ministry will make the decision on the penalty after hearing explanations from the operator on 19 February. If the penalty is imposed, ESP President Misaku Takahashi and other executives will be prohibited from obtaining a license to operate chartered buses for two years.—Kyodo News

German-Russian ties feel Cold War-style chill over rape case

BERLIN — Moscow's intervention in an alleged rape case involving a German-Russian girl has heightened suspicions in Berlin that it is trying to stir up trouble, with a view to weakening Chancellor Angela Merkel.

The case of the 13-year-old, named only as Lisa F., became the focus of political intrigue after she told police that she had been kidnapped in east Berlin last month by migrants who raped her

while she was held for 30 hours.

Senior German officials believe Russia is trying to erode public trust in Merkel using immigration, an issue which has badly damaged her opinion poll ratings and divided European Union governments over who should accommodate asylum seekers pouring in over the past year.

By undermining Merkel, who has taken a tough line on the Ukraine

crisis, Moscow hopes to destabilise Europe and create a vacuum into which it can project its own power, they say.

"There is a Russian attempt to strengthen disunity in the EU and to work with anti-European, right-wing populist parties," said one senior official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The Kremlin could not immediately be reached for comment.

The teenager's case

blew up into a diplomatic row last week when Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused the German authorities of "sweeping problems under the rug". Berlin warned Moscow not to exploit the case "for political propaganda".

The Berlin public prosecutor's office has since said the girl spent the 30 hours with people she knew, and that a medical examination had shown she had not been raped.

But the waters were muddied long enough to allow Lavrov to intervene in the case of Lisa F., who German media say is a dual national who moved with her family to the country in 2004.

"The refugee crisis and the Lisa case have allowed (Moscow) to exploit more strongly groups like Russian Germans, and to play with Germans' angst and insecurities," said Stefan Meister of the German Council on

Foreign Relations, a think tank.

The case has provoked outrage among Berlin's Russian community and Russian media have reported extensively on it.

Russians protested in Bavaria at the weekend, after about 700 people had demonstrated in front of Merkel's office, some holding banners reading "Our children are in danger" and "Today my child, tomorrow yours".—Reuters

Historic deal to protect Canada rainforest from logging

VANCOUVER — British Columbia on Monday unveiled a historic agreement to protect a massive swath of rainforest along its coastline, having reached a deal that marries the interests of First Nations, the logging industry and environmentalists after a decade of often-tense negotiations.

Under the agreement, about 85 per cent of forest within the Great Bear Rainforest would be protected, with the other 15 per cent available for logging under the "most stringent" standards in North America, environmental groups involved in the talks said.

The Great Bear Rainforest is one of the world's largest temperate rainforests and the habitat of the Spirit Bear, a rare subspecies of the black bear with white fur and claws. It is also home to 26 Aboriginal groups, known as First Nations.

"The Great Bear Rainforest, there's no question, it's a jewel in the crown of magnificent landscapes in British Columbia," Premier Christy Clark said at an event on Monday.

She added that the "landmark agreement" would protect more old and second growth forest, while still ensuring economic opportunities for local Aboriginals and communities. The province is expected to enshrine the new measures into law in the spring.

The Great Bear rainforest, which includes forests, waterways and mountains, covers 6.4 million hectares of the province's coast. More than half its surface is forest, including 2.3 million hectares of old growth, which stores high levels of captured carbon.

In the 1990s, frustrated over what they saw as destructive forestry practices on their traditional lands, First Nations partnered with environmentalists to fight back against logging companies, blockading roads and protesting.

By the early 2000s, environmental groups and industry players, including Interfor Corp, Western Forest Products Inc and Catalyst Paper Corp, had started talks. At the same time, the government began negotiating with the Coastal First Nations and



Visitors at the University of British Columbia's Botanical Garden walk along a forest canopy walkway in Vancouver, British Columbia in 2008. PHOTO: REUTERS

Nanwakolas Council.

