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DRUGS IN THE CREEK

Tip-off from resident leads to seizure of 65,000 stimulants in Yangon

Aye Min Soe

POLICE have seized more than 65,000 illegal stimulant pills with a street value of around K327 million (US\$254,000) on Friday.

Counter-narcotics police in Mayangon Township discovered 65,400 tablets in Yogyi Creek while inspecting it after receiving a tip-off from a local resident, Police Officer Aung Zaw Win from Mayangon police station told *The Global New Light of Myanmar* at around 7pm on Friday.

The pills, identified by police as ya ba, were packed in 37 bags and were discovered by a woman who was searching for empty cans and bottles floating in the creek in order to resell them.

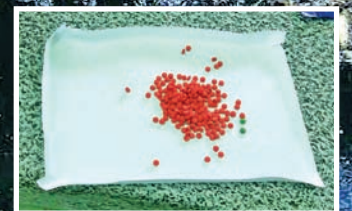
An investigation into the discovery has been opened, said Aung Zaw Win, who added that the value of a single pill on the street is around K5,000 (US\$4).

Myanmar's biggest drug bust occurred on July 28, when an inspection team in Yangon seized 26.7 million stimulant tablets with a street value of more than \$100 million. The counter-narcotics police team found the drugs in a parked truck in Mingaladon Township in northern Yangon.

Police later seized an additional 1.5 million stimulant tablets worth about K7.5 billion (\$5.84 million) during their raids on the



Below: Friday's drug haul.



Police discovered 65,400 illegal stimulants in Yogyi Creek in western Yangon after receiving a tip-off from a local woman searching for cans and bottles to recycle. PHOTO: SUPPLIED BY MAYANGON TOWNSHIP POLICE STATION

head office of Kaladan Delta Development Co. Ltd in North Dagon Township on 3 August. Police discovered the haul of drugs packed in five bags at the head office. The seizure was said to be linked to the

previous one in July in Mingaladon Township.

Kaladan Delta Development Co's branch office and houses of its managing director and members of the board of directors in Mayan-

gon were found to be locked and the suspects believed to have fled, police said. One person was arrested on 13 August in connection to the massive drug haul.

According to information

from the Ministry of Home Affairs, there are similarities between the bags containing the illegal stimulants tablets in North Dagon and those seized in Mingaladon Township.—GNLM

Report published on digital literacy and the law

Ye Myint

ONLINE and Offline human rights need protection as technologies transform Myanmar, according to an assessment on information and communication technology sector in the country.

The assessment developed by the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB) and the Institute for Human Rights and Business has highlighted actual and potential human rights impacts and the gaps in policy, law and practice with recommendations on how to address these.

"The ICT sector is connect-

ing and transforming Myanmar with many opportunities for the enjoyment of human rights, such as the right to education, health and information, and the right to participate in cultural life and government", MCRB Director Ms Vicky Bowman said at the launch of the report in Yangon on Thursday.

But, the director added that the headlong rush to roll out a modern network countrywide brings challenges, particularly in the absence of effective enforcement of labour and safety laws, or adequate policy and legal frameworks."

"These gaps are compounded by most users' lack of ICT experience – their 'digital literacy' – which can put them and others at risk."

Margaret Wachenfeld, Director of Research and Legal Affairs at the Institute for Human Rights and Business said that the challenges facing the ICT Sector in Myanmar include a legal framework that is not designed for the modern technological age, nor aligned with international standards.

"Myanmar needs to fill the regulatory gaps through a rights-based approach which learns

from good (and bad) practice elsewhere."

The report with five main themes— gaps in the policy, legal and regulatory framework, access, online 'digital dangers', "offline" human rights issues and uniting or dividing Myanmar society— has made recommendations to key actors in Myanmar's ICT sector, including the government, companies, CSOs and media and users.

In its recommendations to users, the report stressed the need to undertake basic steps to protect individual's privacy and security while using ICTs.—GNLM

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Senior General Min Aung Hlaing donates to schools in Shan State



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing presents 27 sets of computer to U Kun San Lwin, Chairman of Pa-O Self-Administered Zone. PHOTO: MYAWADY

SENIOR GENERAL Min Aung Hlaing donated computers, notebooks and cash funds to schools and universities at Taunggyi's City Hall on Friday.

He said during a ceremony that the computers and funds were given on behalf of the country's army, navy and air force as part of ongoing efforts to boost educational standards in Myanmar and build a bright future for the nation.

The Chief Minister of Shan State Sao Aung Myat, senior officers from the Office of the Commander-in-Chief and Commander Major General Aye Win of the Eastern Command were present during the ceremony.

The chief minister also briefed the senior general on efforts to tackle the narcotic drug trade, to improve infrastructure and raise health and education standards in Shan State.

The educational institutes received 30 computers and related accessories, as well as thousands of exercise books and K22.5 million in funding. Members of the public also donated 178 computers and over K157 million at the same ceremony.

The senior general later proceeded to the Pa-O Self-Administered Zone, where he gave similar donations and was given an update from Chairman U

Khun San Lwin about regional development. The chairman received 27 computers, K70 million and thousands of exercise books on behalf of local students.

Afterwards, the senior general visited Defence Services Computer Science and Technology Institute and heard reports on agriculture courses before inspecting construction work at the institute.—Myawady

DRD, JICA ink Rural Water Supply Project in Central Dry Zone (Phase II)

RESPONDING to the urgent shortfall of safe drinking water in the Central Dry Zone, the Government of Japan decided to extend Grant Aid for Phase II of the Rural Water Supply Project in Central Dry Zone (Mandalay, Magway and Sagaing Regions). The Grant Agreement was signed on 24 September 2015 between U Khant Zaw, Director General, Department of Rural Development (DRD) under Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development (MLFRD), and Mr. Keiichiro NAKAZAWA, Chief Representative of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Myanmar Office.

The purpose of the project is improvement of

equipment and materials for deep well construction and strengthening of DRD's water quality analysis capacity so as to enable DRD to provide more safe water and contribute to betterment of socio-economic life of rural population in the Central Dry Zone.

In order to achieve the project purpose, JICA will implement the Grant Aid project of up to one billion two hundred and forty-two million Japanese Yen (JPY 1,242,000,000) for procurement of Truck Mounted Drilling Machine, Air Compressor, Crane Truck, Submersible Pump and Generators, and Casing and Screen to develop more than 100 deep wells in the Central Dry Zone.—GNLM



Villagers in dry zone collect water from a water supply facility. PHOTO: MNA

Vice-Senior General visits air force during China tour



Vice-Senior General Soe Win visits a training centre of the Chinese People's Army Airborne Division. PHOTO: MYAWADY

THE Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Vice-Senior General Soe Win visited a training centre of the Chinese People's Army Air Force Corps on Thursday.

The delegation was welcomed by General Liu Fa Qing, who explained about the history of the 15th Airborne Corps' history.

In the afternoon, the delegation flew to Kunming city in Yunnan Province, where they

were welcomed by regional commander-in-chief Senior Colonel Lu Mei Zhang and Myanmar Consular U Aung Kyaw Oo.

The delegation met with Yunnan Province Community Party's General Secretary Mr Li Ji Heng at Haigeng Garden Hotel and discussed issues such as developing aspects of the relationship between Myanmar and China, peace and stability in border areas, the rules of law and the peace process in Myanmar.

Vice-Senior General

Soe Win later met with Yunnan Province Commander General Yang Guang Yao and discussed bilateral military cooperation for peace in border areas, peace and stability along the borders, security for border-cross trade and progress towards achieving a national ceasefire in Myanmar.

On Friday the delegation visited Dian Chi Lake in Kunming and a traditional village. The party was seen off by Yunnan Province Regional Com-

mander-in-Chief Senior Colonel Lu Mei Zhang when boarding a flight to Yangon on Friday afternoon. They were welcomed by Yangon Regional Commander Brigadier Myo Thein Zaw and Chinese Ambassador to Myanmar Mr Hong Liang. The delegation from Myanmar included Lt Gen Yar Pae from Office of Commander in Chief (Army), Nay Pyi Taw Regional Commander Lt Gen Moe Myint Tun and other military officials.—Myawady

Bagan conservation workshop ends

A WORKSHOP on the preservation and conservation of the ancient city of Bagan came to an end on Friday.

The workshop began in Bagan's archaeological zone on 21

September and involved members of the ASEAN Cultural and Information Committee.

During the workshop, archaeologists shared their knowledge and expertise on conserving archaeolog-

ical zones.

Union Culture Minister U Aye Myint Kyu said the aim of the workshop is to strengthen historical knowledge across ASEAN and to take on responsibility and accountability for

preserving sites of great cultural significance.

The workshop was attended by archaeological researchers from ASEAN member states and the ASEAN secretariat.—MNA

German political foundation launches conference



Elections and Ethics Conference aims to promote a stronger understanding of electoral ethics. PHOTO: MNA

A CODE of ethics must be abided by everyone involved in the upcoming election, said the Chairman of Union Election Commission U Tin Aye at the Election and Ethics Conference launched in Nay Pyi Taw on Friday.

The conference is being organised by the German political

foundation Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and involved election candidates, officials from civil society organisations, the media and international groups.

The conference aims to promote a stronger understanding of electoral ethics, international election procedures and how to

overcome any problems that may arise.

U Win Htein of the National League for Democracy, Ms Christian Reick and Dr Thomas Lawo from Konrad Adenauer Stiftung took part in discussions. The conference will continue until 26 September.—MNA

Police donate blood



ONE-HUNDRED police from No.1 Security Force donated blood at 1000-bed hospital in Nay Pyi Taw as part of commemorations for the upcoming 51st anniversary of Myanmar Police Force Day, which falls on 1 October.

Another 75 police carried out sanitation works at basic education middle schools in Nyungkyat Village and Myohla station in Yedashe Township in Bago Region on the same day.—MNA

What they stand for: campaigns aired

Myanmar Farmers' Development Party and Democracy and Human Rights Party broadcast their campaign speeches on Friday.

Myanmar Farmers' Development Party



Chairman U Kyaw Swar Soe explained the policy of his party. He said the party has grown quickly within the short period of three years as it represents 70 percent of Myanmar's population, who live in rural areas. The party promotes freedom of cultivating locally suitable crops and development of farmland, agricultural assistance and returning confiscated farmlands in accordance with the Farmland Law of 2012. The party also aims to address issues affecting farmers during parliamentary sessions.—GNLM

Democracy and Human Rights Party



Chairman U Kyaw Min and Information Officer U Myo Thant (also known as) Mohammad Khan said that the party aims to protect human rights, to work towards the realisation of Myanmar's main national causes, which it defines as unity in Rakhine State, building a single political culture, finding a political solution for advancing equality among ethnic groups and cooperating with political parties who share a similar ideology.—GNLM

Media slots for three political parties announced

NAY PYI TAW— MRTV, Hluttaw channel, MWD (Variety), Myanmar Radio and Shwe FM will broadcast campaign speeches by representatives from All Nationals' Democracy (AND) Party Kayah State, Kayah Unity Democracy Party (KUDP) and National Prosperity Party on 26 September.—GNLM

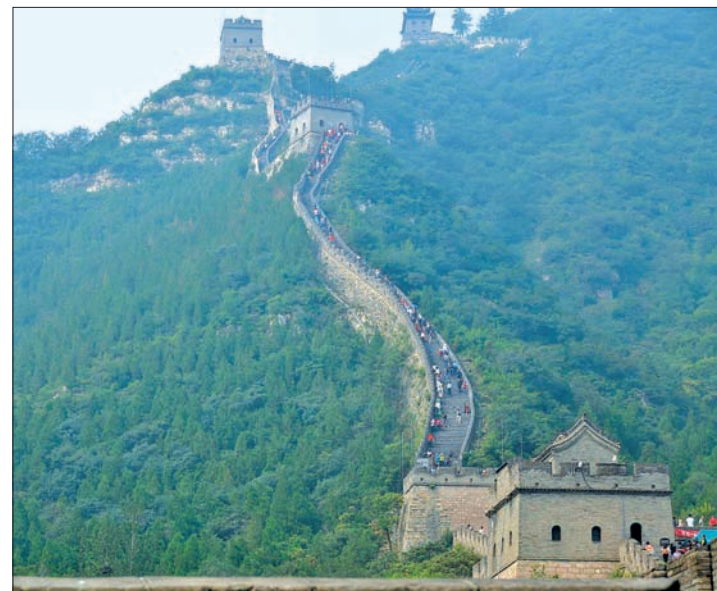
Myanmar youth delegation returns from China

A 100-member Myanmar delegation, who visited China from 20 to 25 September on the invitation of All China Youth Federation, returned home on Friday.

