Message from U Thein Sein, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to Mr. Vladimir V. Putin, President of the Russian Federation on the Occasion of the 65th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between Myanmar and Russia

On the auspicious occasion of the 65th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the Russian Federation, on behalf of the government and people of Myanmar and myself, I have the honour to extend to Your Excellency and, through you, to the government and people of the Russian Federation our warmest congratulations and best wishes for the continued friendship and cooperation existing between our two countries and peoples.

(See page 9)

Message from Mr. Vladimir V. Putin, President of the Russian Federation to U Thein Sein, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar on the Occasion of the 65th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between Myanmar and Russia

Please accept my heartfelt congratulations of the occasion of 65th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and Myanmar.

During the passed period our countries have obtained vast experience of constructive cooperation, I am confident that on this basis we will continue active cooperation work aimed at enhancing the whole complex of bilateral ties.

May I wish you health, happiness and success and send best wishes of prosperity and well-being to the friendly people of Myanmar.

President U Thein Sein meets Chin State government, departmental heads, townsenders

N A Y  P Y I  T A W , 1 7  F e b — P r e s i d e n t U T h e i n S e i n m e t C h i n S t a t e government, officials and townsenders at the state government office in Haka this morning.

The meeting was also attended by the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services and party, Union ministers, chief ministers of Sagaing Region and Chin State, deputy ministers, the State Hluttaw speaker and deputy speaker, MPs, the state chief justice, the state advocate-general, the state auditor-general and officials.

The President said his tour is aimed at fulfilling the needs of the local people in Chin State.

Union Ministers U Tin Naing Thein, U Win Tun, U Ohn Myint, Dr Mya Aye, Dr Ko Ko Oo, Lt-Gen Ko Ko, U Khin Yi and U Hu Tun, and Deputy Ministers Dr Win Myint, U Soe Tint and Maj-Gen Zaw Win elaborated on the government’s reform measures and works in cooperation with Chin State government.

The President in his concluding remarks pointed out that the region and state governments are important because they take charge of development of their own regions.

The President said human resource development plays a key role in development of the country, calling for schooling every child in Chin State. He said he was heartened by the fact that half of students at Kalay University are Chin nationals.

He said Chin State has sound foundation for the stability and the rule of law.

He cordially greeted townsenders of Haka and Thantlang Townships.

The President presented K 10 million and 200 bags of rice provided by the Ministry of Border Affairs for Chin State. The President arrived back here via Pakokku in the evening.—MNA

Weather outlook for subsequent two days

Continuation of likelihood of light rain or thundershowers in the Northern Myanmar areas.
Shuttle service to and from Shwesettaw Pagoda launched

MAGWAY, 17 Feb — As Buddha Puja/nya festival of Shwesettaw Pagoda in Minbu Township of Magway Region started from 15 February, a shuttle service between Magway and the Pagoda is being operated by Aung Gaba bus line. Although pilgrims from every corner of the country have to take Minbu buses for the Pagoda, they will now be able to visit the Pagoda on the shuttle. As of 14 February, Aung Gaba bus line operated a shuttle service with mini buses that leave for Shwesettaw Pagoda from Magway city on 7.30 am and for Magway City from Shwesettaw at 3.30 pm. Bus fare is K 2500 per head.

The bus line provides a private transport service for families and groups of pilgrims. A local said that newly-upgraded Magway-Shwesettaw road ensured smooth transport of pilgrims to and from the Pagoda. Shwesettaw Pagoda Festival will be held up to 1 Waning of Tagu. — Kyemon

One-year-old child found abandoned in empty box in Bago Myoma market

BAGO, 17 Feb — Being informed of an abandoned child by Security Head of Myoma Market U Than Win in Bago on 11 February, Zay ward Administrator U Aung Soe together with U Chan Aye and the security head went to the market where a baby boy was found abandoned inside an empty box at a shop. The abandoned child is believed to be one-year-old. While the child was under the care of responsible persons at the ward administrator’s office, a person who declined to be named took the deserted baby for adoption. Officials concerned scrutinized the person and the adoption process was made in the presence of witnesses. — Kyemon

Narcotic drug seized in Indaw

INDAW, 17 Feb — According to a tip-off, police officers led by Inspector Zaw Win of Mawlu Police Station seized about 2.5 gram of white powder believed to be heroine from Ma Chaw Su of Myaypalin Village while making a body search near a bridge, west of the village with the help of two women.

Rubber and natural latex seized in Chatthin wildlife sanctuary and Shwesettaw wildlife sanctuary

According to a tip-off, police officers led by Inspector Zaw Win of Mawlu Police Station seized about 2.5 gram of narcotic drug and other suspicious items near Chatthin and Shwesettaw wildlife sanctuary.

First India-Myanmar domestic arts show on 20-24 February

MANDALAY, 17 Feb — Mandalay Region government and the Indian Consulate in Myanmar will jointly-conduct the First India-Myanmar domestic arts show at Mandalay National Theatre from 20 to 24 February from 10 am to 6 pm.

In his press meet with media persons in Mandalay, Indian Consul Dr. Madam Mohan Sethi said bamboo-based domestic art works and textiles of hand-woven textile and handicrafts development corporation witnesses on 10 February. Regarding the case, Ma Chaw Su was charged with the possession of narcotic drug and necessary measures are being made to bring the case to court. — Kyemon

Dredging of well claims two lives in Taninthayi Township

YANGON, 17 Feb — Two villagers died while dredging a well in Thayet Village of Taninthayi Region on 12 February.

As Maung Toe Nge who was at the top of the well found U Aye Nge, 47, and Maung Linn Zaw, 22, unconscious in the well which is 10 feet in diameter and 50 feet in depth at about 5 pm on that day, he shouted for help. Villagers rushed there and tried to rescue them. Although they were taken back on the ground, they were pronounced dead at about 5.45 pm.

We are expecting a good harvest to be able to cover the agricultural costs. Wheat can be harvested after three and a half or four months. Some wheat growers who are not affordable to dig a tube well are to coordinate with other tube well owners for their plantations”, a local said. — Kyemon

Sagai Township sees thriving wheat plantations

SAGAI, 17 Feb — Wheat cultivation thrives in Nyaungbinse Village of Sagai Township, Sagai Region. “Wheat plants are used to be grown when the region had a high rainfall. Later, wheat growing has been successful with the help of water supply from the tube wells in the farmlands.

Union Cup Games

From 28-2-2013 to 7-3-2013

Photo shows children under aged five being given Vitamin A and iron tablets by a health staff of Mayin Gyi Village health centre at the office of News and Periodicals Enterprise on Khayaybin feeder road in Zeyathiri Township on 15 February.—Kyemon

Development works of Mohmyin District inspected

NAV PAI TAW, 17 Feb — On his inspection tour of worksite of construction of two new school buildings for Mohmyin Degree College on 10 February, Kachin State Chief Minister U La John Ngai Hsaic called for timely completion of construction works, meeting set standards.

Next, the chief minister met with the executive officer and staff of Mohmyin Township Development Affairs Department at the office in Sein Yadana Mon ward and left necessary instructions. He also oversaw construction of new school building for Basic Education High School No (1) in Ashesu ward and shops of Aung Tharbye market which are under construction.—MNA

Three-hour electricity cut in wards of Mandalay

MANDALAY, 17 Feb — About 70 per cent of national electricity production rests on hydropower plants of the country. Adequate electric city supply had been made by the Ministry of Electric Power in monsoon and winter seasons so far. Arrangements have been made to avoid power blackouts ahead of the rainy season. A request had been made for avoidance of electric power use in industrial zones and cottage industries in wards while public electricity consumption reaches its peak from 5 to 11 pm. Besides, a scheme of alternate three-hour electricity cut is set up daily in ward of Mandalay. — Kyemon
UN says delayed Congo peace deal due to be signed 24 February

UNITED NATIONS, 17 Feb — A delayed UN-mediated peace deal aimed at ending two decades of conflict in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is due to be signed in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa on 24 February, the United Nations said on Saturday.

African leaders failed to sign the deal last month due to the concerns of some countries over who would command a new regional force that would deploy in eastern Congo and take on armed groups operating in the conflict-torn region.

The so-called intervention brigade would be contained within the existing UN peacekeeping force in Congo, known as MONUSCO. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon sent out invitations on Friday for the 24 February signing ceremony and intended to travel to Ethiopia for the event, his spokesman, Martin Nesirky, said. “All the invited presidents have committed to either be there or delegate power to sign,” Nesirky said.

Rwandan Deputy UN Ambassador Olivier Nduhungirehe posted on Twitter that the “African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, Southern African Development Community Chairs, as well as 10 Heads of States of the region will attend the signing ceremony.”

Envoy’s have said that one of the main reasons the deal was not signed in January was that three countries in the 15-member Southern African Development Community bloc—South Africa, Tanzania and Mozambique—felt they did not have enough information on the enforcement brigade.

The creation of an enforcement brigade within a UN peacekeeping mission is new for the United Nations, according to officials in the world body.—Reuters

Bomb kills 64 in Pakistan’s Quetta

QUETTA, 17 Feb — Sixty-four people including school children died on Saturday in a bomb attack carried out by extremists from Pakistan’s Sunni Muslim majority, police said.

A spokesman for Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a Sunni group, claimed responsibility for the bomb in Quetta, which caused casualties in the town’s main bazaar, a school and a computer centre. Police said most of the victims were Shi’ites.

Buried school bags and books were strewn around. “The explosion was caused by an improvised explosive device fitted to a motorcycle,” said Wazir Khan Nasir, deputy inspector general of police in Quetta. “This is a continuation of terrorism against Shi’ites.”

