



**Inle Lake farmers sell off floating plots after expansion banned** PAGE 9



**Mainmahla Island Wildlife Sanctuary protects endangered crocodiles** PAGE 3

ANALYSIS  
**Let there be no doubt** PAGE 8

# NOMINATIONS PLEASE

## PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES TO BE FORMED

THE first regular session of the second Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) and Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) continued for the second day in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday, with discussions for formation of their parliamentary

committees.

At the meeting of the Amyotha Hluttaw, Speaker U Mann Win Khaing Than and U Min Oo, MP from Bago Region Constituency No 6 clarified matters related to the formation of the

parliament's bill committee, including duties, authorities, rights and term of the committee.

The Speaker submitted nominations for the bill committee, choosing U Zaw Min of Sagaing Region Constituency-6 as chair-

man while Dr Myat Nyanna Soe of Yangon Region Constituency-3 as a secretary along with 13 members for the committee.

Speaker U Mann Win Khaing Than also nominated U Saw Than Htut of Kayin State

Constituency-2 as the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and Dr Sai Hseng Kyauk Sam of Shan State Constituency-6 as the secretary of the committee along with 13 members.

**See page 2 >>**



**Japan donates flamingos to Nay Pyi Taw Zoological Garden**

DEPUTY Minister for Environmental Conservation and Forestry U Aye Myint Maung observed the arrival of a batch of 20 flamingos donated by the government of Japan as goodwill gift to Myanmar at the Zoological Gardens in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

The flamingos were brought from the Sapporo Maruyama Zoo in Japan under the animal-exchange programme of the Forest Department in order to boost bilateral relations between the two countries.

On his inspection tour, the deputy minister called for necessary measures to be taken ahead of the coming summer, which has been forecasted to bring high temperatures. He inspected arrangements being made for a flamingo show at the Nay Pyi Taw Zoological Gardens.

The deputy minister also visited the Forest Museum, set to open soon, and gave instructions on its development.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Flamingos donated by Japanese government are seen at Zoological Gardens in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

# AS DOLLAR DROPS, MYANMAR GOLD FOLLOWS

THE fall in the foreign exchange rate of the US dollar has had a negative knock-on effect on the price of one tical (0.576 ounces) of Myanmar pure gold, causing it to devalue by approximately K8,000 this month so far, according to gold sellers.

The US dollar was valued at K1,280 during the last week of January 2016, falling to K1,275 in the first week of February. As a result, the price of Myanmar pure gold has followed a similar decline, falling from K772,000 per tical down to K764,000.

"We will have to continue watching the price of the dollar in order to gauge the state of play of Myanmar pure gold. If the dollar continues to fall, so will Myanmar gold. Thus far, trading hasn't been affected," says U Zaw Aung, the owner of the Taite dia-

mond and gold shop and member of the Myanmar Gold Entrepreneurs Association (MGEA).

He added that the value of an ounce of gold on the world market was US\$1,120 in the last week of January, increasing by \$5 to \$1,125 in February, though

this hasn't made a difference in the value of Myanmar pure gold, which is affected by changes in the value of the US dollar exchange rate.

"Gold sellers are estimating a fall in the value of gold on the

**See page 3 >>**

# Energy Ministry denies failing to contribute 51 per cent of tax revenue to State budget



U Than Htay Aung, Director of Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise.  
PHOTO: A ONE SOE

AN official from the Energy Ministry denied reports by some newspapers and journals that the ministry's Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise failed to contribute 51 per cent of its tax revenue earned

from the country's gas production to the State budget.

We had already explained that Moore Stephens, an independent international audit team who prepared the Extractive In-

dustries Transparency Initiative country report and civil society organisations as well that the ministry has no power to use the amount of revenue on its own volition, said Director U Than Htay Aung of Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise.

The director stressed the need to read between the lines as details are stated in the Myanmar's first EITI report.

This money can be used in accord with instructions of the Ministry of Finance following the government and Parliament approvals, said the director, adding that the ministry is subject to audit by the Union Auditor-General Office every six month.

Since the 2012-2013 fiscal year, state-owned enterprises have run their businesses on a commercial basis and they have been allowed to open cash accounts and other accounts at Myanmar Economic Bank under the title of Union Fund.

The other account allows

55 per cent of the revenue to be brought to the next fiscal year under the agreement of the government after making a contribution which comprises 25 per cent income tax on the revenue and 20 per cent contribution to the State budget.

It is aimed at enabling the SOEs to stand on their own feet with the use of own funds in future, said Director U Than Htay Aung.

According to the ministry, the Yadana project was launched in 1998, followed by the Yetagun project in 2000 and the Shwe and Zawtika projects in 2013.

The country produce 2 billion cubic feet of gas per day from the four projects and 75 per cent of the total production has been transported to Thailand and China under the previous agreements while the remaining 25 per cent including inland gas production is being used at home, said the ministry. — *A One Soe (Kyemon)*

## JJ-Pun to establish rural electrification centres in 100 villages

RURAL electrification centres are set to be established in 100 villages across the country, according to JJ-Pun, an industrial company in the area of distribution of cable, lighting and technological servicing.

The rural electrification centres numbering more than 100 will be set up after the processes of choosing sites for the centres and imports of materials to be used in the centres, according to the company.

The company targets villages that have no access to electricity for the establishment of a rural electrification centre that requires 1,000 square feet per centre, said Saw Min Htet, a team leader of JJ-Pun.

Around 84 per cent of households in rural areas of Myanmar lack electricity, facing many challenges in their daily lives.

"A sense of community among members can be established by taking part in sports and cultural events, market festivals, training program and other meetings held at the centre," said Mr. Philip Hoffmann, managing director of JJ-Pun.

The project will be of great benefit to rural areas where electricity is out of reach for people in those communities, added the managing director.

Under the project, Myanmar's first rural electrification centre was established at Ngazinyaing village in TadaU Township, Mandalay Region in October, 2015.

JJ-Pun is a joint venture between Jebsen & Jessen (SEA) Pte Ltd and Serge Pun & Associates Group.—*Ko Moe*

## Japan Grants US\$103,000 for school in Einme Township

THE Japanese Government, under its Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP) Scheme, has granted US\$103,084 for "The Project for Construction of War Ta Loke Kani Village Basic Education High School in Einme Township, Ayeyarwady Region".

The handover ceremony of the project took place in Einme Township, Ayeyarwady Region on Wednesday with the presence of Mr. Satoshi NISHIZAWA, Second Secretary of the Embassy of Japan, U Mya Than, Regional Hluttaw Representative, U Aung Kyaw Htoo, Deputy Director of Ayeyarwady Region Education Department, Committee Chairman, committee members of the construction project and local residents in attendance. The Japanese



Dignitaries pose for photo together with ethnic Kayin people following a ceremony to fund construction of a school in War Ta Loke Kani Village in Einme Township. PHOTO: SUPPLIED BY JAPANESE EMBASSY

Government provided funding for the construction of a two-storey R.C. building, fully furnished.

The project will benefit 858 students. The Japanese Government also granted US\$593,000 for two

schools and one rural health centre in Putao, Kachin State in late January.—*GNL*

## Parliamentary committees...

>> From page 1

### Second Pyithu Hluttaw to form Bill, Public Accounts committees

THE second Pyithu Hluttaw was convened for the second day of first regular session in Nay Pyi Taw, with discussions for the formation of its Bill Committee and the Public Accounts Committee.

Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw U Win Myint submitted nominations for the Bill Committee and the Public Accounts Committee to the parliament.

U Tun Aung (a) U Tun Tun

Hein of Nawngkhio Constituency is set to act as the chairman of the Pyithu Hluttaw Bill Committee, formed with 15 members, while U Stephen of Kengtung Constituency will serve as secretary.

For the Pyithu Hluttaw Public Accounts Committee, U Aung Min of Zalun Constituency was nominated for the chairman of the committee and U Khin Maung Than of Toungoo Constituency for the secretary.

The committee comprises 15 members. —*Myanmar News Agency*

## Passenger ship catches fire at private dock in Mingun

A PASSENGER ship caught fire yesterday at a dockyard in Mingun as it was being repaired.

The fire started around 2.30 pm due to the cutting of irons with a welding machine that caused materials to catch alight. The resulting fire destroying the three-storey ship which was owned by a private businessman.

The businessman bought the Pyimyanmar-2 ship from the government during an auction and was having it repaired at the private dock to run on the Ayeyarwady River.

The passenger ship was 160 ft long and 30 ft wide.—*Aung Thant Khaing*



Firemen are putting out the flames from the fire at Pyimyanmar-2 Ship.  
PHOTO: SUPPLIED

# Mainmahla Island Wildlife Sanctuary protects endangered crocodiles

ENDANGERED species of crocodile are being held for protection in the Mainmahla Island Wildlife Sanctuary along the coastal in Bogale Township, Ayeyawady Region, by the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry.

The endangered crocodile species remains only in the wild Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, East Timor and Myanmar.

Myanmar legally exported 1,830 crocodiles over the past six years. The government has stopped the export of crocodiles since 1994, after enacting a law to protect wildlife and the environment. According to the law, crocodile smugglers can be punished with at least three years in prison for illegal trading.

Although the government stopped the sale of crocodiles abroad, illegal hunting and trading still takes place in the country as the skins and other parts of the crocodile's body are marketable on the international market. This has led to a gradual decline in the local crocodile population.



PHOTO: ZAR NYI MYINT

There are currently over 100 crocodiles in the sanctuary, half of which are baby crocodiles. Before 1990, the population of crocodiles was over 3,000 around Mainmahla Island, which has been designated as a wildlife sanctuary since 1993 to protect

wild animals, plants and their habitats.

Myanmar's wild crocodiles can generally be found in the eastern part of the Bogale River and the western part of the Kadonkani River. Some people have reported seeing crocodiles meas-

uring up to 6 metres long. The crocodiles in the area can live up to 100 years.

Departmental officials in cooperation with non-government organisations have conducted crocodile population surveys every December.—Zar Nyi Myint

## IFC, UMFCFI to cooperate to strengthen corporate governance practices

THE International Finance Corporation, a member of World Bank Group, and the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry –UMFCFI signed a cooperation agreement yesterday to improve corporate governance practices among Myanmar companies to increase their competitiveness.

The signing ceremony was part of the first corporate governance forum organized by the IFC and the UMFCFI, attracting around 400 government and business representatives.

The half-day forum in Yangon focused on corporate governance challenges and opportunities faced by Myanmar.

