VICE-President U Nyan Tun attended the US-ASEAN Leaders Summit’s second retreat session on “Protecting Peace, Prosperity and Security in the Asia-Pacific” in California, the United States of America on Tuesday.

Upon arrival at the historic residence that hosted the summit’s retreat 2 the Vice-President was greeted by US State Secretary Mr. John Kerry.

Also present at the retreat session were US President Barack Obama, heads of state/government of ASEAN countries, ministers, the ASEAN secretary-general and officials.

In his address, Vice-President U Nyan Tun elaborated on Myanmar’s stance and its implementation of issues such as maritime security, transboundary challenges and the fight against terrorism.

After the meeting, the US President, heads of state/government of ASEAN countries and the ASEAN secretary-general posed for photos.—Myanmar News Agency

WASHINGTON should lift economic sanctions unconditionally as Myanmar has now reached a stage to hand over the responsibilities of the State to the NLD government, said U Ye Htut, Union Minister for Information, to VoA while attending the US-ASEAN Summit in Sunnylands in California State.

Asked what Myanmar would discuss at the summit, the Union Minister said he would call on the Obama government to continue to help the next government and that he would discuss prompt lifting of US economic sanctions.

“We’ve exerted our utmost effort to effectuate national economic development, but they haven’t lifted all the sanctions. Some are not yet lifted at all, they’ve just suspended the sanctions. As the election results have lifted Myanmar’s democratic transition up to a higher stage, what would be most helpful is unconditional lifting of all economic sanctions,” noted the Union Minister for Information. Regarding the transfer of presidency, they should have no doubt at all as the top-level US officials have visited Myanmar before and during the election period, he added.

When asked why president U Thein Sein cancelled this US visit, Minister U Ye Htut replied that now is the time to effectuate a transition which requires thorough preparations, that to ensure stability and prevalence of law and order, the president decided to be within the country to monitor these circumstances.

“We believe ASEAN should go beyond the region to ensure regional stability and development and that both US and China are required to be involved...
Pyithu Hluttaw

Pyithu Hluttaw approves emergency motion, formation of three committees

THE second Pyithu Hluttaw’s first regular session continued for its sixth day with discussions on an emergency motion and the approval process for the formation of three committees yesterday.

On their discussions on the motion calling for an immediate end to fighting in Shan State and prompt measures to be taken to aid war-affected local people, parliamentarians including Defense Services personnel representatives stressed the need of ensuring national reconciliation for building a genuine federal Union and moving towards lasting peace through cooperation of all including ethnic armed organisations.

On discussions, Union Minister U Aung Min and Deputy Ministers Maj-Gen Aung Soe, Rear Admiral Myint Nwe and U Phone Swe made clarifications. Union Minister U Aung Min said that RCSS has been urged through the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee to adhere to the terms and conditions of the nationwide ceasefire agreement that it signed while dealing with civilians.

Regarding TNLA that has no state-level agreement with the government and did not ink the NCA, the Union Minister called for resolving conflicts through negotiations.

In his clarification, Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Maj-Gen Aung Soe said that affected people have been accommodated at 17 relief camps with the provision of food, clean water and health care services. Teachers and students who fled the clashes between RCSS and TNLA have been kept at a monastery to continue learning and teaching there.

The motion was approved, and an approval process for formation of three committees—the International Relations Committee, the Farmers, Workers and Youth Affairs Committee and the Ethnic Affairs and Internal Peace-making Committee—with 15 members each was carried out.

— Myanmar News Agency

Amyotha Hluttaw

Second Amyotha Hluttaw session continues for sixth day

THE second Amyotha Hluttaw’s first regular session continued for its sixth day, approving the formation of three parliament committees and proposing to create three more yesterday.

Following the parliament approval, Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Tha announced that the International Relations, Interparliamentary Relations and Cooperation Committee was formed with 15 members led by chairman U Zon Hlyan Htan of Chin State Constituency 4 and Daw Htu May of Rakhine State Constituency 11.

Likewise, U Min Oo of Bago Region Constituency 6 will lead the Committee on Local and International Non-governmental Organisation formed with 15 members including Dr Pyae Phyo of Ayeyawady Region Constituency 7 as secretary.

Moreover, Dr Than Win of Mandalay Region Constituency 1 will serve as chairman of the 15-member committee on Health, Sports and Culture, with Dr Zaw Lin Htut of Mon State Constituency 9 as secretary.

Next, the Speaker proposed the formation of the Ethnic Affairs Committee with 15 members, naming Daw Shila Nan Taung alias M Nan Taung of Kachin State Constituency 2 chairman of the committee and U Khin Thein Pe of Shan State Constituency 9 the committee’s secretary. Likewise, U Ba Myo Thein of Yangon Region Constituency 5 and U Soe Win of Rakhine State Constituency 12 were proposed as chairman and secretary of the Farmers Affairs Committee while Dr Mya Thaung of Bago Region Constituency 7 and Naw Hla Hla Soe of Yangon Region Constituency 10 were also named as chairperson and secretary of Women and Children’s Rights Committee. The Amyotha Hluttaw session continues today. — Myanmar News Agency

Yangon Region Hluttaw

Yangon Region Hluttaw forms two committees

THE Yangon Region Hluttaw yesterday won parliamentary approval to form two committees on its third day session.

The Bill Committee and the Finance, Planning and Economic Committee were formed as proposed by the speaker, with 11 members each.

The Bill Committee will be chaired by U Thein Myint of the Tamwe constituency and the Finance, Planning and Economic Committee by Daw Sanda Min of the Seikkyi-Khaunagto constituency. — Ko Moe

Deputy speakers of two Houses receive former East Timor counterpart

Parliaments of Myanmar and East Timor eye to strengthen and boost bilateral cooperation. Photo: MNA

DEPUTY Speaker of Amyotha Hluttaw U Aye Thar Aung and Deputy Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw U Ti Khun Myat received former deputy Speaker of East Timor parliament Mr Aderito Hugo de Costa in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

During the meeting, they discussed matters on strengthening bilateral relations and cooperation between the two parliaments.

They also exchanged views over parliamentary works.

Also present at the meeting were Chairperson of Pyithu Hluttaw International Relations Committee Daw Su Su Lwin. — Myanmar News Agency

Japan announces $10.8 million in aid for recovery of flood-affected schools in Myanmar

THE Japanese government yesterday announced a US$10.8 million donation in a grant aid package for the reconstruction of flood-affected schools in Myanmar with the signing of a memorandum of understanding in Nay Pyi Taw. Japanese Ambassador to Myanmar Mr. Tateshi Higuchi and the Deputy Minister for National Planning and Economic Development Daw Lei Lei Thein signed the MoU and exchanged notes at the ceremony.

According to a statement released by the Embassy of Japan, the grant aid will contribute to the reconstruction and rehabilitation of schools in areas affected by the floods and landslides of July last year. — GNM

Ministers’ reminder issued for watercrafts

THE Fisheries Department issued a reminder for small and large vessels including cargo boats and fishing boats to stay 4 km away from AD-7 block from 10 March to 30 April 2016 as a 3D seismic survey would be conducted by MV Polarcus Nula.

Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise and Daewoo International Corporation (Myanmar E & P) is jointly carrying out exploration of oil at the block.—MNA
ASEAN-U.S. Special Leaders’ Summit: Sunnylands Declaration

AT the end of the 15-16 February Special ASEAN-US Leaders Summit in Sunnylands, California, Heads of State/Government of the Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the United States of America released the Joint Statement of the summit:

The Sunnylands Declaration, re-affirming the key principles that will guide cooperation between ASEAN and the US going forward.

Following the salient points of the Joint Statement of the ASEAN-US Special leaders’ Summit: Sunnylands Declaration:

1. Mutual respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, equality and political independence of all nations by firmly upholding the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, the ASEAN Charter and international law;
2. Mutual recognition of the importance of pursuing policies that lead to dynamic, open, and competitive economies that foster connectivity through programs that meet the standards required for the testing of the Zika virus.
3. The fourth article in this issue of the National Health Laboratory (NHL) has announced that it meets the standards required for the testing of the Zika virus.
4. The Zika virus can be contracted by humans through bites from the aedes aegypti mosquito, to a carrier of dengue fever. Those who contract the Zika virus are expected to immediately feel fevers; develop red patches on the skin and red swelling of the face; feel cramps and aching joints; and experience nausea and headaches over a period of two days and one week.

