A WALL and historic materials believed to date back to the ancient Pyu era have been discovered roughly three and a half miles north of Hpo Lay Lone village in Magway township of the same region, although there is still yet to be any effort to preserve the find, according to local residents.

Bricks found at the location are the same size and appearance of bricks from the ancient Beikthano town. A variety of materials believed to be of the Pyu era include a smoker’s pipe, counting beads, copper plates, cups and figures which were found in the vicinity, said U Su, a local resident of Hpo Lay Lone village.

“A local farmer from Leik Kone village stumbled across a couple of gold trays whilst ploughing his fields near the site of the brick wall about two years ago. There were also people who found silver coins and ancient pots. They sold them off as they didn’t understand the value of such antiquities. Only recently I too went and dug around the site and came across a copper bird, elephant figures and old clay pipes.” U Su explained.

Local residents reportedly believed the existence of the brick wall to be merely rumour, letting it go unrecognised as a valuable site of Myanmar heritage.

“The brick wall mound has been spoken of through the generations as the final resting place of the Queen of the Pyu people, Pan Htwar, who, along with her Pyu people, sought refuge after they were defeated in battle.” commented another local of the Hpo Lay Lone village, U Myant Oo.

There is a local desire for the location of the brick wall mound to be excavated as it is believed there is a connection between it and the World Heritage site of the ancient Beikthano town located on the outskirts of the town of Pyay in Bago Region.

All that is left of the brick wall mound is the brick foundations in an area roughly half an acre in diameter. It is believed that the eastern and western sides of the wall show evidence of doorways when stairwells would have once stood.— Myitmakha News Agency
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Round-up

The 13th regular session of the first Pyidaungsu Hluttaw held its 30th meeting yesterday, seeking parliamentary approval for two bills and debating one draft law.

First, the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw speaker Thura U Shwe Mann announced the recording of the second revision of the bill to amend the Myanmar Gems Law.

The joint bill committee read out a draft of the Pesticide Bill, after which the speaker invited parliamentarians to sign up to discuss the bill.

Next, the parliament approved the draft of the Commercial Tax on Special Goods Bill and the Legal Supports Bill, each with remarks from the president. The two bills will now be sent back to the president.

During a discussion on the draft of the Union Tax Law (2016), deputy ministers Dr Lin Aung, Dr Maung Maung Thein, Brig-Gen Kyaw Zan Myint, U Khin Zaw, U Thaung Tin, U Aung Than Oo, U Than Tun Aung and Daw Lei Lei Thein responded to parliamentarians’ questions about the law.—Myanmar News Agency

Union Peace Conference continues in Nay Pyi Taw

The Union Peace Conference entered its third day, with representatives taking part in separate topical discussions at the Myanmar International Convention Centre II in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. During the paper-reading session, stakeholder groups, including the government, parliament, Tatmadaw, ethnic armed organisations, political parties, ethnic minorities and other invitees read out their papers on the conference’s five agenda items: political issues, economic and social issues, security, land issues and the environment.

Next, representatives from the seven stakeholder groups held discussions on the day’s presentations.

The third day of the Union Peace Conference concluded following a recording of the day’s events.—Myanmar News Agency

Japanese company awards scholarships to Myanmar Maritime University students

JAPAN-based MJ Technology Co., Ltd awarded scholarships to outstanding students from the Myanmar Maritime University yesterday.

It was the second scholarship award presentation by the Japanese company to outstanding maritime students who have performed highest in their respective subjects.

Last year, the MJ Technology Co., Ltd provided ten outstanding students with a scholarship of US$600 each per year.

The company helped 40 graduate students pursue degrees in naval architecture, marine engineering, port and harbour engineering and river and coastal engineering in 2014 and 2015 to take up employment with Japanese companies. The Myanmar Maritime University of the Ministry of Transport has created job opportunities for its students, establishing a connection with 25 shipping companies and three foreign companies and departments.—Myanmar News Agency

Second Employment Expo to be opened in Yangon on Saturday

The career finder resource website, work.com.mm, is holding its second Employment Expo, which will feature booths with staff from over thirty local and foreign companies.

The opening of the expo will take place at Yangon’s MICT Park this Saturday morning at 8:30am.

It is known that the Deputy Union Minister of Workers, Employment and Social Services, along with respective officials, will open the expo with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

Social relations manager of the work.com.mm website, Zinmar Thein Mun, explained what will be on offer at the event.

“There’s going to be thirty local and foreign companies present at the expo. [Those attending the expo looking for employment] will have the opportunity to apply for work, while companies will be able to review [the job seeker’s] application and hold interviews. People will be able to walk away from the expo with a job.” she said.

The first Employment Expo that was held landed approximately 1,500 people with employment, it has been reported. Companies that will have booths at the expo include foreign investment companies such as, Yangon Aerodrome construction and the Chinese mobile phone company Huawei, as well as local companies such as Ayeyawaddy Bank and Yan Yan.—Myitrambuk News Agency
President attends opening of office, mini hydropower plant in Lahe

PRESIDENT U Thein Sein attended the opening of the Kay-an-Kyaung mini hydropower plant and an office building for the Naga Self-administered Zone leading body in Lahe, Sagaing Region yesterday.

Accompanied by Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Union Ministers Lt-Gen Kyaw Swe, U Win Tun, U Khin Maung Soe, Dr Tha Aung and U Ye Htut, Mandalay Region Chief Minister U Ye Myint, Maj-Gen Tun Tun Naung of the Office of Commander-in-Chief (Army) and Lt-Gen Mya Tun Oo, the President arrived in Homalin where they were welcomed by Sagaing Region Chief Minister U Tha Aye and ministers and officials.

After hearing reports on work progress at Chindwinn hall, the President gave a speech on the opening of Arts and Science colleges, vocational training schools and the extended cultivation of rubber and tea plantations in Homalin.

The President and party then flew to Naga self-administered zone in Lahe via Hkamti.

Attending the opening ceremony of an office building for the leading committee of the zone and a small-scale Kay-an-Kyaung hydropower plant the President unveiled the signboards of the facilities and inspected them.

The number of villages which can access to electricity in the Naga Self-administered Zone has increased from 11 before 2010 to 193 in 2016. Work on construction of Kyalway hydropower plant started on 1st January in 2015.

The plant installed with 150-KW generators is supplying electricity to people in Lahe around the clock. — Myanmar News Agency

Ray of peace dawning upon Kayah State

President U Thein Sein sent message to the occasion of the 64th Anniversary Kayah State Day.

TO the esteemed nationals and brethren residing in Kayah State,

It is my honour to send you this message on the occasion of the 64th anniversary of Kayah State Day on 15th January today.

In accord with the Sub-article (a) of the Article (180) of the 1947 Constitution, Karenni State was included in Karen State. “An Act to amend the Constitution of the Union of Burma, the Act No. LXII of 1951, states “for the expression “Karenni State” wherever it occurs, the expression “Kayah State” shall be substituted.” The first ever “Kayah State Day” was held on 15th January 1952 after changing its name from Karenni State to Kayah State and this year marks the 64th anniversary.

Differences between brethren residing in Kayah State have led to armed conflicts and their region is lagging behind in development. Now a ray of peace is dawning upon Kayah State and development opportunities are blooming. The Union Government spared no efforts to help build road infrastructures, develop education and human resources, supply electricity, and raise the socio-economic life and health standard in Kayah State. Let me take this opportunity to urge you to take part in these efforts together with the Union and the State governments.

The Union Government could have managed negotiations to end the armed conflicts which have been breaking out for over 60 years, and as a result, the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement was signed by eight ethnic armed groups on 15 October 2015. As there are hopes flashing for genuine eternal peace, it is very important to build unity among our national brethren.

For Myanmar to be able to stand tall among nations of the world, I send this message to nationals living in Kayah State to urge you to untoldly cling to “non-disintegration of the Union; non-integration among our national brethren.

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President U Thein Sein in Naga traditional dress accepts gifts from Naga ethnic people. Photo: MNA

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Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham visits Loikaw to fulfill requirements in health, education sectors

VICE-President Dr Sai Mauk Kham met with medical and educational professionals in Loikaw, Kayah State yesterday to fulfill the requirements of the region’s health and education sectors.

During his address at the 500-bed People’s Hospital in Loikaw, the Vice-President emphasised the need for being professional and striving for capacity building in human resources, pointing out that the Ministry of Health is ranked seventh in national spending as its budget has increased yearly.

