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PRISONERS NO MORE

The State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to seek presidential pardon for political prisoners, activists, students

STATE Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi announced yesterday that she would try her utmost to gain presidential pardons for political prisoners, political activists and students currently facing trial for cases connected with politics as soon as possible.

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Canada commits CAD 44 million to support Myanmar

THE Government of Canada has pledged CAD 44 million (USD 33.5 million) to help ensure a federal union system, efficient administration and women's participation development in Myanmar yesterday.

The announcement of Canada's financial support for Myanmar came after a meeting between Canadian Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Stéphane Dion and Union Minister for Foreign Affairs Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in Nay Pyi Taw.

During the meeting the two ministers held discussions on sharing Canada's experience for the successful establishment of a federal Union, bilateral cooperation in information sector pivotal for ensuring the effective performance of governmental functions and enhancing women's economic empowerment through creation of small businesses and employment opportunities.

After the meeting, the two held a joint press conference and fielded questions from the media.

According to the Canadian government, bilateral trade between the two countries totaled US\$52.2 million last year. — Myanmar News Agency



Union Minister Daw Aung San Suu Kyi talks with Canadian Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr Stéphane Dion. PHOTO: MNA

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Bill to amend excise tax approved at Yangon Parliament

Ko Moe

THE Yangon Region Hluttaw approved a bill to amend excise tax law during a parliamentary session yesterday.

On behalf of the Yangon region government, Minister for Security and Border Affairs Col

Tin Aung Tun presented the bill to the Parliament.

U Win Maung, secretary of the Bill Committee, commented that the bill should become a law as it conforms to the country's policies and objectives and necessary provisions related to excise tax are involved in the bill.

In his comment, MP U Thawda Aung said that more revenue will be collected if the bill is passed.

According to the amended excise tax law, the foreign alcoholic liquor license fee will be set to be at K2 million for restaurants and vendors at airports, stations and ports.

Union govt discusses strategies for efficiency

THE Union government held its first meeting in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday afternoon to seek ways to maximise effectiveness and efficiency in fulfilling its duties following its inception on 30 March 2016.

President U Htin Kyaw, vice presidents U Myint Swe and U Henry Van Thio, Union ministers and other officials were present at the meeting. —*Myanmar News Agency*



Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

Myanmar, Italy strengthen ties in culture, science, tech



Two ministers exchanging agreement. PHOTO: MNA

MYANMAR and Italy has entered an agreement to cooperate in culture, science and technology in a bid to strengthen ties between the countries.

The signing ceremony took place at the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs in Nay Pyi Taw Wednesday, with Union Minister Thura U Aung Ko and

Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni exchanging the agreements after signing them.

The agreement highlighted promotion of language teaching, exchange of scholars, inter-connections of universities, and preservation of cultural heritage between the two countries. —*Myanmar News Agency*

YESC announces power cuts on weekends

THE Yangon Electricity Supply Corporation (YESC) has announced that its weekend upgrades to existing power lines will prompt power cuts in many townships in Yangon Region.

The maintenance is aimed at distributing electricity more efficiently, the corporation said, adding that the work included

cutting down trees and branches, repairing transformers and replacing old power lines with new ones.

The maintenance work to be carried out on 9 and 10 April will affect power cuts in some thirty townships from 9am to 12 noon. —*Myanmar News Agency*

Man stabs woman in the eye; security fails to intervene

POLICE have arrested a man who is accused of stabbing a young woman in the eye with a pair of scissor at Dagon Centre in Myaynigone Township, Yangon, on Wednesday, according to a report from the Sanchaung Police Station.

Police superintendent Win Myint Oo said the man stabbed the woman in the right eye following a loud argument inside the shopping complex. The woman, whose name has not been released, is an employee of the ONYX cosmetics shop, where the assault occurred. The suspect reportedly told police he is the victim's ex-boyfriend.

One witnesses said the girl shouted for help shortly before she was stabbed, but up until the moment of the assault no one intervened in the quarrel. Dagon Centre security personnel were reportedly aware of the fight but did not act until the stabbing took place.

"I saw the young man stab the girl with a pair of scissors. The police came soon after the attack and arrested the young man at the scene of the incident," the witness said.

Police identified the offender as one Nay Dwe, 23, from Kamayut Township.

An officer from the Sanchaung Police Station reported that the girl had recently ended her relationship with the attacker over the phone. The man, incensed by the news, came to her place of work and confronted the victim before stabbing her in the right eye. The victim suffered serious injuries to her face and is currently receiving emergency care at Yangon General Hospital.

Neither the Dagon Centre nor the Yangon General Hospital could be reached for comment.

The victim lost her right eye as a result of the attack but is in stable condition. Police have charged Nay Dwe under sections 307, 452 and 326 of the Penal Code for attempted murder, trespassing with intention to harm and voluntarily causing grievous harm with the use of a dangerous weapon.—*GNLM*



Nay Dwe. PHOTO: SANCHAUNG POLICE

Five per cent tax on top-up discussed

THE Pyidaungsu Hluttaw's legal affairs and special cases assessment commission held a meeting with officials from relevant parliamentary committees and departments concerned with the proposed levying of a 5 per cent commercial tax on mobile

phone services in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

The meeting was attended by Thura U Shwe Mann, chairman of the commission, U Ko Ko Naing, vice-chairman 1 and members, parliamentarians and officials from Hluttaw offices,

officials from the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the Ministry of Planning and Finance and responsible persons from the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry. —*Myanmar News Agency*

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to strive for the granting of presidential pardon to political prisoners, activists, students

STATE Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi announced yesterday that she would try her utmost to gain presidential pardon for political prisoners, political activists and students currently facing trial for cases connected with politics as soon as possible.

The statement, signed by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, comes a day after she was appointed to her new position as State Counsellor, mentioning that releasing prisoners of conscience who are behind bars for their involvement in peaceful political activities is one of the priorities of the new government and re-affirmed by the will of the people as expressed by the wide margin of victory attained by the NLD who have long advocated on behalf of political prisoners.

Sub-article (a) of the Article 204 of the constitution guarantees the right of the sitting president to pardon prisoners, said the statement.

According to Sub-section (1) of the Criminal Procedure Section 401, the president can grant pardon either conditionally or unconditionally to those who are serving a prison term, according to the statement.

In order to release the political prisoners, activists and students facing trial for their involvement in political activism as soon as possible, at the time of the Myanmar new year which falls in mid-April, she will strive to achieve this goal with the use of all possible resources, said Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in the statement released by her office. —GNLM

Col Nyein Chan appointed as head of DIDA

THE President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has confirmed the appointment of Col Nyein Chan as Director General of the Department of International and Domestic Affairs under the Ministry of Defence on expiry of the one-year probationary period.—Myanmar News Agency

Petition over commodities stranded at border to be presented to new government, MRF says

A PETITION will be presented to the new government to take necessary measures to aid the situation of commodities being stranded at the Muse Myanmar-China border as Chinese authorities have confiscated commodities from Myanmar, according to Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF).

“It is likely that China stops entry of Myanmar commodities through the border crossing to protect its own growers during the harvest time,” said Dr Soe Tun, joint-secretary of Myanmar

Rice and Paddy Traders Association.

“But, I think China has used its economic advantage to put pressure on the Myanmar’s new government, convincing us that the Chinese market is important for Myanmar” he added.

The joint secretary called on the government to help Myanmar traders in trouble at border due to seizures on Chinese side.

He predicted that local rice prices are expected to fall if the issue cannot be addressed as the

summer paddy harvest time is coming up.

According to sources, products set for export to China are piled up not only in Muse but also in Mandalay, leaving Myanmar traders difficult to purchase summer paddy as their goods cannot be sent to China.

If traders are unable to buy summer paddy, growers will be in trouble, said Dr Soe Tun, adding that it is because Myanmar agriculture sector heavily depend on China for sales of its products.—Soe Soe Yu

President meets Canadian FM



President U Htin Kyaw welcomes Canadian Foreign Minister Stéphane Dion. PHOTO: MNA

PRESIDENT U Htin Kyaw met Canadian Foreign Minister Stéphane Dion at his palace yesterday in Nay Pyi Taw.

They discussed promotion of cooperative efforts for national

reconciliation, climate change, environmental conservation, culture, education and health. Their discussion also included the exchange of students between the two countries.

The president was accom-

panied by Union Minister for Foreign Affairs and Presidents Office Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Union Minister for Information Dr Pe Myint and officials.—Myanmar News Agency

Sugar piles up at home as China stops imports

THE price of sugar imported to Myanmar from Thailand and India intended for export to China has fallen as China has stopped importing sugar, according to the Myanmar Sugarcane and Sugar Traders’ Association.

Since the end of last month, sugar prices fell to K1,000 from K1,200 per viss (1.63 kilos), said U Win Htay, vice chairperson of the association, adding that sugar is piling up in local markets due to a lack of demand from China.

China has arrested sugar importers within its borders to protect

local manufactures, so there is no way for imported sugar to go, leaving it stranded in Myanmar, said the vice chairman.

China has also arrested sugar buyers suspected of tax evasion.

U Ye Min Aung, owner of a sugar mill in Myanmar, said tonnes of sugar are sitting in warehouses in Mandalay, Muse and Yangon as there is no demand from China.

Rice traders who invested in sugar are struggling to purchase summer paddy as they cannot convert their imported sugar into cash.—Aung Thant Khaing



Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni visits Yangon Heritage Trust. PHOTO: MNA

Italian FM, YHT founder discuss heritage conservation in Yangon

ITALIAN Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni held talks yesterday with Yangon Heritage Trust founder and chairman Dr Thant Myint Oo to discuss efforts to preserve heritage sites in Yangon as well as broader urban planning at YHT’s headquarters in downtown Yangon.

Dr Thant Myint Oo said the government of Italy has supported YHT’s efforts in the past and that he hopes the support will continue

in the future. The Italian foreign minister also visited Myanmar Dedita Gallery in Botahtaung Township. The gallery will undergo conservation efforts to be carried out by an Italian team of experts.

The Italian Foreign Ministry said in a press statement yesterday that history and culture are areas to which Italy aims to contribute its experience by cooperating with UNESCO and Myanmar’s Ministry for Religious Affairs and Cul-

ture in activities to preserve the country’s heritage.

Italy’s contributions to conservation efforts in Myanmar began in 2011 and have reached US\$1.4 million.

To date, the contributions have been used in partnership with UNESCO to preserve historic sites such as the ancient Pyu cities, which became World Heritage Sites in 2014, and the Bagan archaeological zone.—GNLM

Award-winning cattle fetches double price after race



Ox-carts seen after the cart race. PHOTO: AUNG THANT KHAING

OWNERS fetched almost double the original price for their award-winning cattle following the cattle-drawn cart race of the Pahtodawgyi Pagoda Festival in Amarapura Township, Mandalay Region, according to a contestant from Kyaukse Township.

Owners sold their cow after the event receiving twice what their cow was priced at before winning awards in the race, said

Ko Than Aung who took part in the cattle-drawn cart race to mark the pagoda festival.

Winners were they would get a good price after being awarded, he added, saying that they got double price despite the fact a regular cow is worth around K1.5 million on the market.

"I sold my cow for K2.5 million as it was awarded in the

race. I bought it for K1.4 million."

