Local environmentalists welcome suspension of construction projects in Yangon

An order has been issued for the one-month suspension of some construction projects at government land plots under the BOT (Build-Own-Transfer) system in Yangon Region in order to review the environmental impacts of the projects, according to an official at the Yangon Region Government Office.

To modernize Yangon and to construct buildings of international standards in the Yangon City Development Committee Area, some companies were permitted to construct buildings on land plots owned by the government in 2013 and 2014.

However, the authorities had to plan inspection tours at the project sites as local environmentalists, architects and engineers later pointed out that those projects might have an impact on the environment.

Suspended projects include those of Shwe Taung Hyday Development Company, Thukha Yadana Company, Megra Landmark Development Company, Shwe Taung Development Company and Adventure Myanmar Tour and Incentive Company on 49.6 acres of land near Yangon’s landmark Shwedagon Pagoda and construction projects at No 61-63 Kaba Aye Pagoda Road.

“We welcome foreign investment in the country, but we need to take more time to review the environmental impacts before we decide to proceed with any construction projects,” said an official at the Yangon Region Government Office.

Myanmar lion dance team wows crowd in Singapore

Yangon, 8 Feb — Myanmar lion dance team could attract the fans in the 8th International Lion Dance competition in Singapore Saturday, according to the reports.

The contest took place in the city-state’s Chinatown with the 14 teams from 10 nations across Asia, including Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia, China, Thailand and Myanmar, bringing their lions to life.

With high-valued tradition and culture, the lion dance has gained popularity across the globe over the years and is now an internationally recognized sport. The participants performed with rhythmic beat of the drums to the jaw-dropping stunts.

Myanmar teams could win a great cheer from the crowd, but did not score with the judges.

Tortoises from pagoda’s lake released into community forest in southern Myanmar for 2nd time

By Aye Min Soe

Yangon, 8 Feb — Local people in Dawei Township released 42 yellow tortoises (Indotestudo elongate) into a watershed area in Yebyu Township on 2 February as part of efforts for conservation of the species endemic to Myanmar.

This is the second time to release tortoises from a lake into a natural sanctuary area, according to the Wildlife Conservation Society (Myanmar).

In December 2014, local people in Dawei and the WCS released 82 tortoises, 80 Sauk Leik (Morenia ocellata) and two soft-shell turtles, from a pagoda’s lake into a natural sanctuary area.
Mass peace movement demands prompt ceasefire from both sides

YANGON, 8 Feb — A mass peace movement on Saturday has called for the armed forces of both sides to sign a prompt ceasefire, local media has reported. The movement attracted over 3,000 activists of national political forces and ethnic groups, with an activist noting that a ceasefire is an essential prequisite to political dialogue.

“Our country has not tasted peace yet as a result of internal armed conflict that has entered its 65 years,” he said.

Other peace groups sent their messages to the event, urging both sides to end fighting and conclude a peace treaty. A message stated that security, development and peace are three essential factors for a nation, and urged both parties to armed conflict to put the interests of the people before theirs.

“Armed conflict burns public revenues,” it stressed. The mass peace movement witnessed the participation of Buddhist monks and retired army veterans who lost limbs in fighting.

MNA

Myanmar celebrates first International Epilepsy Day in Yangon

By Khaing Thanda Lwin

YANGON, 8 Feb — The Ministry of Health in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) organized the celebration of International Epilepsy Day on Sunday, the first-time event in Myanmar, with the aim of promoting public awareness about epilepsy.

The event is also aimed at improving the participatory role of government as well as other organizations in reducing the treatment gap among people with epilepsy and correcting public misunderstandings about the disease,” said Yangon Region Chief Minister U Myint Swe at the ceremony.

To promote awareness of epilepsy rights around the world, the day was created by the International Bureau for Epilepsy (IBE) and the International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE), is a global event celebrated annually on the second Monday of February.

Events are taking place around the world to mark the first International Epilepsy Day.

The WHO said more than 50 million people around the world are suffering from epilepsy, estimating Myanmar has over 500,000 epilepsy patients.

In a speech, Dr Win Myint, deputy health minister, said, only 25 percent of people with epilepsy from developing countries, including Myanmar, have easy access to medical treatment.

Patients from four sub-urban townships in Yangon and one in Nay Pyi Taw have received free medical services under the four-year epilepsy project that has been conducted by the health ministry and the WHO since 2013 in order to reduce treatment gap in the country.

MNA

Local environmentalists welcome . . .

(from page 1) construction sector because it will help raise our living standards while job opportunities are created for workers. Young Myanmar engineers will also gain valuable work experience," an official of the team said. “However, these projects should be properly implemented in a transparent manner. Suspension does not mean that these projects were shut down. Suspension is just for field inspection of their impacts on the environment. As the companies are international entities, they will also be open to inspection. After inspection works by a team, one member of which is the chairman of the Myanmar Engineering Society, they will be allowed to continue their work. Necessary advice will also be given to our government.

MNA

Myanmar lion dance . . .

(from page 1) “I am a fan of lion dance, so every year I make my way over here to watch it. But I think the results are not up to my expectations. I was hoping the Myanmar team would win, but too bad. Although I’m Singaporean, but I thought one of the Myanmar teams really did very well,” said David, a Singaporean lion dance fan. In the contest, the two teams, the official added.

Heritage conservationists including National Literary Award Winner Architect Dr Kyaw Latt pointed out that construction projects at the former compound of the Ministry of Defence near Shwedagon Pagoda may hurt the ecosystem of downtown Yangon.

“While efforts are being made to encourage foreign investment on the one hand, the projects should be developed in a transparent manner on the other hand. It will be the best way for all. We welcome the field inspection to review the environmental impact of the projects. As these companies are of international standards, they will be able to find the best solution. Cooperation of all is important for a green city,” said environmentalist Dr Myat Thu. Singaporean teams emerged as the first and third places, while China (Taipei) stood in the second place. Lion dance is a traditional dance in Chinese culture and other Asian countries in which two performers make movements in a lion costume. The performance is performed during Chinese New Year and other Chinese traditional, cultural and religious festivals, as well as in important events such as business opening events, special celebrations or wedding ceremonies, or may be used to honour special guests by the Chinese communities.

MNA

Myanmar, Thailand sign joint drug control agreement

NAY PYI TAW, 8 Feb — A Myanmar police delegation left here on 5 February for Bangkok to sign an agreement on bilateral cooperation in drug control, officials said.

The agreement was signed at Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB) in Thailand’s capital on 6 February by Secretary of the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC) Chief of Myanmar Police Force Police Maj-Gen Zaw Win and ONCB’s Secretary-General Mr Permpong Chaovalit.

According to the agreement, Thailand will provide Myanmar with a U$596,968 aid to be used in curtailing narcotic drugs.

The two countries will conduct a one-year programme designed to gear up for joint drug control and transnational crackdown as well as honing laboratory analysis skills, the agreement stated.

Currently, Myanmar and Thailand have been working in tandem in the districts of Tachilek and Monghsoat on a six-year plan worth THB350 million since 2012. The plan involves cooperation in drug control and opium-substitute cultivation programmes.

The Myanmar delegation arrived back in Yangon on Saturday afternoon.

MNA

Yangon Region Chief Minister U Myint Swe views equipment used in treatment of epilepsy at the ceremony to mark International Epilepsy Day.
General Hla Htay Win meets UN humanitarian coordinator

NAY PYI TAW, 8 Feb — Chief of the General Staff (Army, Navy and Air) General Hla Htay Win on Saturday met UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Ms Renata Lok-Dessallien, here to discuss issues on providing humanitarian aids to the victims. They also discussed matters relating to exchange of information between the two sides and progress of preventing the recruitment of child soldiers.

Also present on the occasion were Lt-Gen Myint Soe of the office of the commander-in-chief (Army), senior military officers and officials from the both sides.—Myawady

General Hla Htay Win receives UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Ms Renata Lok-Dessallien.—MYAWADY

Matric student recalled from student protest march

YANGON, 8 Feb — A matric student has been recalled in Ayeyawady Region on Saturday evening, following an announcement and a request to parents by the Ministry of Education, officials said.

Ma Chaw Su San, a student at No.1 Basic Education High School in Pathein, was taking part in the recent student protest march against the National Education Law. Her parents, together with officials of the local education department, brought Chaw Su San back home to Pathein on Sunday morning after a meeting with the Ayeyawady student protest team.

The local education department has arranged to help the young student sit the matric examination.

Chinese container vessel arrives in Myanmar

YANGON, 8 Feb — A container vessel of China Shipping, Asiatic Wave, sailed directly from China without cargo transshipment, berthed at Myanmar Industrial Port in Yangon Sunday. The container ship, which is the first ever in history sailed directly from China, set off from Chinese port cities of Ningbo and Shanghai, arrived Yangon via Ho Chi Minh City and Singapore within 13 days, covering a distance of about 6,300 nautical km.

U Aung Kyaw Htoo, an official of the Myanmar Port Authority, welcomed the Chinese container ship, expressing wishes that increased capacity of freight handling would benefit Myanmar.—Xinhua

Amyotha Hluttaw speaker...