The final agreements, reached more than a decade later, "will deliver certainty for coastal forests, local communities and jobs for years to come," Rick Jeffery, chief executive of industry advocate Coast Forest Products Association, said in a statement.

The deal would also end of the commercial grizzly bear hunt within Coastal First Nations territories, though other existing tourism-related businesses will not be affected.

"Our leaders understand our wellbeing is connected to the wellbeing of our lands and waters," said Chief Marilyn Slett, presi-

dent of Coastal First Nations.

"If we use our knowledge and our wisdom to look after our lands and waters and communities, they will look after us into the future."

The announcement comes nearly two years after a landmark Supreme Court decision that granted

title to a vast swath of British Columbia's interior to the Tsilhqot'in First Nations, who had gone to court to stop logging in their traditional lands.

That decision has bolstered First Nations across the province, who now have a legal precedent for fighting development on their territories.—Reuters

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV MAENAM 1 VOY NO (539N)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV MAENAM 1 VOY NO (539N) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 3.2.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of A.W.P.T where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim's Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

**SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY**

AGENT FOR: M/S WAN HAI LINES PTE LTD
Phone No: 2301185

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV PANJA BHUM VOY NO (026N)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV PANJA BHUM VOY NO (026N) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 3.2.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of H.P.T where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim's Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

**SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY**
AGENT FOR: M/S INTERASIA LINES

Phone No: 2301185

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV EVER APEX VOY NO (472N)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV EVER APEX VOY NO (472N) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 3.2.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of H.P.T where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim's Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

**SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY**
**AGENT FOR: M/S EVERGREEN SHIPPING
LINE.**

Phone No: 2301185

With Cara Delevingne as muse, artist Yeo presents new portraits



British artist Jonathan Yeo speaks during an interview with Reuters at his studios in west London, Britain, on 1 February. PHOTO: REUTERS

LONDON — Known for his famous subjects, from politicians and royalty to Hollywood celebrities, portrait artist Jonathan Yeo explores different ways of looking at the same person in his latest work — a series of paintings of model and actress Cara Delevingne.

The self-taught artist will present the portraits, which in age of constant selfies on social media also look at where the genre is headed, as part of a retrospective of his work in an exhibition opening in Denmark next month.

"A lot of my work in the past has been about one painting of someone and trying to get everything about them into

one image," Yeo told Reuters in an interview. "It had been in the back of my mind that it would be interesting to do the reverse and so rather than do a series of single images of people, to do the same subject over and over again."

In one of the paintings seen by Reuters, Delevingne, who has carved out a successful career as the face of some of fashion's biggest names, is holding a mirror to her face.

In another, the 23-year old, whose own Instagram pictures have garnered a large following, is wearing goggles.

"(It's) alluding really to the fact that she's a performer and playing with her own identity," Yeo said of the first work.

"It's a very interesting point in time and ... one way of highlighting that was to use someone who's an actor, i.e. a professional

chameleon, who's used to changing their own identity one day to another, one job to another."

Yeo taught himself to paint while recovering from Hodgkins Lymphoma, which he developed while at university.

In his 25-year career, he has painted many famous faces including actors Kevin Spacey, Nicole Kidman and Sienna Miller, media mogul Rupert Murdoch, artist Damien Hirst, former British prime minister Tony Blair and Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai.

Some of those works will also go on display at the Museum of National History at Denmark's Frederiksborg Castle, Yeo's biggest exhibition, leading up to his latest series of works.

"Jonathan Yeo Portraits" will run from 20 March to 30 June.—Reuters

Priyanka to present at the 88th Academy Awards

LOS ANGELES — Bollywood actress Priyanka Chopra, who has made a successful international debut with American show "Quantico", is all set to present at the upcoming 88th Academy Awards.

Her name comes in the second slate of presenters that includes Steve Carell, Quincy Jones, Byung-hun Lee, Jared Leto Julianne Moore, Olivia Munn, Margot Robbie, Jason Segel Andy Serkis, JK Simmons, Kerry Washington and Reese Witherspoon.

