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SPECIAL ADVISER

NLD seeks to create 'State Counsellor' role for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

THE Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) agreed yesterday to discuss a special bill that would create the post of the State Counsellor for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in the new cabinet, with plans to debate the bill today.

U Aung Kyi Nyunt, an NLD lawmaker, tabled the State Counsellor Bill to the Upper House yesterday, saying the bill is in conformity with the constitution and in accordance with the Article 217 of the constitution.

"The move and intention to enact the bill is very simple and is within the rights of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. The bill will guarantee her right to give advice to governmental institutions, organisations and individuals. The bill aims to give [Daw Aung San Suu Kyi] the right to facilitate the building of mutual trust and reconciliation in the country through the executive, legislative and judiciary sectors," the MP told reporters.

The bill includes five chapters and eight articles. The bill, reviewed by *The Global New Light of Myanmar*, would guarantee Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's right to contact the government ministries, departments, organisations, associations and individuals for counsel, and she will be accountable to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw.

The term of the office for the State Counsellor is the same as that of the president, who will be in office throughout the duration of the term of current second parliament, according to the bill.

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President U Htin Kyaw and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi enter parliament in Naypyitaw on 30 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

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Trio work on administrative functions in Yangon

Ko Moe

THE Yangon Region administration is currently being run by the Chief Minister, the Minister for Security and Border Affairs and the Secretary of the regional government in close cooperation as the regional cabinet has not been formed yet, said Minister for Security and Border Affairs Col Tin Aung Tun.

"We are working collaboratively on administrative matters before the creation of the cabinet,"

said the regional minister.

U Phyo Min Thein was sworn in last Monday as Yangon Region Chief Minister at the Yangon Region Parliament.

Col Tin Aung Tun, who was nominated by the Commander-in-Chief, was also approved with no objection as Minister for Security and Border Affairs at the regional parliamentary session yesterday.

I will do my best to ensure the security of Yangon Region in ac-

cord with instructions of the Chief Minister, said the Security and Border Affairs Minister.

Yangon Region Parliament has not yet received the nomination of other cabinet members for the Yangon Region government.

Speaking to the media last Monday, U Phyo Min Thein, new Yangon Region Chief Minister, vowed to form an uncorrupted government which will attend to and address the needs of Yangon people and will strive to address

issues related to traffic congestion, unemployment and flooding in the city during the rainy season.

Despite Myanmar's new President reducing the total number of ministries from 36 to 21, no announcement on the number of ministries formed by regional governments has been released yet.

Under President U Thein Sein's administration the Yangon Region government, led by the Chief Minister, was formed with a total of 11 ministers.

Crime NEWS

One man and ox killed in car accident

A PASSENGER bus collided head on with an ox cart near Higyido village, Pyay-Aung Lan road in Aung Lan township on Tuesday leaving one man and an ox dead.

The passenger bus, driven by one Ko Ko Tun alias Aung

Pu, 22, struck the bullock cart being driven by Myint Tun Naing, 31 at high speed. The collision injured two oxen and killed one in addition to Myint Tun Naing. The driver has been charged by the police.— *Kyaw Zayya*



Bus seen after colliding an ox cart. PHOTO: KYAW ZAYYA

Vehicle turns over in Kyaukdaga

A VEHICLE en route to Yangon from Nay Pyi Taw being driven by one Aung Soe Thu, 25, turned over on Wednesday between mileposts 77/4 and 77/5 on the Yangon-Mandalay road near Kyaukdaga town-

ship, Bago region. The rollover reportedly occurred after the driver lost control. The accident badly damaged the vehicle. The driver has been charged by the police.— *Khin Ko (Kyauktaka)*



Car seen overturned. PHOTO: KHIN KO (KYAUKTAKA)

Traffic accident injures 26

A PASSENGER truck heading for Chauk from Ka Tauk Kyaung village carrying 30 passengers overturned between mileposts 399/7 and 400/0, Magwe-Chauk road, Chauk township, Magwe region on Monday leaving 26 people injured.

According to an investigation the vehicle was being

driven by one Aung Kyaw alias Phyo Kyaw, 25, when it capsized after the driver lost control. The accident injured 26 out of 30 passengers.

The injured passengers are currently receiving medical treatment at Mandalay general hospital. Police have filed charges against Aung Kyaw.— *Win Ei Mon (IPRD)*

Brighter Future Myanmar plans to quench thirst of people in Shan State



Kanbawza's drinking water supply facility being seen in Aungban. PHOTO: GNLM

AS El Nino is beginning to make its impact felt nation-wide, Kanbawza's Brighter Future Myanmar Foundation is currently constructing a drinking water supply facility in Tunggyi to benefit more than 9,000 people facing a scarcity of drinking water in the region.

The tube well, being drilled at the Nagapwet Monastery in Shwetaung Ward in

Taunggyi, will be outfitted with a 15,000-gallon concrete tank allowing it to pipe water to three monasteries and the people of three wards through a 7,600 foot long, 2-inch diameter pipe.

The facility is expected to be completed soon according to members of the foundation who are currently supervising the construction project.

Meanwhile, a tube-well in Aungban which was drilled in March of this year is currently producing 2,000 gallons of water per day, benefitting local people around the clock, it has been learned.

The water sourced from the tube well is stored in a 12,000-gallon concrete tank from where it is supplied to local people.— *GNLM*

Yaba seized in Pakokku

A COMBINED investigation team comprising officers and staff of the Myanmar Police Force seized 200 yaba pills from one Kyaw Gyi alias Kyaw Zin Tun at the Shwe Kaung restaurant on Cherry road in Pakokku on Monday. Police also apprehended one Paing Phyo Lwin alias Paing Gyi alias Nga Paing who was found waiting at the entrance to the restaurant though he was not found to be carrying any illegal substances.

When interrogated the pair admitted that they had sold narcotics together with one Pyar Laung alias Htay Min Hlaing. Police located and searched Pyar Laung who was discovered to be carrying six plastic bags com-



Kyaw Gyi alias Kyaw Zin Tun, Pyar Laung alias Htay Min Hlaing and Paing Phyo Lwin alias Paing Gyi alias Nga Paing. PHOTO: DISTRICT IPRD

monly used to hold narcotics. Police have filed charges against all

suspects under the Anti-Narcotic Law.— *District (IPRD)*

Yaba and heroin seized in Nawngkhio

A LOCAL anti-drug in Lashio seized 2,925 yaba pills from one Tun Naing Htay who was searched while onboard a passenger vehicle near milepost 80/4 at the Nawngkhio entrance gate on 26 March.

Similarly, police stopped a motorbike being driven by one Aung Myint with a passenger identified as Juliet on Mong Le village road in Hsenwi town on Monday.

Upon conducting a search the police discovered 121 grams of heroin and 1,200 yaba pills on Juliet and 0.3grams of heroin along with seven yaba pills on Aung Myint.

On that same day police seized 3 grams of heroin and 170 pills of heroin from a motorbike driver on the Taunggyi-Meiktila road. Police filed charges against all suspects under the Anti-Narcotic Law.— *The Mirror*



Tun Naing Htay. PHOTO: THE MIRROR



(From L to R) U Nyan Tun, Dr Sai Mauk Kham and U Maung Myint take the oath at Pyithu Hluttaw. PHOTO: MNA

Three representatives take oath before Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker

THE Pyithu Hluttaw put on record yesterday messages of congratulations sent by foreign parliamentary speakers to its speaker.

Speakers from Thailand, Turkey, Singapore, North Korea, India, South Korea, Lebanon, Pakistan and Iran sent congratulatory messages to the new House Speaker U Win Myint.

Dr Sai Mauk Kham of Lashio constituency, U Nyan Tun of the Zegon constituency and

U Maung Myint of the Minkin constituency took the oath in the presence of the speaker.

The parliament approved a replacement for Daw Su Su Lwin with U Zaw Thein as chairman of its International Relations Committee.

Daw Su Su Lwin represented Thonkhwa constituency and U Zaw Thein represented Wakema constituency. The parliament will meet on 4 April. —*Myanmar News Agency*

Mandalay Region chief minister, Ethnic Affairs Minister sworn in

MANDALAY Region Chief Minister Dr Zaw Myint Maung and Ethnic Affairs Minister Sai Kyaw Zaw were sworn in yesterday in the presence of the Speaker of the Mandalay Region Hluttaw and parliamentarians.

In his inaugural speech, the new Mandalay Region Chief Minister called on regional lawmakers to strive for the abolition of laws set up to oppress the people and the enactment of laws ensuring better protection of civil rights.

Next, the chief minister and the speaker visited the Chief Minister's Office, where they met with staff.

There was no handover ceremony of chief ministerial duties from outgoing Chief Minister U Ye Myint to his successor on Wednesday, according to sources in Mandalay Region.

The outgoing Mandalay Region government did not arrive at the regional office where the new Chief Minister and his party were waiting for the transfer of duties until 6pm on 30 March, said Dr Zaw Myint Maung, the new chief minister for Mandalay Region.

He denied that the handover



Ethnic Affairs Minister Sai Kyaw Zaw takes the oath at Mandalay Region Parliament. PHOTO: AUNG THANT KHAING

of chief ministerial duties was not held owing to the absence of the next regional government led by the new Chief Minister.

"We waited for the handover until 6pm on that day. We were informed by the Chief Minister's Office in the evening that there would not be handover ceremony as the President's Office did not give any instruction about that," Dr Zaw Myint Maung told reporters after the swearing-in ceremony at the Mandalay Region parliament yesterday.

Although he did not receive notes or a phone call regarding the transfer of duties, I will begin

my duties at the Chief Minister's Office as we waited until 6pm on that day, he added.

"I think there should be a handshake between the outgoing and incoming chief ministers to mark the transfer of duties," said U Sai Kyaw Zaw, the new Ethnic Affairs Minister for Mandalay Region.

A representative of the former chief minister wrote a Facebook status saying a computer and furniture purchased by the former chief minister were left for the new chief minister, and the room has been cleaned. —*Aung Thant Khaing*

US President Obama sends congratulations to President U Htin Kyaw

THE President of the United States of America released a statement yesterday congratulating U Htin Kyaw on his inauguration as president of Myanmar.

In the statement Mr Obama also said that he is looking forward to working with him and the newly elected government.

"U Htin Kyaw's inauguration represents a historic milestone in the country's transition to a democratically elected, civilian-led government. This extraordinary moment in Myanmar's history is a testament to its people, institutions, and leaders who have worked together to ensure a peaceful transfer of power,

and it speaks to the significance of the reforms the country has undertaken since 2011," said Mr Obama in his statement.

The statement said that Myanmar will face significant challenges going forward, including achieving broad-based economic development, advancing national reconciliation, and promoting the rights and freedoms of all its people. The United States looks forward to being a friend and partner of the new government and the people of Myanmar as they make progress toward building a more inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous future, according to the statement. —*GNLM*

NLD seeks to create 'State Counsellor' role for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

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The bill is aimed at helping a multi-party democracy to flourish in Myanmar and to build a peaceful, modern and developed nation with a market-oriented economic system and to establish a democratic, federal Union.

Following the submission of

the bill to the parliament, Union Parliament Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than said the debate and voting on the bill will take place on 1 April.