Most purchases of award-winning cattle were made by those who a run cattle-drawn cart rental business and who want to take part in such contests. According to locals, the main aim of most participants of the race is to fetch a good price for their award-winning cattle. — *Aung Thant Khaing*

Two new drugs for TB patients arrive

WITH the introduction of two new anti-tuberculosis drugs which have been proven to have few side effects, patients suffering from Multi-drug Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR-TB) will now receive treatment at the AungSan TB Hospital in Mingaladon Township, Yangon Region, according to Doctors Without Borders (MSF Myanmar) of the End TB project.

Of two new drugs available to fight tuberculosis, 60 per cent of TB patients taking Bedaquiline can be totally treated. Patients taking Delamanid are seeing good results 75 per cent of the time after receiving treatment for 24 months, according to a recent report issued by World Health Organization (WHO).

This new treatment is to

be used along with current TB drugs. Ten new experimental treatments will be conducted this year. Patients in a poor condition will be first priority, said the person who is engaged in the End TB project.

The National TB Programme under the Ministry of Health will also give health care to ten patients who have been deemed most in need. These patients will be treated with Bedaquiline.

Two new drugs have been manufactured since 2014 and are recognised by WHO.

There are 370 new patients (this year) suffering from tuberculosis out of a total of 1000 in Myanmar. Of those, five per cent of new patients and 27 per cent of TB patients who are suffering for the second time are suffering from MDR-TB.—200

Crime NEWS

4,400 kilograms of caffeine seized in Tachilek

A COMBINED investigation team comprising local authorities and members of an anti-drug squad from Tachilek seized pure caffeine weighing 2,250 kilograms from a trailer being driven by one Sai Ung Kyauk near the Wai Lay Lan village check point, Tachilek township on Tuesday.

According to a connected investigation police discovered caffeine weighing 2,150 kilograms in a trailer being driven by one Aik Kaung. The caffeine seized weighed a total of 4,400 kilograms worth K352 million. The cache were seized by the anti-drug police. Similarly, police seized heroin weighing 13 grams and 600 yaba pills from a motorbike being driven by one Aung Myint Naing near Kaung San village, Phakant



Sai Ung Kyauk (a) Aik Kyauk, Aik Vng and Aik Kaung. PHOTO: KO YE

township on 3 April. On the same day police searched a house owned by one Kan Tha. Aik Kyaw was found together with the host. Kan Tha ran fled the scene when he saw the police. Police further seized

heroin weighing 53 grams and 225 yaba pills from one Aik Kyaw at Nyaung Gon village, Mohnyin township. Police have filed charges against all suspects under the Anti-Narcotic Law.— *Ko Ye*

Illegal timber of over 37 tonnes seized in Pale

AUTHORITIES seized illegal timber weighing 37.1016 tonnes near Ma Yoe Tone Eastern village monastery on 3 April.

All these illegal timber were ownerless and kept in Forestry Department at Palea township. Also, forestry Department planned to conduct educational talks and distribute pamphlets to reduce illegal timber production.— *Min Khan Soe (Zayyar Myay)*



Illegal timber seized in Pale being seen. PHOTO: MIN KHAN SOE (ZAYYAR MYAY)

Motorbike accident kills one man

A MAN riding a motorbike died on the spot when another motorbike struck him on Taunggyi-Keng Tung road in Keng Tung town, Shan State East on Monday.

According to an investigation, the motorbike being

driven by one Thein Ko Latt, 37, crashed into the vehicle being driven by Maung Ah Nyunt, 34, when Maung Ar Nyount turned into a road without making any signal.— *Maung Maung Naing (Keng Tung)*

Police arrested thief in Chanmyathasi

POLICE have arrested a suspect who allegedly snatched a mobile phone from a girl on 84 street in Chanmyathasi township, Mandalay on Monday.

According to an investigation, a man on a motorbike approached another motorbike being driven by one Ma Myo Myo Hlaing, 42, with Ma Wai Wai Thin on board. The thief

snatched a mobile phone which was being held by Ma Thin Thin Wai. Both motorbikes fell over when Ma Thin Thin Wai grappled with the assailant over the phone. Local police discovered the crime in progress while on patrol and managed to capture Thet Naung Naung, 25, from Thirihaymar ward.— *Ko Ye*

Ox cart runs over man

ONE Myo Htoo Htet was run over by a bullock cart at the Kyout Htone Gyi village entrance gate in Katha township on Monday. According to an investigation, Myo Htoo Htet and his father stopped the ox cart when they arrived at the Kyauk Htone Gyi village entrance gate.

The ox cart broke out of its own volition and ran down Myo Htoo Htet as he was exiting the driver's seat. It was reported that his exit from the cart frightened the ox. Myo Htoo Htet died upon arrival home. Police are still investigating the case.— *U Ye (Katha)*

LOCAL Business



Farmers toss rice into the wind to remove sand and other impurities before transport. PHOTO: AYE MIN SOE

Rice export to China expected to rise after Thingyan

RICE traders in Muse expect an increase in rice exports to China after the Thingyan Water Festival as new summer rice will enter the local market.

Merchants in the border trade zone have been facing low demand for rice, while the price of

rice has risen in local market.

The price of 100 baskets of rice (20.9 kilograms) has decreased to K20,000 in the trade zone.

Muse, in northern Shan State, is the largest border trade zone in Myanmar. The country mainly

exports raw materials, including agricultural products and fish products and imports consumer goods, electronics and machinery.

In the 2014-15 financial year, Myanmar exported over 1.4 million tonnes of rice to neighbouring countries, mostly to China.—200

New border trade zone in Maungtaw nearly complete

THE establishment of a new border trade zone in Maungtaw, Rakhine State, is 70 per cent complete, according to that project manager.

The project began last December with funds from public funds and private entrepreneurs, said U Aung Myint Thein, chairperson of Maungtaw Border

Trade Merchants Association.

"The authorities provided K6 billion for the project, and businesspersons contributed K4 billion," he added. "Construction workers and engineers are trying to complete the project as quickly as possible." The new zone is situated within Kanyinchaung Village, and the nearest town is about

three miles away.

The main purposes of the project are to develop trade relations between Myanmar and Bangladesh and to ensure the smooth, coordinated flow of commodities by sea. The new zone will contain warehouses, markets and other facilities.—*Rakhine News Agency/Union Daily*

Mitsui, BM, MAPCO sign JV agreement to form Agri First Co Ltd

MITSUI, Behn Meyer (BM), a major distributor of chemicals in Southeast Asia, and Myanmar Agribusiness Public Corporation (MAPCO) signed an agreement yesterday in Nay Pyi Taw to establish a new joint venture called Agri First Co Ltd (AFC).

Tokyo-based Mitsui & Co and BM reached the agreement with MAPCO to manufacture and distribute imported fertilisers in Myanmar.

Founded in 2012, MAPCO is a private company and it is known as a key contributor to the development of agriculture in Myanmar.

Union Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation Dr Aung Thu made the opening speech at the signing ceremony.


AFC plans to invest approximately ¥1.2 billion (US\$10,944,966) in the construction of a fertiliser manufacturing plant, including a warehouse and other ancillary facilities, with an annual capacity 100,000 tonnes in the Thilawa Special Economic Zone.

The company aims to begin production at the new plant in May 2017.

By combining BM's expertise in the manufacturing and distribution of speciality fertilisers, MAPCO's networks with agricultural business operators in Myanmar and Mitsui's financing, logistics, procurement and marketing capabilities, AFC aims to contribute to agricultural development in Myanmar.—*GNLM*



The signing ceremony of joint venture agreement between BMM Venture (S) Pte Ltd and Myanmar Agribusiness Public Corporation. PHOTO: AGRIFIRST CO LTD



Joyful Thingyan Festival

& Auspicious Myanmar New Year, 1378 M.E.



The Global New Light of Myanmar wishes our valued readers, contributors, advertisers and entire people of Myanmar an Exciting, Colourful and Enjoyable Thingyan Festival and a Prosperous, Successful & Healthy New Year!

WB finances Bangladesh 217m USD to upgrade power station

DHAKA — The Bangladeshi government Thursday signed a 217 million US dollars financing agreement with the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) to upgrade a unit in a power station, which will increase the unit's existing electricity generation capacity by more than double.

The agreement was signed by Kazi Shofiqul Azam of Bangladesh's Economic Relations Division and Rajashree Paralkar of the World Bank on behalf of their respective sides in Dhaka.

The Washington-based lender said the Ghorashal Unit 4 Repowering Project will transform a gas-fired steam unit that is currently generating 170 MW into an energy efficient 409 MW plant.

Such conversion to combined cycle technology will increase the plant's overall efficiency from existing 30 per cent to 54 per cent while requiring only 18 per cent more natural gas, it said.

"Bangladesh can grow its economy much faster and reduce poverty significantly if its energy infrastructure can meet the demand for reliable, low-cost electricity," said Rajashree Paralkar, World Bank Acting Country Director for Bangladesh.

"The project will increase the efficiency in gas utilisation of an existing unit, while adding new generation capacity to address the country's severe power needs." The project will also reduce the specific fuel consumption per gigawatt hour by 44 per cent and lower greenhouse gas emissions, said the bank. In addition, it said the project will provide capacity building and institutional support to the Bangladesh Power Development Board. "The government has prioritised improving the efficiency of gas-based power plants, given the shortages in natural gas production," said Kazi Shofiqul Azam, Additional Secretary, Economic Relations Division, government of Bangladesh.—*Xinhua*

Indonesia launches fresh crackdown on child exploitation

JAKARTA — Authorities in the sprawling Indonesian capital are cracking down on the exploitation of children after a raft of cases, from child labour to violence and sexual assault, was uncovered in recent weeks.

Tens of thousands of children are trafficked annually in Indonesia, with the majority forced into prostitution and manual labour, the United Nations' child welfare agency UNICEF says.

The drive follows the arrests last month of several Jakarta residents who sedated infants and used them to beg for money or hired them to motorists looking to evade minimum passenger norms designed to fight the city's notorious traffic

congestion.

"These cases are a wake-up call for us all to improve our policing style, to make it proactive and prevent violence against children," said Jakarta police spokesman Mohammad Iqbal.

Authorities have begun designating safe houses for vulnerable children in the city, besides tightening patrols in neighbourhoods where there are many children, he added.

This week, the city government suspended a rule requiring each car to carry at least three passengers, saying it was encouraging child labour.

The measure had been aimed at congestion in Jakarta, where poor public transport forces commuters

to spend three or four hours in their cars each day, at an annual cost to the economy of about 65 trillion rupiah, or about \$5 billion (£3.54 billion).

The practice of hiring extra passengers, or "jockeys", off the street to satisfy the three-passenger rule has long been in use in the city of 10 million people.

But the discovery of some jockeys drugging babies and offering them for hire prompted authorities to suspend the rule.

"Many victims are traumatised and stressed when they come to us, so we have to counsel them," said Neneng Heryani, the director of a state-run rehabilitation centre that offers academic, sport and musical activities for the chil-

dren. The centre in East Jakarta looks after about 40 children, but thousands more remain at risk of exploitation.

Experts have welcomed the latest efforts to combat child abuse, but have urged the government to take a comprehensive approach in tackling the problem.