They met with Deputy Secretary-General of the All China Youth Federation Ms Dong Xia and the Communist Party of China, International Department of the Central Committee Deputy Direc-

tor-General of Bureau, Mrs Rao Huihua, to exchange views on further cooperation between the two sides.

Whilst in China, the delegates visited some of China's best known tourist destinations such as the Great Wall of China and the Forbidden City, as well as the Sino-Finnish Centre, China Executive Leadership Academy Pudong and Shanghai's Oriental Pearl Tower.—MNA



Myanmar youth delegation built mutual understanding and friendship with Chinese youths. PHOTO: MNA

ADB to double climate financing to \$6 billion a year by 2020

Ye Myint

THE Asian Development Bank announced Friday that it will double its annual spending on tackling climate change to US\$6 billion by 2020, about 30 percent of its overall financing.

Around \$4 billion will go to mitigation through scaling up support for renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable transport and building smart cities, ADB said in a press release issued Friday.

The remaining funds will be spent on adaptation through more resilient infrastructure, climate-smart agriculture and better preparation for climate-related disasters.

"Nowhere is tackling climate change more critical than in Asia and the Pacific, where rising sea levels, melting glaciers and weather extremes like floods and droughts are damaging livelihoods and taking far too many lives," said ADB's President Mr Takehiko Nakao.

According to the state-

ment, the Manila-based lender will continue to explore new and innovative cofinancing opportunities with public and private partners, will tap institutional investment through private equity funds, and will issue more green bonds to fund its climate operations.

Mr Nakao highlighted the importance of technology in the fight against climate change, saying that the lender will adjust its procurement systems to facilitate the integration of cleaner and more advanced technology into its projects.

The bank pledged to provide its member countries with cutting-edge knowledge and expertise on climate change by strengthening partnerships with centres of excellence across the world.

The statement comes as the world leaders are set to gather in New York for their commitments to achieving a set of sustainable development goals by 2030 and the international community is expected to finalise a new global climate pact and ways to finance it in Paris later this year.—GNLM

ELECTION COUNTDOWN
Make your voice count. Cast your vote. **43** DAYS

MPPE signs with Puma Energy as aviation distribution partner



MPPE signs a joint venture agreement with Singapore-based Puma Energy Group in the presence of Union Minister for Energy U Zeya Aung. PHOTO: ENERGY

STATE-owned Myanmar Petroleum Products Enterprise (MPPE) signed a joint venture agreement with Singapore-based Puma Energy Group in Nay Pyi Taw on Thursday to carry out the distribution of aviation fuel.

The agreement was signed by U Thant Zin, Managing Director of MPPE and Mr Robert Jones, Chief Operating Officer of Puma Energy Group Pte Ltd in the pres-

ence of Union Minister for Energy and Chairman of Myanmar Investment Commission U Zay Yar Aung.

MPPE will receive US\$20 million from Puma Energy Group Pte Ltd as a signature bonus and Puma Energy Group Pte Ltd will inject \$51 million into the joint venture business as an initial investment.

MPPE has a 51 percent share

of the business, while Puma Energy Group Pte Ltd owns 49 percent. MPPE is investing machinery and equipment worth US\$26 million.

The joint-venture business is called National Energy Puma Aviation Services Co Ltd.

Puma Energy Group Pte Ltd operates in 45 countries with 10,423 refilling stations, 80 stores and distribution stations, plus two refineries.—*Ministry of Energy*

UEC clarifies voting procedures in Nangsam

MEMBERS of the Union Election Commission-UEC held talks with election officials and representatives from political

parties in the Palaung Self-Administered Zone about preparations for the November 8 election. Locals are checking

their names on voters' lists on a daily basis since they were first put on display on 14 September.—*U Myint Aung*



Locals in Palaung Self-Administered Zone are checking their names on voters' lists as of 14 September. PHOTO: U AUNG MOE

Farmers earn high income from bamboo shoots

LOCALS in Zeyathiri Township have turned to the business of cutting bamboo shoots in mountains in order to earn more during the rainy season.

Farmers can earn more than K8,000 per day from collecting and selling bamboo shoots, said Ko Aung Ye Phyo, a village of Ywathitgon, which is one of the several villages near the Shan Mountain Range.

When they have finished ploughing and while women plant rice seedlings in rain-fed field, local farmers carry on for gathering the bamboo shoots on

the Shan Mountain Ranges during the four-month long monsoon season from June to September.

However, they can't go to the forest every day since it is a tiring job, said Win Soe, a bamboo shoot hunter from the Wae-gyi Village.

"Our work is very very tiring and risky. Sometimes, we slipped on stones and got muscle pains. That's why we can't go to work every day, and have to stay at home for two or three days in a week to take rest," he added.—*Tin Soe Lwin (Tatkon IPRD)*



Bamboo shoots are abundant in Tatkon township with farmers earn more than K8,000 per day. PHOTO: TIN SOE LWIN

Arid zone residents wish continuation of stalled Sameikkon 3 project

RESIDENTS of Myingyan District have requested the completion of the Sameikkon 3 water pump project.

The area has suffered droughts for three consecutive years, and locals have faced a scarcity of water, even though several small dams and lakes were dug in in the area.

The Sameikkon 3 project was initiated by Myanmar's

previous government and was meant to supply water to Myingyan, Natogyi, Taungtha and Mahlaing districts in Mandalay Region. The project stalled when 16 of its intended 35 miles. Once completed, the project would have supplied enough water for agriculture as well as for transportation through local canals.—*Htay Myint Maung*

Headmasters take master course in Yangon



School headmasters take a course which covers non-formal education, education management and supervision, record-keeping and the duties of the principals. PHOTO: KHIN ZAW (MINGALAR)

THE Myanmar Literacy Centre opened a course for school headmasters and coordinators of non-formal primary education in Yangon on Tuesday.

About 90 coordinators and principals in Yangon Region attended the course, which will

last until Thursday. The course covers various subjects, including non-formal education, education management and supervision, record-keeping and the duties of the principals.

Khin Zaw (Mingalar)

Competition to highlight beauty of religious diversity

Khaing Thanda Lwin

SMILE Education and Development Foundation has launched a competition for young people as part of its efforts to tackle hate speech and tensions between religious communities.

The competition invites artists under 35 years of age to submit work that depicts the beauty of Myanmar's religious diversity.

The non-government organisation's Project Coordinator Daw Khin Thinzar said, "The competition aims to promote mutual understanding among people from different religious backgrounds." "Art-

ists do not need to have professional experience, but submissions should capture the title of the exhibition — the Beauty of Religious Diversity," she added.

Various types of art, including paintings, drawings, sculptures, textiles, photography, cartoons and poetry can be submitted.

The foundation will announce 15 winners in November, and their works will be displayed in a travelling exhibition between 13 and 26 November at religious centres around Yangon.

SEDF will also give a special award to the person who receives the high-

est number of votes from exhibition viewers.

"The winning works will also be part of a nationwide awareness campaign celebrating religious diversity in Myanmar," she said.

The Smile Education and Development Foundation was founded in 2007 as a non-profit education institute to provide affordable education programs to youth, women and civil society leaders.

For more information or submit work via email, email poepoe@smile-edu.org no later than 23 October. For more information, call 09 7320 0524 or 09 254 003 466.—GNLM

Donors organise ceremony for over 87s



Paying respect to the elderly is an auspicious deed. PHOTO: KIN ZAW (MINGALAR)

VILLAGERS from Pyinmabin paid respect to community members above the age of 87 at a monastery in Mingaladon Township on 22 September.

The abbot of the monastery explained the pur-

pose of the ceremony, saying that paying respect to the elderly is an auspicious deed.

During the ceremony, donors Dr Zeya Nyunt and his wife, Daw Ei Thandar, offered provisions to

48 elderly people. Village administrator U Lay Nwe expressed his thanks to the villagers for organising the ceremony. U Kyaw Sein also offered words of thanks.—Khin Zaw (Mingalar)

PTA gives awards to students



Teachers are satisfied with their jobs and will always choose to give rather than take. PHOTO: MYINT AUNG

THE Parent-Teacher Association of No. 1 Basic Education Primary School in Kyaukme, Shan State, held its annual meeting and award ceremony for outstanding students on Thursday. The school principal addressed the audience,

saying that although she had not received the honour reserved for war heroes, successful surgeons and famous engineers, she is satisfied with her job as a teacher and would always choose to give rather than take.—Myint Aung



Ottatra District Sub-commission officials distributed equipment to be used in the elections township sub-commissions on Thursday. PHOTO: SHWE YE YINT

Election education course opens in Myingyan



Staff from Myingyan, Taungtha, Natogyi and Nganzun townships election sub-commissions take the course on voting procedures. PHOTO: ZAW MIN NAING

IN preparation for the upcoming election, the Myingyan District election sub-commission opened a course on voting procedures for sub-commission chairmen and members on 23 September.

After the course, the trainees will disseminate the information they learned in their respective communities.

Sub-commission members from four townships in Myingyan District, Mandalay Region are taking part in the two-day course.—Zaw Min Naing

Villagers get solar panels

THE Rural Area Development Department in Ottarathiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw Council Area, provided 6,000 solar panels to residents of Poesartaw village on Thursday.

The panels were installed by Pro Engineering Co and will enable the villagers to use electricity.

The company's lead engineer explained the solar panels to the villagers before handing them over to village officials.—Shwe Ye Yint



Poesartaw villagers in Ottarathiri township, Nay Pyi Taw Council Area get solar panels. PHOTO: SHWE YE YINT

More than 60 injured in quake in eastern Indonesia

JAKARTA — At least 62 people were injured, 17 of them seriously, and 200 houses damaged after a major earthquake struck eastern Indonesia in the early hours of Friday, the country's disaster agency said.

The magnitude-6.6 quake hit West Papua Province at 12:53 am local time, the US Geological Survey said.

The quake was centred off the north coast of the Papua region, about 28 kilometres north of the provincial capital of Sorong and 4,200 km east of the capital Jakarta, at a depth of 28 km under the seabed.

It caused people to flee their houses in a panic, while hospitals were busy rushing their patients outside into the open air.

"We are still compiling the data, and the number of victims or damage may still increase," agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho said. Indonesia is located in the so-called Pacific Ring of Fire, where earthquakes and volcanic eruptions frequently occur.—*Kyodo News*

Philippine Aquino's chosen successor leaps to third spot in new polls

MANILA — Philippine leader Benigno Aquino's handpicked successor jumped to third spot in the third-quarter public opinion survey by independent pollster Pulse Asia, local television network ABS-CBN reported on Thursday.

Manuel Roxas, who held two Cabinet positions before quitting early this month to concentrate on running for president, gained 8 points to move to third place with 18 percent support from Pulse Asia's second-quarter survey.

Roxas, 58, was the only candidate who improved in the survey of 1,200 respondents done nationwide from 27 August to 3 September and commissioned by the commercial broadcaster.

Novice Senator Grace Poe kept her number one position with 27 percent, down 3 points from the previous survey in June. Vice President Jejomar Binay came second with 21 percent, down only one point.

The elections will be closely



President Benigno Aquino (L) speaks to Interior Secretary Manuel "Mar" Roxas during a ceremony at Club Filipino in San Juan city, metro Manila 31 July, 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

watched by investors, who fear the political succession in one of Asia's fastest-growing economies could derail gains made during the Aquino government.

Under Aquino, economic

growth in the Philippines has averaged 6 percent, its best five-year record in four decades. He has also battled to rein in corruption.

About 54 million Filipinos

will be eligible to vote to choose a president, vice president and more than 18,000 local government executives and lawmakers in the general elections, which happen every six years.