(from page 1)

U Myat Thin Aung, Chairman of Hlinethaya Industrial Zone, donated K 10 million for the education foundation.

After the ceremony, the speaker attended the opening ceremony of a middle school in Kyaukpyu Village. At the school opening ceremony, the speaker said that the government has been increasing the budgets for education and health sectors as the two sectors are important for regional development. In conclusion, the speaker urged parents and teachers to take care of the education and health of children.

At the ceremony, the speaker presented certificates of honour to Taungthonelone Sayadaw and well-wisher who donated K 9.1 million and K 2 million for the school to the school headmistress and a member of the school board of trustees.

The schoolmistress explained the brief history of the school and expressed thanks.

Mass demonstration for union peace held in Yangon

YANGON, 8 Feb — Mass movement for peace of the union took place from 3.20 pm to 3.35 pm at Bo Sein Hman Sport Grounds on Shwegondine Road in Bahan Township on Saturday.

Present at the movement were about 3,000 people including U Zeyar Win Myint (Secretary of National Promotion Party) and members, Chairman U Win Ko Ko Latt, Vice Chairman U Chit Ko Ko, and members Ma Hnin Nay Chi Oo, Ma Thi Thi Oo and Saw Thar Maung of Myanma National Network, U Myint Zaw (Patriotic Buddhists Association), U Win Myint (Secretary of Patriotic Youths Network), Secretary (2) U Nay Min Kyaw and CEC U Toe of National Democratic Force Party, people who wish for peace and veterans including retired Captains Tin Ko Win and Ye Moe. 20 monks from Patriotic Monk Union led by U Thu Seikta and U Tin Soe (MNTV) of the media.

The demonstrators marched three people in a roll along Bo Teza Street, Bo Sein Hman Street, U Chit Maung Street, West Race Court Street to Hit-tai Grounds (Kyaikkasan Grounds).

During the demonstration, veterans on wheel-chairs carried flags and photographs of Bogyoke Aung San, Thakin Ko Taw Hmine, President U Thein Sein and Command-er-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, 4-foot x 2-foot blue banners that say “Stop civil war immediately” and “Take public interests into account”, 5-foot x 3-foot banners that say “We hate wars”, “Ceasefire, reduce prejudice” and “We want peace” and chanting slogans “Union Peace, Our cause”, Signing Ceasefire Agreement, Our cause” and “Peace Building must be successful”.

Veterans on wheel-chairs carrying photographs of Bogyoke Aung San, Thakin Ko Taw Hmine, President U Thein Sein and Senior General Min Aung Hlaing take part in mass demonstration for union peace.—MNA
Madaya people to keep marble statue of General Aung San at park

MADAYA, 8 Feb—In commemoration of the centennial birthday of General Aung San, his marble statue will be kept at Bo Taza Park in Madaya, 21 miles of Mandalay, a member of Madaya Chithumyar Group told media.

Arrangements have been made for keeping the statue at a park. As of 29 December, coordination meetings were held in the town every Sunday for the statue. The group collected donations from the people in Madaya so as to set up a fund for the statue.

“Responsible persons of political parties, Madaya Chithumyar Group and funeral service association in Madaya work together for arrangements of the General’s statue. At present, stone sculptor U Maung Gyi is carving the statue,” Ko Say Ti Shin of the General Aung San’s birthday commemorative committee told media.

It may cost about K8 million for carving the statue. The committee has received K6 million from collection of cash donations, he added.

“We collect cash donations in Madaya only. Our work process is smooth in selection of a venue for General’s statue with the assistance of local authorities,” said a responsible person of Madaya Chithumyar.

Under the permission of the Township Education Officer, the group organized the Bogyoke’s centennial birthday’s commemorative essay contest at Basic Education High School in Madaya. A plan is underway to hold the festivities for children as the centennial birthday is coincided with the Myanmar children’s day. As commemorative activities, the youth will offer rice to 500 members of the Sangha in Madaya, serve boiled pea and Indian flag bread as breakfast to the people and give brooches to the attendees.

The statue will be seven feet high and two feet and nine inches wide. It will be kept on the 30 feet wide platform.

The marble statue of General Aung San will be inaugurated at Bo Taza Park in Madaya, Mandalay Region, on 12 February.

Maung Pyi Thu
(Mandalay)

Price of tamarind falls in Myanaung’s market

MYANUANG, 8 Feb—Although demand is high, price of ripened tamarind falls in the market, said a broker of tamarind in Myanaung, Ayeyawady Region, told media.

“Brokers bought K900 per viss (1.6 kilos) of tamarind in early January. Now, it is bought at K450 per viss,” he said.

Rural people sell tamarind produced from their villages in Myanaung to four brokers in urban area daily. “Now we do not need to seek cargo to Yangon. Bags of ripened tamarind are piled at the bus terminal. We transport it at K1,000 per bag weighing 30 viss,” said an owner of truck running along the route from Myanaung to Yangon.

Rural people sell about 160 kilos of tamarind to the brokerages daily. “Now we need not to seek cargo from their villages in Myanaung to four brokers in urban area daily. “Now we do not need to seek cargo to Yangon. Bags of ripened tamarind are piled at the bus terminal. We transport it at K1,000 per bag weighing 30 viss,” said an owner of truck running along the route from Myanaung to Yangon.

Rural Development in 2014-15 fiscal year. Township Administrator U Thein Zaw Kan and officials opened the well. Head of Township Department of Rural Development U Than Lwin explained supply of water from the well.

Nay Lin (Nyaunglebin)

University students enjoy 68th Anniversary Shan State Day in Mandalay

MANDALAY, 8 Feb—Shan National Literature and Culture Committee of Universities (Mandalay) organized a ceremony to mark the 68th Anniversary Shan State Day at Inwa Room No 27 of Mandalay University on 7 February.

Mandalay Region Minister U Sai Maung Hla and Rector of Mandalay University Dr Maung Thin opened the market festival and cultural dance in commemoration of the Shan State Day.

After an official read the message sent by Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Thura U Shwe Mann, the minister and the rector delivered speeches.

Patron of the Shan National Literature and Culture Committee of Universities (Mandalay) Daw Nang Shwe May extended greetings and the secretary spoke words of thanks.

Students from universities in Mandalay and cultural troupes performed Shan traditional dances. Restaurants sold Shan traditional foods around Inwa Hall.

Maung Pyi Thu
(Mandalay)

Nyaunglebin Tsp

Rural area gets well in Nyaunglebin Tsp

NYAUNGLEBIN, 8 Feb—As a gesture of hailing the 68th Anniversary Union Day, the Department of Rural Development in Nyaunglebin Township, Bago Region, put a well into service in Yeblakon Village on 7 February. The well was sunk by Golden House Co Ltd with the fund of Department of Rural Development in 2014-15 fiscal year.

Township Administrator U Thein Zaw Kan and officials opened the well. Head of Township Department of Rural Development U Than Lwin explained supply of water from the well.

Nay Lin (Nyaunglebin)
Indawgyi Shwe Myinzu Pagoda to hold Buddha Pujaniya

MOHNYIN, 8 Feb — A Buddha Pujaniya festival will be held at Shwe Myinzu Pagoda in Indawgyi Lake in Mohnyin Township, Kachin State, from 25 February to 4 March. The pagoda’s board of trustees auctioned licences for shops, lodging, electricity supply, fuel sales, open air market, runs of boat and photo shop during the festival from 5 February. “In the past, district and township authorities managed auction of businesses in the festival. This year, new members of the pagoda’s board of trustees managed auction tasks in a transparent manner,” a member of the pagoda’s board of trustees.

Buddha Pujaniya festival of Indawgyi Shwe Myinzu Pagoda attracts pilgrims, tourists and local travelers in addition to environmentalists in the region.

Agriculture Department opens plant clinic in Pyinmana Tsp

NAY PYI TAW, 8 Feb — A plant clinic was opened at the 440-acre model farm in Alyinlo Village, Pyinmana Township, Nay Pyi Taw Council Area, on 7 February. Agriculture Department under the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation has opened plant clinics with the assistance of the Centre for Agriculture and Biosciences International-CABI of European countries since 2013-14 fiscal year. Deputy Director of the department Dr Kyin Kyin Win explained the clinic will give advices on use of pesticides, best ways to produce organic fruits and vegetables, symptoms of pests and infections. The department assigns two agriculturists as plant doctors at the clinics from 7 am to 11 am every Tuesday to give service to the farmers.

The department has opened the plant clinics in Pathein, Kyaukgyi and Pyapon in Ayeyawady Region, Nyaunglebin, Taungoo and Thayawady in Bago Region, Taikkyi, Hlegu, Kungyangon and Kawhmu in Yangon Region and Koeywa Thabyegon Village in Ottarathiri Township, Alyinlo Village in Pyinmana Township and Kyuntetpe Village in Dekkhinathiri Township. Plans are underway to open more clinics in Sagaing Region and Mon State.