“I saw many bodies of women and children,” said an eyewitness at a hospital.

“At least a dozen people were burned to death by the blast.”

Most Western intelligence agencies have regarded the Pakistani Taleban and al-Qaeda as the gravest threat to nuclear-armed Pakistan, a strategic US ally.

But Pakistani law enforcement officials say Lashkar-e-Jhangvi has become a formidable force.

Last month the group said it carried out a bombing in Quetta that killed nearly 100 people, one of Pakistan’s worst sectarian attacks. Thousands of Shi’ites protested in several cities after that attack.

Pakistani intelligence officials say extremist groups, led by Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, have escalated their bombings and shootings of Shi’ites to trigger violence that would pave the way for a Sunni theocracy in US-allied Pakistan.

“Our national security forces are entirely ready to take security charge by the end of 2014,” Karzai said in his speech delivered at an army officers’ gathering at Afghan National Military Academy. “Outsourcing is not our goal, we want to develop the capacity of our security forces to provide direct support to the Afghan forces in the region while also improving disaster reduction in East Africa. The activity uses a results-based management approach that allows UNOSAT experts and the beneficiary to monitor progress and impact as activities are implemented. UNOSAT has also hired one expert-based in Nairobi to help follow the implementation from within the region while also providing direct support to the IGAD Secretariat and its components, which will draw additional benefits from the project, like the one for Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) and the IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC)—Xinhua

Afghan forces ready to secure country after 2014

KABUL, 17 Feb — Afghan President Hamid Karzai reiterated on Saturday that the Afghan security forces are entirely ready to ensure national security after NATO-led troops withdraw from the country by the end of 2014.

“Once the foreigners leave, Afghans will demonstrate to the world that they are able to secure the country and provide security for the nations,” Karzai said in his speech delivered at an army officers’ gathering at Afghan National Military Academy.

“Our national security forces are entirely ready to take security charge by the end of 2014,” Karzai said. “Afghans do not need foreign forces for the defence of their country.”

Transition of security responsibilities from NATO-led forces to Afghan army and police began in mid-2011 and lasts till 2014 when Afghanistan is due to take over full security duties from US and NATO-led forces.

Currently there are about 100,000-strong foreign forces, with nearly 66,000 of them Americans in the country. Under the US President Barack Obama’s withdrawal plan 33,000 US troops already pulled out of Afghanistan in September last year and another 34,000 will return home within one year.

The Afghan leader also called on Taleban and other insurgent groups to halt the violence and join the government-initiated peace and reconciliation process.

The Taleban, whose regime was ousted by a US-led invasion in late 2001, has renewed armed insurgency since then, staging roadside and suicide bomb attacks, killing combatants as well as civilians.

However, the Taleban has repeatedly turned down government’s offer for peace talks, saying there will be no dialogue with the government in the presence of foreign troops in the country.

According to Karzai, even if the NATO-led forces leave Afghanistan, international financial support for the war-ravaged country will stay.
In a rarity, a meteor hit and an asteroid near-miss on same day

**New York, 17 Feb**—Life looked grim for Yu, a loggerhead turtle, when she washed up in a Japanese fishing net five years ago, her front flippers shredded after a brutal encounter with a shark. Now keepers at an aquarium in the western Japanese city of Kobe are looking for a high-tech solution that will allow the 25-year-old turtle to swim normally again. For years after her injury, Yu's orbits were parallel to its talks with News Corp. Among the names mentioned as having reached out to AllThingsD were Conde Nast, where Swisher recently signed to work as a contributing editor for Vanity Fair, and Hearst. Sources also speculated that former Yahoo and AOL employees to Ross Levinsohn were not returned. While AllThingsD is recognized as the brainchild of Swisher and Mossberg, News Corp actually owns the website and its name. However, according to provisions in their contract, Swisher and Mossberg have approval authority over any sale, the first source said. Technically, News Corp could retain the AllThingsD name in the event of a sale, forcing Swisher and Mossberg to start a new venture under a different brand name. But historically, in these types of situations a deal is usually worked out to allow the founders to take the company name with them as part of a settlement. —*Reuters*

**Kobe, 17 Feb**—A 25-year-old female loggerhead turtle named Yu swims after receiving her 27th pair of prosthetic flippers at the Suma Aqualife Park in Kobe, western Japan on 11 Feb, 2013.—*Reuters*

**Aquarium fights to get disabled turtle swimming again**

A 25-year-old female loggerhead turtle named Yu swims after receiving her 27th pair of prosthetic flippers at the Suma Aqualife Park in Kobe, western Japan on 11 Feb, 2013.—*Reuters*
Australian boys get world-first vaccinations to protect against HPV

Canberra, 17 Feb—Australian schoolboys have begun receiving the first of three vaccinations to protect them against cancers and disease caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV), Health Minister Tanya Plibersek said on Friday. Plibersek said more than 280,000 boys will be eligible for the three-façade vaccine this year, which is estimated to prevent a quarter of new HPV infections. The vaccination will protect boys from cancer and genital warts.

High-stakes cholesterol study could lift Merck cloud

New York, 17 Feb—Favourable results from a huge heart study could help redeem investors’ faith in Merck & Co and its two biggest cholesterol drugs, Vytorin and Zetia, and potentially add billions of dollars in annual revenue.

Investors have poured on the No 2 US drugmaker since late December, following setbacks to a closely watched experimental drug for osteoporosis and a newer cholesterol medicine.

GSK wins priority status for new HIV drug in US

The agency is due to give its verdict on whether to approve dolutegravir by August 17, Britain’s biggest drugmaker said on Friday.

The once-daily drug, which belongs to a novel class known as integrase inhibitors that block the virus causing AIDS from entering cells, is owned by ViV Healthcare, a joint venture focused on HIV in which GSK is the largest shareholder.

The new medicine has already performed strongly in clinical trials, prompting GSK to raise its bet on the product last October by reworking a deal with Japan’s Shionogi. Under that agreement Shionogi agreed to take a 10 percent stake in ViV, which was set up in 2009 between GSK and Pfizer—in exchange for its shared rights to dolutegravir.

The agreement left GSK holding 76.5 percent of ViV, with Pfizer controlling 13.5 percent and Shionogi the remainder. Analysts see dolutegravir as a strong competitor to HIV treatments from market leader Gilead Sciences.

SEC sues over Heinz option trading before buyout

New York, 17 Feb—Securities regulators filed suit on Friday against unknown traders in the options of ketchup maker HJ Heinz Co, alleging they traded on inside information before the company announced a deal to be acquired for $23 billion by Warren Buffett’s Berkshire Hathaway Inc and Brazil’s 3G Capital.

The suit marks the second time in six months that the SEC has taken legal action for alleged insider trading on a 3G deal. The suit, in part, cites “highly suspicious trading” in Heinz call options just prior to the 14 February announcement of the deal. The regulator has frequently in past filed suit against unnamed individuals where it has evidence of wrongdoing, but is still trying to uncover the identities of those involved.

That trading, the suit said, caused the price of the particular call option they bought to soar 1,700 percent and generated unrealized profits of more than $1.7 million. The regulator claims the traders are either in, or trading through accounts in, Zurich, Switzerland.

The account had no history of trading in Heinz over the last six or so months. It has also obtained an emergency order to freeze assets in the Swiss account linked to the trading. In the suit, the SEC refers to the account as the “GS Account” and in a statement Goldman Sachs Group Inc said it was cooperating with the regulator’s investigation.

Irregular and highly suspicious options trading in front of a merger or acquisition announcement is a serious red flag that traders may be improperly acting on confidential nonpublic information,” Daniel Hauke, chief of the SEC’s Division of Enforcement’s Market Abuse Unit said in a statement. Representatives of Heinz and Berkshire Hathaway were unavailable for immediate comment. A 3G representative declined to comment.
Photos of ailing Chavez stir emotions in Venezuela

CARACAS, 17 Feb — President Hugo Chavez’s supporters joyfully blanched first photographs of him since cancer surgery two months ago while opposition activists said the images were worrying evidence of Venezuela’s political vacuum.

In a first proof of life since his six-hour operation in Cuba on 11 December, authorities published four photos on Friday showing Chavez lying in a hospital bed smiling next to his daughters.

Underlining the gravity of his situation, however, an accompanying statement said the 58-year-old socialist leader was breathing through a tracheal tube and struggling to speak.

Within hours, the photos were on sale in Caracas streets, where some of Chavez’s passionate supporters clutched them to their hearts as if they were a religious icon.

“It doesn’t matter that he can’t talk. We understand his message,” said Aniluz Serrano, 57, selling prints in downtown Caracas.

Chavez, who most Venezuelans already assumed - that Chavez is seriously ill and may not be able to return to the presidency.

He has ruled the South American OPEC nation since 1999, maintaining huge popularity among the poor thanks to oil-financed welfare policies and his charismatic leadership.

Chavez’s absence.

Venezuelan sovereignty is being given away to the Cuban government,” one of the most strident opposition leaders, Maria Corina Machado, told Reuters in reaction to the photos.

Opposition politicians believe such optimism is misplaced, given Chavez’s obvious frailty, and are re-“Our president is very brave, and we are proud of him.” — Aniluz Serrano, 57

Cypriot president tasked with sealing bailout

NICOSIA, 17 Feb — Cypriots vote on Sunday to elect a president tasked with negotiating a financial rescue to save the small island nation from a bankruptcy that would rekindle the euro zone debt crisis.

Cypriot voters have a showdown in four decades has blown away the island’s divided status as the main issue in this year’s elections, which conservative leader Nicos Anastasiades is tipped to win.