Union Minister U Soe Than who accompanied the Vice-President on the trip elaborated on health and education sectors being prioritised by the government.

Next, the Vice-President and party inspected progress in construction of a two-storey building for the hospital and health care being provided to patients at the hospital.

Vice-President Dr Sai Mauk Kham later met with officials from universities and an Institute of Education in Loikaw.

In his speech at the University of Computer Studies (Loikaw), the Vice-President promised to respond to the reports of officials concerned, citing that the government is committed to attending to the needs of the country’s education sector.

Highlighting the role of teachers in the education sector, he said that it is essential for the country’s education system to be of good quality so that the quality of the education system improves, thereby contributing towards national development. — Myanmar News Agency

Parliamentary committees plan for next parliament

A work coordination meeting of central and working committees planning the first regular session of the second parliament took place in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

In his speech, speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) Thura U Shwe Mann called on future parliamentarians to strive to ensure high-quality service in the new parliament by taking lessons from previous parliamentary activities.

The speaker stressed the need for the emergence of a multi-party democracy and market economy in accordance with the aspirations of the people and with the constitution in order for the country to stay abreast of other countries.

Next, officials presented reports on preparations for the parliamentary sessions scheduled for 2016 and other matters.

Then, speaker of Amyotha Hluttaw U Khin Aung Myint and other attendees held discussions on the reports. The meeting came to end with concluding remarks on the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw speaker.

Also present at the meeting were deputy speakers U Nanda Kyaw Swa and U Mya Nyin; Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the chairperson of Pyithu Hluttaw Rule of Law and Tranquility Committee; union ministers; deputy ministers; parliamentarians and department heads. — Myanmar News Agency

Photo: MNA

President U Thein Sein in Naga traditional dress accepts gifts from Naga ethnic people. Photo: MNA

Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham inspects health care treatment at 500-bed People’s Hospital in Loikaw.
Ministry of Culture now protecting ancient Bagaya Buddhist Monastery

BAGAYA Monastery, the popular and highly revered site of traditional culture, which is seen as a symbol of the country, has had its preservation ensured by the Ministry of Culture from fading or the loss of its physical details.

A campaign which aims to carry out sanitation around the monastery was recently launched by officials and staff from the Department of Historical Research and National Library, National Cultural and Fine Arts University and the Fine Arts Department.

The Bagaya Buddhist Monastery is situated southwest of Inwa Palace in Inwa ancient city which is located about 20 kilometers away from Mandalay Region. Numerous artistic works of the Inwa Era can be found at these religious edifices.

The original name of the monastery was “Maha Waiyan Bonthar” but it is now formally known as Bagaya (star flowers) Monastery.

The original monastery was destroyed by fire during the reign of King Bagyidawphaya in Myanmar era in 1183. However, King Bagan who established the second Amarapura reconstructed the monastery in 1209 ME with twelve stairways made of brick. Currently, only eight stairways remain because of a fire during the reign of King Min Mon in 1228 ME.

In 1313 ME, the monastery was resurrected to hold Buddhist images and palm-leaf inscriptions from the four corners of the country.

In 1993 A.D the monastery was renovated to mimic the original structure and decorated with ancient architecture. Since then the Buddhist images museum has run the site where 472 Buddha images are still being kept.—Min Htet Aung

New bypass aims to reduce accidents on Mandalay-Lashio highway

THE construction of a new bypass project is being implemented by the government with the aim of reducing traffic accidents on the Mandalay-Lashio highway in Pyin Oo Lwin Township in Mandalay Region, a spokesperson for the project said. “The project is nearly completed,” a project manager said.

The 12-mile-long, 50-foot-wide road is being built by Oriental High Way Co. The project began in April 2015.

After the project is completed, the bypass will help reduce traffic congestion in downtown areas and provide easy access to public transportation.

The bypass starts in the eastern part of Pyin Oo Lwin Township and ends near Nyaungu Village and Phuongtaw Village along the Mandalay-Lashio highway.—632

Drying lakes

FARMERS in Singaing Township, Mandalay Region, are experiencing a water shortage as electric river pump projects have been unable to pump sufficient supply of water for their use, according to farmers in the township. Lakes are going extinct and are covered by grass and bushes, so little water flows into the farmlands, one farmer said.

The government has spent millions of kyats installing three electric river pumps named Htetawmoe, Shwehlano and Ywathaya—with the aim of developing agricultural businesses on virgin lands in the area over the past several years.

At first, the pumps were able to supply local people with enough water for their farmlands, primarily from Shwehlano Lake and Natpyakkan Lake, through various canals. But these lakes have since shrunk.

One resident said the farmland, especially in Natpyakkan Village which is far from the canals, must now rely on rainfall and natural reservoirs for water.

Residents have asked local authorities to prevent the lakes from disappearing by digging out soil and removing garbage with the use of heavy machinery before monsoon season.—Taung Ni Tin Win

Crime News

Yabba seized in Phakant

AUTHORITIES seized yabba pills at two houses in Seinmu Village, Phakant township, on Tuesday. Acting on a tip-off, the police searched a house belonging to one Ma Swe Win and found 480 yabba pills. According to an investigation, police searched another house owned by Ma Tin Nwe alias Khin Mar Kyi and found 1,600 yabba pills.

Member of the police searched a house owned by Ma Kyi Khi Thin alias Lin Latt and found her husband Khon Myo Zaw alias Myo Zaw with 370 yabba pills, two mobile phones and K1.3 million in Hpa-An.

Local police have filed charges against all suspects under the Anti-Narcotic Law.—Myanmar Police Force

Forestry Department seizes animals’ horns and teeth

ANIMALS’ horns, teeth and claws seized by the Forestry Department were destroyed by burning in the Forestry Department Garden Park, Tada-U township, on Tuesday.

The officials of Forestry Department destroyed 725 pieces of animal horns, 30 pieces of tooth, 20 pieces of bear nail, 45 pieces of muntjac tooth, 30 pieces of bear tooth by burning fire.

Assistant director from Forestry Department explained the purpose of burning the animals’ body parts.—Ye Tin

Illegal logs seized in Sagaing

AUTHORITIES seized illegal logs weighing 1.6178 tonnes in Katha, Sagaing region on Monday. Acting on a tip-off, members of the police searched a truck in the name of Shwe Khir Thit on Auk We Gyi village and discovered 1.6178 tonnes logs carried on the vehicle being driven by U Aung Lin,49, together with the bus conductor Soe Naing Win,42. The two suspects are being charged under the law by Katha police station.—Myanmar Police Force
Islamic State launches militant assault on Indonesia’s capital

JAKARTA — Islamic State militants launched a gun and bomb assault on Indonesia’s capital yesterday, police and media said, marking the first assault on the Muslim-majority country by the radical group, but five of the seven people killed were the attackers themselves.

It took security forces about three hours to end the siege near a Starbucks cafe and Sarinah’s, Jakarta’s oldest department store, after a team of around seven militants traded gunfire with police and blew themselves up.

A police officer and a Canadian man were killed in the attack, which — with the attackers took the death toll to seven. Seventeen people, including a Dutch man, were wounded.

Two of the militants were taken alive, police said.

“Islamic State fighters carried out an armed attack this morning targeting foreign nationals and the security forces charged with protecting them in the Indonesian capital,” Amanqiq news agency, which is allied to the group, said on its Telegram channel. Jakarta’s police chief told reporters: “ISIS is behind this attack definitely,” using a common acronym for Islamic State, and he named an Indonesian militant called BahrunNaim as the man responsible for plotting it.

The drama played out on the streets and on television screens, with at least six explosions and a gunfight in a movie theatre.

“The Starbucks cafe windows are blown out. I see three dead people on the road. There has been a hull in the shooting but someone is on the roof of the building and police are aiming their guns at him,” Reuters photographer Darren Whiteside said as the attack unfolded.

Police responded in force within minutes. Black armoured cars screeched to a halt in front of the Starbucks and sniper teams were deployed around the neighbourhood as helicopters buzzed overhead.

After the militants had been overcome, a body was laying on the street, a shoe nearby among the debris. The city centre’s notoriously jammed roads were largely deserted.

Indonesia has seen attacks by Islamist militants before, but a coordinated assault by a team of suicide bombers and gunmen is unprecedented and has echoes of the sieges seen in Mumbai seven years ago and in Paris last November.

The last major militant attacks in Jakarta were in July 2009, with bombs at the JW Marriott and Ritz Carlton hotels. The country had been on edge for weeks over the threat posed by Islamic militants.