Army will support law-abiding government: Senior General Min Aung Hlaing

The armed forces will support any government that leads the country according to the law, while helping the country maintain a good balance in its democratic path, the commander-in-chief of the defence services told the Italian ambassador to Myanmar.

“The army plays a central role in eliminating armed conflict,” Senior General Min Aung Hlaing told Mr Pier Giorgio, adding that the armed struggle is unacceptable in a democratic system.

The commander-in-chief expressed his belief that obeying the rule of law will ensure national stability and reflect public consent.

When asked about the political situation under the incoming government, he responded that the army would strengthen the multiparty democratic system as chosen by the people and make it more systematic.

In connection with queries of ongoing peace talks, he stressed the importance of the total elimination of armed conflict in exchange for lasting peace.

The commander-in-chief and the Italian ambassador discussed ways to promote tourism, relations between the two armed forces, and talks on defense and border guards.—Myawady

Union Information Minister U Ye Htut advises Suu Kyi’s sons to apply for Myanmar citizenship

THE National Health Laboratory (NHL) has announced that it meets the standards required for the testing of the Zika virus.

A BSL-2 level is required laboratories for the testing of the Zika virus, while equipment for the testing will arrive in the third week of February from the World Health Organization (WHO) and other healthcare organisations, according to the health department.

“The Zika virus is unlike other transmittable diseases such as Ebola or SARS, Myanmar is ready to test people for the Zika virus,” said NHL director Professor Htay Htay Tin.

Myanmar lab prepared to test for Zika virus

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“Since the Zika virus is still not treatable, protection [against contracting the virus] is the main priority. In terms of what we require in cooperation from the general public, they need to carry out activities to reduce contact with mosquitoes and to seek treatment at the nearest medical facility if any one experience symptoms of the virus,” explained H.E. Dr. Thein Thein Htay, the Deputy Minister for Health.

The Zika virus does usually exhibit severe symptoms; its symptoms are similar to those of the more common influenza virus.

Medical experts are currently attempting to show proof of the connection between the effects of the virus on pregnant mothers and birth defects in children, such as microcephaly, where a child is born with an abnormally small head.—Myitikulha News Agency
Crime News

AN ISUZU truck heading from Mandalay to Kalay driven by one Win Naing Soe, 32, plowed off the road and into a field following brake failure near Htee Hsaung word, Myinmu township.

The driver of the vehicle was not injured it has been ascertained. – Myanmar Police Force

Break failure damages truck

Yabba pills seized in Mabein

POLICE from Mabein Police Station seized yabba tablets on a motorbike in Mabein township, Moemeik District in Shan State.

Acting on a tip-off, local police investigated a motorbike which was being driven by Ko Sai (a) Nyi Kham heading from Nampong ward to Konekha Ward in Mabein township. They discovered 1600 yabba pills and seized them. The police have filed a case against Ko Sai according to the law.— District IPRD

Accident destroyed five motorcycles

AN undisciplined motorcycle collided with a vehicle driven at a high speed at Theitpan-69 Junction, Chammyatharzi, Mandalay. The collision damaged five motorbikes, it is learnt.

The accident occurred when a motorcycle (46 yd/…….) driven from South to North on 68 Road by Min Htet Paing, 20, with Chit Win behind collided with Toyota Hilux Surf (7G/…... ) driven from East to West on Theikpan Road by U Moe Zaw Tun, 44, it is reported. Min Htet Paing is reported to have disobeyed the traffic police order for stop at the junction.

The collision has damaged four more motorcycles when Hilux Surf slammed into a Super Coup motorcycle driven by Ma Mon Myat Thu, Cyclone cycle by Ko Than Soe Htet, Hyundai Click cycle by U Tun Tun Win and Sunbo Star cycle by Ko Zaw Htet while cycles are queuing at the traffic lights.

Traffic police filed the lawsuits against the careless drivers Min Htet Paing and U Moe Zaw Tun. —Min Htet Aung (ManKoPwar)

Forest fire breaks out in Myittha

A FOREST fire broke out in Simitaing forest near Nyaung Wun village, Kyan Taw, Myittha township, Mandalay on Monday.

The fire broke out amongst dry leaves before quickly getting out of control.

The fire was put out by firemen with the help of local residents. No one was injured in the blaze which was brought under control after a few minutes.— Ye Win Tun (Myatthar)

Head-on collision kills one

AN air-con bus collided head on with a motorbike between mile post Nos. 49/7 and 50/0 on Monywa-Mandalay Road, leaving one dead.

The collision which occurred on Tuesday at around 10am in Myinnmu Township, Saguang Region, killed motorbike rider Win Naing Oo, 35, from Aung Zeya Ward.

Myinnmu Police took action against the bus driver Than Hteik Win, 40, from Nandawun Ward, Monywa according to the law.— Kyemon (624)
**Local Business**

**Myanmar National Airlines celebrates third 737-800 NG delivery**

MYANMAR National Airlines (MNA) has received its third Boeing 737-800 NG. A welcoming ceremony was held at Yangon International Airport yesterday. The newly-arrived aircraft XY-ALF was the third delivery to the airline which plans to expand its network inside and outside Myanmar with better services and new destinations.

New arrivals of airplanes will ensure benefits to the airline as well as the country, said MNA. —GNLM

**Korea-Myanmar friendship bridge (Dala) project launched**

A CEREMONY to launch the Korea-Myanmar Friendship Bridge (Dala) project was held in conjunction with a cash assistance presentation for households in the project area, Dala Township, Yangon yesterday.

Union Minister U Kyaw Lwin, Yangon Region Chief Minister U Myint Swe and Mr. Lee Baek-soon, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Myanmar, formally opened the launching ceremony.

Next, they spoke on the occasion, hoping people in Dala and Yangon enjoy better living standards with the emergence of the friendship bridge and calling for participation of all in the implementation of the project.

Then, the Union Minister, the Chief Minister and Deputy Minister Dr Win Myint presented cash assistance for households in the project area through representatives.

The Korea-Myanmar Friendship Bridge (Dala) is set to be built over the Hline River and will link Yangon with Dala. Upon completion, the bridge will ensure local people in the townships of Yangon Region and Ayeyawady Region can travel smoothly and quickly in and out of their own regions, helping to relieve Yangon’s traffic jams.— Myanmar News Agency

**Blacksmiths replace charcoal with electric power**

BLACKSMITHS from Gwaypinle village in Myaing Township have replaced traditional charcoal furnace with electric fans and equipment.

There are around 150 households in Gwaypinle village where local villagers began replacing traditional blacksmithing methods using open fires with electricity in 2014. A typical blacksmith business is operated by a total of five workers. Ten blacksmiths in the village, it has been learned.

In the past, a workshop would employ a worker to hand pump the charcoal furnace, for which they would earn K4,000 a day. This job has now been filled by electrical equipment like fans.

Workers typically make 40 or 50 knives a day which are sold for K4000 to K5000, said an owner of a forge. A smithy manufactures at least 20 knives a day.

Previously, blacksmiths had to use at least 150 visses (a viss is approximately 1.6 kilos) of charcoal a day. As the businesses have come to replace the furnace worker with an electric fan motor they can not only save money on wages but also mitigate environmental pollution.—Sein Myaing (Myaing)

**Thabyay sees handsome prices**

THE sprig of the Eugenia plant (Shwe Thabyay plant) is gaining good prices in Thaton, Mon State, enabling local cultivators to do well.

Thabyay has seen higher demand and better prices as orders have risen this open season. A handful of Thabyay sells for K800, said Daw Hla Win, a Thabyay grower.

It has been around two months that the Thabyay market has been doing well. It generally sees lower demand in the rainy season, though the supply of Thabyay decreases in summer, and thus, Thabyay is selling well, she added.

The growing of Thabyay costs around K1.5 million for 1,500 trees. However, growers can see a return on their investment within a year. If growers invest more, they will see profits up to K7000 a day, said the owner of a Thabyay farm with 1500 trees.