Polls show Anastasiades, the most pro-bailout figure among the main presidential contenders, has a 15-point lead over his closest rival, Stavros Malas, but may not secure the outright majority needed to avoid a run-off a week later.

He has promised a quick agreement with the European Union and International Monetary Fund on a bailout, a deal investors want thrashed out before the island’s troubles derail progress made in shoring up the rest of the euro zone’s periphery.

Nailing down a deal has proved tricky because almost any way of solving the crisis—from restructur- ing debt to slapping losses on banks—could set a precedent for other troubled states and hurt fragile confidence in financial markets.

Fears that the island will never be able to pay back its debt, German misgivings about its commitment to fighting money laundering and strong links to Russia have further complicated talks on a rescue, which has dragged on for eight months.

“There is a stake, it has never been before,” said Kyراكos Iakovides, publisher of the Cyprus Mail newspaper.

“The country must be rebuilt, Chavez must be re- habilitated in the EU. We need a strong leadership to rebuild the country.”

Chavez sought financial help last year after its banks suffered huge losses from Greece’s sovereign debt restructuring. The island, which has been shut out of international financial markets since May 2011, needs about 17 billion euros in aid—a sum worth as much as its entire economy.—Reuters

Israel treats five Syrians wounded in civil war

Jerusalem, 17 Feb — Israeli soldiers treated five Syrians who had been wounded in fighting between Syrian government forces and rebels near Israel’s security fence on the Golan Heights, the Israeli military said on Saturday.

The victims were taken to a hospital in Israel. The military did not say if they were combatants or civilians, or in what circumstances they crossed over to the Israeli side of the fence, although Israeli media said the wounded had approached the area near the fence and soldiers let them in.

Syrian rebels earlier overran a military police checkpoint in Khan Ar- nabeh, a town in the Golan Heights near the ceasefire line along the demilitarised zone with Israel, a British-based violence monitoring group said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the rebels seized weapons and a tank and the Syrian army shelled villages inside the Israeli-Syrian ceasefire area.

It was not clear if the five Syrians being treated in Israel were wounded in that incident.

Israel Vice Prime Minister Moshe Yaalon, in a television interview, referred to it as a “specific incident” and said the decision to let the Syrians in was humanitarian. Israel will evaluate each individual case if it happens again, he said.

Reuters

Mexico’s Pemex evacuates hospital unit after short circuit

MEXICO CITY, 17 Feb — Mexico’s state-owned Pemex oil monopoly evacuated a unit of its Cadereyta hospital in the eastern state of Nuevo Leon after a short circuit in ceiling wiring produced smoke, the company said on Saturday night, adding there were no injuries.

The incident “was controlled without major damage,” Pemex said in a tweet. In a statement shortly after- ward, the company said the short circuit occurred just before 7 pm local time and firefighters evacuated 10 patients and 36 hospital workers.

Last month, an explosion in Pemex’s Mexico City headquarters killed at least 37 people. Authorities have said the blast was likely caused by a gas leak, but they are still investigating.—Reuters

Ohio teen’s lawyers begin plea talks in fatal school shooting

CLEVELAND, 17 Feb — An attorney for the Ohio teen charged in the shooting deaths of three high school students in the town of Chardon said on Saturday he is negotiating with prosecutors to settle the case as the first anniversary of the attack approaches.

It was not immediately clear if accused shooter TJ Lane would plead guilty to the aggravated murder of three students in the 27 February, 2012, attack in the Chardon High School cafeteria, where three others were wounded.

“We’re in the process of plea negotiations,” said Lane’s attorney, Ian Friedman, adding that his client will first undergo a court- ordered competency evaluation. “Assuming it is completed timely and finds TJ competent, a plea may be entered as soon as 26 February, which is our next court date,” Friedman added.

Lane, who was 17 at the time of the shooting, is being tried as an adult, and has pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity.

He is scheduled to go on trial later this year for three counts of aggra- vated murder in the deaths of Demetrius Hewlin, 16; Russell King Jr, 17; and Daniel Parmertor, 16. He is charged with the attempted murder of Nick Walczak, 18, who was paralyzed from the waist down, and felony assault for wounds to two other students.

Prosecutors said Lane brought a .22-caliber pis- tol to school and fired 10 rounds randomly at stu- dents in the cafeteria.

If a plea deal is reached and announced on 26 Feb-ruary, it would be on the eve of the one-year anniversary of the shooting rampage, which will be remembered with a candlelight vigil, a memorial walk and concert in downtown Chardon.

News Light of Myanmar

Venezuela’s President Hugo Chavez holds a copy of the Cuban newspaper Granma as his daughters, Rosa Virginia (L) and Maria watch while recovering from cancer surgery in Havana in this photograph released by the Ministry of Information on 15 Feb, 2013.—Reuters

Firefighters try to put out a fire at Xing District of northeast China’s Tianjin Municipality, on 15 Feb, 2013. An enter- prise here caught fire on Friday. The cause and losses of the accident were not known immediately.—Xinhua

Mexico’s Pemex evacuates hospital unit after short circuit

MEXICO CITY, 17 Feb — Mexico’s state-owned Pemex oil monopoly evacuated a unit of its Cadereyta hospital in the eastern state of Nuevo Leon after a short circuit in ceiling wiring produced smoke, the company said on Saturday night, adding there were no injuries.

The incident “was controlled without major damage,” Pemex said in a tweet. In a statement shortly after- ward, the company said the short circuit occurred just before 7 pm local time and firefighters evacuated 10 patients and 36 hospital workers.

Last month, an explosion in Pemex’s Mexico City headquarters killed at least 37 people. Authorities have said the blast was likely caused by a gas leak, but they are still investigating.—Reuters

Ohio teen’s lawyers begin plea talks in fatal school shooting

CLEVELAND, 17 Feb — An attorney for the Ohio teen charged in the shooting deaths of three high school students in the town of Chardon said on Saturday he is negotiating with prosecutors to settle the case as the first anniversary of the attack approaches.

It was not immediately clear if accused shooter TJ Lane would plead guilty to the aggravated murder of three students in the 27 February, 2012, attack in the Chardon High School cafeteria, where three others were wounded.

“We’re in the process of plea negotiations,” said Lane’s attorney, Ian Friedman, adding that his client will first undergo a court- ordered competency evaluation. “Assuming it is completed timely and finds TJ competent, a plea may be entered as soon as 26 February, which is our next court date,” Friedman added.

Lane, who was 17 at the time of the shooting, is being tried as an adult, and has pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity.

He is scheduled to go on trial later this year for three counts of aggra- vated murder in the deaths of Demetrius Hewlin, 16; Russell King Jr, 17; and Daniel Parmertor, 16. He is charged with the attempted murder of Nick Walczak, 18, who was paralyzed from the waist down, and felony assault for wounds to two other students.

Prosecutors said Lane brought a .22-caliber pis- tol to school and fired 10 rounds randomly at stu- dents in the cafeteria.

If a plea deal is reached and announced on 26 Feb-ruary, it would be on the eve of the one-year anniversary of the shooting rampage, which will be remembered with a candlelight vigil, a memorial walk and concert in downtown Chardon.

Reuters
**Students enjoy IPRD wall magazine**

The wall magazine show and book donation was held at Basic Education Post-Primary School in Zalun Village of Dawei Township in Taninthayi Region on 7 February morning.

Deputy Head of Dawei District Information

**Umbrella hoisted atop pagoda in Ngaputaw Township**

NGAPUTAW, 17 Feb—A ceremony to hoist umbrella atop Aungchantha Pagoda was held in conjunction with the consecration ceremony in Phayahla Village of Hainggyikyun Sub-Township of Ngaputaw Township in Ayeyawady Region on 3 February.

Missionary Sayadaw Bhaddanta Aloka and Thayay Sithu U Hsan Hsint hoisted the umbrella atop the pagoda. Chairman of Ayeyawady Region Sangha Nayaka Committee Sayadaw Agga Maha Pandita Agga Maha Saddhamma Jotikadha and Public Relations Department Daw Mu Mu Aye raised questions on quiz and presented prizes to outstanding students.

Wellwishers donated books to the headmistress. Later, the students viewed the wall magazine.

Myanma Alinn

**Basic military training course conducted at No 3 University Training Corps**

NAI PYI TAW, 17 Feb—No 3 University Training Corps under the Directorate of People’s Militia and Frontier Forces of the Ministry of Defence and Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education jointly conducted the basic military training course for students of Mawlamine University at the main hall of the university on 5 February afternoon.

Chief Minister of Mon State U Ohn Myint, Commander of South-East Command Maj-Gen Tin Hla Hlaing Win and Rector of the university Dr Hay Aung delivered addresses.

A total of 23 faculty members and 87 students are attending the four-month course.—MNA

**Hsihseng gets newly-repaved asphalt road**

HSUHSENG, 17 Feb—In commemoration of the 66th Anniversary Union Day, Bogadaw asphalt road was put into service in Aungchantha Ward of Hsihseng on 7 February morning.

It was repaved by Hsihseng Township Development Affairs Committee for 2012-2013 fiscal year.

Before opening the newly-repaved road, Member of Leading Body of Pa-O Self-Administered Zone U Khun Maung Pei and Executive Officer U Thein Win of Township Development Affairs Committee explained regional development and maintenance and construction of roads and bridges.—Myanma Alinn

**Blood donated at Nay Pyi Taw General Hospital (1000-bed)**

NAI PYI TAW, 17 Feb—Kanlatmyar Parahita Organization established near staff quarters of Ministry of Construction in Nyana Theikdi Ward of Zabuthiri Township collectively donated blood for the first time at Nay Pyi Taw General Hospital (1000-bed) on 10 February.

