Thamine junction heavily affected by rainy season as measures to prevent floods not yet taken

By Ye Myint

YANGON, 12 June—With rainy season in full swing and no measures taken to prevent floods in Yangon’s Thamine junction—one of the busiest junctions in the city—is frequently under water, with locals criticizing the lack of action taken by authorities despite the fact that floods are an annual occurrence.

On Thursday, commuters from Insein and neighbouring townships to the downtown area had to endure a four-hour journey instead of the usual one-and-a-half-hour trip as flash floods brought Thamine junction to a standstill.

“I waited at the bus stop for nearly one hour,” said a 30-year-old man who successfully got on the over-crowded 124 Bus that took about two hours to reach Oakyin bus stop, one of the stops on the Yangon-Insein Road.

The pavements were packed with waiting commuters as all buses heading to the downtown area were stuck in traffic for hours before finally reaching Thamine junction that resembled a lake this morning.

“As water reaches knee level, all small vehicles have to make a U-turn here at the junction as the car batteries would otherwise go dead. So, all lanes heading to the junction are clogged with vehicles trying to turn back,” a bus driver said. Thursday’s torrential rains started before dawn and lasted until about 9 a.m., leaving commuters and drivers stranded in floodwaters and causing traffic delays in several parts of Yangon, particularly in areas with roads leading to downtown.

Disabled persons in Myanmar vulnerable to discrimination and denial of fundamental rights

By Aye Min Soe

YANGON, 12 June—Myanmar’s first ever National Disability Conference ended on Thursday, with officials expressing concern that many people with disabilities in Myanmar are still largely marginalized and subject to discrimination due to shortage of aid and support and denial of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

An agreement was reached during the three-day conference to formally establish the Myanmar Council of People with Disabilities at national level as an accredited civil society organization of Myanmar to protect and to promote the rights and services for citizens with disabilities in Myanmar.

During the conference, independent experts, who will serve as council members, urged government ministries to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities - UN-CRPD and to make the rights of persons with Disabilities real, including the allocation of national budgets and accepting the active participation of Disabled People’s Organizations.

At the conference, efforts on developing a new law to protect disabled people by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Rehabilitation and the union parliament, were welcomed.

“We have the 1958-Employment Act on acquired disabilities, but in reality, the majority of disabled people are jobless due to weak law enforcement,” said U Aung Ko Myint, President of the Myanmar National Association of the Blind.

According to a survey conducted by the Social Welfare Department in 2008, around 1.3 million people with disabilities live in Myanmar.

“As far as we know, the rights of medication, cash assistance, and job opportunities for disabled civilians have not yet been included in the bill to promote the rights of persons with disabilities and the last stage for drafting the bill should be all inclusive,” said U Thein Han Thu, Joint Secretary of the Association of Affairs of Myanmar Disabled Women.

The conference highlighted the importance of various mechanisms, including a National Plan of Action for People with Disabilities as an instrument for mainstreaming the issue within Myanmar.

The conference recognized the common voices of the entire community with disabilities in Myanmar by vowing to promote their self-determination and full enjoyment of human rights and the meaningful participation in all political, social, economic, civil and cultural spheres.

Further promoted will be voting rights for citizens with disabilities, in time for the general elections next year.

The conference recalled the provisions of both regional and international disability documents, namely the Incheon Strategy for People with Disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region, ASEAN Decade of People with Disabilities (2011-2020), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
Deputy Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw back from World Summit of Legislators

YANGON, 12 June—Deputy Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and the Lower House U Nanda Kyaw Swa attended the 2nd World Summit of Legislators in Mexico from 6 to 8 June.

The deputy speaker and party arrived back in Yangon on Thursday, and

Deputy Speaker of Upper House meets UNDP, Australian guests

NAY PYI TAW, 12 June—Deputy Speaker of the Upper House U Mya Nyein received leader of the UNDP team Ms Emma Morley and the Clerk Mr David Ellder of the Australian Parliament at the hall of the Upper House in Nay Pyi Taw on Thursday to discuss assistance for drawing a strategic plan.

Deputy Speaker of Upper House meets UNDP, Australian guests

were welcomed by Speaker of Yangon Region Hluttaw U Sein Tin Win and officials.—MNA

Thamine junction heavily...

(from page 1)

Flash floods occur every rainy season at Thamine junction, located in a low-lying area and not far from Thamine ditch. Thamine junction divides two townships, Magu-yang and Hlin, with the intersection one of the main points for reaching the town from the northern suburbs.

A total of 32 basic education schools in Yangon Region have been temporarily closed due to heavy rains on Wednesday and Thursday, MRTV reported.

According to the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology, increase of rain in the lower Myanmar areas will continue, with Yangon expect ed to experience thunder-showers.

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President U Thein Sein meets Information Ministers of ASEAN, partnership countries

**NAY PYI TAW, 12 June**—President U Thein Sein met the Information Ministers of ASEAN and three partnership countries who were attending the 12th Conference of the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information on Thursday in Nay Pyi Taw.

During the meeting, the President said these meetings will help promote mutual understanding on information sharing in the region and the results of the meeting will also assist the reforms in Myanmar.

Herminio, B. Coloma, JR, the Communications Secretary of the Philippines, on behalf of the ASEAN Ministers, said the Declaration on Social Responsible Media for a Peaceful and Prosperous ASEAN Community has been agreed during the meeting and he believes in the successful implementation of the declaration.

He also said the ministers made a decision to improve public education to build the ASEAN community in 2015.—MNA

**Health For All Programme needs funds**

**NAY PYI TAW, 12 June**—A workshop on raising funds for a health care programme accessible to everyone took place at the Royal Kumudra Hotel here on Thursday afternoon, sources said.

As the chairman of the National Health Committee, Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham explained what the Health For All Programme is, saying that it is important to seek ways of channelling insurance funds in hedging against medical expenses, which have put around 100 million of the world’s popu-

lation in poverty.

Dr Sai Mauk Kham quoted the World Health Organization as saying that nearly 150 million people from all over the world are faced with a wide array of financial problems as they have to pay for medical treatment on their own.

“The huge amount of money spent on medical treatment doubles the pains patients are suffering,” he said, adding that the government has annually increased health expenditures in a bid to fight poverty. —MNA

**No plan to limit drinking age, union deputy minister tells Upper House**

**NAY PYI TAW, 12 June**—Although there is no age limit for consumption of alcoholic drinks in Myanmar, selling them directly or indirectly to people younger than 16 is prohibited under the by-law of the Burma Excise Act, said Union Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Brig-Gen Kyaw Zan Myint at the Upper House session on Thursday.

The union deputy minister also said that as the habit of drinking alcohol in Myanmar is more prevalent with certain groups of society it is difficult and inappropriate to control drinking by law.

The habit should be controlled by parents, teachers and relatives, the deputy minister pointed out. The government is controlling the export, import, transport, production and storage of alcoholic drinks and possession of raw material for alcohol.

Another topic discussed was travel allowance for teachers in remote areas of the country and budgets for high schools, with the union deputy ministers debating the ways to support teachers.

The ninth session of the Lower House continued in Nay Pyi Taw on Thursday, with union deputy ministers discussing permits for small mining operations, maintenance of embankments, rural healthcare centers and roads.—MNA

**ASEAN information ministers gather to discuss ‘socially responsible media’**

**NAY PYI TAW, 12 June**—The 12th Conference of the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information started at the Myanmar International Convention Centre here on Thursday morning, with Myanmar Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham saying that the media is a very effective tool for the dissemination of information.

Dr Sai Mauk Kham called that the 9th ASEAN Summit last year agreed on a plan to build an ASEAN Community that is peaceful, stable, prosperous and competitive with a view to achieving solidarity and unity among the peoples of ASEAN countries.

Regarding the information sector in Myanmar, the vice president said his country is implementing ASEAN projects under the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity by promoting public awareness through the dissemination of information.

“Our new democratic government is implementing unprecedented reforms in political, economic and social sectors and is concentrating on the development of the media which is conducive to closer relationship between the government and the people,” he said. He stressed the need to create a socially responsible media and to create harmony between transparent media and social responsibility.

He also urged ASEAN information ministers to adopt appropriate activities to promote the ASEAN Community and a socially responsible media in accord with the theme “Socially responsible media for peace and prosperous community.”

