Productive loans offered to cooperative members in rural areas to ensure higher socioeconomic status

President U Thein Sein views power-tillers to be sold to farmers through installment.—SINA

BNI to open branches in Myanmar, S. Korea

Yangon, 27 Jan— PT Bank Negara Indonesia (BNI), Indonesia’s fourth largest bank by assets, will open branches in South Korea and Myanmar this year, according to the country’s ANTARA News Agency.

The unit to be opened in South Korea will be a full branch as requested, but the one in Myanmar cannot directly operate as a full branch, said Gatot M Suwondo, president-director of the publicly traded state lender, in Jakarta recently.

“In South Korea, apart from facilitating investors, BNI also will serve Indonesian migrant workers. In Myanmar, BNI wants only to help promote investment cooperation between the two countries,” Gatot said.

BNI adopted a strategy of “based on related business” to serve Indonesian business people seeking expansion abroad and to encourage foreign investors to do business in Indonesia, he added.

BNI also plans to open another branch office in Malaysia.

GNLM

World Maritime University, DMA ink MoU on collaboration in maritime industry

Yangon, 27 Jan— With the aim of promoting the role of Myanmar in the world maritime sector, the World Maritime University (WMU) and the Department of Marine Administration (DMA) signed a memorandum of understanding Tuesday in Yangon.

The five-year MoU is also aimed at creating a network to share experience and technologies between the two bodies, collaborating in the design of e-learning and learning management systems and implementing IMO regulations in Myanmar’s shipping industry.

Under the agreement, the organizations will cooperate in prevention of oil spills, applied and research programmes, maritime safety issues, survey and updating of navigation aids in Myanmar territorial waters, effective port and shipping management, environmental conservation, and maritime casualty investigations.

The World Maritime University conducts post-graduate courses under the United Nations founded by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in 1983. It produces many qualified graduates across the world annually, most from China.

Established in 1930, the Department of Marine Administration is one of the departments under the Ministry of Transport in Myanmar. There are more than 60,000 seafarers under the DMA. Of them, nearly 50 citizens who graduated from the Least Developed Countries status and reaching a status of a middle-income country, according to the president.

(See page 3)
Ministries concerned make presentation of projects, budgetary matters to Hluttaw

NAV PYI TAW, 27 Jan — The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw held sixth session on Tuesday, with Union-level members from ministries concerned making the presentation of projects and budgetary matters included in National Planning Bill for 2015-2016 FY and 2015 Union Budget Bill.

Deputy Minister for Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development Dr Aung Myat Oo clarified works to be done for meat and fish production and targets, rural infrastructure development focusing on road and bridge construction, community-based building, water supply and sanitation, electrification, sustainable career development and promotion of livestock breeding sector.

In his presentation, Deputy Minister for Communications and Information Technology U Win Than explained matters related to revenue and expenditure, loan and the ministry’s aim to increase the countrywide telephone density from 75 percent to 80 percent in 2015-2016 FY.

Highlighting the procedures that support effective resource allocation and taxation, Union Minister for Finance U Win Thein reported on abolition of financial rules and regulations which are unsuitable to the present situation, measures for developing the banking system of Myanmar Economic Bank, the ministry’s budget for 2015-2016 FY and foreign loans and interests.

Deputy Minister for Labour, Employment and Social Security U Hnin Aung also presented the ministry’s budgetary matters including capital expenditure for the purchase of construction materials and machinery. The seventh day session continues tomorrow. — MNA

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

Farmlands sacrificed for new satellite towns in public interests

NAV PYI TAW, 27 Jan — U Soe Tint, Deputy Minister for Construction, at the Pyithu Hluttaw session here on Tuesday answered a query about the government plans for the loss of farmlands and the sale of apartments in installations.

“Farmland loss is due to establishing new satellite towns in public interests,” he said, adding “The projects are real.

He spoke of the resettlement of affected people on plots measuring 20 feet by 60 feet and 40 by 60 feet, explaining that compensation have been made K10,000 an acre of bare land and K20,000 per acre of land under cultivation.

He added the compensation was more than the then market value.

Regarding the sale of apartments in installations, he said low-price housing projects for ordinary people are under planning stage, with detailed calculations being made to ensure the purchase of apartments in long-term monthly installments.

As for a question concerning the relationship between the Pyu culture and the Bagan culture, Deput y Minister for Culture U Than Swe spoke of three Pyu cities that date back about 2000 years, quoting researchers as saying that there is evidence that the religion, culture, architecture and arts in Pyu era were discovered in Bagan before the times of King Anawrahta. Cultural evidences found in Bagan and shared by Pyu, Mon and Myanmar are of great significance to the culture of Bagan, he said, adding that the Bagan culture has derived from the Pyu culture.

An MP called for the government in her proposal, suggesting that a state-level supervisory committee be formed to deal with arbitrations likely to rise from product-sharing contracts between governmental ministries and foreign firms.

Responding to the proposal, Deputy Minister Dr Maung Maung Thein, who is also a member of the Myanmar Investment Commission, said that ministries differ from one another in their operations and that different projects demand different contracts even in a single ministry.

Disputes involving international companies are to be settled by arbitration according to the New York Convention, which he said covers Myanmar and as a result the Supreme Court of the Union is working on it to write a law.

It is not an easy task to form a state-level committee to tackle disputes on contracts, with the deputy minister saying that contracting parties are fully responsible for the points included in contracts.

“The formation of a committee is against the open market system and will amount to the existence of centralization,” he said. — MNA

Education Ministry to submit bill amending National Education Law to Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

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Amyotha Hluttaw

Amyotha Hluttaw discusses parental leave and business in ethnic armed group areas

NAV PYI TAW, 27 Jan — Amyotha Hluttaw discussed Tuesday three issues of parental leave for government employees, security for businesses in the areas of ethnic armed groups and modern railway system.

In response to the question of MP Dr Myat Nyana Soe, Chairman U Kyaw Thu of Union Civil Services Board explained female employees of civil service can enjoy six-month maternal leave, while the husband of that woman or the male employee of non-civil service woman cannot enjoy paternal leave.

However, the male employee can get one of the 10 types of two-week leave to take care of her wife or new-born baby, but not paternal leave, in accordance with Civil Service Law.

U Kyaw Thu also said the new mother can enjoy the full term of six-month maternal leave even though the baby died; however, the leave of her husband cannot be extended.

Regarding the question MP U Soe Thet, Deputy Minister at President Office U Aung Thein answered that the government and ethnic armed groups have reached an agreement that the latter’s approval and discussions with both sides are needed to carry out development programs and businesses in their areas where ceasefire agreement has been made.

The government has signed ceasefire agreements with 14 ethnic armed groups, while KIA has agreed to cease tension.

For the question of Major Aung Kyaw Zaw, Deputy Minister of Rail Transportation U Myint Thein said two railways of Asia railway network of India-China-Thailand under the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and Kunming-Singapore railway will pass through Myanmar with standard gauge system.

The ministry is now producing dual gauge sleepers compatible with both meter gauge and standard gauge systems to upgrade railways across the country. — MNA

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Vice President U Nyan Tun to pay visit to Thailand

NAY PYI TAW, 27 Jan—U Nyan Tun, Vice President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, will pay an official visit to Thailand in the near future to attend the 3rd Myanmar-Thailand Joint High-Level Committee (JHC) Meeting for the Comprehensive Development in Dawei Special Economic Zone and its Related Project Areas to be held in Bangkok at the invitation of H.E. Mr. Pridiyathorn Devakula, Deputy Prime Minister of Kingdom of Thailand.—MNA

Shwegyin Nikaya holds 19th annual meeting

YANGON, 27 Jan—The 19th Shwegyin Nikaya Sangha meeting took place at Hsekeindayama Monastery in Hmaubye Township, here, on Tuesday.

State Ovadacariya Shwegyin Sangharaja Abhidhaja Maha Rattha Guru Abhidhaja Agga Maha Saddhammajotiika Mandalay Maha Wihokdayon Waso Sayadaw opened the meeting.

Chancellor of Sitagu International Buddha Academy Dr Ashin Nanissara read the advice of the Sangharaja of Shwegyin Nikaya.

ASEAN Tourism Conference continues

NAY PYI TAW, 27 Jan—The ASEAN Tourism Conference of the ASEAN Tourism Forum-2015 continued at Myanmar International Convention Centre-1, here, on Tuesday.

Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism U Huy Aung, President of Myanmar Tourism Federation U Yan Win and ASEAN Tourism Forum 2015 manager Chairman of MP International Pte Ltd of Singapore Mr James Chia cut the ribbon to open the Travel Exhibition of ASAN Tourism Forum-2015.

A total of 527 booths participated in the TRAVEX of ASEAN Tourism Forum-2015.

The union minister delivered an address at the opening of forum.

At Royal Golf Club, tourism ministers of ASEAN countries and officials participated in the golf tourney. In the afternoon, officials of Myanmar and the Philippines clarified development of tourism sector in respective countries to media. The union minister attended the pre-opening of ASEAN Tourism Forum-2016 hosted by the Philippines at Thingaha Hotel in the evening.—MNA

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Chancellor of Sitagu International Buddha Academy Dr Ashin Nanissara read the advice of the Sangharaja of Shwegyin Nikaya.

Union Minister for Religious Affairs U Soe Win supplicated on religious affairs.

The meeting was attended by 38 monks from the US, Germany, Russia, Australia, China, Korea, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Japan and over 1,000 local members of the Sangha.

The meeting will be held up to 29 January.—MNA

President U Thein Sein waves to departmental officials and local people in Kyaukse.

MNA

Productive loans offered to cooperative members...

(from page 1)

He called for cooperation with the government in bringing about peace, stability and rule of law to boost the country’s economic growth.

U Kyaw Hsan, Union Minister for Cooperatives, explained cooperative members what his ministry is doing for rural development, poverty alleviation and socioeconomic development by laying down and implementing reform policies on a broader scale.