Among 300 members of the association, a total of 26 members donated blood at the ceremony.

The organization was formed on 25 March 2012 with the participation of workers and staff from Ministry of Construction.

The organization plans to conduct the computer course, English and spoken English courses to the students who have completed the matriculation examination as of March 2013, according to Chairman of the organization U Kyaw.

“Our organization helps needy people for funeral service free of charge and provides assistance for the injured in traffic accidents,” said the secretary. Anybody may dial 09-420721199 for the organization of assistance.

Myanma Alinn

**Rural development tasks coordinated in Kachin State**

NAI PYI TAW, 17 Feb—A coordination meeting on construction of roads, bridges, water supply and rural housings in rural areas of Kachin State by spending fund of Kachin Regional Development Department of the Ministry of Border Affairs in 2012-2013 fiscal year was held at the office of Kachin State Government in Myitkyina on 23 January.

Responsible persons of KNEZ Co and Tawwin Soe Nyant Co reported on plans to build asphalt roads, gravel roads, earthen roads and bridges in Myitkyina, Waingmaw, Shwegu, Moguang, Mohnyin, Hopin and Tanai townships. The coordinator of Kachin State Development Affairs Department and departmental officials...

Myanma Alinn

**Milk, egg fed to students in Nyaunglebin**

NYAUNGLEBIN, 17 Feb—Nyaunglebin Township Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department organized the ceremony to feed students with milk and egg for the third time at Basic Education Middle School in Nyaunglebin of Bago Region on 13 February morning.

Headmistress Daw Sein Sein Ohn made a speech.

Feeding milk and egg to students will raise their health and fitness and IQ, and more feeding would be held at opportune time, said Dr Hsan Wai Phyo of the Township LBVD.
For rapid progress

Thanks to the reforms in progress, Myanmar is now back on the global stage, broadening the scope of its international relations more and more, while finding extra areas of common interest with many foreign countries and institutions in the interest of the entire country.

As Myanmar is still a developing country, it needs a great deal of strength and energy for rapid development and catching up with others within a short span of time. So, Myanmar has been seeking ways for acquiring technical knowhow, expertise in other areas, financial and material assistance and efficiency trainings through cooperation with many donor countries and organizations around the world. Accordingly, it is organizing business or development forums with the broader participation of international scholars and resource persons and reaching accords for rapid development.

As there are improving signs for international cooperation, Myanmar has committed itself to a wide array of programs for rapid progress, involving the task of strengthening public administration to enhance the transparency and effectiveness of government programmes and foreign assistance, which includes the work of supporting the legislative and oversight functions of the parliaments and new forms of public participation in policy making, clarifying and simplifying lines of authority and devolving decision making processes while strengthening cross-governmental linkages and the government coordination, strengthening government institutions to deliver core functions effectively, and establishing benchmarks and feedback systems on government performance to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

These programmes also cover plans to steadily increase the transparency of budget operations through the timely and reliable publication of budget information, strengthen fiduciary management and safeguard local resources and development cooperation from misuse through improvement of public procurement and implementation of the anti-corruption law, encourage domestic resource mobilization and increase reliance on national resources and strengthen social and environmental safeguards and compliance with their implementation.

Failed Attempts in 19th Century

With the invasion of British colonial power, last Kings of Konbaung dynasty paid attention to foreign relations and attempted to extend diplomatic relations with other major foreign countries of the world. In 1874, King Mindon tried in vain to establish diplomatic relation with Russia – geographically far apart country of Eurasia. He tried to send an emmissary to Alexander Second, the Liberator, Tsar of Russian Empire with the assistance of Persia (Iran). The Special envoy was headed by Min Hla Kyaw Hnin Yarzar and composed of Ah-why-yauk Shwe-tyaung Kyaw Thu Naw-ra-hta and scholar Maung Shwe Aye. They accom-panied the visiting Iranian envoy on his return from Mandalay palace and tried to get the Saint Petersburs Palace, but they didn’t reach the destination.

Myanmar Foreign Minister Kunwon Mingyi U Kaung also sent a note to Russian Foreign Minister Mr. Gorchakov, but the letter was stolen in the posting process of that time. In 1875, Mr. P. I. Pushino, a diplomat from Tsar, arrived Mandalay and was given an audience to King Mindon. It was noted that he made a report on his encounter with the King Mindon to Tsar.

Throughout Myanmar’s endeavour for independence in 1930s onwards, many Myanmar youth learned the leftist literature and the words such as Moscow, Red square, Gorki, Tolstoy, Lenin, Stalin, Bolshhevik, and proletarian were popular among the youth.

In 1898, such a diplomatic relation was established between Myanmar and Russia. The new era of diplomatic relations

For the independence on 4th January 1948, Myanmar established diplomatic relation with Russia (at that time the USSR) on 18 February 1948. Ambassadors-Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary were appointed on both sides in 1951. Myanmar’s first Ambassador to Russia was U Ohn who resided in Moscow on Russian side. He also, the first Ambassador was Dr. Alexander I. Saveliev, followed by 16 ambassadors including the current ambassador Mr. Yuri B. Postov. On Myanmar side, there were eighteen ambassadors starting from U Ohn and followed by U Kyn, U Pe Khin, U Ba San, U Hpee Kun, Thakin Kyaw Tun, U Myo Myint, U Kyaw Khaing, U Hla Shwe, U Kyaw Khin, U Kyi Myint, U Tin Aye, U Tin Tun, U Khin Maung Soe, U Min Myint, U Tin Soe, U Min Thein and present Ambassador U Tin Yu.

Highlevel mutual visits were realized from time to time. Myanmar Prime Minister U Nu paid a visit to Moscow in November 1955. Revolution Council Government Chairman General Ne Win visited Russia in 1965 from 14 to 24 September. After that, Vice Senior General Maung Aye, Vice-Chairman of the SPD – State Peace and Development Council visited Russia in April 2006. On Russia’s side, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR (Prime Minister) Mr. N. A. Bulgmann and Member Technical Cooperation Joint of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Mr. N.S. Khushchev visited Myanmar in December 1955. During the time of Myanmar’s early Parliamentary Democratic era, bilateral relation was in progress since the Soviet Union extended its friendly embrace to all newly independent states.

BSSP – Burma Socialist Programme Party Era

Relation between a Socialist state and Soviet Union brought up many Myanmar civil servants who were educated in Russia. Dr. Ma Tin Win, renowned scholar in contemporary literature, gained her PhD from Russia. Many Myanmar people went to Russia to study in many fields including performing arts, sports and circus. Renowned dancer Nwe Nwe San and U Maung Maung who run the famous circus troop even took the title ‘Soviet- pyan’ (come back from Soviet) as a diploma. They also served as ‘people’s artist’ and were given the friendship between Russia and Myanmar. Thanks to translated novels, Myanmar people were familiar with vodkha and Volga while TASS news agency, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and International Cooperation Agency and Aeroflot flew to and fro between Moscow and Yangon.

There was no high level visit through BSSP era, but there were many cooperation programmes in culture, education and sports. The tall and graceful beauty of Russian ballet, circus. Renowned sports. The tall and graceful beauty of Russian ballet, circus. Renowned

Trade relations and cooperation were enhanced between Myanmar and Russia, especially in the field of Technical Cooperation Joint. Technical Cooperation Joint Commission was formed in December 2009 and cooperation was enhanced by mutual visits of military delegations. Myanmar military delegations also were sent to Russia for higher learning at 23 Russian universities including Moscow University and Saint Petersburg University.

Agreements were signed on cooperation against narcotic drugs, on cooperation between high courts etc. For economic relations, Russia is interested in energy and mining. Up till October 2012, two Russian companies made investment of 94,000 million US$ ranking 15 in Myanmar’s foreign direct investment. The three Russian companies registered at MIC – Myanmar Investment Commission are JSC Zarubezheft, ITEFA Oil and Gas Company and Silver wave Sputnik Petroleum and Nobel Oil.

However, trade relations are not progressing as expected. Compared to other Asian nations, Myanmar’s trade with Russia is very nominal. Bilateral trade volume of 2011-12 was 14.11 million US$ (exporting 12.579 million and importing 1.539 million) and first nine months of year 2012-2013 was 15.126 million US$ (exporting 14.854 million and importing 0.272 million).

While Myanmar exports rice, broken rice, different kinds of beans and textile to Russia, Myanmar imports fertilizers, electricity distributor, textile chemicals, milk powder, machines and machinery.

Since there is potential to progress, much needs to be done between the two chambers of commerce to promote trade. There are also discussions for further exploration on cooperation of tourism, as well as culture, education and sports.

Since many Russian tourists are now travelling to Thailand these days, if we can attract these Russian tourist to Myanmar, that could facilitate Myanmar for further contact with Russian people and more opportunity for economic engagement.

Electricity between Myanmar and Russia, an agreement on visa exemption for less than (90) days of stay was signed on 3 July 2000 in Moscow for diplomatic and special passport, but Bilateral Foreign Office consultation was also held annually at the alternate capitals to enhance cooperation and promote mutual understanding.

(See page 9)
Message from U Wunna Maung Lwin, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to Mr Sergey V. Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation on the Occasion of the 65th Anniversary of the Diplomatic Relations between Myanmar and Russia

On the occasion of the 65th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the Russian Federation, I have the honour to extend to Your Excellency my heartfelt congratulations and best wishes for further beneficial cooperation between Myanmar and Russia.