As the yield becomes lower in summer, the purchaser has to pay as high a price as the suppliers ask because growers will sell to those who offer the best price, said Ko Tun Aung, a reseller.

Thabyay farm owners sell Thabyey sprigs not only in Thaton but also in Mawlamyaing and Hpa-an, said some farm owners.—Thet Oo (Thaton)

**Bridging the gap**

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**Boeing 737-800 NG arrives at Yangon International Airport. Photo: supplied**

Dala Bridge construction project launches. Photo: MNA
US, ASEAN agree on freedom of navigation principle despite split

US President Barack Obama.
Photo: Kyodo News

PALM SPRINGS — The United States and Southeast Asian countries agreed on the principle of freedom of navigation Tuesday in discussions of maritime security on their summit, but failed to bridge gaps over China’s moves to claim disputed areas in the South China Sea. US President Barack Obama and leaders from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations shared a commitment to “peaceful resolution” of disputes, “the rights of freedom of navigation and overflight,” a joint statement said.

The United States was hosting the summit for the first time this year to promote unity with the 10 ASEAN countries, some of which are irked by Chinese behaviour in the South China Sea, including the creation of artificial islands in contested areas.

“One of my main messages over the past two days has been the commitment of the United States to ASEAN and its people,” Obama told a press conference at the close of the two-day summit through Tuesday at the Sunnyside estate in California.

“That commitment is and will remain strong and enduring,” Obama said.

During their summit, the United States and ASEAN discussed whether to name the South China Sea as the area where territorial disputes are taking place in the joint statement, according to ASEAN sources.

Obama discussed the need for tangible steps in the South China Sea to lower tensions, including a halt to further reclamation, new construction and militarization of disputed areas,” Obama said.

Obama urged his ASEAN partners to work together to make sure Beijing keeps a promise that it will not make the artificial islands military posts, according to a diplomatic source. But the final version of the statement does not name the sea. Some ASEAN members who are close to China such as Laos, which currently holds the rotating ASEAN presidency, were opposed to the idea of naming the sea, according to the ASEAN sources.

The United States and ASEAN agreed on the importance of “a rules-based regional and international order that upholds and protects the rights and privileges of all states.”

ASEAN groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam.

The United States has criticized China for creating islands on submerged reefs in the disputed Spratly Islands in the South China Sea and constructing facilities such as airstrips on them despite objections by other claimants, including ASEAN countries.

The US military sent a destroyer within what China claims to be territorial sea near one of the artificial islands to demonstrate Washington does not recognise China’s position around submerged reefs in line with a UN convention.

“I reiterated that the United States will continue to fly, sail and operate wherever international law allows,” Obama said, repeating his administration’s intention to continue with the so-called freedom of navigation operations.

US, ASEAN agree on freedom of navigation principle despite split

Asia watches as GMO legal challenge threatens Philippines food supply

MANILA — A legal challenge to the Philippines’ rules on genetically modified organisms is threatening to spark a food crisis in the country and could cloud the outcome for GM technology around Asia.

Government agencies are scrambling to set new regulations on GMOs by 23 February, after the Southeast Asian nation’s top court late last year demanded an overhaul of existing rules, halting GM planting and issuance of new GM import permits until that was done.

The Supreme Court was acting on a petition by environmental activists led by Greenpeace, with the move likely to be closely watched by governments elsewhere as the Philippines is seen as a trailblazer for GMO.

The country was the first in the region to allow planting and commercialisation of GM corn, which it did in 2002, and has permitted GM crop imports for more than a decade.

“Our framework has served as a model for GMO regulatory framework in Asia. So I am sure whatever happens here, they are closely watching,” said Merle Palacpac, chief of the plant quarantine service at the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI).

“We have the first functioning regulatory framework in Asia. So I am sure whatever happens here, they are closely watching,” said Merle Palacpac, chief of the plant quarantine service at the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI).

“The new rules are expected to tighten environmental scrutiny before biosafety permits are issued, and one of the loopholes of the Supreme Court cited when it voided the old rules, in place since 2002, would also be removed. They will also require more documentation from suppliers of GM products, according to an importer who participated in the discussions. The Philippines argues the trade body’s decision risks public health, while advocates say fears have not been scientifically proven and that high-yielding genetically altered crops would help ensure food security as the world’s population grows.

Around 70 per cent of the Philippines’ corn output, which stood at 7.5 million tonnes last year, is GM. The country’s top GM import is soybean meal. Both are mainly used as animal feed and any supply disruption could spell disaster for the live-stock sector.

The Supreme Court’s December ruling is “anti-nationalistic when you look at it from the perspective of the country’s food security,” said Roger Navarro, president of Philippine Maize Federation.

Corn farmers are worried they might not be able to plant in May. “The livelihood of almost 1 million farmers nationwide will be threatened,” said Romualdez Elvira Jr, a farmer from the northern province of Bicol. Using non-GM seeds, a hectare yields 3 tonnes of corn, said Oliver Aldovino, part of a farmer cooperative on the southeastern island of Mindanao. Aldovino, who switched to GM seeds seven years ago, said output doubled with GM corn.

Indonesia to ban 477 websites over adult-rated contents

JAKARTA — Indonesia is blocking 477 websites, including social network and microblogging services, over alleged “pornographic contents,” a top official said yesterday.

“I have signed off the letter and sent it to the Internet Service Provider. These websites should be blocked in the next two or three days,” said Azhar Hasyim, e-business director at the Communication and Information Ministry in Jakarta.

He noted that these websites have posted the country’s information and electronic law which prohibits sharing posts that contain vulgarity. Azhar said that his office had not warned the owners of the websites in advance, but would communicate later on.

“Once they have agreed to clean up their websites from pornographic content, then we will immediately reopen the access,” said Azhar.

The Indonesian government has indicated it will ban access to websites with adult-rated and pro-terrorism content.

Nissan to start car production for 1st time in Myanmar in 2016

TOKYO — Nissan Motor Co. said yesterday it will start assembling cars for the first time in Myanmar in 2016 when the Japanese automaker expects vehicle demand to grow following political and economic reforms in the Southeast Asian country. Japan’s second-largest automaker by sales in 2013 and its lineup includes the Sunny compact sedan before transferring production to a new facility being built in the Bago region.

The new plant will have a workforce of approximately 300 and an annual production capacity of 10,000 units. “Nissan’s expansion plan involves forming part of the company’s wider growth in emerging markets, which includes production in countries such as India, Russia and Nigeria,” the Japanese automaker said in a statement. Nissan began vehicle sales in Myanmar in 2013 and its lineup includes the X-Trail SUV, note vehicle and Altima sedan. Tan Chong has been the exclusive distributor of Nissan cars in various Southeast Asian countries, including Malaysia and Singapore.

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North Korea could conduct 5th nuke test without warning: US institute

WASHINGTON — North Korea has made it even harder for intelligence authorities to detect its preparations to carry out a nuclear test and could now conduct its fifth nuclear test “with little or no warning,” a US institute that monitors the test site said Tuesday.

The US-Korea Institute of Johns Hopkins University in Washington said on its 38 North website that the fourth and latest test by North Korea on 6 January indicated that Pyongyang “appears to have altered its past test preparation practices” and test preparations can no longer be detected simply by analysing satellite imagery.

North Korea said last month it successfully conducted its first hydrogen bomb test, in defiance of repeated international warnings. Many countries are skeptical of North Korea’s claim that it detonated a hydrogen bomb.

The institute released commercial satellite images dated 1 February and 7 February showing the Pungye-ri nuclear test site in North Hamgyong Province. The institute said the images show “unidentified objects in various locations” near the test tunnel, which could be a survey team making an assessment of the 6 January nuclear test, preparing for another test, or sealing the tunnel to prevent radiation leakage.

“While detecting nuclear test preparations is, under the best of circumstances, an inexact art, in the North Korean case it may be the result of careful planning to avoid detection by commercial satellites as they pass overhead or by instituting a practice of gradual, low-key preparations that take place over months — activity almost indistinguishable from construction, tunnel excavation and maintenance,” the institute said.