Taungtha Tsp to hold ceremony to mark Myanmar Children’s Day

TAUNTHA, 8 Feb — A coordination meeting to observe the Myanmar Children’s Day was held at the hall of Township General Administration Department in Taungtha, Mandalay Region, on 6 February. Township Administrator U Aung Kyaw Nyunt explained purpose of holding the commemorative day and admiration to General Aung San.

Township authorities will organize the extempore talks contest, essay, article, poem and other contests and funfair in commemoration of the Myanmar Children’s Day. The meeting was attended by township administrator, departmental officials, local authorities and members of Township Development Affairs Committee.

Departmental officials share knowledge about consumer rights protection

PYINOO LWIN, 8 Feb — Mandalay Region Commercial and Consumer Department, consumer dispute committee and Agro-based Consumer Producers Association and the fruit and flowers association jointly organized the talks on consumer rights protection at the city hall in PyinOoLwin, Mandalay Region, on 5 February. It was attended by secretary U Swe Tint Kyu and member director-general (Rtd) Professor Dr Aung Myint, departmental officials, teachers, departmental staff, entrepreneurs, shopkeepers and media totalling about 350.

A combined team comprising officials of consumer dispute committee, Food and Drug Administration, District Development Affairs Committee and Health Department made surprise checks of foodstuffs at Myoma market in PyinOoLwin in the afternoon. Officials of the team inspected sales of foodstuffs whether shopkeepers sell inappropriate foods. They gave advices to shopkeepers not to sell inappropriate foods.

Thit Mu Ko (Mandalay)

Inter-village road under construction in Nyaunglebin Tsp

NYAUNGLEBIN, 8 Feb — Gravel is being placed on two miles and four furlongs long inter-village road in Nyaunglebin Township, Bago Region. Metal Dragon Co Ltd constructs the rural road linking Zigongyi, Kyachaung and Kyaban villages, funded K13 million by Department of Rural Development in 2014-15 fiscal year.

Head of Bago District Department of Rural Development U Aung Kyaw Moe and Senior Engineer U Thein Kyaw inspected progress of road construction. On completion, people from rural areas where the road passes will enjoy smooth transport.

Nay Lin (Nyaunglebin)

Under supervision of engineers of Township Development Affairs Committee, workers participate in construction of inter-village gravel road.
PM Abe’s approval ratings rise in Japan after hostage crisis

MUNICH, 8 Feb — Iran’s Zarif denies warning US of possible Rouhani demise

Iran’s foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif gestures during an open debate at the 51st Munich Security Conference at the ‘Bayerischer Hof’ hotel in Munich on 8 Feb, 2015. — REUTERS

Iran’s Zarif denies warning US of possible Rouhani demise

Tokyo, 8 Feb — The Japanese government scored higher public approval ratings for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s handling of the hostage crisis involving two Japanese captured in Syria and killed by Islamic State militants, polls published this week showed.

Japan’s biggest daily Yomiuri found that support for Abe’s government had risen to 58 percent from 53 percent in January. The paper surveyed 1,054 people by telephone on Friday and Saturday for the poll, which was the first since the hostages were killed.

A separate poll released by Kyodo on Saturday also showed an increase in support for Abe. More than 60 percent of respondents said they approved of the government’s response to the hostage crisis.

Islamic State militants beheaded journalist Kenji Goto last month, a week after the group released footage appearing to show the beheaded body of another Japanese hostage, Haruna Yukawa.

Abe has vowed to step up humanitarian aid to the militant group’s opponents in the Middle East and bring the killers to justice. The gruesome executions, and the recordings of Goto released by the militant group captured the attention of the pacific nation.

A majority of the Japanese surveyed by both Yomiuri and Kyodo agreed with Japan’s plan to continue humanitarian aid to regions affected by the Islamic State.

In terms of how Japan should respond to the Islamic State threat, 57 percent of people polled by Kyodo said any response should be non-military.

Abe’s popularity had slipped in recent polls after the resignations of key cabinet ministers and due to Japan’s floundering economy, though his party won a landslide snap election in December.

The killings of the hostages have fanned calls to allow Japan’s long-constrained military to conduct overseas rescue missions as part of Abe’s push for a more muscular security posture.

Reuters

North Korea fires short-range missiles off coast

Seoul, 8 Feb — North Korea fired five short-range missiles off its east coast on Sunday, in a demonstration of military muscle by the secretive state amid escalating rhetoric against the United States and South Korea. The missiles hit the sea after about 200 km (120 miles), a South Korean defense ministry official said.

North Korea frequently fires short-range missiles off its coast as part of military drills. The United Nations imposed sanctions banning North Korea from launching longer-range ballistic missiles, but not short-range missiles.

Sunday’s show of firepower marked the 67th anniversary of the formation of North Korea’s armed forces by state founder Kim II Sung, when the Korean peninsula was divided

into the North and South.

North Korea in recent days also test-fired a new anti-ship cruise missile.

North Korea has increased the scale of air and naval military drills in recent weeks ahead of the annual US-South Korean military exercises on the Korean peninsula, with its leader Kim Jong Un commanding his troops. Pyongyang regularly protests over the drills, which it says are a rehearsal for war.—Reuters

Bangkok, 8 Feb — Thailand’s military government has denied former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra permission to travel overseas to ensure she is in the country to face criminal charges later this month, a government spokesman said on Sunday.

The military toppled the remnants of Yingluck’s government in a coup last May, ending months of demonstrations on the streets of Bangkok that had paralysed her administration, and the government in its entirety, supported our efforts in the negotiations,” said Zarif.

“Everybody has taken every necessary measure to make sure we succeed. All Iranians know this. If we fail, and I hope we won’t, they (Iranians) will not consider us responsible for that failure. They will consider attempts (to ask) too much from Iran as a reason for failure,” the report quoted the three senior Iranian officials as saying.

Zarif said that if Iran and major world powers, including the United States, Germany, France, Britain, Russia and China, failed to reach an agreement it would not be Iran’s fault. He said the negotiations had Rouhani’s support.

“I believe the entire Iranian population under-
Australian PM brings forward vote on leadership to Monday

Sydney, 8 Feb — Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, fighting for his political life, said he would bring forward to Monday a meeting of his party to declare the leadership challenge and allow deputy leadership positions to be voted on.

Abbott, a millionaire lawyer and former investment banker, has not yet said he will challenge Abbott directly but on Sunday he gave the strongest indication yet he would.

“If for whatever reason, the leadership of a political party is vacant, then any member of the party can stand ... without any disloyalty to the person whose leadership has been declared,” Turnbull told reporters outside a function in Sydney.

Abbott has admitted mistakes as pressure intensified on his leadership in recent weeks, and vowed to be more “collegial” and “consultative” in his approach after several of his so-called captain’s calls backfired on his administration.

Political analysts said Abbott’s move to bring forward the vote on his leadership would give any challenger less time to accumulate support from colleagues, who will return to the nation’s capital, Canberra, for parliament on Monday.

“My reading of this is that there is very strong support behind the prime minister,” said Nick Cater, a conservative commentator.

However, the move appeared to backfire with at least some of Abbott’s colleagues. Influenient law-maker Arthur Sinodinos — chief of staff for Abbott’s mentor, long-serving former prime minister John Howard — and former minister Teresa Gambaro were both scathing in their criticism of the decision.

If Abbott is ousted, Australia is faced with having its sixth prime minister in eight years.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, deputy leader of Abbott’s party, has also been touted as either a potential successor to Abbott or party deputy under Turnbull.

Bishop, seen as one of the best-performing ministers in Abbott’s Cabinet, has said she will vote against the motion but has not ruled out standing if the positions are declared vacant.

She was met by Turnbull at the function in Sydney, a party fund-raising event.

Opinion polls have consistently shown voters prefer Turnbull to lead the party but his views on a carbon trading scheme, marriage equality and support for an Australian republic have made him unpopular with the right wing of his party.

Removing Abbott would need support from more than 51 of the 102 members of the federal Liberal Party at the party room vote.

Gov’t stops photographer from going to Syria, confiscates passport

Tokyo, 8 Feb — The Foreign Ministry on Saturday stopped Japanese freelance photographer Yuichi Sugimoto from travelling to Syria by confiscating his passport, the first time it has taken such a step.

Sugimoto, a 58-year-old resident of Niigata city in Niigata Prefecture, has criticized the government move, saying it infringes on freedom of speech.

The ministry said it took the action in accordance with a provision in the passport law that allows it to confiscate a person’s passport if the government determines them from travelling in order to protect their life.

The passport confiscation, coming in the wake of the release of a video purportedly showing the killing of Japanese journalist Kenji Goto by Islamic State, could spur discussions about the constitutional guarantee of freedom to travel to foreign countries.

Sugimoto told Kyodo News late Saturday and early Sunday that he was due to leave Japan for Istanbul, Turu, on 27 February, and then head to Syria after meeting up with a former soldier who he said had previously served as a guide for the slain journalist.

Sugimoto said he did not have plans to enter areas controlled by Islamic State, but rather intended to cover refugee camps inside Syria. He was due to return to Japan on 12 March.

“I’ve been taking safety measures all along. I would definitely retreat if I felt my life was in danger. It is my job to come back alive and tell (my story),” Sugimoto said by phone.