Member countries are to cooperate through various media for the effective implementation of knowledge enhancement of the ASEAN, urged Union Minister for Information U Aung Kyi at the 12th AMRI in Nay Pyi Taw on Thursday morning. The meeting issued the Declaration on Social Responsible Media for a Peaceful and Prosperous ASEAN Community and also agreed to cooperate for the launch of ASEAN Virtual Learning Resource Centre during the first four months of 2015 and to manufacture DVB T2 Set Top Boxes to enable the people in the ASEAN region to watch programmes.

The AMRI+3 took place in the afternoon where the three dialogue partners discussed matters related to promote the cooperation between the ASEAN and the three countries. In the evening, the minister hosted a dinner in honour of the participants in the meetings. —MNA
One-stop service to be given to entrepreneurs in Mandalay

Traffic police assigned to ensure security of students in Mandalay

**Mandalay, 12 June**—The Mandalay Region Small and Medium Enterprises Agency held a coordination meeting at the hall of the Region Industrial Coordination and Inspection Department in Mandalay on Tuesday.

Mandalay Region Minister for Electricity and Industry U Kyaw Myint recounted the guidance of the SME Development Work Committee (Nay Pyi Taw).

“One-stop service must be given to those who submitted complete documents for their registration forms. Call centers will be opened for public relations,” he said.

The department arranges plans for issuing registration to entrepreneurs in various electronic product industries. SME Agencies are formed with national entrepreneurs and can take loans with 8.5 per cent interest, officials said.

Min Htet Aung (Mandalay Sub-printing House)

**Yangon, 12 June**—From January to May 2014, police exposed 999 cases of trafficking in person from 2006 to 2013 and arrested 2,757 human traffickers who had trafficked 2,234 victims, of which 228 were under 18 years old. To enforce law and combat human trafficking, the Anti-Human Trafficking Police Corps was formed with 18 platoons and 12 sections.

The Anti-Human Trafficking law was enacted on 13 September 2005. Thant Zin Win

**Mandalay, 12 June**—The Mandalay Region Small and Medium Enterprises Agency held a coordination meeting at the hall of the Region Industrial Coordination and Inspection Department in Mandalay with the aim of ensuring traffic safety during school hours.

In order to ensure students and parents are aware of responsible conduct on the roads, pamphlets and talks on traffic rules will be given, said Police Major Thein Ko Ko.

“Mandalay residents need to abide by traffic rules for their safety. But our police force will arrange traffic safety measures for the students to raise awareness. And we invite the parents of students to cooperate with us in these tasks,” he said.

According to statistics, a total of 162 people died in 556 traffic accidents in 2012, 182 people died in 426 accidents in 2013 and 78 lost their lives in 177 accidents till May 2014 in Mandalay District alone. Although the number of vehicles has increased in the district in 2014, the number of accidents has declined.

Min Htet Aung (Mandalay Sub-printing House)

**District GAD delivers cash assistance to students**

**Myitkyina, 12 June**—The Myitkyina District General Administration Department held a ceremony to present cash assistance to basic education students who are offspring of its staff at the hall of the department.

Of officials of the department gave cash assistance to the students from primary to university levels. Deputy Commissioner of the district GAD U Khong Lan Dee presented K30,000 to Maung Oo Kay Zin Khant who won one distinction in the matriculation examination 2014. At the ceremony, departmental officials provided K372,500 as cash assistance to the students.

Myitkyina District IPRD

**Took, 12 June**—The Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department presented a K30 million loan to breeders of two villages of Muse Township at the hall of township General Administration Department, northern Shan State, on Thursday.

The move was aimed at improving development in rural areas and reducing poverty.

Township Administrator U Ko Ko Zaw handed over K20 million for breeders from Honawng village and K10 million to those of Mongyu village.

L. Soe (IPRD)

**Homalin Tsp gets suspension bridge**

**Monywa, 12 June**—A suspension bridge across Mansein Creek with the official name Shwe Pyi Thar was held in Shwepyinht village of Homalin Township of Sagaing Region on Tuesday.

Sagaing Region Minister for Mining and Energy U Than Htay donated K50,000 to the Basic Education Primary School of the village, Region Hluttaw MP U Khin Maung Swe, K50,000 to Treatise and Culture Group, Deputy Commissioner of the district U Toe Lwin K50,000 to the BEPS and Director U Maung Maung Aung of Ministry of Mines K50,000 and 10 desks to the school. In addition, other donors presented cash to the fund for the school. The bridge, 500 feet long and 15 feet wide, was built at a cost of K365 million, and can withstand six tons of load.

Sagaing Region IPRD
**Eden group and Hilton Worldwide announce hotels & resorts management agreement**

Yangon, 12 June—A management agreement signing ceremony between Eden Group and Hilton Worldwide was held at Strand Hotel, Yangon on Wednesday.

Eden Group and Hilton Hotels and Resorts Worldwide agreed to cooperate in management and will change the name of Thingalha Garden Hotel in Nay Pyi Taw and Thingalha Ngapali Hotel in Ngapali to Hilton Nay Pyi Taw and Hilton Ngapali, with August 2014 mentioned as the date for change.

Hilton plans to open hotels in Bagan, Mandalay and Inlay Regions within four years and create opportunities for individuals and economic growth with social responsibilities, said Andrew J. Clough Senior Vice President of Development Middle East & Asia.

**Protestors demand amendment of constitution**

Kyunhla, 12 June—Under permission 1/2014 of the commander of Township Police Force, about 3,000 people led by the Secretary of Township National League for Democracy peacefully protested to amend the constitution in Kyunhla of Sagaing Region on Thursday.

They expressed their wishes to amend the Sections 436, 59(d) and 59(f) of the constitution and to build roads and bridges.

**Katha District INRD issues citizenship scrutiny cards to youths**

Katha, 12 June—A ceremony to issue citizenship scrutiny cards to citizens aged 10 years was held in Ward 7 of Katha in Sagaing Region on Tuesday.

Sagaing Region Minister for Finance U Tin Win and the head of Katha District Immigration and National Registration Department explained the issuance of CSC to the local people.

**Summer paddy thriving in Seikpyu Township due to irrigation**

Seikpyu, 12 June—The Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation is implementing projects to build new dams and reservoirs across the nation, officials said.

Farmers in Myinkawa Village grow summer paddy on 275 acres of farmlands irrigated from the water of Aukseik pumping station in Seikpyu Township of Magway Region.

The farmers cultivated high yield paddy strains. Staff of Township Agriculture Department shared knowledge about good agricultural patterns, efficient use of water and proper flow of water at drains along sides of farmlands.

**Farmers of KhinU Tsp receive agricultural loans**

KhinU, 12 June—The Agricultural Development Bank in KhinU Township of Sagaing Region delivered agricultural loans to farmers from 63 village-tracts for cultivation of monsoon paddy in 2014.

The bank plans to disburse over K8 billion to the farmers of the township.

The bank will prioritize the disbursement of loans to the villages that have already paid back their loans. So far, the bank has issued K462.9 million to 845 farmers for 4,629 acres of paddy plantations, said manager Daw Yin Nwe of the bank.

KhinU Soe Wai

**Training given to administrators for enhancement of capacity**

Myingyan, 12 June—Myingyan Township General Administration Department conducted a farmland management proficiency course for ward and village authorities at its office on Wednesday.

Township Administrator U Tun Thwin Aung explained that the training course was opened for administrators to improve their skills in management of farmland utilization.

91 trainees from ward and village administrative offices, clerks and staff of the Township Settlement and Land Records Department attended the two-day course.

Zaw Min Naing (Myingyan)
In Indonesia, foreign investors wait to see who will be president

JAKARTA/TUPEL, 12 June — Billions of dollars in foreign investment hinge on next month’s Indonesian presidential election, with at least one major company holding back after a former special forces general made a surprisingly strong entry into the fray.

A tight 9 July election that will decide who runs Southeast Asia’s largest economy for the next five years pits popular Jakarta governor Joko “Jokowi” Widodo against the ex-general, Prabowo Subianto.

Both favour a more nationalist agenda, underpinned by popular perceptions that the economy has for too long depended on selling off its vast natural resources cheaply to foreign buyers and that past governments have done little to nurture, and protect, local firms.

But Prabowo is seen as more fiercely nationalist, while Jokowi is seen as a hands-on, more capable administrator. And despite Indonesia’s large pool of labour, relatively low costs and a growing middle class, many potential investors say they will wait until the election is decided.

At the top of the list of foreigners with big money to spend is Taiwan’s Foxconn Technology Group, the world’s largest electronics contract manufacturer and one of the major suppliers to Apple Inc.