The institute also warned that North Korea “may have tunnels already completed and ready for a test should it decide to move forward.”—Kyodo News

US flies F-22 fighters over South Korea after North’s rocket launch

US F-22 stealth fighter jets fly over Osan Air Base in Pyeongtaek, South Korea, on 17 February 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

OSAN — The United States flew four F-22 stealth fighter jets over South Korea yesterday in a show of force following North Korea’s recent rocket launch and ahead of the allies’ joint military drills next month aimed at deterring Pyongyang’s threat.

The flight of the radar-evading F-22s, based in Okinawa, Japan, is the latest deployment of key US strategic military assets to the South after the North defied warnings from world powers and conducted a fourth nuclear test last month.

South Korea and the United States said the North’s rocket launch on 7 February was a long-range missile test and violated UN Security Council resolutions that ban the use of ballistic missile technology by the isolated state.

The US military said at the weekend that it had deployed an additional Patriot high-velocity missile interceptor unit to South Korea in response to recent North Korean provocations.

The allies were also expected to begin discussions on the deployment of the advanced Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) missile defence system.

Last month, the United States flew a B-52 bomber capable of carrying nuclear weapons on a low-level flight over the South following the North’s 6 January nuclear test.

The joint military drills scheduled to start in March, which in most years last eight weeks and involve hundreds of thousands of South Korean and US troops, will be the largest ever, according to South Korean officials.

There are 28,500 US troops stationed in the South as part of combined defence with the South’s military of more than 1.2 million. North Korea claims it has a military of more than 600,000.

The North has an army of 1.2 million. North Korea claims the annual drills are war preparations. South Korea and the United States say the exercises, which have been conducted for years without major incident, are defensive.—Reuters

China installs missile system on South China Sea island: US report

WASHINGTON — China has deployed an advanced surface-to-air missile system on one of the disputed islands in the South China Sea, Fox News said Tuesday, with Taiwan authorities also confirming the deployment.

Civilian satellite imagery Fox News obtained shows that China has installed the missile launchers and a radar system on the Chinese-controlled Yongxing Island in the Paracel Islands, according to the broadcaster.

Viet Nam and Taiwan also claim the island, which is also known as Woody Island.

The broadcaster said the deployment is “more evidence that China is increasingly ‘militarizing’ its islands in the South China Sea and ramping up tensions in the region.”

A US official confirmed the accuracy of the photos and that the imagery appears to show the HQ-9 air defence system, which has a range of about 125 miles (200 kilometres), according to Fox News.

The system would pose a threat to any airplanes, civilian or military, flying close by, the broadcaster said.

The report comes as US President Barack Obama suggested his administration will continue with military operations to counter China’s maritime activities in the sea after a summit with leaders from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in California.

China is also constructing large-scale facilities, including airstrips, on artificial islands it created in the Spratly Islands, which lie close to the South China Sea. The deployments are, the United States say, war-preparatory activities to claim sovereignty, and to defend US interests in the area.

The Chinese-controlled Zhongjian Island, also called Triton Island, is claimed by Taiwan and Viet Nam.

In October the US Navy also sent a destroyer within what China claimed to be territorial waters near the artificial island Beijing built on Subi Reef in the Spratlys.

In Taiwan, a National Defence Ministry spokesman said authorities have confirmed the missile deployment and that Taiwan will “closely watch developments hereafter.”

He also warned that interested countries should refrain from “taking any unilateral steps that will intensify tensions” in the South China Sea region to maintain peace and stability, without directly naming China.—Kyodo News

China says missile deployment reports are creations of some Western media

BEIJING — Reports that China has deployed an advanced surface-to-air missile system to one of the disputed islands in the South China Sea have been created by certain Western media, the country’s foreign minister said yesterday.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi also told reporters he hoped Western media would pay more attention to the lighthouses China is building in the region. Taiwan and US officials told Reuters and other media outlets yesterday that China had deployed the missile system.

At the same news conference, Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, who is visiting China, urged restraint in the region and called on all sides to settle disputes peacefully, adding that Australia does not take sides on South China Sea claims.

China claims most of the South China Sea, through which more than $5 trillion in global trade passes every year, and has been building runways and other infrastructure on artificial islands to bolster its claims.—Reuters
Time for a brilliant feat of nation building

Kyaw Thura

Strange as it may seem, international economic analysts are unanimous in their description of our country as an underdeveloped economy with promising prospects for businesses and investment given its abundant natural resources and its geographical location to the world’s two most populous countries, whose combined populations exceed 2.5 billion.

The McKinsey Global Institute expected a June 2013 report that Myanmar had the potential to multiply its GDP by four, from US$45 billion in 2010 to $200 billion in 2030, if the government were to foster the growth of non-agricultural employment opportunities in an effort to unlock high economic growth. The institute suggested a diversified economy to boost labour productivity, pointing out that exclusive reliance on energy and mining would not enable the country to reach its potential.

McKinsey also presented four challenges that have “so far received little attention but can underpin growth and productivity”. According to the report, harnessing digital technology, supporting a structural shift from agriculture to manufacturing, preparing for urbanisation and connecting to the world will require the government to maintain political stability, strong macroeconomic policy, human capital and opportunities for local companies to penetrate overseas markets.

Rights and Responsibility

Dr. Khine Khine Win

This article briefly introduces the linkage between rights and responsibility. 1, belief rights and responsibilities plays a significant role for the promotion and protection of human rights in any society.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights declared that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Being a human being, you have rights. Human rights are entitled as a human being, you have responsibilities to respect the rights of others, to be the best person that we can be, to respect and obey the existing laws... etc. Also we have responsibilities to follow the rules at home, at school and in the community, to respect the rights of others, to be the best person that we can be, to respect and obey the existing laws... etc. Let me give you example, although we have the freedom to express our beliefs and views, we have duty to behave responsibly and to respect other people's rights.

If people do not accept their responsibilities or if they fail to take their responsibility, people would bully, treated unfairly or abused and feel unsafe or unhappy. Whatever the reason, if people fail to take responsibility, they will fail in their jobs, they will fail their teams, and they will fail to grow as individuals also.

When we look at the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2008), we will notice that there is Citizen, Fundamental Rights and Duties of the Citizens in Chapter VIII. Being a citizen of Myanmar, we must know what our rights and duties are.

If you feel your fundamental rights in the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar are violated, you can send a complaint letter to the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission. If the Commission concludes that the alleged violations of the fundamental rights in the Constitution against a citizen are true, it will take steps in accordance with complaint procedures to promote and safeguard the fundamental rights.

Preamble in Declaration of Human Duties and Responsibilities states that the effective enjoyment and implementation of human rights and fundamental freedom is inextricably linked to the assumption of the duties and responsibilities implicit in those rights. Human rights will be better protected or ensured when people assume their duties to the each other and to the local, regional, national and global community. Rights cannot exist without people acting responsibly towards each other. Regardless of this push back to protect the enshrinement of human rights, evidence abounds for the need to foster a dialogue about the link between responsibilities and rights.

Remember: there can be no rights without responsibilities. If you invoke a right, you imply a responsibility.

Basic agricultural course 3/2016 held in Tatkon

A BASIC agricultural course organised by the Department of Rural Development was held in Kyauksarit Village, Tatkon Township, in Nay Pyi Taw on 15 February with the aim of promoting agricultural knowledge and improving living standards of rural people.

U Ko Ko Naing, the Head of the Department of Rural Development for Nay Pyi Taw, made an opening speech and explained the aims of the course, after which trainers elaborated on the agenda.

The course will be last for seven days from 15 to 21 February.—Tin Soe Lwin

Insured workers covered at new hospital

A NEW Workers’ Hospital was opened in Htanabin Township beside the Yangon-Pathein Road on Tuesday, with Union Minister for Labour, Employment and Social Security U Aye Myint in attendance at the ceremony.

The newly-opened 100-bed hospital with a staff of 59 will receive patients at the outpatient department within the next three weeks,” said Dr Aye Aung, the medical superintendent of the new hospital.

The New Social Security Law 2012, which took effect on April 1, 2014, includes six kinds of workers’ insurance. As a result, workers from Hlaingthayar, Shwepyithar and Mimaladon industrial zones and Insein, Hmawby and Mayangon townships who have purchased health insurance can receive treatment at the hospital.

In addition, workers from Ayeyawady Region may also be able to receive treatment at the hospital.