Passport confiscation “robs us of our rights and shows that (Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s government) has turned its fangs against the public,” he said.

“It is outrageous.”

Given the hostage crisis, the ministry and police had asked Sugimoto to refrain from travelling to Syria, but he remained firm in his decision to go to the war-torn country, prompting officials at the prime minister’s office to contemplate action, according to a ministry source.

According to Sugimoto, ministry officials and police officers told him in front of his home on Saturday night that unless he returned his passport, he would be arrested. He subsequenntly complied with the ministry order.

Sugimoto says he has covered conflict zones over the years, visiting Iraq in 2003 and travelling in Syria in 2012 and 2013 in connection with his work.

TransAsia says to cancel more flights following crash

Taipei, (China), 8 Feb — TransAsia Airways said on Sunday it would cancel 52 flights only next week, in addition to the 90 already cancelled after one of its aircraft crashed into a river in Taiwan last week, killing at least 40 of the 58 people on board.

On Friday, Taiwan’s Aviation Safety Council said preliminary findings of the black box showed the almost-new turboprop ATR 72-600 failed to produce enough power after take-off, leaving one engine was turned off and restarted.

“We’ve cancelled 90 flights in the last three days. We’ll cancel another 52 on Monday and Tuesday combined,” said Amy Chen, a vice president of the Taipei-based airline.

Rescuers have recovered 40 bodies, with three still missing following the crash on 4 February. Fifteen people survived.

In the wake of flight GE225’s crash, Taiwan’s aviation authorities ordered TransAsia pilots to take proficiency tests, according to the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA).

Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said at an event in Tel Aviv on Saturday night that Netanyahu’s intention to speak at a joint meeting of the US Congress on 3 March, just two weeks ahead of Israel’s parliament elections.

He said that the planned speech, which would present a hardline approach toward a nuclear Iran amid the ongoing attempts by the world powers and Iran to reach a final agreement on its nuclear program, would produce “enough heat” after take-off, revealing one engine was turned off and restarted.

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Former Justice Minister Tzipi Livni said at an event in Tel Aviv on Saturday night that Netanyahu’s intention to speak at a joint meeting of the US Congress on 3 March, just two weeks ahead of Israel’s parliament elections.

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Monday, 9 February, 2015

Shall we have another significant day like Union Day?

By Kyaw Thura

There can be little doubt that Union Day has been the most significant event in Myanmar throughout history. It is safe to assume that the great day paved the way for the proclamation of independence from colonial rule.

It was on 12 February 1947 that the mainland and the hilly region came together to reclaim national sovereignty from imperialists by speaking with one voice on that issue. Given its great symbolic significance of binding all people from different ethnic groups together under the leadership of General Aung San, that day has since then been commemorated as Union Day without missing a single year.

Despite independence regained in 1948, ethnic armed conflicts have arisen as a direct consequence of colonial legacies. It is however encouraging to witness that the government has been holding out an olive branch to ethnic armed groups, a few of whom still remain to exchange arms for peace.

President U Thein Sein has hinted at every opportunity that the whole country longs for another significant day like Union Day, which is why he expects a nationwide ceasefire accord to be signed on 12 February. Now is an opportune time for parties to armed conflict to bear the primary responsibility to take all feasible steps to keep up the irresistible momentum for ongoing peace process. We have had enough of grave violence in armed conflict that human conscience will not accept.

It is really quite impossible to express anything with absolute exactitude unless that thing is so abstracted from the real world as to not represent any real thing. American physicist Richard Feynman once stated. In no sense can peace be said to be intangible.

Write for us

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.

Education in Singapore: Universities and International Schools

By Sayar Mya


And my better half are on a visit to Singapore for about one month to have fun with our grandchildren from Campbelltown of New South Wales in Australia, during the kids’ school holidays. We are staying at the condominium of our daughter near world famous Singapore Botanical Gardens. She is working in that country.

We have had a nice time in Singapore with the grand children for two weeks, and they left for Sydney on 31 January.

As I have already written in an article entitled “Education in Singapore: Preschool Playgroup to Junior College”, I need to supplement with the information about the functioning of Universities and International Schools in Singapore.

Singapore has six national universities, namely (1) National University of Singapore; (2) Nanyang Technological University; (3) Singapore Management University; (4) Singapore University of Technology & Design; (5) Singapore Institute of Technology and (6) SIM University.

The National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University each have more than 30,000 students and provide a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs including doctoral degrees. Both are also established as research universities with thousands of research staff and graduate students. As of 2012, both universities are ranked among the “Top 50 in the World”.

A third university, Singapore Management University (SMU), opened in 2000, is home to more than 7,000 students and comprises six schools offering undergraduate, graduate, and PhD programs in Business Management, Accountancy, Economics, Information Systems Management, Law and the Social Sciences. The University has an Office of Research, a number of institutes and centers of excellence, and provides public and customized programs for working professionals through its Office of Executive and Professional Education.

The fourth university, privately run SIM University (UniSIM), was opened in 2005. The university currently admits only part-time students and offers part-time degree programs to working adults. In 2012, the government granted UniSIM a national university status and plans are ongoing to expand the university with offering of new full-time degree programs. Two other public institutions are also sponsored by the government. They are the Singapore University of Technology and Design and the Singapore Institute of Technology. Many private universities exist, including foreign universities which have established campuses in Singapore such as the “Chicago Business School” and “Technische Universität München”.

The James Cook University Singapore, University of Adelaide, Curtin University of Technology Singapore, University of New Brunswick, Queen Margaret University, Temple University, The City University of New York, Baruch College, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Aventis School of Management, Curtin University of Technology & University of Wales Institute, Cardiff of UK have established “offshore campuses” in Singapore.

[Note: An “offshore campus”, or overseas branch campus, is a franchised operation that a tertiary or higher education institution creates in order to expand its operations overseas beyond the borders where its main headquarters are operating with the bidding of the host country’s government. The theory behind this idea is the provision of a tertiary institution’s programs through direct contact with the tertiary institution’s own faculty and with its own facilities, rather than surrendering the responsibility to private offshore course providers who may offer courses approved by rival institutions.]

Setting up an “offshore campus” also allows potential students to study for an institution’s program at a much lesser cost than studying in the country where the institution is located. Many American, Australian, British and Canadian tertiary institutions have used this model to expand their operations overseas, particularly in Asia and the Middle East. Additionally, the majority of programs offered are “Business-Related” courses.

Singapore government has planned the fourth public university, namely Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), to meet the rising demand for university education. The university opened its doors at its Dover Road interim campus in April 2012. Its permanent campus at Changi opened in January 2015.

A fifth public institution Singapore Institute of Technology was announced in 2009. The institution starts in 2010 and is intended to provide an upgrading pathway for polytechnic graduates.

International Schools and Private Schools

Due to the residing large expatriate community, Singapore is a host to many international schools. International and private schools in Singapore generally do not admit Singapore students without the permission from the Ministry of Education.

However, on 29 April 2004 the Ministry of Education permitted three new international schools to be set up without permission being needed to admit Singapore students. These schools must follow the compulsory policies set by the Ministry such as (a) playing the national anthem; (b) taking the pledge every morning, and (c) following the nation’s policies on bilinguism. These schools are (1) Anglo-Chinese School (International), (2) Hwa Chong International School and (3) SJI International School. These private schools run by the boards of other locally renowned institutions. The school fees are 15 to 20 percent lower than those of foreign international schools. Their intake includes students from countries such as Malaysia, India, Indonesia, People’s Republic of China, Taiwan, South Korea, Philippines, Vietnam, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

Established under the “Private Education Act”, the Council for Private Education is a statutory board empowered with the legislative power to regulate the private education sector. In addition to its role as the sectoral regulator of private education institutions, the Council facilitates capability development efforts to uplift standards in the local private education industry.

(To be continued)
People of Myanmar and Astrology: Days of the Week

By Nyi Swe Min

No sooner has it uttered the first words in life, “U-We, U-We”, pressed with the Nay Pyi Taw, the People of Myanmar inevitably correspond with astrology. “After the questions ‘male or female’, the question ‘what-day-born’ is to follow. Although it had nothing to do with the teaching of Lord Buddha, astrology takes prominent part in Myanmar way of life. It is believed that the names of the week are directly related with planets in the solar system and called after the respective planet. The planet in ascendency at the time of the birth influences a person’s whole life.

Finding out on what day the baby was born, an elderly person who has sufficiently sound knowledge in astrology will give name in accordance with the birth day. In this aspect, different letters of the alphabet have direct connections with the planets.

For example, the first five letters of the Myanmar Alphabet Ka (က), Kha (ခ), Ga (ဂ), Nga (န), Wa (ဝ) represents Monday planet (Lunar). Therefore, the name of the Monday-born must start with the first five letters in spelling, Kyaw, Khin, Ngwe and so on. Most of the names that follow the prefixes are chosen in line with astrological calculation. As Monday and Wednesday are friendly pairs, the prefix is usually followed the letters Kyaw (က), Kyat (ခ), Lai (ဂ), Lwin (န), Gaing (ဝ) belonging to the Wednesday. However, other letters can follow it in accordance with particular astrological calculation for the baby. In spite of being numerology popular among people of these days. People in the country still adhere to this way of giving names.