Counter-terrorism police had rounded up about 20 people with suspected links to Islamic State, whose battle lines in Syria and Iraq have included nationals from several Asian countries.

—Reuters

North Korea sanctions resolution could take weeks: UN diplomats

NEW YORK — A new UN Security Council resolution to toughen sanctions on North Korea for carrying out its fourth underground nuclear test is likely weeks away and should focus on the denuclearisation of the peninsula, according to multiple diplomats.

“It may take weeks,” Chinese Ambassador Liu Jieyi told Kyodo News on Tuesday, adding that he did not think a timeline “is as important to the right resolution.”

Beijing’s top UN diplomat stressed the importance China places on denuclearisation and peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

“We need to make sure that the draft resolution in terms of specific measures will contribute to the objectives and not take us further away from the objectives and as to what the specific things the resolution we will have to see,” he added.

Diplomats have so far been tight-lipped about the scope of the new resolution, believed to have been drawn up by the United States, or details about the level of meetings that are taking place in New York in response to what North Korea says was a successful hydrogen bomb test on 6 January. Following North Korea’s first nuclear test in 2006, the Security Council adopted a sanctions resolution five days later. But the subsequent two tests were followed up with much slower actions to punish Pyongyang.

The third test on 12 February 2013 drew a resolution on additional sanctions on 7 March after weeks of intense negotiations, largely between Washington and Beijing.

Another Security Council diplomat concurred, saying it was unlikely there would be a resolution in under three weeks as council members were looking for a “shift in the way that we respond to what’s happened in North Korea.”

The diplomat noted the significance of Pyongyang’s claim of testing a hydrogen bomb, which is far more destructive than atomic weapons. This is “a first” and represents “a step change,” the diplomat said. The council’s response, in turn, is expected to be a “step change.”

The source added that discussions are not assuming that North Korea successfully tested an H bomb and that a resolution is not contingent on further verification of the nature of the blast.

The diplomat also said all 15 council members agreed on the necessity for North Korea to denuclearise. The latest test took place just as Japan assumed its seat as a new nonpermanent member for a record 11th time.

It served on the council both in 2006 and 2009 after Pyongyang staged its first and second underground tests and was active in the negotiations at that time.

The United States, along with Japan and South Korea, called for the emergency meeting last Wednesday hours after Pyongyang’s announcement on the detonation of a nuclear bomb.

As North Korea’s chief ally, China has been more resistant to imposing harsh sanctions as it fears pushing the isolated country too far could lead to a mass exodus on its borders.

It remains to be seen how far the sanctions will go, although diplomats have confirmed that various options, including restricting North Korean shipping and additional financial measures, are being considered.

Meanwhile, the North Korean mission at the United Nations released a statement, a commentary carried earlier by the official Korean Central News Agency, saying that the “H-bomb test” was “neither to ‘threaten’ anyone nor to ‘provok[e] someone for a certain purpose.’ ” But it added the country’s scientists and technicians are “in high spirit” to detonate H-bombs “capable of wiping out the whole territory of the US all at once” as it “persistently moves to stifle” North Korea.

Japanese space agency gets strong response to closed-door test

TSUKUBA — The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency has had a surprising number of applicants for its two-week test on human stress in an enclosed environment similar to a space shuttle, according to agency officials.

JAXA showed the press the test facility in Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture, on Wednesday and revealed that about 4,400 people — from students to businessmen — had applied for eight “man-only” spots from 24 December through the Tuesday deadline.

“We didn’t expect this huge reaction,” said an agency official. “People’s interest in outer space might be growing. We want to carry out a successful test.” JAXA will narrow down the applicants to eight as it goes through their motivation and physical conditions.

The eight participants will receive 380,000 yen, or about $3,200, each for spending two weeks in the closed-door facility without contact with the outside beginning 5 February. The sound facility was also used on the design of the International Space Station, with overhead monitoring cameras recording facial expressions and speech.

—Kyodo News
South Korea, China defence officials to discuss North Korea test — Yonhap

SEOUL — Defence officials from South Korea and China will meet on Friday to discuss North Korea’s latest nuclear test, the Yonhap news agency reported, after the South and the United States put pressure on China to rein in its neighbour.

The North’s nuclear test on Wednesday last week angered both China and the United States and again raised questions about what can be done to stop its development of nuclear weapons.

Senior defence officials of South Korea and China will meet in Seoul in an annual forum and discuss a joint response to the test, the South Korean news agency reported.

A South Korean Defence Ministry official could not immediately confirm the report.

North Korea said last week it successfully tested a hydrogen bomb, but the United States and experts questioned the claim saying the recorded blast was too small for it to have been such a device.

South Korean President Park Geun-hye called on China on Wednesday to use its influence over North Korea to press it to end its nuclear programme, adding it could use its permanent seat on the UN Security Council to help draw up effective sanctions.

“I believe the Chinese government will not allow the situation on the Korean peninsula to deteriorate further,” Park told a news conference.

China is the North’s main ally and trade partner but it opposes its bombs, while China’s ties with US ally South Korea have grown closer in recent years.

The US special envoy for North Korea, Sung Kim, met his South Korean and Japanese counterparts in Seoul on Wednesday and said they had agreed that a “meaningful” new sanctions resolution was needed from the Security Council.

“I hope the Chinese authorities agree with us that we simply cannot take a business as usual approach to this latest provocation,” he said. — Reuters

Japan to cooperate with South Korea over currency swap if needed

TOKYO — Japan is prepared to resume a currency swap deal with South Korea if needed, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said yesterday.

“I have not received reports about specific talks (over the matter) as of this moment,” Suga told a press conference. “We will cooperate appropriately if necessary.”

His remarks came after South Korea’s new deputy prime minister in charge of economic affairs Yoo Il Ho, who doubles as the minister of strategy and finance, said Monday before taking office that the country may consider resuming the currency swap arrangement with Japan.

Though Tokyo and Seoul ended the 14-year-old agreement in February last year, a move to resume the deal has been gaining momentum since a landmark accord was reached last month to resolve a dispute over “comfort women” procured for Japan’s wartime military brothels.

The contract formed in 2001, under which each nation can obtain dollars by giving its currency to the other, was expanded in 2011 to $70 billion from $13 billion to ensure South Korea had access to sufficient dollar funds to withstand financial market instability amid the eurozone sovereign debt crisis.

The one-year expansion expired in 2012 and the overall size of the swap deal was cut back to $13 billion.

Tokyo and Seoul then reduced it to $10 billion in 2013. — Kyodo News

Severe weather in Sydney kills one, disrupts flights

SYDNEY — Severe thunderstorms in Sydney yesterday killed at least one person and injured another, police said, with winds of 122 kph (76 mph) lashing Australia’s busiest airport, besides ripping down power lines and closing roads.

A man was killed and a woman passenger suffered critical injuries when a falling tree crushed their car in the city’s west, which emergency services said took the initial brunt of the storm.

Photographs showed damaged shop fronts and roads left impassable by twisted metal and roofing panels. Authorities urged residents to stay indoors and keep away from windows.

“Substantial damage has been caused to a number of homes, cars and power lines,” New South Wales state police said in a statement.

The fierce winds, rain and hail struck Sydney after a blistering day that drove temperatures to 39 degrees Celsius (102 degrees Fahrenheit), the Bureau of Meteorology said, forcing disruptions at the city’s international airport.

The storm had caused delays and diversions, Sydney Airport said in a Twitter message, urging passengers to check with individual airlines for details.

An airport spokeswoman could not immediately be reached for comment. — Reuters

Pakistan TV station attacked with explosives, one wounded

ISLAMABAD — Attackers on a motorcycle lobbed grenades and opened fire at a Pakistani television station on Wednesday, wounding one person, and left behind pamphlets linked to Islamic State’s self-declared province of Khorasan in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Security guards chased away the drive-by attackers, it said, and an editor l cut by shrapnel in the head was hospitalised.

The pamphlets left behind said “Islamic State Khorasan Province” claimed responsibility for attacking media that it accused of “siding with the apostate army and government of Pakistan in their global crusade against Islam.”

Pakistan’s army is fighting a military campaign against Taliban and other militants in the country’s northwest near the Afghan border.

In the past year, several commanders of the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban have sworn allegiance to Islamic State, though there is little public evidence so far of direct operational links with the Middle East-based militants’ leadership.