Political analysts attributed Roxas' sudden rise to the endorsement of Aquino and the public's negative reaction to Poe and Binay's support of an unpopular anti-government protest by a religious group when the survey was conducted.

Rodrigo Duterte, former mayor of Davao, the largest city on Mindanao island in the southern Philippines, dropped to fourth place with 15 percent, unchanged from June.

The survey was made days before Duterte publicly announced he is not seeking the presidency next May. It was also done before Poe declared her intentions to succeed Aquino. Poe, Binay and Roxas had similar rankings in an earlier poll done by the Social Weather Stations released early this week.—*Reuters*

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S Korea's Park warns DPRK to pay price for missile, nuke provocations

SEOUL — South Korean President Park Geun-hye warned the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to pay a price for the implementation of its recent missile and nuclear threats.

Park said in a written interview with Bloomberg, unveiled Friday by the presidential office, that "Should the North (DPRK) go ahead with provocative actions that violate the UN Security Council resolutions, there will certainly be a price to be paid."

She said that the South Korean government has been making every diplomatic effort to prevent the DPRK from further provocations by closely coordinating with

the international society, including the United States.

The South Korean leader is scheduled to leave Seoul for New York Friday to attend the UN General Assembly and the special summit on sustainable development goals (SDGs).

During her speech at the UN headquarters, Park was expected

"South Korea was ready to work with the international community to provide "a range of assistance" if the DPRK decides to abandon its nuclear programme."

— *President Park Geun-hye*

to urge the DPRK to give up its nuclear ambitions and return to the multilateral dialogue table for denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, attended by six parties, such as the two Koreas, China, the United States, Russia and Japan.

Park's comments came amid signs of tensions on the peninsula as the DPRK said last week that it

was at the final stage of developing satellites for the Earth observation. It indicated the launch of a long-range rocket around the 70th anniversary of the founding of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea on 10 October.

Pyeongyang also said last week that it had already started normal operations of all the facilities at its main nuclear complex in Yongbyon, a city some 100 km northeast of its capital. Park said that South Korea was ready to work with the international community to provide "a range of assistance" if the DPRK decides to abandon its nuclear programme.—*Xinhua*

Thai police say too early to conclude arrested suspect is bomber

BANGKOK — Thailand's national police chief said Thursday it is premature to conclude that a foreign suspect detained over last month's deadly bombing in Bangkok is really the bomber, despite local media reports that the suspect recently confessed to being the yellow-shirted man seen in CCTV footage at the blast site.

"I don't dare to decisively confirm (if Adem Karadak is yellow-shirted man) because today he can speak one thing and change to another thing the next

day," Somyot Pumpanmuang told reporters.

Suggesting that the suspect is not necessarily telling the truth, he said it is important for investigators to cross-check the testimony of suspects and witnesses with other available evidence.

Karakad was arrested last month at an apartment in northern Bangkok where security officials seized bomb-making materials.

"On the first day he was detained, police all believed he was

the man in the yellow T-shirt," Somyot said.

But under questioning, he said, the suspect has periodically changed what he told police before.

Earlier, a police spokesman confirmed that DNA samples collected from articles of evidence believed to have belonged to the bomber were found to not match DNA samples taken from Karadak and another key suspect, a Chinese Uyghur man named Meiraili Yusufu.

Karakad's nationality re-

mains uncertain. Officers said they had been able to communicate with him in English, Arabic and Turkish.

So far no group has claimed responsibility for the bombing at the Erawan shrine that killed 20 people and injured more than 100.

Thai courts have issued arrest warrants for 15 people, including a Thai woman, four Turkish men, two Chinese men, one Pakistani man and five foreign men whose nationalities have not been identified.—*Kyodo News*

Unclear if US-Russia interests overlap in Syria — Pentagon

WASHINGTON — The United States is still uncertain whether US and Russian interests overlap in Syria, despite a shared concern about the threat from Islamic State fighters, US Defence Secretary Ash Carter said on Thursday.

Russia has sought military-to-military discussions with the United States as it forges ahead with a buildup in Syria that now includes more than two dozen advanced fighter jets, as well as tanks, troops and artillery.

Carter's remarks, his first on the matter, did not rule out such discussions.

But he suggested he would not support any cooperation with Moscow without an agreement to also discuss, in parallel, removing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad from power.

Moscow is a longtime ally of Assad, a position fiercely opposed in Washington, which views the Syrian leader as a driv-

ing force in the country's four-and-a-half year conflict.

"To pursue the defeat of ISIL without, at the same time, pursuing a political transition, is to fuel the very kind of extremism that underlies ISIL," Carter told a Pentagon news conference, referring to the Islamic State.

Carter, who spoke with Russia's defence minister last week, said it would be a "logical contradiction" for Moscow to believe it could weaken Islamic State without addressing Syria's political future.

He also cautioned Moscow against "indiscriminately" attacking all of Assad's foes, hinting at US fears that Moscow might strike moderate rebels supported by Washington.

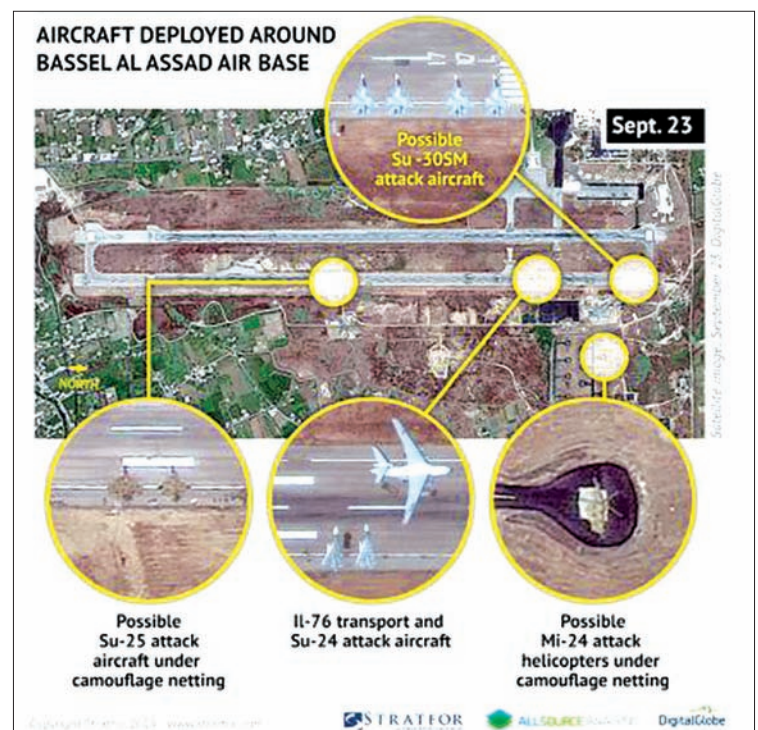
"We will continue to work with Russia on issues where our interests overlap. It is possible but not yet clear that such an overlap might exist in Syria," Carter said

Syria is expected to be high on the agenda when US President Barack Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin will meet in New York next week.

Although the Kremlin said the main focus would be on Syria, the White House insisted the meeting would focus on eastern Ukraine, where Russian-backed forces are fighting the Kiev government. That has prompted tough sanctions that have damaged Russia's economy.

Carter, speaking at a press conference with Ukraine's defence minister, said that Russia's actions in Syria would not distract the United States from the situation in Ukraine.

Asked whether Washington should trust what it hears from Moscow, Ukrainian Defence Minister Stepan Poltorak said his experience with Russia had shown that Moscow was not always truthful.—Reuters



A Digital Globe satellite image courtesy of Stratfor, a geopolitical intelligence and advisory firm in Austin, Texas, shows aircraft deployed around Bassel Al Assad Air Base in Syria, in this image released on September 24, 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

Malala, David Beckham to leaders at UN — don't forget children

UNITED NATIONS — Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai will ask world leaders on Friday to ensure that every child in the world gets a quality free 12-year education, while former soccer star David Beckham made a plea at the United Nations for children to be put first.

Malala, who was shot on a school bus in Pakistan in 2012 by the Taliban for advocating girls' rights to education, will open a summit of world leaders at the United Nations that will adopt a global sustainable development agenda for the next 15 years.

"The rest of the world's children also deserve the right to go to school."

— Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai

"The dreams (the world leaders) have for their own children, I'm hopeful they will have the same dreams for the rest of the world's children. ... The rest of the world's children also deserve the right to go to school," Malala told Reuters in a phone interview on Thursday.

"If you want our future to be more powerful, to be enlightened, to be bright, we need to invest in education, which does not require as much money as we think - just



English soccer star and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) goodwill ambassador David Beckham(C). PHOTO: XINHUA

\$39 billion, which we spend just in eight days on (the) military," she said.

Malala, who celebrated her 18th birthday in July in Lebanon by opening a school for Syrian refugee girls, said she would also highlight the plight of refugee children as Europe faces the largest wave of refugees and migrants since World War Two.

"It really makes me sad; so I'm hopeful that world leaders will really think about finding a solution to all these problems and ensuring that people go back to their homes," she said.

Malala will speak at the United Nations after an address by Pope Francis.

She said she hoped to be able to meet him because she

believed his words could "bring people together to work for the betterment of humanity."

Beckham, who has been a goodwill ambassador for UN children agency UNICEF since 2004, on Thursday launched an installation created by Google in the lobby of UN headquarters that sends personal messages from children to world leaders.

"Join me in asking the world leaders to put children, especially the most disadvantaged, at the heart of the new global goals," the Briton said.

"Children all share the same hope, for a better future. With the world focussed on the new global goals there is a real opportunity to make that hope a reality."—Reuters

Obama to host China's President Xi amid simmering tensions

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama will host Chinese President Xi Jinping for his first US state visit on Friday, but the pomp and pageantry will not be enough to mask tensions over alleged Chinese cyber spying, Beijing's economic policies and territorial disputes with its neighbours.

US and Chinese officials hope to launch the summit on a positive note by showcasing at least one area of cooperation — the global fight against climate change — when they announce a deal to build on a landmark emissions agreement struck last year.

But that achievement is all but certain to be overshadowed by major points of disagreement that underscore a growing rivalry between the world's two biggest economic powers.

Xi's state visit will formally begin at 9 am EDT/1300 GMT on Friday with a welcome ceremony on the White House South Lawn, including a 21-gun salute, followed by Oval Office talks, a joint news conference and a black-tie state dinner.

Despite such ceremonial honours, the Chinese Communist leader — coming to Washington on the heels of Pope Francis — can expect nothing like the wall-to-wall US news coverage given the popular pontiff who drew adoring crowds wherever he went. In diplomatic terms as well, no major policy breakthroughs are expected on the big issues that divide the two countries.

But the summit will yield a significant announcement by Xi of a commitment by China, the world's biggest producer of greenhouse gases, to begin a national "cap-and-trade" pro-

gramme in 2017 to limit emissions, US officials said. It is an effort to build momentum toward a global climate change pact in Paris later this year, something Obama sees as part of his legacy.

However, the announcement is expected to be one of the summit's few tangible policy achievements.

High on the agenda is cyber security, a growing source of strain after high-profile cyber attacks on US business and government databases blamed on Chinese hackers. Washington is considering sanctions against Chinese companies and individuals.

Visiting Seattle on the first leg of his trip, Xi denied involvement by the Chinese government and pledged to work with the United States to fight cyber crime. While Obama's aides say no formal agreement is likely, Chinese officials have suggested the possibility of a basic deal against cyber warfare.

Obama is also expected to press Xi to follow through on economic reforms and refrain from discrimination against US companies operating in China. Some analysts believe Obama has more leverage due to China's slowing economic growth, which has destabilised global markets.

At the same time, the Obama administration is still at a loss about how to curb China's assertiveness in the South China Sea, where Beijing has continued to reclaim land for potential military use despite conflicting claims with its neighbours.

The two leaders held a private dinner on Thursday after Xi's arrival to begin grappling with their differences.—Reuters

PERSPECTIVES

Stop dreaming of peace

Kyaw Thura

Our country has lagged behind others in terms of social, educational and economic development due to a lack of internal peace and stability. After more than six decades of armed conflict, it seems that the resolve to armed conflict is not a solution to the restoration of peace and stability.