More than 200,000 workers have health insurance policies in these townships and industrial zones.

The new hospital is located on a 50-acre plot, with authorities planning to upgrade the current hospital to include 100 beds in order to treat workers with head and neck problems.

The ministry has carried out healthcare services for insurance policy holders through three workers’ hospitals, traditional hospitals and nearly 100 clinics in 100 townships.—Than Htike
Sunflower growers in Sagaing turn to peanuts

A female farmer works at a peanut plantation. Photo: Maung Chit Lin

Farmers in the area have developed peanut plantations since 2014. Each plantation produces around 60 baskets per season. Last year, growers sold peanuts for about K11,000 ($9) per basket. Farmers from Letpadan, Thetkaikyin, Hantaw and Kyaukphyu villages mainly cultivate winter crops.—Maung Chit Lin

Myananda Earth Dam filled for summer use

THE authorities have renewed their efforts to solve water shortage problems in the country’s dry zones, including Mandalay Region.

Currently, authorities in Nga-thayawk Township, Mandalay Region, are trying to raise the water level of the Myananda Earth Dam in the township’s No. 2 Zaygyo Ward.

Residents of the township depend on the dam for drinking water. Although a lot of water remains in the dam, authorities have begun pumping water from the Tabya Dam, located near Pyimpin Ward, into the Myananda Earth Dam. There are 100 tube wells in the township, some of which produce insufficient supply of water in the summer, said U Zaw Lwin, a resident of Zaygone Ward.—Ye Win Naing

Promoting Use of Local Currency in International Trade Settlement: An Assessment on Asian Experiences

Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt, Senior Economist

(Continued from yesterday)

Findings under firm-level survey are as follows:

(i) The same currency was largely used for price setting, invoicing and settlement of exports to third parties;
(ii) All firms used the same currency for price setting and invoicing for all their export revenues from third parties;
(iii) Invoicing currency could differ from the price setting currency because of a “request from the customer”;
(iv) The U.S. Dollar was the main alternative for exports;
(v) Currency choice was similar for exports of the intra-firm and inter-firm.

(ix) Use of the customer’s currency did not depend on large markets or large orders;
(x) To minimize the risk of price deviations across countries a limited set of currencies was used for setting prices;
(xi) An objective of risk management was to minimize the variability of cash flow.

Lessons Learned

The same currency is used to a very large extent in pricing, invoicing and settling payment simplifying international comparisons of the currency denomination in international trade. The finding that average prices changed frequently, points to macroeconomic implications indicating domestic price and interest rate effects. If the invoicing currency is also the pricing currency, there is a clear link between invoicing and exchange rate pass-through.

The findings clearly show the trend towards less use of dollar to reduce the FX risk, especially for exports, but also for imports. This implication is potentially important; if both exports and imports have similar currency denominations, changes in net exports will lead to changes in demand for the local (domestic) currency, especially if domestic firms do not immediately (or ever) convert foreign currency payments to the domestic currency. It points to the importance of the liquidity of the local currency. This increase has come at the expense of local currency. The use of the U.S. dollar as a vehicle currency is larger than the use of the Euro. One possibility could be that international payments in Euro can be conducted at less cost than international payments in other currencies in the absence of the Eurozone crisis.

This implies that the choice of invoicing currency constitutes an important strategic pricing decision of a firm. In addition, exporters also performed effectively price discriminate between markets, and took into account destination specific market conditions when setting prices. Moreover, promoting use of local currencies of ASEAN countries in the intra-ASEAN or ASEAN+5 trade in a certain extent would increase substantially the regional trade.

In conclusion, the costs of the dependence on currencies outside of the region for the settlement of trade in the region results in cost for converting currencies for trade settlement; the instability in export prices in response to exchange rate changes and costs of hedging exchange rate risks. In contrast, the merits of using the local currencies for trade settlement reveals encouraging efficiency in trade and investment transactions; lowering the above mentioned transaction costs of a currency; enhancing export competitiveness arising from cost effectiveness; and promoting trade and investment at the firm, country and regional levels.

The policy recommendations can be drawn as follows: removal of the restrictions on capital flow so as to establish a secure trade settlement system; development of strategic trade policy for market diversification, in particular, in the European market in the framework of use of euro as vehicle currency; encouragement of bilateral and regional trade and investment under ASEAN+5 and Closer Economic Relations (CER) countries adoption of foreign exchange regulation policy and regulations to foster the use of local and regional currencies in trade and investment; introduction of new trade settlement systems to facilitate more use of local currencies at firm, national and regional levels; development of sound financial markets; promotion of strategic intra-regional production and trade networks in major export industries and engaging in financial cooperation programs and monetary coordination in the region. With respect to coordination of exchange rate policy within Asian countries, ‘easing the foreign exchange regulation and capital control’ was considered as an important policy, in comparison, ‘the local currencies denominated Asian bond market’ as a priority option in policy coordination. At the country level, improving the factors affecting choice of invoicing currency outlined above are crucial.

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Charities urge European leaders to keep aid for poorest, not refugees

Migrants walk towards a makeshift camp close to the Austrian border town of Spielfeld in the village of Sentilj, Slovenia, on 16 February 2016.  PICTURE: Reuters

LONDON — Hundreds of millions of people in developing countries will lose out if European governments raid their aid budgets to cover the costs of hosting refugees and tightening border security, a coalition of charities said on Tuesday.

They issued their warning as the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), a group of the world’s major donors that defines and oversees what spending can be counted as aid, meets in Paris this week to discuss the refugee crisis and the rules shaping aid spending for the next 15 years.

Faced with the substantial cost of looking after a record one million migrants who are to be funded from and erecting fences to keep out a growing flow of migrants needed to support the migrants’ countries of origin so that they stay in the forefront of increasing spending outside Europe, “That’s a particular challenge for those ...most opposed to migration. They should be at the forefront of increasing spending outside Europe,” he said.—Reuters

Russia will send first S-300 missile system to Iran on Thursday

MOSCOW — Russia will send the first S-300 air defence missile system to Iran on Thursday, Russia’sRIA state news agency reported yesterday quoting an unidentified source. The missile system will be delivered under the terms of an earlier contract.

Russia will sign this year a contract with Iran to supply a batch of its Sukhoi Su-30SM multi-role fighter jets to the Islamic Republic, RIA news agency quoted a senior official at Russia’s arms export agency as saying.

Iranian Defence Minister Hossein Dehghan is visiting Moscow this week. He met the Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday, the Kremlin said, giving no further detail.—Reuters

China says any deployment of missiles on own territory would be legitimate

BEIJING — Any deployment of missiles on China’s own territory would be legitimate, a spokesman for China’s Foreign Ministry said yesterday, asked about reports that China has deployed an advanced surface-to-air missile system on one of the disputed islands it controls in the South China Sea.

Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said he was unaware of the specifics of the situation, but added that any facilities built have to do with national defence, not militarization. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said earlier that reports of the missile deployment had been created by “certain Western media”. Taiwan and US officials told Reuters and other media outlets on Wednesday that China had deployed the missile system.—Reuters

Djuric: We expect new investigation into all crimes against Serbs

BELGRADE — Director of the Serbian government’s Office for Kosovo-Metohija (KiM) Marko Djuric said on Tuesday, 15 years since an attack on a Nis Express bus near Podujevo, in which 12 Serbs were killed and 43 wounded, that it was unacceptable to see the crime not getting a court to endow the victims and their families at least some kind of consolation.

“Even today, after fifteen years have passed, the perpetrators of this grave crime have not been found, just as those who killed the Serb children in Gorazdevac, the 14 reapers in Staro Gracko, the Stolic family in Obilic have remained unknown, and just as nobody knows who sets fire to and destroys Serb homes and desecrates churches and monasteries in Kosovo almost every day,” Djuric said.—Reuters

Apple CEO opposes court order to help FBI unlock iPhone

WASHINGTON — Apple Inc Chief Executive Tim Cook said his company opposed a demand from a US judge to help the FBI break into an iPhone belonging to one of the San Bernardino shooters.

Cook said that the demand threatened the security of Apple’s customers and had “implications far beyond the legal case at hand.”