Seven lawmakers—four elected MPs and three military representatives—will debate the bill today.—*GNLM*

Dredging work to solve erosion problem in Mandalay Region completed

DREDGING works at 26 individual spots have been carried out to help prevent river bank erosion along the Ayeyawady River, Punhlaing River and Dohtawady River in Mandalay Region, according to an official from the region's Water Resources Utilisation Department.

With the use of funds from both the regional government and Union government the department has spent just over K4 million on the Ayeyawady River

waterway development project which included dredging works to protect against river bank erosion in the region, said Director U Toe Aung Lin of the department.

As the dredging operation was undertaken along those rivers as of only a few months ago, timely completion of the works has ensured the safe flow of vessel traffic at a time when water levels are falling, the director said. —*Aung Thant Khaing*



Preventive measures against erosion of the Ayeyawady River is completed. PHOTO: AUNG THANT KHAING

LOCAL Business

IOC bids for fuel marketing and retail rights in Myanmar

NEW DELHI: State-run Indian Oil Corp (IOC) has bid for rights to import, store and distribute petroleum products in Myanmar.

"We have put in a bid to enter fuel marketing and retail business in Myanmar," a senior company official said.

Myanmar Petroleum Products Enterprise (MPPE) last year invited companies to form a joint venture for import, storage, distribution and sale of all petroleum products except liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and liquefied natural gas (LNG).

A separate tender for cooking gas LPG was floated. IOCBSE -1.64 % had bid for that tender too, the official said.

MPPE left the fuel distribution business when it was privatised in 2010, but is planning a re-entry into the fast-growing business sector that is marred by widespread dissatisfaction over service standards and fuel quality.

In 2010, MPPE transferred 216 filling stations to private companies across the country but it still runs 12 pumps which supply fuel to state departments.

It also owns four main fuel terminals and 24 sub-fuel terminals. Around 70 private companies run the country's 1163 petrol stations, but few have storage facilities or an import licence.

MPPE now wants to tie up with foreign companies to expand the business and rehabilitate existing facilities. MPPE will hold 51 per cent of equity while the foreign company will hold the rest.

The joint venture will be for a maximum of 30 years, extendable two 10-year periods.—PTI



Off-shore gas field of Myanmar. PHOTO: GNLM/FILE

Myanmar economy declined 30 per cent in 2015

THE economy of Myanmar declined around 30 per cent in 2015 due to destructive natural disasters, political transition, China's economic slowdown and the general global economic downturn, Dr Myo Thant, the vice president of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI), said at the general annual meeting of the Myanmar Retailers Association.

The government expected fiscal growth to stand at around

9.2 per cent according to the project and 8.3 per cent according to the expert, while the World Bank predicted the growth at only 6.5 per cent.

The exchange rate of foreign currency depreciated about 25 per cent, with the Kyat falling in value against the American dollar. The political transition and the recent outbreaks of natural disaster caused the commodity prices to go up, resulting in high inflation.

The country's real estate

market saw a record high in 2014. Over 4,000 apartment buildings are expected to be finished in 2016 despite some sluggishness in the construction businesses.

Currently, the real estate market is relatively cold in Yangon as most apartments are bought for commercial purpose rather than for personal living. The market is expected to grow again when the condominium law comes into effect, Dr Myo Thant said.—MPPS/Union Daily

Japanese traders eye organic Myanmar avocados

JAPANESE traders have offered to purchase organic Myanmar avocados, according to the Myanmar Fruits and Vegetables Producers Association (MFVPA).

"Japan has extended an offer saying they desire organic avocados. We can't speak about the details [of the offer] yet. We will be able to export as many avocados as is desired. That

said, we are still discussing the sizes and quality of the desired fruit," said U Soe Than Mindin, chairperson of the MFVPA.

"Although Myanmar produces organic crops, there has been difficulty in establishing a separate organic-only market," he added.

"We've been practising organic agriculture for over 10 years

now. We've been planting avocados for a long time and still have foreign buyers. Many people are interested in organic methods [of agriculture]," said U Hla Myaing, chair of the Myanmar Organic Agriculture Association.

Organic crops are cultivated naturally without the use of chemicals or pesticides.—Myit-makha News Agency

Pea export prices rise due to high demand

EXPORT prices of various peas dramatically rose following a surge in demand from India, while supply remains low in the domestic market.

The export price of green gram rose from K1,270,000 to K1,470,000, while the price of pigeon peas rose from K150,000 to K200,000, according to pea traders from the Bayintnaung commodity depot.

Pea prices dropped starting from the first week of February as a result of low demand from

India and US dollar depreciation. The price bounced back following a period of high demand from India, despite a month of losses.

"There is high demand this month. The price was still on the decline up to third week of March. The price rose again by K50,000 per tonne due to the advanced buyers," said U Min, a pea trader at the Bayintnaung commodity depot.

India purchased about 10,000 tonnes of various peas during the last week of March.—200

Expired food vendors to be fined up to K5 lakh

WITH an aim to reduce sales of expired foodstuffs and drugs, the Health Department under the Yangon City Development Committee will conduct surprise checks throughout the coming 2016-2017 fiscal year.

The city's busiest markets, including Theingyi, Thirimingala, Mingala and Bogyoke markets, will be targeted for checks. Officials from the department will check whether any expired or dyed foodstuffs and drugs are being sold.

The authorities will confiscate expired foodstuffs from

first-time offenders, and repeat offenders will be fined between K10,000 and K500,000, according to the Health Department of the YCDC.

A combined team comprising township authorities and staff of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will conduct laboratory tests of drugs and cosmetic products.

In previous years, surprise checks have identified food dyes made from insects that can cause gastrointestinal disorders in bamboo shoots and fish paste products.—200

Agricultural production costs inhibit international sales

HIGH agriculture production costs have hampered our ability to penetrate international markets, said U Chit Khaing, chairman of the Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF).

The federation will submit a proposal to the new government in an effort to reduce production costs.

Myanmar exported over 1.84 million tonnes of rice during the 2014-2015 fiscal year.

The country's export volume

is predicted to increase as a result of a decline in domestic consumption, the chairman said, referring to a survey conducted by the MRF.

Urban consumption per head is 4.8 litres per month and 3.8 baskets per year, while consumption levels in rural areas are around 16 litres per month and 4.7 baskets a year, according to a survey on Myanmar rice consumption conducted by the federation.—WWP&MPSS/Union Daily

Dried Mayan fruit businesses under threat in Pau

DRIED Mayan fruit businesses face closure in Pau township, Mon State, due to a poor yield and increased costs of production this year.

"We have had a bad harvest because of the rains. Moreover, labour and production costs are unaffordable," said Daw San Yuon, local dried mayan fruit supplier.

The price of Mayan fruit stood at K400 per viss but has now jumped up to K500 this year. Workers are normally paid K4,000 a day but are now demanding a raise of K1,000. Dried Mayan fruit are mainly distributed to brokerages in Yangon. The high business season is generally from March to April.—200

North Korea in 'top-speed dash' for May congress, Kim's nuclear policy

SEOUL — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is poised to declare his signature ruling policy during a rare party congress in May and despite tough new UN sanctions, it is likely to be the twin pursuit of nuclear prowess and economic development.

North Korea's official media have carried almost-daily reports and commentary extolling the "sacred road" to the day Kim's leadership will be endorsed at the "victorious and glorious 7th party congress."

This week marks the half-way point in what state media describes as a 70-day "top-speed dash to glorious victory," a campaign that calls for ramped-up productivity and a sprucing-up of the capital Pyongyang as it prepares to greet delegates.

Propaganda posters in photos seen by Reuters urge residents: "Comrade, have you implemented your 70-day battle plan for today?"

The highlight of the congress, the first in 36 years, will likely be the formal adoption of Kim's signature "byongjin policy," said Cho Min, an expert on the isolated North's leadership and former vice president of the South Korean government-run Korea Institute for National Unification.



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un inspects a flight drill of fighter pilots from the Korean People's Army's (KPA) Air and Anti-Air Force, in this undated photo released by North Korea's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) in Pyongyang, on 21 February. PHOTO: REUTERS

Byongjin means "simultaneous push" — in North Korea's case for economic development and nuclear weapons capability. It follows Kim's father's Songun, or "military first," policy and his grandfather's Juche, the North's home-grown founding ideology that combines Marxism and extreme nationalism.

"He (Kim Jong Un) doesn't

look willing to back down on nuclear armament and the congress is the place for maximum impact if he wants to declare it to the world," Cho said, adding another nuclear test is "worryingly" likely in the run-up to the meeting.

North Korea conducted its fourth nuclear test on 6 January, leading to new United Nations Security Council sanctions early this

month, backed by Pyongyang's sole major ally, Beijing.

Since taking power in late 2011 after the death of his father Kim Jong Il, Kim Jong Un's tenure has been marked by turmoil and purges within his inner circle, including the 2013 execution of his powerful uncle Jang Song Thaek as well as five replacements of his defence chief. "He's tried

other things such as (Workers' Party) Political Bureau meetings, dismissals, demotions, etc., and it hasn't had the effect he wanted," said Michael Madden, an expert on the North Korean leadership.

"The Party Congress is the most effective way to re-set North Korean political culture," he said.

The North is probably in the midst of selecting more than 3,000 delegates to the event that revises the ruling party's charter and adopts new rules for its ultimate leadership body, officials in South Korea said.

It is a process that will continue until about 20 days before the congress, expected in early May, while the agenda is formalised at the same time, one of the officials said, based on the run-up to the last two meetings, in 1970 and 1980.

"The preparations are no simple feat ... given they have to arrange to find lodging for 3,000 people, for example," another official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Pyongyang residents have been mobilised before daybreak and after work, as well as during regular work hours, to make preparations, a Western source in Pyongyang told Reuters, requesting anonymity.—Reuters

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Diminutive 'Hobbit' people vanished earlier than previously known

WASHINGTON — The extinct human species dubbed the "Hobbit" vanished from its home on the Indonesian island of Flores far earlier than previously thought, according to scientists who suspect our species may have had a hand in these diminutive people's demise.

Researchers on Wednesday said they recalculated the age of bones of the species, named *Homo floresiensis*, found inside a Flores cave, and determined it disappeared about 50,000 years ago rather than 12,000 years ago as previously estimated.

The Hobbit's discovery in 2003 created a scientific sensation. *Homo floresiensis* stood 3-1/2 feet tall (106 cm), possessed a small, chimpanzee-sized brain, used stone tools and may have hunted pygmy elephants.

The researchers said there is not yet direct evidence the Hobbit people encountered *Homo sapiens* but noted that our species was already on other islands in the region at around that time and had reached Australia by about 50,000 years ago.

Geochronologist Bert Roberts of Australia's University of Wollongong said it was possible *Homo sapiens* played a role in the Hobbit's extinction and the issue would be a major focus of further research.

"To me, the question is,

'Would the Hobbits have become extinct if humans had never made landfall on Flores?' And the answer is 'no.' We were likely the decisive factor in their demise, but we still need to find hard evidence to back up this hunch," Roberts said. Numerous animals disappeared on Flores at the same time, said paleoanthropologist Matt Tocheri of Canada's Lakehead University and the Smithsonian Institution's Human Origins Programme. These included small elephants, giant marabou storks,

vultures and large Komodo dragon lizards. After fresh excavations from 2007 to 2014 improved the understanding of the cave site, the scientists re-evaluated the ages of sediment containing *Homo floresiensis* remains and the actual bones. The Hobbits' skeletal remains were 60,000 to 100,000 years old while their stone tools were 50,000 to 190,000 years old, said archaeologist Thomas Sutikna of the University of Wollongong and Indonesia's National Research Centre for Archaeology.