It is also believed that the day of the birth was born has somewhat influence on its character and behaviour. For example, Friday-born is supposed to be talkative and Saturday-born has strong and forceful mind and so on.

Most of the fortunate-telling for the baby is usually done in accordance with the day on which it was born.

Days of the week are divided into two sets of the pair; the friendly and the hostile. The friendly and the hostile pairs are further divided into four groups respectively: inner friendly, outer friendly and inner hostile, outer hostiles.

They are all noted in the monastery; the outer friendly pair are considered to make his parents more prosperous, the outer hostile pair are considered to bring plenty of wealth. “Thar Na Se, Moo Hmwe” (သာရာ နေ စခြင်) means that Saturday-born first son will bring a lot of trouble to his parents. So, the father of Saturday-born first son has to make a leap over it, carrying a sword on his shoulder to evade the evils on the other hands, it is believed that Saturday-born eldest son will make his parents more prosperous “So no Thar Hnaung Mi Na Kaung” (သာရာ ဟွောင် မိုး ကျင်း) means that Saturday-born eldest son will bring a lot of trouble to his parents.

Furthermore, days of the birth has greater influence on choosing the partner of life. Most of Myanmar girls in olden days did not make their decisions in choosing their life-partners recklessly without knowing the day of birth. A girl used to choose a young man who was born on one of her friendly days. Rarely did she choose a youth born on any of her hostile day because if she did so, it was believed her life will be in short duration or she will be in trouble for the rest of life. She would be in poverty. Only the combination of friendly days could bring the couple happiness, long life and prosperity.

Now-a-days, some of Myanmar still keep the custom of doing usual bathing or shampooing in accordance with rhymes of astrological calculation for the baby. “Thar Hla Shwe Taung Ye Ko Shuang” (သာရာ လှ စောင်း ဗျာ စောင်း) meaning No son shall do bathing on Friday, Wednesday and Saturday. On the other hand, the day on which usual bathing should be done is also appointed as “Aung San Phyoe Ye Cho Ye” (အဲခင် စနေ ပိုး ဗျာ ဗျာ) meaning Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday are the most suitable for bathing.

There are another two kinds of days, viz, lucky days or kingly days (Yetyazar) and unlucky days (Pyatsada) on which whether someone should do something which has been done on lucky days would certainly bring hardships or obstacles or even failure and only those which have been done on Lucky days would be successful.

The following is a story used to be told by Upper Myanmar People humorously connecting with Lucky days and Unlucky days.

Once upon a time, two monks had an assignment to travel a long journey by boat. One of the monks together with his disciples started his journey on one of the unlucky days without paying heed to any suggestion not to go. But the second monk chose the next day being a lucky day to start his journey. As the boatmen of the first monk rowed so slowly that the boat conveying the second monk and his disciple caught up with them in a short time. While the two boats were travelling along side by side in the river, a storm broke out and the waves both the storm and the waves both of the boats turned up-side-down and so the two monk and their disciples had to swim across the river.

Then one disciple of the monks who had started on Unlucky day reproached his master for travelling on Unlucky day. Then the monk replied, “Well, if I met the mishap as I travelled on unlucky day, then why did the boat traveling on lucky day face with the same mishap?” Then his disciple fell dumb as he had found no answer to give.

Sabbe Sattī Kamma Sa Kā

3rd Myanmar Development Cooperation Forum

“Building on Foundations — Focusing towards Future Inclusive Development”

7 – 8 February 2015

Nay Pyi Taw

2015 MYANMAR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FORUM JOINT STATEMENT

1. On the 7th and 8th of February 2015, Myanmar’s development partners participated in the 3rd Myanmar Development Cooperation Forum under the theme of “Building Upon Foundations – Focusing Towards Future Inclusive Development”. Stakeholders included the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Members of Parliament, and representatives from political parties, international development partners, representatives of international and local civil society, the private sector and academia.

2. On this occasion we came together to discuss our joint progress ensuring effective, efficient and inclusive development cooperation is able to bring about the most benefit for the country and for the people of Myanmar. In doing so, we recall and reaffirm our joint commitments expressed within the Nay Pyi Taw Accord for Effective Development Cooperation, the localization of global development effectiveness principles in Myanmar.

3. We also recall the Joint Statement issued at the conclusion of the 2014 Myanmar Development Coopera- tion Forum for a renewed commitment to ensuring development cooperation in Myanmar works effectively to benefit all communities, including those most vulnerable, and to ensure they can benefit from, and be involved in shaping, Myanmar’s transition to inclusive growth.

4. As increasing numbers of development partner proj- ects and programmes come online, managing them effectively will become a shared priority. In accordance with the 2014 Nay Pyi Taw Accord Action Plan we have set up an online Aid information Management System. This will help us better direct support to where it is needed most, and to determine what is working and what areas require additional attention. While development partners have committed to publish details of their work and achievements to this system, the Government is also increasing its commitment to transparently sharing through membership of the International Aid Transparency Initiative, and a commitment to joining the Open Government Partnership and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

5. Those present at this Forum recommitted themselves to working with the following, inclusive and interoperable partnerships with Myanmar to support the realization of its development potential through the observance of the Nay Pyi Taw Accord for Effective Development Cooperation. We also look toward the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation and seek to remain a committed partner, both sharing and receiving lessons learned as we progress upon our development effectiveness journey.

This Joint Statement was approved by acclamation on 8 February 2015 at the 3rd Myanmar Development Cooperation Forum.

3rd MDCF concludes in Nay Pyi Taw

Nay Pyi Taw, 8 Feb

— The 3rd Myanmar Development Cooperation Forum held under the theme “Building upon Foundations — Focusing towards Future Inclusive Development” concluded successfully at the Myanmar International Convention Centre (2) in Nay Pyi Taw on Sunday.

Union Minister Dr Kan Zaw delivered a speech at the forum, team leaders including Dr Daw Yin Yin Nwe, U Tin Htun Oo, Daw Nwe Nwe Win, Dr Daw San San Aye, U Min Zarni Lin, U Khant Zaw, U Kyaw Zeya and Daw Khine Khine Nwe read out reports on country's economic development, strategic routes to development of Myanmar, land resource management, public finance management, social protection, institutional changes and public administration, regional integration, promotion of cooperation and interconnectedness, rural development and poverty reduction, innovative partnerships-private sector and development cooperation.

Then, participants engaged in discussions on the outcomes and declarations of the forum.

At the press conference after the forum, Union Min- ister Dr Kan Zaw explained the outcome and declara- tion of the forum.

Present at the forum were union ministers, deput- ty ministers, representatives of the hluttaw and political parties, economic ministers from state/region govern- ments, representatives of donor countries, international organizations, the UN, INGOs and officials.—MNA

Monday, 9 February, 2015
Merkel defends Ukraine arms stance in face of US criticism

MUNICH, 8 Feb — Germany’s Angela Merkel said on Saturday that sending arms to help Ukraine fight pro-Russian separatists would not solve the crisis there, drawing sharp rebukes from US politicians who accused Berlin of turning its back on an ally in distress.

The heated exchanges at a security conference in Munich pointed to cracks in the transatlantic consensus on how to confront Russian President Vladimir Putin over a deepening conflict in eastern Ukraine that has killed more than 5,000.

Ukraine’s military said on Saturday that pro-Russian separatists had stepped up shelling of government forces and appeared to be amassing troops for new offensives on the key railway town of Debaltseve and the coastal city of Mariupol.

The rebel offensive has triggered a flurry of shuttle diplomacy, with Merkel and French President Francois Hollande jetting to Moscow on Friday to try to convince Putin to do a peace deal.

But European officials acknowledge that the Russian leader may have little incentive to negotiate now, preferring to sit back and watch as separatists seize more territory, underlining a ceasefire agreement clinched last September in the Belarus capital Minsk.

The German leader conceded in Munich that it was uncertain whether a Franco-German peace plan presented to Kiev and Moscow this week would succeed.

But she rejected the notion that sending weapons to Kiev, an idea being considered by US President Barack Obama, would help resolve the conflict.

“I understand the debate but I believe that more weapons will not lead to de-escalation,” said the conservative German leader, who has led western efforts to try to resolve the crisis through negotiations and will travel to Washington on Sunday for talks with Obama.

US senators Lyndsey Graham and John McCain, who attended the conference, were wthering in their criticism of the German stance, which is supported by other big European countries like France.—Reuters

Mexican cartel ‘Queen of the Pacific’ to be released from prison

MEXICO CITY, 8 Feb — A jailed Mexican drug smuggler known as the “Queen of the Pacific” is to be released after partially completing a five-year sentence on money-laundering charges, the attorney general’s office said on Saturday.

A federal judge in Mexico’s western Jalisco state accepted the appeal of Sandra Avila Beltran and ordered her immediate release, saying her five-year sentence was based on the same crime that triggered previous stints behind bars.

Avila Beltran, the highest-profile woman linked to Mexico’s drug trade, was expected to be set free later on Saturday, a federal security official said on condition of anonymity.