Despite encouraging signs of progress during peace talks between the government's negotiation team and a senior delegation representing ethnic armed groups, the signing of the

nationwide ceasefire accord remains frustratingly elusive. For both sides to make their dream of restoring peace come true, all they have to do is to stop dreaming.

The problem of persistent armed conflict among national brethren lies at the root of the failure to make a courageous and decisive effort to satisfy common needs and stimulate the well-being of all ethnic groups residing across the country.

Undoubtedly, poverty is something that will persist in the absence of peace and stability. Ending poverty demands a moral obligation to help the vulnerable through the correct use of natural resources so as to avert the adverse effects of widespread economic injustice. Under no circumstances should economic reforms result in making the rich richer.

It is time for the government and the ethnic

armed groups to revive a spirit of fraternity and solidarity in the belief that there is no alternative but to support one another and create a society that respects each other's differences. All things considered, unity in diversity is an essential element of peace and stability, given the fact that our country is home to more than one hundred ethnic groups.

Write for us

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

VOTERS BEWARE!

(Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)

U Than Htay

With the imminent countrywide General Elections getting nearer and nearer, we could now see several political parties becoming more active, including the previously lethargic ones, scrambling for vote-wooing campaigns and hectic hustings. We would now hear more than our earful of vote-soliciting election campaign speeches by the responsible party functionaries from various political parties in TV and news media. As usual, these speeches will be euphonious, heart-warming and hope-promoting replete with rosy promises and mouth-watering assurances. As veteran voters, however, we should be able to distinguish grain from chaff, by now. We have seen a lot of chaffy characters in our parliaments at all levels during the past 5 years. Certainly these phoney parliamentarians should not be re-elected. We the voters, should see to that.

We do have one advantage now. In retrospect, we know, by person, who were the right representatives of the people as proved by their own attitudes, actions and performances in public service in the 3 spheres of the State Power, namely, the Legislature (Parliament), the Judiciary and the Administration (Government) during the past 5 years. I don't have to name these people, for you all know them by name and their respective constituencies. By all means, we should vote for them, if they choose to run for their current parliamentary seats again regardless of their political party affiliations. If

one or more happen to be independent candidates so much the better, for they don't have to toe the party line and follow the mandate which might sometimes adversely affect the people's welfare. All these people have proved their worth as true-blue people's representatives.

At the same time, now we know who we should not vote for in view of their total lack or poor performances in public service in the past 5 years, if they reappear as candidates again. We could apply the same line of thought and action in selecting or

also unconscionable. It goes against the ever-veracious maxim in politics, that says: Man matters most. I could not help but detect in the exhorter's exhortation, the veiled traces of doubt, desperation and desire for an all-out win in the forthcoming elections. After all, the dignity and dependability of any political party rest on the personal probity, admirable ability and laudable leadership of several politicians leading that particular political party. So, it is the people, but not the party who make things tick in politics.

“Exhorting the people to vote for one's particular political party affiliation rather than the candidate herself or himself is, not only undemocratic but also unconscionable. It goes against the ever-veracious maxim in politics, that says: Man matters most.”

rejecting the new candidates. This is what we could and should do this time.

When the chips are down, it is the individual, the doer, that counts, not her or his political party which is merely a badge. Exhorting the people to vote for one's particular political party affiliation rather than the candidate herself or himself is, in my opinion, not only undemocratic but

Hodiernal political parties in Myanmar should train and bring forth their party members, especially the young generation, as capable cadres inspired with the deep conviction and utter willingness to do good for their countrymen, instead of exclusively serving their own party as prompted by the narrow-minded partisan spirit. This partisan spirit, as seen in our Myanmar par-

liaments, often clashes with the wish and welfare of the downtrodden people whom all the political parties here have sworn to serve. Not only that, this unscrupulous partisan spirit also generates vicious power plays in politics (heinous crimes by any standard) which are the dirty political stunts ruthlessly pulled by intransigent and power-mad politicians.

The most egregious and quite lethal power play in politics in very recent times was the one that we have witnessed in the neighbouring country, Thailand. There, the senseless standoff blatant and bloody, between the red shirts and yellow shirts of the two bitterly opposing political parties in Bangkok, crippled and incapacitated the country's national economy and security to such extent that the military has to intervene at last with a *coup d'etat* to save the country from chaos. How stupid the people and how ruthless the politicians could be!

Similarly, in USA, reputedly the top democratic country, the political skirmish between the Congress (Republican majority) and the President (Democrat) left the country stymied for months resulting in the serious financial stringency for the Executive Branch (Federal Government) and coercive (rather undesirable) lay off of several innocent federal employees. What a despicable turn of events!

These two infamous incidents should remind us, the voters, how partisan spirit and power play in politics perpetrated by the ruthless politicians could hurt the people. In our Myanmar parliaments too, we could see these political power plays, of course, on smaller scale, enacted under the guise of democracy. We could never forget that many a good motion which

would substantially benefit the people but at odds with the interests of the majority of the parliamentarians got snuffed out by the majority partisan votes. The good out of the bad in such instances is that we know now who are really the trustworthy people's representatives and who are political poltroons. Such revelations constantly remind us for whom we should cast our precious votes.

The current system of the franchise and election rules that favour the "winner takes all" tradition is, in reality, not conducive to the true practice of democracy. In this type of political climate, the major political parties will always go for an all-out win in elections, catering at first to the whims and fancy of the voters. Once that certain political party gains the required majority seats in the respective chambers of parliaments and is able to form one-party government with a good control on the parliaments as well, that winning party would run the country with her own party mandate which may or may not be in harmony with the voter's interests and well being.

That is, what really is happening in (exceptions do exist) democratic countries in the world today, the bi-partite or tri-partite contention for political power. Shorn of its democratic election camouflage, it is, in short, one party's rule, which could become as bad as one man's rule, if the party leader turns power-mad and despotic. We could see such instances in some of the African States nowadays. We should not, in the first place, be gullible and naïve to let any

political party to bamboozle us into believing that particular political party could be our sole saviour from our present miserable life conditions. Power corrupts people and parties. We all know that. Personally I believe safety in numbers. So I would not let any one person or party to get monopoly in political power just because I don't want that person or party to dominate us. We all should realise and understand it.

Noxious political power plays mentioned earlier, do thrive in this sort of winner takes all political setup, as there will be frequent, if not constant, conflicts between the party in power and opposition party. No wonder, some of our Myanmar politicians want to change this lopsided election system to allow small political parties and those of our ethnic brethren fair chances in elections.

As such, the more we could have elected the party attachment free independent candidates to our parliaments, the better it would be in a way. I prefer to have rather a coalition government and parliaments where more different non-partisan people's representatives (including those of our ethnic brethren) could have their say that would really benefit our countrymen.

More often than not, deeds done by rational brainwork are far better than those precipitated by emotional sentimentality.

So my concluding admonitory advice to all of my fellow voters is, cast your valuable votes intelligently but neither emotionally nor sentimentally.

About the author

U Than Htay, a career geologist with 36 year active service and 11 years as an able Advisor, is a retired Deputy Director General from the Department of Geological Survey and Mineral Exploration (DGSE), Ministry of Mines.

What are the Other Countries Doing to Conserve the Mangroves

Khin Maung Myint (MPT Retired)

I had written about the importance of the mangrove forests and the necessity to conserve them. That article was largely based on my experiences and knowledge acquired while navigating among the mangrove forests with a ship some forty years ago and also on some information from the research papers and reports by some foreign institutions. I found that some of the reports are not comprehensive, as they are mostly based on the satellite images and a few days' field trips to Myanmar. The durations of the field trips were too short to be able to collect enough information and data and also such international teams spent most of their times in big cities instead of in the fields. However, as my approach to this subject is to create awareness of the importance of the mangroves, I obtained much insight on the subject from them, which I am very grateful. As for this article, I had to rely on reports and case studies made in other countries and learn what they are doing to conserve their mangroves. I am just a layman who is obsessed with this subject, so I will not try to sound professional in my presentation.

Thus, I will not be dwelling much on the technical aspects or data.

Strategies and Tactics

As the root causes of the destructions of the mangroves worldwide are almost the same everywhere, I think their strategies and tactics to conserve the mangroves may be applicable to our country too. When I studied the conservation works done by some countries in our region I noticed there are similarities in their strategies with only a few variations, which are peculiar to each country. I intend to discuss the salient points that are common to all countries generally, and try to

deliberate those that are peculiar to certain countries, wherever relevant, along the way. I had noticed that every country that are implementing the mangrove rehabilitation projects adhered to some or all of the following tactics:—

1. Restrict Loggings. The first step to rehabilitate the mangrove forests starts with tight restrictions on logging. The restriction of logging involves the banning of timber and firewood extractions and charcoal making. To be able for the populace to observe these restrictions, alternatives or substitutes are provided; for instance building materials and other forms of fuels for cooking purposes—such as liquid petroleum gas, electricity, fuel pellets made of saw dusts, rice husks and coconut husks etc. In Bangladesh and Sri Lanka they substitute coconut husks and cow dung for cooking purposes.

2. Curtailing Commercial Industries. Commercial industries, such as agriculture and aqua-culture are the major causes of the large scale depletion of the mangroves around the world. Thus, curtailing the number of agricultural farms, fish farms, shrimp farms and salt pans are being carried out in most countries to protect the mangroves from further destructions.

3. Reforestations of Unproductive Agricultural and Aqua-cultural Farms. It had been found in many countries that most agricultural and aqua-cultural businesses in the mangrove areas were quickly abandoned due to poor productivity. Unproductive rice farms, fish farms, shrimp farms and salt pans are reclaimed and replanted with mangroves, proved to be effective in the rehabilitation of the forests and gaining momentum in some countries.

4. Educating the People. Awareness training programmes, to educate the inhabitants of the areas in

and around the mangrove forests the benefits of the mangroves and the importance and necessity to conserve them, are also making good progress. There are also demonstrations and practical trainings on how to plant the mangroves. Thus the general populace is getting more and more involved in the conservation projects as the results of such programmes.

5. Provision of Incentives. Provision of incentives that include the training of the people dwelling in or near the mangroves, in business skills and creating jobs that would generate more incomes; giving training in home backyard vegetable gardening methods—such as multi-rack and aqua-ponic vegetable gardening; granting of loans by micro-financing organizations for the womenfolk to start their own businesses to supplement their families' incomes. As the populace become self-sustainable they gradually keep away from exploiting the mangroves. In Sri Lanka microcredit are granted women in exchange for looking after the mangroves.

6. Finding Markets for their Produces. Once the womenfolk had successfully established their business, individually or as groups, their produces need markets. Arrangements are made where they can sell their products, for example—the farmers' market that are popular in some countries.

7. Community-based Conservation. The community, after being educated about the benefits of the mangroves and the incentives they received in lieu of living-off the mangroves, they volunteered to participate in the rehabilitation. Some communities organized the plantation of the mangroves on their own free will to reestablish the mangrove forests in the vicinity of their villages.

8. Promote Eco-tourism in the Mangrove Forests. Eco-tourism in the mangrove forest regions are getting popular in the neighbouring

countries. As the mangrove forests are endowed with bio-diversities, they attract students of biology as well as nature lovers. In countries like Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, there are nature boardwalks constructed over the swampy places inside the mangrove forests to make access easier for tourists.

9. Advocacy Service. The advocacy services by NGOs proved to be effective in the preservation of the forests.

The Sri Lankan Model

The experts estimated that more than fifty per cent of the mangrove forests worldwide were destroyed over the past three decades and Myanmar is the worst hit. Some put the destruction rate of the mangrove forests in Myanmar at 64.2 per cent during that same period. To my knowledge, the concerned departments, the United Nations organization, such as the Food and Agriculture Organizations (FAO), World Wildlife Fund (WWF) an International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) and some local NGOs are already conducting conservation works in Myanmar.