Homo sapiens first appeared in Africa about 200,000 years ago and later trekked to other parts of the world, encountering other human species like Neanderthals who went extinct not long afterward. The previous assessment that the Hobbits had lived as recently as 12,000 years ago indicated they had survived for perhaps 40,000 years after our species reached the region. The new results show this was not the case. The research appears in the journal *Nature*.—Reuters



Archaeological excavations of Holocene deposits at Liang Bua on the Indonesian island of Flores are seen in progress in this undated handout picture courtesy of the Liang Bua Team. PHOTO: REUTERS

More remains of Chinese soldiers from Korean War returned

SHENYANG — The remains of 36 Chinese soldiers killed in the 1950-53 Korean War were returned to China on Thursday from the Republic of Korea (ROK), the third batch returned following a handover agreement signed by the two countries in 2013.

Escorted by two Chinese J-11 fighter jets, an Il-76 transportation plane carrying coffins of the soldiers landed at Taoyuan International Airport in Shenyang, capital of northeast China's Liaoning Province, around 11:30am.

The remains will be buried in a martyrs' park in Shenyang, with a burial ceremony due to be held on Friday morning.

"I am honoured to join in the task of receiving the soldiers' re-

mains. They are heroes," said Du Yuxin, a soldier who participated in the reception at the airport.

According to an agreement between China and ROK signed in late 2013, the two sides consult every year on the handover of remains of Chinese soldiers found in ROK. Remains of a total number of 505 soldiers were returned to China in 2014 and 2015.

The Chinese People's Volunteers (CPV) fought with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's army in the Korean War against the ROK army and US-led UN forces. Nearly 200,000 CPV soldiers have been confirmed killed in the war so far, most of whom were buried on the Korean Peninsula. —Xinhua



Soldiers of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (R) receive from their South Korean counterparts coffins containing remains of soldiers of the Chinese People's Volunteers (CPV) killed in the 1950-53 Korean War, during a handover ceremony at the Incheon International Airport of South Korea, on 31 March. PHOTO: XINHUA



Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan is sworn in after being elected as the new Chairperson of the National Assembly (NA) and the Chairperson of the National Election Council in Hanoi, capital of Viet Nam, on 31 March 2016. PHOTO: XINHUA

Viet Nam's parliament elects first female speaker

HANOI — National Assembly (NA) of Viet Nam yesterday elected Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan as the country's first female house speaker in capital Hanoi.

Ngan has been elected and sworn in as the NA Chairperson with 472 "yes" votes out of 481 valid ballots, at the ongoing 11th session of the 13th NA.

Meanwhile, she was also elected as the Chairperson of the National Election Council with 467 "yes" votes out of 477 valid ballots.

Prior to the election, Ngan served as Vice Chairperson of the NA from July 2011.

Earlier on Wednesday afternoon, NA Vice Chairwoman Tong Thi Phong delivered a proposal on the nomination of candidates for the position of NA head, of which the 12th Central

Committee of the Communist Party of Viet Nam (CPVCC) and CPVCC's Politburo nominated Ngan as the sole nominee to the post.

On Wednesday, Nguyen Sinh Hung was relieved from duty of the NA Chairman and Chairman of the National Election Council.

In late January, Hung was not elected to be among 200 members of the new CPVCC.

At the second session of the 12th Central Committee of the CPV in early March, Vietnamese party chief Nguyen Phu Trong said the central committee reached high consensus that it is needed to soon replace and re-arrange key leadership positions in order to promptly implement the resolution of the 12th national party congress. —Xinhua

Flyover collapse kills 14 in Kolkata, scores feared trapped

KOLKATA (India) — A flyover under construction in the bustling city of Kolkata collapsed on to moving traffic below, killing at least 14 people with as many as 150 people feared trapped, police said.

Residents were using their bare hands to try to rescue people pinned under a 100-metre (110-yard) length of metal and cement that snapped off at one end and came crashing down in a teeming commercial district near Girish Park.

"Monumental tragedy. Rescue ops on. Many feared dead," Derek O'Brien, spokesman for the left-wing party that governs the state of West Bengal of which Kolkata is the capital, said in a tweet. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, seeking re-election in a regional poll next month, rushed to the scene to survey the damage. She faces tough questions over who was responsible.

A newspaper reported last November that Banerjee wanted the project — already years late — to be completed by February. Project engineers expressed concerns over whether this would be possible, *The Telegraph* said at the time.

Television footage from the scene showed a bloody hand reaching out from under what appeared to be a girder. People were trying to hand bottles of water to survivors pinned underneath.

"The concrete had been laid last night at this part of the bridge," resident Ramesh Kejriwal told Reuters. "I am lucky as I was planning to go

downstairs to have juice. When I was thinking about it, I saw that the bridge had collapsed."

A senior police officer on the scene said that 15 critically injured people had been rescued.

"Most were bleeding profusely. The problem is that nobody is able to drive an ambulance to the spot," said Akhilesh Chaturvedi, a senior police officer.

A 140-tonne crane brought to the scene was unable to lift the concrete slab under which many people were feared trapped, including passengers in a minibus.

Home Minister Rajnath Singh tweeted his concern and announced that rescue teams would be rushed to the scene.

Yet there was little sign of a coordinated rescue operation, with access for heavy lifting

equipment restricted by the buildings on either side of the flyover and heavy traffic in the area.

The 2-km (1.2-mile) flyover has been under construction since 2009 and has missed several deadlines for completion.

Construction projects in India have long been plagued by lax safety standards and dubious ties between politicians and business. The disaster could play a role in the West Bengal state election, one of five being held from next month that will give a verdict on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's nearly two years in power. Indian company IVRCL (IVRCL.NS) is building the Vivekananda Road flyover, according to its web site. Its shares were down 6 per cent after falling as much as 11.8 per cent on news of the disaster. —Reuters



A general view of the collapsed flyover in Kolkata, India, on 31 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

Nuclear terrorism fears loom over Obama's final atomic summit



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau arrives on his official plane to attend the upcoming Nuclear Security Summits in Washington, on the tarmac at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland on 30 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

WASHINGTON — Just as fears of nuclear terrorism are rising, US President Barack Obama's drive to lock down vulnerable atomic materials worldwide seems to have lost momentum and could slow further.

With less than 10 months left in office to follow through on one of his signature foreign policy initiatives, Obama will convene leaders from more than 50 countries in Washington this week for his fourth and final Nuclear Security Summit, a high-level diplomatic process that started and will end on his watch.

A boycott by Russian President Vladimir Putin, apparently unwilling to join in a US-dominated gathering at a time of increased tensions between Washington and Moscow, adds to doubts that the meeting will yield major results.

The recent deadly militant attacks in Brussels have fuelled concern that Islamic State could eventually target nuclear plants and develop radioactive "dirty bombs," a topic that may well be

uppermost in leaders' minds as they meet. Despite significant progress by Obama in persuading dozens of countries to rid themselves of bomb-making materials or reduce and safeguard stockpiles, much of the world's plutonium and enriched uranium remains vulnerable to theft.

The absence of Russia, one of the biggest atomic powers, could detract from decisions reached in Washington this week.

Obama, in an opinion piece in *The Washington Post*, said, "Our massive Cold War nuclear arsenal is poorly suited to today's threats. The United States and Russia — which together hold more than 90 per cent of the world's nuclear weapons — should negotiate to reduce our stockpiles further."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Wednesday Russia was skipping the summit because of a "shortage of mutual cooperation" in working out the agenda.

While noting that Moscow had continued joint work on nu-

clear security, White House spokesman Josh Earnest said Russia was going to "miss out on an opportunity" and that its no-show illustrated the "degree to which Russia is isolated." Russia has chafed over US-led sanctions over the Ukraine conflict.

Efforts to make the world safer have also been complicated by North Korea's nuclear weapons advance and Pakistan's move toward smaller, tactical nuclear weapons, which Washington fears may further destabilise an already volatile region.

All of this weighs on Obama's agenda as he prepares to host world leaders on Thursday and Friday. He inaugurated the event nearly six years ago, after using a landmark speech in Prague in 2009 to lay out the goal of ridding the world of nuclear weapons as a central theme of his presidency. There is no guarantee that once Obama, the driving force behind the initiative, leaves office in January his successor will keep the issue a high priority.—*Reuters*

Serbian firebrand Seselj faces verdict in UN war crimes trial

THE HAGUE — UN judges rule yesterday in the war crimes trial of Vojislav Seselj, a Serbian nationalist politician accused of stoking murderous ethnic hatred during the 1990s wars prompted by the break-up of federal Yugoslavia.

The verdict may prove as difficult for the UN Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) to manage as the decade-long trial, which suffered multiple delays as Seselj represented himself and challenged the court at every turn.

Seselj, 61, was granted provisional release in 2014 after being diagnosed with terminal cancer. However, he is still alive and has

re-immersed himself in Serbian politics, addressing rallies in defiance of ICTY orders.

He refused to return for Thursday's court session, due to begin at 0800 GMT, and did not intend to even watch it by satellite. Judges averted a showdown over his attendance by excusing him from attending for health reasons at the last minute.

A close ally of late Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, Seselj faces three counts of crimes against humanity and six of war crimes for inciting ethnic cleansing in Croatia, Bosnia and the Serbian province of Vojvodina. Prosecutors say in addition to his

rhetoric about creating an ethnically pure "Greater Serbia", he helped set up paramilitary units to carry out the plan. Serb paramilitaries drove tens of thousands of Muslims and Croats from their homes. A prolific author, Seselj is known for passionate speeches, a short temper and crude threats such as telling Serb enemies that he would "gouge out their eyes with rusty spoons".

He says he is innocent of wrongdoing. If convicted, he could face life imprisonment, which would require his transfer to the ICTY. That would pose a dilemma for Serbia's government.—*Reuters*

NEWS IN BRIEF

Britain to ship record amount of nuclear waste to US: UK government source

LONDON — Britain will ship 700 kilograms of nuclear waste to the United States under a deal to be announced by Prime Minister David Cameron at a nuclear security summit in Washington yesterday, a British government source said.

In return for the shipment, the largest ever movement of highly enriched uranium, the United States will send Europe a different type of nuclear waste that can be used to produce medical isotopes for the treatment of some cancers. "The prime minister will be announcing a landmark deal that we have agreed with the US and with (European Atomic Energy Community) Euratom," the British government source said, on condition of anonymity.

"It is a win-win. We get rid of waste and we get back something that will help us to fight cancer."

At the two-day summit, being attended by more than 50 world leaders, Britain and the US will also announce plans to host a joint exercise later this year to test the ability of their governments and nuclear industries to deal with a cyber attack in the civil nuclear sector. The source said this was not in response to intelligence about a specific threat, but "prudent planning".—*Reuters*

Hungarian Nobel laureate Kertesz dies aged 86 — state news agency MTI

BUDAPEST — Hungarian novelist and Auschwitz survivor Imre Kertesz, winner of the 2002 Nobel Literature Prize, died yesterday at the age of 86 after a long illness, state news agency MTI reported, citing his publisher.