The extent of actual militant involvement in attacks can also be difficult to verify. Police say extortionists often use the names of feared groups to intimidate their victims.

In December, an attacker threw a hand grenade at the offices of Din News in the eastern city of Lahore, leaving behind similar leaflets at the site of the attack. Four people were injured in that incident, Pakistan media reported. — Reuters
EU takes on Poland, launches rights probe over court, media 

BRUSSELS — The European Union began an unprecedented inquiry on Wednesday into whether Poland’s new conservative, Eurosceptic government has breached the EU’s democratic standards by taking more control of the judiciary and public media. The first use of the EU executive’s new Rule of Law Framework could in principle eventually lead to sanctions such as the suspension of Poland’s voting rights. But the main impact now may be to further sour relations among EU member governments already strained by multiple crises and mounting nationalism.

“The European Commission does not wish to put into question any of the democratic choices made by the Polish people,” its deputy head, Frans Timmermans, wrote to the Polish justice minister when he was foreign minister in 2014. “I think we can all imagine how a similar situation might be handled in the EU powerhouse Berlin as ‘silly’ and reminded Germans of their World War II crimes in Poland, while a pro-government magazine depicted Chancellor Angela Merkel as Hitler on its cover, and Juncker as a Nazi general.”

Timmermans, who has responsibility for human rights on the executive, pushed his colleagues hard to launch the procedure, sources familiar with the meeting told Reuters. The Dutchman promoted the mechanism when he was foreign minister in The Hague in 2014 as a response to criticism the EU had failed to curb authoritarian measures by several key minister dismissed him as a Nazi general.

But diplomats said Warsaw did itself no favours in Brussels by its combative reactions ahead of the Commission debate.

One key minister dismissed criticism from EU powerhouse Berlin as “silly” and reminded Germans of their World War II crimes in Poland, while a pro-government magazine depicted Chancellor Angela Merkel as Hitler on its cover, and Juncker as a Nazi general.

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Former Israeli president Peres hospitalised over heart attack

JERUSALEM — Israeli elder statesman Shimon Peres suffered a heart attack yesterday and was undergoing surgery at a hospital near Tel Aviv, Israel’s Channel 10 television said.

A Peres aide confirmed that the 92-year-old former prime minister and president had been taken by ambulance to Sheba hospital in Tel Hashomer with an irregular heartbeat. “He is conscious and talking but still has chest pains,” the aide, Ayelet Fisch, told Israel’s Army Radio. The hospital’s spokesperson could not immediately be reached for comment.— Reuters

Car bomb attack by Kurdish militants kills five, wounds 39 in southeast Turkey

CINAR, (Turkey) — Kurdish militants launched a car bomb attack on a police station in Turkey’s southeastern town of Cinar overnight, killing five people and wounding 39, the provincial governor’s office said yesterday.

Militants of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) attacked the police station and adjoining accommodation in the town south of Diyarbakir, the region’s largest city, around 11:30pm (10.30pm BST), the governor’s office said in a statement.— Reuters

Kerry thanks Iran, credits diplomacy in release of US sailors

WASHINGTON — US Secretary of State John Kerry thanked Iranian authorities on Wednesday for their cooperation in the release of 10 American sailors who were taken into custody in the Gulf and credited diplomacy with resolving the situation.

“I think we can all imagine how a similar situation might have played out three or four years ago, and that today this kind of issue can be resolved peacefully and efficiently is a testament to the critical role diplomacy plays in keeping our country safe, secure, and strong,” Kerry said in a speech at the National Defence University.— Reuters

Contract for construction of bridge across Sava River

BELGRADE — Serbia’s road maker Putevi Srbije signed a contract with an Austrian consortium for the construction of a second bridge across the Sava River near Osijekina in the length of 1,964m as part of the Belgrade bypass road.

The total value of the contract is RSD 3.57 billion, excluding VAT, and the project is to be completed within 26 months from the date of signing. The bridge will be built as part of the second phase of construction of the E-70/E-75 section between the Dobanovci and Orljava loops.

The consortium, made up of JV Strabag AG - Ed. Zublin AG — Dywidag Bau GmbH — PZP Zajecar, made the best offer and won the international tender for the project, Putevi Srbije said in a release.— Tanjug

Mexico to grant transit visas to Cuban migrants

MEXICO CITY — Mexico on Wednesday said it plans to grant 20-day transit visas to a group of 180 Cubans who were chosen from thousands stranded in Costa Rica to continue on their long journey toward the United States.

The Cubans will have to leave Mexican territory after the permits expire, the National Migration Institute said, adding the visas were given for humanitarian reasons.

The Cubans’ arrival is part of a pilot programme agreed last month to start allowing the migrants to move toward the United States from Costa Rica, where they have been stuck since mid-November after Nicaragua shut its borders.

The first group, chosen out of an estimated 8,000 stranded there, flew to El Salvador on Tuesday, from where they boarded buses and arrived in Mexico on Wednesday.

The flow of migrants from Cuba has surged as the process of a detente between Washington and Havana stirs fears that preferential US asylum rights for Cubans may end soon.

Central American governments will meet next Thursday in Guatemala to evaluate the first trip of Cubans and see if the transit programme should continue, Costa Rican Foreign Minister Manuel Gonzalez said on Wednesday.

In upcoming meetings, diplomats are also expected to work out logistical details of how the migrants’ travel will be paid for, the Mexican government has said.— Reuters

British minister says staying in an unreformed EU would be ‘disastrous’

LONDON — A cabinet minister in Prime Minister David Cameron’s government hinted yesterday he could back leaving the European Union, saying that to remain in the bloc without significant reform would be disastrous for Britain.

“Simply staying in the EU with our current terms of membership unchanged would be disastrous for Britain,” Leader of the House of Commons Chris Grayling wrote in The Daily Telegraph newspaper. Cameron is renegotiating Britain’s relationship with the 28-member bloc ahead of a referendum which could come as soon as June. — Kyodo News

2 men injured in explosion at Kobe pizza shop

KOBÉ — Two men suffered burns to their faces and were rushed to hospital yesterday following an explosion at a pizza shop in Kobe, western Japan.

The two men in their 20s and 30s are employees of the pizza shop, firefighters said. At around 12:40pm, firefighters received an emergency call reporting the sound of an explosion and smoke at an outlet of Chicago Pizza Co near JR Motomachi Station, according to the Kobe municipal fire department investigating the incident.— Kyodo News

NEWS IN BRIEF

European Commission First Vice-President Frans Timmermans gives a news conference at the European Commission headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, on 13 January. PHOTO: REUTERS
Navigating the choppy waters of Myanmar’s post-election era

In pursuit of intergenerational justice

Khin Maung Aye

THIS TUESDAY was a day of political significance, one for which a monument should be erected to commemorate a key moment in the pursuit of peace in Myanmar. On 12 January 2016, the good governance and governing well requires a new political practice and a new social contract, as it is through the building of a democratically elected government that we can bring about national reconciliation.

It was an auspicious day not only for indigenous armed organisations but also for the entire nation. The Union Peace Conferences have laid down firm foundations for the restoration of eternal peace.

In his speech at the opening of the UPC, president U Thein Sein said: “This conference is not just a meeting to be held for just a short period. In fact, this is the commencement of a building of a democratic, federal union. The points under discussion and those representing various organisations are to be carried forward into an extended process of negotiating national reconciliation. Starting with this conference, matters relating to politics, social issues, economic issues, security, land policy and environmental policy will continue to be discussed within the political framework.”

It is undeniable that nations develop only in peaceful conditions; without peace and stability, development cannot be carried out. It is of the utmost importance to transfer lasting peace to future generations. Bloodshed and instability cannot be left unchecked. It is, therefore, needed to hand over a peaceful and developed nation to future generations for the sake of intergenerational justice.

The Global New Light of Myanmar would like to urge all stakeholders attending the Union Peace Conference to focus on common interests and negotiate with a win-win strategy in order to bring about peace and stability upon which future generations will build a modern, peaceful, developed nation.

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 khinmaungaye@hotmail.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.
Foreign tourist visits to ancient Min Hla fort exceeded 3,000 in 2015

OVER 3,200 foreign tourists visited the ancient fort of Min Hla, located along a stretch of the Irrawaddy river in Magway Region, by boat during 2015, according to the Department of Ancient Research at the town of Min Hla.