Projects for rural development and poverty reduction are aimed to bring down poverty rate to 16 percent from 26 percent in 2015 in line with the United Nations Millennium Goals, the union minister stated.

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The 14th TELMIN focused on cooperation of ASEAN with dialogue partners in development of ICT in the region, implementation of ASEAN ICT Master Plan 2015, arrangements for drawing ASEAN ICT Master Plan 2020, payment to ASEAN ICT Fund, harmonization of radio frequency in the region, cooperation in emergency communication, planning for cyber security and smart application, and establishment of ASEAN Internet Exchange for building Internet linkage in ASEAN region.

After the meeting, they released the Bangkok Statement.

Myanmar won the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Category at ASEAN ICT awarding ceremony.

While in Bangkok, the union minister met ITU officials, the deputy minister of Internal Affairs and Communications of Japan and the minister of Communications and Information Technology of Indonesia.

Deputy Australian Ambassador Ms Carla Giuca welcomes Union Minister for Mines Dr Myint Aung at the reception to mark National Day of Commonwealth of Australia in Yangon on 27 January.—MNA

Union CIT Minister attends 14th TELMIN in Bangkok

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Old medical students pay respects to retired faculty members

MANDALAY, 27 Jan — The respect paying ceremony of old students from Mandalay University of Medicine took place at Myanmar Medical Association (Mandalay) in Mandalay on 26 January.

Chairman of the organizing committee Dr Aung Myint extended greetings.

Old students from the university in 1970 academic year paid respects to retired faculty members and presented gifts.

On behalf of the faculty members, Professor Dr Bo Ni, Professor Dr Chit Maung and retired Rector U Win Maung gave words of advice.—Tin Maung (Mandalay)

Chinese consul general donates solar lamps to rural areas in PyinOoLwin Tsp

MANDALAY, 27 Jan — The Chinese consul general donated solar lamps at the city hall in PyinOoLwin Township, Mandalay Region, on 26 January.

Mandalay Region Minister for Electricity and Industry U Kyaw Myint, Deputy Speaker of Mandalay Region Hluttaw U Aung Htay Kyaw and the Chinese consul general presented 165 solar lamps to Pinlein Village, 140 to Thaginton Village, 32 to Thabyekon Taunggyi Village, 46 to Thabyekon Village, 63 to Lesaw Village, totalling 446.

Also present at the ceremony were Deputy Region Electrical Engineer U Sein Win Myint, PyinOoLwin District electrical engineer U Zaw Myint Aung and officials.

Maung Pyi Thu (Mandalay)

Mandalay Region government arranges uplift of teaching skills of basic education teachers

MANDALAY, 27 Jan — The English proficiency skill course for basic education teachers concluded at the National Theatre in Aungmyethazan Township, Mandalay, on 26 January.

Union Minister for Education Dr Daw Khin San Yi delivered an address. Chief Minister of Mandalay Region U Ye Myint explained efforts of the region government for development of education sector.

U Win Pe Maung of Amarapura Partners presented gifts to the union minister, the chief minister and the region minister for social affairs.

The union minister and the chief minister presented certificates to the trainees.

The training course was Mandalay Region Government and Amarapura Partners for uplifting teaching knowledge test of basic education teachers. A total of 171 teachers from the region attended the course.

Thiha Ko Ko (Mandalay)

Indian Consulate General observes Republic Day in Mandalay

MANDALAY, 27 Jan — A ceremony to mark the 66th Anniversary of Republic Day of the Republic of India was observed at the Indian consulate-general in Chanmyathazi Township, Mandalay, on 26 January.

Those present at the ceremony paid tribute to India’s national leader Mahatma Gandhi statue. The Indian consul general read the message sent by the Indian President.

Cultural troupes from Mandalay and PyinOoLwin performed dance and song entertainment to the audiences.

The Indian consul general presented prizes to the winners in the junior and senior level painting contests in commemoration of the anniversary of Republic Day of India.

Tin Maung (Mandalay)

Distribution of stoves to conserve environment of Inlay Lake

Nyaungshwe, 27 Jan — A ceremony to distribute stoves to local people was held in Nyaungshwe Township, Shan State, on 24 January.

Shan State Minister for Forestry and Mining U Sai Aik Paung made a speech. Director of Shan State Forest Department and Shan State Environmental Conservation Department Sein Ma Ma explained advantages of using the stove for environmental conservation.

The ceremony was aimed at ensuring long-term existence of Inlay Lake and conservation of environment. Thanks to stoves, the local people will minimize use of firewood from the forests around Inlay Lake and Nyaungshwe Township.

Nay Myo Thurein
Facilities of Tatkon Township sports ground to improve sports skills of athletes

TATKON, 27 Jan— Tatkon Township sports ground is being upgraded for enabling the local people to take sports exercises with the use of modern equipment.

The archway of the sports ground has been built on a grand scale. The entrance road to the sports ground was placed with concrete. The sports ground was facilitated with tracks, score board, gymnasium, outdoor ground for volleyball and Sepak Takraw events, water tanks, can-teens, sports equipment shop and stands.

Four fitness sports equipment have been installed in front of the sports ground.

Tin Soe Lwin (IPRD)

Local farmers to compete cultivation of Palethwe paddy for boosting production

NYAUNGSHWE, 27 Jan— The systematic nurturing of paddy was carried out in ThaleU village-tract in Nyaungshwe Township, Shan State, on 26 January.

Head of Township Agriculture Department U Zaw Win Tun explained use of good agricultural patterns for boosting production of Palethwe hybrid paddy to yield over 200 baskets of paddy per acre. Staff of the department demonstrated systematic nurturing of Palethwe paddy in summer.

Jin 2014-15, competitive cultivation of Palethwe hybrid paddy to produce over 200 baskets per acre will be held on 10 acres of farmland in ThaleU Village, with participation of five farmers.—Nay Myo Thurein

11 senior citizens residing in Meiktila District

MEIKTILA, 27 Jan— Eleven elder persons of above 100 years old are residing in Meiktila District.—GNLM-018

Traditional medicine practitioners give health care to villagers

NAY PI TAW, 27 Jan— Officials of Dekkhina District Traditional Medicine Department made trips to villages for providing health care services to the people with the use of traditional medicines.

On 25 January, Head of District Traditional Medicine Department U Hla Maw and staff went to Nyaungbintha village and sugar mill in Pyinmana and gave health care services to 250 people free of charge.

Together with the medical team, Head of Township Information and Public Relations Department Daw Aye Aye Khaing and staff showed wall magazine on danger of narcotic drugs to the local people and donated books and publications to “Pynnya Alindan” library in Nyaungbintha Village.

Shwe Kokko

Students enjoy international foods and cultural festival

MANDALAY, 27 Jan— Horizon International School (Mandalay) held the International Food and Culture Day at its school in Chamayethazan Township, Mandalay, on 26 January.

Deputy Speaker of Mandalay Region Hlutaw U Aung Htay Kyaw, Mandalay-based Chinese Consul General Mr Wang Yi, Indian Consul General Dr Nandakuma and Chairman Mr Arif Gomez of Mediterranean International Education Services Co Ltd formally opened the International Food and Culture Day. They viewed sales of international foods and enjoyed the funfairs of students.

At the festival, responsible persons explained facts about Myanmar, England, the United States of America, the Philippines, Turkey, India and China to the students.

Students performed traditional dances and songs to the audiences.

Proceeds from the sales of goods will be donated to the multimedia classrooms and supply of purified water to schools in the region.

Tin Maung (Mandalay)
NEW DELHI, 27 Jan — US President Barack Obama ended a landmark day in India on Monday with a pledge of $4 billion in investments and loans, seeking to release what he called the “untapped potential” of a business and strategic partnership between the world’s largest democracies.

Earlier in the day, at the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Obama was the first US president to attend India’s annual Republic Day parade, a show of military might that has been associated with Cold War anti-Americanism.

It rained as troops, tanks and cultural floats filed through the heart of New Delhi, but excitement nevertheless ran high over Obama’s visit, which began on Sunday with a clutch of deals to unlock billions of dollars in nuclear trade and to deepen defence ties.

“Both sides hope to build enough momentum to forge a relationship that will help balance China’s rise by catalyzing democratic India into the league of major world powers.”

The leaders talked on first name terms, recorded a radio programme together and spent hours speaking at different events, but despite the bonhomie, Obama asked Modi to rein in the sugar Webb, that trade ties were still fragile.

Obama accounts for only 2 percent of US imports and one percent of its exports, Obama said. While annual bilateral trade had reached $100 billion, that is less than a fifth of US trade with China.

“We are moving in the right direction ... That said, we also know that the US-India relationship is defined by so much untapped potential,” Obama told the Indi an and US business leaders. “Everyone here will agree, we’ve got to do better.”

Modi said US invest ment in India had doubled in the past four months and vowed to do more to slash the country’s notorious red tape and make it one of the world’s easiest places for business.

Obama said that US Export-Import Bank would finance $1 billion in exports of “Made-in-America” voice acts. The US Overseas Private Investment Corporation will lend $1 billion to small- and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas of India.

Regarding renewable energy, a key focus for Modi, $2 billion will be committed by the US Trade and Development Agency for renewable energy, Oba ma said.

Most significant was an agreement on issues that, despite a groundbreaking 2006 pact, had stopped US companies from setting up nuclear reactors in India and had become one of the major irritants in bilateral relations.

“Moobama breaks N-deallock,” ran the front-page headline of the Mail Today, the newspaper which carried a photograph of Modi and Obama hugging each other warmly.

Obama ends day of Indian pageantry with $4 billion pledge

Elite police unit chief sidelined over deadly militant clash in Philippines

MANILA, 27 Jan — The chief of the Philippines’ elite police force has been recalled over his handling of an operation at the weekend to arrest two wanted Islamic militants that left over 40 members of the security force dead, the interior minister said on Tuesday.