"It is time to push an agenda for sound corporate governance to ensure the sustainable development of Myanmar's emerging private sector and new stock market," said Deputy Finance Minister Dr Maung Maung Thein.

"The cooperation between IFC and the UMFCFI is a key milestone in improving corporate governance standards and practices," he added.

IFC will be helping Myanmar companies struggling with underdeveloped boards of directors, ill-defined directorial duties, poor transparency, rudimentary control frameworks, and inadequate shareholder regulations.

Many of these issues stem partly from the absence of a robust legal and regulatory framework that includes basic governance provisions and investor protections.—GNLM

## Management of Ayeyawady river basin discussed



Photo: wikipedia

THE National Water Resources Committee organised a workshop on the sustainable development of the Ayeyawady Basin in Yangon yesterday, with local and foreign experts finding ways to make effective use of the basin as part of the Ayeyawady Integrated River Basin Management Project.

The project was founded last year with funding from the World Bank, according to U Tun Lwin Oo, Director General of the Directorate of Water Resources and Improvement of River Systems.

"It is the first project where the department has cooperated with the world's financial institution,"

he said, adding that the project is aimed at improving the management and development of the Ayeyawady River Basin and keeping national water resources intact.

He stressed the importance of water resources in supporting the ecosystems and generating national economic development, urging participants to focus their discussions on how to overcome challenges and grasp opportunities.

The World Bank lent US\$100 million for the implementation of the Ayeyawady Integrated River Basin Management Project, which will last five years from 2015 to 2020.—Myanmar News Agency

### U Chit Ko Ko appointed Director General

THE President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has confirmed the appointment of Director-General-Director U Chit Ko Ko of Road Transport Administration Department, Ministry of Rail Transportation on expiry of the one-year probationary period.—Myanmar News Agency

## As dollar drops, Myanmar gold follows

>> From page 1

world market this month. But it won't be the same as the fall of Myanmar pure gold – its decline in value will be much slower," said U Maw Maw, the general manager of the Aung Thamar gold shop.

The value of Myanmar pure gold is dependent upon the value of the US dollar and gold on the world market. This is evident from last year's events, in which the price of Myanmar pure gold rose with the rise in value of the

dollar, and when the price of the dollar fell, the value of Myanmar pure gold followed suit, U Maw Maw continued.

The price of a tical of Myanmar pure gold on the morning of 4 February was valued at K764,000, and the value of the same amount of 15 karat gold was K720,000. At the same time, an ounce of gold on the world market was valued at \$1,125, and the price of \$1 was valued at K1,275, according to gold sellers.—Myitmakha News Agency



Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs U Tin Oo Lwin is being welcomed by the Sri Lankan Ambassador on his arrival at a reception to mark the 68th Anniversary Independence Day of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka in Yangon. PHOTO: MNA

# Potatoes thrive in Tatkon

POTATO growers along the Tatkon-Pobbathiri road in Nay Pyi Taw expect to earn good profits for their winter crops, locals have reported.

"We generally spend around K500,000 (US\$390) per acre on a potato plantation. The costs cover expenditures for fuel and wages for employees," a farmer from Kyanywa Village said.

These investments usually

result in profits for the growers.

"We expect to receive K500,000 in profit from each plantation" the farmer said.

Potatoes have been grown in the area since November 2015 with the use of modern technology. The crop can be harvested in mid-February. Potato growers say they expect a bumper harvest this season.—

*Tin Soe Lwin*



A potato grower seen throwing water onto a potato plantation. PHOTO: TIN SOE LWIN

## 8th Junior Golf Myanmar tournament coming this month

THE Myanmar Golf Federation will organise a golf tournament in Yangon with the aim of training professional youth golfers in the country.

Junior Golf Myanmar will run between 12 and 13 February at the Royal Mangaladon Golf Club with contestants divided into four categories—below 10, 12, 15 and 25 years of age.

This is the 8th Junior Golf Myanmar tournament organised by the federation.

To register, contestants can call 095109552, 095109554, 095113959, 095132559, 095453014 or 095000006 not later than 5 February.

Applicants who apply for Junior Union Caps need to pay a fee of K20,000 for the contest.—*Phoe Thaw Zin*

## Zika virus prevention measures carried out nationwide

THE Ministry of Health has accelerated prevention activities against the Zika virus infection across the country nationwide following the WHO announcement of a public health emergency on 2 February.

The outbreak of the Zika virus began in Brazil last year. The virus subsequently spread to other countries in South America, Central America and the Caribbean. The virus has trickled out of the Americas into island nations in the Pacific and

in Africa, but it has not reached Europe or Asia.

Infection with the Zika virus is caused by the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito, usually causing mild fever, rash, conjunctivitis and muscle pain.

To prevent the outbreak of Zika infections in Myanmar, the health ministry is monitoring every point of entry into the country for the virus, especially at international airports in Yangon, Mandalay, Nay Pyi Taw and Nyaung U.

As part of its prevention effort, the health ministry is also conducting a dengue control programme in Mandalay Region in cooperation with partner organisations, said Dr Win Naing, head of Mandalay Region health department. He also urged members of the public to participate in the programme to ensure its success. So far, no suspected cases of Zika have been reported in the country.—*Min Htet Aung (Mandalay Sub-printing House)*

## Crime News

### Log loaded vehicle turns over in Katha

A VEHICLE carrying illegal Tanmalan logs turned over in Katha township on Monday. Acting on a tip-off, a combined investigation team comprising officers and staff from the Forestry Department searched the vehicle and discovered 1.7 tons of Tanmalan logs on the vehicle being driven by one Aung Naing from Banmauk township. The police have filed charges against him.—*Ngwe Oh (Katha)*



Vehicle seen being turned over. PHOTO: NGWE OH (KATHA)

### Opium seized in Namtu

A LOCAL anti-drug squad at Namtu toll gate seized 440 bags of opium worth Kyats1 million in a Land Cruiser car heading from Namtu to Lashio being driven by one U Aik Hsa

in Namtu township, Kyaukme, Shan state on 31 January. The police station has filed charges against the suspects under Anti-Narcotic Law.—*U Myint Aung*



U Aik Hsa. PHOTO: U MYINT AUNG

### 15,400 Yabba pills seized in Lashio



Yan Hson Phone and Cho Tar Kwe. PHOTO: MPF

AN anti-drug squad discovered 15,400 Yabba pills in a car being driven by one Yan Hson Phone near Hopeik village, Lashio township on Monday. The police arrested Cho Tar Kwe, the owner of the narcotics at Hopeik oriental toll gate.

In a separate incident, the squad discovered 310 Yabba pills and 3 grams of raw opium in a house owned by one Elkywe in Mae Pan village, Maisat township. These men are being charged under the anti-Narcotic law.—*Myanmar Police Force*

### Thieves caught in Tada-Oo

TWO men have been charged with snatching a sling bag from a passer-by on 30 January, according to a police station in Amarapura township, Mandalay.

According to the investigation, Ma Sandar Swe and Ma Thin Thin Yu were shopping when two men approached them.

The two men snatched a bag from Sandar Swe on Dokhtarwady River bridge. Witnesses who pursued the thieves took Phoe La Pyae, 18, and Ye Linn Naing alias Ahbye, 23, to the Amarapura police station. The local police have filed charges against them.—*Maung Pyithu (Mandalay)*

## North Korea's next move unknown, Chinese envoy says after Pyongyang trip

BEIJING — China's point man on North Korea said yesterday, just after returning from a three-day visit to Pyongyang, that its neighbouring country's next move is still unknown.

"I said what must be said. I did what must be done," Wu Dawei, China's special representative for Korean affairs, told reporters after arriving at Beijing's international airport. "But on what the outcome will be, I don't know yet."

Wu made a surprise visit to North Korea on Tuesday, as the UN Security Council discusses imposing fresh sanctions on Pyongyang following its fourth nuclear test last month.

It was the first known visit by a senior Chinese official to North Korea since it conducted the test on 6 January, which was again in



China's top nuclear envoy, Wu Dawei, waves from Beijing's international airport, on 4 February, after returning from a three-day visit to Pyongyang. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

violation of UN resolutions. However, China may have lost face, as North Korea, on the day of Wu's arrival, notified UN agencies of its plans to launch a satellite-carrying rocket as early as next week.

The launch is widely seen by many other countries as a covert

test of technology for a long-range ballistic missile.

China has been under international pressure in recent weeks to do more to rein in North Korea.

Beijing has yet to disclose who Wu met in Pyongyang.—*Kyodo News*

## South Korean leader calls North Korea's launch plan 'intolerable'

SEOUL — South Korean President Park Geun-hye yesterday blasted North Korea's plan to launch a long-range rocket as "intolerable" and called for "strong sanctions at the United Nations," according to the presidential office.

North Korea's missile launch "is intolerable as it would pose a threat not only to the Korean Peninsula, but to world peace as well," Park said.

"The only way to prevent North Korea's miscalculation is to adopt strong sanctions at the UN and make it realise it can't survive if it doesn't abandon nuclear weapons," she said.

North Korea has notified the International Maritime Organisation of its plan to launch an earth observation satellite between 8 February and 25 February.

But the move is widely seen as a pretext to test another long-range rocket utilizing ballistic

missile technology, which would violate UN Security Council resolutions that have been imposed on North Korea since 2006 when it conducted the first of its four nuclear weapon tests.

Park stressed the importance of international cooperation in responding to the North's provocations, which she said are "aimed at threatening our people and maximizing fear."

Earlier in the day, Defence Ministry spokesman Moon Sang Kyun told reporters, "We have completed all military deployment to detect and track the missile."

Moon said the military is prepared to shoot down the missile if it enters South Korea's airspace.

South Korea and the United States, he said, are "intensely monitoring all activities related to the North's missile launch."—*Kyodo News*

### GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

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## Isolated Nepal PM could be toppled by constitution crisis

KATHMANDU — An unwieldy coalition of lawmakers trying to implement Nepal's first democratic constitution is finding common cause with protesting minority groups, isolating Prime Minister K.P. Oli and increasing the risk his government could fall this spring.

Oli, of the leftist Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), promised to resolve simmering tensions in the southern plains and lift a blockade of the Indian border when he was voted in to power almost four months ago.

Yet sporadic violence, in which more than 50 people have died since August, continues in the Himalayan nation with police shooting dead three demonstrators last month.

Protest leaders say the heavy-handed police tactics show the government is not sincere about finding a solution, while in Kathmandu residents have to choose between queuing for hours for fuel and gas and paying exorbitant prices on the black market.