Its chairman, Terry Gou, made no secret of the fact during a visit to Jakarta in February that he liked the country’s banks, relatively low costs and a growing middle class, many potential investors say they will wait until the election is decided.

At the time, Jokowi was the clear front-runner in the election. He still is, but Prabowo has since been backed by the powerful Golkar party and opinion polls show the former general is catching up. A large percentage of voters are undecided, one survey has said.

Foreign direct investment in Indonesia was $20.4 trillion rupiah ($2.3 billion) in 2013, up about 22 percent from the previous year. But growth slowed sharply to 9.8 percent in the first quarter this year, the government has said.

Foxconn, listed as Hon Hai Precision Industry Co Ltd in Taiwan, is waiting for the new government to take office in October before deciding whether to go ahead with a $1 billion manufacturing project in Indonesia, a company source has said.

Key sticking points appear to be Foxconn’s request for free land in Jakarta and Indonesia’s convoluted bureaucracy.

“Regarding the incentives Foxconn has requested, there’s no one they can talk to whose decisions will count,” a source with direct knowledge of Foxconn’s situation. “Indonesia is a huge market for Foxconn. Foxconn truly hopes there will be a clearer direction in their policies after the election.”

Supporters walk near a giant banner with pictures of Indonesian presidential candidate from Indonesia Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) Joko Widodo and his running mate Yusuf Kalla during a campaign in Jakarta, Indonesia, on 11 June, 2014. Indonesia’s presidential campaign is to be held from 4 June to 5 July and presidential polls on 9 July, 2014. — Reuters

Jokowi has earned a reputation of being a hands-on leader and a problem solver, analysts say.

“A lot of problems that businesses face in Indonesia are operational issues such as land acquisition. Based on his track record, he is likely to be more closely or directly involved in trying to solve these issues,” said Anton Alfandi, an analyst at IHS.

“Jokowi wins, businesses will look at what he does in the first six months or a year. If they see some results then they’ll deliver what he promised, you’ll see the foreign investment coming in.”

The attraction of Indonesia to investors from countries like Japan, South Korea and the United States lies with its population of 240 million, the world’s fourth-biggest, as well as its expanding middle class.

Many companies are also keen to diversify their operations away from Thai- land, which has been rocked by political unrest. In Vietnam, another regional manufacturing hub, anti-China riots broke out last month over disputed sovereignty in the South China Sea.

Japanese firms are keenly eyeing the automotive, food products and financial services sectors in Indonesia, Tomiyoshi said.

“Japanese companies face limited growth in their domestic market so they have to look outside, particularly in Indonesia.”

Chief Economic Minister Chairol Tanjung has invited Samsung Electronics to invest in a mobile phone factory in Indonesia and the South Korean company is considering it, said Lee Kang Hyun, vice president of PT Samsung Electronics Indonesia.

In January, the government imposed a controversial export tax and a ban on mineral ore shipments to force miners to build smelting and processing plants, spurring investor concerns that it signals a more protectionist Indonesia.

Jokowi and Prabowo are both unlikely to lift the mineral ore export ban, party officials said.

Both presidential candidates are also likely to take a more protectionist approach towards the banking sector. Jokowi has proposed restricting the sale of national banks to foreign investors, while Prabowo insists on “strict reciprocity” for the banking and insurance sectors. Currently, foreign ownership of banks is capped at 40 percent. In July last year, Singapore’s DBS Group Holdings Ltd said it would not pursue a $7.2 billion takeover of Indonesia’s PT Bank Danamon after the deal was stuck in limbo for months. US companies were planning around $61 billion in new investments in Indonesia over the next 3-5 years “provided that the investment environment is conducive and welcoming”, according to a study late last year led by Ernst & Young.

But some investors believe it’s worth being in Indonesia in the long term. While Indonesia struggles with a lag in labour productivity versus its neighbours and an uneven income distribution, these are “short-term woes that will down the road if acted on,” said Bharat Joshi, an investment manager at Aberdeen Asset Management in Asia.

“We still like the attraction of the country’s rising wealth and favourable demographics, underpinned by low debt and increased consumerism,” Joshi said.

Thai junta finds funding easy to come by as banks lend again

BANGKOK, 12 June — As Thailand’s junta tries to pull the economy back from the verge of recession, the generals have a significant advantage over the government they ousted — the country’s banks are prepared to lend them money, and cheaply too.

When the military government tendered for a 50 billion Thai baht ($1.5 billion) loan this month to help pay money owed to rice farmers, 12 banks offered a total of 145 billion baht. The state-run Government Savings Bank (GSB) won the tender, lending for three years at a rate of 2.1792 percent, much lower than a yield of 2.45 percent on three-year government bonds. In contrast, commercial banks and even state banks had been reluctant to lend to the government of Yingluck Shinawatra after it was put in caretaker mode in December. “Previously, there was a problem of legality, whether the Finance Ministry would be able to guarantee loans under a caretaker government,” said Amnuy Preemonwong, a board member of the GSB.

“But that’s not an issue now as the current government has full powers. It’s not only the GSB, other banks are more confident about lending. Everybody will dare lend now.”

Indeed, in February a rush of withdrawals by customers saw the GSB scrap a 5 billion baht loan that could have been used to prop up the then-government’s controversial rice-buying scheme, and the bank’s president resigned. Also in February, state-owned Krung Thai Bank PCL said it would not offer loans for the government’s rice-buying scheme, mainly due to legal risks.

On Thursday the Finance Ministry will put a 40 billion baht loan up for tender, and the Amnuy said the GSB board had approved bidding for the whole amount. — Reuters

A bank employee counts Thai baht notes at Kasikornbank in Bangkok on 12 Oct, 2010. — Reuters
Joint Media Statement

Twelfth Conference of the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information and Third Conference of ASEAN Plus Three Ministers Responsible for Information
Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar 12 June 2014

1. The Republic of the Union of Myanmar hosted the Twelfth Conference of the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information (12th AMRI) and the Third Conference of ASEAN Plus Three Ministers Responsible for Information (3rd AMRI+3) in Nay Pyi Taw, on 12 June, 2014.

2. The Conferences were preceded by the Senior Officials Meeting for the 12th AMRI on 10 June 2014, and the ASEAN Plus Three Senior Officials Meeting for the 3rd AMRI+3 on 11 June 2014.

Opening Ceremony

3. The Conference was officiated by the Vice President Dr. Sai Mauk Kham. In his Opening Address, the Honourable Vice President emphasized that as we are moving forward to set up a people-centred ASEAN Community, the need for stronger coordination and effective communication among the different sectoral bodies in implementation of the ASCC Blueprint, optimizing opportunities for information and cooperation to inform the public about the benefit of ASEAN’s integration and community building.

4. The ASEAN Anthem ‘The ASEAN Way’ was played at the opening ceremony.

5. The Conference was chaired by His Excellency (HE) U Aung Kyi, Union Minister, Ministry of Information, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, representing Minister attached to Ministry of Information, Media, and Training; and Working Group Chair of the ASEAN Plus Three.

6. The Chairman in his opening statement stated that the year 2014 is an important year for Myanmar as she is taking the rotating chair of ASEAN for the first time after joining ASEAN in 17 years. 2014 is also a key timeline towards marking the establishment of an ASEAN Community by 2015. He further highlighted the need to involve the media sector so that ASEAN would reach all people, and provide an opportunity to educate peoples about the benefits of ASEAN’s integration and ASEAN community building process.

Steady Progress of Information and Media Co-operation

7. Appreciating the need to implement a comprehensive communications plan to meet the vision of ASEAN Community by 2015, the Ministers called for stronger coordination and effective communication among the different sectoral bodies in implementation of the ASCC Blueprint, optimizing opportunities for information and cooperation to inform the public about the benefit of ASEAN’s integration and community building.

8. The Ministers noted a steady progress and outcomes of key projects aiming to increase ASEAN awareness and mutual understanding through the ASEAN information and media cooperation process, such as the television and radio news exchanges (ASEAN Televisio News and ASEAN-in-Action respectively), and the ASEAN Quiz (regional and national levels), etc.

9. The Ministers noted with satisfactions that several initiatives have been taken up to address the requirement of a growing population using social media, amongst which those include the new website for ASEAN’s culture and information which replaces the ASEAN Media Portal and the ASEAN Culture and Information Portal, social media and an ASEAN Virtual Learning Resources Centre (AVLRC). All of which will serve as resourceful platforms that enable online users seamless navigations on culture, history and place of interest in ASEAN.