Kertesz won the Nobel Prize for works the judges said portrayed the Nazi death camps as "the ultimate truth" about how low human beings could fall.—*Reuters*

El Salvador plans 'extraordinary' moves to fight violence

SAN SALVADOR — El Salvador plans to boost prison security and deploy more troops in the streets to battle a rising wave of gang violence that has pushed murder rates to record levels, President Salvador Sanchez Ceren said on Wednesday.

The government has declared a state of emergency in seven prisons, limiting gang leaders' movements inside and prohibiting visitors and outside communication for 15 days.

Officials also plan to contract a thousand reserve soldiers to reinforce existing troops in controlling chunks of territory taken over by gangs, known as maras.

The small, impoverished Central American state ranks among the world's most violent. Murders jumped almost 120 per cent in the first two months of this year compared to 2015. "Faced with this irrational violence, we are forced to take urgent measures, of an extraordinary character, in order to guarantee security (and) peace for all Salvadorans," Sanchez Ceren said in a national broadcast. The government also plans to ask Congress to approve 14 measures to increase prison controls, as incarcerated leaders are still able to order killings and extortions.—*Reuters*

Mainland, HK police nab nearly 3,000 illegal immigrants in joint operation

BEIJING — Mainland and Hong Kong police have arrested 2,943 illegal immigrants in a joint operation to crack down on growing human smuggling, the Ministry of Public Security said on Wednesday.

Among the detained immigrants, 2,860 are from Southeast Asia and 83 from South Asia, said the ministry at a press conference held in Shenzhen of Guangdong. Most illegal immigrants were trying to sneak into Hong Kong from the mainland to seek employment, it added. Since the 17-month campaign started on 20 February, police in Guangdong, Guangxi and Yunnan have dismantled three cross-border smuggling syndicates with the help of Hong Kong police, the ministry announced the results of the first phase of the crackdown.

A total of 142 suspects from the three syndicates were apprehended by police, including 29 from countries in Southeast Asia and South Asia. The cross-border smuggling rings are well organised with clear division of labour, said the ministry.

"Smugglers in Southeast Asia and South Asia recruit immigrants, smugglers in the mainland transfer them to Guangdong from the border and ports and then sneak them into Hong Kong, and smugglers in Hong Kong take control of the whole process," it added. Illegal immigrants have also committed crimes such as thefts, robberies and drug smuggling, which in result seriously harmed public security in both Hong Kong and Guangdong, the ministry said.—*Xinhua*

OPINION

An outstanding issue that can't wait

Kyaw Thura

It goes without saying that governance is considered to be democratic only when its institutions are transparent and accountable to the people, with no discrimination on the grounds of religion, race and gender. Accordingly, a government is clean only when its cabinet members avoid corruption and interference in legal procedures and trust an independent judiciary with the responsibility to administer the laws, interpret them and translate them into practice so as to ensure the rule of law across the country.

On the other hand, lack of transparency and accountability will undermine the government's efficiency. Weaknesses in governance will give rise to corruption, which is often seen as the root cause of deficiencies in development projects. A glance at history is adequate enough to notice that violence reigns where poverty prevails.

No doubt that many outstanding issues await the new government in such a manner to challenge its leadership. It is, therefore, absolutely vital to discriminate between problems that require urgent attention and those that can wait.

One sensitive issue is none but the controversial Myitsone dam project at the confluence of the Maykha and Malikha rivers in Kachin State, which President U Thein Sein shelved in 2011 as he could not afford to be indifferent to a storm of protest from the public and environmental activists. The project is a joint venture between the outgoing government and Beijing-based China Power Investment Corporation (CPI).

Given the importance of the country's riverbed and the environmental destruction the project may trigger, we cannot afford any more delays in protecting our beloved River Ayeyawady against commercial exploitations.

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PHOTO: INTERNET

Betel Chewing and its Paradigm as an Intangible Culture

Maung Phyo (WYU)

BETEL-CHEWING is a deep-rooted tradition in Myanmar. The evidences for the statement could be traced back in many of the textual references on Myanmar history and culture and epigraphic evidences like stone inscriptions all over Myanmar. Since ancient days, betel has been used on most of the formal occasions within Myanmar society, high and low. However, due largely to recession, declining economy and deteriorating socio-economic conditions of the citizenry throughout the incumbencies of the successive Myanmar Governments, a new tradition of betel-chewing ensued, i.e. mushrooming of the betel-shops at almost every corner of the streets all over Myanmar.

In general, the origin of betel-chewing custom may go back to Bagan Era. King Kwunsaw Kyaung Phyu (1002 AD?) was so named because he is thought to have served the King under the capacity of Kwunsaw rank (A royal courtier who is tasked with levying tax on betel growers and betel merchants). Thus, betel is chewed all over Myanmar especially in rural area and outskirts of the towns and cities. It has been one of the offertories to the Lord Buddha and his Order of Monks as well as one of the royal delicacies. The importance of betel chewing can be traced back into the days of the successive Myanmar Dynasties. Betel is believed to have played a pivotal part in settling the court cases since the olden times. Betel fine was usually borne by the disputants who had lost at a trial. However, Myanmar people were accustomed to chewing betel at home with a betel casket. Wherever a gentleman or an old-age royal courtier goes, it is customary that his followers or attendants accompany him with the betel casket. The caskets were usually studded with gems and jewels or gilded in accordance with the social status and rank of the betel chewer. In this respect, the royal betel caskets turned out to be the most beautiful and grand of all. However, after the annexation of Burma by the British, there was a series of influx of Indian labors into Myanmar at the biddings of the British Government to meet the manpower shortage. As a side effect of these labor migrations, the Indian habit of betel chewing might have started to take root in Burma. Probably these Indian labors as well as educated Indian who moved to Myanmar in pursuit of a greener pasture had introduced Indian tobacco leaf and intoxicants into the country.

The betel is a kind of vine that belongs to the Piperaceae family. It is binomially termed as Piper betel L. Betel or betele (Portuguese) derived from the Tamil word vettila



PHOTO: STEVE TICKNER (IRRAWADDY.ORG)

in which "vetel" means "betel" and "ila", "leaf". In other word, it is also called "vetrilai" in Tamil, i.e. "vettri" for "victory" and "ilai" for "leaf". It is also known as "Paan" in Hindi and Bengali. In Myanmar, it is called "kum" or "kwun". In Mon and Thai, it is called "Plu".

Areca is a genus of approximately 50 species of palms in the family Arecaceae. Its name is actually derived from a name locally used on the Malabar Coast of India.

According to Rumphius, betel originates in Java, all of East India, Old India, on the Islands as well as in Quantung, the southernmost province of China. In addition, if chewing betel and areca nut is primarily accepted as Indian culture, it is convincing that the betel chewing custom may have spread over the countries or ancient city states that received or adopted the Indian culture. Myanmar is the country that followed the Indian culture in many aspects. Therefore, it is speculated that the culture of betel chewing in Myanmar is also the adopted one from the Southern India.

In the "Anandapanna" stone inscription that was inscribed in 610 ME, it is described as "လယ်ကိုတက်သောသခင်တို့ကား ဆွမ်းနှစ်အိုး ကွမ်းသီးနှစ်လုံး ကွမ်းအိမ်သားကြေး တစ်သာ အစိတ်တန်သာ ပြုသတည်း" which can be translated into English like "Two pots of alms-food, two pots of areca nut and one viss and two and a half tical of betel are donated to the

monks who are entitled to this paddy field by donation".

In the life account of King Kwunsaw Kyaung Phyu, it can be deduced that the name itself reflected the rank relating to the royal task of the betel tax collection. Furthermore, Queen Phwar Saw stone inscription (603 ME) makes mention about betel and betel caskets about twice in line (14) and line (23) respectively. Again in the Lay Hmyat Hna Pagoda (585 ME) Stone Inscriptions described in the last lines as in "ပုရတရား မှီကံ သင်ပုတကွမ်းပန်းပြေတံ တစ်စိမ်သော့" which is in English as "In order for the (lay people) to offer alms-food and betel to the Lord Buddha."

In the Kawiletkhana Thet Pone Than Pauk (a Myanmar literary genre in the form of verse for easy reference of correct spelling), "နိဂြိန်းမြန်း တလန်းလန်း ကွမ်းယန်းဘေးဝါဝေ" (which stands roughly for "Chew betel to redden your lips and refresh your mind") vouches for the use of betel since the ancient time in Myanmar. In the last verse of Thanwara Pyo (a kind of long verse that virtually depicts one of the Jataka stories), the stanza "တပေသင်ကာနေလှည့်ရာတွင် ထည့်လာကွမ်းပန်း သိမ်းမြန်း ကျောင်းတန်" (which can be translated into English as "During his stay at the monastery for studies, he has had to attend to the venerable Monks on any errand such as offering betel and keeping the precinct clean) hints at the use of betel at the monastery.

Betel is chewed all over Myanmar by people of various walks of life, high and low. Betel is chewed with slaked lime and areca nut, with slaked lime, areca nut, tobacco and some aromatic like licorice, cardamom for flavor and stimulation, and in the olden days with catechu and sweetening agents. However, today, no one is

found chewing betel with catechu. It is very likely that every betel chewer falls in the habit of taking betel quid with fermented or alcoholic tobacco called Sey Baung or Hnat Sey (Tobacco Soaked in the Alcoholic Drinks) in Myanmar or with intoxicants imported from India.

Approximately before 1990, there were only a few betel shops in each quarter in the outskirts of Yangon. The Indian-blooded Myanmar citizens mostly ran these shops. In those days, one of the significant characteristics of these betel shops seemed to be a coil of coconut-fiber rope with one tip catching fire. The coil was always seen hanging down at one outer corner of the shop for the customers to light their cheroot or cigarette as the shopkeepers could not afford to offer matchboxes and the gas lighters were also not in vogue at that time. There were two pots: one for slaked lime and the other for catechu in any typical betel shop in those days. Most of the intoxicants and other aromatic covered tobacco, licorice, clove, aniseed, cardamom, turmeric and a few imported brands from India like Signal, Saga and Muski.

As for intoxicants as ingredients to a quid of betel, tobaccos like Sey Me (Dark brownish tobacco) and Sey War (Yellowish tobacco) are very common with Myanmar betel chewers in addition to Sey Baung and Hnat Sey. Furthermore, flavored tobacco imported from India or locally produced are also

available such as No (92), (45), (100), Signal, Saga, etc. There is also Gutkha that is a dry, relatively non-perishable, containing areca nut, slaked lime, catechu, condiments and powdered tobacco. The same mixture without tobacco is called Pan masala. Both come in foil sachets or packets. However, they are available only in downtown Yangon, but not in the outskirts.

As a cultural aspect, the day before the Buddhist Sabbath is known to Myanmar as Aphate Nay (Aphate Day). However, the day before Aphate Day was once termed as Kwam Phate Nay (the day on which oral invitation to a particular charity or donation is carried out by distributing betel to every household in a particular neighborhood). This custom has already been extinct in Myanmar both rural and urban. Besides, "Kwam-hte" culture is almost unknown to all. In fact, it is nothing but an act of regarding the presiding monk and the newly ordained monks as teachers by offering them with betel already brought in inside the betel-casket by the most beautiful damsel in the neighborhood called "Kwam-taung-kai" in Myanmar.