"There are reports that corruption is rising and the government is not able to meet expectations of the people," said Dinanath Sharma, a spokesman for the Maoist party that props up Oli's fragile coalition.

Oli, 63, heads a fractious cabinet with no less than six dep-

uty premiers — one a royalist bent on reinstating the monarchy and another the leader of a party representing minority Madhesis who has yet to sign the constitution.

Relations with India have deteriorated further since New Delhi tried and failed last September to delay the promulgation of the constitution so that dissenters — many with family ties across the border — could be brought on board.

Oli's hostile rhetoric has annoyed New Delhi, said a former diplomat, even as increased co-operation between Indian and Nepali officials has eased the impact of the blockade in recent weeks.

India has sympathised with the protest movement, hosting a briefing by Madhesi and other leaders last week, amid talk on the New Delhi cocktail circuit that Oli's days in power may be numbered.

"Madhes is a colony of the ruling class. We are living under apartheid," Vijay K. Karna, a Madhesi protest leader, said in New Delhi. He described Oli as "the main problem" in efforts to reach a constitutional compromise.

Bishnu Rimal, Oli's political adviser, sees no immediate threat to the government that could last until elections due in 2018. "There is no possibility of



Nepal's Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli, also known as KP Oli, observes a minute of silence for earthquake victims during an event organised to mark the 18<sup>th</sup> National Earthquake Safety Day and the official launch of earthquake reconstruction efforts in Bungamati village, Nepal in January 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

the government falling soon or of any other person forming a new one," Rimal told Reuters.

Following a winter lull, Madhesi leaders are under pressure to revive their campaign for a unified plains province that has hampered efforts to recover from two devastating earthquakes last year. The party to watch is the opposition Nepali Congress, the largest in parliament, which will elect a president at its general convention in March.

The party — which has ties to both India and southern Nepal — will then face a choice between joining a government of national

unity or attempting to capture power by dislodging Oli, according to a local level Congress leader. Senior Congress leaders contacted by Reuters played down speculation they would oust Oli, although a central committee member said Congress was best placed to mediate between ruling "ultra nationalists" and the protesters.

Maoist spokesman Sharma said the party was not considering leaving the coalition yet. "But we'll discuss with the prime minister about our concerns seriously," he said. "He must change his ways."—*Reuters*

## New Zealand PM praises TPP leaders amid protests at signing ceremony

AUCKLAND — New Zealand Prime Minister John Key yesterday praised the governments of the 12 Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal as thousands of protestors demonstrated against the agreement outside the official signing venue in Auckland.

Speaking at the signing ceremony of the “most important agreement,” Key urged the assembled trade representatives to ensure the pact was ratified as quickly as possible.

“What brings us together is a shared belief that opening and integrating our markets through trade and investment will enhance the prosperity of our peoples,” said Key.

“TPP liberalises trades and sets consistent rules to make it easier to do business across the region. TPP will create new trade opportunities, diversify export destinations and help firms do business overseas,” he said.

“That is overwhelmingly in the best interests of our countries and our citizens.” The combined countries made up over a third of global GDP and a market of over 800 million people, “so TPP is a big deal literally.”

Outside the casino conference hall hosting the ceremony, thousands of protestors marched through downtown Auckland demonstrating against the pact.

Protestors claim it gives corporations undue influence over the regulatory powers of governments and undermines national sovereignty.

The demonstrators scuffled with police after they blocked roads through central Auckland.

The main opposition Labour Party said the government had “botched” its handling of the TPP, from negotiating the deal in secret to holding a “stage-managed” signing in a casino.

“Today’s protests are a public sign of the deep discomfort many New Zealanders feel about what is happening in this country. The government must now seek ways to heal that wound,” Labour leader Andrew Little said in a statement.

Ratification of the TPP by the 12 nations — Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States and Viet Nam — is expected to take up to two years.—*Xinhua*



A member of police bomb squad checks a cardboard box under a bench which is suspected as a bomb on the sidewalk of Thamrin street in Jakarta, Indonesia, on 4 February 2016. At the end, it is concluded that the suspicious cardboard box is not a bomb. PHOTO: XINHUA

## DPRK ruling party convenes meeting to discuss stronger leadership

PYONGYANG — The Central Committee of the ruling Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) and the Korean People’s Army Committee of the WPK convened an enlarged meeting to discuss strengthening party leadership, the state media KCNA reported yesterday.

Top leader of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) Kim Jong Un attended the meeting held on 2-3 Febru-

ary, which focused on further strengthening the party on the occasion of the seventh WPK Congress slated for early May this year.

The meeting also focused discussions on the problems, including privilege seeking, misuse of authority, abuse of power and bureaucracy, according to the KCNA.

Steps to resolve such problems were put forward at the

meeting, it said.

Kim stressed that this joint meeting, which is the first of its kind in the history of the party, is “of weighty significance” in strengthening the party ideologically and in terms of organisation.

The meeting marked a significant event in “consolidating the unbreakable unity and cohesion of the leader, the party, the army and the people as firm as a rock,” Kim added.—*Xinhua*

## Churches offer sanctuary as UN criticises Australian asylum policy

SYDNEY — An Australian court ruling paving the way for the deportation of over 250 asylum seekers to an offshore immigration camp drew criticism from The United Nations and sparked protests yesterday, while church leaders publicly offered them sanctuary.

On Wednesday, the High Court rejected a legal test case that challenged Australia’s right to deport detained asylum seekers to the tiny South Pacific island of Nauru, about 3,000 km (1,800 miles) northeast of Australia.

Some 267 people who were brought from Nauru to Australia for medical treatment, including up to 80 children, are now at risk of being returned to the detention centre that houses around 500 people. The centre has been widely criticised for harsh conditions and reports of systemic child abuse.

Rupert Colville, the spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in an emailed statement that Australia could contravene its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child by sending back the group, which includes more than 12 women and at least one child



A sign stands outside the High Court of Australia in Canberra, Australia. PHOTO: REUTERS

who have alleged sexual assault or harassment while in Nauru.

The group also includes 37 children born in Australia.

Under Australia’s immigration policy, asylum seekers attempting to reach the country by boat are intercepted and sent to camps on Nauru or on Manus island in Papua New Guinea.

The government says the policies are necessary to stop asylum seekers dying at sea aboard the often rickety boats used by people smugglers.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton reiterated in a statement that asylum seekers arriving by

boat would either be intercepted and turned back or “sent to another country for processing”.

However, in an interview on ABC Radio yesterday, he appeared to open the door to at least some of those affected remaining in Australia.

“If there are exceptional circumstances in the individual cases, then we’re happy to look at that — and that’s always been the case,” he said.

While the numbers of people attempting to reach Australia are small in comparison with the floods of asylum seekers in Europe, the issue is a big political challenge for Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

Hundreds of Australians yesterday protested outside the Sydney offices of the Department of Immigration, with more rallies planned in cities across the country.

“It’s a completely dreadful and immoral thing that we are sending kids back there. It makes me ashamed of my government and ashamed of Australia,” Sara Lubowitz, 52, told Reuters.

Several churches have offered sanctuary to the asylum seekers.—*Reuters*

## Indonesia demands changes to China-backed railway project

JAKARTA — Indonesia’s Ministry of Transportation on Wednesday demanded an Indonesia-China consortium make various changes and improvements to the design of the country’s first high-speed railway.

During a press conference, Hermanto Dwiatmoko, director general for railways, said the ministry had asked PT-Kereta Api Cepat Indonesia-China to change the distance between the track centres of the planned Jakarta-Bandung line, ahead of a construction permit for the scheme being issued.

“By our calculations, under the current design the train can only run at about 250 kilometres per hour,” he said, adding that the proposal was to widen the width between track centers from 4.6 metres to 5 metres. He added that the trains for the project had been designed to run at 350 kph.

Hermanto said that the consortium had also been asked to improve earthquake resistance measures in the design, as the railway will pass an area prone to quakes, and to carry out a comprehensive technical seismological study along the length of the railway and

provide an early warning system.

He also said a planned station near the Halim Perdanakusumah air force base, southeast of Jakarta, would need to be relocated, as the air force had refused to grant permission on the grounds of potential disruption to the base’s operations.

As of Wednesday the ministry had yet to issue a construction permit to the consortium due to those issues.

The joint venture was established in October after the Indonesian government rejected proposals from China and Japan for developing the project using the state budget.

Jakarta then decided to pick China after the latter agreed to cooperate under a business-to-business contract without state funding and without a government guarantee. Japan had insisted on a government guarantee.

On 21 January, President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo took part in a groundbreaking ceremony for the scheme, kicking off its construction. Two weeks after the ceremony, work has yet to commence.—*Kyodo News*

## US Republican questions timing of \$1.7bn Iran payment, hostage release

WASHINGTON — A powerful US lawmaker on Wednesday demanded Secretary of State John Kerry provide an explanation of a \$1.7 billion claim settlement paid to Iran just as Tehran released American prisoners last month.

Republican Ed Royce, chairman of the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, wrote that the timing of the settlement and the administration's failure to brief Congress "has led some to express concern that the payment represents a de facto 'ransom' for the release of American hostages."

Royce asked Kerry to provide by 17 February information including lists of all US officials who participated in negotiations with Iran over the settlement agreement, the prisoner release and the nuclear agreement announced in July.

He also asked for legal analyses of the dispute, a timeline of negotiations over the dispute and an explanation of how the interest payment in the settlement was calculated, among other information.

On 17 January, the State Department said the United States



Representative Ed Royce (R-CA) leaves a Republican caucus meeting at the Capitol in Washington in 2014. PHOTO: REUTERS

and Iran had settled a longstanding claim at the Iran-US Claims Tribunal, releasing to Tehran \$400 million in funds frozen since 1981 plus \$1.3 billion in interest.

State Department spokesman John Kirby said Kerry would respond to the letter. He did not offer further specifics on when and how.

"We can confirm receipt of Chairman Royce's letter, and as with all Congressional correspondence, we'll respond as ap-

propriate," Kirby said.

US Republican lawmakers, who are strongly critical of Democratic President Barack Obama's Iran policy, have been questioning the payment for weeks. No Republican supported the nuclear agreement when Congress had the opportunity to review it last year. After the settlement was announced, Obama said it was a better alternative than letting more interest accumulate while waiting for a legal judgment.—Reuters

## Negotiations on UN Security Council reform kick off

NEW YORK — The UN General Assembly on Wednesday kicked off the first of a series of plenary sessions to tackle various aspects of Security Council reform — an issue that Japan has been pressing as an aspirant for a permanent member seat on an expanded body.