As I am trying to make the general public aware of the benefits of the mangroves, this article is intended to instigate some would-be environment-enthusiasts to get interested and incite their desires to work for the conservation of the mangrove forests. Thus, for their benefit, I would like to mention what Sri Lanka is doing to rehabilitate and conserve their mangrove forests. She had learned a good lesson after the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, that places where there are intact mangrove forests along their shores were spared from severe devastations. Thus, she is going all out to conserve the mangroves on a country-wide scale. With the help of the US based organization, the Seacology, Sri Lanka had launched a 3.5 million dollar programme to conserve the mangroves. They are the first in the world to implement such a scheme. Their approach is based on the community participation. They give incentives by granting micro-finance loans to the womenfolk in exchange for looking after the mangroves. The women involved in such schemes are given training in planting mangrove trees. As many women became successful in their businesses, made possible by the microcredit, they become more enthusiastic to conserve the mangroves. As they become aware of the importance of the mangroves for their safety and their livelihoods, by being actively involved in the conservations, they passed on the message to their husbands and families. Thus their dependence on the mangroves are reduced and hence the exploitation of forests are becoming lesser. Also the strict forestry ordinance concerning the mangrove forests contribute

greatly to the conservation efforts.

Mangrove Conservation Projects in Myanmar

Myanmar too is earnestly endeavoring to conserve the depleted mangroves. A joint community-based project for the environment and livelihood conservation, by the FAO and the Ministry of Environment Conservation and Forestry, implemented in the Wun Baik mangrove reserves is generating good results. Today, a total of 22000 people in 32 villages in that area are growing more foods, increasing their incomes, while preventing and developing the environments. I noticed that the above mentioned project targets the womenfolk, as in Sri Lanka, to get the community aware of the benefits of the mangroves. Small businesses run by women produce and sell tree seedlings and fuel efficient stoves as a result of the education and business skill trainings provided by the programme. The stoves managed to cut use of wood for cooking by about forty per cent. Double-rack backyard gardens increased food supplies for family consumptions and also increased the income of the families by selling their surplus. About forty families are making over thirty thousand Kyats a month from their vegetable gardens. Two new fresh water ponds in two villages are providing water, a rare commodity in the summer, for their gardens. Four acres of abandoned paddy fields had been turned back into mangroves using ecological mangrove restoration techniques, as a demonstration of community-based mangrove management.

Also the WWF, which is operating world-wide to support and assist the governments and social organizations, in various fields of conservation had opened its office in Yangon. It is actively involved in the conservations of forests, wildlife, environments, and ecosystems, etc; by collaborating with the Ministry of Environment Conservation and Forestry and giving financial and technical supports to the social organizations, which are involved in those activities.

These are very encouraging developments for the conservation of the environments and the ecosystems of our country and the mangrove forests are bound to benefit from them. They should be carried on with lasting, unrelenting momentum. The local communities, too, are responsible to observe the conservation and management policies and should get involved in the rehabilitation of the mangroves, which provide them with foods and livelihoods, and above all, protect them against the destructive forces of nature.

“The first step to rehabilitate the mangrove forests starts with tight restrictions on logging. The restriction of logging involves the banning of timber and firewood extractions and charcoal making. To be able for the populace to observe these restrictions, alternatives or substitutes are provided; for instance building materials and other forms of fuels for cooking purposes—such as liquid petroleum gas, electricity, fuel pellets made of saw dusts, rice husks and coconut husks etc. In Bangladesh and Sri Lanka they substitute coconut husks and cow dung for cooking purposes.”

Britain's EU opponents join forces with 'Out' campaign group

DONCASTER — Opponents of Britain's membership of the European Union have joined forces to create a group that will lead the 'Out' campaign in an EU referendum due by the end of 2017.

Prime Minister David Cameron has promised to renegotiate Britain's ties with the bloc ahead of the vote. He has said he is confident of being able to recommend Britain stays, but rules nothing out if he cannot get the changes he wants.

The "Out" umbrella campaign, branded 'Leave.EU', has been set up by businessman Arron Banks, a financial backer to Britain's anti-EU UK Independence Party (UKIP).

The group will be formally launched at UKIP's annual conference in Doncaster in northern England on Friday.

"What you are going to see today are all the different, disparate groups in this country who support leaving the European Union coming together," UKIP leader Nigel Farage said.

"We today formally will join hands and start the referendum campaign properly."—Reuters

Lack of EU migrant strategy reignites Serbia-Croatia tensions

ZAGREB — Former Yugoslav foes Serbia and Croatia traded embargoes and insults on Thursday in the latest fallout from Europe's failure to agree a comprehensive response to the tide of migrants streaming north through the Balkans.

After weeks of recrimination and buck-passing, a summit on Wednesday did produce a glimmer of political unity between EU states on measures to help the refugees closer to home, or at least register their asylum requests as soon as they enter the European Union.

But all attempts in recent weeks to stem the flow have only prompted more desperate people to make a dash for Europe before the doors are shut or winter makes the journey too perilous.

On Thursday alone, about 1,200 people crossed in boats from Turkey to the Greek island of Lesbos in under an hour, following the 2,500 who had made the dangerous passage the previous day.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the European leader who has done most to welcome refugees, told her parliament that the EU was "still a long way from where we must get to".

Nowhere was that more evident than in eastern Europe, where beggar-my-neighbour policies have led countries alternately to try to block the flow or shunt it somewhere else.

Until last week, most of those

fleeing war or poverty in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere were finding that the quickest route into the EU, and their preferred destination of Germany, was from Serbia into Hungary.

But since Hungary sealed its border with razor-wire, an overwhelmed Serbia has simply diverted almost 50,000 migrants to the EU's newest member state, Croatia, which says it also cannot keep pace with the influx.

Demanding that Serbia send at least some of the migrants to Hungary or Romania, Croatia barred all Serbian-registered vehicles from crossing from Serbia.

Croatian Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic said he would not let Serbia "make fools of us ... We can function with 4,000 to 5,000 people a day. But more than that will not work, and I will not allow it."

Serbian Justice Minister Nikola Selakovic said Serbia had been "brutally attacked", and its Foreign Ministry compared the restrictions to racial laws enforced by the Nazi puppet state in Croatia in World War Two.

Belgrade in turn blocked Croatian goods and cargo vehicles, and the escalating dispute threatened to undo 15 years of progress towards reconciling two countries that were enemies during Yugoslavia's bloody collapse in the 1990s.

In a bid to forestall such disputes, EU leaders on Wednesday night pledged at least 1 billion eu-



A girl holds an umbrella as she walks in front of a group of migrants heading towards the Hungarian border from Botovo, Croatia. PHOTO: REUTERS

ros (\$1.1 billion) for Syrian refugees that remain in the Middle East. The summit also decided that EU-staffed "hotspots" would be set up in Greece and Italy by November to register and fingerprint new arrivals and start the process of relocating Syrians and others likely to win refugee status to other EU states, while deporting those classed as economic migrants.

The meeting eased some of the acrimony seen at an interior ministers meeting on Tuesday when four eastern EU countries who opposed a plan to distribute 120,000 asylum seekers proportionally among member states were simply outvoted.

That number is still only a fraction of the almost half a million refugees and migrants who

have reached the EU this year. "I am deeply convinced that Europe not only needs a redistribution (of refugees), but that, much more, it needs a long-term process for a fair distribution of refugees among member states," Merkel told the German parliament.

But Hungary said it might challenge even the existing distribution scheme in court.

"The quota proposal is a typical example of the moral imperialism that Germany forces upon Europe," Janos Lazar, Prime Minister Viktor Orban's chief of staff, told reporters.

He also said that Hungary might consider simply letting migrants coming from Croatia pass through by train or bus, if Austria and Germany agreed to accept them.—Reuters

Mexico parents of 43 missing students reject President's response to demands

MEXICO CITY — Parents of 43 Mexican students kidnapped and apparently massacred a year ago demanded a new probe into their fate on Thursday, accusing President Enrique Peña Nieto of ignoring their demands to solve a crime that has battered Mexico's image.

The families asked the government to launch a new internationally supervised investigation and to review Mexico's own in-

vestigations, after international experts cast doubt on Mexico's official account of the incident.

In a meeting with families on Thursday, Peña Nieto offered to set up a new unit in the attorney general's office to search for disappeared persons.

But he stopped short of authorizing a new international probe or promising to review former-Attorney General Jesus Muri-

llo and other officials' involvement in the investigation for possible obstruction of justice, as the families had sought.

"I feel very hopeless because the government did not give us a response," said Cristina Bautista, mother of one of the disappeared students. "From the experts we have gotten a lot, from Peña Nieto, nothing," she said.

Peña Nieto came to power

three years ago vowing to restore order in Mexico, where hundreds of thousands have died in violence linked to organised crime since 2007.

Restoring public trust in his government's ability to act against corruption and a perceived culture of impunity has become Peña Nieto's biggest challenge in the wake of the disappearances.

According to the Mexican government, the students were rounded up by corrupt cops who handed them over to a gang that burnt them in a nearby dump.

But in a report released earlier this month, international experts flagged deep flaws in the official investigation and rejected its central claim that the victims were incinerated in a garbage dump in Cocula, near Iguala.

On Thursday, Peña Nieto promised to follow recommendations from the international report and create a group of experts to analyze the Cocula dump, vowing to continue the investigation.

"We're on the same side. You and I are seeking the same thing: to know what happened to each and every one of your sons," Peña Nieto said, according to his spokesman who gave a press conference after the meeting. But many doubt Mexico's ability to lead a fair investigation, after a

government auditor last month exonerated Peña Nieto and his finance minister from any wrongdoing over purchases of homes from public contractors that aroused suspicions of conflict of interest.

"I feel very hopeless because the government did not give us a response."

— mother of one of the disappeared students

Families, students and activists gathered in Mexico's historic central square waving signs with photos of the missing students and demanding that Peña Nieto stepped down. Some had vowed a 43-hour fast, but none appeared satisfied with the president's response.

"It was a requirement to go and see him," said Cesar Gonzalez, a father of one of the students. "Unfortunately... the government has never given us anything besides psychological blows."—Reuters



Relatives hold pictures of some of the 43 missing students of Ayotzinapa College Raul Isidro Burgos and shout during a news conference after a private meeting with Mexico's President Enrique Peña Nieto, ahead of the first anniversary of the students' disappearance, in Mexico City, 24 September, 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

Saudi suggests pilgrims at fault over haj deaths, Iran indignant

MINA — Saudi Arabia, under growing pressure to account for a crush that killed more than 700 people at the haj pilgrimage, on Friday suggested pilgrims failing to follow crowd control rules bore some blame for the worst disaster at the event for 25 years.

The kingdom's regional rival Iran expressed indignation at the deaths of 131 of its nationals at the world's largest annual gathering of people, and politicians in Tehran suggested Riyadh was incapable of managing the event. In a statement posted on his ministry's website, Saudi Health Minister Khalid al-Falih said an investigation would be conducted rapidly and a final toll of dead and wounded calculated. At least 863 pilgrims were injured. "The investigations into the incident of the stampede that took place today in Mina, which was perhaps because some pilgrims moved without following instructions by the relevant authorities, will be fast and will be announced as has happened in other incidents," the statement said.

Falih said the injured were being transferred to hospitals in Mecca and if necessary to other parts of the country.

Falih's comments were likely to be seen by the kingdom's critics as an attempt to deflect responsibility for the incident: Safety during haj is politically sensitive for the kingdom's ruling Al Saud dynasty, since the ruling family presents itself internationally as the guardian of orthodox Islam and custodian of its holiest places in Mecca and Medina.

With photographs of piles of the dead circulating on social media and pilgrims frantically search-



Medical personnel tend to a wounded pilgrim following a crush caused by large numbers of people pushing at Mina, outside the Muslim holy city of Mecca, 24 September, 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

ing for missing compatriots, the effort to uncover the facts and assign blame was likely to grow more acute and possibly more political.

Saudi King Salman ordered a review of haj plans after the disaster, in which two big groups of pilgrims collided at a crossroads in Mina, a few km (miles) east of Mecca, on their way to performing the "stoning of the devil" ritual at Jamarat.

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani, in New York to attend the UN General Assembly, echoed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in blaming Saudi Arabia for the incident.

"I ask the Saudi Arabian government to take the responsibility

of this catastrophe and fulfil its legal and Islamic duties in this regard," Rouhani said in a statement published on the state news agency IRNA. In Tehran, protesters held a demonstration after Friday noon prayers. Iranian state television said they were showing their anger at "Saudi incapability and incompetence to run the haj".