Now with the availability of the betel shops at every corner of the streets in downtown Yangon, the intangible culture like keeping the betel casket and serving the guests is brought on the brink of extinction. There is none that bothers to keep the betel casket at home both in downtown Yangon and the outskirts apart from the old-aged people who continue to preserve the culture knowingly or unknowingly.

The betel shops are penetrating and replacing the previous culture with momentum. Bronze or iron areca nut cutter, (Kwam Hnyat) beautifully cast with mythical figures, are very likely to have

sunk into oblivion in the similar manner with the disappearance of the bronze or golden or lacquer baskets. At the festivals of Ordination and the like, the term Kwam Taung (betel casket) has become corrupted into Kwam Taun (in Myanmar, ကွမ်းတောင်းကိုင်း မှ ကွမ်းတောင်းကိုင်း) which corresponds to Betel-casket bearer). On the occasion, the betel casket bearer (they are very likely to be the most beautiful girl in the neighborhood) does not actually hold the betel casket. Instead, they carry the aluminum casket filled with the yellow robe. Actually, the term / Kwam Taung/ and the term /kwam hte/ are very important for the ordination ceremony. /kwam the/ or /kwam phait/ stands for the act of offering to the preceptor (the master monk at the ordination ceremony) with the offertory (betel) by which it means a request put forward to the presiding monk in order to accept the novice as his pupil. As regards betel as an offertory to the Lord Buddha, Myanmar people no longer regard betel as a flower to offer. It may be because there is a lack of knowledge on the etymology of the word "betel" (Kwam in Myanmar) which in its original sense stands for "something to adore, admire or worship" in Myanmar. Therefore, betel as an offertory can be found only on some of the Nat (Spirit) worshipping occasions like U Shin Gyi Worship). As for spreading culture of betel chewing among Myanmar youths, many of their reasons go to making themselves feel like a man, behaving the same way as their elders do or to entertain a feeling of importance among their interlocutors or in front of their different sex and getting rid of their bad breath. Remedial activity may be nothing but raising public awareness on the effects of intoxicants and aromatics in a betel quid.

All in all, by establishing the

modern trend of betel-chewing culture, it does not simply mean that the extinction of the said culture is subject only to the replacement of the modern trend. There may be other factors remaining to be explored. The article is merely a humble attempt to highlight the importance of conservation of an intangible culture in Myanmar. It is hoped that at the biddings hopefully stemmed from the present article, other researchers also explore these factors to the extent that there is no stone unturned in terms of the betel chewing culture in Myanmar.

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PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA.ORG

Assad says he can form new Syria government with opposition

MOSCOW/BEIRUT

President Bashar al-Assad said it would not be difficult to agree on a new Syrian government including opposition figures, but his opponents responded on Wednesday that no administration would be legitimate while he remained in office.

Assad, bolstered by military victory in the desert city of Palmyra, was quoted by Russia's RIA news agency as saying a new draft constitution could be ready in weeks and a government that included opposition, independents and loyalists could be agreed.

While the distribution of portfolios and other technical issues would need to be discussed at Geneva peace talks, which resume next month, "these are not difficult questions", Assad said.

Opposition negotiators immediately dismissed Assad's remarks, saying that a political settlement could be reached only by establishing a transitional body with full powers, not another government under Assad.

"What Bashar al-Assad is talking about has no relation to the political process," said George Sabra of the High Negotiations Committee.

The United States also rejected Assad's comments. "I don't know whether he envisioned himself being a part of that national



An aid convoy of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent enters the Wafideen Camp, controlled by Syrian government forces, near a poster of Syria's president Bashar al-Assad, to deliver aid into the rebel-held besieged Douma neighbourhood of Damascus, on 4 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

unity government. Obviously that would be a nonstarter for us," White House spokesman Josh Earnest said.

Syria's crisis erupted five years ago with protests against Assad which were put down with force. It descended into a civil war which has killed more than 250,000, drawn in global military powers and helped Islamic State

establish its self-declared caliphate. Nearly five million refugees have been driven abroad.

At a conference in Geneva, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on countries to resettle nearly half a million Syrian refugees in the next three years.

"This demands an exponential increase in global solidarity," he said, though his appeal won im-

mediate responses from only three countries — Italy, Sweden and the United States.

Assad told RIA the war had cost more than \$200 billion in economic losses and damage to infrastructure. That is in line with a UN-backed body which estimates physical damage at \$90 billion, with an additional \$169 billion of accumulated losses from a

collapse in GDP to less than half the 2011 level.

Despite Assad's upbeat assessment of the chances for a political solution, his comments reflected deep differences with the opposition. It says that for the last four years international agreements on Syria's future have centered on the principle of setting up a transitional governing body.

Assad's opponents have understood that such a body would have full powers, and that he would not play a further role.

But the president said the very idea of a transitional body was "illogical and unconstitutional".

"That's why the solution is forming a national unity government which prepares for a new constitution," he said, adding that its formation would be agreed in Geneva.

Russia's six-month-old intervention in Syria helped to swing military momentum in Assad's favor, reversing last summer's gains by insurgents including Western-backed rebels and helping government forces to drive Islamic State out of Palmyra on Sunday.

The recapture of the Palmyra and its military airport, in the central Syrian desert, opens up the road further east to the Islamic State bastions of Deir al-Zor Province and Raqqa.—Reuters

Libya's UN-backed Presidential Council reaches Tripoli by ship

TRIPOLI — Members of Libya's UN-backed Presidential Council reached Tripoli by ship on Wednesday, defying attempts to keep them out of the city and prevent them from installing a unity government.

Seven members of the Council including Fayeze Seraj, its head and the new government's prime minister, arrived from Tunisia at Tripoli's Abusita naval base amid tight security.

The situation in Tripoli remains volatile, and hours after their arrival clashes erupted between supporters and opponents of the Council. A key TV channel that backs a separate, self-declared government in Tripoli was taken off air. A self-declared government and armed groups that back it had warned the Council and the unity government not to travel to the capital. Tripoli's airspace was closed for several hours on Sunday and Monday, a move the Council said was designed to prevent it from reaching Libya.

Seraj told Reuters that the council members had travelled in a Libyan navy vessel from the Tunisian port of Sfax, a 12-hour journey.

"There are challenges ahead of us, including uniting Libyans



Libyan Prime Minister-designate Fayeze Seraj (R) is greeted upon arrival in Tripoli, Libya, on 30 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

and healing divisions," he said after arriving. He later made a brief statement saying the government would release a programme in the coming days.

"We will work for a ceasefire across Libya, for national reconciliation and the return of displaced people, and we will seek to confront Islamic State," he said. The government of national accord (GNA) emerged from a UN-mediated deal signed in December aimed at ending the country's political impasse, resolving its armed

conflict and tackling a growing threat from Islamic State jihadists. Western powers have recognised it as Libya's sole legitimate government, but it has faced opposition in both eastern and western Libya.

Since 2014 Libya has had two competing pairs of parliaments and governments, both backed by loose alliances of armed brigades. The government in Tripoli was brought to power by armed factions that won a battle for control of the capital in 2014.—Reuters

Air strikes target al Qaeda in Yemen, troops control Aden district

ADEN — At least four suspected al Qaeda militants in southern Yemen were killed in what is believed to be a drone strike on Wednesday as unidentified warplanes bombed outposts held by the Islamist militant group further east, witnesses and local residents said.

The four suspected militants were killed when what was thought to be a US drone fired on a checkpoint at the entrance of the city of Azan in southern Yemen.

It was not immediately possible to confirm the accounts by the residents, who said the militants had seized the city two months ago. The United States has acknowledged using drones but declines to comment on specific attacks.

The stepped-up air strikes came as forces loyal to President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi conducted a security operation against militants in al-Mansoura district of Aden, trying to end a state of chaos that had gripped the southern port city where the Yemeni government is temporarily based.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Islamic State have exploited the year-old Yemen war between Hadi supporters, who are

backed by a Saudi-led alliance, and Iran-allied Houthis to seize parts of the country, including the Hadramout provincial capital in southeastern Yemen.

Residents said unidentified warplanes launched three strikes on a former Yemeni army camp east of Mukalla controlled by al Qaeda late on Wednesday night.

They said the air strikes ignited a fire at the old al-Rayyan air base that could be seen from several miles away. Residents said they believed the attacks have caused casualties, but provided no figures.

The militants seized Mukalla in April last year, a month after a Saudi-led alliance began military operations trying to restore Hadi to power after he was forced to flee his temporary headquarters in Aden by the advancing Houthi forces.

Last week, US warplanes struck a training camp run by al Qaeda, killing at least 50 people and wounding more than 30.

A local al Qaeda commander said in an audio recording posted on the Internet on Wednesday that the camp was being used to train tribal volunteers to fight the Houthis.—Reuters

China-led AIIB eyes first loans to India

NEW DELHI — India hopes to receive one of the first loans issued by the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) later this year, as it looks to raise \$500 million for solar power projects from the newly created lender, Indian officials said.

Funding for clean energy projects would allay fears of environmental lobbyists that the bank's relaxed lending criteria could promote dirty fuels like coal in developing economies, like India, that are in a hurry to ramp up energy output.

The multilateral investment bank, which has authorised capital of \$100 billion, plans to join global clean-energy initiatives, and could fund eco-friendly investment projects to avoid allegations of promoting pollution.

India, the bank's second biggest shareholder after China, is looking to borrow from the AIIB, a senior official said, to back

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's plan of expanding installed solar capacity to 100 gigawatts by 2022.

"In about six months, funds could start flowing from AIIB," Tarun Kapur, joint secretary at the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, told Reuters.

Interest on the loan is likely to be 2-2.5 per cent and would be linked to LIBOR — a floating benchmark based on the rate at which commercial banks lend to each other — for a term of over 15 years. The AIIB, which is headquartered in Beijing and was launched in January, did not comment directly on borrowing by India but said it was developing a project pipeline in a number of countries.

"It is expected that the first loan decisions will be taken later this year," it said in written answers to questions submitted by Reuters.—Reuters

With Galaxy S7, Samsung seen rediscovering its mobile mojo

SEOUL — Early indications of stronger-than-expected sales of new Galaxy S7 smartphones suggest technology giant Samsung Electronics Co Ltd is emerging from a two-year decline at its flagship mobile business.

Squeezed by Apple Inc in premium products and undercut by Chinese rivals like Huawei [HWT.UL] in cheaper devices, Samsung's smartphone profits and global market share have fallen and sapped momentum at South Korea's most valuable company.

But several brokerages on Wednesday upgraded first-quarter forecasts for what is still the world's top smartphone maker, citing a strong start for the Galaxy S7 and S7 edge premium phones that were launched earlier this month.

Samsung likely shipped 9.5



A model demonstrates a Samsung Electronics' new smartphone Galaxy S7 during its launching ceremony in Seoul, South Korea, on 10 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

million S7 phones in the first quarter, significantly more than the initial estimate for 7 million, Jay Yoo, industry analyst at Korea Investment & Securities, wrote in a report.

"It looks like the sell-in numbers have been pretty good and analysts are raising their sales forecasts for the S7 this

year," noted HDC Asset Management fund manager Park Jung-hoon.

"The firm is pushing up volume in the mid-to-low tier to protect market share. Starting S7 sales about a month earlier than the S6 to take advantage of Apple not having new products out yet was also a good move."