The majority of foreign visitors came from countries such as the USA, Britain, Australia, Germany, Switzerland, New Zealand and Canada as well as lesser numbers of Asia region tourists. “Once the boats dock at the river jetty [in the town of Min Hla], the main place foreigners visit is the Min Hla fort which dates back to the time of the Myanmar monarchy,” explained Daw Hla Win, Head of the Min Hla Ancient Research Department.

The Min Hla fort was built in 1860 – 1861. Construction was a collaborative effort between the younger brother of King Mindon, Prince Kanaung; French and Italian experts and Myanmar engineers.

The Min Hla fort was built on the western bank of the Ayeyarwaddy river, measuring 184 by 171 feet in length, with a height of 26 feet. The telegraph office that was used during the time of the Myanmar monarchy still stands today, located in the northern wing of the fortification.

A TOTAL of 141 civil society organisations (CSOs) sent a formal request to the Ministry of Forestry, Environment and Conservation (MECF) on 14 January, asking the ministry to stop the illegal logging trade along the Myanmar-China border.

The letter was sent to the MECF as well as to a Chinese company called the Blue Moon Fund, which provides financial support to investors in logging enterprises and trade between China and Myanmar. The letter highlighted the illegal logging trade in Kachin and Shan states, calling for better management of vulnerable forests in those areas.

“On top of the inequalities that can arise in the management of natural resources, which can be made much worse by instability in the region, illegal logging can cause the current peace negotiations to collapse. It can also be a hindrance to the development of the country,” said Daw Khun Jar, a spokesperson for the Kachin Women’s Network.

Myanmar CSOs have criticised the lack of transparency in discussions between Myanmar and China in 2015 about illegal border crossing and timber trading. “CSOs were not informed about the discussion between the two countries [on the issue of illegal logging]. The issue is linked to resources that Myanmar people depend on and that can have large-scale repercussions for the public. The discussions that were held between the two governments were held behind closed doors,” said Ma Nan, a member of the Shan Farmers Network.

The statement by the 141 CSOs mentions that Chinese investors have begun investing in wood-cutting and wood craftsmanship since exports of timber from Myanmar to China ceased.

The aforementioned CSOs also called for the MECF to recognise the letter, to consider its contents and to open transparent inroads for discussion. Last year, 152 Chinese nationals were caught carrying out illegal logging in Kachin State. Two loggers were sentenced to 10 years in jail, while the rest were sentenced to life imprisonment at the Myitkyina court on 22 July 2015. However, they were later released on 31 July in an amnesty after an official announcement was made by the Chinese embassy in Yangon, which the punishments were too severe.—Myitmakha News Agency
Istanbul bomber entered Turkey as refugee from Syria: PM says

ISTANBUL — An Islamic State suicide bomber who killed 10 German tourists in the heart of Istanbul’s historic district entered Turkey as a refugee from Syria and went undetected as he was on an entry list, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said on Wednesday.

The bomber, who blew himself up among tourists on Tuesday near the Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia, the top sites in one of the world’s most visited cities, had registered with immigration authorities in the city a week ago.

Turkey has kept an open border to refugees from Syria’s civil war and is now home to more than 2.2 million, the world’s largest refugee population. But its border has also been used by foreign fighters seeking to join Islamic State or return from its ranks to commit atrocities abroad. “This individual was not somebody under surveillance. He entered Turkey normally, as a refugee, as someone looking for shelter,” Davutoglu told a news conference, adding he had been identified from fragments of his skull, face and nails. “After the attack his connections were unveiled. Among these links, apart from Daesh, we have the suspicion that there could be certain powers using Daesh,” he said, using an Arabic name for Islamic State.

Turkey accuses Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and his allies including Iran and Russia, of cooperating with Islamic State in the Syrian regime’s effort to destroy Syrian opposition forces.

Turkey, which like Germany and Iraq, has become a target for attacks abroad after the Suruc and Iraq attacks.—Reuters

UN envoy says Syria peace talks still on for 25 January

GENEVA — The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria said after meeting representatives of the United States, Russia and other major powers on Wednesday that Syria peace talks were still planned to start in Geneva on 25 January.

Steffan de Mistura told reporters they had discussed access to the government-besieged town of Madaya, where the first aid deliveries were made on Monday to starving civilians after three months. “This meeting was essential in order to move forward on the Geneva talks, and there are issues still, and very much at stake, that’s why I needed to consult them,” he said. Assistant US Secretary of State Anne Patterson said the talks were still “on track” for 25 January and she had had a “good conversation” with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov and senior officials from Britain, China and France.

“Everyone’s primary concern is humanitarian access given some of the dire situations that are taking place inside of Syria,” Patterson told reporters.

Syrian rebel groups said earlier on Wednesday they would not participate in the peace talks unless humanitarian articles in the latest UN resolution on the conflict were implemented.

The groups, who include the powerful Islam Army, mentioned articles 12 and 13 of a resolution in the Syrian Geneva Talks on 25 January,” it said. The opposition council told de Mistura that the Damascus government would have to take goodwill steps, including a prisoner release, before they would go to negotiations.

Russia’s Foreign Ministry said on Twitter that Gatilov would meet representatives of various opposition groups on Thursday. It also said the international powers needed to do more work to agree lists of groups to be regarded as terrorists. Patterson said the United States and Russia were working “very assiduously” on the question of defining terrorist groups.

They had been discussing “the terrorism issue in the whole Syria-Iraq corridor” for months, and military and intelligence contacts were continuing.—Reuters

Obama discusses Syria, Ukraine with Russia’s Putin

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama, in a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday, emphasized the need to work toward a diplomatic solution to the crisis in Ukraine and address the conflict in Syria, the White House said.

Obama told Putin that a key next step in resolving the Ukrainian crisis was for all sides to agree on the modalities of local elections in the Donbas region of Ukraine, the White House said in a statement.

The two leaders also “noted the necessity of taking steps to foster productive discussions between representatives of the Syrian opposition and regime under United Nations auspices, principally by reducing violence and addressing the urgent humanitarian needs of the Syrian people,” the statement said.

They also discussed the “importance of a strong and united international response” to North Korea’s recent nuclear test.

Separately, the Kremlin said in a statement that Obama and Putin expressed support during their phone call for an easing of tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia.—Reuters

IS group gains ground in Iraq’s Salahuddin Province

TIKRIT — Islamic State (IS) militants yesterday took control of large areas of the eastern part of Salahuddin Province, threatening the provincial capital city of Tikrit and several key towns, a provincial security source told Xinhua.

The extremist group carried out a major attack at dawn from their positions in Makhoul mountain range and advanced in several routes to capture a large area from Fat’ha in northern part of the province to the areas of Tal Gseiba and al-Madad, some 30 km east of Tikrit, the source said on condition of anonymity. Tikrit is located some 170 km north of the Iraqi capital of Baghdad. IS militants also advance through a rugged area in Makhoul mountain range and cut the strategic road between Tikrit and the city of Kirkuk, the source said.

The IS advance came amid heavy clashes with security forces and allied militias, which, so far, resulted in the death of 12 militants and seven security members, including two officers, the source said, citing initial reports about the ongoing battles.—Xinhua
**Home Retail in talks to sell Homebase to Australia’s Wesfarmers**

LONDON — British takeover target Home Retail (HOME.L) said on Wednesday it was in advanced talks to sell its Homebase home improvement stores to Australia’s Wesfarmers (WES.AX) for 340 million pounds in cash, allowing it to focus on its Argos chain.

If successful, the move by conglomerate Wesfarmers, Australia’s dominant hardware retailer and second biggest supermarket owner, would mark its first acquisition offshore.

“The UK home improvement and garden market is an attractive and growing market,” said Wesfarmers in a statement confirming that it had made a conditional offer for the UK’s second largest home improvement and garden retailer.

Wesfarmers said its aim was to “reinvigorate” Homebase’s assets and build a Bunnings-branded business over three to five years. Bunnings is Australia’s leading home improvement chain.

Home Retail considered selling Homebase in 2014, but decided instead to shrink the number of stores by a quarter while it focused on Argos, which contributed about six times as much operating profit as Homebase in its 2015 financial year.

Home Retail Chief Executive John Walden said a sale represented good value for shareholders as it would come about a year into a three-year improvement plan for the chain, which trails Kingfisher’s (KFGL.L) B&Q and Travis Perkins’ (TP.K.L) Wickes in the British DIY market.

“The sale would allow the group to focus on Argos and its transformation plan, with an improved balance sheet and financial position, which I believe represents an even greater opportunity for building long-term shareholder value,” he said.