Through our mutual endeavours, I am confident that the traditional friendship, cooperation and understanding between our two countries will be consolidated further in the years ahead.

I also recall your recent visit to Nay Pyi Taw which was instrumental in enhancing our bilateral relations. I look forward to working closely with Your Excellency to intensify our interaction not only in bilateral relations but also in multilateral cooperation.

In this respect, I would like to underscore Myanmar’s strong political commitment to strengthen our cooperation with Russia. Given our traditional friendship, I anticipate that we will be able to assist each other in both global and regional forums.

Please accept, Excellency, my best wishes for the further development of our existing multi-faceted cooperation so as to move forward to a new height in the coming years, with the assurances of my highest consideration.

Message from Mr Sergey V. Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation to U Wunna Maung Lwin, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar on the Occasion of the 65th Anniversary of the Diplomatic Relations between Myanmar and Russia

On the occasion of the 65th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Russian Federation and the Republic of the Union of Myanmar I would like to extend to you my warmest congratulations.

Our ties with friendly Myanmar are based on mutual understanding and trust, have constructive character and are not subjected to vacuum by political conjuncture. Rich experience of cooperation in political, trade and economic, military-technical and other spheres accumulated during passed decades creates a solid foundation for successful implementation of bilateral projects in the years ahead. We are satisfied with cooperative interaction of our countries in international and regional arenas, which is built on the consonance of positions on topical problems of contemporary world.

I recall with warm feeling our meetings in Moscow and Nay Pyi Taw, and count upon further regular contacts between the Foreign Ministries of the two countries.

I wish you Mr. Minister, good health, well-being and all the success.

Parliaments was established and Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw Thura U Shwe Mann visited Moscow in June 2011 as first foreign trip in his new capacity as Speaker. Union Minister for Foreign Affairs U Wunna Maung Lwin also paid a friendly visit to Moscow on 27 to 29 February 2012 and discussion was made with his counterpart Russian Foreign Minister for further promotion of bilateral relations. He also had a chance to give a courtesy call to Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the Russian Federation Council.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov paid a friendly visit to Myanmar on 16 January 2013 as the First Russian Foreign Minister visit. It was the First Ministerial visit in decades. During his one day trip, Russian Foreign Minister had franc and thorough discussion with his counterpart Union Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin and paid a courtesy call on the President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

The discussions were made on formation of Joint Commission which would encourage trade and investment.

Myanmar’s foreign policy is based on friendly relations with all countries of the world and Russia is Myanmar’s traditional ally.

While Russia gives particular attention to Asian countries and ASEAN, it is definitely sure that Myanmar-Russian Friendship would be in progress in the years to come.

Message from Mr Sergey V. Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation to U Wunna Maung Lwin, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar on the Occasion of the 65th Anniversary of the Diplomatic Relations between Myanmar and Russia

On the occasion of the 65th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Russian Federation and the Republic of the Union of Myanmar I would like to extend to you my warmest congratulations.

Our ties with friendly Myanmar are based on mutual understanding and trust, have constructive character and are not subjected to vacuum by political conjuncture. Rich experience of cooperation in political, trade and economic, military-technical and other spheres accumulated during passed decades creates a solid foundation for successful implementation of bilateral projects in the years ahead. We are satisfied with cooperative interaction of our countries in international and regional arenas, which is built on the consonance of positions on topical problems of contemporary world.

I recall with warm feeling our meetings in Moscow and Nay Pyi Taw, and count upon further regular contacts between the Foreign Ministries of the two countries.

I wish you Mr. Minister, good health, well-being and all the success.

Parliaments was established and Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw Thura U Shwe Mann visited Moscow in June 2011 as first foreign trip in his new capacity as Speaker. Union Minister for Foreign Affairs U Wunna Maung Lwin also paid a friendly visit to Moscow on 27 to 29 February 2012 and discussion was made with his counterpart Russian Foreign Minister for further promotion of bilateral relations. He also had a chance to give a courtesy call to Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the Russian Federation Council.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov paid a friendly visit to Myanmar on 16 January 2013 as the First Russian Foreign Minister visit. It was the First Ministerial visit in decades. During his one day trip, Russian Foreign Minister had franc and thorough discussion with his counterpart Union Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin and paid a courtesy call on the President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

The discussions were made on formation of Joint Commission which would encourage trade and investment.

Myanmar’s foreign policy is based on friendly relations with all countries of the world and Russia is Myanmar’s traditional ally.

While Russia gives particular attention to Asian countries and ASEAN, it is definitely sure that Myanmar-Russian Friendship would be in progress in the years to come.

President U Thein Sein presents gifts to a local in Haka, Chin State

President U Thein Sein, 17 Feb

—President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar U Thein Sein visited Thantayar Aye Pagoda at Zetawun Meditation Centre in Haka today.

Accompanied by Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Vice-Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the President also paid homage to Sayadaw Dr Bhaddanta Tejojara.

President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar U Thein Sein presents gifts to a local in Haka, Chin State.—NNA

Myanmar ship sinks near Pangasinan

MANILA, 17 Feb.—A Myanmar ship heading for China sank at sea near Bolinao in the province of Pangasinan, leaving a Malaysian crew dead and 14 others missing, the Philippine Coast Guard said today.

“Initial reports said that it encountered engine trouble and experienced rolling and eventually sank,” Philippine Coast Guard spokesman Armand Balilo said.

PCG got the information of the accident from a Chinese vessel, which rescued nine crew members of the ill-fated ship, MV Arita Bauxite. Of the nine, two were injured while the rest were in Balilo.

Healsought the farmers to manage their incomes so that they can send their children to the school, to teach them to be able to conserve their traditional culture and to learn Myanmar language to be able to contact with the peoples across the Union.

MNA
Three killed in house fire in western Turkey

ANKARA, 17 Feb — At least three Turks were killed in a house fire in Turkey’s western Bursa Province, the semi-official Anadolu news agency reported on Saturday.

The fire hit a family in Bursa, leaving three girls, aged four, seven, and 18, killed after being trapped in the house. The father was rescued by firefighters.

Firefighters extinguished the fire within 30 minutes, said the report, adding that the reason behind the fire could be the explosion of a LPG pipe due to leakage.

An investigation into the incident has been launched.—Xinhua

Cuba removes civil aeronautics institute to improve govt’ efficiency

HAVANA, 17 Feb — The Cuban authorities have decided to merge the Cuban Aeronautics Institute (IACC) into the Transport and Navigation Ministry in an effort to improve government efficiency, local media reported on Friday.

The move by the Council of State was part of a series of reform measures to “separate government and business functions” to improve Cuba’s public institutions, the official Granma daily said.

The IACC, including 11 departments and three joint venture companies, were responsible for directing, implementing and monitoring state and government policy related to air transportation, civilian air navigation and other auxiliary and related services.

It would keep its name after the merger.

Cuban President Raúl Castro has carried out a number of structural reforms since assuming office, including replacing the once powerful Sugar Ministry with a state holding company.—Xinhua

Humanitarian situation worsens as clashes continue in Syria

BEIJING, 17 Feb — Civil war-stricken Syria was hit by an unprecedented string of sectarian kidnappings and a power outage over the weekend.

On Saturday, government troops and rebels clashed around the international airport and two airbases in Syria’s northern province of Aleppo. The rebels forced the closure of the Aleppo international airport, the second largest in the country, but resisted a number of strong counter strikes.

Analysts say the rebels have recently stepped up their offensives to capture more strategic territories, in a bid to prod President Bashar al-Assad into negating and strengthening their hand in the possible talks.

The Syrian crisis has dragged on for nearly two years, with no signs of an end in sight. Its fallout is emerging and spreading.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported on Saturday a spike of sectarian kidnappings over the past two days.

Meanwhile, a power outage added to the woes of the people in control of the Aleppo province and the southern provinces of Daraa and Sweida on Saturday.

The residents in Damascus have grown used to frequent power cuts as the country’s conflict has damaged infrastructure and sapped the government’s finances.

In addition, the refugee crisis is weighing on the international community, especially neighboring countries. According to the United Nations refugee agency, more than 1.5 million people have fled their home, with 728,553 refugees in neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres said last week that scores of people fleeing fighting in Syria could reach 1.1 million by June.

The humanitarian situation in Syria is “the most dramatic crisis we are facing today,” he said, adding that developed nations, including those in Europe, need to accept more refugees as Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon have done. —Xinhua

Farm theme boosts enrollment in rural Kansas school

WALTON, (KANSAS), 17 Feb — The first clue is a sign “Fresh Eggs for Sale” in front of the school. There is a sheep pen on the baseball field and the sounds of farm animals greet pupils every morning.

This is not your ordinary elementary school. It is the Walton Rural Life Centre, a kindergarten-through-fourth grade charter school in rural Kansas that uses agriculture to teach students about math, science, economics—and responsibility.

The farm theme is so popular that the centre has a waiting list to enroll and has given the town of Walton, population 235, a boost, said Mayor Evan Johnson.

“It’s been a priority for us and a source of pride,” Johnson said.

Students take turns each week feeding chickens, sheep, pigs and cattle. They wash and sell the eggs, make yarn from wool and raise pigs for market—with pork coming back to the school for meals. They also raise vegetables for school snacks.

“They love it, and they are learning,” said Principal Natis Voigt, who has seen the student test scores as one example.

At the farm where small towns struggle to keep up, Walton is turning students away for lack of space. In 2007, enrollment dipped to around 100, putting the school at risk of closing, Vogt said. But the school has 168 students today.

About half the students come from outside the school’s enrollment boundaries and some live outside the school district, which is based five miles away, in Newton, Kansas.