Reacting to the news, the 33-year-old "Bajirao Mastani" star tweeted, Looking forward @ TheAcademy!! This will be an

insaaaaane night!"

She has been congratulatory messages on Twitter from her fans, colleagues from Bollywood and critics since the announcement.

Replying to one such post, the actress wrote, "Now the hunt for the perfect dress begins!!! #oscars2016."

Priyanka becomes the sole representative of India at this year's Oscar ceremony. The country's official entry in the best foreign film category for the Oscars 2016, "Court" could not make it to the final five. The Academy Awards are scheduled to take place on 28 February, 2016, at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California.—PTI

Japanese talk show marks 40th anniversary with host eying half century

TOKYO — Record-breaking Japanese talk show "Tetsuko's Room" marked its 40th anniversary yesterday, with its 82-year-old host saying she aims to keep going at least another 10 years.

"Today is the start of the 41st year. Please look forward to more fun talks coming, as I intend to continue at least another 10 years," proclaimed Tetsuko Kuroyanagi, actress and host of the program broadcast by TV Asahi, at the outset of the recorded show she has steered since February 1976.

Renowned conductor Seiji Ozawa, 80, and his actor son Yuki Yoshi, 41, appeared as guests in the anniversary-day episode. "It's amazing she has done this every day for the past 40 years," the senior Ozawa said as he presented flowers to

Kuroyanagi.

The talk show is broadcast daily on weekdays. The veteran actress has never missed a recording of the show, according to the broadcaster.

"Tetsuko's Room," which started 2 February 1976, was recognised by Guinness World Records in 2011 for achieving the most TV talk show episodes hosted by the same presenter.

In May 2015, it reached its 10,000th episode, a feat also recognised by Guinness. More than 10,000 domestic and foreign celebrities have appeared on the show, including actor Ken Takakura, Nobel laureate for literature Kenzaburo Oe, cartoonist Osamu Tezuka, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and US singer Lady Gaga.—Kyodo News



Actress Tetsuko Kuroyanagi. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

Adele tops Billboard, Rihanna's million 'Anti' giveaway ineligible

LOS ANGELES — British singer Adele regained the top spot on Monday on the weekly US Billboard 200 chart, while R&B star Rihanna's latest record sold less than 500 copies after a million copies were given away for free, making them ineligible for Billboard charts.

Adele's record-breaking "25" is still seeing strong sales three months after its release with 116,000 total units sold in the past week, comprising album and song sales and streaming activity, according to figures from Nielsen SoundScan.

Rihanna's eighth album "Anti" was released on 27 January exclusively on online music platform Tidal, which charges users upwards of \$10 a month. It was released on all other digital platforms, including iTunes and Amazon, two days after the Tidal exclusive.

"Anti" sold under 500 albums but through a deal with Samsung, a million copies were offered free to fans who signed up for Tidal membership, making them ineligible for Billboard charts rankings, which does not count sales of albums priced under \$3.49.



British singer Adele. PHOTO: REUTERS

It is likely to climb the chart next week after a full week of sales and release of the physical album in stores on Friday.

Through sales of lead single "Work," which clocked 126,000 digital downloads and took the top spot on the Digital Songs chart, and more than 4 million streams, "Anti" came in at No 27 on the Billboard 200 chart.

Only two new entries debuted in the top 10 of the Billboard 200 chart this week: Heavy metal group Megadeth's latest album "Dystopia" opened at No 3 and the 2016 Grammy nominees album, featuring hits by Kendrick Lamar, Taylor Swift and The Weeknd.—Reuters

Messi to meet young Afghan famed for shirt made from plastic bag



Five year-old Murtaza Ahmadi (C) wears a shirt of Barcelona's star Lionel Messi as he poses with members of a youth soccer team at the Afghan Football Federation headquarters in Kabul, Afghanistan on 2 February. PHOTO: REUTERS

KABUL — Barcelona star Lionel Messi will meet an Afghan boy who gained Internet fame after a touching series of photographs went viral, showing him playing in a shirt improvised from a plastic bag and bearing the name and playing number of his hero.