Avila Beltran was first detained in Mexico in 2007. She allegedly helped build the Sinaloa cartel in the 1990s with Joaquin “Shorty” Guzman, Mexico’s most-wanted drug boss until he was captured early last year.

Avila Beltran, niece of Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo, known as the godfather of the Mexican drug trade, was extradited to the United States in August 2012.

She is known as “Queen of the Pacific” because of her success developing smuggling routes along Mexico’s Pacific Coast into California.

Colombia’s FARC rebels invite Miss Universe to attend peace talks

BOGOTA, 8 Feb — Colombia’s Marxist FARC rebels have invited the newly-crowned Miss Universe Paulina Vega, a native of the country’s Caribbean coast, to attend their peace negotiations with the government, a bid to end 50 years of fighting.

The 22-year-old Vega, a business student and model from the northern city of Barranquilla, was named Miss Universe in late January and has said in interviews that she would be willing to travel to the talks.

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“We have read with great interest your desire to contribute to your good works to reaching peace,” the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, said in a statement on their website late on Friday.

“We are very happy to accompany you on your journey to Havana, at this time we invite you to make a visit,” added the FARC, which has been holding negotiations with the government in Cuba since late last year.—Reuters

Venezuelan president condemns new US “conspiracy” against his country

CARACAS, 8 Feb — Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro reacted on Saturday a new “conspiracy” by the US government to use the Inter-American Democratic Charter (IDC) of the Organization of American States (OAS) to justify foreign intervention in his country.

In a televised broadcast, Maduro urged US President Barack Obama to rectify this attitude against his administration and demanded respect to Venezuela’s sovereignty.

“I reject a document of the National Security Strategy of the United States government because it’s an interventionist text,” he said. Maduro explained that the report publicly presented on Saturday by Obama indicated that Washington would support “certain citizens of countries where the full exercise of democracy is at risk, as in Venezuela.”

“I make an urgent call to the governments of Latin America to support Venezuela and reject the new conspiracy organized by the United States against our democracy,” said Maduro. According to Maduro, the IDC is an instrument adopted in 2001 by a majority of right-wing OAS leaders to support an intervention in Caracas.

He added that in the next few days he will send a letter to the US president expressing his government’s “independent” position and addressing “disturbing statements” made recently by Obama.

“I demand respect to our nation and government from President Obama,” he said. He urged the Venezuela people to “continue overcoming conspiracies” and warned the local opposition that his government won’t allow any form of violence in the South American nation.—Vinhua
African nations pledge 8,700 for anti-Boko Haram force

YANGON, 8 Feb — African nations pulling together a regional force to fight Boko Haram's incursions into Nigeria pledged 8,700 soldiers on Saturday. The pledge could put the regional force at 11,000, the Nigerian news agency quoted as saying by the United Nations Security Council.

The Boko Haram has been fighting in Nigeria's northeast for five years and controls most of the region's territory. It has also twice seized the Nigerian capital, Abuja, in recent months. Nigeria's military is struggling against the five-year insurgency, which has killed thousands of Nigerians and displaced some 1.5 million people.

The group's killing of a captured Nigerian soldier on Saturday, the first of its kind since the group's resurgence last year, reflects the hostility of its wealthy society and growing isolation for the Gulf states, which employs many Nigerians.

The GCC, a six-nation bloc comprising energy-rich Gulf states, may signal the end of a long-term resistance to regional forces.

Gulf countries, opposition say Houthi takeover in Yemen a 'coup'

Yemen has been in political limbo since the president and prime minister resigned last month after the Houthis seized the presidential palace. On Friday, the movimiento dissoluted parliament and said it would set up a new interim government.

Abdel Malik al-Houthi, the group's leader, said on Saturday he was open to all parties playing a role in Yemen's future.

"Our hand is extended to every political force in this country... the door is open for partnership, cooperation and brotherhood and now everybody bears their responsibility for building, not destruction," he said in a televised speech.

But he warned: "Any move which targets this people, its economy, security or stability is unacceptable, and the great Yemeni people will confront any such conspiracies." Parties from across Yemen's political spectrum declined to support the Houthis' moves.

Yemen has been in turmoil since the country's last president, Abdu Rabbo Mansour Hadi, fled to Saudi Arabia after being overthrown by the Houthis in 2012. The Houthis are allied to Iran and have been fighting a five-year insurgency against the government.

The Houthis control most of the country's north and have taken over several cities, including the capital, Sanaa. They have also launched attacks on Saudi Arabia's oil facilities.

The conflict has been complicated by a separate battle in Benghazi, where forces allied to the government launched an offensive in mid-October to expel Islamist armed groups.

Jordan army planes bomb IS targets

AAMAN, 8 Feb — Jordan carried out a third straight day of air strikes on Islamic State targets on Saturday, in response to the group’s killing of a captive Jordanian pilot.

Gulf countries, opposition say Houthi takeover in Yemen a ‘coup’

Yemen has been in turmoil since the country’s last president, Abdu Rabbo Mansour Hadi, fled to Saudi Arabia after being overthrown by the Houthis in 2012. The Houthis are allied to Iran and have been fighting a five-year insurgency against the government.

The conflict has been complicated by a separate battle in Benghazi, where forces allied to the government launched an offensive in mid-October to expel Islamist armed groups.

The UN is hoping to get both sides to agree on a national unity government. It plans to arrange local ceasefires and prisoner exchanges as a first step to defuse the conflict.

The conflict has been complicated by a separate battle in Benghazi, where forces allied to the government launched an offensive in mid-October to expel Islamist armed groups.

Tripoli / BENGHAZI, 8 Feb — Libya’s warring factions will resume UN-sponsored talks on Tuesday inside the country to try to resolve a struggle between two governments and parliaments, officials from both sides said on Saturday.

The news came as new clashes between pro-gov-ernment forces and Islamists in the eastern Benghaz city killed seven soldiers, bringing the death toll of four months of fighting there to almost 700, medics said.

Libya has been in chaos since a NATO-backed revolt ousted Muammar Gaddafi nearly four years ago. Two rival governments allied to armed groups are fighting for legitimacy in a conflict that Western powers fear might lead to full-scale civil war in the oil-producing nation.

The opposition of the GCC, a six-nation bloc comprising energy-rich Gulf states, may signal growing isolation for the impoverished Yemen and reflects the hostility of its majority Sunni Muslim neighbours towards the Ira-nian-backed Houthis.

"This Houthi coup is a dangerous escalation which we reject and is unacceptable. It totally contradicts the spirit of pluralism and coexistence which Yemen has known," the GCC was quoted as saying by KUNA news agency.

The GCC called the takeover a “threat to the security and stability of the region and the interests of its people.”

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BRAZIL'S RUSSOEU POPULARITY PLUNGES AMID SCANDAL, BAD ECONOMY

SÃO PAULO, 8 Feb — Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff's popularity has plunged by nearly half since her recent re-election as a severe government corruption scandal, an economic slowdown and surging prices for electricity, gasoline and bus fares left voters feeling misled. The Datosfolha poll of 4,000 people published on Saturday showed those interviewed who rated Rousseff’s performance as “excellent or good” fell to 23 percent from 42 percent in December, just after she won her second term in a tight race.

Over the same period, the percentage of people who rated her as a “bad or terrible” president rose from 44 to 24 percent. It was the first time since Rousseff took office in 2011 that the state-run oil company, Petrobras, has witnessed more negative marks than positive ones.

The remainder of respondents, 33 percent, rated Rousseff’s government as average, which was unchanged since December. Rousseff promised during last year’s campaign that she would not have to dramatically raise utility prices or slash government spending, but since her October reelection she has done both to try to regain investor confidence and revive an economy that has sputtered since she took office.

The economy is expected to shrink in the first months of the year, annualized inflation is above 7 percent and rising, and many Brazilians are facing the possibility of water and energy shortages due to a prolonged drought.

Sixty percent of respondents said they believed Rousseff had lied more than she told the truth during the campaign.

Meanwhile, 77 percent of respondents said they believed Rousseff knew about corruption in the state-run oil company, Petrobras, which has been under investigation for several years as president and previously as vice president of Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, when she was chairwoman of the board.

Rousseff has denied any knowledge of the graft scheme, which investigators say siphoned billions of dollars.

The worsening of Rousseff’s image is consistent across age groups, but the poorest socioeconomic groups, who benefited most from the policies of Rousseff and her mentor, Lula, showed less disapproval than higher income earners. The rich showed the highest disapproval.

Union says US refinery strike widened; cites unfair labour practices

HOUSTON, 8 Feb — The United Steelworkers union said on Saturday the strike by US refinery workers is expanding to two more plants early on Sunday due to unfair labour practices by oil companies.

“Management cannot do, Ohio, shortly after 12 am local time on Sunday would bring the number of plants with striking hourly workers to 11, including nine refineries accounting for 13 percent of US refining capacity.”

BP said on Friday it had received notice of the walk-outs at the two refineries, but the Steelworkers had said little about them until Saturday.