"At the moment this is more like firefighting and reactionary," said Arist Merdeka Sirait, chief of a national panel on child protection, pointing to an urgent need for preventive measures. "People need to be educated," he said. "The whole mindset needs to be changed, to think of children not just as a source of income, but as needing protection."—*Reuters*

North Korean submarine spotted in waters off South's east

SEOUL — A North Korean Sinpo-class submarine was spotted in the early hours of Thursday in waters off South Korea's east coast and returned to a port in the North a few hours later, according to a local television network.

The appearance of the Sinpo-class submarine,

known as a new ballistic missile submarine in North Korea, prompted South Korean military intelligence units to track its movements, MBN reported.

The submarine returned to a port in the eastern city of Wonsan around 9pm, the report said, adding the North might have tried an

ejection test of a submarine-launched ballistic missile.

North Korea is believed to have conducted its latest SLBM test in December last year, its third-known SLBM test following the first in May and the second in November last year. In a regular press

briefing, a South Korean military official from the Joint Chiefs of Staff declined to confirm the report, only saying the South Korean military, in cooperation with the United States, is closely monitoring all activities related to the North's SLBMs.—*Kyodo News*

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Viet Nam gets new PM with tough task and big shoes to fill

HANOI — Viet Nam's parliament approved a new prime minister on Thursday, handing former bureaucrat and legislator Nguyen Xuan Phuc the challenge of maintaining the momentum of one of Asia's fastest-growing economies.

Phuc rises from deputy prime minister to lead a government committed to overhauling its troubled state sector and broad reforms under a US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership, a major trade pact covering four-tenths of the global economy.

The 61-year-old completes the trio of core leaders of a youthful country hooked on social media, and growing in its awareness of politics and Viet Nam's complex ties with China and the United States.

Phuc has some big shoes to fill, taking over from Nguyen Tan Dung, a tough-talking reformist whose decisiveness won him broad support but, say experts, saw him sidelined by conservatives concerned he would become too powerful.

Viet Nam is officially



Nguyen Xuan Phuc (R) chats with delegates before the opening ceremony of the Spring Session of the National Assembly (Parliament) of Viet Nam in Hanoi on 21 March.

PHOTO: REUTERS

ruled by consensus with key decisions made by the Communist Party's elite politburo. Dung had served a maximum two terms and is no longer a politburo member, although key policy makers from his government are among the new 19-member body. "Phuc certainly will be lower key than the hard-charging Dung," said Murray Hiebert, a Southeast Asia specialist at Washington's Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

"We should expect him

to operate within the consensus of the ruling politburo. He will have seen the impact on Dung of his more flamboyant, independent style." Phuc was the only candidate chosen at the party's January congress. His appointment for a five-year term was approved by 475 of 480 lawmakers present.

He is from the central province of Quang Nam and his expertise is management and economics. He held key posts in local politics and on legislative committees and

was once head of planning and investment in Danang, Viet Nam's third-biggest city. Phuc becomes part of a new triumvirate with party chief Nguyen Phu Trong and President Tran Dai Quang, who was endorsed last week.

Addressing the assembly, Phuc pledged to achieve targets for the economy, which grew 6.7 per cent in 2015, tackle graft, improve the investment climate and fight to protect Viet Nam's sovereignty.—*Reuters*

Malaysia parliament report calls for probe into 1MDB



A construction worker talks on the phone in front of a 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) billboard at the Tun Razak Exchange development in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 3 February 2016.

PHOTO: REUTERS

KUALA LUMPUR — A Malaysian parliamentary inquiry on Thursday slammed the board of state fund 1MDB for being irresponsible and urged a probe into its former chief, but stopped short of implicating Prime Minister Najib Razak who was an advisor for the troubled firm.

Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) said senior management at 1Malaysia Development Bhd withheld crucial information from the board and made transactions without its knowledge or approval.

The bipartisan PAC is the first Malaysian entity to level allegations against 1MDB, which is at the centre of corruption and money-laundering investigations in the United States, Switzerland,

Singapore and Luxembourg.

US Department of Justice officials have asked Deutsche Bank AG and JPMorgan Chase & Co to provide details on their dealings with 1MDB, as the global investigation into 1MDB widens. Goldman Sachs' relation with 1MDB is also under review.

The 1MDB fund, which had piled up over 42 billion ringgit (\$11 billion) in debt since its inception in 2009, said its board of directors have collectively offered their resignations after the report. The parliamentary report said former 1MDB CEO Shahrol Azral Ibrahim Halmi has to take responsibility.

"As such, enforcement agencies are asked to investigate Shahrol Azral Ibrahim Halmi and any-

one else related," the report said. The executive board of the fund offered their resignations after the report was released.

It called for the advisory board of the fund — chaired by Prime Minister Najib Razak — to be abolished and any reference to the prime minister be changed to finance minister in the company's memorandum and articles of association.

Najib, who founded 1MDB in 2009, was not otherwise named in the report. Najib has consistently denied any wrongdoing. He said the report showed that former Malaysian premier Mahathir Mohamed's allegations against him were false.

Mahathir quit the ruling party in February and has stood with the opposition in calling for Najib to resign over the 1MDB scandal.

The scandal has fueled a sense of crisis in a country under economic strain from slumping oil prices and a prolonged slide in its currency last year.

Shortly after it was released, opposition leader Tony Pua, who was part of the PAC, told a news conference that Najib, should at least be held culpable for the mismanagement at the fund.

"Anything else we don't know, as we don't have the overseas bank statements of 1MDB," said Pua, an MP with the Democratic Action Party (DAP).

Pua lamented the failure to get crucial information on 1MDB's foreign banking transactions. The report did scrutinise several overseas transactions that

it said were made without 1MDB board approval.

One was a \$700 million transfer to an account belonging to a company named Good Star Ltd. Another unapproved transaction of \$300 million was made to 1MDB PetroSaudi Ltd, a joint venture company set up in the British Virgin Islands.

The report also said billions of dollars in unexplained payments were paid to a company called "Aabar Investments PJS Ltd (Aabar Ltd)" in 2012 without board approval.

The report said 1MDB has not clarified whether Aabar Ltd was a subsidiary or linked to an Abu Dhabi sovereign wealth fund called Aabar Investments or another Abu Dhabi fund called International Petroleum Investment Corp (IPIC).

The Wall Street Journal, citing documents from international probes, reported that investigators believe around \$1 billion moved through state agencies, banks and companies linked to 1MDB before eventually finding its way into Najib's personal accounts.

The 1MDB fund has denied that any of its funds went to the prime minister. The Attorney-General cleared Najib in January of any corruption or criminal offences, saying the \$681 million was a gift from a member of Saudi Arabia's royal family and that most of it was returned.

The scandal has rocked Najib's government as public outrage over the alleged mismanagement and corruption grows.—Reuters

Four feared dead as wreckage of SDF jet found on Kagoshima mountain

KAGOSHIMA — The wreckage of an Air Self-Defence Force jet carrying six people that went missing Wednesday was found on a mountain in southwestern Japan on Thursday, with four of the crew members located but showing no signs of life, Japan's Defence Ministry said.

The four crew members of the U-125 flight inspection aircraft, who have yet to be officially announced as having died, will be transported off the mountain on Friday or later, according to the Air Staff Office.

The ministry earlier announced that all six were found near a mountain peak with no vital signs but the office later retracted that, saying only one was found and that the mistake occurred due to confusion on the ground.

It was later announced that three other crew were found Thursday afternoon while two remain missing. The search was halted in the late afternoon and will resume Friday morning.

The crew members and part of the wreckage were found around 500 metres east of a 1,182-metre peak of Mt. Takakuma, which sits between the cities of Kanoya and Tatumizu in Kagoshima Prefecture.

The location is about 10 kilometres north of the Maritime Self-Defence Force's air base in Kanoya. The 15-metre twin-engine jet, used for checking on the condition of air navigation facilities, disappeared from radar around 2:35pm Wednesday after taking off from the MSDF air base. The Self-Defence Forces, police and firefighters had mobilized about 600 of their members on Thursday to search around Mt. Takakuma although wind, heavy rain and fog hindered their efforts, limiting the number of actual participants in the day's search to about 260.—Kyodo News

Liberal Bangladeshi blogger killed by machete-wielding attackers

DHAKA — Attackers in Bangladesh wielding machetes killed a liberal blogger, police said on Thursday, the latest in series of murders of secular activists by suspected Islamist militants.

Postgraduate law student Nazimuddin Samad, 28, was attacked as he was returning from a class at his university in the capital, Dhaka, late on Wednesday, police said.

Last year, suspected militants killed five secular writers and a publisher, including

a Bangladeshi-American activist. A banned Islamist militant group, Ansarullah Bangla Team, claimed responsibility for some of the attacks.

Police officer Tapan Chandra Shaha said three or four men attacked Samad with machetes and then shot him after he fell to the ground. People heard the attackers shouting "Allahu akbar" (God is Greatest) as they fled, he said. Imran H Sarker, convener of the BOAN online activist group said Samad was an outspoken

critic of injustice and militancy.

"We found him always a loud voice against all injustice and also a great supporter of secularism," Sarker told Reuters.

Bangladesh has seen a wave of militant violence over the past year or so, including a series of bomb attacks on mosques and Hindu temples.

Some recent attacks have been claimed by Islamic State, including the killing of Hindu priest, a Japanese citizen, an Italian aid worker and a policeman.

The government denies that Islamic State has a presence in the Muslim-majority country of 160 million people.

Hundreds of students from the Jagannath University where Samad studied protested against his murder and demanded the prompt arrest of the killers.

They blocked roads in and around the university and told reporters that if those behind the earlier murders of bloggers had been punished then Samad would not have been attacked.—Reuters

Thai police investigate Line stickers lampooning royal family

BANGKOK — Thai police are investigating stickers lampooning Thailand's royal family which appeared briefly on the popular Japan-based Line instant messaging service, a police spokesman said on Thursday.

Thailand's royal family is protected by some of the world's strictest lese-majeste rules. Under the military government which seized power in a May 2014 coup, prosecution of those deemed to have insulted the monarchy have risen rapidly and sentences become increasing-

ly harsh. "We are investigating where the stickers came from and who did this," said Colonel Somporn Daengdee, deputy chief of the police's Technology Crime Suppression Division.

He declined to say more due to the sensitivity of the issue.

Line, which is one of Thailand's most popular social media platforms, apologised for the set of cartoon stickers and said it was no longer available to purchase. The stickers had spread quickly online on Wednesday. "LINE Corporation is aware of

the culturally sensitive sticker set that may have caused discomfort among our users in Thailand," Line said in a statement posted online. "The sticker set in question has been pulled from the LINE Sticker Shop."

King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 88, is a revered figure in Thailand. The king has been staying at a Bangkok hospital since May 2015 and worries over his health and the succession has formed the backdrop to more than a decade of political crisis in Thailand.—Reuters



A woman stands next to images of Thailand's King Bhumibol Adulyadej outside Siriraj hospital in Bangkok, on 11 January 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

OPINION

Myanmar's twin institutions

Kyaw Thura

EVEN a glance at the history of our country is enough to reveal that insurgency and independence are twin events, making governments and militaries twin institutions. Even after Myanmar gained its independence from British colonial rule, the insurgencies of the White Flag communists and the Red Flag communists continued to struggle

with the new government. In 1949, these groups held vast tracts of countryside. Rural people were terrorised by the civil war, which continues to this day in the form of ethnic armed conflict.