Sainsbury’s jointly founded Homebase and owned the chain until 2000, but it barely mentions the stores when it laid out the “compelling” logic behind its ambitions for Home Retail, leading to speculation that it would immediately offload the business to private equity or another retailer.

A sale to Wesfarmers relieves Sainsbury’s of its task. It has until 2 February to make a firm offer or walk away.

Analysts at Investec had put a value of 1.45 billion pounds on Home Retail, based on their assumptions of an equity value of 230 million pounds for Homebase, 360 million for Argos and the remainder from cash, its loan book and freehold property.

Home Retail said about 200 million pounds of the proceeds from Homebase would be returned to shareholders, while 75 million would go on restructuring and deal costs and 50 million would be paid into its pension scheme.

It said selling the business, which contributed 19.8 million pounds in operating profit in its 2015 financial year, would significantly improve its balance sheet, mainly by reducing its store leasing liabilities.

Wesfarmers, which is being advised by Lazard, declined to comment on how it would fund the cash deal. Home Retail said it would update the market on its Christmas trading on Thursday.

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Google creates virtual reality arm, names key executive to run it

SAN FRANCISCO — Alphabet Inc’s Google has created a virtual reality (VR) computing division and said Clay Bavor, the executive running its product management team, will run the new arm.

A spokesperson for Google, Joshua Cruz, confirmed Bavor’s new role on the team, but declined to provide any further details.

According to Bavor’s Twitter profile, he is the vice president of Virtual Reality at Google. As vice president of product management, Bavor oversaw some of Google’s key apps, including Gmail, Google Drive and Google Docs, his LinkedIn profile showed.

Technology news website Recode first reported Bavor’s appointment on Tuesday and said his earlier role will now be taken over by Senior Vice President Diane Greene.

Google has been flirting with virtual reality but never quite fully dived into it until now. In May last year, the company announced a partnership with action-camera maker GoPro to enable 360 degree view in virtual reality, using a new technology that Google had developed.

The company said in November its video-sharing site YouTube supported virtual reality video. Viewers could view VR videos using a cell phone and Google cardboard viewer.

Oculus, the virtual reality company Facebook bought in 2014, has started accepting pre-orders for its much-anticipated virtual reality headset, Rift, which will ship in Q1.

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UK motor insurance premiums see biggest rise since 2011

LONDON — Comprehensive car insurance premiums in Britain rose 13.2 per cent in 2015, the biggest annual rise since 2011, according to Confused.com’s car price insurance index.

The increase, following a jump of 6.9 per cent in the fourth quarter, pushed the average premium for an annual comprehensive car insurance policy to 672 pounds, data from the price comparison website Confused.com and consultants Willis Towers Watson Plc (WLTW.O) showed.

“The recent increase to Insurance Premium Tax along with inflationary pressures on claims costs, especially to vehicle damage repair costs, have been the major factors driving up prices,” UK Head of P&C Pricing at Willis Towers Watson, Stephen Jones said.

The cost of third-party fire and theft policy (TPFT) policies rose at a similar rate, up 6.9 per cent in the quarter and 16.8 per cent annually, the company said.

“We’ve now seen 11 consecutive months with no premium decreases, which would suggest that the trend is likely to continue,” Head of Data Services at Confused.com, Steve Fletcher said.

In November, the government raised Insurance Premium Tax rise to 9.5 per cent from 6 per cent.

In 2011, the average comprehensive premium reached a high of 858 pounds per year.

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1st Philippine-developed satellite to be launched in March

TSUKUBA — The Philippines’ first satellite developed with the country’s involvement was unveiled Wednesday at the Tsukuba Space Centre of the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency ahead of its launch scheduled for March.

The micromini satellite for disaster and crop surveillance was jointly developed by researchers at two Japanese universities and the Philippine Department of Science and Technology.

The 30-kilogram satellite is equipped with four cameras and measures 55 centimetres long, 35 cm wide and 55 cm high.

Under the plan, a US rocket will carry the satellite to Japan’s Kibo laboratory on the International Space Station in March before it is released into space, which can take place as early as April.

The satellite, named Mah-a Sat-1, will primarily monitor rice cultivation and disasters such as earthquakes and typhoons, according to the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency.

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Google creates virtual reality arm, names key executive to run it

SAN FRANCISCO — Alphabet Inc’s Google has created a virtual reality arm, names key executive to run it

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Samsung Electronics to produce Qualcomm’s Snapdragon 820 chips

SEOUL — Tech giant Samsung Electronics Co Ltd said yesterday it will mass produce Qualcomm Inc’s new Snapdragon 820 mobile processors using its 14-nanometre chip production technology.

Samsung said in a statement the manufacturing technology used for the chips was the same as one being used for its new Exynos processors.

The South Korean firm did not elaborate further or reveal the value of the deal with Qualcomm.
India in talks to boost Rafale deal ahead of Hollande visit

PARIS — France and India are negotiating to widen a proposed $9 billion deal for the sale of 36 French-built Rafale warplanes to include an option for further purchases, but have yet to decide the scope of the deal, a person close to the talks said.

The nations have been negotiating for months after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced plans to buy 36 warplanes directly from the French government following the collapse of a larger commercial deal with Dassault Aviation.

Talks have sped up in recent weeks ahead of a visit to India by French President Francois Hollande on 25-27 January, and aides were said to be locked in discussions with Indian officials at France’s presidential offices on Wednesday.

“The deal should be signed at the end of Janu¬ary and there is an option” for more jets, the person close to the talks said. Dassault Aviation declined to comment.

Indian government sources say the Rafale deal is politically done, paving the way for Hollande’s visit, though the country’s longstanding efforts to modernise its air force have been peppered with delays and premature hopes of a deal.

One source at the defence ministry said the all-in price for the 36 fighter jets, in fly-away condition, was 610 billion rupees ($9.1 billion).

An option for addi¬tion purchases could give France an extra edge over US and European rivals circling India’s lucrative arms market and alloy concerns among India’s military about the strength of its ageing air force, which is at its weakest operational strength since the 1962 war against China.

The source close to the talks played down a report that the options would cover 18 planes, expanding the potential deal by 50 percent. “No. The negotiations are ongo¬ing,” he said. Indian military officials have warned their air force risks a major capability gap with China and Pakistan without new western warplanes, or if local defence contractors cannot produce what the military needs in a timely manner.

In October, Indian of¬ficials said the government had turned down the mil¬itary’s request to expand the acquisition of 36 Dassault-built fighter planes to plug vital gaps, nudging it to accept an indigenous combat plane.—Reuters

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Smitten with actress, Mexico’s ‘Chapo’ tripped up by flirting

MEXICO CITY — Details of flirtatious phone mes¬saging chats between Mexican drug lord Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman and ac¬tress Kate del Castillo have gripped Mexico, and an of¬ficial said his “obsession” with her led him to lower his guard and be caught.

Guzman, 57, was ar¬rested in the northern city of Los Mochos on Friday, six months after a dramatic second jailbreak through a tunnel in his cell. He is now back in the same prison.

Mexican authorities said they intercepted a se¬ries of instant message conversations in which del Castillo, 43, brokered a secret meeting between Guzman, herself and Holly¬wood star Sean Penn in October, helping them trace the kingpin.

A senior government official was quoted as saying that Guzman “had a kind of obsession” with the actress that was his undoing.

Del Castillo took to Twitter to thank her sup¬porters and wrote: “Not surprisingly many have chosen to make up items more than my own eyes,” Guzman said, according to transcripts of the exchang¬es published by newspaper Milenio on Wednesday. “I’m very moved,” she re¬plied. “Nobody has ever looked after me.”

The government of¬ficial said the stories were genuine and that Guzman “had a kind of obsession” with the actress that was his undoing.

Del Castillo wrote with del Castillo began publicly in 2012 when the actress, who has fronted campaigns for L’Oreal and Ford, wrote an open letter calling on the capo “to traffic in good¬ness” and saying she be¬lieved more in him than the government.—Reuters

US to expand refugee programme for Central Americans fleeing violence

Washington — The United States will expand its programme helping the thousands of people flee¬ing violence in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, US Secretary of State John Kerry said on Wednesday.

The announcement fol¬lows backlash from Dem¬ocrats in the US Congress who called on the Obama administra¬tion to halt its de¬cision to open additional centres in the Western hemisphere — in Quito, Ecuador. The State Department spokesperson said the Quito centre oper¬ates in the Government.—Reuters

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Venezuelan opposition seeks to unblock congressional deadlock

CARACAS — Three Venezuelan opposition lawmakers gave up their seats on Wednesday in a bid to defuse an acrimonious power dispute between President Nicolas Maduro’s government and the newly opposition-led National Assembly.