Getting Samsung's mobile business back on track is important for Vice Chairman Jay Y. Lee, the de facto leader of family-run conglomerate Samsung Group, to show his ability to manage the sprawling electronics-to-fashion business, some investors say.

Samsung shares gained as much as 2.4 per cent on Wednesday to an 18-week high. The stock is up by more than a fifth since mid-January following a 22 per cent slide over the previous three months.—Reuters



A man looks at an electronic board showing market indices outside a brokerage in Tokyo, Japan, on 2 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

Asian stocks edge up to four-month high, dollar sags on Fed caution

TOKYO — Asian shares edged up to a four-month high yesterday as receding worries of near-term US interest rate hikes continued to buoy investors' appetite for riskier assets.

But spreadbetters forecast a slightly lower open for Britain's FTSE, Germany's DAX and France's CAC, with sliding crude oil prices expected to prevent European stocks from extending the previous day's rally.

The dollar hovered near seven-week lows versus the euro, still gripped by cautious comments from Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen earlier in the week on monetary tightening.

MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan was up 0.1 per cent, briefly reach-

ing its highest since early December. The index was poised to eke out a gain of 1 per cent this quarter, which saw equities rocked earlier by global growth worries, and particularly for the Chinese economy. Japan's Nikkei rose 0.2 per cent, on track for an 11 per cent loss on the quarter as the yen firmed against the flagging dollar, while Australian stocks added 1.5 per cent.

Shanghai shares climbed 0.5 per cent, en route to a quarterly drop of about 15 per cent.

Risk appetite has increased since Fed Chair Yellen said on Tuesday that the US central bank should proceed cautiously as it looks to hike rates, pushing back against some colleagues who have suggested another move may be

just around the corner.

"Fed Chair Janet Yellen's speech earlier this week is still dragging the dollar down, sparking risk appetite globally," said Kim Moon-il, a foreign exchange analyst at Eugene Futures in Seoul.

Yellen's views were echoed by Chicago Fed President Charles Evans, who said on Wednesday there was a high hurdle to raising rates in April, given low inflation. Following such cautious views from top Fed officials, the Dow climbed 0.5 per cent and the S&P 500 rose 0.4 per cent overnight.

The CBOE Market Volatility Index, Wall Street's "fear gauge", ended down 1.9 per cent at its lowest level since August.—Reuters

Microsoft's Windows 10 reaches 270 million users, no mobile numbers

SAN FRANCISCO — The latest version of Microsoft Corp's Windows operating system has 270 million active users eight months after launch, the world's largest software company said on Wednesday.

The number, announced by executive Terry Myerson at Microsoft's annual gathering for developers in San Francisco, represents a solid start for Windows 10 after the tepid reaction to its predecessor, Windows 8.

Getting its Windows strategy right is a key part of Microsoft's plans to stay relevant in a mobile-centric world where rivals like Amazon.com Inc, Apple Inc and Alphabet Inc's Google carry more clout with many consumers and developers.

One reason for the rapid take-up is that Windows 10, released in July, is free for individual consumers who download it during its

first year. Enterprise customers must pay for Windows 10.

An anniversary upgrade to be released this summer will also be free for users already running Windows 10, Myerson said on Wednesday.

The giveaway is effectively an admission by Microsoft that few individuals are willing to pay for software, and represents a shift to a strategy embraced by most tech startups of attracting as many users as possible and nailing down how to make money later.

Microsoft laid out its business case last year: the more consumer devices run on Windows, the more potential targets it gains for advertising sales and for its own paid-for applications and services.

Myerson said before launch he was aiming for 1 billion devices running Windows 10 within a few years.—Reuters



Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella delivers the keynote address during the Microsoft Build 2016 Developer Conference in San Francisco, California, on 30 March. PHOTO: REUTERS



Parents of the Chibok girls hold a "Bring Back Our Girls" banner during their meeting with Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari at the presidential villa in Abuja, Nigeria, on 14 January 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Dozens feared missing after migrant boat sinks off Libya

TRIPOLI/ROME — Dozens of migrants were feared missing after their boat sank off Libya on Wednesday, a spokesman for the country's naval forces said, amid signs of a sharp increase in the number of people attempting the dangerous crossing from North Africa to Europe.

Earlier Italian officials said their coast guard and navy vessels had rescued 1,361 migrants on Wednesday from boats and rubber dinghies in the southern Mediterranean.

The Libyan spokesman, Ayoub Qassem, said

naval guards had intercepted one boat carrying 120 migrants off the coast near Sabratha and had also managed to rescue 32 from the boat which sank. It was not known exactly how many people were missing.

More than 16,000 people have made the crossing from north Africa to Italy in the first three months of 2016, some 6,000 more than in the same period last year.

The number of new arrivals is expected to climb further in coming months as warmer, more stable weather kicks in, making it easier for people traffickers

to put the boats to sea.

The Italian coast guard said that after saving some 3,680 people over the past three days a further 350 migrants, most believed to be minors, had been spotted on a boat off Sicily and an operation was under way to bring them ashore.

Italian officials have also warned that a deal to limit the number of migrants travelling via Turkey to Greece could increase the flows through Libya to Italy.

However, until now, the vast majority of migrants using the Mediterranean route have

continued to come from sub-Saharan Africa, with no significant increase in the number of Syrians, Afghans or Iraqis, who have mostly been using the Greek route. Hundreds of thousands of migrants have reached Italy in recent years, looking for a better life in the West.

Most are believed to have moved swiftly on to wealthier northern Europe, taking advantage of the European Union's passport-free travel zone, but moves to suspend the border pact could make it much more difficult for them to leave.—Reuters

Suspected suicide bomber not one of Nigeria's missing Chibok girls

ABUJA — A suspected suicide bomber intercepted in northern Cameroon last week before she could blow herself up is not one of 219 schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram in the Nigerian town of Chibok in 2014, an African public advocacy group said on Wednesday.

The abduction of about 270 school girls by the Islamist militant group sparked international outrage and a campaign for their safe return. Some 50 of the girls managed to escape but 219 are still missing. The Murtala Muhammed Foundation (MMF), a non-government organisation, partnered with Nigeria's government to

help parents from Chibok verify the girl's identity after she claimed to be among the missing students.

Nigeria's government had said it was keen to ascertain the girl's identity so that she could possibly assist the government in investigations regarding the fate and whereabouts of the missing Chibok girls.

MMF chief Aisha Muhammed-Oyebode said three representatives of parents of the missing students looked at photographs of the girl and a woman she was arrested with and said they "do not fit the description of any of the missing daughters from Chibok". She said the

Nigerian government told her group on Tuesday that the girl identified herself as a 12-year-old originally from Maiduguri, northeast Nigeria, who was abducted from Bama about 60 km (40 miles) away, when the town was overrun by Boko Haram a year ago.

The woman was said to have identified herself as a 35-year-old mother of two. Muhammed-Oyebode said the pair had been handed to the Nigerian military and were returning to Nigeria. Former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan was criticised for his slow reaction to the Chibok kidnappings, which was seen by

some as indicative of his response to Boko Haram, which at its strongest held large swathes of northeastern Nigeria.

President Muhammadu Buhari, who defeated Jonathan in an election last year, ordered a new investigation into the abductions in January.

Joint operations between Nigeria and neighbouring countries drove Boko Haram from many of its strongholds last year but the group has stepped up cross-border attacks and suicide bombings, many of which have been carried out by young girls.—Reuters

Trump sounds off on abortion; criticism comes from all sides

WASHINGTON — Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump said on Wednesday that women who end pregnancies should face punishment if the United States bans abortion, triggering a torrent of criticism from both sides of the abortion debate, including from his White House rivals.

After MSNBC broadcast a clip of an interview with Trump, the billionaire businessman rowed back his remarks, first saying that the abortion issue should be handled by states and later that doctors who performed abortions should be the ones held responsible.

"The doctor or any other person performing this illegal act upon a woman would be held legally responsible, not the woman," Trump said in his last statement. "The woman is a victim in this case as is the life in her womb."

Trump's earlier statements drew heavy fire from abortion rights supporters and opponents alike.

Abortion has long been a divisive issue in American politics, even though the procedure was legalized in a Supreme Court ruling more than 40 years ago. Opposition to abortion has become a central plank in the platform of most conservative politicians.

Trump has won support from Republican voters for selling himself as a Washington outsider. But the New York real estate tycoon, who once supported abortion access, has come under pressure from conservatives to prove he is truly one of them. At the same

time, he has drawn criticism for comments that offended women and minority groups.

"Of course, women shouldn't be punished," rival Republican candidate John Kasich said on Wednesday, saying he opposed abortion except in specific cases such as rape.

US Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, the third candidate for the Republican nomination for the 8 November election, said Trump had not thought through the issue. "What's far too often neglected is that being pro-life is not simply about the unborn child, it's also about the mother," he said in a statement.

Abortion rights supporters were equally incensed.

"What Donald Trump said was outrageous and dangerous. I'm constantly taken aback at the kinds of things that he advocates for," Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton told MSNBC. "Once again, he has showed us who he is."

Dawn Laguens of the Planned Parenthood Action Fund, the political arm of the women's health group, called Trump "flat-out dangerous" in a statement.

Abortion was legalized in the United States in 1973, when the Supreme Court declared that a woman's constitutional right to privacy protected her decision to end a pregnancy.

In the decades since, there have not been enough votes on the Supreme Court to reverse the ruling, but numerous states have passed laws aimed at restricting abortion.—Reuters

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV WEST SCENT VOY NO (109N)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV WEST SCENT VOY NO (109N) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 1.4.2016 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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Huge seawall at Hamaoka plant completed to protect against tsunami

SHIZUOKA (Japan) — Chubu Electric Power Co said yesterday it has finished building a huge seawall at its Hamaoka nuclear power plant in Shizuoka Prefecture to protect the facility from a tsunami triggered by a massive earthquake predicted by scientists.

The construction of the seawall, which stands 22 metres above sea level and 1.6 kilometres in length, began in November 2011 after a huge earthquake and tsunami triggered triple meltdowns at the Fukushi-

ma Daiichi nuclear power plant of Tokyo Electric Power Co in March 2011.

Located on the Pacific coast in central Japan, the Hamaoka complex is believed to be situated at what would be the epicenter of a potential massive earthquake in the Nankai Trough running south of Japan's mainland.

The seawall was built higher than the originally planned 18 metres as the government estimated that tsunami waves as high as 19 metres could strike the nuclear power plant.

In the case of a magnitude 9.0 earthquake originating off the Suruga Bay or the Sea of Enshu — which stretches along the Shizuoka Prefecture coast — the city of Omaezaki, where the Hamaoka plant is situated, could be hit by a quake registering 7, the maximum on the Japanese seismic intensity scale, the Shizuoka prefectural government said.

Tsunami waves as high as 19 metres would be expected to hit the coast 20 minutes after the quake, it said.