“The parents like the unique curriculum, the project-based learning,” said Jennifer Sauerwein, co-president of the school’s Parent-Teacher Association. “The kids get that real-life hands-on, day-to-day connection to learning.”

Working with animals, for example, is a study in math because students count out eggs in dozens, add and subtract money earned and spent, measure animal food in fractions of each container and equate perimeter lengths with animal pens.

Feeding the animals is not just a chore, said Walton teacher Amanda Paulus.

“It gives them a lot of responsibility in that they are actually caring for something that depends on them,” Paulus said. —Reuters

Cyprus company not to be held responsible for horsemeat scandal

NICOSIA, 17 Feb — A Cyprus registered company originally blamed for starting the horsemeat scandal across Europe cannot be held responsible in any way, authorities in Nicosia said on Saturday.

“We made a thorough examination of the company’s documents and we have established that it had acted legally and properly all the way,” said George Kyriakides, director of the Veterinary Services at the Ministry of Agriculture.

He said the Dutch company, Draap Trading Limited, had placed an order for horsemeat with a Romanian horse slaughter house and a meat cutting establishment, which are registered as horsemeat facilities under EU rules.

Kyriakides said the meat purchased by Draap Trading, registered in Cyprus’ southern port city of Limassol and operates from premises in Belgium, from the Romanian facilities was mislabeled on the way to its destination, but he could not say where.

“It is up to the authorities of other European countries involved to investigate the labelling of the meat,” he added.

French authorities have said that well-known Spanghero company based in the south of the country knowingly sold as beef what could have been horsemeat, something which the company strongly denied.

Meanwhile, a Cypriot public health official said 16.5 tonnes of hamburgers had been destroyed by a Cypriot importer after the scandal started in Ireland.

He added that further examinations were under way to establish whether the meat products of the company were in any way contaminated with harmful medication given to horses. —Xinhua

Passengers and vehicles detained by a heavy fog are seen on board a ro-ro ship at a port in Haikou, capital of south China’s Hainan Province, on 18 Feb, 2013. A total of 46,000 passengers and 8,700 vehicles have left the Port of Haikou from 8:00 pm Friday to 8:00 am Saturday, after being detained by a heavy fog that disrupted the waterway traffic across the Qiongzhou Strait. —Xinhua

People gather at the scene of car bomb blast that targeted a popular beachfront restaurant in Mogadishu, Somalia, on 16 Feb, 2013. Two persons were confirmed dead and five others injured in the blast.—Xinhua

Quake rattles Rome, no damage or injuries reported

ROME, 17 Feb — An earthquake struck 90 km southeast of Rome on Saturday, Italy’s National Institute of Geophysics and Vulcanology said. There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries. The 4.8 magnitude quake struck at 10:16 pm and was felt from Rome to Naples and in the neighboring region of Abruzzo, according to Reuters witnesses.

The epicentre was near the towns of Sora and Isola del Liri.—Reuters

Third grade students Cody Eye and Elizabeth Harder feed the hogs at the Walton Rural Life Centre Elementary School, in Walton, Kansas, on 18 Jan, 2013.—REUTERS

Kyriakides said the company were in any way involved in the possible talks. He said the meat products of the company were in any way contaminated with harmful medication given to horses.
Japanese FM visits Okinawa on US Futenma base relocation

Tokyo, 17 Feb—Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida on Saturday visited the country’s southernmost prefecture of Okinawa to discuss the long-stalled issue of relocation of a key US air base, local media reported.

Kishida met with Okinawa Governor Hirokazu Nakaima and asked the governor to support the plan agreed by Japan and the United States to relocate the base within Okinawa to a less populated area, according to Japan’s Kyodo News Agency.

The visit came a few days before a four-day US trip by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who will try to restore Japan-US alliance scratched by the spiny issue.

However, the minister failed to reach an agreement with Nakaima as the governor, who also discussed the issue with Abe earlier this month, reiterated that Okinawa people want the base to move outside Okinawa as soon as possible, according to the report.—Xinhua

Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew in hospital, but recovers

SINGAPORE, 17 Feb—Singapore’s former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew was hospitalized on Friday after an irregular heartbeat led to a brief stoppage of blood flow to the brain, the Prime Minister’s Office said on Saturday.

Lee, 89, “has recovered but will remain warded for a few days for the doctors to adjust his medications and for observation,” the Prime Minister’s Office said in a statement.

It said Lee was admitted to the Singapore General Hospital after experiencing a suspected “Transient Ischaemic Attack (TIA) associated with a prolonged episode of atrial fibrillation (i.e. irregular heartbeat).”

France wants India to open up its markets

NEW DELHI, 17 Feb—France has urged India to open up its domestic markets by eliminating the existing hurdles, which will encourage French companies to invest up to one billion US dollars in this country.

“French companies are willing to invest up to one billion US dollars in India. There are always obstacles to opening markets. I am not here to interfere in the political decisions but these decisions (to open up markets) are nonetheless necessary. We are all convinced that India has a great future and we want to partake in that,” French President Francois Hollande was quoted as saying in Mumbai on Friday as he wrapped up his two-day state visit to India.

The French President, who had earlier met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during which several pacts were inked between the two countries, also said that India “has the potential to grow at 10 percent” but faces “immense challenges commensurate with its size.” “French businesses would like to invest more in an emerging economy like India. We pride ourselves on being one of the biggest investors here.

The stock of our assets here is $17 billion and we wish to increase this investment flow by one billion US dollars.—Xinhua

Soldier wounded as rebels strike army convoy in S Philippines

DAVAO CITY, (Philippines), 17 Feb—A Philippine Army soldier was wounded when leftist rebels detonated an improvised bomb and fired at an army truck on the way to help rebuild typhoon-hit areas in southern Philippines on Saturday, the military said.

The incident happened along the Pan-Philippine Highway in Tagum in southeastern Mindanao at around 10 am, said Lieutenant Colonel Lyndon Paniza, spokesperson for the army’s 10th Infantry Division. Paniza said soldiers from the army’s 66th Infantry Battalion assigned to a humanitarian task force were aboard an army truck when they were ambushed by an improvised landmine believed planted by the New People’s Army (NPA). “The soldiers were transporting construction material to (typhoonstruck) Compostela Valley Province when attacked,” Paniza told Xinhua by text message, adding that a soldier suffered shrapnel wounds and had to be transported back to an army hospital in Davao some 500 kilometres away. He said the army vehicle also sustained damage as a result of the blast.

The rebels also fired at the soldiers, sparking a brief firefight, before withdrawing to a forested area, said Paniza.

“Despite the incident, the military would still continue helping rehabilitate typhoon-affected communities in the region,” the military official said, condemning the NPA attack as “anti-people and anti-development.”

The 4,000-strong NPA, armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines, has been fighting a leftist insurgency in 60 Philippine provinces since 1969. Xinhua

Thai PM expresses concern over drought

BANGKOK, 17 Feb—Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra said Saturday that her government was worried about drought situation which could be intensified in the next three months, Thai News Agency reported.

The premier expressed concern in her weekly televised address “Yingluck government meets the people”, saying that the government has reviewed its strategies in tackling drought to avoid repeated problems, as 29 provinces, mostly in the north and northeastern, have been declared disaster zones affected by drought.

She said the government wants the public to have sufficient water resources for consumption, while for agriculture, the government will have to consider the water management situation in each area, such as suggesting farmers to plant crops which consume less water and introducing alternative occupations.

In the long-term, Yingluck said a sustainable water management plan is needed under a single command operation with about 12 million US dollars of budget, which will covers both flooding and drought.

Regarding haze problem in the north caused by forest fire and burning of cultivated lands after harvest to prepare fields for the next plantings, Yingluck said a special committee has been set up to closely monitor the smog situation during the so-called “80 dangerous days” after harvest season.—Xinhua

The city is seen through the fog in Nanning, capital of south China’s Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, 17 Feb, 2013. Heavy fog engulfed Nanning here on Sunday.—Xinhua

Two Afghan security members die in explosion in northern province

SHIRGHAN, (Afghanistan), 17 Feb—Two members of Afghan security forces were killed and four others were wounded on Saturday when a bomb hit their vehicle in the country’s northern province of Jawzjan, the provincial police chief said.

“Two members of National Security Directorate (NDS) died and four others were wounded when their vehicle touched off a roadside planted bomb in Khwaja Buran, an area outside provincial capital at around 3:30 pm local time,” Abdul Ariz Khairat told Xinhua, blaming Taliban insurgents for the attack.

He said the NDS or intelligence service unit was in a routine patrol with police forces when the blast took place in the province 390 km north of Afghan capital Kabul.

The Taliban has been waging an insurgency since its regime was toppled by a US-led invasion in late 2001.

Xinhua

People gather at the site after a car accident in Kota Kinabalu in Sabah, east Malaysia, on 17 Feb, 2013. A high-speed car rammed into a tree, killing two young men.—Xinhua
Six killed in attacks in northern Iraq

Baghdad, 17 Feb — At least six people were killed, including two would-be-suicide bombers, in two attacks in the Iraqi provinces of Nineveh and Salahudin on Saturday morning, police sources said.

The deadliest attack occurred in Nineveh when two men approached the house of a commander of the rapid reaction police force in the town of Tal Afar, some 70 km west of the provincial capital city of Mosul, a provincial police source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity.

The guards of the commander’s house opened fire at the two, who apparently were wearing explosive vests, killing one of them and blowing up the vest of the other, the source said.