Judge Shira Pym of US District Court in Los Angeles said on Tuesday that Apple must provide “reasonable technical assistance” to investigators seeking to unlock data on an iPhone 6C that had been owned by Syed Rizwan Farook. In a letter to Apple’s customers, Cook said the FBI had asked the company to build “a backdoor to the iPhone.”

“The government is asking Apple to hack our own users and undermine decades of security advancements that protect our customers — including tens of millions of American citizens — from sophisticated hackers and cybercriminals,” he said. “We can find no precedent for an American company being forced to expose its customers to a greater risk of attack.”—Reuters

Texas executes man for murder of liquor store clerk

HUNTSVILLE — Texas on Tuesday executed a man who was convicted of fatally shooting a liquor store clerk in a robbery outside of Dallas in 1990.

Gustavo Garcia, 43, who has spent more than half of his life on death row, was put to death by lethal injection at the state’s execution chamber in Huntsville. He was pronounced dead at 6:26 p.m., a prisons official said.—Reuters
UN envoy wins Syria govt green light for aid convoys—UN

GENEVA — The Syrian government has approved access to seven besieged areas and UN convoys are expected to set off in days, the United Nations said on Tuesday after crisis talks in Damascus.

UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, who won the green light at talks with Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem, said the world body would test the government commitment to allow access yesterday but gave no details.

Their meeting in Damascus came at a time when government forces have been advancing rapidly with the aid of Russian air strikes, and just days before an internationally agreed pause in fighting is due to take effect.

De Mistura said they had discussed the issue of humanitarian access to areas besieged by all sides in the five-year war.

“It is clear it is the duty of the government of Syria to want to reach every Syrian person wherever they are and allow the UN to bring humanitarian aid,” de Mistura said in a statement. “Today we test this.”

The Syrian government hit back at de Mistura’s comment, saying his own credibility needed testing.

Syrian state media said it quoted a Syrian foreign ministry source as saying that Damascus would not allow de Mistura to talk about testing its seriousness.

“The truth is Syria needs to test the credibility of De Mistura who has been contradicting what happened during the meeting with the Syrian government,” the foreign ministry source was quoted as saying.

“Delivering aid to areas as besieged by terrorists has been the government’s commitment towards its people for years.”

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that Syria had approved access to Deir al-Zor; Foua and Kafriya in Idlib; and Madaya, al-Zabadani, Kafr Batna and Mouaddamiya al-Sham in rural Damascus.

“Humanitarian agencies and partners are preparing convoys for these areas, to depart as soon as possible in the coming days,” the OCHA said. It was not immediately clear whether the convoys would begin on Wednesday, as de Mistura had indicated.

Nor was there any indication of a breakthrough on access to areas besieged by armed opposition groups.

UN-backed peace talks are scheduled to resume in Geneva on 25 February, after de Mistura suspended a first round earlier this month. Last Friday global powers meeting in Munich agreed to the pause in fighting in the hope that this could allow the talks to resume, but the deal does not take effect until the end of this week and was not signed by the Syrian warring parties.

“We are witnessing a degradation on the ground that cannot wait,” UN spokesman Ahmad Fawzi told a news briefing. “The reason (de Mistura) suspended (the talks) was, as you know, that cities were still being bombed, people were still being starved on the ground.”

The Syrian government is meanwhile advancing in the north of the country with Russian air support. Damascus says its main objectives are to recapture Aleppo — Syria’s biggest city before the war — and seal the Turkish border, lifeline of rebel-held territory for years.

Those would be the biggest victories for Damascus of the war so far, and would all but end rebel hopes of overthrowing President Bashar al-Assad, the goal they have pursued since 2011 with the support of the West, Arab states and Turkey.

Syria’s ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Husam Aala, said in an interview in the daily Tribune de Geneve: “We have done all we could to facilitate the passage of aid convoys in January and February.”

“The advance of the Syrian army in this region has allowed us to break the siege imposed against two towns, Nubul and al-Zahra. It opened the way for the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to deliver aid to 70,000 residents. Our objective was to cut all the supply routes for arms and for men to the terrorist groups armed by Turkey.”

The United Nations has reported that hospitals have been struck in northern Syria in areas where Russian and Syrian warplanes are launching air strikes as part of their advance.—Reuters

UN asks Congo to investigate new Central African Republic child sex abuse allegations

UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations said on Tuesday it had asked Democratic Republic of Congo to investigate four new allegations that its troops had sexually abused children in Central African Republic while deployed as UN peacekeepers.

UN spokesman Farhan Haq said the latest four victims were “residents of the Ngakobo camp for internally displaced persons in Ouaka prefecture and were allegedly sexually exploited and abused by peacekeepers between 2014 and 2015.”

He said the UN mission in Central African Republic was working to ensure the victims have “access to appropriate medical and psycho-social assistance.”

Haq said Democratic Republic of Congo has 10 days to notify the United Nations if it intends to investigate the accusations. If it does not the world body will conduct its own inquiry.

The UN mission in Central African Republic announced in January that the Congolese contingent would be sent home after failing an internal assessment. The UN review of Congolese troops assessed the equipment, the vetting procedures and overall preparedness of the contingent. Haq said the repatriation of some 800 Congolese troops was due to start on 25 February.

There have now been dozens of abuse accusations against UN peacekeepers, French and European troops.

The world body has pledged to crack down on allegations of misconduct and abuse to avoid a repeat of past mistakes. An independent review panel accused the United Nations and its agencies of grossly mishandling allegations of child sexual abuse by foreign troops in Central African Republic in 2013 and 2014.

The previous head of the UN mission in Central African Republic, Babacar Gaye, resigned last August.

Foreign troops were deployed in Central African Republic after mainly Muslim rebels seized power in the majority Christian country in 2013, provoking reprisals and fuelling religious and inter-communal violence that has killed thousands. French troops have been in the country since December 2013. European Union troops were there from April 2014 to March 2015. A United Nations peacekeeping mission assumed authority from African Union troops in September 2014.— Reuters

Suicide bomber kills at least 10 recruits at Yemeni army camp — medics

ADEN — A suicide bomber killed at least 10 recruits at a Yemeni army camp run by President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi’s government in the southern port city of Aden yesterday, medical sources and an official said.

They said several other recruits were also wounded in the explosion at the gate of Abbas camp in Burai- qa, a district of the city of Aden, which had been recently set up to absorb new conscripts to an new army being set up by Hadi’s government.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, the latest in a series of bombings that had rattled the city since Saudi-backed forces captured Yemen’s second largest city from the Iran-allied Houthis in July last year.

Hundreds of new recruits were at the gate trying to register their names to join the Yemeni army, they said.

Residents said ambulance casualties out to hospita- l as troops surrounded the area to keep onlookers away.— Reuters

ADVERTISEMENT FOR A 6.3 MARINE SEISMIC SURVEY IEE REPORT

Woodside Energy (Myanmar) Pte. Ltd on behalf of the joint venture participants, proposes to undertake a three-dimensional (3D) marine seismic survey in Block A-6 located in the Rakhine Basin, Myanmar. This is scheduled to commence in April 2016 and take up to 59 days to complete. An Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) has been prepared by Woodside (the Operator for matters other than government liaison), AECOM Malaysia and E Guard for the proposed activity. The report can be viewed at:

- Woodside’s office in Yangon: 70 LA-2, Golden Valley Road, Bahan Township, Yangon
- EGuard’s office in Yangon: No. 90, Mya Kani Thar Lane, Nyin Chan Yar Street, 10 Miles, Pyay Road, Saw Bwar Gyi Gone Qr., Insein Township, Yangon
- Township General Administration Department, Quarter 3, Yone Paung Sone Road, Thar Baung
- Environmental Conservation Department, Ayeyawady Regional Office, No 13 Saw Mill, Shwe Myin Tin Village, Pathein
- Department of Fisheries, Ayeyawady Regional Office, Tae Gyi Kone, Pathein
- Myanmar Fisheries Federation, Ayeyawady Regional Office, Near BEHS No. 2, No 2 Qu. Pathein

Feedback on the report can be provided in writing to feedback@woodside.com.au, info@eguardser- vices.com or directly to staff at Woodside’s and EGuard’s offices in Yangon by 4 March 2016.
SAN ANTONIO DE LOS BANOS — Long known for its cigars and rum, Cuba has added organic honey to its list of key agricultural exports, creating a buzz among farmers as pesticide use has been linked to declining bee populations elsewhere.