Manuel Roxas also said he had ordered an investigation into the operation that turned into a deadly 12-hour clash with Muslim rebels. The head of the Philippine National Police said the operation had not been cleared by top police officials.

Forty-four Special Action Force (SAF) officers were killed and 12 others wounded in the firefight in Mamasapano town, Maguindanao on Sunday. Police said eight Muslim rebels were also killed in the clash, which shattered a ceasefire that held for three years.

“We have directed the administrative relief of SAF Director Leo Napenas from his current duties pending the outcome of this board of inquiry,” Roxas, the interior and local government secretary, told a news conference.

“He has been recalled back to Manila. He was given a chance yesterday to help retrieve the bodies of his men. If there were lapses and someone is responsible for it, then he will be made accountable.”

Roxas on Monday described the incident as a “miscarriage”.

Nearly 400 SAF officers were involved in the operation aimed at arresting two militants who had taken refuge with fighters of the country’s largest Muslim rebel group, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

The two militants, Zulkifli bin Hir, a Malaysian member of the al-Qaeda-linked Jemaah Islamiah rebel group behind numerous bomb attacks in the Philippines, and Filipino Abdul Basit Usman, both carry a bounty on their heads.

AirAsia crash report won’t include black box data — investigator

Indonesian soldiers show the cockpit voice recorder of AirAsia QZ8501 at Iskandar airbase in Pangkalan Bun, Central Kalimantan on 13 Jan, 2015.—Reuters

The preliminary report, which the ICAO requires within 30 days of the date of the accident, will include “information on the plane, the number of passengers and other information like that”, NTSC investigator Suryanto told Reuters.

It will not include analysis of the cockpit voice recorder and flight data recorder, both of which were recovered by divers from the bottom of the Java Sea.

Data from radar and the aircraft’s two “black box” flight recorders is providing investigators with a clearer picture of what occurred during the final minutes of Flight QZ8501.

Transport Minister Ignatius Jonan told a parliamentary hearing last week that, based on radar data, the plane had climbed faster than normal in its final minutes, and then stalled.

The NTSC will hold an annual media conference this week to talk about the agency’s achievements over the past year. The agency is not expected to discuss details of its investigation into the AirAsia crash, said NTSC head Ta-tang Kurniadi.

The final report on the investigation, which will be made public, must be filed within a year.

Indonesia’s military halts recovery efforts for crashed AirAsia jet

Indonesia’s military on Tuesday halted search and recovery efforts for an AirAsia (AIBA.KL) passenger jet, navy officials said.

“The operation has been ongoing for 30 days so the joint team has been pulled out,” said Rear Admiral Widodo, head of the navy’s western fleet, told reporters.

“We apologize to the families of the victims. We tried our best to look for the missing victims.”

Seventy bodies have been recovered.

“Days of rough weather and poor visibility have hampered navy divers’ efforts to find more bodies and recover the fuselage of the plane. The Airbus A320-200 vanished from radar screens on 28 December, less than half way into a two-hour flight from Surabaya, Indonesia’s second-biggest city, to Singapore. There were no survivors.

The flight recorders have been recovered and are being analysed.

File photo taken on 8 Dec, 2014 shows workers installing a subway for export to Brazil in CNR Changchun Railway Vehicles Co, Ltd in Changchun, capital of northeast China’s Jilin province. China CNR Corporation Limited, a leading manufacturer of locomotives in China, announced a subway export contract with the United States on Monday. It is the country’s first foray into the US rail transit market. China CNR will sell 284 subway trains worth 4.118 billion yuan (670 million US dollars) to the transportation regulator in Massachusetts, to equip Boston’s Red and Orange subway lines, according to the announcement.—XINHUA

Elite police unit chief sidelined over deadly militant clash in Philippines

Indonesian soldiers show the cockpit voice recorder of AirAsia QZ8501 at Iskandar airbase in Pangkalan Bun, Central Kalimantan on 13 Jan, 2015.—Reuters

The preliminary report, which the ICAO requires within 30 days of the date of the accident, will include “information on the plane, the number of passengers and other information like that”, NTSC investigator Suryanto told Reuters.

It will not include analysis of the cockpit voice recorder and flight data recorder, both of which were recovered by divers from the bottom of the Java Sea.

Data from radar and the aircraft’s two “black box” flight recorders is providing investigators with a clearer picture of what occurred during the final minutes of Flight QZ8501.

Transport Minister Ignatius Jonan told a parliamentary hearing last week that, based on radar data, the plane had climbed faster than normal in its final minutes, and then stalled.

The NTSC will hold an annual media conference this week to talk about the agency’s achievements over the past year. The agency is not expected to discuss details of its investigation into the AirAsia crash, said NTSC head Ta-tang Kurniadi.

The final report on the investigation, which will be made public, must be filed within a year.

Indonesia’s military halts recovery efforts for crashed AirAsia jet

Indonesia’s military on Tuesday halted search and recovery efforts for an AirAsia (AIBA.KL) passenger jet, navy officials said.

“The operation has been ongoing for 30 days so the joint team has been pulled out,” said Rear Admiral Widodo, head of the navy’s western fleet, told reporters.

“We apologize to the families of the victims. We tried our best to look for the missing victims.”

Seventy bodies have been recovered.

“Days of rough weather and poor visibility have hampered navy divers’ efforts to find more bodies and recover the fuselage of the plane. The Airbus A320-200 vanished from radar screens on 28 December, less than half way into a two-hour flight from Surabaya, Indonesia’s second-biggest city, to Singapore. There were no survivors.

The flight recorders have been recovered and are being analysed.
Japan OKs new strategy to address expected rise of dementia patients

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (2nd f L) addresses a ministers’ meeting to decide a national strategy on dementia on 27 Jan, 2015, in Tokyo. It is estimated that the number of elderly people suffering dementia will reach around seven million in Japan in 2025. —Kyodo News

Tokyo, 27 Jan — The government on Tuesday adopted a new strategy to bolster measures against dementia, expecting the number of patients to reach about 7 million in Japan in 2025 as the population ages. The government aims to provide appropriate medical care and support for patients and their families and ensure closer cooperation across government ministries and agencies.

“We will pursue a framework and make it a model for the world,” Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said at a meeting of relevant Cabinet ministers where the strategy was approved, referring to dementia as a “common challenge” around the world.

In the draft state budget for fiscal 2015 starting April, the government increased its allocation for dementia measures to 16.1 billion yen, up 6.6 billion from fiscal 2014.

The government’s adoption of the new framework comes as Japan deals with a growing number of dementia patients going missing or becoming victims of consumer-related fraud.

Roughly one in five elderly people aged above 65 will be affected by the progressive neurological condition in 2025, when postwar baby boomers turn 75 or older, a Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare study team has estimated.

The number of patients aged 65 or older was estimated at 4.62 million as of 2012.

The strategy features seven pillars such as introducing dementia diagnosis training in line with the government’s goal to provide suitable medical treatment and care.

Another pillar of the strategy is to research and develop ways to prevent and treat the disease. By the end of fiscal 2015, the government will establish a system for early diagnosis of the illness and begin clinical trials of a cure by around 2020.

The government also aims to introduce in fiscal 2016 a scheme to enhance cooperation among primary care doctors, specialists and those involved in nursing care to provide support for dementia patients.

The new framework, dubbed the New Orange Plan, replaces the health ministry’s five-year Orange Plan on dementia care implemented from fiscal 2013.

Abe announced his plans for a revised national strategy at an international conference on dementia care in Tokyo in November.—Kyodo News

Argentina says journalists safe after one flees, fearing for life

Damian Pachter, a journalist with the Buenos Aires Herald, stands in the arrivals hall at Ben Gurion International Airport near Tel Aviv on 25 Jan, 2015. —Reuters

BUENOS AIRES, 27 Jan — Argentina’s cabinet chief on Monday said journalists could work safely in the country after the reporter who broke the news of the mysterious death of a state prosecutor fled to Israel, saying he feared for his life under the current government.

On 18 January, Damian Pachter was the first to report that prosecutor Alberto Nisman, who was investigating the deadly 1994 bombing of a Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires, had been found dead in his apartment from a gunshot wound to the head.

Nisman had been due to appear before Congress on 19 January, the day after his death, to face questions about his allegation that President Cristina Fernandez conspired to derail his investigation.

No arrests have been made yet but lead investigator Viviana Fein said on Monday she had charged the man who lent Nisman the gun found by his body with illegally providing a weapon. The crime carries a prison sentence in Argentina of one to six years, Fein said.

Pachter said his phones were tapped and that he was being followed before he fled the country.

“For sure, there are strong tensions in terms of opinions but with the most absolute freedom of expression, and there is no type of obstacle for any reporter to express whatever he thinks.” Argentine cabinet chief Jorge Capitanich told a regular news conference. The government has come under fire for publishing Pachter’s travel details on Twitter. Capitanich said it did so to shed light on a case of public interest.

Nisman was found dead late on 18 January, a gunshot wound to his head and a 22-caliber pistol by his side along with a single shell casing. Fein said investigators had started examining footage from the surveillance cameras in the building where Nisman lived. Her team was also checking telephone calls and DNA samples that are being held at a “site of maximum security”. The authorities originally said evidence suggested the prosecutor had killed himself, but Fernandez later said the death was not a suicide. She did not say who killed him, and no one has been arrested. Social media has been seething with conspiracy theories, some pointing at Fernandez and her government. The government says it suspects rogue agents from its own intelligence services.

Pachter told website Infobae that he was under fire for publishing the man who lent Nisman the gun.

Fein said.

“Some members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations including the Philippines have territorial disputes with China over the sovereignty of islands that are believed to be resource-rich in the South China Sea.”

Some members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations including the Philippines have territorial disputes with China over the sovereignty of islands that are believed to be resource-rich in the South China Sea.—Kyodo News

Russia’s 12th humanitarian aid convoy for Donbas to be ready by 31 January

MOSCOW, 27 Jan — Russia’s Emergencies Ministry plans to complete the formation of the 12th convoy with humanitarian aid for Donbas citizens by 31 January, the ministry’s press service said on Tuesday.