The huge blast killed two policemen and an off-duty Iraqi army Colonel nearby, the source said, adding that the commander, who apparently was the target of the two attackers, escaped the attack unharmed.

Nineveh Province has long been a stronghold for insurgent groups, including al-Qaida militants. Its capital city of Mosul, some 400 km north of Baghdad, is one of the country’s most restive cities.

In Salahudin Province, a judge named Ahmed al-Baiyati was killed and his son wounded when a sticky bomb attached to his car detonated in the city of Tuz-Khurmatu, some 200 km north of Baghdad, a provincial police source anonymously told Xinhua.

The ethnically mixed city of Tuz-Khurmatu is part of disputed areas claimed by both the autonomous region of Kurdistan and Baghdad central government. —Xinhua

Iran launches NGL plant in Persian Gulf

Tehran, 17 Feb — Iran inaugurated a natural gas liquids (NGL) plant on the Persian Gulf island of Siri, Tehran Times daily reported on Saturday.

The Siri NGL plant is projected to produce 1,400 barrels of gas condensates, 1,500 barrels of pentane, 4,000 barrels of butane, and 8,000 barrels of propane per day, the managing director of National Iranian Offshore Oilfields Co., Mahmoud Zirakchianzadeh, was quoted as saying.

The plant will also have about 500 million US dollars of sales annually, said Zirakchianzadeh. Some of the output of the new plant will be produced from associated gas, also known as flare gas or associated petroleum gas, which is burnt out and significantly contributes to the worldwide anthropogenic emissions of carbon dioxide, according to Tehran Times.

About 40 million cubic metres of associated gas is burnt every day at Iranian oil fields, meaning around 3 billion US dollars of losses for the country annually, said the daily.

Chinese firm sells meteorite pieces online

Xinhua

Chinese scientists have sold meteorite pieces online, after a Chinese man claimed he found one of the meteorites which exploded over the Ural Mountains of Russia on February 15.

The meteorite explosion released an estimated 150 kilotons of energy, which was equivalent to the power of 10 megatons of nuclear weapons.

According to experts, the meteorite explosion released an estimated 150 kilotons of energy, which was equivalent to the power of 10 megatons of nuclear weapons.

The Xinhua news agency quoted a meteorite hunter as saying that he found one of the meteorites which exploded over the Ural Mountains of Russia on February 15.

Xinhua

Several pieces of a meteorite which exploded over the Ural Mountains of Russia on February 15 have been sold online by a Chinese hunter.

The meteorite explosion released an estimated 150 kilotons of energy, which was equivalent to the power of 10 megatons of nuclear weapons.

The Xinhua news agency quoted a meteorite hunter as saying that he found one of the meteorites which exploded over the Ural Mountains of Russia on February 15.

The meteorite explosion released an estimated 150 kilotons of energy, which was equivalent to the power of 10 megatons of nuclear weapons. Several pieces of a meteorite which exploded over the Ural Mountains of Russia on February 15 have been sold online by a Chinese hunter.
Jessica Alba feared she was suffering a stroke

LOS ANGELES, 17 Feb — Jessica Alba recently feared she was suffering a stroke. The Sin City actress — who has two daughters, Honor, four and Haven, 18 months, with her husband Cash Warren — had a major health scare in the middle of the night after her arm went numb.

“Just before the 31-year-old beauty told Jimmy KimmeLive! ‘My whole arm was numb, and then I got a cold sensation from the back of my neck up to the front. And then I was like, ‘I think I can’t move my face.’” Jessica rushed to the hospital to get a CAT scan and an MRI. After being fully checked out she was assured she did not have heart problems.

She said: “They all said, you had all the signs of a stroke if you were much older.” She later discovered that she has developed carpal tunnel syndrome, possibly from spending too much time on her computer. Jessica, who runs her own organic baby product business The Honest Company, previously revealed that she tries to stay fit and healthy but she hates working out. She said: “I like doing dance classes. That’s fun. Like hip hop class, mixed with like core Pilates-type exercises. And sometimes I do sprint intervals just because I hate working out. Anything where I have to do something but I can get my mind off of doing it, that’s so much better for me than anything that’s repetitive. Or the music has to be loud and I have to be moving.”

Jessica Alba had a major health scare in the middle of the night after her arm went numb. — PTI

British actor Hugh Grant announces birth of second child

LOS ANGELES, 17 Feb — Hugh Grant announced on Saturday that he had become a father for the second time after Tinglan Hong gave birth to a baby boy.

“In answer to some journos (journalists),” the British actor posted on the social media website Twitter, “am thrilled my daughter now has a brother. Adore them both to an uncool degree. They have a fab mum.”

“And to be crystal clear. I am the Daddy,” he added in a second tweet. Grant, 52, who is best known for such films as “Notting Hill” and “About a Boy,” did not reveal the child’s name on Twitter. The actor and Hong had their first child in 2011, when his spokeswoman said in a statement that the baby girl was the result of a “fleetish affair” but Grant “could not be happier or more supportive.”

Days later, Hong won a court injunction in Britain “prohibiting harassment” of her and the child after she said paparazzi had made her life unbearable. Grant is a strident critic of Britain’s tabloid newspaper culture. On his Twitter message on Saturday, Grant mentioned that the press had obtained his baby boy’s birth certificate and were making inquiries. “Now I’ve confirmed... hoping my family will be left in peace,” he wrote.

PTI

Rishi Kapoor dons biker avatar in ‘Chashme Buddoor’

MUMBAI, 17 Feb — Veteran actor Rishi Kapoor will be donning a completely new avatar of a biker dude in the remake version of ‘Chashme Buddoor’.

The 60-year-old will be riding Harley Davidson in the by-lanes of Goa and sporting innumerable tattoos—like those of a star, flower, other abstract designs, mermaid and bikini-clad girls — all over on his hands. —PTI

Katy Perry fuels rumours of engagement

LOS ANGELES, 17 Feb — Pop star Katy Perry has fuelled rumours that she is engaged to boyfriend John Mayer after she was spotted wearing a heart-shaped ring on her engagement finger.

The 28-year-old ‘Wide Awake’ singer was seen wearing the sparkling ring as she went for a romantic Valentine’s dinner with her rocker boyfriend, reported Sun online.

Dressed in a bizarre floor length folk-style frock, Perry beamed as she happily exited the venue, clutching a bag full of goodies. —Reuters

Designers old and new dazzle at London Fashion Week

LONDON, 17 Feb — Britain’s long-established designers brought classic elegance to the catwalks, while up-and-coming talent packed a punch with fun, youthful styles on the second day of London Fashion Week. One of Kate Middleton’s favoured designers, Daniella Helayel, showcased a collection of printed chiffon kaftans, woven jacquards and geometric patterns.

Models wore thick jackets with shearling and fur linings, accessorized with wide brimmed hats and eagle feathers in a collection inspired by the rugged landscape of the Nava-jo Indians. “There are lots of feathers, lots of feather prints, it was also inspired by rugs, different textures and body paints,” Helayel, designer for Issa London, told Reuters backstage after the show. With buyers from 39 different countries in attendance, the British Fashion Council estimates orders of more than 100 million pounds ($155.23 million) are placed during London Fashion Week each season. The five-day event blends emerging talent with veteran designers such as Vivienne Westwood and is best known for its cutting-edge talent and avant garde trends. —Reuters

Model Cara Delevingne presents a creation from the Issa Autumn/Winter 2013 collection during London Fashion Week, on 16 Feb, 2013. —Reuters

Rihanna brings high street to catwalks at London show

LONDON, 17 Feb — Pop singer Rihanna launched her first clothing line with British high-street retailer River Island on Saturday, adding A-list glitz to the British leg of the international fashion circuit. The fashion credentials of the British high street have flourished in recent years as more household clothing brands inch onto the catwalks of major fashion centres. Models strutted in a line through a tiered catwalk of five square compartments at Rihanna’s show, pausing in each to showcase midriff-bearing mesh tops and yellow shift dresses.

Denim tops teamed with slouchy jeans and monochrome dresses with thigh-high slits mirrored the Barbados-born singer’s dressed-down but raunchy style. —Reuters

PTI

Jessica Alba walks out onto the catwalk after the presentation of her Rihanna for River Island Autumn/Winter 2013 collection during London Fashion Week, on 16 Feb, 2013. —Reuters

Designer catwalk at London Fashion Week 2013

PTI

PTI

PTI
The 301st goal for Messi as Barca win in Granada

Madrid, 17 Feb—Leo Messi scored two more goals in his incredible season as FC Barcelona took a hard fought 2-1 win away to Granada to ensure they at least retain their lead at the top of Spain’s B E V A

Thiago and Alexis had further shots on goal, but it was a miss from Alexis, who dwelt on the ball in the Granada penalty area, which led to the first goal of the game as Granada launched a counter attack which saw Nolito nod the ball down for Odion Ighalo to poke the ball home from close range, although he looked to be in an offside position. Barca had the majority of the play thanks to the hard work of the Granada midfield and defence, didn’t find their rivals net until the 50th minute when Tono was unable to hold a low drive from Cesc Fabregas and Messi was on hand to poke home from close range. Messi has now scored in his side’s last 14 league matches and it was his 36th league goal of the campaign and his 300th for the club.

Freestyle skiing: Uemura 3rd in Sochi Olympic test run

Sochi, (Russia), 17 Feb—Aiko Uemura finished third in the women’s moguls on Friday in a World Cup Olympic test event at the venue for the 2014 Winter Games.

It was Uemura’s second place in the Sochi test event, Haas produced an eight-foot birdie putt at the par-four 10th, burst out into a three-shot lead in the third round of the Northern Trust Open on Saturday.