“We have strived to enhance safety in accordance with our belief that there is no option to abandon nuclear power,” Tatsuya Muramatsu, chief of Chubu Electric's Hamaoka regional office, said after confirming the completion of construction. “With this (wall), we have completed efforts to built anti-quake measures for now,” he added. The Hamaoka plant suspended operation in May 2011 due to safety concerns at the request of then-prime minister Naoto Kan.—*Kyodo News*



Chubu Electric Power Co's Hamaoka nuclear plant in central Japan: Construction of a coastal levee to protect against tsunami from a possible Nankai Trough earthquake will be completed on 31 March. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

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Accumulators, electric; acidimeters for batteries; alkaline batteries; amplifier; anode batteries; answering machines; audio tapes and discs; batteries for lighting; batteries for mobile phones; batteries for pocket lamps; batteries, electric, for vehicles; batteries; battery boxes; battery chargers for mobile phones; battery jars; button batteries; calculators; camcorder batteries; camcorders; cameras; cassette players; cathode ray tube computer monitors; cathode ray tube displays; chargers for electric batteries; battery chargers; clocks(time-) [time recording devices]; clock radios; colour televisions, including pure flat colour televisions; television apparatus; compact disc changers; portable audio compact disc players; compact disc recorders; compact discs[read-only memory]; compact discs [audio-video]; compact radio cassette recorders; connectors[electricity]; cordless phone batteries; cylindrical battery cells; decoders; receivers (audio-and video-); digital cameras; camcorders; cameras (cinematographic-); cameras [photography]; digital plasma displays; digital readout tuners; gauges with digital readout; programmable digital read-out units; digital synthesized tuners; digital to analog audio converters; digital video disc changers; digital video disc players; digital video disc receivers; digital video disc recorders; digital/ audio converters; analog to digital audio receivers; earphones[other than hearing aids for the deaf]; irons (flat-), electric; equalizers; galvanic batteries; grids for batteries; headphones; high tension batteries; light emitting diode display; liquid crystal display computer monitors; liquid crystal display television monitors; liquid crystal display television; liquid crystal display screens; lithium batteries; lithium-ion batteries; manganese alkaline batteries;

microphones; mobile telephones; multisystem colour televisions; nautical apparatus and instruments; naval signaling apparatus; navigation apparatus for vehicles[on board computers]; navigational instruments; nickel cadmium batteries; nickel cadmium cordless phone batteries; nickel cadmium cylindrical cells; nickel metal-hydride batteries; plasma televisions; plates for batteries; portable telephones; prismatic cells; projection televisions; projectors; projection apparatus; projection screens; radio cassette players; radio/double cassette combo players with facility for sing-along; rechargeable batteries; record players; recorded disk players; remote control units; selectors; channel selectors for television; silver - oxide batteries; solar batteries; sound alarms; speaker systems; speakers [audio equipment]; personal stereo speaker apparatus; public address speaker systems; super flat colour televisions; tape recorders; telephone apparatus; telephone receivers; telephone transmitters; telescopic antennas; antennas; antennas; television receivers; transformers [electric]; tuners; amplifier tuners; amplitude modulation tuners; electronic tuners; line tuners; radio tuners; signal tuners; stereo tuners; video tuners; vacuum fluorescent display; video cassette players; video cassette recorders; video compact disc players; video tapes and discs; video recording discs; wireless telephones; zinc oxide batteries; all included in class 9.

Apparatus for lighting, heating, steam generating, cooking, refrigerating, drying, ventilating, water supply and sanitary purposes; Air conditioning apparatus; Air cooling apparatus; Air deodorizing apparatus; Air dryers; Air filtering installations; Air heaters, air reheaters, heating apparatus [electric]; Air (ionization apparatus for the treatment of -); Air purifying apparatus and machines; Air sterilizers; Apparatus for generating steam for cooking purposes; Autoclaves [electric pressure cookers]; Bakers' ovens; Barbecues; Bath (heaters for -); Bath fittings (hot air-); Bath installations (sauna-); Bedwarmers; Beverages cooling apparatus; Central heating radiators; Coffee filters [electric]; Coffee machines [electric]; Coffee percolators [electric]; Coffee roasters; Coils [parts of distilling, heating or cooling installations]; Cooking apparatus and installations; Cooking rings; Cooking utensils [electric]; Cooling appliances and installations; Cooling installations and machines; Cooling installations for liquids; Cooling installations for water; Convectional ovens and ovens, other than for experimental purposes; Deep fryers [electric]; Drying apparatus and installations; Electric cookers; Energy saving lights; Fans [electric] for personal use; Filters for air conditioning; Filters for drinking water; Freezers; Fruit roasters; Griddles [cooking appliances]; Grills [cooking appliances]; Hair dryers; Hand drying apparatus for washrooms; Heaters[electric] for feeding bottles; Heating apparatus [electric]; Heating plates; Home bread markers; Hoods (extractor-) for kitchens; Hot plates; Ice chests; Ice machines and apparatus; Kettles [electric]; Kitchen ranges [ovens]; Laundry dryers [electric]; Microwave ovens [cooking apparatus]; Plate warmers; Portable lightings such as torchlights; Pressure cooking saucepans [electric]; Refrigerating apparatus and machines ;Refrigerating appliances and installations; Refrigerating cabinets; Refrigerating chambers; Refrigerating containers; Refrigerators; Rotisseries; Steam cookers; Steam generators for domestic use; Steam generating installations; Steam oven; Steamers; Steamers [electric] for cooking; Sterilizers; Stoves; Structural plates for ovens; Toasters; Waffle irons [electric]; Water heaters; Water purifying apparatus and machines; Chest freezer; Dehumidifier; Humidifiers; Ice machines and apparatus; Lanterns for lighting; Water dispenser for drinking water ;Wine cooler. (Int'l Class 11)

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Date: 1st April, 2016



PHOTO: REUTERS

Beyoncé gets surprise visit from Hillary Clinton

LOS ANGELES — Pop star Beyoncé received a visit from US presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton while filming a music video.

The “Drunk In Love” star, who is currently working on a new album, was recently in Los

Angeles shooting a promo for the record when a special guest joined her in the studio, according to *Us* magazine.

It is unclear if former Secretary of State Clinton will appear in the video or what the purpose

of the set visit was, but she has often heaped praise on Beyoncé in the past, and she’s clearly a fan.

“I want to be as good a president as Beyoncé is a performer,” she had said.—*PTI*

Harrison Ford uses the force for good

NEW YORK — The battered leather jacket worn by Harrison Ford in the latest “Star Wars” movie has been put up for auction in New York to help a cause dear to the actor’s heart. Ford, 73, signed and donated Han Solo’s “Star Wars: The Force Awakens” jacket to help raise money for research into epilepsy — a condition he recently revealed that his adult daughter Georgia Ford suffers from.

Harrison said he was impressed with the work done by the FACES (Finding a Cure for Epilepsy and Seizures) unit at New York University’s Langone Medical Center. “I hope this jacket will provide some means to further that exploration. This is a cause that is near and dear to me and unlike the cynical Han Solo, I’ve got a good feeling about this,” he said.

Harrison told reporters earlier in March that his daughter Georgia, 26, had suffered seizures since she was a child and that doctors at the Langone Medical center had finally diagnosed epilepsy as the cause some eight years ago.

Bidding for the leather jacket stood at \$33,000 on Wednesday (March 30) and the online auction continues until 11 April at the website.—*Reuters*

Actress Fujiwara, Kabuki actor Kataoka tie the knot

TOKYO — Actress Norika Fujiwara and Kabuki actor Kataoka Ainosuke tied the knot on Wednesday, their management agencies said, after they announced being in a relationship in August.

Fujiwara and Kataoka, both 44, held a press conference in Tokyo yesterday to talk about their nuptials.

It is the first marriage for Kataoka, a native of Sakai, Osaka Prefecture. In addition to being an actor of the traditional Japanese

performing art, Kataoka also acts in modern dramas with his performance as a Financial Services Agency inspector in the megahit 2013 TV drama series “Hanzawa Naoki” seeing his popularity rise.

Fujiwara, hailing from Nishinomiya, Hyogo Prefecture, divorced comedian Tomonori Jinnai, 42, in March 2009, about two years after marrying him.

Fujiwara, also a model, is a popular television and theater actress.—*Kyodo News*



Actor Kataoka Ainosuke & Actress Norika Fujiwara. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

I like myself more at 35: Jessica Alba

LOS ANGELES — Actress Jessica Alba will ring in her 35th birthday in just under a month, and the mother-of-two says she likes herself way more now than she did a decade ago.

Alba said she is excited about her upcoming birthday celebrations, reported *E!Online*.

“I have to say I like me better at 35 than at 25,” she said.

“I definitely went through a crisis at 25, 26, 27. I don’t know, it was like a 3-year crisis. Then I had honour at 28, and I felt like everything just kind of fell into place and made sense. I feel really good now, and I’m excited about turning 35.”

Talking about her birthday plans, Alba dished, “I’m trying to figure out a fun birthday. I’m thinking maybe a girls’ thing with some of my friends. Then, I was thinking something at my house.—*PTI*



PHOTO: REUTERS

World’s largest film screen poised to impress Chinese audience

HEFEI — A Chinese company has developed an extra-large film screen, measuring 100 by 25 metres.

The manufacturer, Star Screen Co., Ltd. in east China’s Anhui Province, spent two years developing the 1.6-tonne screen, which has been recognised as the world’s largest by the science and technology committee of the state film administration.

The company overcame several technical difficulties in screen evenness, spraying and transportation.

Some technical specifications of the final product are even better than the national standard, said Yang Xuepei, deputy director of the committee.

“Take polarization ratio for example: a higher ratio means a better 3D effect, while a substandard screen brings viewers sore eyes and dizziness,” said Yang.

Eight orders from cinemas and movie theme parks have been placed for the screen, and the company is expecting more orders after the official launch.

Over 3,300 new cinemas opened across the country over the past five years, with the number of screens soaring to 31,000, said Lin Minjie, general manager of China Film Equipment Company.

The new screen will be made to fit the China Film Giant Screen (CGS), a large format film system jointly developed by the China Film Company and China Research Institute of Film Science and Technology.

Launched in 2011, the CGS has become one of the fastest-growing high-end digital movie exhibition systems in the world, according to Lin. Of the 350 giant screens available in China, 133 have adopted the CGS system.

“CGS has been exported to

the United States, India, Indonesia, Thailand and will soon enter the European market including France and Russia,” Lin said.

China’s box office sales in 2015 hit 44 billion yuan (6.75 billion US dollars), up 48.7 per cent from 2014 and a whopping 235.9 per cent from 2011.

Monthly ticket sales in February reached 6.87 billion yuan, overtaking that of North America for the first time, official data showed. Last year alone, 8,000 new screens were installed nationwide, with 6,700, or 80 per cent of them, produced by Star Screen.

“Alongside the breathtaking growth of box office sales, China’s own film equipment industry is also booming,” Lin said. “More film projectors, servers, screens and sound equipment with independent proprietary intellectual property rights are made in China.” —*Xinhua*

Child labour rises in Gaza amid soaring unemployment

GAZA — Child labour has risen sharply in Gaza, where youngsters toiling in garages and on construction sites have become breadwinners for families feeling the brunt of the Palestinian enclave's 43 per cent unemployment rate.

In the past five years, the number of working children between the ages of 10 and 17 has doubled to 9,700 in the territory, according to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics.

The bureau said 2,900 of those children are below the legal employment age of 15. Economists in the narrow coastal strip, home to 1.9 million Palestinians, estimate the real number of underage workers could be twice as high.

The increase in Gaza goes against trends. The International Labour Organisation says the worldwide number of children in labour has fallen by a third since 2000, from 246 million to 168 million, with more than a fifth in sub-Saharan Africa.