The convoy will consist of more than 170 trucks that will deliver over 1,500 tons of cargo. “There are foodstuffs, medicines, essentials, building materials and other life necessities,” the ministry said. The aid convoy will be formed in southern Russia’s Rostov region in the ministry’s Donskoy rescue center. Earlier on Tuesday, a humanitarian aid convoy departed from the Moscow Region’s Noginsk rescue center.

“The trucks from Noginsk will be joined by vehicles from other Russian regions and the formation of the 12th convoy is to be completed by 31 January,” the spokesman said.

Since mid-August 2014, 11 Russian humanitarian aid convoys have delivered more than 14,800 tons of relief supplies, mainly foodstuffs, medicines, building materials and primary necessity items to people in eastern Ukraine’s Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

ITAR-TASS

The convoy will consist of more than 170 trucks that will deliver over 1,500 tons of cargo. —ITAR-TASS

Philippine defence chief to visit Japan this week

Tokyo, 27 Jan — Defence Minister Gen Nakatani said on Thursday his Philippine counterpart will pay a three-day visit to Japan this week from on Thursday.

Ahead of their talks on Thursday, Nakatani and Philippine Defence Secretary Voltaire Gazmin are expected to sign a memorandum over bilateral defence cooperation, Nakatani said. On Friday, Gazmin is scheduled to visit the Self-Defence Forces’ bases in Okinawa, where he will inspect maritime and airspace surveillance activities. The Philippines have territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea.

Some members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations including the Philippines have territorial disputes with China over the sovereignty of islands that are believed to be resource-rich in the South China Sea.—Kyodo News
Wednesday, 28 January, 2015

Shining future for ASEAN tourism

By Aung Khin

The tourism industry in ASEAN is shining like never before as the rising middle class among its more than 600 million people is a rich source of visitors for the region. With its great outdoors and rich and diverse culture, the region has the potential to be a strong global brand in tourism.

The roadmap of the region for the tourism industry includes promoting ASEAN as a single tourist destination and allowing visitors to travel throughout the region using a single visa in the future. Some countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand have done very well attracting tourists on their own. But as a region, ASEAN needs a more collective branding – a series of tourism campaigns that will go viral and bring visitors to multiple countries. The wholesale tourism business via “MICE” – meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions – could be integral to grabbing a greater market share.

Although topographical features would be a barrier for the region to build a European-like inter-connected network outside mainland Indochina comprising Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and west Malaysia, a network of nautical highways across maritime destinations would be a viable option.

ASEAN’s Strategic Tourism Plan (ATSP) from 2011 to 2015 was signed in 2014. The first step towards the ATSP was the formulation of a concise vision of Southeast Asia’s tourism development for the next 10 years (2016 – 2025). The first implementation period will be laid down for the new ATSP this year, with the formation of a task force for key responsibilities including developing the strategic direction, strategic actions, measures, outcomes and timeline of ASEAN tourism for the years 2016 – 2020.

ASEAN possesses a lot of potential to become a quality tourism destination offering a unique, diverse ASEAN experience by 2025 and will be committed to responsible, sustainable and inclusive tourism development. However, peace and stability are priorities to realize this expectation.

Opinion

We appreciate your feedback and contributions. If you have any comments or would like to submit editorials, analyses or reports please email Wallace.tan@gmail.com with your name and title.

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

2014 in Retrospect and Prospects for 2015

Sonu Trivedi

In most liberal democracies political institutions and traditions have taken decades, even centuries to develop and have achieved high levels of legitimacy and public acceptance. By contrast, a country like Myanmar is still in a fragile state searching for political form and institutionalization. In the aforesaid background, this article reviews crucial developments of the year 2014. However, the list of events is not exhaustive. An attempt is made to focus only on the significant happenings. It further looks at the prospects and critical variables of change and policy options for the current year 2015.

2014 in Retrospect

The 2014 has been an exciting and extremely important year for Myanmar as it took the rotating Chairmanship of ASEAN for the first time after joining it in last seventeen years since 1997. Credit goes to Myanmar for successfully carrying out its role as Chair of ASEAN despite its internal strife and volatility. It ended with the mega event of the Annual ASEAN summit and East Asia summit held in November at the capital city Nay Pyi Taw and handing over of the baton of Chairmanship to Malaysia for 2015. It was a rendezvous witnessing major world leaders visiting the country and making it the focus of international media.

The year also witnessed country’s first Census held after a gap of three decades since the last one held in 1983. In spite of the logistics and security challenges, it was successful enough in conducting this headcount. Notwithstanding the criticisms of its inclusiveness, it is going to effect the internal dynamics and policy prescriptions for economic growth in the country. The Census data will allow the government to accurately estimate key economic indicators and other socio-economic data for sustainable development and economic planning. Though, the preliminary results were declared on 30th August 2014, the detailed economic indicators and data on ethnic composition would be released by May 2015.

Internally, nevertheless, sectarian violence dominated the domestic politics in Myanmar in 2014. This was visible in the outbreak of riots in July in the heart and the second largest city of Myanmar—Mandalay. The ongoing sectarian violence, which has been flaring now since almost two years, is no longer an internal affair of Myanmar alone. The outburst of Buddhist nationalism in recent times may have a long term implications and its impact is going to be widespread influencing the security in the entire region of Indo-Pacific.

In spite of continuous effort in the direction of ceasefire and peace dialogues, inflighting and skirmishes have continued in the Kayin and the Kachin state and northern areas of Shan state. Continued clashes between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and armed forces in Myanmar has displaced a large section of ethnic nationalities who have been demanding greater autonomy for bringing forth the issue of humanitarian assistance and human rights abuses. Fresh violence at Laiza in November 2014 is a witness to the fact that peace process has a long way ahead and the road to go before it achieves substantial results.

The issue of Constitutional reform was also high on the agenda in 2014 with the opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi carrying on signature campaign throughout the country in support of the Constitution Review process and amending Section 436 of the 2008 Constitution. This section deals with the constitutional amendment requiring the approval of 75 per cent of parliament members. The petition by July 2014 was signed by around 5 million people and hailed as a breakthrough for democracy in Myanmar. Meanwhile, the Government had set up Constitutional Review Joint Committee to propose draft amendments to the 2008 Constitution, which has recommended changes to allow greater power sharing between the government and ethnic groups but largely remains silent on Section 436.

The issue of Proportional Representation (PR) also flashed up in 2014 as a part of electoral reforms in Myanmar. The proposal seeks to reform the electoral system from a first-past-the-post system to a proportion-al system before general elections scheduled for 2015. Proponents of a PR system argue that it would foster diversity in Myanmar’s nascent multi-party democracy and ensure that no votes would be wasted. Though, NLD and ethnic parties have lined up against such a proposal, it was strongly supported by the members of USDPS. However, in a strange way in November 2014, Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann, announced that efforts to introduce pro-portional representation before the next general elections were being quietly dropped. This is based on the advice of the Myanmar’s Constitutional Tribunal which suggested that the new electoral system would be unconstitutional.

The peace process has a long road ahead and the miscalculation and contestations against the National Education Law in 2014 had been widespread on grounds of lack of autonomy for education in ethnic institutions and complete disregard for inclusive consultations. The provisions of the law have angered students and faculty who have held demonstrations in several states around Myanmar. The law seeks formation of a National Education Commission, which is feared to grant the government too much control over the educational institutions in the country thereby eroding their independence and autonomy in the longer run. Last week also witnessed protest march in Mandalay, against the controversial law which is supposed to curb academic freedom and it is expected that rallies would continue in Yangon and other educational centres throughout the country.

Prospects for 2015

Although, the country is witnessing rapid transformation and reforms but still, it has a long way to go. With the elections due in the last quarter of 2015, there is a ray of hope for establishing durable democratic order in Myanmar. But the process is not free from challenges.

The reform process, however, in Myanmar is scarred by the reformists and hardliners in the army. The hardliners have become more concerned after the last by-elections when military backed USDPS could just get one out of the 45 seats. This outcome has caused alarm within the ranks of the military and raising speculation about a backlash by hardliners. The reformist-minded President Thein Sein has given a signal by saying that “conservatives who do not have a reformist mindset will be left behind, while the country is on its path to change”.

Even the Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham has also emphasized that “not only political, economic, administrative and social reforms are needed but there also needs to be a change to our mindset”.

Provision of changing political dynamics with the entry of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her party in the Parliament is going to shape the future of political transformation in Myanmar. Her entry in the Parliament has been a means of legitimizing regime’s mandate to govern and enhance its own reform credentials. The regime needs her in the Parliament to bolster the authority of its own political system. However, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi needs the military per-haps more than anyone else if she is to advance politically and amend the Constitution, given a quarter of seats are reserved for the military.

Furthermore, being the leader of the largest opposition party, the dynamics which she shares with other opposition party is going to decide for so far as the results of 2015 elections are concerned. So far, several ethnic based and minority parties have embraced NLD in the legislature and are committed to overall confidence and their strength in the opposition. Together, they have taken up subjects such as health, education, social security and environmental issues in the Parliament along with national reconciliation including ethnic peace deals, rule of law, political and constitutional reform.

(See page 9)
THE FOURTEENTH MEETING OF ASEAN PLUS THREE (CHINA, JAPAN AND REPUBLIC OF KOREA) TOURISM MINISTERS
26 January 2015, Nay Pyi Taw, MYANMAR

STATEMENT

1. The Fourteenth Meeting of the ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan and Republic of Korea) Tourism Ministers was held on 26 January 2015 in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, in conjunction with the Eighteenth Meeting of ASEAN Tourism Ministers (MA-ATM) and the ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) 2015. The Meeting was co-chaired by H.E. U Htay Aung, Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism, Myanmar and H.E. Mrs Du Yili, Vice Chairman of China National Tourism Administration. The Meeting was preceded by the Twenty-Sixth Meeting of ASEAN Plus Three (APT) NTOs held on 24 January 2015.