Hamid Aboutalebi, Rouhani's deputy chief of staff was also quoted by Fars news agency as saying "the incompetence of Saudi Arabian government in this incident is obvious." Iran's deputy Foreign Minister, Hossein Amir Abdollahian also called "Riyadh's negligence inexcusable" and announced a committee has been established

to look into the incident.

Iranians pilgrims who survived the deadly incident described Saudi's response "too little, too late," according to Iran's state run Press TV. They said the rescuers arrived at the scene two hours after the incident and started collecting dead bodies first instead of helping the injured.

Saudi Arabia's Interior Ministry spokesman Major General Mansour Turki was quoted in Sau-

di media on Friday as saying the security forces had immediately responded and begun to rescue those who fell in the crush.

"This year haj ceremony was disorganised as Saudi government had hired young and inexperienced people," Saeed Ohadi, Head of Iran's haj and pilgrimage organisation told Iran's state broadcaster in a live interview from Mecca.

A leading Iranian MP said Saudi Arabia is not qualified to be in charge of Haj.

"The fatal stampede occurred after Saudi officials closed two routes leading to site ritual," Alaeddin Boroujerdi, head of parliament's Foreign Affairs and National Security committee was quoted as saying by Fars news agency. Speaking in New York, Pope Francis expressed "my sentiments of closeness" with the world's Muslims after the tragedy. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and the United States offered condolence.

In Islamabad, the Pakistani ministry of religious affairs said seven Pakistanis were dead and six were injured.

Former Iraqi Prime minister Nuri al-Maliki, an ally of Iran and foe of Riyadh, said the incident was "proof of the incompetence of the organisers of the pilgrimage season". He said the haj should be placed under the authority of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the world's largest Muslim organisation.—Reuters

The accident was "proof of the incompetence of the organisers of the pilgrimage season".

— Former Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki

Six dead in attack on DR Congo army base

GOMA — At least three Congolese soldiers were killed in an attack on their camp in the troubled east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, military sources said Friday.

Three soldiers' wives were also killed in the assault on the camp at Rumangabo, 50 kilometres (30 miles) north of Goma, the capital of North Kivu province. The attackers also made off with heavy weapons, a source said.

"Three soldiers were badly wounded and died at the scene," army spokesman Captain Guillaume Djiko told AFP.

Mineral-rich North Kivu has been torn apart by conflict for over two decades, with Ugandan and Rwandan rebel groups still active there and blamed for killing hundreds of civilians despite a UN mission to pacify the province.—AFP

Militias a vital prop for Syria's beleaguered army

DAMASCUS — More than 150,000 trained and equipped fighters in pro-government militias have become an indispensable brace for a Syrian army beleaguered by well over four years of intractable conflict.

"There are more than 25 main militias of different sizes that fight alongside the Syrian army" and number between 150,000 and 200,000 men, a security source told AFP.

The most prominent is the National Defence Forces (NDF), established in 2012 after the army suffered a string of defeats in the provinces of Damascus, Homs and Aleppo.

Under the command of Brigadier General Hawash Mohammed, the NDF has deployed some 90,000 fighters from various sectarian backgrounds throughout Syria.

For Assef Hamdoush, a 28-year-old student-turned-NDF fighter, "there aren't enough young men to fight the rebels committing massacres in Latakia province", the coastal heartland of President Bashar al-Assad.

"We didn't have a choice: fight or die," Hamdoush told AFP.

His 31-year old friend, Karim, said his reasons were more economical. "I lost my job. I didn't have any means of surviving other than taking up arms," he said.

Militiamen receive a monthly salary of \$100 to \$300, compared with army conscripts who receive about \$10 a month.

"This is what has pushed so many to leave the army and to join the NDF."

— Lawyer Alaa Ibrahim

"This is what has pushed so many to leave the army and to join the NDF," said lawyer Alaa Ibrahim. Young Syrian men also choose the NDF because they are deployed near their hometowns, instead of serving for months in far-away provinces in the mainstream forces.

Joining the NDF also grants them more power in their hometowns. "This is why the army has forbidden its soldiers to become members of these groups and has said that fighting in the militias does not exempt them

from mandatory military service," Ibrahim told AFP.

Experts say Syria's army has been roughly halved from its pre-war size of 300,000 by deaths, defections and increased draft dodging. In a recent interview, Assad highlighted the importance of "volunteer" fighters, without whom "the army would not have been able to hold on for four and a half

years of such a difficult war".

Some militias are run by political parties, with the ruling Baath Party commanding some 10,000 men. Others are organised along tribal or sectarian lines: Alawites defend their heartland along the coast, Druze fight in the southern province of Sweida and Christians battle in the northeast.

The army has also received substantial support from thousands of fighters sent by Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon — notably the powerful Shiite group Hezbollah. "The presence of these parallel

groups does not mean that the Syrian army has collapsed, but that the burden has become so heavy that it needs support forces at its side," said one high-ranking official close to Syria's Bureau of National Security.

The security source said the militias receive orders from a single "central leadership, in coordination with the Bureau of National Security which is in direct contact with the presidency".

Militias play a central role on key front lines, including at Zabadani, the last rebel stronghold along the border with Lebanon, as well as south of Damascus and in Latakia. In the Shiite district of Al-Amin in central Damascus, the pictures of six young men killed in Aleppo are posted on walls.

Although most militiamen were trained by the army, others have received training from Hezbollah and Iranian forces.

"The militias fight alongside the army and follow its orders, while being independent administratively, organisationally and in their training," the high-ranking official said.—AFP

FAO chief stresses links between conflict, imperilled rural livelihoods and migration

ROME — The millions of people who are being forced to flee from war, poverty and other hardship are a tragic reminder of the urgent need for peaceful solutions based on social justice and improved economic opportunities for all, FAO Director-General Jose Graziano da Silva said Thursday.

“Rural development and food security are central to the global response to the refugee crisis. War causes hunger and hunger too, kills and forces people from their homes,” he said.

“Whether living in camps or finding themselves on the move, people are in a particularly vulnerable situation. The world needs to give a comprehensive response that offers hope and concrete solutions to refugees, and this response must consider their present and future food security, and the rehabilitation of their rural livelihoods.”

“Supporting agriculture-based livelihoods can contribute to both helping people stay on their land when they feel safe to do so and creating the conditions for the return of refugees, migrants and displaced people,” the FAO chief said.

“Most of the displaced hope to return to their lands as soon as the conflict is over, but the impacts of conflict on food security often last long after the violence has subsided,” he said.

According to the FAO, agriculture continues to be the backbone of livelihoods for the majority of people in conflict and post-conflict situations.

points out that the conflict in Syria is having a devastating impact on agriculture, with food markets and supply chains dysfunctional, much of the irrigation and other infrastructure destroyed and farmers and livestock keepers left with no other option than to abandon their fields and animals. Meanwhile the influx of Syrian refugees is also

“Rural development and food security are central to the global response to the refugee crisis. War causes hunger and hunger too, kills and forces people from their homes.”

— FAO Director-General Jose Graziano da Silva

In this context, the FAO focuses its work on providing relief to protect agriculture-based livelihoods during the conflict while creating the conditions for rehabilitation and long-term resilience of agriculture as a crucial strategy for peacebuilding, poverty alleviation and overall development in countries facing protracted crisis situation.

The FAO, the Rome-based UN food agency,

impacting agriculture in neighbouring host countries.

Working with partners, the UN food agency is strengthening food security and building the resilience of households and communities in Syria and in neighbouring countries. Such efforts aim to save livelihoods while helping communities lay the foundations for their own long-term recovery, the FAO said.—Xinhua

Snowden launches push for global privacy treaty

NEW YORK — Fugitive former US spy contractor Edward Snowden on Thursday backed a push for an international treaty on privacy rights, protection against improper surveillance and of whistleblowers as he said more countries are trying to boost spying powers.

Speaking via video conference from Russia, which granted him asylum in 2013 after he leaked details of mass US surveillance programs, Snowden said mass spying was a global problem that needs a global response.

“We have to have a discussion, we have to come forward with proposals to go ‘how do we assert what our rights are, traditionally and digitally and to ensure that we can not just enjoy them, but we can protect them,” Snowden said.

On the eve of the annual gathering of world leaders at the United Nations, Snowden, campaign group Avaaz, journalist Glenn Greenwald — who obtained Snowden’s leaked documents — and his partner David Miranda launched the campaign for what they dubbed the Snowden Treaty.

“We see that in many countries around the world



American whistleblower Edward Snowden delivers remarks via video link from Moscow to attendees at a discussion regarding an International Treaty on the Right to Privacy, Protection Against Improper Surveillance and Protection of Whistleblowers in Manhattan, New York 24 September, 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

governments are aggressively pressing for more power, more authority, more surveillance rather than less,” said Snowden, citing Australia, Canada, Britain and France.

“In every case these policy proposals that work against the public are being billed as public safety programs,” he said.

Snowden acknowledged that the campaign for a treaty was likely to take years.

Miranda said a draft of possible treaty, developed by international legal experts on Internet freedoms and surveillance, had been

shared with some countries, but he declined to name those states.

In December, the United Nations General Assembly expressed concern about digital spying. It also said unlawful or arbitrary mass surveillance and the interception and collection of online data are “highly intrusive acts” that violate privacy rights. The 193-member General Assembly adopted a non-binding resolution.

In July the UN Human Rights Council appointed its first digital privacy investigator, Malta’s Joseph Cannataci.—Reuters

‘No justification whatsoever’ for homelessness, pope says in Washington

WASHINGTON — Pope Francis met for lunch with 200 people who are homeless or living in poverty in Washington on Thursday and told them there was no social or moral justification for homelessness.

Francis, after delivering a speech to the US Congress in which he urged lawmakers to do more to help society’s most vulnerable people, visited a Catholic Charities center that provides food, medical services and help in job hunting.

“We can find no social or moral justification, no justification whatsoever, for lack of housing,” the pope told charity workers, donors and recipients in the capital of the world’s richest country.

Francis has made advocacy for the poor a center point of his tenure, born out of his time spent in slums and soup kitchens as a church leader in Argentina before becoming pope in 2013, the first from Latin America.

As the first pope to speak before the US Congress, he told lawmakers to “keep in mind all those people around us who are trapped in a cycle of poverty. They too need to be given hope.”

Some of the people the pope met at the Catholic Charities centre said they hoped his words would prompt Congress and other elected officials to do more to meet the needs of the poor.

“You never hear them speak about homelessness or how the job market has been. You hear the job market is bad, but you don’t hear them say, ‘What can we do to help?’” said Angela Ford, 45, who several years ago lost her job in the auto industry and lives in housing provided by the church.

“With all the negative political messages, it’s great to have someone positive here.”

The National Alliance to End Homelessness group said in a policy pa-

per in April on homeless trends in 2013/14 that 578,424 people in the United States were sleeping outside, in an emergency shelter or temporary housing on a night in January 2014. It said that while the economy was recovering from the Great Recession in that period, overall homelessness decreased by 2.3 percent.

Eric Dyer, 50, who said he has faced bouts of homelessness since 1988 and is currently homeless, said he hoped the pope’s call would help put pressure on Congress to do more to help the destitute.

“I think that they are so busy up there a lot of times that when they do get a chance to think about our situation, it just gets pushed under the table like bread crumbs,” Dyer said as he waited to meet the pope. “There should be a system in place that doesn’t allow them to do that.”

The visit was likely intended to underline his



Pope Francis with homeless people who are served meals by Catholic charities, in Washington on 24 September, 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

remarks to Congress, said Rev. John Jenkins, president of the University of Notre Dame, a Catholic university.

“The wonderful thing about this pope is he does it in words, but even more powerfully, he does it in gestures,” Jenkins said.

The pope blessed a meal of boneless teriyaki chicken breast and pasta salad for the group before mingling with the crowd, shaking hands and pausing for photos as admirers shouted in Spanish “Papa! Papa!” He recalled the biblical story of Jesus’ birth,

which starts with his parents being unable to find a place to stay in Bethlehem.