The union said in a statement that US refinery owners have outbid Dutch oil company Royal Dutch Shell Plc have failed to discuss health and safety issues and engaged in “bad-faith bargaining, including the refusal to bargain over mandatory subjects; undue delays in providing information; impeded bargaining; and threats issued to workers if they joined the strike.”

A Shell spokesman said the company was unaware of any unfair labor practice charge filed against it with the US Department of Labour.

“We regret that we have been unable to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement with the USW prior to contract expiration,” said Shell spokesman Ray Fisher. “We remain committed to resolving the remaining issues through collective bargaining at the bargaining table.”

Saturday was the seventh day of the strike, which the USW called on 31 January after it said Shell had walked away from the negotiating table.

About 4,000 workers at refineries in California, Kentucky, Texas and Washington initially left their jobs when the strike began shortly after midnight on 1 February.

Another 1,440 workers will join the picket lines when employees of the BP-operated refineries in Indiana and Ohio leave their jobs early on Sunday.

Oil companies are continuing to operate all but one of the plants with temporary replacement workers. BP said replacement workers would take over operations at the Whiting and Toledo refineries.

Tesoro Corp elected to shut down production at its Martinez, California, refinery by the end of this week because half the plant’s production was already shut due to a planned overhaul.

Since the start of the strike, the union has stressed the safety and health aspects of its proposals to prevent accidents in refineries.

“Management cannot continue to resist allowing workers a stronger voice on issues that could very well make the difference between life and death for too many of them,” said USW International President Leo Gerard, according to the statement issued on Saturday.

ISLAMIC STATE ‘SENTENCED’ US HOSTAGE TO DEATH LAST YEAR

WASHINGTON, 8 Feb — The young American hostage who Islamic State says was killed in a Jordanian air strike was condemned to death by the militant group last year, according to an American Muslim activist.

Islamic State seized worker Kayla Mueller in 2013 in northern Syria and initially gave her a “life sentence” in retaliation for the jailing in Texas of a Pakistani woman whose case is a well-known cause among Islamist militants, said activist Amin Siddiqui.

A US military group who leads a US campaign to free the Pakistani.

The militant group said on Friday that Mueller, a 26-year-old from Prescott, Arizona, was killed when Jordanian fighter jets bombed a building where she was being held. Jordan expressed doubt about the claim and US authorities said they could not confirm it.

Mueller’s family has long asked US officials, aid groups and media outlets, including Reuters, not to use her name for fear the publicity could induce Islamic State to harm her. After Islamic State’s claim on Friday, Mueller’s parents issued a public statement on Friday night, identifying their daughter by name and saying they remained hopeful she was still alive. Mueller’s family has not given details of any communication with the militant group and Saalakhan’s information could not be verified by Reuters.

Saalakhan said that last summer, as Islamic State extended its control over parts of Iraq and Syria, the group threatened to kill Mueller. Saalakhan first mentioned the “sentencing” of Mueller in an open letter to the group he released last year. On 12 July, militants told Mueller’s family she would be executed in 30 days if Pakistani neuroscientist Aafia Siddiqui were not released or the American’s family did not pay a ransom of 5 million euros ($6.6 million), he said. The information about the threats came from a representative of Mueller’s family, Saalakhan said.

Islamic State apparently did not carry out its death sentence after Saalakhan and an Arizona pastor wrote open letters to the group. Siddiqui’s family rejected Islamic State’s attempt to link the two cases and said it did not want Mueller to suffer.

Members of the United Steelworkers union picket the Tesoro refinery in Carson, California on 2 Feb, 2015.—Reuters

WORLD
20 militans lay down arms in E Afghanistan

JALALABAD, (Afghani-
stan), 8 Feb — A total of 20
armed militants laid down
arms and gave up fighting in
the eastern Nangarhar
province with Jalalabad as its
capital, 120 km east of
Kabul on Sunday.

“Joining with these
to the people to the peace
process, the security situation
will be further improved in
Shinwar and adjoining dis-
tricts,” deputy to provincial
governor, Hanif Gardiwal
said in a ceremony to wel-
come the former anti-gov-
ernment fighters.

The former militans
who also handed over their
weapons to police on Sun-
day were active in the
mountainous Shinwar dis-
tric over the past couple of
years, the official added.
Taliban militans fight-
ing the government have
tyet to make comment.

5.1-magnitude quake
hits 13km SE of Nabire,
Indonesia —USGS

HONG KONG, 8 Feb — An earthquake measuring
5.1 on the Richter scale
jolted 13km SE of Nabi-
re, Indonesia at 18:53:23
GMT on Saturday, the US
Geological Survey said.

Three wounded in shooting at
Pittsburgh area shopping mall

PHILADELPHIA, 8 Feb — A gunman wounded three
people at a Macy’s depart-
ment store in a shopping
centre outside Pittsburgh on
Saturday in what police said
was a shooting that targeted
one of the victims.

“We believe that one of
those three people shot was
a targeted individual,” said
Monroeville Police Chief
Doug Cole of the incident
at the Monroeville Mall out-
side Pittsburgh.

The other two victims
were described as bystand-
ers and the suspect was still
at large. Police from sev-
eral departments as well as
FBI agents responded to the
shootings, evacuating the
mall where shoppers hid in
stores after shots were fired.

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Plane with human remains of MH17 tragedy returns to Netherlands

THE HAGUE, 8 Feb — A Dutch military transport
aircraft carrying a coffin for another victim in the
MH17 Flight disaster ar-
ried at Eindhoven Air
Base in the Netherlands on
Saturday.

The plane from the air-
port of the eastern Ukrain-
ian city of Kharkiv was
received by Dutch Defence
Minister Jeanine Hen-
sis-Plasschaert, Interior
Minister Ronald Plasterk
and around 150 relatives.

The Malaysia Airlines
MH17 crashed on 17 July,
2014, killing 298 people on
board, including 196 Dutch
citizens. The Dutch Minis-
ter of Security and Justice
announced on 13 January,
2015 that one more victim
was identified, Forensics
teams in the Netherlands
have so far identified 295
victims with DNA testing.

There have been a total
of eight flights that escort-
red the remains of MH17
victims from Ukraine to the
Netherlands since the crash.

Weather report

BAY INFERENCE: Weather is generally
dil in the Andaman Sea and
partly cloudy in the Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL EVENING
OF THE 9th Febru-
ary, 2015: Weather will be generally
dil in Tanintharyi Region,
Shan, Kayah, Kayin and
Mon States and partly
cloudy in the re-
maining Regions and
States.

STATE OF THE
SEA: Strong easter-
nly winds with moder-
to rough sea are likely
at times off and
along Mon-Tanimthayi
Coasts. Surface wind
speed in strong easter-
nly wind may reach
(30) m.p.h. Seas will be
moderate elsewhere in
Myanmar waters.
Los Angeles, 8 Feb — Singer Ed Sheeran is not expecting to win a Grammy Award. The 23-year-old singer-songwriter said he is not too fussed about the 57th annual ceremony, reported the Daily Spy. "Just being nominated for a Grammy — all the artists say this I know — but honestly I'm not too fussed about winning, just because I probably won't! I never win anything," Sheeran said. "I won the year of the Brits because I was a male and not Adele she won everything else! And I got the VMAs because Pharrell didn't turn up [and] I did. They said, 'He's not here, do you want it?' he added. The 'Don't' singer is nominated for three Grammy Awards this year: Best Pop Vocal Album, Album of the Year and Best Song Written For Visual Media. Sheeran also tipped Sam Smith as his favourite. "I think Sam will win a large amount of them. I don't think he's gonna walk away with nothing." PTI

Inarritu wins top Directors Guild Award for ‘Birdman’

Los Angeles, 8 Feb — Mexican filmmaker Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu won the top Directors Guild Award on Saturday for “Birdman,” his satirical take on show business, raising his and his film’s chances for Oscars in two weeks. The Directors Guild of America’s award for feature film director has correctly predicted the best director Academy Award for 10 of the past 11 years. “I never expected to be here tonight talking to you, never in my life,” Inarritu, 51, said alongside last year’s DGA winner, fellow Mexican Alfonso Cuaron. The other nominees for the DGA award were two-time winner Clint Eastwood for Iraq war drama “American Sniper,” Richard Linklater for coming-of-age tale “Boyhood,” Morten Tyldum for British World War Two story “The Imitation Game” and Wes Anderson for colorful caper “The Grand Budapest Hotel.” The Academy Awards will be held on 22 February and voting concludes on 17 February. Since 1948, there have been only seven occasions when the DGA award winner has not gone on to win the corresponding Academy Award. “Argo” director Ben Affleck won the DGA in 2013 but was not nominated for the best director Oscar award, which was given to Ang Lee for “Life of Pi.”—Reuters

Ryan Gosling in ‘Beauty and the Beast’ movie?