Over the years, Myanmar's army, navy and air force put up an effective defence against the insurgencies and fought to save the country from collapse into anarchy. At times, the military has secured broad acceptance and heartfelt recognition by the people its role in national politics.

However, as an old maxim goes, misfortunes never come alone. Years of poor management resulted in a sluggish economy, triggering mass demonstrations against U Ne Win's government across the country. Accordingly, the attempt to overthrow the government in 1988 was followed by a period of anarchy, prompting the military to seize power on 18 September of that year.

Judging from these events, the role of the army is deeply entrenched in national politics. But this does not necessarily mean its presence in politics is guaranteed or eternal.

The government and the military may be siblings, but they are not the same entity. For the moment, the presence of the military in parliament should be viewed as a necessary evil until peace is restored.

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Key stakeholders matter most for speedy improvement of education sector

Myo Myint

THE success of any endeavour depends on many factors, especially, when it concerns the whole nation. Upgrading education is one such endeavour. There is no doubt that in order to be able to provide students with useful knowledge and skills, and training to be good citizens, quality programmes, up-to-date teaching and learning materials, syllabi and curricula, modern libraries, laboratories, and recreation facilities are essential. Equally important, if not more important than money, material and method is the active participation and strong support of key stakeholders in the education sector, because they can ensure that all the knowledge, material and financial resources that are being invested are properly utilized by monitoring, assessing and giving advice on the teaching-learning process and its outcomes. Stakeholders are, in the words of edglossary.org, persons or organizations that "have a stake" in the school and its students, meaning that they have personal, professional, civic, or financial interest or concern". Since education is a lifelong learning process, and very few in society are free from its impact, every member of the society may be said to be a stakeholder. Those who can be regarded as the key stakeholders in education are parents, students, teachers, school administrators, local, regional and national education authorities, elected officials, the government, members of the community, and local as well as national industrial and business leaders as they benefit directly from it or have an impact on it. If the key stakeholders wish to ensure the

holistic development of the education sector, each has to ensure that his/her voice is heard, in order that his/her needs are reflected on the direction the education sector is taking.

It is internationally accepted that one of the parents' main obligations towards their children is to provide them with education, and if possible, quality education. In order to do so, the first priority of parents should be to see that there is a school in the locality to which their children can go to. If there is none, then, with the assistance of other members of their respective community, they need to work for the establishment of a school that is conveniently located for their children. Elected officials can be of much assistance in this matter, as it is part of their responsibility to work for the development of the region they represent, and they also have the connections, and leverage to be able to do so. On the other hand, all parents must not be totally dependent on the government to provide quality education for their children. They must take an active part in identifying the needs of the school and help provide whatever kind of support they can: moral, financial, material, or voluntary service. Another important role that parents must fulfil is to not only monitor the progress of their children, but also the performance of the school and its teachers to ensure that the school is fulfilling its responsibilities. In this connection, parents should actively and willingly take part in the Parent-Teacher Association, and school board of trustees, always be in touch with developments in the school, ensure that there are transparency and good governance at school, ensure their voices are heard by being

involved in the decision making and fulfil the school's needs as much as they can.

Among key stakeholders, students are the most important as the education sector exist for their benefit and as they obviously form the main bulk of the stakeholders. Firstly, for the education sector to be truly successful, whether they are enrolled as primary students or university students, or whether they pursue full-time or part-time courses, students need to show complete trust and confidence in their teachers, appreciate their teaching, knowledge, sacrifice and dedication and have respect for them, so that their teachers will want to go on with their grueling work despite the small pay they earn, the huge responsibilities they have to shoulder and the little personal time they have. Next, in order to reach their potential, students must learn to move from total dependency on their teachers to independent learning and thinking. They and their parents must also appreciate the difference between schools and tuitions, and school teachers and tuition teachers. Schools and school teachers are dedicated to providing them with all round development and nurturing good citizenship, while the intention of the majority of tuition classes and tuition teachers are to make money, keep students happy in their classes, and coach them to pass the exam using all sorts of means, including rote learning, short cuts and dishonest ways. The intention of education is proving training to develop the whole person, physical, intellectual, emotional, moral, and cultural. Students must therefore try to make good use of their time, by taking an active part in school, class and association activities

that promote creativity, thinking abilities, social skills, and all-round development. Wherever possible, they must learn to try out subject related, social related, or health related skills imparted to them, in real life situations, and share them with friends and members of their family and community. They must promote in themselves the spirit of volunteerism, selflessness, goodwill and tolerance of differences since young, taking part in activities to keep their home, school and surroundings neat and tidy, and helping their parents, teachers, schoolmates, and other members of the community, especially the disabled and disadvantaged, in whatever way they can, as preparations to play a positive and leading role in society later on in their lives and making the world a better place. In brief, students who are the most important stakeholders in education must demand the best from education, and also make the best use of education, whenever, and wherever possible.

Another key stakeholder is the teacher, who may be said to be the person in the driver's seat. Teachers are highly respected in most societies, including Myanmar, because of the role they play in training young people as well as the role they play in society as trustworthy and knowledgeable persons. It is obvious that they must have the necessary qualifications to become a teacher regarding mastery of subject matter, appropriate methodology, and child psychology. Additional requirements are having wide general knowledge, creativity, the capacity to learn new things, patience, a pleasant personality, high moral standards, being willing to keep on learning, enjoy working as a teacher, etc. How-

ever, Myanmar education sector is facing a crisis due to lack of interest in their work and in their students by many teachers with the excuse that they do not receive adequate pay and that students do not care very much about their teaching as they are paying more attention to what is taught at their tuitions. To a certain extent it is true that education has now become tuition-driven, as most teachers are more interested in the additional income generated from their tuitions, and how to recruit more students for their tuition classes. It is unfortunate that naïve parents and students have become addicted to the short-term benefits derived from parrot learning, short-cuts and exam specials taught in the tuition classes and some treat their tuition teachers as lords and masters. Some parents and students do not know what real education is, or its long-term benefits. Those teachers who are more interested in making money from tuitions than in their responsibilities as mentors need to know that they are doing a great disservice not only to their students but also to the country. Those teachers who are paying more attention to making money than to their noble profession should devote full time to their tuitions and leave the schools and students in the hands of those teachers who are genuinely interested in nurturing their students. Corrupt teachers need not worry whether there will be enough teachers left at school, if they leave, since there are many graduates wanting, waiting and willing to become teachers. At the same time, dedicated teachers should join hands to get the authorities to appreciate their value, understand their difficulties and

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Ngamoeyeik (Thunanda) Bridge opened

THE Ngamoeyeik (Thunanda) Bridge linking Thunanda Road in North Okkalapa Township to Yaza Thingyan Road in North Dagon Township was opened to traffic yesterday following completion of construction works.

The bridge was built by Myanmar V-Pile Co Ltd at a cost of K6 billion. Construction of the bridge began last August. Upon the completion of the bridge, hundreds of workers from North Dagon Township, who previously walked to

work at an industrial zone in North Okkalapa Township using an old suspension bridge, will be able to get to work by car or motorbike, said Daw Soe Soe Tin, the project director of the company.

The bridge includes a two-lane motorway and is 247 metres long. The concrete structure is flanked by one-meter sidewalks on both sides and can handle loads weighing up to 75 tonnes.

Though the bridge is wide enough for the flow of traffic, the

two approach roads on either side of the bridge are narrow and must be widened to ensure smooth traffic flow, the project director said.

The travel time to Dagon Seikkan Township from North Okkalapa Township can now cut thanks to the new bridge, said taxi driver U Wunna Htay. "I can drive my passengers from Aung Mingala bus terminal to their homes in South Dagon and North Dagon townships using the new bridge," he added. —Soe Win



Ngamoeyeik (Thunanda) Bridge. PHOTO: SOE WIN



The house damaged by the strong wind in Hakha . PHOTO: KYAW SWAR FB

Wind damages new homes for disaster victims in Hakha

STRONG winds hit in Hakha, the capital of Chin State, on Wednesday, blowing the roofs off homes built for victims of previous natural disasters in the area. No people or animals have been reported injured.

Located on the Hakha-Phalan Road, the roofs of 38 wooden houses, which primarily housed victims of landslides, were blown off.

Authorities are now making arrangements for replacing the roofs.—District IPRD

Key stakeholders matter most for speedy improvement of education sector

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provide necessary assistance, in particular, the hardship of teachers posted to remote and underdeveloped areas. In Myanmar society, those in the teaching profession have the tradition of making huge personal sacrifices in the interest of their students, and at this very important stage in their country's history to promote education, equality, prosperity and genuine democracy, teachers should not be reluctant to continue to be dedicated and self-sacrificing.

The fourth group of key education stakeholders are education authorities consisting of school heads, university rectors, officials in charge of inspection, and administration, elected representatives and local administrative officials. As policy makers, managers, administrators, inspectors and observers in a traditional education setting such as in Myanmar, they play a very influential role on the way allocated funds are utilized, teaching is conducted, the amount of effort teachers are exerting to improve teaching/learning, how much learning is taking place, the way education standards are being improved, the activities conducted at the institutions, and the way academic and recreational facilities are being used. The right person with excellent problem solving and decision making skills needs to be appointed in the right place, because even minor decisions, or lack of decisions, and actions can have a huge impact on a vast number of students,

teachers and support staff for a long time which may need a lot of time to redress. For instance, at the higher education level, the establishment of a quality assurance system has been delayed for nearly a decade because the matter was not placed in the hands of a competent university administrator capable of making decisions and being familiar with establishing organizations. In the meantime, universities in Myanmar continue to function without knowing precisely the quality of their programmes, the worth of their degree certificates and the predicament of their students and how much contribution their institutions are contributing to the development of their country. One important quality of good administrators is being accessible to students, parents and other stakeholders, in order to know their opinions, expectations and needs, and in return to explain to them the goals and missions of their education institutions, the assistance required and the problems being faced in fulfilling the main stakeholders' needs. They also need to be capable of networking with other stakeholders, such as, leaders of local community, business and industry and mobilizing their ideas and financial and human resources. This is vital if institutions are to develop further and remain relevant to community, business and industry needs. Another important quality of institution leaders is having the ability to lead without bias, fear, favouritism, corruption and self-aggrandizement,

otherwise, they lose the respect and cooperation of their teachers and students, and their institutions become failed institutions. Administrators must also be dynamic and innovative, willing to shed old programmes and introduce new ones demanded by the times, or else their institutions, like themselves, become obsolete, and the huge number of low quality graduates they produce annually will not have the knowledge, skills and competencies to function in this world of change, challenges and competition. Since those serving as school heads, rectors and inspectors also have wide ranging authority, they have great influence on all aspects of their institutions, ranging from the way rubbish is collected, to the quality of teachers, how far the teachers abide by prescribed syllabi, to the quality of textbooks, programmes, facilities, student learning and how funds are utilized. In addition, they can also influence the direction their institutions take, either moving up or sliding down. Some management officials tend to replicate themselves. This results in the blind appoints another blind to succeed him/her. If this occurs in the education sector, it will mean that the sector will never be able to climb out of the deep hole dug by successive blind managers. Consequently, those who are in charge of management must train younger persons of high calibre to succeed them, or else the vacuum will be filled by incompetent persons and because of the Myanmar tra-

dition of amarde, not wishing to hurt the feelings of other persons, or imposing on others, such persons remain in their position till the time of their retirement. Unfortunately, there is much scope for corruption, nepotism and favouritism in the education sector, due to its vast scope, the huge number of people and activities involved, and the vast amount of money spent for its development each year. As is known by all, corruption hinders development, as a large amount of the money provided by the government for projects gets wasted in the form of bribes given to corrupt officials, which results in poor quality of work, and loss of trust in and respect for dishonest officials by their colleagues and the public. In the same way, nepotism and favouritism cause inefficiency, disharmony and mistrust. Due to the serious consequences, when appointing senior managers in the education sector, careful selection is needed. On their part, as stakeholders and public servants who belong to the education sector, and are highly respected and trusted by the community, they must avoid corruption and be above reproach at all cost. On the other hand, elected representatives and local and regional administrative officials must keep a careful watch on the performance of students, schools and the management within their jurisdiction and also provide assistance by making known the needs of education institutions to relevant authorities.