“The Son of God came into this world as a homeless person,” Francis said. “The son of God knew what it was to start life without a roof over his head.”—Reuters



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Toronto's urban debris creates haven for flora, fauna and nature-lovers



Geese fly over Tommy Thompson Park located on a man-made peninsula known as the Leslie Street Spit, in Toronto May 24, 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

TORONTO — Like a rooftop garden in an over-crowded financial district, Toronto's Leslie Street Spit is an unexpected urban oasis whose narrow escape from development has brought marshes, lagoons and forests to the center of Canada's largest city.

Jutting into Lake Ontario just minutes from the worst of Toronto traffic, the more formally named Tommy Thompson Park was created over 60 years ago by the dumping of dredged sand, concrete chunks and earth fill, expanding what was once just a thin strip of land in the city's busy harbor.

The dumping continues to this day but while development plans have threatened the spit from its beginning, the passion of the cyclists, birders, hikers and naturalists who flock to the artificial peninsula every weekend has preserved the unlikely park and left nature to prevail.

For some, the spit offers the best views out to the Great Lake and towards the city's soaring skyline. For others, the auto-free roads offer safe, serene cycling, running and roller-blading in a city whose streets are often

clogged with cars. For most, it offers a 5-km (3-mile) stretch of nature untamed by development: home or visiting spot to 300 species of birds and site of 500 hectares (1200 acres) of pioneer plant life, cottonwood and poplar groves, grassy marshes and gravel beaches.

While trucks hauling concrete and earth from the city's construction sites ply the spit from Monday to Friday, the park is turned

made those early plans obsolete. The spit of land has a diverse ecosystem, with a rugged eastern shoreline giving way to wildflower meadows in the middle sections and marshy lagoons on the western shore, beneath the city skyline.

"Nature has a remarkable way of taking over," said Karen McDonald, project manager with the conservation authority. "It's really strong in some areas and

nearby — unlovely to some, a gritty oasis to others.

Colonies of gulls, terns, herons and cormorants nest along the beaches or in the groves, attracting binocular-toting enthusiasts at dawn. Late summer brings butterfly enthusiasts to the spit, while anglers fish from the park's shores and small bridges.

The place has been eyed for other uses in the bustling city — the population of greater Toronto is some 6 million. From early on, an activist group who call themselves the Friends of the Spit have fought off development, including plans for a hotel, amphitheatre, government dock, yacht clubs, parking lots, water skiing school and campground. "As honey attracts bees, vacant land attracts plans," the Friends say on their website www.friendsofthespit.ca, pledging persistent vigilance to protect the park for public use forever.

"No other piece of land has attracted such passionate defenders, nor has any other piece of land had such a lengthy battle waged, simply to maintain it and allow it to grow as nature intended." — Reuters

"It's really strong in some areas and plant life started to grow here without the help of a human hand."
— Karen McDonald, Toronto and Regional Conservation Authority

over to an eager public every weekend, when its main road and numerous winding paths beckon city residents. Admission is free.

More than 100,000 people visit annually, according to the Toronto and Regional Conservation Authority, which owns the land and water bodies included in the park. Initially eyed for port-related facilities in the 1950s, the spit was opened to the public in the 1970s after a decrease in lake shipping

plant life started to grow here without the help of a human hand."

The gradual transformation from a lifeless pile of rubble to an urban wilderness means the Leslie Spit is never finished, an ever-changing and unmanicured parcel of water and land. Cobble beaches are, upon closer examination, composed of red brick, concrete, and kitchen tile worn to colorful pebbles, with patches of rusting rebar and urban detritus piled

WEATHER REPORT

BAY INFERENCE: Weather is partly cloudy in the North Bay, monsoon is strong in the Andaman Sea and South Bay and weak elsewhere in the Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL EVENING OF THE 26th September, 2015: Rain or thundershowers will be widespread in Taninthayi Region, Kachin and Mon States, fairly widespread in Upper Sagaing Region, Rakhine and Kayin States, scattered in Nay Pyi Taw, Bago, Yangon and Ayeyawday Regions and Chin State and isolated in the remaining Regions and States with likelihood of isolated heavy falls in Taninthayi Region and Mon State. Degree of certainty is (100%).

'Pan' movie's Tiger Lily: white but packed with girl-power



Actress Rooney Mara arrives for the world premiere of "Pan" at Leicester Square in London, Britain, 20 September, 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

NEW YORK — Tiger Lily may not be played by a Native American actress in a new movie version of the Peter Pan story, but her tough, all-action character is an inspiration to girls, the movie's director said on Thursday.

Joe Wright's controversial decision last year to cast white actress Rooney Mara as Tiger Lily in his upcoming live action "Pan" prompted a petition to movie studio Warner Bros that has collected some 94,000 signatures.

Wright said the defining image of Tiger Lily as a Native American came largely through the 1953 animated Walt Disney version of "Peter Pan."

Scottish writer JM Barrie's century-old play and novel refers to Tiger Lily and her tribe

as "pickaninny" warriors — a non-specific but racist term usually used to describe people with dark skin.

Wright's movie "Pan," a prequel to the Peter Pan tale that will be released next month, depicts Tiger Lily as a warrior princess and gives her more authority and fight scenes than any of the men in the film.

"I was particularly keen to make sure Tiger Lily wasn't a damsel in distress," Wright told Reuters on Thursday. "Tiger Lily is the bad-ass warrior who is far more pro-active physically in defeating (evil pirate) Blackbeard than any of the boys. She has all the action sequences."

"When little girls come out of seeing the movie, their favorite character always is Tiger Lily.

When asked why, they say 'because she can do anything.' I think she is quite an empowering character for little girls and that to me is really gratifying," Wright said.

Wright said Mara was chosen because she has "a regal quality and also she's a little bit frightening - you really wouldn't mess with Rooney."

Wright cast dozens of black, Indian, Korean and other nationalities to make up Tiger Lily's tribe in Neverland. "I liked the idea they were indigent people who were fighting against the colonialist rule of Blackbeard," he said.

"I can understand how it appears from an outside perspective," Wright said of the upset over Mara's casting. "But when people see the film, they get it." — Reuters

Russia's Putin calls Elton John, for real this time, offers meeting

MOSCOW — President Vladimir Putin phoned Elton John on Thursday to say he would be ready to meet up for a chat after the British singer requested a meeting to discuss his concerns about gay rights in Russia.

Putin's call came just a week after a pair of Russian comedians tricked John, 68, into thinking he was talking to Putin on the phone in a stunt that the entertainer laughed off, while saying he hoped it would highlight discrimination against gay people.

This time, Dmitry Peskov, Putin's spokesman, said the Russian leader really had phoned John, who has used his status as one of the world's most famous gay celebrities to push for equal rights for homosexuals around the world.

"Putin phoned him," Peskov told reporters. "He said: 'I know some guys played a trick on you on the phone, but don't get offended."

They are harmless people, though that of course does not justify what they did."

Putin told John that since



British singer Elton John performs during the Rock in Rio Music Festival in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 20 September, 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

he was a popular performer he would be ready to meet him and discuss any subject which interested him, if their schedules coincided, Peskov said.

Western states and human rights activists have criticised Russia for its treatment of gay people, and John has previously spoken out against a 2013 law banning the dissemination of "gay propagan-

da" among young people.

Putin has said he is not prejudiced against gay people, but has made comments which activists have criticised as being ambiguous and insulting towards homosexuals.

John, who plays to vast audiences in Russia when he tours, could not immediately be reached for comment. — Reuters

'Fast & Furious 8' has no director

LOS ANGELES — "Fast & Furious 8", the sequel to "Furious 7" and currently the fifth highest-grossing film ever, has no director.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, franchise veteran Justin Lin and "Furious 7" helmer James Wan have both passed on directing the sequel, which has been slotted for release on 14 April.

Wan has apparently opted to make "The Conjuring 2: The Enfield Poltergeist", whereas Lin has his hands full with Star

Trek Beyond. While a search for a new director remains ongoing, producer Neal H Moritz was quick to deny suggestions that Vin Diesel's demanding nature caused trouble with Wan on the "Furious 7" set.

"Obviously, if there was any issue, we wouldn't be making the eighth film with Diesel right now," the producer insisted.

Universal added, "The studio and filmmakers loved working with James on 'Furious 7', but he was never in the mix for

an eighth film due to a scheduling conflict with 'The Conjuring 2'.

"We are actively casting and searching for the right director for the next chapter of the franchise."

Diesel previously hinted that the eighth instalment of the Fast & Furious series will likely take place in New York — after spanning the globe for the last movie.

"Furious 7" baddie Jason Statham is also expected to return as Deckard Shaw. — PTI

Italian designer Molinari wants 'Joie de Vivre' in Blugirl line

MILAN — Italian designer Anna Molinari slashed hemlines, pumped volume into sleeves and printed butterflies on tops and dresses for next spring in her "Joie de Vivre" Blugirl womenswear collection, shown on Thursday.

Models strutted down the catwalk in short feathered black dresses, crop tops, jumpsuits, and ruffled skirts cut to show off legs.

Molinari also teamed boxy butterfly-printed tops with "maillot de bain" (swimsuit) shorts as part of the spring/summer 2016 line.

The colourful butterfly print also featured on boxy long dresses as well as see-through short dresses. Satin-like tops

had voluminous ruffle endings and were worn with slim trousers. Asked about the "Joie de Vivre" theme, Molinari told Reuters: "I want it because these are not very serene times.

"Like everyone else in the world, I want there to be a bit of happiness, joy and serenity."

All outfits were accessorised with golden belts, earrings, bracelets and necklaces reading "ANNA", the designer's first name. Sandals in brown and gold were either flat or high-heeled.

Molinari used a palette of white, cream, mustard yellow, cocoa and black with dabs of fuchsia pink. Sequined T-shirt dresses had blue and white or green and white stripes. — Reuters



A model presents a creation from the Blugirl Spring/Summer 2016 collection during Milan Fashion Week in Italy, 24 September, 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

Rail life: history of trains brought to life in Brussels

BRUSSELS — Nearly two centuries ago, Belgium launched continental Europe's first commuter train line connecting Brussels to Mechelen, a small city half-way to the port of Antwerp.

To mark that place in rail nostalgia, Brussels has opened a state-of-the-art train museum, reachable through a plushly renovated 19th-century train station in the EU capital's working-class north.

The museum is a bold gamble by budget-strained Belgium, costing 25 million euros (\$28 million) at a time when most spending on culture in Europe is being slashed.

Train World is a testament to the 19th-century industrial revolution that saw the kingdom of Belgium tower for a century as one of globe's biggest economies, reaching deep into Africa and its colony of the Congo.

Entry to Train World is through the old Schaerbeek train station, constructed in 1887 and more a brick-built cathedral than rail hub, with spired towers and a wrought-iron entry. Museum tickets are bought in a grand hall at wood-panelled

booths, inviting the visitor back to an era long before low cost airlines and reservations by Internet.

The heart of the visit is a moodily lit warehouse adjacent to the station that curator Francois Schuiten wants to be seen as a "railway opera", filled with two-centuries of train travel's glorious history.

"The idea is to create a real show using sound, image, projections, putting the visitor on the tracks, over them, below them," said Schuiten, who has devoted 10 years to Train World, which opens on September 25.

Appropriate for the land of Tintin and The Smurfs, Brussels-born Schuiten is a cartoonist, known for dark visions of an art-deco future in which many of the trains on display could easily fit.

In the show's first hall are five 19th century steam trains of legend, now polished and resplendent after decades of collecting dust in a lost rail depot.

These trains have names: the locally built "Le Belge", or the "Pays de Waes", which in 1844 could already reach 60 kilo-

metres per hour (37 miles).

By 1902, "Type 18" doubled that speed, its curvy copper boilers shined to perfection with wheels and gears greased.

"These machines are gems... that only needed to be reawakened," Schuiten told AFP. The cartoonist's favourite is "type 12 Atlantic", designed in 1939, with a honed shape that invokes today's bullet trains that connect Paris or London to Brussels in two hours or less.

Type 12, called affectionately "La Douce" by Schuiten, reached 165 kilometres an hour during the steam engine's pre-war heyday. In all, there are 22 models of trains on display, from a third class clunker to luxury sleeper trains, including royal wagons from 1901 and 1939.

The trains "reveal our history... There's the dream of travel, but also the story of our cities, of leisure, of technology," Schuiten said.