10. With regard to digital broadcasting, the Ministers welcomed initiatives that are identified to benefit leapfrogging to Digital Video Broadcasting—Terrestrial Second Generation (DVB-T2), and noted regional efforts in the implementation of the ‘Guidelines for ASEAN Digital Switch-Over’ (2015-2020). The Ministers welcomed the completion of the multivendor TV co-production programme on ‘Rice: Seed of Life’ in a series of ‘Color of ASEAN’ in High Definition format.

11. In the area of technical standards, the Ministers endorsed a recommendation on the development of an ASEAN-wide DVB-T2 Integrated Receiver Decoder (IRD) specification to reap the benefits of economies of scale for affordable DVB-T2 IRDs in ASEAN Member States who already adopted DVB-T2 for DTB.

Social Responsible Media for a Peaceful and Prosperous ASEAN Community

12. The Ministers agreed that the information and media shall cover more cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder issues to support creating a sense of belonging and enhancing deeper mutual understanding among ASEAN Member States about their culture, history, religion and civilization. The Ministers also highlighted the need to deepen media cooperation to support communication building through closer coordination, joint projects, media networking and human resource development especially the younger generation, to support ASEAN’s concerted efforts in promoting ASEAN awareness and building the ASEAN Community.

13. At the Conference, the Ministers agreed to adopt the Declaration on Social Responsible Media for a Peaceful and Prosperous Community. The Declaration (appeared as ANNEX 2) is a guiding document to further strengthen cooperation in the fields of information and media through undertaking programmes and joint activities, and by leveraging on all forms of media.

14. The Ministers shared positive views on the necessary expansion and improvement of the information and media cooperation in ASEAN so that it will effectively enhance the existing programmes in disseminating information on ASEAN, and educate our peoples on the progress of the ASEAN community building process. In this regard, the Ministers noted the set up of three Working Groups, namely ASEAN Digital Broadcasting (ADB), Working Group on Information, Media, and Training; and Working Group on Content and Production, to strengthen the information and media cooperation in ASEAN.

Enhancing Cooperation Partners

15. The Ministers exchanges views on the progress of ASEAN Plus Three cooperation and possible measures to further enhance cooperation between ASEAN and the Plus Three countries in the field of information and media.

16. The ASEAN Plus Three Minister reviewed the progress of the ASEAN-China Work Plan on Enhancing ASEAN-China Cooperation through information and media (2010-2015), and the Work Plan on Enhancing ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation Through Information and media (2012-2017). The Ministers noted that several initiatives are being discussed to further enhance cooperation between ASEAN and the Plus Three countries.

17. The ASEAN Ministers appreciated China’s efforts to use broadcasting and publications for fostering the ASEAN-China friendly ties and good-neighbourly relationships. The ASEAN Ministers noted that China pays great attention to the framework exchanges and cooperation in the field of information and media within the ASEAN Plus Three framework with the understanding that the AMRI-3 is an important mechanism for pragmatic cooperation aimed at promotion mutual understanding and trust and maintaining peace, stability for development in the region.

18. The ASEAN Minister welcomed the progress of cooperation with Japan on digital content, especially local content development and human resource development. The ASEAN Ministers expressed their appreciation for Japan’s plan on cooperation to promote authorized distribution of broadcast content, shared knowledge of content, and strengthen people and cultural exchange based on the recognition that information and media could contribute to enhancing ASEAN connectivity including people-to-people connectivity.

19. The ASEAN Ministers noted a proposal from the Republic of Korea on possible ways in which ASEAN and the ROK could collaborate, in addition to the ASEAN Plus Three framework. The ASEAN Ministers welcomed the furtherance of media exchanges with the ROK, including exchanges in digital broadcasting technology as well as co-production of digital content, exchanges and training of journalists and the development of human resources.

Closing and Acknowledgement

20. The Ministers agreed to convey the 13th Conference of the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information (13th AMRI) and its related meetings with Dialogue Partners in the Philippines in 2016.

21. The Ministers expressed their sincere thanks and appreciation to the Government and people of Myanmar for the warm hospitality and excellent arrangements made for the 12th AMRI Conference. The Conference was held in the traditional spirit of ASEAN solidarity and cordiality.

ANNEX I

List of Ministers
i. H.E Dato Paduka Haji Abd. Wahab bin Juned. Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office, Brunei Darussalam;
ii. H.E. Dr. Khieu Kanharith, Minister of Information, Cambodia;
iii. Dr. Kazuhiro, Secretary-General, representing Ministry of Information and Communication, Indonesia;
iv. H.E. Mr.Ssavanhkone Razamvory, Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism, Lao PDR;
vi. H.E. Mr. Jalani bin Johari, Deputy Minister of Communication and Multimedia, Malaysia;
ix. H.E U Aung Kyi, Union Minister of Information, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar;
ixi. H.E.Mr.Sonny Coloma, Secretary, Presidential Communications Operations Office, Philippines;
xii. H.E. Dr. Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister for Communications and Information, Singapore;
xixi. H.E. Mr. Pisau Sunavanaj, Ambassador of Thailand to Myanmar, representing Minister attached to the Prime Minister’s Office;
xiv. H.E. Mr. Nguyen Thanh Hung, Vice Minister of Information and Communications, Socialist Republic of Viet Nam;
xxi. H.E Mr.Le Luong Minh, Secretary-General of ASEAN;
xxii. H.E. Mr. Cai Mingzhao, Minister of State Council Information Office, People’s Republic of China;
xxiii. Mr. Socheat Sok, Director General for International Affairs, Global ICT Strategy Bureau, representing Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan;
xxiv. H.E.Mr. Sun Gyu Bang, Deputy Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Republic of Korea.
Myanmar’s telecommunication sector to see improvement with foreign firms entering the market

By Myint Win Thein

Myanmar has been a country with one of the lowest telecommunication networks densities, but recent reforms are going to change the scene of the Myanmar telecom sector completely, officials said, because for the first time in the history of the country, new licenses were granted to foreign companies. The two foreign telecom operators received the license about a year ago. They will be launching their services in the third quarter of 2014.

The public, who is disappointed by the current communication services provided by the Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications, are looking forward to Sim cards to be issued by the two foreign firms, Telenor from Norway and Ooredoo from Qatar. The new operators will have to compete fiercely in the Myanmar telecom market, which has been monopolized by the MPT for decades.

All the operators have promised to offer best services for the public as the MPT’s current services are still slow and unreliable.

Ooredoo said its 3G technology will be the most advanced in the country while Telenor said its goal is to deliver state-of-the-art telecommunication and internet services that will enrich the daily lives of the people across the country. MPT is trying to partner with a Japanese mobile service provider and promised to offer services as good as others.

All the telephone operators in Myanmar will have to face challenges but the ones that offer best services at the cheapest price to the public will emerge as the winners and the public will be able to enjoy better telecom services in the near future.

U.S. to train Myanmar engineers, technicians on building safety enhancements along Yangon-Mandalay Highway

By Ye Myint

YANGON, 12 June—A letter of agreement to improve the safety of the Yangon-Mandalay Highway was signed on 27 May between the Ministry of Construction of Myanmar and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the US Embassy in Yangon has said.

According to a press release, U.S. architecture and engineering experts will train and mentor Myanmar engineers and technicians in highway safety standards and in building safety enhancements along a 10-kilometer section of the road. The demonstration section, funded in cooperation with the U.S. Government, will serve as a model for ongoing improvements implemented by the ministry along the entire highway.

U.S. Ambassador to Myanmar Derek J. Mitchell, said he was pleased with the U.S. would be able to improve a small section of the Yangon-Mandalay Highway, and work with the ministry to help address very real concerns about safety standards.

According to the press release, the agreement formalizes a partnership that began with a preliminary safety survey in May 2013. Following assessment on design, traffic volume, vehicle speed, and existing safety measures along the highway by USAID engineers, it concluded that the most effective means to achieve scalable road safety improvements is through technical assistance and training on safety standards, bringing experience and best practices from the United States to help improve the safety and security on Myanmar’s roads.

The release pointed out that increased speed and a lack of highway safety measures have resulted in a disproportionately high number of fatalities on the 386-mile long Yangon-Mandalay Highway on which over 3,000 vehicles drive every day.

Signing of Grant Agreement for “Project for Improvement of Education College”

NAY PYI TAW, 12 June—The Grant Agreement (GA) for the “Project for Improvement of Education College” was signed between U Ko Ko Tin, Director General of the Department of Educational Planning and Training (DEPT), Ministry of Education and Mr. Masahiko Tanaka, Chief Representative of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Myanmar Office, following the signing of Exchange of Notes between the two governments of Japan and Myanmar on 5 June 2014.