The final group of key edu-

cation stakeholders who can provide help in the promotion of the education sector are members of the local community, and business and industrial leaders. They are seen as having two main responsibilities to fulfil. The first is to constantly keep in touch with education authorities, inform them of their expectations, requirements and new developments, and make them heed their advice, so that education institutions can provide human resources of the quality and quantity they need. The second is to assist education institutions with their financial, material and technical resources, so that they have alternative means of support than that of the government. On the part of education institution authorities, they must be capable of going beyond the perimeters of their institutions and form strong partnership with and learn from this group of stakeholders, to keep their programmes ever fresh and their products ever relevant to society's needs so that their graduates get jobs of their choice.

As the country is expecting profound changes from the education sector with the advent of the new government, all stakeholders should join hands to make the necessary contributions for the uplift of the education sector, in order to escape swiftly from the vicious circle of a poor country having a poor performing education system and a poor performing education system not being able to lift the country out of poverty.

Turkey, Germany herald progress as migrant flow to Greece slows



Migrants wearing life jackets wait for a dinghy to sail off for the Greek island of Lesbos from the Turkish coastal town of Dikili, Turkey, on 6 April. PHOTO: REUTERS

ATHENS/DIKILI, (Turkey) — Turkey and Germany said on Wednesday an agreement between Ankara and the EU meant to stem the flow of migrants to the Greek islands was showing signs of success, but many were still trying to cross the sea and the route remained far from sealed off.

The accord, which came into force on Monday, aims to help end the chaotic arrival of migrants and refugees, most fleeing war and poverty in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, after more than a million reached Europe last year.

The influx has threatened the EU's system of passport-free travel and prompted its executive on Wednesday to propose strengthening common asylum rules.

New arrivals on the Greek islands from Turkey dropped to 68 in the 24 hours to Wednesday morning from 225 the previous day, data from the Greek migration ministry showed. That compared to a single day last October, during the peak of the crisis, when arrivals approached 9,200 people.

Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said the fall was a direct result of the EU-Turkey deal. A spokesman for the German government, which lobbied skeptical European partners to back the accord and is under political pressure at home to show progress, also said things were moving in the right direction.

"It is functioning, and the (number of) illegal migrants is in decline," Davutoglu said during a visit to Helsinki.

Under the accord, migrants and refugees who cross the Aegean Sea illegally are sent back to Turkey. Since Monday, 202

people, mostly from Pakistan, have been returned. Greek and Turkish officials say more may be sent back this week.

But the number of illegal migrants arriving on the Greek islands fluctuates daily, and the UN refugee agency UNHCR was more cautious about whether the deal was deterring them.

"The conditions forcing these people to move, including onwards to Europe, are still present and many people are falling through the cracks," said Boris Cheshirkov, a UNHCR spokesman on the Greek island of Lesbos.

Turkish authorities detained several groups at sea shortly after dawn on Wednesday, including about 40 Iraqis, some of whom set sail in a small dinghy from a cove 20 km (12 miles) south of the town of Dikili. Others, left on the beach as the dinghy was too small, watched as the Turkish coastguard intercepted them.

"Greece does not want to host us. Turkey is not allowing us. Where should we go? We drown in the sea with our children, that's it," said one Iraqi, declining to give his name.

Around 15 Pakistani migrants were also intercepted and taken to Dikili, where a reception centre has been set up.

On a nearby road, nine Syrian Palestinians who had fled the Yarmouk refugee camp on the edge of Damascus, their belongings in rubbish bags over their backs, were trying to find transport after abandoning efforts to cross the sea, deciding the groups they planned to join were too big and the boats too small.

"This agreement is not about Syrians or Palestinians. Where can we go if we go back

to our land?" one said of the EU-Turkey deal, declining to give her name.

Under the accord, the EU will take in thousands of Syrian refugees directly from Turkey and reward it with financial aid, visa-free travel and progress in its EU membership negotiations.

Critics say the EU was in such a rush to start the returns to Turkey that it skirted legal concerns, something that will come back to haunt it once it moves on to the deportation of asylum-seekers and refugees rather than the illegal migrants sent back so far.

Human rights campaigners have questioned whether Turkey has sufficient safeguards to qualify as a safe country for refugees.

European officials say it is essential for Turkey to adopt tighter regulation on protection for Syrians. A Turkish official said such regulation had been agreed and was awaiting the approval of President Tayyip Erdogan.

Non-Syrians returned from Greece are being taken to a centre in the Turkish town of Kırklareli near the Bulgarian border, from where they are expected to be deported.

Returned Syrians are expected to be taken to a camp in the southern town of Osmaniye. Those with the means will be allowed to settle elsewhere in Turkey among an existing Syrian migrant population of 2.8 million, officials say. Greece has reported a spike in the number of asylum applications of individuals who have arrived since 20 March, the date the first phase of the EU accord took effect and new arrivals were detained in holding centres.—Reuters

NEWS IN BRIEF

Italian police use tear gas, water cannon in Naples anti-Renzi protests

ROME — Italian police fired tear gas and water cannon on Wednesday during running battles with protesters demonstrating against Prime Minister Matteo Renzi during a visit to the southern city of Naples. Renzi, in Italy's third-largest city to discuss plans for the urban development of a former industrial site, was greeted by a hostile group of 1,500 people, some of whom threw fireworks and stones and tried to force police road blocks.

The protesters, who oppose the redevelopment plans which they say have not involved the local community, brandished a giant-sized model of the prime minister in the form of Pinocchio and chanted "Renzi go home" in Neapolitan dialect. Some foreign tourists were caught up in the clashes and four officers were slightly injured, according to local media.—Reuters

Cypriot authorities have agreed to extradite EgyptAir hijacker

CAIRO — Cypriot authorities have agreed to hand over an Egyptian man accused of hijacking a passenger plane and diverting it to Cyprus, Egyptian state news agency MENA said on Wednesday.

The suspect, whom Cypriot and Egyptian authorities have identified as Seif Eldin Mustafa, 59, surrendered last week after commandeering a domestic Alexandria-Cairo flight with 72 passengers and crew on board.—Reuters

One of Brussels bombers had worked in EU Parliament

BRUSSELS — One of the Islamic State suicide bombers who killed 32 people in Brussels on 22 March had worked as a cleaner for a short period in the European Parliament six years earlier, a spokesman for the EU assembly said on Thursday.

In 2009 and 2010, "one of the perpetrators of the Brussels terrorist attacks worked for a period of one month for a cleaning company which was contracted by the European Parliament at the time," spokesman Jaume Duch Guillot said in a statement which did not name the individual.

An EU official said the person was Najim Laachraoui, a 25-year-old Belgian who prosecutors said blew himself up in the airport attack and is also suspected of making suicide vests for last November's Paris attacks in which 130 people died.—Reuters

Iran's Rouhani backs moderate interaction with neighbours, world

TEHRAN — Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said on Thursday his country was not a threat to any other nation and supported interaction with the rest of the world, state TV reported.

"We are in favour of moderation policy ... Iran is not a threat to any country ... Tehran wants interaction with the world, with its neighbouring countries," Rouhani told a gathering in Tehran that was broadcast live on state TV.

A number of Iranian manufactured products representing its latest nuclear achievements were unveiled at a ceremony in Tehran in the presence of Rouhani and other officials ahead of National Nuclear Technology Day on Friday.

Iran emerged from years of economic isolation in January when the United Nations' nuclear watchdog ruled it had curbed its nuclear programme, clearing the way for the lifting of UN, US, and European Union sanctions.—Reuters

M6.7 quake hits near Vanuatu

SYDNEY — An earthquake with a magnitude of 6.7 hit near Vanuatu on Thursday, the third strong quake to jolt the South Pacific island nation this week, according to the US Geological Survey.

The quake struck in waters around 106 kilometers west of Sola at 2:32pm local time and occurred at a depth of 26.8 km, the USGS said.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center did not issue any tsunami warnings. There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

Quakes of a magnitude of 6.9 hit on Sunday and Wednesday. The USGS initially estimated the quake's magnitude at 6.9 before revising it down to 6.7.—Kyodo News

Syrian army and allies launch attack south of Aleppo

BEIRUT — The Syrian army and its allies launched a major attack on insurgents south of Aleppo, described as the fiercest government assault in the area since an agreement to ease the fighting came into effect in February.

Fighting south of Aleppo in recent days has put further strain on the already widely violated ceasefire deal brokered by the United States and Russia with the aim of launching a diplomatic process towards ending the five-year-long war.

The indirect talks organised by the United Nations are struggling with no sign of compromise over the main issue dividing the sides: the future of President Bashar al-Assad. A second round of talks is due to begin on Monday in Geneva.

Rebels described intense air strikes in the southern Aleppo area where the al Qaeda-linked Nusra Front shot down a Syrian warplane on Tuesday and captured its pilot.

Nusra Front, which along with Islamic State is not part of the ceasefire, last week attacked and captured a town in the area, killing dozens of Syrian soldiers and their allies, among them 11 members of the Lebanese Shi'ite group Hezbollah.

A statement from the Syrian army and its allies said they were targeting armed groups in areas south of Aleppo, supported by "heavy and concentrated air strikes", the website of the Hezbollah-controlled



A man inspects the wreckage of a Syrian warplane that was shot down in the Talat al-Iss area, south of Aleppo, Syria, on 5 April. PHOTO: REUTERS

al-Manar reported.

The statement said the attack was a response to insurgent violations of the cessation of hostilities agreement. "This fire will continue until all the militants surrender", it said.

Each side accuses the other of seeking to wreck the cessation of hostilities agreement that has slowed the war across many of the major frontlines of western Syria but not stopped it entirely. Though Nusra is not part of the deal, its fighters are deployed near rebel groups that are.

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 mil-

lion refugees have been driven abroad.

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

The recapture of Palmyra and its military airport, in the central Syrian desert, opened up the road further east to the Islamic State bastions of Deir al-Zor province and Raqqa. Any offensive on Deir al-Zor or Raqqa, however, would probably need significantly more firepower than the Palmyra assault.

A rebel said the government attack south of Aleppo was the heaviest in that area since the truce

agreement came into effect. Hany al-Khaled of the Sham Revolutionary Brigades group, an affiliate of the Levant Front, said his group had taken part in repelling the attack, and Shi'ite militias fighting with the government had suffered heavy losses.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a British-based organisation that tracks the war, said air strikes, artillery and rockets were being used in an attack aimed at recovering Telat al-Eis, the town seized in the Nusra Front-led assault.