Kept at a distance, stands an untouched box car that deported Jews, gypsies and other victims of the Nazis to their deaths from Belgium's train stations.—AFP

Picasso, Van Gogh and God in Italy sacred art show

FLORENCE — From Picasso's Christ on the Cross to Van Gogh's Pieta, a new exhibition in Italy reveals the revival and radical revision of sacred art after the Age of Enlightenment, all thanks to a revolutionary pope.

The Divine Beauty show in Florence throws fresh light on religious art between the middle of the 19th and 20th centuries, with never-before seen together works in styles ranging from naturalism to symbolism, realism and abstract.

"When you think of sacred art you think of works of art up until the Baroque period at most," which makes this exhibition particularly unusual, curator Ludovica Sebregondi told AFP.

It was Pope Pius IX (1792-1878) who encouraged this period of innovation in the arts: the Italian — a liberal first beloved then loathed by the people — was a fierce patron even during the most troubled period of his papacy. The

call to find a modern vocabulary for Christian art led to an explosion of new styles and in some cases total abandonment of classical depictions.

The most startling example here is Edvard Munch's half-body portraits of Mary — produced between 1895 to 1902 — in which she is shown nude, her expression described by the curators as "between erotic ecstasy and agony".

In a second etching of the same work in the collection, the figure is framed by sperm, wriggling towards a foetus with a skeletal head, an echo of the figure in The Scream.

"The exhibition belies the idea that for 150 years faith was no longer interesting to artists," Florence Archbishop Giuseppe Bortoloni told journalists at the show's opening, saying the collection captured "lesser known aspects of modern art".

It is a new sacred art: here the virtuosos, some of whom rarely paint-

ed religious works, used the Christian story to express personal tragedies or depict the horrors of the First and Second World Wars.

In 1964, where this exhibition ends, Pope Paul VI appealed for "the friendship between the Church and artists" to be "re-established" in a bid to return to tradition — but it was too late to undo some of history's most provocative works.

"Each one tells their own story. When the sacred theme is no longer tied to Church politics it really becomes a personal theme," co-curator Anna Mazzanti said.

In one work, Munch explores the act of prayer: a 1902 woodcut depicts his father — "obsessively religious, almost to the point of psychosis" — kneeling with hands clasped, just as he had seen him once following a violent argument.

Nearby hangs an oil and charcoal on paper by Spain's Pablo Picasso, executed in 1896 when he



An armless man draws Mona Lisa on a street in Xining with his foot on 24 September, 2015. PHOTO: XINHUA

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Today Fresh

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08:03	Am	News
08:26	Am	U Kyaw Thu: From Artist to Philanthropist (Part-II)
08:43	Am	Kid's Home
08:48	Am	Myanmar Charitable Labour Association
09:03	Am	News
09:26	Am	Distinguished Myanmar Ladies "Tin Moe Lwin"
09:35	Am	A Real Dream Of Accidental Gift
10:03	Am	News
10:26	Am	A Highland with Peace and Charm
10:45	Am	Gardener: King Orange Plantation

(11:00 Am ~ 03:00 Pm) - Friday 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	The Hills Of Phowintaung And Shwebataung
07:44	Pm	Famous Pagodas of Sagaing
07:52	Pm	Today Myanmar: Ceasefire
08:03	Pm	News
08:26	Pm	The Writer: Chit Oo Nyo (Part-1)
08:52	Pm	Tea

(09:00 Pm ~ 11:00 Pm) - Today Repeat (09:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(11:00 Pm ~ 03:00 Am) - Friday Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(03:00 Am ~ 07:00 Am) - Today Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(For Detailed Schedule - www.myanmaritv.com/schedule)

MRTV Entertainment Channel

(26-9-2015, Saturday)

6:00 am	6:50 am
• Classical Songs	• Myanmar Series
6:05 am	7:10 am
• Teleplay	• Cassette Drama
6:25 am	9:25 am
• Documentary	• Myanmar Video

Traditional boxing match on 4 October

MYANMAR Fight 7 for new generation of Myanmar traditional boxing will be held at Yangon's Thein Phyu Stadium on 4 October.

The event is being organised by Myanmar Media Group, which is providing free tickets and aims to unearth new talents in traditional boxing. Matches will include four rounds and three rounds.

"We aim to showcase new talents in traditional boxing. The eight matches we held last month were very successful and we're hoping that the seven held this month will be just as successful," Managing Director of Myanmar Media Group Mar Jay said.

The fight will be broadcast live on television and the matches will continue to be held twice a month.—GNLM

Neymar admits Man Utd conversations

MADRID — FC Barcelona striker, Neymar has dropped a sporting bombshell by confirming the news that he spoke to Manchester United over the summer.

The English press mentioned the story, but few took seriously the chance of the Brazilian ace abandoning Barca to play in the Premier League. However, in an interview with the Brazilian version of sports network ESPN, Neymar confirmed that he did speak to the English club.

"There were some conversations, but nothing concrete came of it. There were a lot of rumors, but I didn't receive any offers," he said.

Although there were no offers, the very fact that one of Barca's star players spoke to another club, must be worrying for Barcelona President, Josep Maria Bartomeu and perhaps it is because of that the club has speeded up moves to offer Neymar a new and improved contract.

The Brazilian is currently in his third season with Barca after arriving in the summer of 2013 in a deal which has led to the club facing charges of tax avoidance, forced former President, Sandro Rosell to resign and will see him an Bartomeu face charges in court.—Xinhua

Defending champion Ayeyawady United to take on Yadanabon

Ko Moe

AYEYAWADY United FC will defend its title when it comes up against Yadanabon FC at Aung San Stadium on Sunday in the final match of the General Aung San Shield 2015. The winner will

compete in the 2016 AFC Cup. The champions sailed into the final by defeating Rakhine FC 3-0 during the semifinals and trounced its rivals Magway FC 8-0.

Ayeyawady's Riste has emerged as shield's top scorer to date, with eight goals in total,

while Keith Martu Nah is close behind with seven goals.

The defending Champion Ayeyawady United FC has won the cup twice: it took home the trophy last year after defeating Nay Pyi Taw FC last year in the final.—GNLM

Campaign to preserve traditional boxing underway



A traditional boxing match organised by the Myanmar Traditional Boxing Federation. PHOTO: MIN HTE

THE Myanmar Traditional Boxing Federation together with Ministry of Education has launched a campaign in high schools to preserve traditional Myanmar boxing.

"We would like the youth to know the boxing is traditional to preserve for their next generations. This is our own culture and tradition," said U Khin Maung Soe, chairperson of MTBF.

Together with Ministry of Education, the federation started to demonstrate the traditional boxing in Yangon and Mandalay and matches have also been held abroad.

The origins of the sport date back 1,200 years, when the sport was played in the kingdom of Pagan, which is now known as Bagan, according to Mr Mar Jay, Managing Director of Myanmar Media Group which hosts traditional boxing fight matches.—Maung Sein Lwin (Myanma Alinn)

Allertova stuns top seed Halep in Guangzhou

CZECH Denisa Allertova stunned world number two Simona Halep 6-4, 6-3 in the quarter-finals of the Guangzhou International Women's Open on Thursday.

The win against the Romanian top seed gave the 22-year-old, ranked 74 in the world, only her second victory against a top 10 player after she defeated Carla Suarez Navarro in the first round of the US Open recently.

After going up 5-4 in the first set, Allertova won six of the next seven games for a 5-1 lead in the second and then closed the match out with a backhand winner.

"I have amazing feelings because I won against Simona Halep — she's a great player, ranked No 2. I can breathe now!" Allertova told the WTA website after the match.

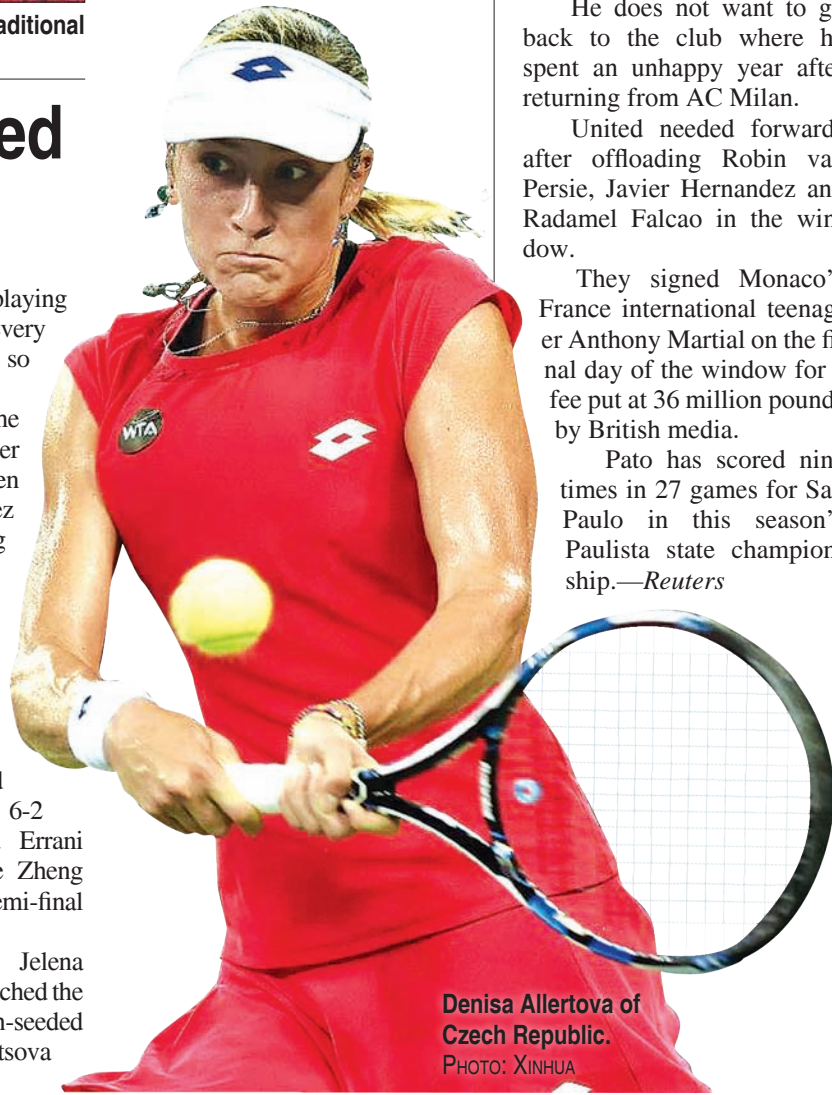
"I don't know, I was just trying to focus every point, not looking who's on the other side, just

focusing on myself and playing my tennis. I was fighting every point and it worked. I'm so happy.

"It was my first time playing such a top player like this, but at the US Open I played against Suarez Navarro, also an amazing player, a top 10 player, and I beat her, but it's the first time in my life to have a win like this."

Unseeded Yanina Wickmayer of Belgium earlier defeated another Romanian in sixth seed Monica Niculescu 6-2, 6-2 while third-seeded Sara Errani powered past local hope Zheng Saisai 6-1, 6-0 for a semi-final meeting with Allertova.

Number four seed Jelena Jankovic of Serbia also reached the last four by defeating fifth-seeded Russian Svetlana Kuznetsova 6-2, 7-5.—Reuters



Denisa Allertova of Czech Republic. PHOTO: XINHUA

Manchester United wanted me, says Brazilian striker Pato



PHOTO: REUTERS

SAO PAULO — Manchester United made a late attempt to sign Brazilian striker Alexandre Pato just before the January transfer window shut, according to the Sao Paulo player.

"Two hours before (the window closed) I had a very good offer from Manchester United," Pato told Sportv on Thursday without giving any other details of the proposed deal.

The 25-year-old is on loan at Sao Paulo until the end of the year from rivals Corinthians who want to sell him.

He does not want to go back to the club where he spent an unhappy year after returning from AC Milan.

United needed forwards after offloading Robin van Persie, Javier Hernandez and Radamel Falcao in the window.

They signed Monaco's France international teenager Anthony Martial on the final day of the window for a fee put at 36 million pounds by British media.

Pato has scored nine times in 27 games for Sao Paulo in this season's Paulista state championship.—Reuters