Under this Project, a grant amount of up to JPY 2.5 billion will be extended with the purpose of improving quality of teacher education in the education college. The said grant amount will cover for administration building including assembly hall and gymnasium, classrooms building, hostels and dining hall with kitchen. Necessary equipment will be set up as necessary.

Mr. Christopher Milligan, first mission director of USAID for Myanmar in 24 years, has pledged the agency’s assistance to capacity building for Myanmar engineers while speaking of the cooperation program between the agency and the Ministry of Construction during a meeting on planning of safety standards for the Yangon-Mandalay Highway, the main route from Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw through the centre of the country. Based on statistics during the period from 2009 to 2014, more than 700 highway accidents occurred, claiming the lives of over 360 victims.

GOLD PRICE, FE RATE (11-6-2014)

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FE RATE

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Director-General

U Ko Ko Tin

hands with JICA

Myanmar Chief Representative

Mr. Masahiko Tanaka after exchanging notes.

NLM
Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict

Rape has been used as a weapon of war repeatedly in our lifetimes, on every continent and in every major conflict. It has nothing to do with sex, and everything to do with power and the desire to conquer and humiliate.

The nature of the act consigns many survivors – of both sexes – to a lifetime of isolation, exclusion, and fear. In some countries survivors of rape are regarded as prostitutes, and are rejected and considered unfit for marriage. Without social acceptance, many are consumed by shame and mental suffering, and scarred by physical injuries.

Without legal recognition, they often lack financial support, healthcare, or the counselling needed to recover from their experiences. The victims are often very young children, whose bodies, minds and future can be irrevocably damaged.

Such is the corrosive power of the stigma that it often attaches itself to the next generation – to children born of rape, or the families of survivors. This powerful taboo around warzone rape also explains why its scale and severity is not widely understood.

(But) when public opinion is roused and governments stir themselves, change can be rapid.

There is evidence that this is now happening.

First-ever Motor Partner Network Association Event introduced

By Khaing Thanda Lwin

YANGON, 12 June—The government has reduced the taxation on the export and import of vehicles but the price of cars has not decreased significantly in the market, said Speaker U Moe Kan Shein, Chief Editor of Automobile Weekly Car Journal on Thursday.

At the First-ever Motor Partner Network Association Event at 50th Bar in Yangon, he added the customer demand for the Myanmar automotive market depends on reducing the cost of registering the car.

He also said most of Myanmar customers prefer brands like Toyota rather than other brands and fuel-saving cars are popular with sales of the Honda Fit increasing on a daily basis in the market.

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Speaker U Aung Khan, Head of SEO of motors.com.mm, talked about online advertising and social media marketing.

He gave advice to website developers to apply Google+ for an online market extension that has shown to be more useful than Facebook and to create more mobile applications for Myanmar users as mobile culture is on the rise.

During the event, Science Affairs Writer Ko Ko Aung shared his knowledge about the prevention of traffic congestion that is one of the causes of a decrease in demand. He pointed out the country needs more road networks, car parks and automatic traffic lights control. According to the survey, there are around 600,000 vehicles across the country.

To formulate Action Plan and roadmap on information and media to advance ASEAN awareness and community building and realise ASEAN regional integration and post 2015 vision

Nay Pyi Taw, 12 June—The 12th ASEAN Ministers’ Meeting Responsible for Information (AMRI) in Nay Pyi Taw on Thursday released the Declaration on Social Responsible Media for a Peaceful and Prosperous ASEAN Community, aimed at ensuring the emergence of responsible media to broaden the horizon to formulate Action Plan and roadmap on information and media to advance ASEAN awareness and community building and realise ASEAN regional integration and post 2015 vision.

The declaration features the building of a peaceful and prosperous ASEAN Community, further cooperation in the information and media sectors, working together for Social Responsible Media in the ASEAN region, applying new media and advantages of social media to educate ASEAN people, jointly conducting training in cooperation with the United Nations and Social Responsible Media.

We will launch the first ever International Protocol on how to document and investigate sexual violence in conflict. Over a year in the making and the work of hundreds of experts, it will help investigators preserve information and evidence in the aftermath of an attack, improve the chances of successful prosecutions, and protect victims from trauma.

We will ask countries to bring their laws on rape and sexual violence into line with international standards. We will call for all soldiers and peacekeepers to be trained to understand and prevent warzone sexual violence.

Simple measures, from installing lighting in refugee camps to accompanying women collecting firewood, can dramatically reduce the risk of rape. And the truth is that governments never achieve this by themselves. Ending sexual violence in conflict requires us to break the mould. We need governments and citizens and civil society to work together, in a new model for how we tackle vast global issues.

It is in our power to remove rape as a weapon of war from the world’s arsenal of cruelty. And it is in our hands to treat victims not as social outcasts, but as courageous survivors.
US focus is on boosting Iraqi forces, not air strikes

WASHINGTON, 12 June — The White House signaled on Wednesday that it was looking to strength-en Iraqi forces to help them deal with an insurgency rather than to meet what one US official said were past Iraqi requests for US air strikes.

An Obama administration official who spoke on condition of anonymity said Iraq had previously made clear its interest in drone strikes or bombing by manned US aircraft to help it beat back the militant onslaught.

Sunni rebels from an al-Qaeda splinter group overrun the Iraqi city of Tikrit on Wednesday and closed in on the biggest oil refinery in the country, making further gains in their rapid military advance against the Shi'ite-led government in Baghdad.

The threat to the Baiji refinery comes after militants from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) seized the northern city of Mosul, advancing their aim of creating a Sunni Caliphate straddling the border between Iraq and Syria.

The White House, however, suggested that air strikes were not at the top of its agenda as it considers what it may do to help the Iraqi government against an insurgency that has drawn strength from the civil war in neighbouring Syria. — Reuters

Iraq insurgents take Saddam’s home town in lightning advance

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Maliki described the fall of Mosul as a “conspiracy” and said those who had abandoned their posts would be punished. He also said Iraqis were volunteering in several provinces to join army brigades to fight ISIL.

In a show of the militants’ reach, a car bomb- ing in a crowded market in the town of Salwan, which sits on Iraq’s southernmost border with Kuwait, killed five people.

In a statement on its Twitter account, ISIL said it had taken Mosul as part of a plan “to conquer the entire state and cleanse it from the apostates”, referring to the province of Nineveh of which the city is the capital.

Militants executed 10 soldiers and policemen on Wednesday near the town of Riyadh, 60 km (40 miles) southwest of Kirkuk, after setting up a checkpoint on the road, police sources said, while in Tikrit six police officers were executed.

In Mosul, 80 Turkish citizens were being held hostage by the militants, the foreign ministry in Ankara said.

Turkey threatened to retaliate if any of the group, which included special forces soldiers, diplomats and children, were harmed. Ambassador of the NATO defence alliance held an emergency meeting in Brussels at Turkey’s request and Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan held talks with US Vice President Joe Biden about the developments.

ISIL, led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, broke with al-Qaeda’s international leadership, branded the US-led coalition an “un-Islamic” force and declared itself a “caliphate” straddling the border between Iraq and Syria.

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New tech, venture capital feed “gold-rush” among India’s IT start-ups

MUMBAI, 12 June — In India’s IT services outsourcing sector, local start-ups, often backed by US venture capital funds, are nipping at the heels of industry heavyweights such as Tata Consultancy Services Ltd (TCS NS) and Infosys Ltd (INFY NS).

These nimble start-ups, most of them based in Bangalore, offer niche cutting-edge technology products, solutions and services that traditional outsourcing companies don’t offer, or can’t offer at competitive rates.

To be sure, Tata Consultancy (TCS), Infosys and Wipro Ltd (WIPR NS) still account for the bulk of the $100 billion-plus core IT industry’s sales and employ hundreds of thousands of engineers. But as these focus on routine services like application development and IT infrastructure management, the start-ups are stealing a march in newer areas such as cloud computing and mobile technology.

The value of outsourcing contracts for digital technologies — social, mobility, analytics and cloud (SMAC) — is set to soar to $287 billion by 2016 from $164 billion last year, says Rajat Tandon, a senior director at the National Association for Software and Services Companies, an outsourcing sector lobby group. Start-ups will lead the race in providing solutions based on these SMAC technologies, says the group, which predicts the number of start-ups in India will top 2,000 by 2015, from 450 in 2012.