The statement reported by al-Manar accused insurgents of breaching the truce "in execution of foreign orders". Opposition official Asaad al-Zoubi, meanwhile, told Reuters the truce was "in danger of ending" due to government violations. —Reuters

Islamic State nets millions from antiquities — Russia

UNITED NATIONS — Islamic State militants in Syria and Iraq are netting between \$150 million and \$200 million a year from illicit trade in plundered antiquities, Russia's ambassador to the United Nations said in a letter released on Wednesday.

"Around 100,000 cultural objects of global importance, including 4,500 archaeological sites, nine of which are included in the World Heritage List of ... UNESCO, are under the control of the Islamic State ... in Syria and Iraq," Ambassador Vitaly Churkin wrote in a letter to the UN Security Council.

"The profit derived by the Islamists from the illicit trade in antiquities and archaeological treasures is estimated at US \$150-200 million per year," he said.

The smuggling of artifacts, Churkin wrote, is organised by Islamic State's antiquities division in the group's equivalent of a ministry for natural resources. Only those who have a permit with a stamp from this division are permitted to excavate, remove and transport antiquities.

Some details of the group's war spoils department were previously revealed by Reuters, which reviewed some of the documents seized by US Special Operations Forces in a May 2015 raid in Syria.

But many details in Churkin's letter appeared to be new.

The envoy from Russia, which has repeatedly accused Turkey of supporting Islamic State by purchasing oil from the group, said plundered antiquities

were largely smuggled through Turkish territory.

"The main centre for the smuggling of cultural heritage items is the Turkish city of Gaziantep, where the stolen goods are sold at illegal auctions and then through a network of antique shops and at the local market," Churkin wrote.

Turkish officials were not immediately available for comment on the Russian allegations. Russian-Turkish relations have been strained ever since Turkey shot down a Russian plane near the Syrian border last November.

Churkin said jewellery, coins and other looted items are brought to the Turkish cities of Izmir, Mersin and Antalya, where criminal groups produce fake documents on their origin.

"The antiquities are then offered to collectors from various countries, generally through Internet auction sites such as eBay and specialised online stores," he said. Churkin named several other Internet auction sites that he said sold antiquities plundered by Islamic State.

"Recently ISIL has been exploiting the potential of social media more and more frequently so as to cut out the middleman and sell artifacts directly to buyers," he said.

eBay said it was not aware of the allegations that it was being used to sell plundered items. "eBay has absolutely zero interest in having illicit listings of cultural or historical goods appear on our platforms," it said. "We're currently looking into the claims of this letter." — Reuters

Two wounded in rocket fire from Syrian side

ANKARA — Two people were wounded early Thursday in Turkey's southern province of Kilis by rockets fired from neighbouring Syria, private Dogan news agency reported.

The two rockets were fired from a Syrian region

under the control of Islamic State (IS) militants, Dogan said.

Thursday's was the latest of a string of incidents in Kilis province involving fire from Syria in recent months, including three mortar shells on 8 March.

In January, one person was killed and several others wounded after a rocket landed at a school garden in the province.

Kilis is located adjacent to a roughly 100-km strip of border territory controlled by Syrian rebels.—Xinhua

NOTICE FOR SUBMITTED CONSTRUCTION PERMITS

1. Construction permits submitted by landlords, licensed engineers, licensed contractors did not meet the requirements in terms of the necessary documentation. Subsequently, actions could not be taken, resulting in delays.
2. According to YCDC Regulation 4(b), it is stated that "if there are unmet requirements in the submitted permits, notification must be made to the applicants. If the application is not re-submitted within a period of thirty days, the case will be dismissed."
3. As such, cases related to construction permits, renovation permits and demolition permits that were submitted before June 2015, will be closed. The documents related to the submitted permits, may be recollected before May 31, 2016.

Head of Department, Engineering Department (Building)
Yangon City Development Committee

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In Chernobyl nuclear zone, animals thrive without humans

CHERNOBYL EXCLUSION ZONE — What happens to the environment when humans disappear? Thirty years after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, booming populations of wolf, elk and other wildlife in the vast contaminated zone in Belarus and Ukraine provide a clue.

On 26 April, 1986, a botched test at the nuclear plant in Ukraine, then a Soviet republic, sent clouds of smouldering radioactive material across large swathes of Europe.

Over 100,000 people had to abandon the area permanently, leaving native animals the sole occupants of a cross-border “exclusion zone” roughly the size of Luxembourg.

In the Belarussian part of the zone, tumble-down villages marked with yellow and red radiation warning signs have become hunting grounds for predators such as wolves and hawks.

Birds, including tawny owls and magpies, nest in the roofs and chimneys of abandoned buildings.

“People can never live there — it’s impossible — not even for the next 24,000 years,” Ukrainian Ecology Minister Hanna Vronska said of the zone, which encompasses 2,600 sq km (1,000 square miles) of forest, marsh and open countryside.

The long-term impact of the radiation on animal populations is a subject of intense debate because scientists have struggled to untangle the positive effects of human absence from the negative effects of living in a poisoned environment.

Despite the radiation, wolf numbers are over seven times higher in the Belarussian part of the zone compared with uncontaminated areas elsewhere, according to a study published in scientific journal *Current Bi-*



A white-tailed eagle lands on a wolf's carcass in the 30 km (19 miles) exclusion zone around the Chernobyl nuclear reactor, in the abandoned village of Dronki, Belarus, on 15 February. PHOTO: REUTERS

ology last October.

Some wolves have taken to straying outside the zone to steal calves from nearby farms, prompting hunters to set traps or shoot them as a deterrent.

International donors have funded the building of a 30,000 tonne “safe confinement” arch to prevent more deadly particles spewing from the stricken nuclear reactor's site for the next 100 years.

Nevertheless, nothing can

be done to decontaminate trees and soil that suffered the worst of the nuclear fallout within a 30-km radius of the plant.

In March, Vronska said authorities were considering turning the uninhabitable zone into a biosphere to protect and study its native animal populations in what would be the largest nature reserve in Europe.

There are also plans to use parts of the area to store nuclear waste and for solar power.

Special government permits, usually valid for a few days, are required for anyone wishing to visit the exclusion zone from the Belarussian side. Roads going into the zone are guarded to prevent any unauthorised person entering.

While the rules of access are also strict on the Ukrainian side, small tour groups can visit sites within the zone, including the “ghost town” of Pripyat. —Reuters

South Africa local government vote in August a test for Zuma

JOHANNESBURG — South Africa will hold local government elections on 3 August, President Jacob Zuma said on Wednesday, in what looks likely to become a referendum on his leadership after an attempt to impeach him and mounting concern about weak economic growth.

This year's local elections pose a major risk for Zuma's dominant ruling African National Congress, with the party facing a strong challenge from opponents seeking to capitalise on what they see as Zuma's missteps.

Any defeats in the big population centres for the ANC, which counts on rural areas for the bulk of its support, could damage the

party that has been in power since the end of white-minority rule in 1994 as it gears up for a presidential election in 2019.

Zuma is unable to stand in that vote after completing two terms but is likely to be influential behind the scenes in picking a new ANC leader at a conference in 2017, even though calls are already growing for him to step down.

The elections will choose provincial officials, metropolitan and local municipal councils and mayors. The opposition aims to wrestle control of the commercial hub Johannesburg and capital Pretoria from the ANC, as well as urban centres where anger has

risen against the ruling party.

“So yes, it's on the 3rd of August that we deal decisively with ZANC (Zuma's ANC),” Mmusi Maimane, leader of the Democratic Alliance, the biggest opposition party, said on Twitter.

The firebrand leader of the leftist Economic Freedom Fighters, Julius Malema, also tweeted that his party was “ready to contest these elections”.

At a media briefing in downtown Johannesburg on Tuesday, churches, trade unions and civil rights groups increased the rhetoric against the president, while an ANC branch in the city also urged him to resign.

“People are feeling pain. Anger and urgency is growing,” the groups said in a joint statement, calling for protests against Zuma. It was not immediately clear how much support the groups had.

Zuma's son Edward backed his father, saying there was a conspiracy to force the president from his office.

“We know it's only not about the well being of the country ... its about merely personal vendettas that they have against the president of the country,” Edward Zuma said in an interview with ENCA television station.

“They have tried many tricks in the book, they have failed,” he said of the people who have called on Zuma to resign. —Reuters



A woman casts her ballot in Johannesburg's Alexandra township, in May 2014. PHOTO: REUTERS

Turkey launches inquiry into leak of 50 million citizens' data

ISTANBUL — Turkey is investigating how hackers have posted online the identity data of some 50 million Turks, including what they said were details about the president and prime minister, after what is believed to be the biggest data breach seen in the country.

While no group has taken credit for uploading the data to a website called the Turkish Citizenship Database, the comments posted suggest Turkey may be a target of political hackers.

The 1.5 gigabyte compressed file contains the national identity number, date of birth and full address for 49.6 million Turks, according to the website, or around two thirds of the population.

The website said it included the ID information of President Tayyip Erdogan, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and former president Abdullah Gul and taunted the president.

“Who would have imagined that backward ideologies, cronyism and rising religious extremism in Turkey would lead to a crumbling and vulnerable technical infrastructure?” the website says. “Do something about Erdogan! He is destroying your country beyond recognition.”

An official at Ankara's chief prosecutor's office said on Wednesday it was investigating the breach, but declined to give further details.

The number of Turkish cit-

izens affected was roughly the same size as the entire electorate, Justice Minister Bekir Bozdog told reporters.

“How and from where this was leaked needs to be looked into,” he said. “I believe the necessary investigations — both administrative and judicial — have been launched and whatever is necessary will be done.”

Tuncay Besikci, a computer forensics expert at auditing and consultancy firm PwC, confirmed to Reuters the file contained ID numbers and personally identifiable information of at least 46 million citizens.

Transport and Communication Minister Binali Yildirim said on Tuesday the breach appeared to date back to at least 2010. It is not clear when the file was first uploaded, although reports of it surfaced in local media this week.

He said the data was from electoral records that the state shares with political parties before elections.

However, Besikci, the computer expert, said he believed the data was taken from the government's official Population Governance Central Database in or around 2009 and later illegally sold on to firms that dealt in asset foreclosures.

In December, Turkish Internet servers suffered one of the most intense cyberattacks seen in the country, raising fears Ankara may have been a target of political hackers. —Reuters

Swiss police raid UEFA as Panama Papers scandal spreads

ZURICH/REYKJAVIK — Swiss police raided the European soccer body UEFA on Wednesday to seize information about a contract disclosed in the Panama Papers that was signed by Gianni Infantino, now head of the global soccer body FIFA.

The impact of the leaked documents from a Panamanian law firm is snowballing, with Iceland facing a political crisis after its prime minister stepped aside on Tuesday following revelations about his wife's finances.

Recently elected Infantino joined a growing list of public figures and political leaders whose financial arrangements have come under scrutiny after the release of the 11.5 million documents, which have caused public outrage over how the rich and powerful can hide money to avoid taxes.

Infantino said he was "dismayed that his integrity was being doubted" by media reports which said the contract he signed several years ago as a UEFA official sold broadcast rights at a low price to a company which sold them on at a far higher price.