Los Angeles, 8 Feb — Ryan Gosling has reportedly been offered the role of beast in the new “Beauty and the Beast” movie. The ‘Notebook’ star, who made his directing debut with the upcoming ‘Lost River’, has been offered the role opposite Emma Watson.—Reuters

I did a lot which I am not proud of: Justin Bieber

Los Angeles, 8 Feb — Pop star Justin Bieber has admitted he had been putting on a front that made him seem “arrogant or conceited”. The 20-year-old singer, who appeared on “The Ellen DeGeneres Show”, said he has just been pretending to be that way as he tries to navigate becoming an adult. “It was the first time I was on television for a long time and I just was worried about what people were thinking about me. I did a lot of things over the past few years that I’m not proud of… I was just nervous to be in front of people again and talk in front of them… I thought I just looked really extra nervous and I kinda just wanted to explain myself,” he told DeGeneres. Bieber’s explanation on the show was largely well-received and so far picked up close to five million views. “I am a human, right?” Bieber continued. PTI

More women directors needed in Hollywood: Jodie Foster

Los Angeles, 8 Feb — Actress director Jodie Foster feels more women are needed behind the camera in Hollywood to change things. The actress, who started acting when she was just three, has seen a lot of positive changes in the industry but feels more needs to be done for equality, reported People magazine. “When I was growing up in the film business, I never saw a woman’s face,” Foster said during a film festival. “Sometimes it was the lady who played my mom. Or occasionally it would be a makeup artist. But most often it would really just be me and the script supervisor.” And little by little, as time went on, a few female faces started coming onto crews. And it changed everything.” The 52-year-old star still thinks that there is a long way to go. “There aren’t enough women directors. And hopefully that will change. And perhaps that will change with this next generation.”—PTI

Hollywood’s movie tech wizards honoured by Oscars organizers

Los Angeles, 8 Feb — From the team who made it possible to digital curl and trim outrageous hair in “The Hobbit” trilogy to the inventors of a high-speed car chase camera used in James Bond film “Casino Royale”, some of the most ingenious behind-the-scenes innovators were celebrated at a pre-Oscars ceremony on Saturday night. Two weeks before the Oscars, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences handed out its Scientific and Technical Achievement Awards to the visual effects, sound and technical wizards whose work behind the camera is a vital but often unheralded part of making movies. While the Academys Awards on 22 February will present Oscars to actors, directors and others who worked on films released in 2014, the yearly scientific and technical awards honour those who have contributed to the process of film making over a longer period of time, sometimes decades. Presenting the awards were a pair who have had recent breakthrough roles in front of the camera: Margot Robbie, in “The Wolf of Wall Street”, and Miles Teller, the star of “Whiplash”, a current best picture nominee. Robbie thanked the audience for making the film “stunning”. The Beverly Hills event gave awards to 58 individuals for 21 scientific and technical achievements. These usually consist of plaques or certificates but on Saturday two Oscar statuettes were presented, one to veteran sound engineer and Dolby Laboratories executive David W Gray for his groundbreaking work on movie sound. Gray, whose statute came with the Gordon E Sawyer lifetime technical achievement award, has dozens of film credits, including sound work on the 1983 hit “Flashdance” and the 1988 action blockbuster “Die Hard” starring Bruce Willis. He thanked his children “for understanding that dad’s a geek and a complete workaholic.” Also receiving an award was a team that developed SpeedTree, a software that creates virtual vegetation and has been used in the movies “Avatar” and “The Great Gatsby”. Other honorees were the inventors of the MOVA Facial Performance Capture system that records every movement of an actor’s face, enabling facial movements to be reproduced or altered. It has been used in movies including “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button” in 2008 for Brad Pitt’s aging facial effects. That film won the visual effects Oscar.
Juventus continue title charge by easily beating Milan

MILAN, 7 Feb — Juventus continued their charge towards a fourth successive Serie A title as they comfortably swept aside AC Milan 3-1 on Saturday to complete a league double over their old rivals.

Carlos Tevez, Leonardo Bonucci and Alvaro Morata shared the Juventus goals while Luca Antonelli briefly equalised for Milan, who were comprehensively outplayed despite occasional moments of promise.

After Morata added the third in the 63rd minute, it became a case of whether increasingly ragged Milan could keep the score respectable.

Juventus, in danger of turning Serie A into a one-horse race, moved 10 points clear of second-placed AS Roma, who visit Cagliari on Sunday (2:00 pm).

Milan, beaten 1-0 by Juventus at San Siro earlier in the season, are stuck in joint 19th alongside Genoa after losing four of their six league games since the mid-season break.

“We played a good game but, unfortunately, we gave away too many chances and set pieces because we weren’t concentrat- ed enough,” said Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri, who was fired by Milan just over a year ago.

Tevez opened the scor- ing with his 14th league goal from Genoa, headed Milan level from a corner in the 28th minute but that only shook Juventus back into action and Bonucci flicked in Tevez’s header to put them back in front three minutes later. The defender tripped over the advertising hoardings as he celebrated the goal. “We reacted like a great team after the Mi- lan goal,” he said. “That’s Juventus, we know how to react at the right moment.”

Morata completed the job when he fired in the rebound after a long-range Claudio Marchisio shot cannoned off the post.—Reuters

Gerrard’s Everton rivalry ends in tame stalemate

LONDON, 8 Feb — In the Steven Gerrard scrap- book of Merseyside Derby memories, he is unlikely to reserve a page for what is probably his last local hur- rah. A 0-0 Premier League draw against old foes Ever- ton at Goodison Park is not how the Liverpool captain would have dreamt about signing off from the rivals’ habitual battle for superi- ority.

Having terrorised Ever- ton for the best part of 16 years, Saturday’s clash was a rare occasion when Ger- rard, fresh from making his 700th club appearance, had little or no impact.

An overhead kick that was deflected over the bar sent him clear in the 14th minute. Gabriel Paletta gave chase but it was always a lost cause.

Antonelli, making his debut following his move from Genoa, headed Milan level from a corner in the 28th minute but that only shook Juventus back into action and Bonucci flicked in Tevez’s header to put them back in front three minutes later. The defender tripped over the advertising hoardings as he celebrated the goal. “We reacted like a great team after the Mi- lan goal,” he said. “That’s Juventus, we know how to react at the right moment.”

Morata completed the job when he fired in the rebound after a long-range Claudio Marchisio shot cannoned off the post.—Reuters

Toure absence leaves City title hopes in the balance

LONDON, 8 Feb — When Manchester City boss Manuel Pellegrini carries out his post-season analy- sis, he will quickly be able to pinpoint that the wheels came off their campaign when Yaya Toure left for the African Nations Cup.

City are without a vic- tory since Toure departed at the start of January and their 1-1 draw at home to Hull City on Saturday was their fourth consecutive wireless Premier League game, leaving them seven points adrift of Chelsea at the top.

It is not an irretrievable margin, but they look inca- pable of making inroads into that deficit at present, al- though Ivorian Toure is back from injury — impor- tant players will help. We need to try and find other ways to play. It is difficult to know what the reason is for the spark going.”—Reuters
London, 8 Feb — Chelsea landed a potentially decisive blow in the title race with a 2-1 win at Aston Villa on Saturday that put them seven points clear of Manchester City who hit the self-destruct button in a 1-1 draw at home to Hull City.

It briefly looked like both the top two may drop points when Villa ended a near 11-hour goal drought to level the scores at Villa Park but a thunderous finish from Bramsley Ivanovic maximised the embarrassment for Chelsea’s main title rivals.

City needed a stoppage-time free kick from James Milner to rescue a point against relegation-threatened Hull but it still left them winless since the start of the month when midfielder Yaya Toure hauled his side back from the lead of the month when midfielder Yaya Toure hauled his side back from the lead after 35 minutes.

When City waved goodbye to Toure they could not have imagined they would not win a league game in his absence.

Again they struggled for inspiration in midfield and looked likely to drop all three points until Milner curled home from 25 metres.

If they wanted a lessor curler in how to manage the relentless pursuit of points that you need to win the league it was provided by Chelsea.

Jose Mourinho’s side took the lead when their defences were open at the back and we didn’t create chances.

It was a maiden victory for Mourinho at Villa Park and took his team to 56 points from 24 games — not that complacency is part of the Portuguese’s vocabulary.

“It is one more hurdle in the title race but there are many more,” Mourinho told the BBC.

“Every game is difficult. It is possibly the only league in Europe where teams from the bottom can play against the top ones and not just make things difficult but win points.”

Tottenham continued with a 1-0 win against an Arsene Wenger Arsenal side is a relatively rare occurrence, which made Kane’s double strike all the sweeter for the home fans.

The derby looked like following a familiar pattern as Oriol put Arsenal ahead but Kane levelled with a tap-in from close range before producing a superb header to give Spurs 43 points, one ahead of Arsenal.

Sadio Mane lashed the ball home to lift Southampton up to third with 45 points, six clear of Liverpool who drew with Everton in a lifetime clash that was probably Steven Gerrard’s last involvement in a Merseyside derby.

Crystal Palace’s resurgence under Alan Pardew continued with a 1-0 win at Leicester City while Swansea City and Sunderland drew 1-1.

Hull City.

Loic Remy (L) of Chelsea is challenged by Aly Cissokho of Aston Villa during their English Premier League soccer match at Villa Park, Birmingham on 7 Feb, 2015. Reuters

Jores Okore headed in from six metres but parity lasted only until Ivanovic drilled home.

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