“There’s a gold rush. Start-ups are rushing in to serve markets that were never served before,” said Sharad Sharma, co-founder of iSPIRT, a think-tank and start-up consultancy.

One such relative newcomer is ISGN, a mortgage technology and services company backed by California-headquartered New Enterprise Associates and India’sKK Birla group. With a modest workforce of 1,200, the 2007 start-up is already taking business from its bigger, established rivals, winning outsourcing contracts from leading US mortgage companies.

ISGN last year won a $75-$100 million renewal order from one of the top five US mortgage companies which had previously placed work with one of the major Indian IT firms, said CEO Amit Kohliyal, a former Infosys veteran. He declined to give details, citing a confidentiality pact.

MasterCard expects big growth from ‘big data’ insights

BERLIN, 12 June — MasterCard Inc, the world’s second-largest debit and credit card company, sees business booming from selling data to retailers, banks and governments on spending patterns found in the payments it processes, a top executive told Reuters.

MasterCard, which handles payments for 2 billion cardholders and tens of millions of merchants, uses that information to generate real-time data on consumer trends, available more quickly than regular government statistics.

“It is an incredibly fast growing area for us,” Ann Cairns, who heads MasterCard’s business outside North America, said in an interview, stressing that the company respects cardholder privacy, using anonymous data rather than personal information. MasterCard does not give figures for its information services products but “other revenues”, which include the sale of data, grew 22 percent in the first quarter of 2014 to $341 million, outpacing the growth of total revenue dominated by payments processing, which rose 14 percent to $2.177 billion. Cairns said clients for the data include retailers, banks and governments, with MasterCard tailoring it to their needs.

“Retailers are fantastic at using the data they have available about how people shop in their store, how their inventory turns over, but what they don’t know is what happens outside their store,” she said. — Reuters

Intel loses court challenge against $1.44 billion EU fine

LUXEMBOURG, 12 June — US chipmaker Intel (INTC.O) lost on Thursday its challenge against a record 1.06-billion-euro ($1.44 billion)fine handed down by European Union antitrust regulators five years ago for blocking rival Advanced Micro Devices (AMD.N).

The European Commission in its 2009 decision said Intel tried to thwart AMD by giving rebates to PC makers Dell, Hewlett-Packard Co (HPQ.N), Japan’s NEC (6701.T) and Lenovo (0992.HK) for buying most of their computer chips from Intel. The EU competition authority said Intel also paid German retail chain Media Saturn Holding to stock only computers with its chips.

Judges at the Luxembourg-based General Court backed the Commission’s decision.

“The Commission demonstrated to the requisite legal standard that Intel attempted to conceal the anti-competitive nature of its practices and implemented a long term comprehensive strategy to foreclose AMD from the strategically most important sales channels,” the court said. Judges said the EU watchdog had not been heavy-handed with the level of the fine, equal to 4.15 percent of Intel’s 2008 turnover, versus a possible maximum of 10 percent. — Reuters

Tiny ancient fish unlocks secrets of Earth’s early vertebrates

WASHINGTON, 12 June — This is certainly not just another fish tale.

A tiny jawless fish that lived more than half a billion years ago is providing scientists with a treasure trove of information about the very dawn of vertebrate life on Earth.

Researchers on Wednesday described about 100 fossil specimens of the fish unearthed at the Burgess Shale site in the Canadian Rockies and other locales, many exquisite ly preserved showing the primitive body structures that would later evolve into jaws.

The fish, Metasprigginia, lived about 515 to 500 million years ago amid the astonishing flourishing of complex life during the Cambrian Period.

While two fragmentary specimens had been found previously, the new ones revealed unprecedented detail about one of the earliest known vertebrates.

Creatures like Metasprigginia began the lineage of vertebrates — animals with backbones — that later would include the whole range of jawed fishes, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals including people.

“It allows an understanding of where we come from and what our most distant relatives might have looked like,” said Jean-Bernard Caron, a paleontologist at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.

“This is certainly not just another fish tale. Because of its great age — more than half a billion year old — Metasprigginia provides a deep down view at the origins of the vertebrates.”

Metasprigginia was a soft-bodied jawless fish no bigger than a person’s thumb — about 2-1/2 inches (6 cm) long, with a small head, a narrow, tapering body, a pair of large eyes atop the head and a pair of small nasal sacs.

It did not have bones but possessed a skull possibly made of cartilage as well as precursors to vertebrae and a skeletal rod called a “notochord” that provided body support like backbones would do in later vertebrates. It is unclear if it had fins.

The scientists were especially excited about the gill structure of the fish because of the preview it gives to the anatomy of later vertebrates — paving the way for the jaws that would open a world of possibilities for so many later creatures. Metasprigginia boasted seven pairs of rod-like structures called gill arches, or branchial arches, that functioned for both filtration of food particles and respiration. The first pair of these gill arches was more robust than the others and pressaged the first step in the evolution of jaws, Caron said. — Reuters

Employers of ISGN work at their stations inside the company headquarters in Bangalore on 11 June, 2014.—Reuters

A MasterCard logo is seen on a door outside a restaurant in New York on 3 Feb, 2010.—Reuters

Metasprigginia fossil from Marble Canyon, which lived about 354 to 565 million years ago during the Cambrian period is shown in this handout image. — Reuters

An employee walks past an Intel logo at the 2014 Computex exhibition at the TWTC Nangang exhibition hall in Taipei on 3 June, 2014.—Reuters
Somalia could slide backwards if world loses interest: UN

The world steps up support to improve Somalis’ lives, the United Nations’ special representative for the country said on Wednesday.

In the struggle against former Shabaab militants in Somalia, the Somali army and African Union forces have seized control of 10 or 11 towns from the Islamists in the last few months, said Nicholas Kay told Reuters in an interview during a visit to Brussels for talks with European Union officials. “But unless we can consolidate those gains, unless the people in those areas feel the benefit of being in a government-controlled area, they get better services, better governance and their basic needs for food and medicines are met, unless we can do that, then there is a risk that this will not be a success,” he said.

Kay, a British diplomat, voiced concern that Somalia was losing out on attention and resources to other crisis-hit countries such as South Sudan, Central African Republic, Mali and Ukraine.

He said funding for humanitarian work in Somalia had “dropped off a cliff” even though a top UN official had warned of “worrying parallels” between now and 2010 — the year before a famine which killed hundreds of thousands of people.

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Seven freed Bangladeshi hostages return home

DHAKA, 12 June

Seven crew members freed by Somali pirates returned to Bangladesh on Thursday morning, nearly four years after their kidnapping ordeal began. They appeared briefly before TV cameras after landing at the Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaaka around 8:40 am local time.

Senior government officials received them at the airport and they were greeted with bouquets of flowers.

The men, who had been held in dire conditions, beaten and tortured, appeared sombre and still traumatized by their captivity under threat of death.

The seven Bangladeshi sailors with four others from India, Iran and Sri Lanka were freed last week. The 11 men freed were part of the crew on a Malaysian-owned cargo vessel which was hijacked 1,500 km off Somalia in November 2010, while sailing from the United Arab Emirates to Kenya.

After long persuasion by the government as well as relevant international organizations, the Bangladeshis were released alive by their captors on 6 June this year.

Seven of the ship’s 23-man crew were released in 2012, while four others drowned when the ship sank last year.

US House Republican No 2 Cantor to step down after election shock

WASHINGTON, 12 June

A shock primary election defeat for Eric Cantor, the No 2 Republican in the US House of Representatives, left his political party in chaos on Wednesday as financial markets worried the shakeup might renew budget fights that in the past have caused government shutdowns and near credit defaults.

Cantor, who has served as House Majority Leader since 2011, unexpectedly lost in Tuesday’s vote to college economics professor David Brat, an activist in the Tea Party movement, which wants to reduce federal government spending and taxes and advocates for a smaller government. The

The men, who had their eyes on the US House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) leaves after a news conference at the US Capitol in Washington on 11 June, 2014.—Reuters US House Majority Leader Eric Cantor to step down after election shock

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Chinese navy fleet visits Namibia

WALVIS BAY, (Namibia), 12 June — A Chinese navy fleet consisting of two missile frigates and a supply ship docked at Namibia’s Port of Walvis Bay on Wednesday, marking the beginning of China’s first-ever naval visit to the Southwestern African country. The warships were welcomed by a cheering crowd of about 600 people at the port. Among them Chinese Ambassador Xin Shunkang, high-ranking Namibian navy officers, the Mayor of Walvis Bay and Chinese nationals working in Namibia, some of whom had driven 400 kilometres from the capital Windhoek in witness of the occasion.