Reuters, which has not seen the documents, was unable to confirm this and UEFA denied that the rights were sold at below the market price.

"UEFA can confirm that today we received a visit from the office of the Swiss Federal Police acting under a warrant and requesting sight of the contracts between UEFA and Cross Trading/Teleamazonas," UEFA said in a statement.

Infantino said in a



FIFA President Gianni Infantino gestures during a news conference at the South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL) headquarters in Luque, Paraguay on 28 March 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

FIFA statement the contract had been "properly conducted" by UEFA.

British Prime Minister David Cameron also faced another day of questions about his finances, because his late father was among the tens of thousands of people named in the documents from law firm Mossack Fonseca, which has denied any wrongdoing.

After having at first described it as a private matter, Cameron's office said on Tuesday that he and his family did not benefit from any such funds at present. Cameron also said he did not own any shares or have any offshore funds.

But his failure to say whether he or his family would benefit in future only intensified media speculation, with the story splashed across many newspaper

front pages on Wednesday.

"There are no offshore funds or trusts which the prime minister, Mrs Cameron or their children will benefit from in future," a spokesman for Cameron said on Wednesday.

Among those named in the documents are friends of Russian President Vladimir Putin, relatives of the leaders of China, Britain and Pakistan, and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko.

Poroshenko said he set up an offshore trust to separate his business and political interests after he became president and the arrangements were carried out with full transparency. He said he was not trying to minimize tax payments.

"There does not need to be an investigation," Poroshenko told reporters in Tokyo, when asked about the

planned investigation by Ukraine's fiscal services.

Iceland suffered further political fallout from the documents, with the government hoping to avoid early elections by trying to pick a prime minister to replace Sigmundur David Gunnlaugsson.

He stepped down after the documents showed his wife owned an offshore company that held millions of dollars worth of debt from failed Icelandic banks. Gunnlaugsson has said his wife's assets were taxed in Iceland but the opposition has accused him of a conflict of interest because his government was negotiating deals with claimants on the banks. It was not clear whether Gunnlaugsson's wife had received any payment from the banks.— Reuters

Panama will form commission to review financial practices

PANAMA CITY — Panama said on Wednesday it would form an independent commission to review the country's financial practices following the leak of information from a local law firm that has embarrassed a clutch of world leaders.

"The Panamanian government, via our foreign ministry, will create an independent commission of domestic and international experts ... to evaluate our current practices and propose the adoption of measures that we will share with other countries of the world to strengthen the transparency of the financial and legal systems," President Juan Carlos Varela said in a televised address.

Governments across the world have begun investigating possible financial wrongdoing by the rich and powerful after the leak of more than 11.5 million documents, dubbed the "Panama Papers," from the Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca.

In his brief statement, Varela reiterated Panama would work with other countries over the leak, which was published in an investigation by the US-based International Consortium of Investigative Journalists and various news organisations.

The papers have revealed financial arrangements of prominent figures, including friends of Russian President Vladimir Putin, relatives of the prime ministers of Britain and Pakistan and Chinese President Xi Jinping, as well as Ukraine's president.

Panama is still considering who will be in the

commission, and Gian Castillero, a senior government adviser, said in an interview he expected it to report within six months.

Castillero conceded that the leak had hurt the reputation of Panama, which has an economy that was 83 per cent services-based, he said.

France's government responded to the revelations on Tuesday by saying it would put Panama back on its list of "uncooperative countries", though Castillero was dismissive of the move.



Panama President Juan Carlos Varela. PHOTO: REUTERS

"The declarations from France are emotional and political declarations which shouldn't be repeated," he said in response to a question about whether other countries could follow France's lead.

Castillero stressed that no proof had been found to show Mossack Fonseca had acted improperly. And he was adamant that the fact that founding partner Ramon Fonseca was a friend of Varela's would not affect the government's judgment of the firm.

"I don't think it's really that difficult," he said.— Reuters

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV BANGSAKAO VOY NO (39)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV BANGSAKAO VOY NO (39) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 8.4.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of A.I.P.T-3 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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Phone No: 2301186

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV KOTA HARTA VOY NO ()

Consignees of cargo carried on MV KOTA HARTA VOY NO () are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 8.4.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of H.P.T where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

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CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV MARIA T.L VOY NO (GY01)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV MARIA T.L VOY NO (GY01) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 8.4.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T.T-4 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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Hugs, tears, respect as 'American Idol' looks back

LOS ANGELES — "American Idol," the TV show that searched for a pop star and itself became the biggest force in US television, took a trip down memory lane on Tuesday as it prepares to bring down the curtain after 14 years on the air.

Original judges Simon "Mr. Nasty" Cowell, Paula Abdul and Randy Jackson, along with winners including Kelly Clarkson, Carrie Underwood and Scotty McCreery looked back on the highs and lows of the talent show credited with harnessing people power to turn ordinary Americans into superstars.

"'Idol' was made for people like me that just needed a door," said Underwood, who was raised on a farm in Oklahoma and who went on to become a Grammy-winning force in country music.

"I still hear on a daily basis, 'I voted for you'," added Underwood, who won in 2005.

The 90-minute retrospective "American Idol: American Dream," was broadcast as the TV series prepares to crown its last Idol later this week before ending production.

Old clips recalled how Fox

television took a chance in 2002 on unknown Britons Cowell and series creator Simon Fuller and a format that turned atrocious auditions into mass entertainment, brought an acerbic tone to critiques of amateurs, and handed TV audiences the power to choose the winner.

Between 2005-2007, "American Idol" was watched by some 30 million Americans, crushing shows on rival networks. Audiences have now dropped to around nine million.

Along the way, stars like Clarkson were born, Americans were introduced to "guyliner" courtesy of 2009 runner-up Adam Lambert, and others, like Jennifer Hudson, were booted off only to triumph a few years later.

"When I was winning the Oscar (for 'Dreamgirls') at the Kodak Theatre, I was thinking, oh, the 'American Idol' final was here. That was the first thing that came to my mind," said Hudson, who won the supporting actress Academy Award in 2007.

Over the years, the "Idol" judges hugged (Abdul), fought (Nicki Minaj and Mariah Carey), cursed (Steven Tyler) and



Steven Tyler, Jennifer Lopez and Randy Jackson stand together after being announced as the judges for season ten, in Inglewood, California in September 2010. PHOTO: REUTERS

wept (Jennifer Lopez), and, after the departure of Cowell in 2010, became kinder.

"Working with Mariah and Nicki was exceptionally challenging," recalled executive producer Nigel Lythgoe. "Nothing

would stop them once they got going, which I don't think the public enjoyed. We certainly didn't."

Although "American Idol" comes to an end this week, Fuller held out the hope that it may

return one day.

"I do believe there is an opportunity to do things differently and see what a revamped next generation 'American Idol' might look like," he said. —Reuters



Charlize Theron. PHOTO: REUTERS

LOS ANGELES — With leading ladies Charlize Theron, Emily Blunt and Jessica Chastain, female characters dominate fantasy film "The Huntsman: Winter's War", unleashing dark forces, freezing enemies and fighting evil.

The movie is a prequel to the 2012 "Snow White and the Huntsman", which was inspired by the Brothers Grimm fairytale, and sees Oscar winner Theron and "Thor" actor Chris Hemsworth reprise their roles as evil Queen Ravenna and The Huntsman. The story follows Ravenna and her sister Freya (Blunt) as they seek kingdom domination with The Huntsman and his bow and arrow wielding love interest Sara (Chastain) battling to defeat them in their quest.

"With this specific genre, it's usually that the girl is tied to a tree and the guy has to save her and there's a lot of damsels in distress," Blunt told Reuters. "I think this fairytale just adopts a different dynamic between men and women ... I remember it really struck me when I read the script that they were so layered and nuanced and different from each other as well."

While Ravenna will stop at nothing to remain the fairest in the land, Freya turns into an icy-hearted villainess after losing her child. —Reuters

Women lead the way in 'The Huntsman: Winter's War'

Charlie Sheen under investigation by LAPD 'threat' detectives

LOS ANGELES — Detectives from the Los Angeles Police Department's "threat management" squad have opened a criminal investigation of actor Charlie Sheen, a police spokesman said on Wednesday.

Police disclosed little else about the investigation, which the LAPD spokesman, officer Mike Lopez, said began with a complaint lodged against the actor on 31 March.

Lopez declined to provide any information about the nature of the alleged victim or threat, but said investigators had obtained a search warrant in the case, and that as of Wednesday afternoon had yet to contact Sheen.

Unconfirmed reports from media outlets, including Vari-

ety and RadarOnline.com, referred to an audio tape they said was at the center of the investigation.

A lawyer for Sheen, best known for his starring role on the long-running hit CBS comedy "Two and a Half Men," could not immediately be reached for comment.

The police investigation marks the latest brush with the law for the 50-year-old actor, whose career has been overshadowed for years by his admittedly raucous lifestyle, substance abuse, stints in rehab and legal troubles. Last No-

vember, Sheen acknowledged he had been diagnosed as HIV-positive four years earlier and was being extorted for more than \$10 million to keep that information quiet.—Reuters



PHOTO: REUTERS

Studio Ghibli's 'Ronja' among winners of Int'l Emmy Kids Awards

TOKYO — Television anime series "Ronja, The Robber's Daughter" from Japan's Studio Ghibli has won the animation category of the International Emmy Kids Awards, public broadcaster NHK said Wednesday. The series was created

by Goro Miyazaki, an animation movie director known for "Tales from Earthsea" (Gedo Senki) and "From Up on Poppy Hill" (Kokurikozaka Kara). The story is based on a novel by Swedish children's literature writer Astrid Lindgren, portraying bandit families living in beautiful and magnificent forests and their conflicts.

NHK, officially known as Japan Broadcasting Corp., broadcast the animation series from 2014 through 2015.

The International Emmy Awards are organised by the International Academy of Television Arts & Sciences and awarded to excellent TV programmes produced outside the United States.—Kyodo News

US woman fights for her dream in Japanese pro wrestling

TOKYO — Forget cherry blossoms and delicate slices of raw fish. The Japan on which Kris Hernandez has pinned her dreams is the thud of body slams, sweat, and garish costumes — the world of professional women's wrestling.

"I fell in love with it — the drama, the excitement," the 31-year-old from the United States said of her first encounter with this unusual side of Japan.

"I was on the edge of my seat with every move, thinking 'Oh my God, how come they are not dead? Can I make a living doing this? Let me try'."

So Hernandez, who lived in San Francisco before coming to Japan, became the first foreigner to train from scratch and work her way up into Japanese women's pro wrestling.

She quit her teaching job and shared a house with women wrestlers, living off savings as she began a tough daily training regimen including gymnastic moves.

"I was pretty poor then, but I wanted to become a wrestler so badly. I would walk four hours across Tokyo to get to practice, do three-hour training and then get the train back," she said.

"If I saved the train fare one way, it would be all right."

She made her debut in Au-

gust 2014 under the name Kris Wolf, wearing a costume with a wolf's head and tail.

Even in this world, which Hernandez says is harder-hitting than its US counterpart, Japanese rules on hierarchy come into play.

"It's kind of militant — don't talk to the senior unless you are spoken to, clean, stay after until all the seniors leave, then you can leave. Arrive 30 minutes before the seniors," she said. The money is not huge — she earns \$250 for a weekly show — but that's not the point.