2. The Ministers were pleased with the growth in the arrival of international visitor where the APT region welcomed 241 million visitors in 2014, an increase of 6.9% from 2013. The Ministers noted that intra-APT travel remained the main source of tourism growth in the region, accounting for 66% of the total international visitor arrivals in 2013.

3. The Ministers welcomed the successful conclusion of the 17th APT Summit and the respective ASEAN Plus One Summits held on 13 November 2014 in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar and encouraged the Plus Three countries to continue to support the implementation of the 2012 Leaders’ Statement on ASEAN Plus Three Partnership in Connectivity in order to further enhance connectivity in the region.

4. The Ministers commended the progress made in the implementation of the APT Tourism Cooperation Work Plan 2013-2017 including the APT Tourism Students Summit held on 19-26 October 2014 in both Bangkok and Pattaya, and the APT Media Familiarization Tour Programme to promote tourism knowledge and skills development.

5. The Ministers noted the importance of development of framework to promote tourism statistics in order to have a better understanding of the tourism development in APT countries. In this regard, the Ministers welcomed the progress made in implementing the APT Tourism Cooperation Work Plan including the Nara Tourism Statistics Week held on 17-21 November 2014 in Nara, Japan.

6. The Ministers applauded the roles of the ASEAN-China Centre, ASEAN-Japan Centre and ASEAN-Korea Centre in promoting tourism and cultural exchanges between ASEAN and the Plus Three countries during the year 2014.

7. The ASEAN Tourism Ministers expressed their gratitude to China for the provision of supplementary booths at China International Travel Mart 2014, production of Discovery ASEAN and Taste of ASEAN which was screened on CCTV, live radio broadcast highlighting destinations in ASEAN, familiarization tour by Chinese media to ASEAN Member States, and workshop for tour operators.

8. The ASEAN Tourism Ministers also expressed their appreciation to Japan for ASEAN-Japan Centre’s Annual Work Program for FY2014 which includes exchange program for youth, technical workshop on community-based tourism for BIMPS, tourism and exchange public relations activities, CLMV Travel Mart, theme-based tourism promotion, exchange program on capacity building and culture, and career development support for ASEAN Students in Japan.

9. The ASEAN Tourism Ministers further expressed their gratefulness to the Republic of Korea (ROK) for their support to develop ASEAN Tourism through promoting and capitalizing on cultural and creative industries, including the establishment of an official website of ASEAN-Korean Partnership http://www.korea-asean.com.

10. The Ministers expressed their sincere appreciation to the Government and People of Myanmar for the warm hospitality and excellent arrangements made for the Meetings.

Representatives of protest students agreed to discuss with govt

TAUNTHA, 27 Jan—Student protesters have agreed to discuss with the government in Nay Pyi Taw.

Nanda Sit Aung and Aung Hnaing San, representatives of protest students, said they have agreed to meet with Union Minister U Aung Min.

The agreement was reached after discussion between protest leaders and Director-General Dr Soe Win of Higher Education Department (Upper Myanmar), Director-General Dr Khaing Mye of Department of Myanmar Education Research Bureau, Rector of Mandalay University Dr Maung Thin and Principal of Myingyan Degree College Dr Ko Ko Myint on Myingyan-Taungtha motorway after they left Myingyan for Taungtha at 9 a.m. Tuesday.

The protesters together with some students and locals from Myingyan stayed the night at Monpin township. —Joyo

Protest students and officials hold talks.

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2014 in Retrospect...

(from page 8)

However, given the ongoing tussle emerging within in the NLD, the political scenario at present seems to be in a pandemicum. The NLD party suffers from lack of professionalism, centralised structure and leadership vacuum. One of the most challenging exercises at this point of time is to revitalise the party and introduce inner-party democracy which has so long been dominated by the 88 generation and aging political leaders. As the leader of the party, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has to reinvigorate faith in the party which suffers from internal splits and schisms due to the ongoing cleavage between the radical and the reformist forces within the NLD. Consolidating her position amidst the waves of sectarian violence and widening rift between Buddhist majority and Muslim minority is another formidable challenge faced by her and NLD before 2015 election. Given the rising expectations of the people of Myanmar, she has to keep up to all the potential challenges.

Nevertheless, resolving the ethnic issue will be Myanmar’s biggest challenge now. Overcoming of sixty years old ethnic conflict will not be easy and the government will have to do a great deal to build the trust necessary to move beyond temporary ceasefires to resolve the underlying political issues. These developments, therefore, have a significant implication for the dynamics of power struggle and future road map to the Presidency in Myanmar in the 2015 elections.

As for the possible leaders to appear in 2015, three are prominent: the reformist U Thein Sein, determined Thura U Shwe Mann and the charismatic Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Who heads the executive and who controls the legislature is an important issue vis-à-vis the current political landscape and the cleavages that exist between the reformists and hard-liners. The scenario, however, is complex.

The incumbent President U Thein Sein wants to pacify the hard-liners in the government in Nay Pyi Taw. However, given the rising expectations that she will be able to generate party. There are fears that she will be able to manage the executive and pacify the hard-liners in the military.

Another possible scenario is towards a coalition government with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi being the nominal leader and the face of Myanmar for the world. The cabinet, on the other hand, would remain dominated by the current ruling party USDP, while Thura U Shwe Mann would extend his control and solidify his position in the lower house. This seems to be the most viable option which would help the country earn foreign investment and at the same time allow a focus on the internal reforms and transformation in Myanmar. But this could become a reality only through the constitutional reform process. Changing the current constitutional provision which bars her from contesting the Presidency and other stringent rules demands immediate deliberation and amendments.

This complex scenario of political change in Myanmar will be vital to the regional dynamics of Indo-Pacific in the future.

(Sona Trivedi teaches Political Science at Zakir Husain Delhi College, University of Delhi)
Greek leftist Tsipras sworn in as PM to fight bailout terms

ATHENS, 27 Jan — Greek left-wing leader Alexis Tsipras was sworn in on Monday as the prime minister of a new hardline, anti-bailout government, determined to face down international lenders and end nearly five years of tough economic measures.

The decisive victory by Tsipras’ Syriza in Sunday’s snap election reignites fears of new financial troubles in the country that set off the regional crisis in 2009. It is also the first time a member of the 19-nation euro zone will be led by parties rejecting German-backed austerity.

Syriza’s success is likely to empower Europe’s fringe parties, including other anti-austerity movements across the region’s economically-depressed south. The trouncing of the centre-right conservatives represents a defeat of Europe’s middle-ground political guard, a potential Syriza coalition partner, said the independent Greeks, whom he called “far right” and “anti-European”. But he said he would wait to see what the government’s programme before deciding whether to support a vote of confidence in parliament.

The tie-up suggests Syriza will keep up its confrontational stance against Greece’s creditors, who have dismissed his demands for a debt write-off and insisted the country needs reforms and austerity to get its finances back on track.

“At first sight this looks like a very strange marriage, but both parties share a strong opposition to austerity,” said Diego Iscandar, an analyst at IHS Global Insight.

Fidel Castro appears to lend support to Cuba talks with US

HAVANA, 27 Jan — Retired Cuban leader Fidel Castro on Monday appeared to lend his support to talks with the United States in his first comments about his longtime adversary since both countries agreed last month to restore diplomatic ties.

But Castro stopped short of an enthusiastic endorsement of the rapprochement, announced on 17 December by his younger brother and Cuba’s current president, Raul Castro, and US President Barack Obama.

“I don’t trust the policy of the United States nor have I had an exchange with them, but this does not mean ... a rejection of a peaceful solution to conflicts or the dangers of war,” Fidel Castro, 88, said in a statement published on the website of Cuba’s Communist Party newspaper Granma.

The United States and Cuba held historic high-level talks last week in Havana that are expected to lead to the re-establishment of diplomatic ties severed by Washington in 1961.

Any peaceful or negotiated solution to the problems between the United States and the peoples or any people of Latin America that doesn’t imply force or the use of force should be treated in accordance with international norms and principles,” Fidel Castro said.

“We will always defend cooperation and friendship with all the peoples of the world, among them our political adversaries.”

He took power in a 1959 revolution and spent much of his 49 years in power razing against the United States, which never succeeded in many attempts to oust him.

He was finally forced into retirement in 2008 by poor health and was succeeded by his brother Raul, who is now 83.

The president of Cuba has taken positive and important steps in accordance with his prerogatives and the powers given to him by the National Assembly the Communist Party of Cuba,” Fidel Castro said of his brother in the statement.

His silence on the issue had led to speculation over his health and whether he supported his brother’s rapprochement with the United States.

On 12 January, he sent a letter to former and retired Argentine soccer star Diego Maradona that squelched rumours he had died.

Argentine president plans to dissolve spy agency after prosecutor’s death

BUENOS AIRES, 27 Jan — President Cristina Fernandez plans to disband Argentina’s intelligence agency amid suspicions that rogue agents were behind the mysterious death of a state prosecutor investigating the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community centre.

In her first televised address since Alberto Nisman was found dead with a single bullet to the head, Fernandez said on Monday night she would send Congress a bill creating a new security body that would be more transparent.

Nisman’s death on 18 January, just a day before he was due to appear in Congress over his claims that Fernandez conspired to derail his investigation, has triggered a storm of conspiracy theories, including some directly against Fernandez. But her government says Nisman was tricked into making his allegations against Fernandez and then killed when he was no longer of use to those who led the conspiracy. It said the scandal is linked to a power struggle at the Intelligence Secretariat, or SI, and to operatives who had recently been fired. The SI, formerly known as the SIDE, has significant power and autonomy. In the “dirty war” directed by Argentina’s military dictatorship of 1976-83, the agency spied on Marxist rebels, labour unions and other leftists.

Fernandez said the draft bill will be sent to Congress before she travels to China at the weekend, and that legislators would hold extraordinary sessions in the February holiday period to debate the proposal.