Organic honey has become Cuba’s fourth most valuable agricultural export behind fish products, tobacco and drinks, but ahead of the Caribbean island’s more famous cigars and coffee said Theodor Friedrich, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation’s (FAO) representative for Cuba.

“All (Cuba’s) honey can be certified as organic,” Friedrich told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. “Its honey has a very specific, typical taste; in monetary value, it’s a high ranking product.”

After the collapse in 1991 of the Soviet Union, Cuba’s main trading partner, the island was unable to afford pesticides due to a lack of foreign currency, coupled with the US trade embargo. By necessity, the government embraced organic agriculture, and the policies have largely stuck. Now that the United States is easing its embargo following the restoration of diplomatic ties last year, Cuba’s organic honey exporters could see significant growth if the government supports the industry, beekeepers said. Cuba produced more than 7,200 tonnes of organic honey in 2014, worth about $23.3 million, according to government statistics cited by the FAO.

The country’s industry is still tiny compared with honey heavyweights such as China, Turkey and Argentinia. But with a commodity worth more per liter than oil, Cuban honey producers believe they could be on the cusp of a lucrative era.

With 80 boxes swimming with bees, each producing 45 kg (100 lb) of honey per year, farmer manager Javier Alfonso believes Cuba’s exports could grow markedly in the coming years. His apiary, down a dirt track in Santa Ana de los Banos, a farming town an hour’s drive from the capital Havana, was built from scratch by employees, Alfonso said. “There is just a bit of production now, but it can get bigger,” he said, looking at the rows of colourful wooden boxes.

Like other Cuban bee farmers, he sells honey exclusively to the government, which pays him according to the world market price and then takes responsibility for marketing the product overseas. Most of Cuba’s honey exports go to Europe, he said. He would like to be able to borrow money to expand production, but getting credit is difficult, he said, so for now his team of farmers build their own infrastructure for the bees.

“It’s a very natural environment here,” said Raul Vasquez, a farm employee. “The government is not allowed to sell us chemicals - this could be the reason why the bees aren’t dying here” as they have been in other places.—Reuters

Weather-weary Indian farmers resort to new cash crop: blood

JHANSI — Karna, a farmer from Badgaon village in northern India, has few options but to sell his blood for money, after persistent drought left him unable to live off his land.

The farmer, now 60, began commuting an hour and a half from his village to Jhansi town in Uttar Pradesh state for a job that paid little money.

“I was working as a labourer, but for survival,” said Karna, who goes by one name. “When my son fell ill, I had no other option but to sell my blood.”

For many farmers in this part of Bundelkhand, blood is the new cash crop — a source of guaranteed income as they exhaust other ways of making ends meet. In India, blood donors are not usually paid. But some hospitals buy blood, even though it is against the law.

Bundelkhand, a hilly region divided between the states of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, has struggled with extreme weather in the past few years. Drought, hailstorms, unseasonal rainfall and most recently an unusually warm winter have played havoc with crop yields, making farming unviable for many.

Unemployment has soared, and locals are leaving the rural belt to work as unskilled labour in nearby urban areas. Financial assistance provided by the authorities has failed to achieve much on the ground, as it is far lower than farmers’ losses.

Farmer Lakhan Ahirwar, 61, relies on intermittent labouring jobs to get through dry spells. But when work is scarce, selling his blood is the most reliable source of income.

“I could not find any work for almost five days,” he said. “What should I do? I had to feed my children.”

Rajendra Singh, a prominent water conservationist and winner of the Stockholm Water Prize, said it was “a matter of grave concern that farmers from many areas in Bundelkhand (have) sold their blood and gave him 1,200 rupees ($17.50).”

“I was working as a labourer. I had no other option,” said Singh, who once worked for the Organisation (FON) in New Delhi with his pregnant wife. “Even during the eighth month of her pregnancy she had to work as a labourer in Delhi, as they had no other source of income for survival,” said the farmer.

Tourists from all over the world who flock to Bundelkhand to visit Khajuraho, a world heritage site famous for its temples adorned with erotic carvings, are largely unaware of the plight of local farmers.

The region has received below-average rains since 2007, and is now facing its third successive year of drought. Agricultural production has declined substantially and livestock are suffering too.

Crops in nearly half the districts of Madhya Pradesh have been hit by insufficient rainfall, the state government says.

In neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, the situation is even worse, with 69 out of 71 districts receiving below-average rains in 2015, according to the India Meteorological Department.

Last year, unseasonably heavy rains and hailstorms devastated crops at the ripening stage in April and May in Bundelkhand. That was followed by drought in August and September, and a warm winter. The freak winter badly affected the rabi crop, sown during the winter months, on around 40 per cent of India’s farmland.

The negative effects have pushed some farmers to commit suicide, even as state governments scramble to ease the agrarian crisis. More than 3,200 farmers in Bundelkhand alone have killed themselves in the last five years, according to official records. Crop losses and worries over debt are the main reasons. Local leader Shivnarain Singh Parihar of the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (Indian Farmers’ Union) said among two farmers per day, on average, are committing suicide in Bundelkhand.

—Reuters
Japanese calligrapher Souun Takeda poses for a photo at his atelier, where he teaches 300 students, in Fujisawa, near Tokyo, on 8 February. Photo: KYODO NEWS

TOKYO — The keyboard has all but supplanted the handwritten message as the communication mode of choice, but Japanese calligrapher Souun Takeda believes the pen — or more precisely, the brush — mightier tool for tapping into something more visceral.

Although Takeda recognizes the practical applications of today’s social networking, he suggests Japanese calligraphy, which can be traced back to the origins of Chinese civilization, offers an insight into beauty, depth, and positive energy that transcends language.

The deeper the message, he says, the more important it is to express oneself in writing.

“Use social networking sites for speed and convenience. I write by hand to add depth and weight to my messages. I take the best of both worlds,” Takeda, one of the most celebrated Japanese calligraphers today, said in a recent interview with Kyodo News.

“The deeper the message, the more I will rely on the letter. There’s an option of using text emoticons but I’ll definitely write out a letter, for example, if I want to apologise to someone. It’s more sincere,” he said.

The 40-year-old Kumamoto native, whose name Souun is a stage name given to him by his mother Souyou Takeda, feels the technological revolution has only served to elevate his social status as a professional calligrapher.

Writing by hand has become increasingly rare these days, but Takeda feels that in the computer age there is a yearning for the ancient art as a form of healing.

“I look on the bright side of things. Since computers appeared, more Japanese people have been craving a spark that can’t be had through electronic gadgets. This is a result of having become cold. Japanese calligraphy has become a healing method much like your own voice,” he said.

Takeda, along with his two younger brothers, was first exposed to Japanese calligraphy when he was six through his mother, and all three siblings eventually became teachers. After studying information science at the Tokyo University of Science, he worked for Japan’s largest telecom company, NTT, for nearly three years.

But he realised the power of his calligraphy can have on others one day when a colleague became overwhelmed by tears after seeing him write her name with a brush. She told him it was the first time in her life she liked her own name.

“It was such an eye-opening experience. I realised how important a single name can be. It’s like a logo you carry on your back your entire life. I imagined how wonderful it would be if I could express the beauty in a name through my calligraphy,” he said.

Takeda never thought twice about replacing his business suit with a samue, the traditional work garb of Zen monks and writers of his craft. He resigned from his company the next day.

After performing on stages in his 20s and developing his own network, Takeda opened a calligraphy school in the Shonan beach area in Kanagawa Prefecture in 2006, where he currently teaches 300 students with hundreds more waiting in the wings for instruction.

His youngest student is a kindergartener and oldest 77, proof that age is no barrier. Reading, writing and so-rohan (Japanese abacus) were traditionally taught in terakoya, or temple schools attended by the elementary schoolchildren of commoners during the Edo Period (1603-1868).

To this day, many Japanese, especially children, attend calligraphy schools because it is believed to reflect a person’s character.

“You’d be surprised how many parents in Japan have an inferiority complex about their poor handwriting. They can’t make their kids never learn to play the piano or wear a kimono, but they really do care that their kids have neat handwriting,” Takeda said.