"There is a shared atmosphere of having the same goal," Japan's Ambassador, Motohide Yoshikawa, told reporters after the closed door meeting. The goal he refers to is the negotiation of a text distilled from various ideas that have been compiled so far.

At the meeting, the first topic canvassed was the issue of the relationship between the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Under the chairmanship of Luxembourg's Ambassador Sylvie Lucas, who took up the post last year, the five topics — ranging from less to more controversial — will be discussed in an effort to find common ground.

According to Lucas, the size and working methods of the council will be tackled on 22 February. That will be followed by discussions on the veto in March, geographical representation in April and the most contro-

versial topic, that of the categories of membership, in May.

"We hope to really build on this momentum and distill hopefully these areas of convergence on" the first session before holding the second meeting on 22 February, Lucas told Kyodo News.

Japan, which became a new nonpermanent member of the powerful council in January, hopes to use the current momentum and a series of five intergovernmental negotiations to chart a path towards realising its objective, along with Germany, Brazil and India, known as the Group of Four.

The G-4 has been pressing for reform of the 15-member body, calling for the expansion of the number of permanent seats by six. Currently, Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States occupy the permanent seats and exercise veto wielding powers. The group is also pressing for an increase in the number of nonpermanent members from 10 to 14 or 15.

Unlike the African Group which also calls for expansion in both categories, the G-4 does not envisage expanding veto rights to any new permanent members.

Meanwhile, the Uniting for

Consensus group, which includes countries such as South Korea, Italy and Pakistan, is only calling for enlargement of the number of nonpermanent members.

"We will try to find a solution, a compromise solution," Italian Ambassador Sebastiano Cardi told Kyodo News. "At the moment we are still looking into it, there is a lot of goodwill."

The hotly contested debate on how to expand the council has gripped the international body for decades. Most believe it is time to reform the body to better reflect the current reality, rather than the power structure from after World War II when the United Nations was created.

The problem, however, remains finding a way to bridge the divide. During the day-long meeting some diplomats, such as Lithuania's Ambassador Raimonda Murmokaite, believed the session was a step in the right direction. "We have to create a new momentum definitely because in this repetition, we all know the positions of each other," she said. "We need to be making steps where we start something, and building on the momentum, to create something positive."—Kyodo News

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Japan to extend SDF dispatch to UN mission in South Sudan through October

TOKYO — Japan plans to extend the dispatch of Self-Defence Forces personnel to a UN mission in South Sudan by eight months until the end of October, a ruling party lawmaker said yesterday.

The government is expected to make the decision official at a Cabinet meeting Tuesday. Government officials explained the extension plan to members of the Liberal Democratic Party on Thursday, the lawmaker said.

Japan plans to extend the mission in line with the UN Security Council's decision to extend the mandate of the UN mission in South Sudan until 31 July. The UN mission called UNMISS has been conducting peacekeeping operations in South Sudan, which became independent from Sudan in 2011. South Sudan has been seeing conflict between government forces and rebels since late 2013. Under new security legislation, Japan has become able to order more extended duties for SDF members, such as going to the aid of its allies and UN staff under attack.—Kyodo News

#### India to soon allow women to serve on warships

NEW DELHI — After the Indian Air Force, the Indian Navy has said that it will soon allow women to serve on warships and as naval pilots.

"Women will soon be allowed to serve on warships and as pilots," Indian Navy chief Admiral R.K. Dhowan told the media in the southern port city of Visakhapatnam Wednesday.

"A proposal to induct women as pilots is already with the Indian Defence Ministry and the Navy is moving towards making warships conducive for women officers to be posted on them," he said.

The Indian Defence Ministry last year approved the induction of women into the combat stream of the Indian Air Force and that the first woman fighter pilot will be in the cockpit in June 2017.

"The Ministry of Defence has approved the induction of women into the fighter (combat) stream of the IAF," it had said in a statement. "This progressive step is in keeping with the aspirations of Indian women and in line with contemporary trends in armed forces in developed nations," the Ministry added.—Xinhua

#### German police raid properties in search for IS suspects

BERLIN — German police conducted raids in Berlin and other parts of northern Germany yesterday in a search for four men suspected of having links to Islamic State militants and possibly preparing an attack in Germany, police said.

They arrested two men and one woman on existing warrants related to other matters, they said.

The raids, carried out in part by special forces, took place on four flats and two offices in Berlin and also in properties in North Rhine-Westphalia and Lower Saxony. Police seized computers, mobile telephones and sketches. One of the suspects is wanted by Algerian authorities, who believe he is a member of Islamic State, said the Berlin police.—Reuters

#### Explosion-hit plant of Toyota affiliate to resume production on 29 March

NAGOYA — An affiliate of Toyota Motor Corp said Wednesday it will resume production on 29 March at a steel plant in central Japan following an explosion last month that has affected production. Masao Ukai, vice president of Aichi Steel Corp, revealed the outlook for resuming operations during a press conference in Nagoya for the release of his company's earnings report. Aichi Steel had previously only said it would resume operations in March.

The explosion occurred on 8 January at its steel plant in Tokai, Aichi Prefecture.

"It is possible to shorten the time schedule (for some operations)," Ukai said.

Also Wednesday, Toyota said it will halt operations at all its domestic plants on 8 February, including parts production. As a result of the explosion, Toyota decided Monday to suspend all vehicle production lines in Japan from 8 February through 13 February due to a shortage of parts. But the automaker continued to produce auto parts including those for export to continue overseas vehicle production.—Kyodo News

## OPINION

### Let there be no doubt

Kyaw Thura

**T**WO months have passed since Myanmar's historic elections in November. The National League for Democracy, led by Nobel laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, conquered the elections. At a time when the NLD-dominated parliaments are getting ready to begin their work, the entire population, as well as the international community, is ready to evaluate the capacity of the winning party and gauge how the next government will con-

tinue to speed up the country's reforms.

Having been buffeted by a multi-coloured insurgency, ethnic strife and widespread poverty for over half a century, our country is in desperate need of national reconciliation to further strengthen democratic institutions, including executive, legislative and judicial bodies, in order to deal with the outstanding issues.

Despite some remaining challenges, the recent sweeping change brought about by the people's vote signals to the whole world that the country has undergone a paradigm shift in its approach to governance. Though inevitable, change is gradual rather than instant. We have to take into account all foreseeable risks of the country's possible backslide into the painful days of dictatorship. We need to open our eyes to these possible consequences and do everything

in our capacity to nip them in the bud.

It goes without saying that our natural resources and human talents, if correctly managed, have the potential to generate economic gain, thereby enabling the country to move forward with an astonishing velocity on the path toward development.

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*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.*

# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON THE EPIDEMICS OF ZIKA VIRUS

Contributed by  
Brazil Embassy

### What is the Zika virus?

The Zika virus is actually an arbovirus (a large group of viruses), transmitted by the bite of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, which is also the cause of the dengue fever. Zika was first identified in Brazil in April 2015. The virus received the same designation of the place of origin of its identification in 1947, after being detected in sentinel monkeys that were being used to monitor for the presence of yellow fever in the Zika forest in Uganda.

### - What are the symptoms?

About 80% of people infected by the Zika virus do not develop clinical manifestations, whether they are adults or children. The main symptoms are headache, low-grade fever, mild joint pain, skin rashes, itching and redness in the eyes. Other, less frequent symptoms are swelling in the body, sore throat, coughing and vomiting. Overall, the evolution of the disease is benign and the symptoms disappear spontaneously after 3-7 days. However, joint pain may persist for approximately one month. Severe and atypical forms are rare, but when they occur they may exceptionally lead to death, as identified in November 2015 for the first time in history.

### - How is the virus transmitted?

The most frequent mode of transmission is through the bite of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. Other possible forms of transmission of the Zika virus need to be examined in depth based on further scientific studies. There is no evidence of Zika virus transmission



**A Cambodian health official shows a plastic bottle with mosquitoes, which are caught in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on 4 February 2016. Cambodian health officials visited three sites in Phnom Penh on Thursday in order to catch mosquitoes and larvae for Zika virus tests. PHOTO: XINHUA**

through breast milk, as well through urine, saliva or semen.

### - Is there a vaccine against Zika?

There is no vaccine against the Zika virus. The development of vaccines against the Zika virus is part of Brazil's National Plan Against the *Aedes aegypti* and its related investments. As this requires time for research to be conducted, however, it is essential that prevention and control measures against *Aedes aegypti* are adopted, because as well as combating Zika they will also help avoid other diseases such as dengue and chikungunya.

### - What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment for Zika viral infection. The recommended treatment for symptomatic cases consists of acetaminophen (paracetamol) or dipyron to control fever and reduce pain. If an itchy rash occurs, antihistamines might be considered.

The use of aspirin and other

anti-inflammatory drugs is not recommended, due to the increased risk of bleeding complications associated with infections caused by other flaviviruses.

### - What precautions should be taken?

#### Prevention/Protection

- \* Install mosquito nets on windows and doors, wear long-sleeved clothing – pants and shirts – and apply insect repellent on exposed areas of the body.
- \* It is advisable to stay in places where mosquito nets or other barriers available.

#### Attention

- \* If you notice the presence of skin rashes, red eyes or fever, seek health care.
- \* Do not take medication or attempt any treatment on your own before consulting a doctor.
- \* Seek medical advice on birth control and contra-

ceptive methods.

### - How is Zika virus diagnosed?

In most suspected cases of dengue, chikungunya and Zika, confirmation is made by clinical and epidemiological criteria. In the case of Zika, commercial serological diagnosis is not available yet. The test chosen to help in identifying areas of transmission of such diseases and in framing control measures is called RT-PCR, and is performed by laboratories of reference within Brazil's Unified Health System (SUS) network. After the confirmation of one case in a particular area, other infections can be clinically diagnosed, through medical assessment of symptoms, and through the medical protocols currently used for dengue and chikungunya.

### - What other types of tests are currently under development, and where?

The Evandro Chagas Institute is developing a serological test. Due to Brazil's specific circumstances with regard to the circulation of other flaviviruses, which causes many serological cross-reactions, the test is recommended with certain reservations and is being made available to "sentinel" laboratories for the purpose of Zika diagnosis in Brazil. In addition to the serological test, the Institute has also carried out the complete genetic sequencing of the Zika virus circulating in Brazil.