Five year-old Murtaza, from a poor family in the Jaghori District in the central province of

Ghazni, became an unlikely Internet sensation after the pictures were shared on Facebook and other social media sites.

Unable to get a real Messi shirt, Murtaza's brother had rigged him up a plastic bag in the light blue and white colors of the Argentinian national team, with "Messi" and the number "10" written on it in marker pen.

The pictures were shared around the world and the Afghan Football Federation said on its website on Monday it was in contact with representatives of Messi and would arrange for Murtaza to meet the player soon.

Last month, Messi won the Ballon d'Or award for the world's best player for the fifth time.—Reuters

African boy attacked by chimps recovers after New York surgery

STONY BROOK, (N.Y) — Just weeks after a surgical team on New York's Long Island began a series of operations to rebuild both lips of an 8-year-old boy mauled by chimpanzees in Africa, the sound of success filled a play room at Stony Brook Children's Hospital.

"Slurp!" was heard as Dunia Sibomana sipped a spoonful of chicken broth through his newly created lips. The surgery has already helped him keep food inside his mouth, speak more clearly and stop constant drooling, said lead surgeon Dr Alexander Dagum, the hospital's chief of plastic and reconstructive surgery. Two years ago, Sibomana was playing with children in his native Democratic Republic of Congo when chimpanzees attacked, ripping off his lips and killing his younger brother.

The rare double-lip reconstruction requires several surgeries over the course of about nine months, and the first took place on 11 January. Complications arose during the surgery, which was expected to last eight hours but stretched to 14, as Dagum harvested a rectangle of skin,

nerve, tendon and vein from the child's forearm and used it to form the circle of both lips.

It turned out the vein was too short to reach a crucial blood supply in the neck so Dagum scrambled to collect a second vein from the boy's upper arm to make the connection. Racing against the clock to keep the transferred tissue alive by surgically restoring the blood supply, Dagum looked through a microscope and sewed vein to vein and nerve to nerve.

In the end, Dagum said he was surprised by the extent Sibomana is now able to move his lips, which will improve further as swelling subsides. A subsequent surgery this summer also is meant to enhance the movement and look of the lips.

"We're really happy. We got more than we expected," Dagum said. After surgery, Sibomana remained sedated for a week as the healing began. His hospital room is filled with stuffed animals and balloons and manned 24 hours each day by volunteers from Smile Rescue Fund for Kids, the charity that paid for his travel to the hospital, which donated the medical treatment.—Reuters

Japanese prefecture inducts late 'stationmaster cat' into Hall of Fame

WAKAYAMA — Wakayama Prefecture, which mourned the death last year of a cat credited with rescuing a local railway from dire financial straits, inducted the late feline into its newly established Hall of Fame yesterday.

Tama became the first inductee as the western Japanese prefecture, which saw an influx of domestic and foreign tourists wanting to see the popular "stationmaster cat," effectively created the local

Hall of Fame to honour the female calico.

"I wanted to honour Tama. I want to make sure that her achievements will go down in history," Wakayama Gov Yoshinobu Nisaka told a press conference on the reasons of establishing the Wakayama Hall of Fame.

"People or animals" popular among prefectural residents and who are credited with boosting the reputation of Wakayama can be

admitted to the Hall of Fame, the prefecture explained.

The Kishigawa Line of Wakayama Electric Railway Co had been losing passengers and was on the brink of closure before the cat became the honorary stationmaster of Kishi Station in January 2007.

The novelty of a cat dressed as a stationmaster drew large numbers of tourists and spawned a succession of copycat, as well as dog

and rabbit, "stationmasters" across Japan.

Tama died in June 2015, prompting the railway to set up the Tama Shrine, a Shinto shrine that enshrines Tama as a deity protecting the railway line.