“We need to make the intelligence services more transparent because they have not served the interests of the country,” said Fernandez, seated in a wheel chair and dressed all in white. The feisty leader said the intelligence services had changed little since the return to democracy but she steered clear of her usual fiery rhetoric after a week in which she has come under a barrage of criticism for her handling of the scandal. Nisman claimed the week before his death that Fernandez opened a secret back channel to Iran to cover up Tehrani’s alleged involvement in the AMIA bombing and gain access to Iranian oil. Fernandez has called the accusation absurd. Iran has repeatedly denied any link to the bomb attack. Opinion polls have shown few Argentines expect they will ever know how Nisman died. Thousands took to the streets last week to protest the slow pace of justice for the victims of the 1994 bombing of the AMIA center that killed 85 people and demanding answers to the questions around Nisman’s death. The scandal around Nisman’s death has created fresh turmoil in Argentina just 10 months ahead of a presidential election. Fernandez is constitutionally barred from seeking a third term.”— Reuters

Greek’s President Karolos Papoulias (R) welcomes Alexis Tsipras, Syriza party leader and winner of the Greek parliamentary elections, before Tsipras’ swearing-in ceremony as Greece’s first leftist prime minister in Athens on 26 Jan, 2015.— Reuters
**Amman considers releasing convicted terrorist in exchange for hostages**

**Amman, 27 Jan — Jordan may be willing to release a convicted terrorist in exchange for a Japanese journalist and a Jordanian military pilot believed to be held hostage by Islamic State militants, two members of the country’s parliament told Kyodo News on Monday.**

Bassam Al-Manaseer, chair of the Arab International Affairs Committee, and Ali Bani Ata, chair of the Japan-Jordan parliamentary friendship league, suggested in separate interviews that Amman may comply with the Islamic State’s demand to release the convicted terrorist Sa-jida al-Rishawi from prison in Jordan if the group releases the Japanese journalist Kenji Goto and the pilot.

First Lieutenant Muath al-Kasaesbeh, 24, who was in contact with the militant group through a third party, they said.

The interviews came the day after an image was posted online Saturday of Goto, a 47-year-old freelance journalist, holding a picture purportedly showing that the group had executed 42-year-old Haruna Yukawa, another Tokyo-based national believed to have been detained with Goto. In an accompanying audio message, a man claiming to be Goto said the captors changed their demand to the release of al-Rishawi, who was convicted of an attempted suicide bombing at an Amman hotel in 2005, instead of a $200 million ransom demanded earlier.

On such a swap plan of al-Rishawi for the Japanese journalist and the 26-year-old Jordanian military pilot who has been held captive by Islamic State since December, Japan’s top government spokesman Yoshhide Suga declined to comment, saying the situation is “ongoing.”

“We are not aware of that,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Goto told a press conference in Tokyo on Tuesday.

The Japanese government has not revealed details of negotiations with the Islamic State government, with a government source saying Tokyo is requesting Amman’s cooperation to solve the situation.

Originally, Islamic State is believed to have seen a hostage swap between the Jordanian military pilot and al-Rishawi, an Iraqi woman on death row in Jordan.

Amman, citing knowledge of Jordanian diplomatic policy, said it would be impossible for Amman to release al-Rishawi only in exchange for the release of the Japanese hostage Goto.

If such a hostage swap were made, the Jordanian pilot captured by Islamic State could be killed as he would be no longer a candidate for hostage swap deals, Al-Manaseer said.

“We are afraid that Daish take out this pilot from the game. It means they want to kill him,” he said, using an alternative name for Islamic State.

The best-case scenario would be a case where both Goto and the pilot will be exchanged for a death row prisoner, Al-Manaseer said.

But Islamic State could raise its demand for Amman for such a deal, such as the release of other prisoners or a ransom, Al-Manaseer said, noting uncertainty of what Islamic State would demand in exchange for the release of the pilot.

“The most difficult thing is Daish is not clear about what they want,” he said.

In addition to al-Rishawi, the release of another detained Iraqi terrorist in Jordan, Ziad Al Karboli, may be demanded by Islamic State in return for the release of the Jordanian pilot, The Jordan Times reported on Monday, citing analysts and reports.

In the end, how Amman will deal with the hostages issue will likely rely on the decision of Jordanian King Abdullah II, as he has vast authority over the country’s policy decisions, observers said.

Yasuhide Nakayama, a senior Japanese diplomat overseeing Japan’s task force to deal with the situation, said in Amman on Monday night, “Both governments (of Japan and Jordan) are working together by joining hands,” to free the Japanese journalist and the pilot.

“We are going to strive to rescue Mr Goto with the full support of the Jordanian government,” Nakayama said.

**Car bomb kills one in Egypt’s Alexandria**

**Cairo, 27 Jan — One person was killed by a car bomb, parked near a police station by suspected Islamist militants, in the Egyptian city of Alexandria early on Tuesday, security sources said.**

The attack in Egypt’s second-biggest city also wounded two people but there were no immediate details about the identity of the victims.

Security sources also said that unknown assailants had attacked a police station in western Alexandria with Molotov cocktails, setting it alight but causing no casualties. On Sunday, about 25 people were killed in anti-government demonstrations on the anniversary of the 2011 uprising that raised hopes for political change. On Monday, about 25 people were killed in anti-government demonstrations on the anniversary of the 2011 uprising that ousted veteran autocrat Hosni Mubarak.

However, signs of discontent emerged in the run-up to the anniversary of the 2011 uprising that raised hopes of greater freedoms in the most populous Arab country.

Activists accuse President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of returning Egypt to authoritarian rule since the army removed Morsi, a Muslim Brotherhood candidate for the presidency after the army removed him in July 2013 and then arrested him.

Sisi says he is committed to democracy in Egypt, a strategic US ally with influence across the Arab world.

Islamist militants have killed hundreds of police and soldiers since then-army chief Sisi overthrew president Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013.

A law enacted during Sisi’s rule severely restricted demonstrations, dramatically reducing unrest in Egypt.

However, signs of discontent emerged in the run-up to the anniversary of the 2011 uprising that raised hopes of greater freedoms in the most populous Arab country.

The town of Lunel, in the Herault region, has attracted attention after local media reports that as many as 10 of its residents sought to travel to Syria to fight alongside Islamists.

France has stepped up its fight to break up jihadist recruitment cells after 17 people were killed in three days of violence by Islamist militants in Paris earlier in January.

The attacks, one at the heart of the French capital’s most Jewish quarter of Charlie Hebdo and the other at a Jewish supermarket, were launched by men who had connections to jihadist recruiters. All three were killed as security forces closed in on them.

Since then, police in Belgium, France and Germany have interrogated dozens of jihadist suspects and in Paris last week French prosecutors asked for formal investigations of four men suspected helping prepare jihadist attacks. All three were killed as security forces closed in on them.

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**French police arrest four in anti-jihadist raid**

**Paris, 27 Jan — Special police forces in France arrested four men in the southern French town of Lunel on Tuesday after two people were injured at a Demah, a police source said.**

Two of them had returned from Syria, the source said.

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**Bullets hit flydubai passenger jet at Baghdad airport**

**Baghdad, 27 Jan — Bullets hit a passenger jet operated by budget carrier Dubai Aviation Corp, known as flydubai, as it was landing at Baghdad airport, the company and officials said on Tuesday.**

An aviation official and a security official told Reuters two passengers were lightly injured when three or four bullets hit the body of the plane on Monday evening but they were unable to specify the source of the gunfire.

Flydubai, Emirates Airlines EMIRATES, Sharjah’s Air Arabia AIR.DUB and Abu Dhabi’s Etihad Airways suspended flights following the incident, in line with a directive from the United Arab Emirates’ civil aviation authority.

“Afta landing at Baghdad International Airport (BGW) on 26 Jan 2015, damage to the aircraft fuselage consistent with small arms fire was discovered on flydubai flight FZ 215,” a company spokesperson said.

The spokesperson denied that any passengers had required medical treatment and said an investigation was underway. The aviation official said Iraq had briefly suspended air traffic on Monday following the incident but that most flights had resumed on Tuesday morning.—Reuters

**Car bomb explodes outside hotel in Libya’s Tripoli — witnesses**

**Tripoli, 27 Jan — A car bomb exploded in front of a Tripoli luxury hotel on Tuesday, witnesses said.**

There was no immediate word on casualties. The blast happened in the parking area at the Corinthia hotel, the country’s most prominent hotel located in the centre of the city.
New York, 27 Jan — A life-threatening blizzard barreled into the US Northeast, affecting up to 20 percent of Americans as it kept workers and students housebound, halted thousands of flights and prompted New York to ban cars from roads and shut down subway trains.

With memories still fresh of Sandy, a storm that ravaged the East Coast in 2012, the governors of six East Coast states declared emergencies. The storm could affect up to 60 million people in nearly a dozen states.

The National Weather Service in New York said roughly 5.5 inches of snow had fallen in the Manhattan’s Central Park by early Tuesday and nearly nine inches were recorded on parts of Long Island. NWS officials in Boston reported early on Tuesday wind gusting up to 70 mph at Nantucket Memorial Airport.

"Please stay home," New Jersey Governor Chris Christie told residents, ordering all but the most essential government workers in his state home from Monday afternoon until Wednesday at the earliest. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo banned travel from 11 pm for all but emergency vehicles on roads in 13 counties, including New York City, suburban Westchester and Long Island, with the threat of a $300 fine for violators.

"If you are in your car and you don’t need to go to work, town, village, city, it doesn’t matter, after 11 o’clock, you will technically be committing a crime," Cuomo said. "It could be a matter of life and death so caution is required." Additional driving bans in Connecticut, Massachusetts and New Jersey brought travel across the region to a standstill amid near white-out conditions.

Vucic: We would like to be like Finland

Helsinki, 27 Jan — Serbia’s Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic met in Helsinki on Monday with Finland’s Prime Minister Alexander Stubb to discuss Serbia’s EU integration, chairmanship of the OSCE, relations in the region and the situation in Ukraine.