On a tricky day for scoring at a sun-baked Riviera Country Club, American Haas fired a sizzling seven-under 66 to move two shots with one hole to play before bogeying the last for a 70 to slip back into a three-way tie for second. Also at 11-under total of 201.

For Odion Ighalo to poke the ball home from close range. Messi has now scored in his side’s last 14 league matches and it was his 36th league goal of the campaign and his 300th for the club.

Now a basketball player?

You must be Usain

Houston, 17 Feb—Usain Bolt, do not quit your day job. The world’s fastest man played in a celebrity basketball game on Friday in the run-up to Sunday’s NBA All-Star game and failed to impress the crowd—or himself—with his skills. Bolt hit one of five shots, missed both of his free throws and totalled just two points.

So Paulo, 17 Feb—Rafael Nadal advanced to the final of the Brazil Open on Saturday with a 6-3, 6-7 (2-7), 6-1 victory over Argentine's Martin Alund. Sunday’s title decider against Argentina’s David Nalbandian will be the Spaniard’s second straight final since returning from a seven-month layoffs with a knee problem. In his first tournament back from injury last week, the 11-time grand slam winner lost to world No 73 Horacio Zeballos in the Chile Open final.

Earlier, Nalbandian said he was confident of clinching his first ATP title since 2010 against Nadal. The former world No 3 progressed to the final of the indoor clay-court event after defeating Italy’s Simone Bolelli 6-3, 7-5. “I am feeling better as the week goes on, with each match and with that my confidence has grown,” the current world No 93 said. “Physically I’m feeling very good. I have matches with three sets but the points have been short and for that reason I haven’t felt any pressure.”

Sunday’s final will be Nalbandian’s first final since being disqualified for kicking an advertising sign and injuring a line judge at Queen’s Club in London last June, which would have no impact on Sunday’s final. Nadal (Nadal) is a tough opponent on any surface but his control allowed him to make a brave challenge of the game as Granada launched a counter attack which saw Nolito nod the ball down for Odion Ighalo to poke the ball home from close range, although he looked to be in an offside position. Barca had the majority of the play thanks to the hard work of the Granada midfield and defence, didn’t find their rivals net until the 50th minute when Tono was unable to hold a low drive from Cesc Fabregas and Messi was on hand to poke home from close range. Messi has now scored in his side’s last 14 league matches and it was his 36th league goal of the campaign and his 300th for the club.

Arsenal defender Denilson unsure of future

Rio de Janeiro, 17 Feb—Arsenal midfielder Denilson admits his future remains uncertain as he continues his bid to secure the 25-year-old on a permanent contract. Denilson has been on loan at the Brazilian club since 2011 after falling out of favour with Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger.

Last month the former Brazil under-17 international expressed his desire to remain at Sao Paulo after his loan deal expires on 30 June. But he revealed on Saturday that he is no closer to cutting ties with the north London club, which he joined as an 18-year-old in 2006 for a fee of 3.4 million British pounds.

“IT’s hard to know who will have the advantage with the balls that are being used.”—Xinhua

Charging Haas takes control at Riviera

Bill Haas of the US tees off on the 12th hole during the third round of the Northern Trust Open at Riviera Country Club in Los Angeles on 16 Feb, 2013.—Reuters

Putting 68 with a seven-under-par 65 on Saturday, Haas produced an eighth-foot birdie putt at the par-four 10th, burst out into a three-shot lead in the third round of the Northern Trust Open on Saturday.

On a tricky day for scoring at a sun-baked Riviera Country Club, American Haas fired a sizzling seven-under 66 to move two shots with one hole to play before bogeying the last for a 70 to slip back into a three-way tie for second. Also at 11-under total of 201.

For Odion Ighalo to poke the ball home from close range. Messi has now scored in his side’s last 14 league matches and it was his 36th league goal of the campaign and his 300th for the club.

Nadal defeats Alund to reach Brazil Open final

Sao Paulo, 17 Feb—Rafael Nadal advanced to the final of the Brazil Open on Saturday with a 6-3, 6-7 (2-7), 6-1 victory over Argentine's Martin Alund. Sunday’s title decider against Argentina’s David Nalbandian will be the Spaniard’s second straight final since returning from a seven-month layoffs with a knee problem. In his first tournament back from injury last week, the 11-time grand slam winner lost to world No 73 Horacio Zeballos in the Chile Open final.

Earlier, Nalbandian said he was confident of clinching his first ATP title since 2010 against Nadal. The former world No 3 progressed to the final of the indoor clay-court event after defeating Italy’s Simone Bolelli 6-3, 7-5. “I am feeling better as the week goes on, with each match and with that my confidence has grown,” the current world No 93 said. “Physically I’m feeling very good. I have matches with three sets but the points have been short and for that reason I haven’t felt any pressure.”

Sunday’s final will be Nalbandian’s first final since being disqualified for...

PACIFIC PALISADES, (California), 17 Feb—Defending champion Bill Haas, lifted by a spectacular eagle at the par-four 10th, burst out into a three-shot lead in the third round of the Northern Trust Open on Saturday.

On a tricky day for scoring at a sun-baked Riviera Country Club, American Haas fired a sizzling seven-under 66 to move two shots with one hole to play before bogeying the last for a 70 to slip back into a three-way tie for second. Also at 11-under total of 201.
Del Potro on fire as he sets up final with Benneteau

DELFT, 17 Feb—Argentine Juan Martin del Potro is favorite to add his name to the banner of champions wrapped around the Ahoy Arena after beating Bulgaria’s Grigor Dimitrov 6-4, 6-4 at the World Indoor Tournament on Saturday. Runner-up last year, he will face Julien Benneteau, conqueror of champion Roger Federer, in Sunday’s final after the Frenchman eliminated compatriot Gilles Simon in the semi-final. Del Potro has been in devastating form and reached the title match without dropping his serve all week.

From the moment the lanky Argentine broke his Bulgarian opponent’s service in the third game, when Dimitrov missed an easy volley, there seemed to be only one winner. “I’m satisfied with this win against a player with a great potential who can be top 10 of 20 in the near future.” Despite his favorite status in the final, 2009 US Open champion Del Potro did not want to talk up his chances.

“I was a bit of surprise that Roger went out but it doesn’t please me as I don’t pay any attention to the other half of the draw before the final,” he said. “It doesn’t matter who I play tomorrow, I just have to stick with my game plan and play it hard.” Benneteau has yet to lift a tour title in his 13-year career despite reaching seven previous finals. He retained his form from Friday when he ousted top seed Federer, although the 31-year-old had to wait for his chances against Simon. “I handled yesterday’s win ok. I put it behind me after I woke up yesterday,” Benneteau said.—Reuters

Seventeen-year-old Shiffrin wins slalom gold

SCHLADMING, (Austria), 17 Feb—Mikaela Shiffrin became one of Alpine skiing’s youngest world champions when she won the women’s slalom on Sunday at the age of 17 to continue an impressive performance by the United States. Shiffrin, who has already won three slalom races on this season’s World Cup circuit, was third fastest in the first run but then produced a typically aggressive performance in the second to take gold.

One month short of her 18th birthday, Shiffrin pipped Austria’s Michaela Kirchheger by 0.22 of a second to become the third youngest’s world slalom world champion and deny the hosts a first individual gold medal. The Austrians, who won four of the five individual women’s golds in Garmisch-Partenkirchen two years, had to be content with Kirchheger’s silver and bronze for Anne Fenninger in the giant slalom and Nicole Hosp in super combined. Olypmic champion Maria Hoefl-Riesch, gold medal winner in the combined event last week, straddled a gate in the lower part of the course as she missed out, four months after her slalom gold at Val d’Isere. Defending champion Marlies Schild, who badly injured her knee two months ago at Are, Sweden, exceeded expectations by finishing ninth, only after three weeks after returning to the snow. Sweden’s Frida Hansdotter, who finished sixth after the first run, was third. “I can’t believe what is happening to me here,” Shiffrin told reporters at the finish line.

All-star game may get hostile, says West coach Popovich

HOUSTON, 17 Feb—Players and coaches concede that Sunday’s NBA All-Star game is a show for the fans yet when the game is on the line, action on the basketball court could become a little hostile. “The main object is fun — the players want to show their talents and they want to play with each other. Certain players are never going to play with somebody else on the same team,” said West coach Gregg Popovich of the San Antonio Spurs. “But when you get to the fourth quarter it gets serious they want to win. Things get one venue,” said Miami’s LeBron James, who tied Durant’s 36 points last season in a losing effort for the East. “We have a
Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker urges ward/village-tract administrators to carry out tasks with participation of local people

Dr Tun Lwin of the Department of Border Affairs carrying out the tasks with participation of local people.

**Significant night temperatures**

- **Haka**
  - 9°C

- **Loilem**
  - 9°C

**Rural region development calls for active participation of local people**

Rural region development calls for active participation of local people. So far 1008 houses have been built in Sagaing Region, 654 in Magway, 803 in Mandalay, 1826 in Bago, 339 in Yangon, 904 in Ayeyawady and 84 in remaining region and states totaling 5618. Dr TL: Co-operating with UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, UN-HABITAT, JICA and BAID is in progress.

Q: What are the future plans of the department?

Dr TL: Plans are underway to invite international aid to be able to implement the rural region development tasks. The department has planned to build 6446 miles of road and 1516 bridges. I would like to invite mass participation in the tasks so that rural region development will be successful. The department is making great strides in the task of agricultural sector development and generating more incomes for farmers.

**Photo**: Maung Maung Than (Kawhmu)