### - How do these tests contribute to further research and development?

The complete genetic sequencing of the Zika strains isolated from febrile patients will significantly contribute to the understanding of various aspects of

the virus. Particularly significant was the detection of the Zika genome in two cases resulting in deaths, which enabled the international scientific community to envision an as-yet-undescribed evolution of Zika infections, a possible subject for future scientific studies.

### - Are there any reports of Zika virus outbreaks in other countries?

Zika is considered endemic, though not widespread, in East and West Africa. And serological evidence in humans suggests the virus has been spreading in Asia since 1966.

According to the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization's latest epidemiological bulletin, 22 countries/territories in the Americas have detected the indigenous transmission of the Zika virus (American Virgin Islands, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, French Guiana, Guadalupe, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Martinique, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, St. Martin, Suriname and Venezuela).

### ZIKA VIRUS AND MICROCEPHALY

#### - What is microcephaly?

Microcephaly is a congenital malformation in which the brain does not develop properly. Babies with microcephaly are born with a head circumference which is smaller than normal. (The normal circumference is at least 32cm.) This congenital malformation can result from a number of different factors, including infectious chemical and biological substances, bacteria, viruses, and radiation.

See page 9 >>

# Inle Lake farmers sell off floating plots after expansion banned

IN an effort to prevent the silting of Inle Lake, a popular tourist destination in Shan State, the Ministry of Forestry has prohibited the expansion of floating cultivation plots on the lake. The move has inadvertently caused the price of the plots to increase, according to local cultivators.

A 100-foot long floating cultivation plot on Inle Lake in the 2014-15 fiscal year was valued at around K80,000, while the same plot now costs about K200,000.

“Since the punishment for expanding floating cultivation plots over the demarcated perimeter is no longer a fine of K500,000 but a year in prison, cultivators are sticking to the rules. Inle Lake is silting up. Cultivators are now just selling off their plots,” said a local resident called Ko Win Maung.

The prohibition on the expansion of floating cultivation plots on Inle Lake is part of a five-year sustainability and environmental conservation project implemented by twelve

departments from 2010-11 to 2014-15 on the lake.

“There is a law, though there hasn’t been any legal action taken. Those who go over their permitted perimeter have been told to reduce their plots by local authorities.

As far as the K500,000, that’s just an understanding between people; it hasn’t been officially approved. The current prohibition of floating cultivation plot expansion is an activity being carried out with the agreement of villagers in a bid to mitigate damage to the lake,” said U Sein Htun, a local administrator from the Inle region.

The department of environmental conservation and wildlife protection, the department of forestry and the department for the protection of Inle Lake have announced the prohibition of the aforementioned floating plot expansion, along with land management by-laws and relevant land administrative departments, in order to conserve the waters of Inle Lake. However,



Floating cultivation plots on the Inle Lake. PHOTO: MYITMAKHA NEWS AGENCY

there have been no reported cases of legal action being taken yet.

The department for the protection of Inle Lake was formed in 1990 in order to carry

out water conservation, to ensure floating island cultivators do not overstep their allocated plots and to prevent the water surface of the lake from becoming narrow from too much cul-

tivation.

Most cultivators in the area cultivate tomatoes, chillies and varieties of gourd on floating island plots. — *Myitmakha News Agency*

## Myanmar Fisheries Federation urges expansion of farming enterprises in Sagaing Region

THE Myanmar Fisheries Federation (MFF) has urged the expansion of fish farming enterprises in Sagaing Region as numbers of fish have dwindled in the wake of natural disasters last year.

“There must be a move away from conventional methods of fish breeding to a modern

system. Modern fish breeding techniques allow for a larger quantity and a better quality of fish, leading to greater profits. We will provide financial assistance from our side,” explained U Win Kyaing, the general secretary of the MFF.

A combination of factors, including deforestation, ex-

treme weather and gold panning and mining activities, play their part in causing rivers, streams and ponds to silt up, resulting in the depletion of fish numbers. Electric and chemical fishing practices are also a part of the problem, as they inadvertently kill off newly born fish,” he said.

“Take a trip to the market and you’ll see lots of farmed fish for sale, but you’d be lucky to spot any river-caught fish. River-caught fish are a much-favoured type of fish,” said a fish farmer from Monywa.

The MFF boasts over 600 lifelong members in Sagaing Region.

A total of 25.2 million kilos of fish were farmed on 6,374 acres of fish farms during the 2014-15 fiscal year. In all of 2015, 1,595 people were involved in fish farming; 351 practiced leg-rowing fishing; and 12,212 people employed conventional fishing techniques.— *Myitmakha News Agency*

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON THE EPIDEMICS OF ZIKA VIRUS

>> from page 8

**- Is there confirmation that the increase in cases of microcephaly in Brazil is due to the Zika virus?**

When the Oswaldo Cruz Institute in Brazil detected Zika in the amniotic fluid of two pregnant women whose fetuses had microcephaly, and later the Evandro Chagas Institute identified the virus in a newborn baby with microcephaly (a fatal case), it was able to scientifically establish a connection between the Zika virus and the microcephaly cases currently being observed in Brazil.

**- During what stage of pregnancy is there the greatest susceptibility to the virus?**

In the cases reported so far, most of the pregnant women whose babies have developed microcephaly did themselves display symptoms of the Zika virus – mainly in the first three months of pregnancy. But women should be careful not to come into contact with the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito at any time during pregnancy.

**- What are the Brazilian Ministry of Health’s current recommendations for pregnant women?**

The Brazilian Ministry of Health emphasizes that pregnant women should not use any drugs that are not prescribed by a healthcare professional, that they should undergo all the required prenatal examinations, and that they should inform a healthcare professional of any alteration they perceive during pregnancy. It is also important that they take measures to avoid contact with the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, for example by using insect repellents that are suitable during pregnancy, wearing long sleeves, and being careful not to let stagnant water accumulate anywhere in their home or workplace. Also, pregnant women should consult their doctor prior to traveling, whatever the destination.

**- How is the diagnosis for microcephaly carried out? Is it possible to detect microcephaly during prenatal exams?**

In Brazil, an initial physical

examination of newborn babies is routine, and should be carried out within 24 hours of birth. This is one of the key moments to carry out an active search for possible congenital anomalies. It is also possible to diagnose microcephaly during prenatal exams. However, pregnant women should ask their physician about the medical imaging modality recommended to their case.

**- What is the treatment for microcephaly?**

There is no specific treatment for microcephaly. There are support procedures that can assist in the development of the baby and the child, and Brazil’s Unified Health System (SUS) network recommends these procedures. As each child with microcephaly may develop different complications – including respiratory, neurological and motor complications – medical specialists in a number of different areas might become involved. Recommended services include primary care, specialized rehabilitation, examinations and diagnosis, hospital services, and

also orthotics and prosthetics in applicable cases.

**- Can microcephaly kill or cause serious consequences?**

In about 90% of cases, microcephaly is associated with intellectual disability (the exceptions are when the condition is inherited, in which case the baby’s cognitive development can be normal). The type and severity of the sequelae vary from case to case. A connection has already been identified between infection by the Zika virus and severe cases of microcephaly, including those leading to death. In these serious cases, the Zika virus RNA was identified while other known viruses such as dengue and chikungunya were found to be absent.

**- Can children and babies affected by the Zika virus experience neurological problems?**

It is fundamental to avoid rumors and speculations. There are no documented cases of sequelae in children who contracted Zika after they were born. Microcephaly is a condition identified only at birth. People of any age can be

infected by the virus, not only children.

**- Which Brazilian states are recording higher than average numbers of microcephaly cases?**

Brazil’s Ministry of Health investigates 3,488 suspected microcephaly cases throughout the country. A report published on January 27 shows that 270 cases have been confirmed as microcephaly, six of which related to the Zika virus. 462 reported cases have been dismissed. By January 23, 4,180 suspected microcephaly cases have been reported.

According to that report, cases have been registered in 830 cities throughout 24 Brazilian States. The Northeast region concentrates 86% of the reported cases, Pernambuco being the State with the largest number of cases which remain under investigation (1,125), followed by the States of Paraíba (497), Bahia (471), Ceará (218), Sergipe (172), Alagoas (158), Rio Grande do Norte (133), Rio de Janeiro (122) and Maranhão (119).

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## Britain, Norway pledge extra \$2.9bn for Syria before donor conference

LONDON — Britain and Norway pledged yesterday to spend an additional \$2.9 billion (2 billion pounds) in aid for Syrians by 2020, seeking to build momentum for a donor conference that the United Nations hopes will raise more than \$7 billion for this year alone.

With Syria's five-year-old civil war raging and UN-mediated peace talks in Geneva halted after just a few days amid acrimony between government and opposition negotiators, the one-day London conference will try to tackle dire humanitarian needs.

The war has killed an estimated 250,000 people and driven millions from their homes, with 6 million Syrians displaced within the country and more than 4 million others having left for Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and beyond.

UN agencies are appealing for \$7.73 billion to cope with the disaster this year, with a further \$1.2 billion needed to fund national response plans by



Syrian refugees receive aid baby packages at a health centre at Al Zaatari refugee camp in the Jordanian city of Mafraq, near the border with Syria, on 30 January. PHOTO: REUTERS

countries in the region.

For European nations, improving the humanitarian situation in Syria and neighbouring countries is seen as critical to reduce incentives for Syrians to travel to Europe, where a huge refugee crisis has put many countries under severe strain.

"We can provide the

sense of hope needed to stop people thinking they have no option but to risk their lives on a dangerous journey to Europe," British Prime Minister David Cameron said in a statement, announcing a new pledge of 1.2 billion pounds (\$1.75 billion).

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon called for a

strong show of solidarity at the conference, which will be attended by dozens of heads of state and government and ministers, as well as numerous humanitarian organisations. Ban said in a speech on Wednesday that Syrians were being victimised several times over: at home, where life was impossible, by people

smugglers during their journeys, and by harsh treatment upon arrival in countries of sanctuary.

"Razor-wire fences, the confiscation of assets, and the vilification of people seeking safety all summon up ghosts of past crises — the lessons of which we are meant to have learned already," Ban told an audience at Cambridge University.

He was referring to measures adopted by some European countries, including Denmark, which has passed a new law allowing border guards to seize assets from asylum seekers to help pay for their stay.

"If we fail to take decisive action now, the situation for civilians and Syria's neighbouring countries will only get worse, and this will affect the whole of the international community," Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg said in a statement announcing Thursday's pledge. —Reuters

## UN halts Syria talks as government closes in on Aleppo

GENEVA — A United Nations envoy halted his attempts to conduct Syrian peace talks on Wednesday after the army, backed by Russian air strikes, advanced against rebel forces north of Aleppo, choking opposition supply lines from Turkey to the city.