The railway also appointed Nitama (Tama the Second), another calico cat, to become the stationmaster of Kishi Station to continue the tradition established with Tama.—Kyodo News



Tama, honorary stationmaster of Kishi Station on the Kishigawa Line of Wakayama Electric Railway Co in western Japan, attends an event at her station in January 2013. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

mitv Myanmar International

(3-2-2016, Wednesday)

Today Fresh

(3-2-2016 07:00am ~ 4-2-2016 07:00am) MST

07:03	Am	News
07:26	Am	Jade Pagoda: Weirawsana
07:44	Am	The Beauty In The North Of Myanmar
08:03	Am	News
08:26	Am	Discovering Tribes: Pre Kayaw (Their Life and Customs) (Part-2)
08:52	Am	Sagaing: Gold Leaf
09:03	Am	News
09:26	Am	Chef Life "Moe Moe Khaing"
09:36	Am	Strolling Along A Memory Link - U Pein Bridge

09:53	Am	My Life & My Art
10:03	Am	News
10:26	Am	Myanmar Agarwood
10:41	Am	Myanmar HR Conference (2015) (Part- III)
10:50	Am	Delicacies From Magwe
(11:00 Am ~ 03:00 Pm) - Tuesday Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)		
(03:00 Pm ~ 07:00 Pm) - Today Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)		

Prime Time

07:03	Pm	News
07:26	Pm	An Oasis Trip to Mt. Popa
07:54	Pm	Kid's Home
08:03	Pm	News
08:26	Pm	Tapestry- A Unique Combination Of Painting and Craftsmanship
08:44	Pm	A Simple And Peaceful Life
(09:00 Pm ~ 11:00 Pm) - Today Repeat (09:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)		
(11:00 Pm ~ 03:00 Am) - Tuesday Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)		
(03:00 Am ~ 07:00 Am) - Today Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)		
(For Detailed Schedule - www.myanmaritv.com/schedule)		

MRTV Entertainment Channel

(3-2-2016, Wednesday)

6:00 pm	8:55 pm
• Songs of yester Years	• Musical Programme
6:20 pm	9:15 pm
• Pyi Thu Ni Ti	• Joint Performance by State Orchestra and Traditional Orchestra
6:40 pm	10:40 pm
• Fashion Show	• Myanmar Movies (Black & White)
7:50 pm	
• TV Drama Series	
8:45 pm	
• Catch Asia News (Part-28)	

From 3.2.2016 (Wednesday) 06:00 Pm
To 4.2.2016 (Thursday) 06:00 Pm

This schedule will be repeated four times in 24 hours.



Barcelona's Lionel Messi shows to the crowd the FIFA Ballon d'Or 2015 trophy before their Spanish League soccer match against Athletic Bilbao. PHOTO: REUTERS

Argentina coach says Messi will not play at Rio Olympics

BUENOS AIRES — Lionel Messi will not chase a second Olympic football gold medal at the Rio de Janeiro Games in August, Argentina coach Gerardo Martino said on Monday.

Martino added he did not want the Barcelona forward, who will captain Argentina at the Centennial Copa America in the United States in June, to suffer burnout after a demanding season.

He can take three over-age players in his under-23 squad to the Rio Games but Messi, who helped Argentina win their second Olympic football title in Beijing in 2008, will not be one of them.

"Messi won't go to the Olympic Games because there

is a lot of competition for the national team this year," Martino said with World Cup qualifiers also in mind.

"We have the Copa America, the Olympic Games and after that four rounds of the qualifiers," he told Radio La Red.

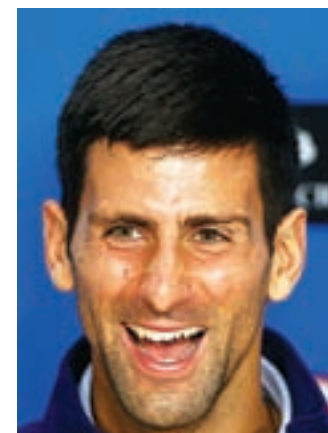
"The reality at Barcelona shows the season will be long. I want to win very much but not at any price, nor for throwing the players on to the pitch for them to die there."