"I was doing it because it was cool," said Hernandez, who is now on a break after suffering a concussion.

The brutal reality of the ring is masked by a strong fantasy element that feeds its popularity with fans, most of them men.

But the rough and tumble may also be an outlet for many of the wrestlers in a country where women are usually expected to be demure and cute, Hernandez said.

"Sometimes it's a part of themselves that they cannot normally express," she said.

"I have met so many that are so sweet and shy outside the ring, and then you get into the ring and they explode."

—Reuters



Wrestlers Kris Wolf and Starfire fight during their Stardom professional wrestling show at Korakuen Hall in Tokyo, Japan, in July 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

Thousand-year-old Huangyao town attracts visitors in SW China



ZHAOPING — People visit the Huangyao ancient town of Zhaoping County, southwest China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, on 6 April 2016. The town has become a tourist destination thanks to its 1,000-year history. PHOTO: XINHUA

Rare First Folio of Shakespeare's collected plays found in Scotland

SCOTLAND — A rare, nearly 400-year-old copy of a first edition of William Shakespeare's collected plays has been found at a stately home in Scotland, on the Isle of Bute.

Experts consider the First Folio, as such editions are known, the most reliable text for 36 plays written by the man considered by many to be the world's greatest playwright. They include "Macbeth" and "As You Like It".

The edition found at Mount Stuart on the Isle of Bute was authenticated by Emma Smith, professor of Shakespeare Studies at Oxford University.

"The collections managers were in touch to say they had a Shakespeare First Folio and my first reaction was yeah, right, sure you do. But on much closer inspection they turned out to be right," Smith told the BBC in an interview. The three leather-bound volumes, worth an estimated 2.5 million pounds, bring the total of known surviving copies in the world to



A pyrotechnician lights a flaming depiction of William Shakespeare during a firework display at the Royal Shakespeare Company marking the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth in Stratford-upon-Avon, in this file photograph dated in April 2014. PHOTO: REUTERS

234. "Without this (edition) we would have lost probably half of Shakespeare's work," Smith said.

They were collated and first published in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, according to the British Library.

The details of the hands through which the folio passed are documented in a letter from the

book's 18th century editor, Isaac Reed, accompanying the book, Smith said, helping the authentication process. The folio will be on display for the first time at Mount Stuart from Thursday as part of an exhibition that will run until 30th October. This year marks the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death on 23rd April 1616.—Reuters

10:50 Am Sagaing: Guitars

(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 To My Dream City (Part- 1)

07:50 Pm Thingyan Songs & Dances

08:03 Pm News

08:26 Pm The Great Po Sein

08:51 Pm Colourful Threads

(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)

(8-4-2016, Friday)

6:00 pm

- Weather Report
- Music Programme

6:30 pm

- Pyi Thu Ni Ti

6:50 pm

- Thingyan Dances

7:10 pm

- International Drama Series

7:50 pm

- International Drama Series

8:30 pm

- Cartoon Programme "Monster INC (Part-I)"

9:10 pm

- Music Programme

9:20 pm

- Sai Htee Hseng Or An Exceptional Music Star From Shan Plateaus (Ep-4)

9:50 pm

- International Movie Songs

10:00 pm

- English Premier League (Review) (Part-III)

10:20 pm

- Myanmar Video

Midnight

- Close Down.

**From 8-4-2016 (Friday) 6:00 Pm
To 9-4-2016 (Saturday) 6:00 Pm**

Gritty Man City fight back to draw 2-2 against PSG

MANCHESTER City claimed a vital edge in their Champions League quarter-final tie against Paris St Germain after grabbing two away goals in a scrappy 2-2 first leg draw on Wednesday.

PSG, playing in their fourth straight quarter-final in the competition, fell behind when Kevin De Bruyne opened the scoring in the 38th minute, but Zlatan Ibrahimovic capitalised on a City blunder to level, having earlier missed a penalty.

The home side, who had exited at this stage for the last three seasons, then took the lead through Adrien Rabiot just before the hour but Fernandinho made it 2-2 after benefiting from a PSG mistake.

City, who are playing in the quarter-finals for the first time, will host PSG at the Etihad stadium next Tuesday, where boss Manuel Pellegrini is hoping for more of the same.

"We have to keep that mentality for the second leg," he said.

His PSG counterpart Laurent Blanc, however, was left to rue a disappointing display.

"It's not a good result, we made too many technical mistakes," the former France centre back said.

Both teams were without



Paris St Germain's players and Manchester City's players in action during their UEFA Champions League Quarter Final First Leg at Parc des Princes, Paris, France on 6 April, 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

key midfielders as City's Yaya Toure was ruled out with a knee injury and PSG's Marco Verratti was sidelined with a groin problem.

PSG, crowned Ligue 1 champions last month, were boosted by the return of Serge

Aurier, who was handed his first start since insulting coach Laurent Blanc in February while City welcomed back Joe Hart and the keeper made his presence count.

The home side made a shaky start with David Luiz picking up a yellow card in the first minute,

which will rule the Brazil international out of the second leg.

Luiz, however, won PSG a penalty when he was brought down by Bacary Sagna in the 12th minute, only for Hart to deny Ibrahimovic with a sharp diving save to his right — his

third straight penalty save in the competition.

It was a measure of revenge for Hart, who in 2012 conceded four Ibrahimovic goals as Sweden beat England 4-2 in a friendly.

Ibrahimovic looked nervy as he missed the target midway through the first half with only Hart to beat having been nicely played in by Thiago Motta in what was a scrappy start by PSG, whose normally neat passing game lacked accuracy.

After Blaise Matuidi, who will also miss the second leg after being booked, lost the ball in midfield, Fernandinho played De Bruyne through and the Belgian fired past Kevin Trapp to open the scoring.

Ibrahimovic, however, levelled three minutes later, capitalising on a bizarre City blunder.

Hart played a goal kick to a Fernando, who dithered on the ball before his pass hit the Swedish striker's outstretched foot and rolled into the empty net.

PSG went ahead in the 59th minute when Hart palmed away Edinson Cavani's header into the path of Rabiot, who tapped in.

Fernandinho levelled with 18 minutes remaining, latching onto Bacary Sagna's cross after Aurier and Thiago Silva failed to clear.—Reuters

Venus powers on, Bencic upset in Charleston

CHARLESTON — Venus Williams avoided another early exit with a routine win over fellow American Alison Riske at the Volvo Car Open in South Carolina while Swiss second seed Belinda Bencic was ousted by Russian qualifier Elena Vesnina.

Third seed Williams, who had a first-round bye after arriving in Charleston having lost the opening match in four of the five events she has played in 2016, breezed by Riske 6-4, 6-2 on Wednesday.

"It wasn't easy," the former world number one, who used a mix of big serves and solid ground-

strokes to get by Riske, said during an on-court interview. "It was great tennis from both of us, an hour and a half of slam, bam, thank you ma'am!"

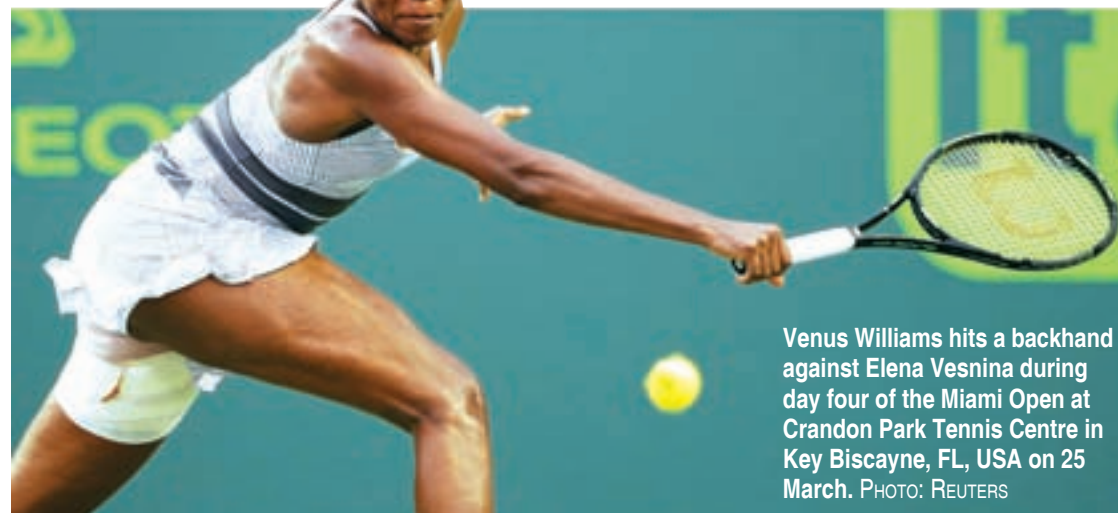
The seven-times grand slam champion has had a disappointing season so far with opening losses at Auckland, the Australian Open, Indian Wells and Miami. Sandwiched between those losses was a title triumph in the inaugural Taiwan Open.

The 35-year-old Williams, in search of her 50th WTA title, will next face Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva on the unique

green clay courts of Charleston for a spot in the quarter-finals.

World number 10 Bencic had no answer for Vesnina, who needed just 56 minutes to secure a 6-1, 6-1 triumph and passage to the third round. Others reaching the third round were Italian fifth seed Sara Errani and American seventh seed Sloane Stephens.

Fourth seed Lucie Safarova of the Czech Republic was upset in earlier action, falling 6-3, 6-3 to American wildcard Louisa Chirico, while last year's runner-up, eighth-seeded American Madison Keys, lost to German Laura Siegemund 6-7(3), 6-4, 6-4.—Reuters



Venus Williams hits a backhand against Elena Vesnina during day four of the Miami Open at Crandon Park Tennis Centre in Key Biscayne, FL, USA on 25 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

Leicester within four wins of fairytale

LONDON — When Leicester City faced Sunderland on the opening day of the season, even their most optimistic fans were expecting another testing struggle to avoid relegation.

As they prepare to visit Sam Allardyce's side in the return fixture on Sunday, some of those supporters are now pre-emptively buying scarves emblazoned with the words 'Premier League Champions'.

While many are no doubt steering clear to avoid tempting fate, four victories from the remaining six games of the season will hand Leicester a maiden top flight title and complete one of the most remarkable fairytales in English soccer history.

Leicester lead second place Tottenham Hotspur by seven points heading into Sunday's game and need 12 more to put themselves out of sight.

For the Leicester side that plunged to the foot of the table last season, four wins in six games might have seemed like a daunting task. Yet such has been the collective sense of calm that

seems to encircle Claudio Ranieri's side this year that few are now expecting a collapse in the home straight.

The slip-ups and the wobbles have been reserved for the so-called bigger teams, who have all fallen off the pace while Leicester have sailed smoothly through the supposed choppy waters of the title run-in.

Four successive 1-0 victories have propelled Leicester to the verge of success and been testament to the organisational abilities of their Italian coach.

Leicester have never kept five consecutive clean sheets in the top flight, but, in a season when past records have counted for little, it would be a brave man, or perhaps a foolish one, to bet against another shut-out against Sunderland, whose relegation woes are intensifying.

Allardyce's side are four points adrift of Norwich City in 17th and entering the now-or-never part of the season when they will have to start winning or become resigned to their fate. — Reuters