In his welcoming remarks, Ambassador Xin pointed out that it was the first visit of Chinese navy vessels to Namibia since the two countries established diplomatic ties 24 years ago, hence it would be significant to further enhance mutual understanding and cooperation. After a brief welcoming ceremony, Chinese and local visitors were allowed to board missile frigates Yuncheng, with the flag ship of the fleet, and frigate Luoyang, a rare chance to look closely at the development of a modern Chinese navy. Admiral Ngapandwa, Namibia’s Chief of Naval Operations, said after he was given a detailed tour of Yuncheng that the visit marked another “milestone” in friendly cooperation between the two navies.

Suicide bomber hits army checkpoint near Libya’s Benghazi

BENGHAZI, 12 June — A huge explosion likely caused by a suicide bomber at an army checkpoint outside the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi killed the attacker and wounded six others last Thursday, an army official told Reuters. “A car approached with great speed and then exploded. It appears to be a suicide attack,” he said.

Three soldiers and three civilians were wounded and the alleged attacker was killed, the officials said, after first putting the death toll at two. “There are body parts spread all over...so we first thought two people had been killed,” an army official said. A suicide bomber hit the same army checkpoint in December, killing 13 soldiers, in the first suicide attack since the 2011 ouster of Muammar Gaddafi. Some soldiers of the targeted army unit had declared support for a military campaign launched by retired army general Khalifa Haftar against Islamist militants months ago. More than 100 people have been killed in fighting, mainly in Benghazi, since then.

Haftar has accused the weak central government in Tripoli of failing to tackle Islamist militants such as the Ansar al-Sharia group, which has its own checkpoint in Benghazi. — Reuters
Author JK Rowling donates 1 mln stg to fight Scottish independence

LONDON, 12 June — JK Rowling, Britain’s best-selling author and creator of teenage wizard Harry Potter, has donated 1 million pounds (1.68 million) to the campaign against Scottish independence, saying on Wednesday she believed Scotland was better off staying in the United Kingdom.

Rowling lives in the Scottish capital of Edinburgh where she wrote the first of the Potter series in a local cafe and will be among about four million Scottish residents to decide on Sept. 18 whether to end the 307-year tie to England.

Rowling said she was concerned about the economic impact of going alone, with Scotland’s oil and gas reserves being depleted and an ageing population, becoming the latest in a string of celebrities to wade into the increasingly heated debate.

“...if we leave ... there will be no going back. This separation will not be quick and clean: it will take microsurgery to disentangle three centuries of close interdependence, after which we will have to deal with three bitter neighbours,” she wrote.

Rowling said she knew her stance might put her in the firing line of a fringe of aggressive nationalists who she compared to Death Eaters, followers of Harry Potter villain Lord Voldemort.

“It’s a shame there is an audience for such a vocal minority in this debate. I’d prefer to stay and contribute to a country that has given me more than I can easily express,” she wrote. “I just hope with all my heart that we never have cause to look back and feel that we made a historically bad mistake.”

A spokesman for the Better Together campaign confirmed Rowling had donated 1 million pounds to the fight to keep Scotland in the United Kingdom which is the biggest donation yet to the pro-union campaign that is leading in opinion polls.

The largest donation to the team fighting for independence has come from Britain’s biggest lottery winners, Scottish couple Colin and Chris Weir, who have given about 3.5 million pounds from their 2011 winnings of 161 million pounds.

Rowling, who was born in England but has lived in Scotland for 21 years, first went public with her opposition to Scottish independence in 2012 but her statement on Wednesday spelt out her thinking.

She said she believed Scotland was more powerful in global markets as part of the union with England, Wales and Northern Ireland and was concerned about Scotland’s relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom if it broke away.

“...if we leave ... there will be no going back. This separation will not be quick and clean: it will take microsurgery to disentangle three centuries of close interdependence, after which we will have to deal with three bitter neighbours,” she wrote.

Other celebrities publicly to oppose independence include singer David Bowie who appealed to Scotland to stay with the United Kingdom at an awards ceremony in February and comedian Billy Connolly who said it was a time to stay together.—Reuters

Miranda Lambert album scores first No 1 on Billboard 200 chart

LOS ANGELES, 12 June — Country singer Miranda Lambert debuted at the top of the Billboard 200 album chart for the first time on Wednesday, beating Disney’s juggernaut film soundtrack “Frozen” and a new album from rapper 50 Cent.

“Platinum,” the fifth album from Lambert, sold 180,000 copies in its first week, according to figures from Nielsen SoundScan. She held off “Frozen,” which sold 52,000 copies in its 28th week on the chart and notched No 2. The soundtrack, which features the Oscar-winning song “Let It Go,” has sold 2.9 million copies in the United States since its November release.

Country singer Brantley Gilbert’s “Just As I Am” dropped one spot to No 3 this week, while 50 Cent’s “Animal Ambition: An Untamed Desire to Win” opened at No 4. Last week’s chart-topper Coldplay’s “Ghost Stories” dropped to No 5. Rockers Led Zeppelin landed in the top 10 this week after releasing expanded versions of three of its first albums: “Led Zeppelin,” “Led Zeppelin 2” and “Led Zeppelin 3.” The records, which were originally released between 1969 and 1970, clocked in at No 7, No 9 and No 10 respectively.

The soundtrack to teen romance film “The Fault in Our Stars” debuted at No 8. For the week ending 8 June, overall album sales totaled 4.5 million units, down 7 percent from the comparable week in 2013, Billboard said.—Reuters

Sharing Latin music with China

BEIJING, 12 June — Talking with Tamela Hedstrom is a delight. Her sparkling eyes, deep and magnetic voice and signature smiles make you feel that you are on a sunny beach in Costa Rica, not on a noisy backstage in an early May windy afternoon in Beijing.

In a bright yellow lit-up dress, Hedstrom was due to start her first performance in Beijing, after a 14-hour journey from Costa Rica and a one night show in Shanghai. This is her first trip to China.

She was invited by the Costa Rican Embassy in Beijing as the performing artist for the Strawberry Festival in Shanghai and the Latin American and Caribbean Music Festival in Beijing.

Hedstrom is a delight. Her exotic background, ranging from Latin to soul and from funk to pop, “I was born in Sweden but raised in Costa Rica. I have lived in different countries with different peoples and hear different music. I’m hungry to learn different ways of loving and seeing the world.”

That’s why my music is hard to explain. You have to hear it to understand it,” Hedstrom said. But a passion of life, living and for hope are the constant themes of Hedstrom’s music. “I grew up with the idea of saving the world, and making the world a better place, as my mother is a sociologist who works in environmental protection. So I’m hopeful about my music,” she said.—Xinhua

Tamela Hedstrom sings at the “Night of the Latin American and Caribbean Music.”—Xinhua

Hedstrom is a multi-lingual Latin-pop, soul singer and songwriter. Her song “Acércate” was nominated for the Best Tropical Song Award of the Latin Grammy Awards in 2012. Born to a Swedish father and an Ecuadorian mother, her musical style is as diverse as her exotic background, ranging from Latin to soul and from funk to pop. “I was born in Sweden but raised in Costa Rica. I have lived in different countries with different peoples and hear different music. I’m hungry to learn different ways of loving and seeing the world.”
Alabama woman charged for asking fake Facebook friend to kill family

New York, 12 June — An Alabama woman was charged for trying to enlist a Facebook friend, who in fact was her aunt posing as a man, to kill her family, police and prosecutors said on Wednesday.

Marissa Williams, 19, faces 10 years to life in prison if convicted on one count of solicitation for murder, a class-A felony, of $27 million.

An Alabama woman was charged for trying to enlist a Facebook friend to kill family in western Alabama community of Fosters, where she started to meet men online and invite them to the house.

Police said Williams had in April moved in with her aunt’s family in the fact was her aunt posing as a man, to kill her family, police and prosecutors said on Wednesday.

Marissa Williams, 19, faces 10 years to life in prison if convicted on one count of solicitation for murder, a class-A felony, for her alleged plot to kill several relatives and even a family pet.

Her $50 cellphone bill, Norris said.

At one point, she told Ellis that she was sick of her family and asked him to shoot dead her aunt, her aunt’s fiancé, Williams’ cousin and the family dog and to run away with him, Norris said.