Messi led Argentina to the 2014 World Cup final in Rio where they lost 1-0 to Germany after extra time.

The 16-team Copa America, to celebrate 100 years of the world's oldest active international football tournament, will be played from June 3-26 with the 10-member nations of South America's CONMEBOL and six from rival region CONCACAF taking part.

Argentina, who also won Olympic gold at the 2004 Athens Games, failed to qualify for London 2012.—Reuters

French Open stands in Djokovic's path to greatness



Serbia's Novak Djokovic. PHOTO: REUTERS

LONDON — He is the tennis version of the Terminator and he'll definitely be back at the French Open in May, but for Novak Djokovic his exploits at the claycourt major could decide his place in the pantheon of greats. For the second time in his career, Wimbledon, US Open and Australian Open champion Djokovic will arrive at Roland Garros needing seven victories to become the first man in almost 50 years to hold all four grand slam titles at the same time. It is a feat that is so difficult that it has not been achieved by a man since Australian Rod Laver won the second of his calendar Grand Slams in 1969.

Djokovic's effort to join an exclusive club which boasts only two male members — Don Budge and Laver — was thwarted in 2012 by Rafa Nadal in the Paris final.

With nine-times French Open champion Nadal no longer the force he was, Djokovic will arrive in Paris as the overwhelming favourite to lift to the Musketeers' Cup for the first time at his 12th attempt.

Djokovic, beaten in three Paris finals over the last four years, may never get such a golden opportunity to complete a feat that was tantalisingly just out of reach for tennis greats such as Pete Sampras, Roger Federer and Nadal. The biggest obstacle standing in his way may be his own mental belief.

Djokovic may have contested five consecutive grand slam finals, he may have won a record-equalling sixth Australian Open title and he may be ranked number one in the world — but for all his confidence, he knows that he has had 11 failed attempts to win the ultimate prize in claycourt tennis.—Reuters

Guardiola to Man City, English spending passes 1bn pounds

LONDON — English clubs took their spending on players for the season soaring past 1 billion pounds on Monday, but the biggest signing on transfer deadline day was that of a manager as Manchester City confirmed Pep Guardiola will take over this summer.

A relatively quiet final day for Europe's mid-season transfer window saw the biggest deals done by mid-table Premier League clubs.

Everton shelled out 13.5 million pounds to bring Senegal striker Oumar Niasse from Russian Premier League club Lokomotiv Moscow while Stoke City shattered their club record by signing French midfielder Giannelli Imbula from Porto for 18.3 million pounds shortly before the window closed.

Deloitte said the 175 million pounds (\$252.42 million) spent by English clubs was the highest for a January transfer window since the 225 million spent in the 2010/11 window.

Manchester City, who spent 100 million pounds in the summer to bring in Kevin De Bruyne and Raheem Sterling, did not add to their squad in the window but

Guardiola is unlikely to be the only big-name arrival at the Abu Dhabi United Group-owned club in July.

City's current manager, Manuel Pellegrini, stunned a pre-match news conference on Monday by saying he would leave the club on 30 June.

Shortly afterwards, City announced that Bayern Munich manager Guardiola, one of the world's most respected coaches who won 14 titles in four years at Barcelona, including the Champions League twice, had agreed a three-year contract.

His arrival will more give weight to the Premier League's claim to being most attractive league in the world.

City's rivals sat up and took notice, with Liverpool manager Juergen Klopp saying Guardiola was on a mission to conquer Europe. "Pep won everything in Spain, nearly everything in Germany, so I think he wants to win everything in England, that is clear." While Guardiola will have a huge war chest to add to the squad in the summer, he might be surprised by the spending power of the Premier League's smaller clubs.—Reuters



Bayern Munich's coach Pep Guardiola. PHOTO: REUTERS