Serbia is a very important country in the Western Balkans because of its EU integration, chairmanship of the OSCE and good relations with other countries, Stubb stressed.

Vucic thanked his colleague for support to Serbia’s EU integration, adding that joining the EU was a strategic goal.

Serbia would like to be like Finland, to get good results through hard work, Vucic emphasised.

The two discussed also bilateral cooperation, trade, which is on the rise, and a plan to bring more Finnish investors to Serbia.

Commenting on whether Finland supports opening the first chapters of the accession talks between Serbia and the EU, Stubb stated that his country could not influence those processes, but that it supported EU enlargement, and that he hoped the first chapters would be opened as soon as possible.

"Serbia has to fulfil all its obligations first, Vucic underscored, adding that he also hoped the first chapters would be opened soon, but that his government was not working on it just for the sake of opening those chapters, but for the benefit of Serbia and its future.

He started his visit to Finland by taking part in a business forum organised by the Finnish national agency Finpro, which represents 550 Finnish companies.

Vucic briefed the Finnish investors on the reform process and the economic situation in Serbia, urging them to come in the greatest numbers possible and invest in the country.

We are not asking for charity, we have embarked on the reform process on our own, without external pressure, because we want to be a modern, economically stable, European country. We want a healthy economy and hard work, he said.—Tanjug

Eight French, two Greeks killed in NATO plane crash in Spain

Marked, 27 Jan — Eight French nationals and two Greeks were killed when a Greek fighter plane crashed during NATO training in Spain on Monday.

Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy said in a statement that a French J-16 fighter, in a NATO training exercise at the Spanish Albacete air force base, crashed because of "aero-engine problems" resulting from "deterioration in the environment with poor visibility".

The Greek fighter jet, which was carrying out a NATO training exercise at the Spanish base but somehow went wrong during the take-off, was "crashing into the parking area for planes, crashing into various planes that were parked there," the defence ministry said in a statement.

Two pilots on board were among the dead and other pilots and mechanics were "underneath the plane in the parking area, according to Spanish media reports." TheGreek Mirage and Italian Alpha Jet planes were parked when the plane crashed, the defence ministry said.

Five of the injured were taken to a specialist burns unit at La Paz Hospital in Madrid while the others were treated at a hospital in Albacete.

"I am deeply saddened," NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said in a statement. "This is a tragedy which affects the whole NATO family. I express my heartfelt condolences to the loved ones and the nations of those who lost their lives, and I wish a speedy recovery to the injured."
WEATHER REPORT

BAY INERENCE: Weather is partly cloudy in the South Bay and generally fair in the Andaman Sea and elsewhere in the Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL EVENING OF THE 28th January, 2015: Weather will be partly cloudy in Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin State and generally fair in the remaining Regions and States.

STATE OF THE SEA: Seas will be moderate in Myanmar waters.

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Decrease of night temperatures in Eastern Myanmar areas.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 28th January, 2015: Fair weather.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 28th January, 2015: Generally fair weather.

CIA drone strike kills al-Qaeda men in Yemen

SANAA, 27 Jan — A CIA drone strike on a car in Yemen killed three men believed to be al-Qaeda militants on Monday, officials said, in a sign US security operations would continue despite a political crisis in the volatile Arab country.

President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and his government quit on Thursday in a confrontation with an Iranian-allied armed group, depriving Washington of a staunch ally in its campaign against al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

The attack by a remotely piloted plane in central Marib province was the first since the departure of Hadi and signals Washington’s campaign against AQAP is continuing, at least in its use of drones, despite his absence. AQAP claimed responsibility for deadly shootings in Paris on 7 January and American officials fear al-Qaeda will gain strength in Yemen’s current power vacuum.

US security officials had said on Friday the collapse of the US-backed government had disrupted Washington’s counter-terrorism campaign, dealing a major setback to US efforts to undermine one of al-Qaeda’s most potent wings.

Several US government sources indicated on Monday the latest strike was carried out by a CIA drone. A CIA spokesman declined to comment. — Reuters
Spielberg — 70 years after Holocaust Jews still face anti-Semitism

KRAKOW, (Poland), 27 Jan — Hollywood director Steven Spielberg said on Monday he hoped that the Holocaust commemorations taking place in Poland on Tuesday will be a warning for future generations, in light of a rising tide of anti-Semitism and intolerance against Jews.

Spielberg was talking to Holocaust survivors in the southern Polish city of Krakow, ahead of the main event marking 70 years since Soviet troops liberated the Nazi German Auschwitz death camp.

“If you are a Jew today, in fact if you are any person who believes in the freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom in free expression, you know that like many other groups, we are once again facing the perennial demons of intolerance,” the Oscar-winning filmmaker said.

The director won an Academy Award for Best Director for “Schindler’s List,” his 1993 movie about a German who saved more than a thousand mostly Polish-Jewish refugees during the Holocaust, warned of spreading anti-Semitism.

“(There are) Facebook pages identifying Jews and their geographic locations with the intention to attack and the growing efforts to banish Jews from Europe,” said Spielberg.

“My hope for tomorrow’s commemoration is that the survivors will feel confident that we are renewing their call to remember. That we will not only make the survivors will feel confident that we are renewing the growing efforts to banish Jews from Europe,” the Oscar-winning filmmaker said.

Chinese actress buys into Alibaba Pictures as it warns of losses

HONG KONG, 27 Jan — Chinese actress Zhao Wei has taken a major stake in Alibaba Group Holdings Ltd’s film division, bringing some star power to a company that warned on Monday it could rack up losses of as much as HK$600 million (£51 million) for 2014.

The star of “Shao-lin Soccer” and “Red Cliff” and Huang Youlong, her husband, paid more than HK$5 billion for 18 per cent of Alibaba Pictures Group Ltd. according to Hong Kong stock exchange filings.

Zhao, considered one of the country’s most bankable stars, and her husband made the acquisition through holding company Gold Ocean Media Inc. in December. Online-commerce company Alibaba bought and renamed the film-making company for more than $800 million last year, as it expands into movies and entertainment content.

Those moves came as Chinese Internet rivals Tencent Holdings Ltd and Baidu Inc also began to explore forays into movie-making and film content.

Kylie Minogue to headline Hyde Park gig

LONDON, 27 Jan — Singer Kylie Minogue is to headline a Hyde Park gig for the Barclaycard presents British Summer Time 2015 series.

The 46-year-old ‘Can’t Get You Out of My Head’ singer will be supported by Grace Jones and Chic featuring Nile Rodgers on 21 June, reported Digital Spy.

‘I’m so excited to perform at Hyde Park this summer. I have great memories of playing shows there and am looking forward to doing it all again! Given the amazing artists performing and that it will be the longest day of the year, I can’t wait,’ she said.

Other acts confirmed to play at British Summer Time 2015 include Taylor Swift and The Who.

Senior Vice President at Live Events Jim King said, “We are thrilled to announce Kylie as the third headline for Barclaycard presents British Summer Time Hyde Park. Her live shows are always amazing and show why she still reigns supremely as Pop’s Princess.” —PTI

James Franco finds his most despicable character in ‘True Story’

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‘Selma’ director DuVernay to make Hurricane Katrina feature film

LOUISIANA, 27 Jan — Ava DuVernay, the director behind the Oscar-nominated Martin Luther King Jr biopic “Selma,” will write, produce and direct a feature film set in the time of Hurricane Katrina, the company backing the film said on Monday.

David Oyelowo, who plays King in “Selma,” is in talks to co-produce and star in the film, described by Participant Media as “a sweeping love story and complex murder mystery,” set during the time of the 2005 hurricane that slammed into the US Gulf Coast and deluged the city of New Orleans after levees broke.

DuVernay, the first African American woman nominated for a Golden Globe for directing, was hired by Participant Media, which was founded in 2004 by billionaire and former eBay President Jeff Skoll to produce entertainment programming that inspires social change.

The announcement comes less than two weeks after she was passed over for an Oscar nomination for best director, an exclusion that fuelled a debate over the lack of diversity in this year’s Academy Awards nominations.

“Selma,” a $20 million movie from Paramount Pictures, did secure a Best Picture Oscar nomination.
Talks over transfer system stall after FIFPro demands rejected

BERNE, 27 Jan — Talks aimed at reforming football’s transfer system have broken down after European clubs and leagues refused to accept proposals to protect unpaid players, the players union FIFPro said on Tuesday.

The negotiations, which opened last March, have come to a standstill and FIFPro has called for an extraordinary meeting of its Europe division in Athens on Wednesday to discuss the issue.

FIFPro said the European Clubs Association (ECA) and the European Professional Football Leagues (EPFL) had failed to accept four key proposals to ensure contractual stability.

These included a proposal to allow a player to terminate his contract at 10 days’ notice if he is unpaid for more than 30 days, and another entitling the player to financial compensation if his contract is terminated without just cause.

In such cases, players should be allowed to join another club without the restriction of any transfer window, FIFPro said.

ECA and the EPFL were not immediate available for comment.

“These reforms would make the contract of a professional player a two-way street,” FIFPro secretary general Theo van Seggelen said in a statement.

“The situation can be contrasted to the rights of a club where a player breaches a contract, which would see him often responsible to pay his own transfer value and subject to a mandatory ban.”

“Transfer values have, of course, spiralled out of control and can see players liable for the payment of millions of dollars, something no other employee would have to bear.”

“The transfer system is failing football and its players,” he added.

Van Seggelen described the issue as the biggest problem in professional football.

“Every year, around 4,000 players file cases with FIFA either because the club has not paid them or the club has unjustly terminated the contract,” he said.

Due to the volume of cases, players have to wait several years for a hearing.

JAPAN’S publication sales drop 4.5% in 2014, largest fall on record

TOKYO, 27 Jan — Sales of books and magazines in Japan — excluding those in digital formats — dropped 4.5 percent in 2014 from a year earlier to an estimated 1.6 trillion yen, the largest fall on record, a research institute said on Monday.