Another senior UN official said the Russian escalation was the main reason for the suspension of the peace talks, which have made little progress since beginning earlier this week.

Staffan de Mistura announced a three-week pause in the Geneva talks, the first attempt to negotiate an end to Syria's war in two years, saying they needed immediate help from the rival sides' international backers, principally the United States and Russia.

"I have indicated from the first day that I won't talk for the sake of talking," the envoy, who has described the negotiations as Syria's last hope, told reporters.

A senior UN official told Reuters on condition of anonymity that De Mistura halted the talks after Russia's military escalation undermined the negotiating process. "I think the special envoy decided to suspend the talks because the (United Nations) did not want to be associated with the Russian escalation in Syria, which risks undermining the talks completely," the official said.

"The stepped up air strikes gain the government ground, but also aim at humiliating the opposition on the ground and in Geneva," he added. —Reuters

## Militant group Al Shabaab leading suspect in Somalia plane blast: US government sources

MOGADISHU / WASHINGTON — Investigators suspect the Al Shabaab militant group was behind a likely bomb blast that forced an Airbus A321 into an emergency landing this week in the Somali capital of Mogadishu, US government sources said Wednesday.

One US government source said investigators believe the Islamic militant group Al Shabaab perpetrated the attack. However,

officials said that there had been no claim of responsibility for the attack.

One man was killed by the blast on Tuesday on the Daallo Airlines plane, officials said. Local authorities north of Mogadishu said the body of a man, believed to have been sucked out through the hole in the fuselage made by the blast, was found in their area.

Two US government sources said on Wednesday that initial forensic

testing had detected possible traces of the explosive TNT on the aircraft. But one official cautioned that such tests have a high false-positive rate, and further tests are under way.

US government sources said, however, that as the investigation has proceeded, investigators are increasingly convinced that some kind of bomb did explode on the plane.

There was no immediate comment from Al

Shabaab, a Somali Islamist group that has waged an insurgency against the Western-backed Somalia government. It has carried out regular attacks on officials, government offices and civilian sites.

Daallo Airlines, which did not refer to a blast, said on its website that the "incident" that caused a hole in the fuselage happened 15 minutes into the flight.

"Pilots managed to land the aircraft back (in

Mogadishu Airport safely and without any further incident. All passengers, except one, disembarked safely," it said, adding there was an investigation into "the cause of one missing passenger."

Two passengers were taken to the hospital with minor injuries, it added.

"The investigation goes on," Somali civil aviation director Abdiwahid Omar said on the state radio website. —Reuters

### CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI  
VOY NO (SM 307)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI VOY NO (SM 307) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 5.2.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T.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 THE SHIPPING CORP. OF  
INDIA LTD

Phone No: 2301185

### CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV BC SANFRANCISCO VOY NO (024W)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV BC SANFRANCISCO VOY NO (024W) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 5.2.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.P 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 ORIENT OVERSEA  
CONTAINER LINES

Phone No: 2301185

### CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV KOTA RESTU VOY NO (RSU-501)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV KOTA RESTU VOY NO (RSU-501) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 5.2.2016 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.

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# Zika alarm rises after US sex link, more Brazil birth defects

GENEVA/BRASILIA — The World Health Organisation voiced concern on Wednesday over the reported sexual transmission of the Zika virus in Texas amid worries that such infections could make efforts to combat the virus linked to severe birth defects in Brazil even tougher.

The virus, spreading quickly across the Americas, is usually transmitted by mosquitoes. But health officials in Dallas County reported on Tuesday that the first known case contracted in the United States was a person infected after having sex with somebody who had returned from Venezuela.

The WHO declared a global health emergency on Monday, citing a “strongly suspected” causal relationship between Zika infection in pregnancy and microcephaly, a condition marked by abnormally small head size that can cause permanent brain damage in newborns.

Health ministers from across South America gathered in Uruguay’s capital, Montevideo, to discuss the public health emergency and how the region can coordinate its fight against the outbreak.

There is no treatment or vaccine for Zika. Sexual transmis-



**Brazil's Health Minister Marcelo Castro (2<sup>nd</sup> L) participates in a meeting with other Health Ministers from Mercosur-member countries to discuss policies to deal with the Zika virus at the Mercosur building in Montevideo, on 3 February. PHOTO: REUTERS**

sion could add a new dimension to the threat Zika poses, but WHO spokesman Gregory Hartl stressed that “almost a 100 per cent of the cases” are transmitted by the bite of a mosquito.

“This reported case in the US of course raises concerns,” Hartl said at the UN agency’s headquarters in Geneva. “This needs to be further investigated to understand the conditions and how

often or likely sexual transmission is.”

But he said that for the WHO “the most important thing to do is to control people’s exposure to mosquitoes.”

The WHO estimates as many as 4 million people could become infected in the Americas.

Hartl called the Texas case only the second worldwide linked to sexual transmission, referring

to media reports about a case of an American man who returned from Senegal in 2008 and is suspected of having infected his wife. The medical literature also has a case in which the virus was detected in semen.

“If you swap enough bodily fluid, most viruses can probably be sexually transmitted to some extent,” said Ben Neuman, a virologist at Britain’s University of

Reading.

Florida Governor Rick Scott declared a public health emergency in four counties with travel-related cases of the Zika virus, and ordered state officials to increase mosquito control efforts in some of the southeastern US state’s most heavily populated locales including Miami and Tampa.

Scott directed state officials to pay special attention to mosquito spraying in residential areas.

In addition, the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, which has urged pregnant women to consider delaying travel to locations with ongoing Zika transmissions, added Jamaica and Tonga to its travel alert.

The WHO said the virus has been transmitted in at least 32 countries, from South America to the Western Pacific.

Late on Tuesday, the Brazilian health ministry said the number of newborns with microcephaly it suspects are linked to the virus had increased to 4,074 as of 30 January, from 3,718 a week earlier.

Researchers have identified evidence of Zika infection in 17 of these cases, either in the baby or in the mother, but have not confirmed that Zika can cause microcephaly.—Reuters

## Russian cosmonauts breeze through spacewalk outside space station

CAPE CANAVERAL — Two veteran Russian cosmonauts returned to the International Space Station on Wednesday after replacing experiment equipment that is testing how materials and biological samples fare in the harsh environment of space.

Station flight engineers Yuri Malenchenko and Sergey Volkov left the station’s airlock at 7:55am EST (1255 GMT) for what was expected to be a 5-1/2-hour spacewalk, a live broadcast on NASA Television showed.

The men finished 45 minutes early and floated back inside the orbital outpost as it soared 250 miles (402 km) above Earth.

“We’re ahead of the game,” an awaiting crewmate, speaking in Russian, told the spacewalkers, a translator reported.

Malenchenko and Volkov began their spacewalk by casting off a flash drive into space, giving a ceremonial send-off to recorded messages and video from last year’s 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory Day, said NASA mission commentator Rob Navias.

Victory Day commemorates the former Soviet Union’s victory over Nazi Germany. The flash drive eventually will re-enter Earth’s atmosphere and burn up.

Malenchenko, who was making his sixth spacewalk, and



**Russian cosmonaut Sergei Volkov waves as he boards the Soyuz TMA-18M spacecraft at the Russian-leased Baikonur cosmodrome in September 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS**

Volkov, on his fourth, then collected samples from outside the airlock’s hatch door and from a window. The swabs will be analysed to determine how much residue from the station’s steering thrusters has built up on the surfaces.

The cosmonauts subsequently made their way to the site of a seven-year-old European science experiment holding plant seeds, bacterial spores, fungi and other samples. They removed the equipment and installed other devices to test how biological samples and various materials, such

as coatings used on spacecraft, withstand the extreme temperature swings and high radiation of space.

The station is a \$100 billion (£68 billion) research complex owned and operated by 15 nations. Rotating crews of astronauts and cosmonauts have staffed the orbital outpost since November 2000.

The first crewmembers to spend one year in orbit, NASA astronaut Scott Kelly and Russian cosmonaut Mikhail Kornienko, are scheduled to return to Earth on 1 March.—Reuters

## Parental depression may hurt children’s school performance

WASHINGTON — Children whose parents are diagnosed with depression are more likely to perform poorly in school, a new study said Wednesday.

Researchers at Drexel University looked at data on more than 1.1 million children born from 1984 to 1994 in Sweden and linked their school performance at the end of the northern European nation’s compulsory education at about age 16 with parents’ depression diagnoses from inpatient and outpatient records.

They found children whose mothers had been diagnosed with depression are likely to achieve grades that are 4.5 percentage points lower than peers whose mothers had not been diagnosed with depression.

For children whose fathers were diagnosed with depression, the difference is a negative four percentage points, according to the study published in the US journal JAMA Psychiatry.

Put into other terms, when compared with a student who achieved a 90 per cent, a student whose mother or father had been diagnosed with depression would be more likely to achieve

a score in the 85 to 86 per cent range. The study also showed that maternal depression appeared to have a larger negative effect on girls than boys. Girls scored 5.1 percentage points lower than their peers on final grades at 16 years old, while boys only scored 3.4 percentage points lower, it said.

“Our study — as well as many others — supports that both maternal and paternal depression may independently and negatively influence child development,” senior author Brian Lee, associate professor at Drexel University’s Dornsife School of Public Health, said in a statement.

“There are many notable sex differences in depression, but, rather than comparing maternal versus paternal depression, we should recognise that parental depression can have adverse consequences not just for the parents but also for their children,” Lee said.

In an accompanying editorial, Myrna Weissman of Columbia University said the findings highlighted the importance of treating parents who suffered from depression.—Xinhua

# Greeks strike against leftist government's pension plans

ATHENS — A one-day strike brought Greece to a standstill yesterday, as trade unions protested against the left-led government's plans for pension reforms that could help appease foreign creditors, but risks pushing thousands of people further into poverty.

Domestic flights were grounded, ferries stay docked in ports and most public transportation was paralysed as part of the strike organised by Greece's main labour unions, GSEE and ADEDY.

Thursday's action is the second nationwide walkout since leftist Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras came to power in January 2015 on a pledge to end years of austerity, only to cave in and sign up to new reforms under a bailout package worth up to 86 billion euros, or face expulsion from the euro zone.

Thousands of workers, self-employed professionals, farmers and pensioners were expected to rally in central Athens around midday.