Venezuela’s Supreme Court has barred the three — plus a government legislator — from office pending a probe into alleged vote cheating in their jungle state Amazonas.

But the move, which won control of the legislature in December’s elections for the first time in 17 years of socialist rule, defiantly swore the three in anyway.

However, in a reluctant U-turn cheered by government lawmakers as a “victory for the people,” the opposition majority approved on Wednesday a bill from the three asking to leave the legislature pending resolution of the election dispute.

The Supreme Court, which almost always rules in favour of the government, had said congressional decisions would be null until the swearing-in of the three was overturned.

“We completely reject that ruling,” the three’s letter said. However, by leaving, “we help free parliament from the institutional ambush they (the government) want to lead it into.”

The opposition’s victory in the December vote gave them a long-sought power-base to take aim at Maduro, who succeeded the late president Hugo Chavez, with a group of red-shirted by-standers who appeared to be government supporters, witnesses and some local media.

The opposition argues that even without its three barred legislators, it still has a two-thirds super majority that will enable it to, for example, fire ministers.

Without the four barred legislators, the opposition has 109 seats to the government’s 54. So the opposition would have two thirds of an effective sitting total of 163 seats.

The government, though, is likely to argue that based on the chamber’s total capacity of 167 seats, the opposition will have less than a two-thirds majority.

In addition to the move to defuse the dispute over the legislators, there was a rare sign of rapprochement in news that National Assembly president Henry Izturiz, this week.

Many Venezuelans want dialogue so leaders on both sides can focus on the country’s economic crisis: a deep recession, runaway inflation and shortages of basic sics. — Reuters

Palestinian shot dead in attempted stabbing in West Bank

JERUSALEM — Israeli army said yesterday morning that troops shot dead a Palestinian after he tried to stab a soldier in the southern West Bank, the latest in a four-month surge of violence.

The incident occurred at the Beit Anun Junction, north of Hebron, an area in which many of the recent Palestinian attacks took place.

No Israelis were injured in the incident, a military spokesperson said in a statement.

According to the spokesperson, a Palestinian “armed with a knife, attempted to stab a soldier.”

The suspect, whose name was not immediately identified, was shot and killed.

The incident came a day after Israeli forces killed two Palestinian men, one 23 and the other 17, outside Beit Anun, claiming that one of them intended to perpetrate a stabbing attack while the other had driven him.

At least 150 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces or armed civilians since the violent uprising began in mid-September.

The temblor caused New Chitose Airport to close its runways temporarily, while some trains in Hokkaido and bullet trains on the Tohoku Shinkansen Line stopped briefly in Aomori and neighbouring Iwate prefectures, according to the operators.

No abnormalities were detected at nuclear power plants in Hokkaido and Aomori, the regional power companies said.

The Japanese government has set up a liaison office at the crisis management center inside the prime minister’s office.

The meteorological agency has warned aftershocks with a maximum intensity of 4 on the Japanese scale could occur over the next week. — Kyodo News

M6.7 quake shakes northern Japan, no tsunami warning

TOKYO — An earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 6.7 shook northern Japan shortly after noon Thursday, the weather agency said, but no tsunami warning was issued.

The 12:25pm quake registered lower 5 on the Japanese seismic intensity scale of 7 in southern parts of the northern main island of Hokkaido and northern Aomori Prefecture, the Japan Meteorological Agency said. The quake originated at a depth of around 50 kilometres off the coast of Urakawa in Hokkaido.

Two women aged 86 and 95 from Sapporo were taken to hospital after they were knocked over but did not suffer serious injuries, according to the local fire department and police.

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No abnormalities were detected at nuclear power plants in Hokkaido and Aomori, the regional power companies said.

The Japanese government has set up a liaison office at the crisis management center inside the prime minister’s office.

The meteorological agency has warned aftershocks with a maximum intensity of 4 on the Japanese scale could occur over the next week. — Kyodo News

Earthquake victims return back after receiving blankets distributed by Nepalese Army at Kerauja, one of the worst quake-hit villages in Gorkha, Nepal, on 13 January 2016. Nepalese Army distributed blankets to earthquake victims residing in those shelters. Earthquake victims in Gorkha District are in difficulties due to heavy snowfalls in recent days amid harsh winter. Photo: Xinhua

Claim day notice

MV DYNAMIC OCEAN 02 VOY NO (+) Consignees of cargo carried on MV DYNAMIC OCEAN 02 VOY NO (+) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 15.1.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of A. I. P. T. 2 where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim’s Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

MV CREMONA VOY NO (141W) Consignees of cargo carried on MV CREMONA VOY NO (141W) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 15.1.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.P where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim’s Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.
Music meets fashion in LA as Stella McCartney shows pre-fall line

LOS ANGELES — Music, celebrities and fashion came together in Los Angeles on Tuesday as British designer Stella McCartney presented her autumn 2016 collection amid the Hollywood awards season buzz.

Modèles danced between rows of records and CDs at Hollywood’s landmark Amoeba Music store, dressed in “fur-free fur” or embroidered coats and jackets adorned in cat motifs and leopard and tiger prints.

Light dresses bore graphic circles while loose blouses were paired with loose trousers. Known for her neutral colour palettes, McCartney’s pre-fall line came in cream and earthy tones with dabs of indigo, orange and pink.

The designer, who presents her main collections in Paris, followed on the heels of Tom Ford, who showcased his fall 2015 line in Hollywood in February. Last year, Louis Vuitton held its “LV Series 2” exhibit in Hollywood while Burberry took over Los Angeles’ Griffith Observatory to show its 2015 collection.

“We’d always wanted to have a party in LA and it just really felt like the right time,” McCartney said.

“I have so many close friends here and I spend a lot of time here and it just feels like a moment when music, film, fashion, the arts, it’s all just come together for LA.”

McCartney often dresses select celebrities for the red carpet. At Sunday’s Golden Globes, Taraji P. Henson, who won best drama TV actress for “Empire”, wore a custom McCartney strapless white dress.

“We don’t go out and kind of attack people and we don’t pay people, we just go with the flow of whatever happens that season,” she said.

The show drew big names like Gwyneth Paltrow, Kate Hudson, Katy Perry and Angelica Huston to the store. McCartney, daughter of former Beatle Paul McCartney, said music is a key influence.

“I’ve been brought up with music, so it’s something that I feel very comfortable around, probably more comfortable around than fashion, quite frankly,” she said.

The fashion spotlight on Los Angeles centres on the red carpets rolled out during the two-month awards season.

Saint Laurent will present its fall/winter 2016 menswear and part of its womenswear collections in Los Angeles on 10 February ahead of the Grammy Awards five days later.

The curtains come down on the awards season on 28 February when the Oscars are handed out at the Academy Awards ceremony in Hollywood’s Dolby Theatre.

Stallone says ‘didn’t expect to win’ Golden Globe

LONDON — Sylvester Stallone and cast members of “Creed”, which continues on from the Hollywood star’s “Rocky” films, hit the red carpet in London for the movie’s European premiere on Tuesday.

The 69-year-old actor won a Golden Globe award for reprising his iconic role as Rocky Balboa in “Creed” and received a standing ovation at the ceremony in Los Angeles on Sunday.

His performance in 1977’s “Rocky” — the first film in the franchise — earned Stallone nominations at the Golden Globes, Oscars and BAFTAs — but he failed to win any of those awards.

“I didn’t expect to win,” Stallone said on the London red carpet.

“I didn’t expect to be there; the last time I was there was maybe 1977, there was maybe 10 tables and it was indoors, it wasn’t televised — it was so surreal for me — here is my wife my three kids — and Rocky, he just comes through.” — Reuters

Rihanna named most marketable star

LOUIS — R&B star Rihanna has beaten out the likes of Angelina Jolie and basketball phenom Stephen Curry to be named the world’s most marketable celebrity.

According to new data from The NPD Group, the “Umbrella” singer, 27, leads the way when it comes to endorsement opportunities as the average big-name celebrity.“— PTI

‘Fifty Shades’ and ‘Pixels’ among Razzies ‘worst film’ nominees

LOS ANGELES — As awards season heats up in Hollywood, the annual Razzies Awards on Wednesday named the year’s worst achievements in film with steamy romance “Fifty Shades of Grey” and Adam Sandler’s video game adventure “Pixels” among the top nominees, while Sylvester Stallone was honored with a redemption.