Upon reading the request, the aunt contacted the sheriff’s office. Williams admitted to police she had asked her Facebook friend for the favor, but said she did not intend to actually have anyone killed, Norris said.

Messi balks at sky-high rent for Brazil mansion

Sao Paulo, 12 June — Sky-high property prices in Brazil have claimed a new victim in Argentina forward Lionel Messi, the world’s highest-paid footballer.

Messi scrapped plans to rent a mansion for his family outside the city of Belo Horizonte for the duration of the World Cup, according to the online edition of O Estado de Sao Paulo newspaper.

His new contract with Spanish club Barcelona will reportedly earn the four-times World Player of the Year a net annual salary of $27 million.

Messi and his staff thought the 150,000 reais ($67,600) rent for a month-long stay in the 21,500-square-foot mansion was expensive, Estado said. In addition to proposing a lower rent, Messi’s entourage pressed the landlord to put up an enclosure for privacy purposes.

A source with knowledge of the negotiations confirmed some of the terms, adding that the talks broke down in early May.

Messi’s staff made an offer that “didn’t please me. The deal didn’t go through,” Paulo Nassif, the mansion’s owner, told Estado.

Efforts to reach Nassif and Messi’s father Jorge Messi, who runs all his business affairs, were unsuccessful. A spokesman for the Argentine team declined to comment.

The mansion has seven suites, 13 restrooms and 86,000 square feet of land next to a lagoon. Messi declined instead to rent a house in Rio de Janeiro for his family, Estado said.

The Argentine squad is based for the World Cup in Belo Horizonte, Brazil’s third-largest city.

Real estate prices and rents have soared in Brazil in recent years, with prices in major cities like Rio and Sao Paulo often in the same league as New York, London and Paris.

Argentina’s Lionel Messi arrives with the national soccer team at the international airport in Belo Horizonte, ahead of the 2014 World Cup, on 9 June, 2014. Reuters
SALVADOR, Brazil, 12 June — Spain will be lifted by a reminder of the glory of four years ago as the defence of their World Cup crown begins against 2010 finalists the Netherlands in Salvador on Friday in a standout Group B opener.

Spain, also 2008 and 2012 European Championship winners, arrive in Brazil with 16 players retained from the squad that triumphed in South Africa, the most returned at the following World Cup by any world champion, with many still bearing the scars of a bruising encounter with the Dutch in 2010.

Spain dominated possession in Johannesburg and took a barrage of heavy tackles by a fierce Dutch defensive guard, but fans streaming to the Fonte Nova arena will be hoping for a more open contest this time around as Xavi, Andres Iniesta and David Silva’s superb passing game comes up against a Dutch counter attack possessing Arjen Robben and Robin van Persie.

Vincent Del Bosque’s La Roja bolstered this time by the prolific Brazilian-born Diego Costa, began among the favourites for the tournament in Brazil, where success would see them become the first Europeans to win the World Cup in the Americas.

Much has been made of the addition of Costa, who hails from Lagarto in the north east of Brazil and whose family will travel the 350 kilometres to Salvador to see him take on the Dutch. His presence in Spain’s starting XI will bring added value to a team who have often played without a traditional centre-forward.

A revelation in La Liga last season with 36 goals as Atlético won the title, Costa has reacted angrily to goalkeepers’ keepers’ Casillas and the dynamic midfield of Xabi Alonso, Sergio Busquets, Silva, Xavi and Iniesta and has been under lock a Dutch side set-up to counter.

Costa will lead an otherwise familiar line-up in Salvador with defenders Cesar Azpilicueta, Sergio Ramos, Gerard Piqué, and Jordi Alba in front of goalkeeper Iker Casillas, and the dynamic midfield of Xabi Alonso, Sergio Busquets, Silva, Xavi and Iniesta and has been under lock a Dutch side set-up to counter.

The Dutch tactics under coach Louis van Gaal have been hotly debated in the Brazil build-up after he opted to ditch a traditional 4-3-3 approach in favour of a 5-3-2, after losing midfield king pin Kevin Strootman to long-term injury and favouring a more pressing approach.

“I don’t think at the moment we are capable of playing tika taka,” Arjen Robben, told Dutch team website Ons Oranje. “The counter is a very dangerous weapon that we will be certainly using at this tournament. While Van Gaal has also pushed to blood more youngsters into the national side, his team to face Spain will include a core of household names, including a rejuvenated Wesley Sneijder who has bounced back from losing the captaincy and his place in the side to take a key role as provider for Robben and Van Persie.

Sneijder will play just in front of midfield enforcer Nigel de Jong — fortunate to stay on the pitch in the 2010 final after a kung-fu kick on Xabi Alonso — and Jonathan de Guzman if fit. Ron Vlaar will lead a back line including the promising Daley Blind, son of Danny who becomes Dutch coach in 2016.

Van Persie’s form and fitness is key to Van Gaal’s plans. The captain endured a stop-start domestic campaign and while he has said he is fit for the cup with some niggling injuries, the jury is still out after not looking completely comfortable in training.

Group B rivals Australia and Chile also play Friday in Cuiaba.—Reuters

Chile, Australia primed for Cuiaba meltdown

CUIABA, 12 June — If Australia’s World Cup warmup against Ecuador in London in March is anything to go by, their opening Group B clash with Chile at the Pantanal Arena could be a thriller. Australia, who took a shock three-goal lead against the Ecuadorians before being over-run in the second half and losing 4-3, like to hit opponents with fast breaks and if they are to do anything of note in Brazil they must beat Chile. Chile like to play in their opponents’ half with a fast and furious pressing game based on as much possession as possible.

With big guns Spain and the Netherlands, who met in the final in South Africa four years ago, up next in the group Chile also need to take the three points.

The South Americans, third in their region’s qualifying group, are favourites against an Australian team in transition with the 2015 Asian Cup a far more realistic goal. Chile are playing on their own continent but the muddy conditions in Cuiaba deep in the Mato Grosso swampland are not necessarily an advantage for them because the country has a more European climate. Chile have a more talented squad than Australia with Barcelona forward Alexis Sanchez and Juventus midfielder Arturo Vidal major players at top European clubs. They may be thin at the back in a 3-4-3 formation but will aim to starve the opposition of the ball. On Friday we’ll go out to attack from the first minute and we’ll run until we’ve smothered our opponents, midfielder Marcelo Diaz said at Chile’s Belo Horizonte base.

“We’ll see if Australia give us space or not… let’s hope what we have planned works out,” he told a news conference. Vidal, who had knee surgery on 7 May, took full part in Wednesday’s practice but is unlikely to start against Australia.

The Chilean squad has the lowest average height in the tournament and will need to counter the Australians’ strengths in the air, particularly from veteran midfielder Tim Cahill. “We manage the heights factor well, working on our timing and distance,” defender Gonzalo Jara said.

Cahill became Australia’s all-time top scorer with two headed goals against Ecuador and now has 32 in 68 internationals having also scored against South Africa in their last warmup.

Australia coach Ange Postecoglou’s decibel levels reached those of a competitive match when Argentina came out onto the pitch but the players, including Lionel Messi and Angel Di Maria, kept their cool and briefly waved to their own fans in the crowd before turning their focus to their training.

Argentina, who along with Brazil are the South American favourites to lift the trophy, kick off their tournament against Bosnia on Sunday.

“The team down there on the pitch will bring the World Cup back home,” Sebastian Suner from Rosario, who was draped in an Argentine flag, told Reuters.

“Listen to the boos. It can’t get any sweeter than lifting the trophy in Brazil in a month’s time,” the 22-year-old said with a grin.

Tight security was in place with streets around the venue closed and helicopters hovering over the stadium, which hosted World Cup matches after some negligible injuries, the jury is still out after not looking completely comfortable in training.

Argentina also play Iran and Nigeria in Group F.

Argentina-Brazil rivalry spills over into training

BELO HORIZONTE, Brazil, 12 June — Argentina got an early taste of what to expect from their Brazilian hosts at the World Cup when they were welcomed with jeers and whistles in their first open practice session on Wednesday.

Some 5,000 fans attended the session in Belo Horizonte’s Independencia stadium with the locals giving their fierce rivals a noisy reception ahead of the tournament start on Thursday.

The decisive levels reached those of a competitive match when Argentina’s national team to face Spain will include a core of household names, including a rejuvenated Wesley Sneijder who has bounced back from losing the captaincy and his place in the side to take a key role as provider for Robben and Van Persie.

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Group B rivals Australia and Chile also play Friday in Cuiaba.—Reuters