At one garage in downtown Gaza, 16-year-old Mahmoud Yazji and another

boy, aged 12, work nine hours a day. Mahmoud said he earns the equivalent of \$13 a week; the younger boy takes home half of that.

"My father makes 1,000 shekels (\$258) a month. It disappears in a few days and we struggle for the rest of the month," Mahmoud said.

Haitham Khzaiq, 16, quit school six months ago to sell candy apples to visitors at Gaza's newly developed seaport, a major picnic venue. He works a half-day, seven days a week, and said he earns a total of 20 shekels (\$5).

"We are five brothers and eight sisters. I am the oldest son and I had to work because my father is unemployed," he said. "I don't earn enough but it is better than nothing and it is better than begging people for money."

A devastating 2014 war between Palestinian militants and Israel, border restrictions imposed by Israel and Egypt and the destruction of cross-border smuggling tunnels by an Egyptian government at odds with Gaza's Hamas rulers have



Palestinian boy Mahmoud al-Sindawi, 15, sells balloons and footballs at the Seaport of Gaza City on 17 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

contributed to economic hardship in the territory.

The United Nations estimates that 80 per cent of the population is aid dependent, with unemployment rising to its current level from around 35 per cent five years ago.

"Some people are living like kings and many others like us are hardly finding anything to eat," said 10-year-old Mohammed, who sells potato chips on the street and began working af-

ter his father, a construction labourer, lost his job.

A gap is evident on the Gaza beachfront, where child vendors lugging trays of tea, coffee and snacks mingle with other children using expensive cellphones to record their family picnics. Several smart hotels overlook the port and beachfront.

A Dutch-funded organisation, El-Wedad Society for Community Rehabilitation, has been running a pro-

ject for three years aimed at convincing families in Gaza of the importance of returning working children to the classroom.

"We are very worried. We feel children's rights are being trampled on," said Naem al-Ghalban, who heads the society.

Its representatives visit the homes of working children they meet on the street and invite them to guidance sessions at the organisation's headquarters.

Children are taken for visits to Gaza's colleges to show them what could lie ahead if they go back to school.

Ghalban said that over the past three years, some 50 working children have taken up their studies again as a result of the organisation's efforts.

"We have managed to persuade some families that educating their children is far better and more valuable than the little money they make," he said.—Reuters

Osaka art museum houses collection in sophisticated setting

OSAKA — An art museum established by a textile firm in Izumi, Osaka, houses a collection that once belonged to the founding family of the now-defunct company inside a complex renowned for its sophisticated design.

The Kuboso Memorial Museum of Arts holds some 11,000 objects such as bronze and earthen wares from China, western paint-

ings, and Japanese calligraphic works and paintings including about 6,000 "ukiyo-e" woodblock prints.

The museum's air of luxury is created by spacious buildings constructed in the style of a "sukiya" or tea-ceremony house, a beautiful garden and other facilities.

Named after the cotton weaving company, Kuboso, it is regarded as a pioneer

among museums based on personal art collections.

Kuboso was established in the city of Izumi by Sotaro Kubo in 1886 and contributed to the rise of the textile industry in Osaka. But it went out of business in 1977 amid an industry slump.

Kuboso and the founding Kubo family, when they pulled the plug on the business, built a museum and

donated it, together with its land and some 500 artworks, to the city. With the company and family donating more artworks, the museum has increased its collection and facilities since its opening in 1982.

Kuboso Memorial is a "top-level public museum having two national treasures and 29 important cultural properties," curator Rieko Unai said.

Visitors enter the front gate in the new building completed in 1997 and walk through an outdoor garden, with a beautiful collection of well-maintained trees and plants that seasonally bloom, to the main building.

A tea-ceremony house, built before the Pacific War, stands near the main building. The museum also has a music hall that accommodates more than 100 people.

While concerts are held at the hall mainly on weekends, there are many frequent visitors because separate fees are not required on top of door charges paid at the front gate.

For the museum's 35th anniversary next year, "we are preparing various events that will enable visitors to enjoy wonderful artworks whenever they come here," Unai said.—Kyodo News

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07:26	Am	A Day Life Of Kayan Padaung Tribe
07:54	Am	Scented Buddha Images
08:03	Am	News
08:26	Am	Myanmar Traditional Instruments (MYANMA DRUM)
08:51	Am	Thingyan Songs & Dances
09:03	Am	News
09:26	Am	Irawaddy Dolphin (Part- I)
09:41	Am	Irawaddy Dolphin (Part- II)
09:54	Am	Creations of a Designer
10:03	Am	News

10:26	Am	Chanmyay Yeiktha Meditation Centre - Chaw Dwin Gone
10:42	Am	Amazing "Sayargyi Nyein Chan Aung"
10:53	Am	School for the Blind

(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	Travel To The Southern Part of Shan State (Kalaw)
07:45	Pm	Now in Yangon
07:52	Pm	Thingyan Songs & Dances
08:03	Pm	News
08:26	Pm	Creator of Imagination
08:52	Pm	Ngapali Beach: Fishing Villages

(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)

MRTV Entertainment Channel

(1-4-2016, Friday)

6:00 pm	• Weather Report • Music Programme	8:30 pm	• Cartoon Programme "BEN 10 ALIEN FORCE" (Part- 24)
6:30 pm	• Pyi Thu Ni Ti	9:00 pm	• Music Programme
6:50 pm	• Thingyan Dances	9:10 pm	• Wonderful Indonesia
7:00 pm	• International Drama Series	9:50 pm	• International Movie Songs
7:40 pm	• International Drama Series	10:10 pm	• Myanmar Video
		Midnight	• Close Down.

From 1-4-2016 (Friday) 6:00 Pm
To 2-4-2016 (Saturday) 6:00 Pm
This schedule will be repeated four times in 24 hours.

England team mates set to resume title rivalry

LONDON — Having combined seamlessly for England, the players of Leicester City and Tottenham Hotspur will resume battle in the Premier League title race this weekend with the two main protagonists facing testing fixtures.

Hostilities were put to one side as the likes of Leicester striker Jamie Vardy and Spurs counterpart Harry Kane both impressed as England won in Germany and lost at home to the Netherlands.

Yet with the international break over, Kane, one of five Spurs players in the England squad, and Vardy, who played alongside England debutant and club mate Danny Drinkwater, are back in opposing camps.

Kane, who scored against Germany, will be hoping that his team win at Liverpool on Saturday and narrow the gap to leaders Leicester, who play Southampton at home on Sunday.

Vardy, who scored his first two goals for England in Saturday's game in Berlin and Tuesday's match at Wembley, is hoping to get back on the scoresheet after five league games without a goal.

"The (England) goals can



England team mates during training at Olympiastadion, Berlin, Germany on 25 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

only be good for my confidence and I will hopefully be scoring again at the weekend," he said.

With only seven matches remaining, Leicester, seeking a

fourth straight win when they face Southampton, are top with 66 points, five ahead of Spurs on 61.

Arsenal are a further six behind with a game in hand and on

Saturday have a quick opportunity for revenge against Watford, who ended the Gunners' bid for a third successive FA Cup triumph when they beat them 2-1 at the Emirates three weeks ago.

Fourth-placed Manchester City, whose title hopes virtually evaporated when they lost 1-0 at home to Manchester United, travel to Bournemouth, while fifth-placed West Ham United will be looking to continue their top-four push at home to Crystal Palace.

Palace have tumbled from fifth on New Year's Day to 16th and will be desperate to end a run of 13 league matches without a win that has dropped them far too close to the relegation zone for comfort.

Bottom-placed Aston Villa, who sacked French manager Remi Garde on Tuesday, look to have very little chance of escaping and have caretaker Eric Black in charge for the visit of outgoing champions Chelsea on Saturday.

Unless Palace's nosedive continues, two from Norwich City, Sunderland and Newcastle United look set to go down with Villa.

Norwich are at home to Newcastle, who now have 11 players sidelined with injuries after goalkeeper Rob Elliot was ruled out for the season after damaging knee ligaments in Ireland's 2-2 draw with Slovakia.—*Reuters*

Azarenka beats Konta to reach Miami semis

MIAMI — Victoria Azarenka withstood some early pressure from Britain's Johanna Konta to continue her quest for a third Miami Open title with a 6-4, 6-2 quarter-final victory on Wednesday.

Azarenka, who 10 days ago beat Serena Williams to win the Indian Wells title in California, was too consistent for the 24th-seeded Konta in the end to keep alive her bid to capture the second half of the Sunshine Double.

She will now face second seed Angelique Kerber, who beat American Madison

Keys 6-3, 6-2.

Konta, playing her first quarter-final of a WTA Premier event after making her first grand slam semi-final at the Australian Open in January, more than held her own in a first set played in blustery conditions.

Azarenka, however, rose to the occasion to fend off five break points, while Konta double-faulted twice to drop serve as the Belarusian took charge in just over 90 minutes.

"She's such a great player," eighth-ranked Azarenka, the 2009 and 2011 champion, told ESPN. "I

see a lot of potential."

"I couldn't actually get a read on her serve in the beginning — it was tough for me to adjust — but then I got a bit lower and tried to get more returns in, be a bit more aggressive."

The British number one, who was ranked 151st in the world this time last year, took some satisfaction from the match.

"I'm happy with the level I was able to bring to the court," Konta, now ranked 23rd, told the BBC. "Obviously I'm disappointed that I couldn't have done a little bit better but I'm taking the positives from it."

Kerber, who won the Australian Open, lost the opening match of her two previous tournaments but was helped by 39 unforced errors by Keys, the last American remaining in either draw, who was not able to put much pressure on her German opponent.

The 28-year-old left hander upset Azarenka in the quarter-final at Melbourne Park then beat Konta in the last four and Serena in the final to claim her first grand slam title.—*Reuters*



Victoria Azarenka reaches for a backhand during day ten of the Miami Open at Crandon Park Tennis Centre, Key Biscayne, FL, USA on 30 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

I learned valuable lessons from last season, says Bale

BARCELONA — Gareth Bale learned valuable lessons from his disappointing Real Madrid campaign last season, he said on Wednesday.

The Wales forward enjoyed a dream first season at the Bernabeu after a world record 85.3 million pounds (\$122.67 million) move from Tottenham Hotspur in 2013, scoring in the finals of the Champions League and King's Cup as Real won the double.

Bale struggled to kick on during a difficult second term, attracting boos from some supporters and criticism from the media as his club failed to win a major trophy and speculation grew that he was seeking a return to the Premier League.

"Maybe last season I didn't play to anywhere near my potential," he told a news conference ahead of Saturday's 'Clasico' at runaway La Liga leaders Barcelona.

"This season I wanted to improve. It was important for me to keep working hard, to keep fighting, it's difficult playing in a foreign country.

"I've felt more settled, more involved in the team this year and I think that has shown in performances on the pitch.



PHOTO: REUTERS

It's good to have a bad season, you really do learn a lot about yourself," added Bale.

"I understand the game a lot more over here and hopefully there is a lot more still to come in the future."

Two separate spells on the sidelines with injury have meant Bale has only started 16 La Liga games this season but he has made his presence felt, scoring 15 goals.

Bale has moved ahead of former Barca striker Gary Lineker as the top-scoring British footballer to have played in La Liga, notching a total of 43 goals in 76 matches.

"I feel like I am playing well, growing and improving all the time," he said. "I'm in good form at the moment.—*Reuters*