They will later march to parliament, in what is expected to be a test of the government's resolve as it struggles to convince lenders it is committed to the terms of



Protesting journalists take part in a demonstration against planned pension reforms in front of the Labour ministry in Athens, Greece, on 3 February. PHOTO: REUTERS

its third bailout while clinging on to a thin majority in parliament. The nationwide strike coincides with a key bailout review. The heads of the European Union and International Monetary Fund mission assessing Greece's progress arrived in Athens this week to discuss the pension plan, tax reforms and bad loans weighing on banks. The government wants to conclude the review swiftly to start talks on debt relief and convince Greeks that their sacrifices are paying off. Greece must cut pen-

sion spending by 1 per cent of GDP or 1.8 billion euros this year. To protect pensioners who have seen their pensions slashed 11 times since 2010, Athens plans to increase social security contributions. But unions say the new plan hurts employment in a country where the jobless rate is 25 per cent and forces workers, mainly self-employed, to tax evasion as it links social security contributions to income.

"We cannot live, we cannot survive with what the government is asking from

us," said farmer Socratis Aleiftiras, among thousands of farmers who have blocked roads across the country for the past two weeks. Under terms of pension reform, their social security contributions will increase almost threefold in coming years.

Although the measures, which include the gradual phasing out of a pension benefit by 2019, are broadly in line with bailout demands, sources close to the lenders said they may not be enough to address a deeper-than-expected fiscal gap.—Reuters

## Assange says to leave Ecuador embassy, accept arrest if loses UN case

SYDNEY — WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange will leave the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he took refuge in June 2012 to avoid extradition to Sweden, and accept arrest on Friday if a UN panel investigating his case rules against him, he said in a statement.

Assange, 44, is wanted in Sweden for questioning over allegations of rape in 2010 which the Australian denies.

"Should the UN announce tomorrow that I have lost my case against the United Kingdom and Sweden, I shall exit the embassy at noon on Friday to accept arrest by British police as there is no meaningful prospect of further appeal," Assange said in the statement posted on the Wikileaks Twitter account.

"However, should I prevail and the state parties be found to have acted unlawfully, I expect the immediate return of my passport and the termination of further attempts to arrest me."

Assange fears Sweden will extradite him to the United States, where he

could be put on trial over WikiLeaks' publication of classified military and diplomatic documents, one of the largest information leaks in US history.

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention is currently considering a request for relief by Assange, who argued in a submission that his time in the embassy constituted arbitrary detention.

Assange argued that he had been deprived of his fundamental liberties, including lack of access to sunlight or fresh air, adequate medical facilities, as well as legal and procedural insecurity.

Assange made international headlines in early 2010 when WikiLeaks published classified US military video showing a 2007 attack by Apache helicopters that killed a dozen people in Baghdad, including two Reuters news staff. Later that year, the group released over 90,000 secret documents detailing the US-led military campaign in Afghanistan, followed by almost 400,000 internal US military reports detailing operations in Iraq.—Reuters

# Brazilian president urges all people to beat mosquitoes

RIO DE JANEIRO — Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff on Wednesday called on all Brazilians to help fight the proliferation of the Aedes aegypti mosquito, which transmits the zika virus.

The only way to fight zika is to stop the reproduc-

tion of the Aedes mosquitoes that lay their eggs on stagnant water, Rousseff said in a nationwide television and radio speech aired Wednesday evening.

Rousseff urged all Brazilians to help eliminate stagnant water in possible breeding places, while assur-

ing that governmental buildings are being inspected for possible breeding places as well. "I call on all of you so that we can fight together against the proliferation of the mosquito which spreads zika," the president said.

The zika virus has been recently declared an

international emergency by the World Health Organization. If pregnant women are infected with the zika virus, especially in the first weeks of pregnancy, their children may develop microcephaly, a syndrome in which a baby is born with a smaller cranium.

Rousseff described the virus as a "threat to Brazilian homes" and noted that the government will do everything to support the mothers of microcephalic babies. Even though the threat of the zika virus is new, the Aedes mosquito is a longtime foe of the Brazilian

population and authorities, as it also transmits dengue, which is endemic to Brazil and potentially lethal.

Dengue outbreaks are frequent in summer for months in Brazil and public campaigns to help control mosquitoes are made all year long.—Xinhua

## CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV TAN BINH 129 VOY NO (0116)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV TAN BINH 129 VOY NO (0116) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 5.2.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of S.P.W-5 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.

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MV BANGKACHAI VOY NO (142)

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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.

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# After cowboys and folk music, the Coens' 'Hail' Hollywood's Golden Age



Cast members (L-R) Josh Brolin, George Clooney, Alden Ehrenreich, Jonah Hill and Channing Tatum pose at the premiere of "Hail, Caesar!" in Los Angeles, California, on 1 February. PHOTO: REUTERS

LOS ANGELES — For more than thirty years, Joel and Ethan Coen have tackled almost every film genre, from stoner comedy "The Big Lebowski" to revenge Western "True Grit" and the 1960s New York folk music scene in 2013's "Inside Llewyn Davis."

But for their latest caper, the filmmaker brothers found themselves inspired by something a little closer to home — Hollywood's Golden Age.

"Hail, Caesar!" out in US theaters Friday, follows a stress-filled couple of days in the life of Eddie Mannix (Josh Brolin), a fixer at a major Hollywood film studio who is dealing with the mysterious kidnapping of his leading man Baird Whitlock (George Clooney).

Mannix must deal with two nose twin gossip column-

ists (Tilda Swinton), a pregnant leading lady (Scarlett Johansson) and a punctilious director (Ralph Fiennes) trying to make a star out of a bumbling young cowboy (Alden Ehrenreich).

Then there are the suspicious movements of singing-and-dancing spectacle Burt Gurney (Channing Tatum).

"It's hard to be in (Los Angeles) for any length of time and not feel like it must have been great in the 40s and the 50s," Ethan Coen told Reuters.

"So much of it has gone but there's enough of it left to suggest what it might have been like."

Hollywood's glamorous facade is a world away from the small town crime wave in 1996's "Fargo," the underground folk music scene that the Coens explored in "Llewyn Da-

vis" or the suburban dynamics in "Burn After Reading."

"It's a different world and the exotic nature (of Hollywood), that's part of the attraction," Joel Coen said.

With the exception of Mannix, who is inspired by the real-life Eddie Mannix, a fixer at Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer during the 1930s through 1960s, all the characters are fictional hybrids of real Golden Age stars.

Clooney's Whitlock has roots in Cary Grant, Johansson's smart-talking aquatic actress DeeAnna Moran has shades of Ester Williams and Lana Turner, Swinton's dual role as Thessaly and Thora Thacker is derived from influential Hollywood gossip Hedda Hopper and Tatum's Gurney channels the charms of Gene Kelly.

Ethan Coen said they were

drawn to Mannix as a "kind of a Christ-like figure because he takes on all these problems, other people's sins."

"He's also the sane person in the insane universe, he's the one person who's not the kook in a kooky world that he has to control, he's the straight man," added Joel Coen.—Reuters

# Taylor Swift to develop mobile game with Glu Mobile

LOS ANGELES — Grammy-award winning pop star Taylor Swift is making her first foray into the world of mobile gaming by partnering with Glu Mobile Inc to develop a new game, the company said on Wednesday.

Glu Mobile did not provide further details on the game or Swift's involvement, except that the game was slated for release in late-2016 and that it was a "multi-year partnership."

Glu Mobile, the company behind the popular "Kim Kardashian: Hollywood game", has focused on signing up global stars with a large social media following to make personalised mobile games.

Swift has nearly 71 million followers on Twitter, while more than 74 million people "like" the "Blank Space" singer's Facebook page.

"We realize that Taylor and her global fan base expect a new and highly differentiated mobile gaming experience," Niccolo de Masi, Glu Mobile's chief executive, said in a statement.

Glu Mobile's list of celebrities include "Anaconda" rapper Nicki Minaj and action star Jason Statham. Last month, the company signed up celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay.

Glu Mobile's shares rose 22 percent to \$2.52 in extended trading on Wednesday after the company also reported better-than-expected fourth-quarter revenue.—Reuters

# The pouting male models are back for 'Zoolander 2'



Cast member US actor Ben Stiller poses during a photo call before the fan screening of his film "Zoolander 2" in central Madrid, Spain, on 1 February 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

BERLIN — Male models Derek and Hansel are back. "Zoolander 2", the sequel to the 2001 hit comedy, premiered in Berlin on Tuesday night, with Ben Stiller and Owen Wilson reprising their popular roles. The duo were joined on the red carpet by co-stars Penelope Cruz and Will Ferrell, who returns as the villainous Mugatu. "It was obviously great to work in a city like Rome and to be kind of back together with Ben and Owen and that sort

of thing but it was a pretty tight schedule," Ferrell said. "There were a lot of days where you're running around and wearing some uncomfortable corset you can't breathe in. And I had people sticking pens in me, things like that. So it's not really a funny story but it's a painful story. But for your art you sometimes have to suffer."—Reuters

Taylor Swift. PHOTO: REUTERS

# Chinese village hopes for year of profitable monkey business

BAOWAN VILLAGE, (China) — During decades of political turmoil in China under Mao Zedong, monkeys were not trained or kept as pets, but often eaten.

But one village in rural Henan Province, where the land is too hard and rough to grow crops, residents have for centuries relied on training performing monkeys to make money. And as the Year of the Monkey approaches, they are hoping for bumper business.

A small temple devoted to the deity of the Monkey King, a popular figure from Chinese folklore and literature, sits on the outskirts of Baowan.

“Since this will be the Year of the Monkey, and we will be putting on (monkey performance) competitions for tourists, we all need to visit this temple and burn some incense,” Zhang Zhijiu, a 60-year-old former monkey busker, said after praying.

Monkey breeding and raising is illegal across China without a proper license, but the 2,500 villagers of Baowan are an excep-



A monkey rides a bicycle during a daily training session at a monkey farm in Baowan village, Xinye county of China's central Henan province, on 2 February. PHOTO: REUTERS

tion. The animals, some wearing tight metal collars, are taught to ride bicycles and walk on stilts. One trainer was throwing daggers

at a monkey balanced on a wooden board on a rolling cylinder.

The animal was deftly catching the daggers and putting them

between its teeth.

Fan Haoran, 57, a trainer at Qilingang Monkey Farm who travelled the country monkey busking for decades, has been training monkeys since his youth. He says the key is to develop a relationship.