The tongue-in-cheek Razzies, created in 1980, serve as an antidote to Hollywood’s prestigious Oscars ceremony, as organizers choose to bestow winners of the year’s worst films with a gold spray-painted trophy worth $4.97.

Stallone, who won his first Golden Globe last week for reprising his iconic role as Rocky Balboa in “Creed,” is nominated for the Razzie Redeemer Award, going from an “all-time Razzie champ to 2015 award contender.”

He will compete for the title with Will Smith, nominated for his redeeming role in “Concussion,” actor-director Elizabeth Banks for directing the hit “Pitch Perfect 2” and horror filmmaker M. Night Shyamalan for directing hit horror “The Visit” after a slew of flops.

Winners of the Razzies are voted for online by around 900 members of the Razzies committee, and anyone can sign up to vote, with memberships starting at $40.

The “tacky” Razzies ceremony is traditionally held in Hollywood on the night before the 28 February Oscars ceremony, and those honored seldom show up.

Perennial Razzie favourite Sandler, nominated for five consecutive years, this year scored nods for worst actor in “Pixels” and worst screen combo for “Adam Sandler & Any Pair of Shoes” for his role in “The Cobbler” — about a cobbler who can magically step into the shoes of his customers.

Eddie Redmayne, a potential best actor Oscar contender for his role in “The Danish Girl,” landed a worst actor Razzie nomination for “Jupiter Ascending,” while Rooney Mara, potential Oscar best actress nominee, landed a worst supporting Razzie nod for her role as Tiger Lily in “Pan.” — Reuters
LOS ANGELES — The saga of drug lord Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman, who was captured on Friday in Mexico, is a good fit for one Los Angeles clothing company.

Guzman was photographed in a shirt from apparel firm Barabas shaking hands with Sean Penn in an image accompanying the actor’s recent Rolling Stone article about the fugitive.

Barabas quickly capitalised on the drug kingpin’s taste for the abstrackt-design shirt that features bright blue stripes, posting on its Facebook page, “EL CHAPO GUZMAN WEARING BARABAS SHIRT!” Later, the firm said in another post that high traffic had temporarily crashed its website, Barabasmen.com. On Wednesday, the website was back up, with side-by-side photos of the Guzman-Penn meeting, and a handsomely coiffed male model in the same Barabas shirt. “Most wanted shirt,” read a caption under the pictures.

Mexico’s government says it plans to extradite Guzman to the United States, where he is wanted on charges including drug trafficking, kidnapping and murder.—Reuters

2 Chinese universities in top 10 of world’s most int’l universities

LONDON — Two Chinese universities, University of Hong Kong and University of Macao, squeezed into the top 10 of the world’s most international universities in 2016, according to a new list published by Times Higher Education yesterday.

The latest list showed that University of Hong Kong ranked third and University of Macao seized the sixth place. World’s Most International Universities Ranking 2016 by The Times Higher Education included 200 universities from 28 countries. It employed indicators such as the proportion of international staff, the number of international students and research partners published with at least one co-author from another country of each institution. The survey also revealed that London enjoyed the largest number of the world’s international universities, with 15 among on the top 200 list, including six in top 30, which were the Imperial College London (10th), University College London (18th), King’s College London (20th), London School of Economics and Political Science (22nd), Queen Mary University of London (23rd) and Royal Holloway, University of London (30th).—Xinhua
LONDON — ‘Keep Calm And Carry On’ could be Claudia Ranieri’s motto for the second half of the season after Leicester City earned a 1-0 win at Tottenham Hotspur on Wednesday to put the heat back on Premier League leaders Arsenal.

Their chances of taking the title may still be minimal — just two percent according to a statistical report in the Leicester Mercury — but Robert Huth’s late header made a top-four finish look a lot more likely.

Leicester had gone three league games without a goal, dropping behind Arsenal and prompting fears that a slide had started, but their fighting spirit shone through at White Hart Lane.

Striker Jamie Vardy and winger Mahrez have netted 28 goals between them this season but both were off the park when Huth scored.

“We created a lot of chances more... If we make 79 I am very happy,” he added.

It was the second of three matches against Spurs in 10 days, after a 2-2 draw on Sunday, which the FA Cup forced a replay, which Leicester host next Wednesday.

Vardy, who missed Sunday’s match because of a minor groin operation, had few chances against Spurs and extends his run without a goal to five matches.

Ranieri had no concerns, however, and said the forward’s recent performances had been hindered by injuries.

“In the last month and a half, I have not seen Jamie at training because always there was a little problem. Now... slowly he can start to retrain with us and improve his condition,” said Ranieri.

The Italian also heaped praise on his defence and in particular goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel, who made a series of remarkable saves to keep his side in the match.

“The first 15 minutes were unbelievable, they press a lot and we want to press them but it wasn’t possible ... Kasper made some fantastic saves and it is the third clean sheet in a row (in the Premier League),” said Ranieri.

Leicester drew 0-0 with Bournemouth and Manchester City in their previous two league games.

A frustrated Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino said Spurs had been the better side but hailed Leicester’s spirit.

“We need to give them full credit because in the way that they play and believe and fight on the pitch, it is unbelievable,” he said.

“I’m disappointed because I think we played better... All the stats are positive for us but then football is about scoring and we didn’t score...” — Reuters

Barca ease past Espanyol into Spanish Cup quarters

MADRID — Holders Barcelona cruised into the King’s Cup quarter-finals with a side missing several regulars beat city rivals Espanyol 2-0, with Munir El Haddadi netting both goals in a thumping 6-1 aggregate success on Wednesday.

Fellipe Caicedo caused some problems for the Spanish and European champions’ defence but keeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen was equal to anything the Ecuador striker could throw at him.

“We already had a big advantage and we just tried to protect it,” Barca centre back Javier Mascherano told Spanish TV.

“We played a good game and I think the victory was deserved. Let’s see who we get now in the draw,” added the Argentine international.

Athletic Bilbao, whose 23 Spanish Cup triumphs are only bettered by Barca’s 27, also progressed when forward Inaki Williams struck to secure a 1-0 win at Villarreal and a 4-2 victory over the two legs.

Bilbao, who lost to Barca in the final last season and in 2012, have reached the last eight for three consecutive seasons.

Third-tier Cadiz, who went through to the last 16 after Real Madrid were expelled for fielding an ineligible player, fell 2-0 at Celta Vigo and were eliminated 5-0 on aggregate.

Las Palmas beat Eibar 3-2 at home in the Canary Islands last week and won by the same scoreline in the Basque country to advance 6-4.

In the remaining two ties, Atletico Madrid, the 2013 winners, and Rayo Vallecano are level at 1-1 and Gary Neville’s Valencia lead Granada 4-0 before Thursday’s second legs.

Sevilla knocked out city rivals Real Betis and second-division Mirandes, the only non-La Liga side left in the competition, eliminated Deportivo La Coruna on Tuesday.

The quarter-finals will be played over two legs later this month, with the semi-finals at the start of February and the final on 21 May — Reuters

David Beckham honoured at UNICEF Ball

LONDON — Former soccer star David Beckham has received UNICEF USA’s Humanitarian Leadership Award.

The 40-year-old star has been given the accolade at the annual UNICEF Gala Ball in Beverly Hills in recognition of his charity work and has vowed to continue his efforts to help disadvantaged children through the organisation and his own offshoot, the Seven Foundation, reported Female First.

Ahead of the black tie event, alongside a picture of himself with a group of kids who benefit from the fund, Beckham, who is a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, wrote, “Extremely honoured to receive the @UNICEFUSA’s Humanitarian Leadership Award this evening at the UNICEFBall. I can’t wait to continue doing all I can for UNICEF and my 7 Fund, 7.Org, to help children across the world (sic).”

Beckham arrived alone, sans family, to the event at the Beverly Wilshire Four Seasons Hotel, but once inside was joined by a string of other famous faces, including Miranda Kerr, Selena Gomez, Nicole Kidman, Jennifer Connelly, Michelle Rodriguez and Heidi Klum.

The celebrated sportsman was handed the honour by his friend veteran musician Elton John.

The event also marked the launch of French fashion house Louis Vuitton for UNICEF.

The global partnership will help support children affected by conflict, disease, natural disasters, and other situations that threaten their safety and well-being. — PTI