The sales declined for the 10th consecutive year, mainly because a consumption tax hike in April dampened consumer demand, slowing the sales, the Research Institute for Publications said.

Book sales are estimated to have totaled 175.4 billion yen, down 4.0 percent, while magazine sales came to an estimated 852.0 billion yen, down 5.0 percent, with sales of weekly magazines falling sharply.

Sales of books and magazines peaked in 1996 with an estimated 2.7 trillion yen, meaning that the market shrank to two-fifths its size 18 years earlier.

With information readily available through smartphones and other electronic devices, digital publications have grown steadily in the Internet era, developing into a 101.3 billion yen market in fiscal 2013, up 31.9 percent from the previous year, according to Inpress Corp., a publisher and Internet service operator.

New Philharmonic takes wing above Paris periphery

PARIS, 27 Jan — In the northeast of Paris, steps from the roar of the ring road, hundreds of thousands of aluminum birds soar across the angular carapace of the new Paris Philharmonic, their inlaid wings a lyrical counterpoint to the otherwise colourless spot.

With the opening of a new symphony hall far from the capital’s elegant boulevards or former slaughterhouse grounds, Paris hopes to inspire a new generation of music lovers while revitalizing the Porte de Pantin area linking the city and under-served suburbs.

Two weeks after its official opening attended by President Hollande and a host of dignitaries, workers are putting the final touches to the roof, walkways and facade.

Designed by French architect Jean Nouvel, whose designs include Copenhagen’s concert hall and Louvre Abu Dhabi, the project has been controversial since its 2006 inception, both over its location and its price tag, now nearly doubled from a preliminary estimate of about 386 million euros ($433 million).

In advocating a first-class symphony hall for Paris, Philharmonic President Laurent Bayle has said “it’s a question of sharing and social stakes” — that it be accessible to all and that its primary aim be to introduce music of all kinds to young people.

That dovetails with a push by city and regional authorities for a Greater Paris to share municipal facilities and bring improved cultural access to those in outlying areas cut off by the “peripherique,” the busy, multi-carriage road that rings the city.

“The Philharmonic is the first landmark in the future Greater Paris,” said Bayle, calling the project a “marvellous addition to the east of Paris that is undergoing major change.”

The building is next to the “City of Music” centre of smaller concert-halls, a music museum and exhibition space dating from 1995 around La Villette park.

About 30,000 visitors attended an open-house weekend at the Philharmonic that showed off the myriad sound-proof educational rooms where an array of drums, lutes, violins, trombones and other instruments await the young and curious.

While programming mid-week is more sophisticated fare, weekends offer many family events and parents can listen to concerts while their kids participate in workshops.

“It’s not about lowering standards, we just have to show people that it’s easy to go out and hear music,” Philharmonic spokesman Philippe Provensal said.

The jewel of the building is the elegant 2,400-seat symphony hall, where acoustic panels recall birds in flight. Panelled in blond wood and outfitted with black velvet seats, the hall has been designed with both sound quality and comfort in mind, such as the space allowing air to circulate behind the balconies.

The space can be configured 17 different ways for a maximum seating of 3,650. Disagreements with the administration over costs and technical issues led Nouvel to boycott opening night.

“We had a building that wasn’t entirely finished and an architect who wasn’t there — but it was a huge international success,” spokesman Provensal said.

Reuters
Early salvo sends hosts Australia into Asian Cup final

NEWCASTLE, 27 Jan — Hosts Australia rode two early strikes to a 2-0 victory over United Arab Emirates that sent them into the Asian Cup final for a second successive tournament at a rain-soaked Newcastle Stadium on Tuesday. The Socceroos, who lost to Japan in the final four years ago, will take on another East Asian power in South Korea on Saturday in the 7th semi-finals clash of the tournament hosts with Trent. The Socceroos led the way for the goal-happy tournament hosts with Trent. The Socceroos made the most important early impression to the delight of the majority of the crowd of 21,079.

Winger Robbie Kruse had his cross blocked after a burst down the right in the opening minutes of the first half. The other striker Ahmed Khalil hit the woodwork in the first half as they were unable to create enough clear-cut chances. The wet pitch probably did not help but Australia, with Matthew Spiranovic restored to the back four after suspension, also defended well enough to contain Abdulrahman and his team mates. It was at the end of the first half that the Socceroos made the best chance in the 10th minute when Abdulaziz Sanqour broke down the right flank and crossed for striker Khalil to hit the ball first time against the base of the post. Australia were straight back on the attack, though, and after another surge down the right the ball was heading towards Tim Cahill in front of goal.

Cahill was dragged back as he was attempting a shot and Mat Leckie then had an effort blocked but the ball fell to Davidson, who calmly slotted it low and hard into the goal. The Australians were in no mood to sit back and protect their lead but the UAE kept their shape and gradually worked their way back into the contest. Khalil let fly with a long-range effort that flew past Mat Ryan and wide of the post in the 51st minute and Abdulrahman continued to probe for weaknesses in the Australian defence. Massimo Luongo, Australia’s find of the tournament, had another impressive game in midfield and his curling effort came after 72 minutes.

The Socceroos continued to press forward and Leckie forced a save out of Majed Naser in the 75th minute. The referee failed to see it and awarded a goal kick.

The UAE probably deserved a goal but Ali Ahmed Makhbout had his shot smothered by Sainsbury in the dying minutes to leave his tally for the tournament at four.—Reuters

UEA’s goalkeeper Majed Naser (C) punches the ball clear against Australia’s Tim Cahill during their Asian Cup semi-final soccer match at the Newcastle Stadium in Newcastle on 27 Jan, 2015.— REUTERS

Berdych ends Nadal tyranny on day of shocks

MELBOURNE, 27 Jan — Iron-willed Czech Tomas Berdych ended eight years of tyranny under nemesis Rafa Nadal to storm into his second Australian Open semi-final on Tuesday after Maria Sharapova inflicted another grand slam champion check on Eugenie Bouchard.

Stunned by Sharapova’s 6-3, 6-2 demolition of the seventh-seeded Russian, the Rod Laver Arena crowd were knocked off their seats by Berdych’s 6-2, 6-0, 7-6(5) victory over the 14-times grand slam champion. Ekaterina Makarova had earlier set the tone on a cloudy day of shocks, dumping second seed Serena Williams of the US 6-4, 6-0 to set up an all-Russian semi-final with Sharapova. But it was Nadal’s stunning on a mild summer’s day that rocked Melbourne Park to its foundations and shook the biggest money in the men’s game off the back of Berdych. The big-serving Czech’s 17-match losing streak to the Spaniard was the equal longest in the professional era and after fending off Nadal in a tight third set, the seventh-seeded Czech revealed in his Vitas Gerulaitis moment: “I start pretty well, you’re playing Rafa and you have to keep going to the last point,” the 29-year-old said courtside. “We set up the great plan for today’s game and it worked.”

“I’m just putting myself in the best possible position right now, really trying to go one by one.”

The first two sets were over in exactly an hour, with Berdych serving masterfully, saving all four break points conceded and sealing the match with a raking second serve that Nadal could only bunt back into the net cord. On the comeback trail after injury and illness, Nadal battled hard to save three match points, but his second set whitewash was his first bagel since playing great rival Roger Federer at the 2006 Wimbledon final, adding to the surreal atmosphere over centre court.

“It was just not my day. I didn’t play with the right intensity, the right rhythm,” Nadal said. “It was a day when the opponent played better than me. I made him play very easy so you cannot expect to win quarter-finals... helping the opponent to play well.”

Berdych will play the winner of sixth seed Andy Murray and local hope Nick Kyrgios, who clash in the evening session.

Though similarly one-sided, it was old stager Sharapova maintaining her dominance in the earlier quarter-final. Bouchard said she had learned a lot from her gutting French Open loss last year when Sharapova overhauled her from a set down, but nothing could have prepared her for the 78-minute demolition that Sharapova inflicted upon her. The Russian wore a look of grim determination as she waited in the player’s tunnel to make her centre court entrance, but it was masking a head full of nerves. She double-faulted and committed two unforced errors to gift three break-points in the opening game. Her opponent used just one to break her before charging to a 3-0 lead. Completely dictated, Bouchard had nowhere to hide from her second serve which the strong-willed Russian feasted upon.

Sharapova was stingy, giving up only two break points for the match, none in the first set, and saving both. In full flight, she swooped in for the kill with a string of smoking winners, sealing it with a crunchy inside-out forehand. As Sharapova blew kisses, Bouchard headed straight for the exits, biting her lip. “I am happy that I was able to lift my game after having a couple matches where I wasn’t satisfied!” the 29-year-old said. “But the toughest is what’s to come. I hope that I’ll be able to take that and play even better.” It was a depressingly similar story for third seed Halep, who had crashed into the quarter-finals by succumbing to a succession of lower-ranked opponents. She ran head-first into a brick wall in the form of lithe left-hander Makaro-vi, a grand slam doubles champion who announced herself with a run to last year’s semi-finals at Forest Hills. Halep also has major credentials, reaching last year’s French Open final and favoured to go one step further in time. Instead, she froze, later admitting she had felt “a little bit too stressed” before a ball was struck. Makarova, however, was a brawling, hustling ball of energy. She broke twice for a 3-0 lead before her opponent had blinked, poring reality short and despaching the Romanian’s top-spin bombs with disdain from the baseline.

The Romanian lost focus only briefly in the second set, falling 0-40 in the second game, but saved all three break points before mooring to victory in 69 minutes. The 26-year-old left-hander, who describes herself as shy off-court, has not lost a set all tournament. Her matches have lasted a tick over one hour and 11 minutes on average and she will head into her clash with Sharapova fresh and in top form.

“I’m not shy on the tennis court. It’s a big stage,” she said. “I never beat Sharapova (Shararova), so it will be tough.”—Reuters

Maria Sharapova

Tomas Berdych

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