“Firstly, you have to show concern and take care of them. Secondly, you must proceed slowly, little by little, and not rush. For instance, when shaking hands — from the beginning, little by little — and then it will remember your hand.”

But for China, which has spent decades trying to end rural poverty, animal rights have been almost non-existent until recently, and then mostly among urban pet owners.

Zhang Junran, president of Xinye County's monkey breeding association, admitted that Baowan's treatment of monkeys has been controversial, but he said the current methods were humane.

“Our way of training mon-

keys to perform was not the most educated (in the past). Especially when it came to their living conditions... But these monkeys also have lives, and they have brought us so many benefits, which have made such major changes to our lives. We must be good to our monkeys,” said Zhang.

Zhang Zhijie, 57, keeps a four year-old macaque tied on a leash just outside his home. Zhang comes from a line of monkey trainers and has made a small fortune performing across the country.

“It started from my grandfather, then my father, and then it was passed down to me. My kids studied in primary school, and then went college.

Their education was completely paid for by money made from our monkey performances,” he said.

But the family business may be coming to an end — his children are not showing the same interest in the family tradition.

—Reuters

# Belgian star chef says winning famous blog's top award unexpected

KRUISSHOUTEM, (Belgium) — Belgian chef Peter Goossens already holds three Michelin stars for the small restaurant he runs in the Flemish countryside, but said he never expected it to be voted the best in the world by the influential global restaurant blog wbpstars.com.

Goossens opened his restaurant “Hof van Cleve”, south of the city of Ghent, 25 years ago. Apart from his Michelin stars, he also holds 19.5 out of a possible 20 points from French restaurant guide Gault Millau.

Wbpstars.com, which was founded in 2011 by a group of food critics from Sweden and Denmark who grew unsatisfied with existing ways of rating restaurants, gave his restaurant 94 out of a possible 100 points.

“I never expected this but it has been my aim from the start to make a top notch product,” Goossens told Reuters.

Wbpstars.com has about 25 restaurant reviewers around

the world. Restaurants are given scores between 0 and 100 through multiple anonymous visits in which the opinions of diners are also taken into account.

“From the amuse bouches to the final petits fours, every single dish will create a big smile on your face,” the wbpstars.com review said when it awarded him the title last month.

Well-known in Belgium for his role as a judge on the local version of “Master Chef”, Goossens's menu at “Hof van Cleve” focuses on local produce such as vegetables grown at nearby farms.

His own favourites include the Belgian endive, Belgian white asparagus as well as fish from the North Sea and local varieties of game.

“We serve fish from the North Sea, vegetables from this region, we will never work with a red mullet, for example, because it's a fish from the South.



Belgian chef Peter Goossens (L) tastes a preparation in his three Michelin stars restaurant ‘Hof van Cleve’ in Kruishoutem, south of the city of Ghent, Belgium, on 3 February. PHOTO: REUTERS

We only use local products,” Goossens said.

Goossens still strictly observes the lunch and dinner ser-

vices at Hof van Cleve every day and, unlike other celebrity chefs, has no other restaurants.

With seating limited to 45

places and 11 tables, reservations have to be made months in advance, especially on weekends.—

Reuters

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### Today Fresh

07:03	Am	News
07:26	Am	A Glance At A Naga Family Life
07:44	Am	The Caves
08:03	Am	News
08:26	Am	Discovering Tribes- Gaybar Kayin
08:48	Am	A Pilgrimage To Prominent Pagoda In Pakokku
09:03	Am	News
09:26	Am	Entrepreneur: Chaw Khin Khin
09:35	Am	A Real Dream Of Accidental Gift
10:03	Am	News

10:26	Am	Myanmar HR Conference (2015) (Part- V)
10:43	Am	Crab Business (Part-I) Mud Crab

(11:00 Am ~ 03:00 Pm) - Thursday 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	A Journey To Southern Shan State (Ep-2)
07:47	Pm	Myanmar Charitable Labour Association
08:03	Pm	News
08:26	Pm	Sai Htee Hseng Or An Exceptional Music Star From Shan Plateaus (Ep-1)
08:53	Pm	Myanmar Masterclass: Portraiture

(09:00 Pm ~ 11:00 Pm) - Today Repeat (09:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)  
(11:00 Pm ~ 03:00 Am) - Thursday 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](http://www.myanmaritv.com/schedule))

## Hard Rock Cafe fetes 45 years with London memorabilia exhibit

LONDON — From Madonna's bustier to Paul McCartney's suit, fashion memorabilia from the world of music goes on display at an exhibition in London on Wednesday celebrating the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Hard Rock Cafe.

The display, called “Hard Rock Couture”, features items worn as well as instruments played by singers and musicians across the decades, including Elvis Presley, Jimi Hendrix, Lady Gaga and Rihanna. The Hard Rock Cafe, which first opened its doors in central London before expanding with restaurants worldwide, has what it calls “the world's greatest collection of music memorabilia” — all of which began with an Eric Clapton guitar.—Reuters

# Suarez scores four as Barca rout Valencia 7-0

BARCELONA — Luis Suarez scored four goals and Lionel Messi grabbed a hat-trick as Barcelona all but wrapped up their King's Cup semi-final by crushing Valencia 7-0 in the first leg at the Nou Camp on Wednesday.

Barely seven minutes had elapsed when Neymar stole the ball from a careless Andre Gomes in midfield, raced forward and passed to Suarez who rifled a shot across goal past Matthew Ryan.

Barca went two up when Sergio Busquets sent a long ball down the right which Aleix Vidal pulled back for Suarez to blast past Ryan.

"Great result which puts us closer to the objective," Suarez told Movistar. "There'd have to be a catastrophe to not play the final."

Valencia struggled to contain a Barca side with Neymar, Messi and Suarez creating danger almost at will.

Gary Neville's side rarely got near goalkeeper Marc-Andre Ter Stegen as Barcelona produced one of their best performances of the season with Andres Iniesta and Messi playing in their



PHOTO: REUTERS

ninth King's Cup semi-final in 10 seasons.

Messi scored the third after a neat backheel from Neymar.

On the stroke of halftime Barcelona were awarded a penalty when Shkodran Mustafi brought Messi down and was sent off but Neymar hit the post to leave the score 3-0 at the interval.

Russian Denis Cheryshev came on as a substitute for his Valencia debut just before Messi scored Barca's fourth in the 59<sup>th</sup> minute, taking a backheel from Suarez and weaving past two defenders.

Valencia had the ball in the net in the 69<sup>th</sup> minute after Cheryshev laid on for Rodrigo but it was

ruled out for offside and Messi soon completed his hat-trick.

"I couldn't imagine a debut like this. I know it's Barcelona but we can't give such an image (of ourselves)," Cheryshev, on loan from Real Madrid, said. "Like this we won't go anywhere."

Suarez scored twice in the last seven minutes, a header from

Adriano's cross and a shot from Arda Turan's square ball taking the Uruguayan's tally to nine goals in five matches and 35 for the season.

The second leg, in which Barcelona can afford to rest leading players, should be a mere formality in Valencia next Wednesday.—Reuters

## Myanmar Football Federation scores K3 billion sponsorship

THE Myanmar Football Federation (MFF) has revealed that it has secured a K3 billion (US\$2,387,250) sponsorship deal for the current 2016 football season.

The main financial backers of the sponsorship deal are the telecommunications company Ooredoo, together with television and radio broadcasters.

"The money will be used to develop the league and the clubs that play in it," said MFF chairperson U Zaw Zaw.

The MFF is currently holding Leagues 1 and 2 of Myanmar National Football, to which a minimum of K40 million (\$31,830) will go toward football clubs compet-

ing in League 1, with K20 million (\$15,915) going to financial assistance for clubs in League 2.

"We've got more finances to raise the quality of football clubs this coming year. The clubs that can play at home will be given K100 million (\$79,575)," said Dr Saing Hsan Htun, vice chairperson of the MFF.

The offices of the Myanmar National Football League, which used to be located within the Gold Hotel, near the Thuwanna National Stadium, were relocated by the MFF to within the Novotel Hotel, located on Pyay Road.— *Myitmakha News Agency*

## Chelsea held by Watford, Everton sink Newcastle

LONDON — There was no way through for Chelsea as Watford halted their recent resurgence in a goalless Premier League stalemate at Vicarage Road while Everton piled more woe on Newcastle United with a 3-0 victory on Wednesday.

If Newcastle had hoped to buy their way out of trouble, they were handed a reality check at Goodison Park as a first-half goal from Aaron Lennon and two late penalties from Ross Barkley kept January's big spenders in the relegation zone.

While Chelsea have spent much of the season dwelling just above the drop zone, their fortunes had improved since Guus Hiddink took temporary charge in December. Watford, however, were the better side for the majority of the game, even if they had keeper Heurelho Gomes to thank as Chelsea came to life in the closing stages.

Watford's Odion Ighalo passed up the best opening in the first half when he misjudged the flight of a cross and completely

fluffed a close-range header.

Chelsea did not really get out of second gear until after the restart and only started to dominate when Eden Hazard was summoned off the bench.

Diego Costa had flashed a first-half effort wide, but probably thought he had scored when he had a late header superbly saved by Watford keeper Gomes.

It was an eighth league game without defeat for Chelsea, but last season's champions remained in the bottom half of the table in 13<sup>th</sup> place, four points adrift of Watford in ninth.

Newcastle, who spent liberally in the recent transfer window, handed new signing Andros Townsend his debut in an effort to add attacking thrust to a side that had scored only seven goals in their previous 17 away league games.

It was Everton, however, who took the lead after 23 minutes when Lennon collected the ball on the edge of the area before turning and firing low into the net.

Newcastle could have fallen

further behind as Barkley had an effort tipped on to the bar by Newcastle keeper Rob Elliot, who also pushed an effort from Tom Cleverley on to the post.

The victory was effectively confirmed when Lennon was fouled in the area and Barkley fired home the penalty two minutes from the end.

The midfielder added another spot-kick in stoppage time having been brought down by Newcastle's Jamaal Lascelles, who was sent off for the offence.

Barkley is enjoying a purple patch of form and his contribution was heralded by his manager Roberto Martinez.

"Phenomenal footballer, phenomenal person," the Spaniard told the BBC.

"He took responsibility with both penalties and showed how he is an assured, technical footballer." It was only a second win in 11 league matches for Everton, who moved up to 11<sup>th</sup> in the table on 32 points, while Newcastle are still two points adrift of the safety zone.—Reuters