The main instruments used for shodo, translated as “the way of writing,” include a brush (fude), an inkstick (sumi), inkstone (suzuri) to grind the inkstick against, standard-size paper (hanshi) and paper weight (bunchin).

Calligraphy is taught in most Japanese elementary schools, and all students have their own set of shodo tools.

Aside from calligraphy lessons, Takeda has published over 40 books, many of them of the self-help variety, as well as lectures and provided custom calligraphy services. He has designed logos for name cards, doorplates, T-shirts, umbrellas, beach sandals, wall stickers, sake bottle labels, and even gravestones.

One customer recently paid 3 million yen (about $26,500) for a signed artwork of Takeda’s consisting of a single kanji character, measuring seven metres in height.

Last June, Takeda made his overseas debut with an exhibition in Oja, a small city in California located northwest of Los Angeles.

He has been invited back this summer and is also scheduled to hold an event in Houston, Texas, in June.

“I want to work more overseas, but I don’t care where I go. I believe we are all governed by a universal law, so anyone can relate to shodo and what it can do — lift spirits, bridge communicative gaps, simplify life challenges, bring people together.”

As for the challenge of overcoming language and my English, he said, “I could express the beauty in your entire life. I imagined the way of writing,” include a brush (fude), an inkstick (sumi), inkstone (suzuri) to grind the inkstick against, standard-size paper (hanshi), and paper weight (bunchin).

Calligraphy is taught in most Japanese elementary schools, and all students have their own set of shodo tools.

Aside from calligraphy lessons, Takeda has published over 40 books, many of them of the self-help variety, as well as lectures and provided custom calligraphy services. He has designed logos for name cards, doorplates, T-shirts, umbrellas, beach sandals, wall stickers, sake bottle labels, and even gravestones.

One customer recently paid 3 million yen (about $26,500) for a signed artwork of Takeda’s consisting of a single kanji character, measuring seven metres in height.

Last June, Takeda made his overseas debut with an exhibition in Oja, a small city in California located northwest of Los Angeles.

He has been invited back this summer and is also scheduled to hold an event in Houston, Texas, in June.

“I want to work more overseas, but I don’t care where I go. I believe we are all governed by a universal
Lady Gaga makes psychedelic Grammy tribute to kindred spirit David Bowie

LOS ANGELES — Lady Gaga paid psychedelic tribute on the Grammy’s stage on Monday to the late British rock visionary David Bowie with a multimedia song-and-dance performance that sought to capture the boundary-pushing essence of a kindred pop music spirit.

Bowie, a forerunner of Ga- ga’s brand of provocative, gender-bending performance image- ry, died of cancer at age 69 on 10 January, just two days after the release of what became his critical- ly acclaimed final studio album, “Blackstar.”

Gaga, 29, a six-time Gram- my laureate who, like Bowie, is known for frequent self-reinven- tion, arrived on the red carpet dressed in an outfit that channeled Bowie’s signature androgynous look, sporting a bright, blue em- bellished jacket-dress and bright orange hair.

On stage she charted Bow- ie’s half-century career with a medley touching on 10 of his hits — “Space Oddity,” “Changes,” “Ziggy Stardust,” “Suffragette City,” “Rebel Rebel,” “Fashion,” “Fame,” “Under Pressure,” “Let’s Dance” and “Heroes.”

The song-dance number was punctuated by a torrent of flash- ing multi-colored lights and images projected on a large screen behind her, including a closeup of her face adorned in Aladdin Sane makeup — a nod to one of Bowie’s personas — with a spider crawling over her nose.

Bowie’s work also garnered posthumous Grammy award rec- ognition on Monday as a new version of his composition “Sue (Or In a Season of Crime),” re-recorded for his 26th studio album and final album album, “Blackstar,” earned the prize for best arrangement for instrument and vocals.

That Grammy went to big- band orchestra leader and com- poser Maria Schneider, who said she had no idea at the time she was collaborating with Bowie on what would be his final project.

“It was the greatest privilege to work with David Bowie and to experience his creativity,” she told reporters backstage.

“Sue” was originally included as a fresh track for Bowie’s 2014 compilation album “Nothing Has Changed.” The album “Blackstar” was released two days before his death. Earlier in the show, another late pop talent, Eagles co-found- er, guitarist and songwriter Glenn Frey, was saluted by surviving members of his band who joined Jackson Browne for a perfor- mance of one of the Eagles’ big- gest hits, “Take It Easy.”

Frey, who co-founded the Eagles with Don Henley in 1971 in Los Angeles, died at age 67 in January of complications from a number of ailments, including pneumonia.

Director Spike Lee says ruckus over diversity changed Oscars

BERLIN — American director Spike Lee said on Tuesday the Academy Awards organisers would not have pledged to di- versify their membership had it not been for the debate about the lack of black actors among nom- inees for the best actor award this year.

Lee was speaking at the Berlin International Film Festi- val where his film “Chi-Raq” is being shown out of competition.

“It if had not been raised, I believe the Academy would not have made those changes,” Lee told a news con- ference.

“So it was worth it. A week later they changed everything up. “That would have happened if people kept quiet, not just me, Will and Jada,” he said, referring to actor Will Smith and his wife Jada Pinkett Smith. “A whole bunch of people, it wasn’t just myself.”

Lee originally was quot- ed in January as having said he would boycott the Academy Awards ceremony because of the lack of diversity but later clarified his position to say that he and his wife Tonya would not be attending.

“His wife Tonya and I will be attending the Academy, which hands out the Oscar honors, announced in short order after Lee regis- tered his protest that it would double the number of women and ethnic minority members by 2020.”

Bieber wants to cover up the tattoo tribute to Selena Gomez

LONDON — Pop star Justin Bieber says he is keen to cover up the tattoo he got as a tribute to ex-girlfriend Selena Gomez on his arm.

The 21-year-old “What Do You Mean?” hitmaker said he has tried to conceal it with some “shading,” reported Female First. “This is my ex-girlfriend, I kinda tried to cover her face up with some shading, but people still know,” Bieber said.

The singer is currently be- ing linked to Hailey Baldwin. The rumours of them having a romantic relationship started doing the rounds after they posted pictures full of PDA on Instagram.

Eagles of Death Metal to give Paris concert for attack survivors

PARIS — US band Eagles of Death Metal, on stage when Islam- ic State attacked their venue and killed 89 people in Paris last No- vember, expressed sympathy with those too traumatized to attend their concert at another Paris hall on Tuesday.

With armed police on guard, workers hung the band’s name in big red letters outside the Olympia concert hall in Paris. The Bataclan hall, where they were playing to a crowd of about 1,500 people on the evening of the attack on 13 No- vember, is still closed.

The three militants who attacked the crowd at the Bataclan body had guns, perhaps “everyone should have one,” he said.

In December, Eagles of Death Metal appeared on stage at a U2 concert in Paris for their first re- turn to the city since the attacks. Tuesday will be their first full con- cert.
NEW YORK — Honest Co, the shopping website cofounded by actress Jessica Alba, has been accused of fraudulently labeling dozens of home and personal care products as natural, plant-based or chemical-free, causing consumers to over-pay.

A lawsuit filed on Friday by Brad and Manon Buonasera in US District Court in Manhattan targets Honest’s marketing of at least 41 items such as floor cleaners, laundry detergent, children’s toothpaste, soap and bubble bath.

While the products were labeled “natural,” “all natural,” “naturally derived,” “plant-based” and “no harsh chemicals (ever!),” they contained “a spectacular array of synthetic and toxic ingredients,” such as the toxins phenoxethanol and methylisothiazolinone, the Buonaseras said.

“Honest’s products are a chemical soup,” the complaint said.

The plaintiffs are seeking damages that could top $5 million and be tripled. They also want class-action status for New Yorkers who bought Honest’s products.

Honest has already discontinued or changed ingredients and labels for some of the 41 products, the complaint said.

In a statement, Honest said: “The Honest Company takes its responsibility to our consumers seriously and strongly stands behind our products. These allegations are without merit and we will vigorously defend this baseless lawsuit.”

Alba was not named as a defendant. The Buonaseras’ lawyers did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

A similar lawsuit over five Honest products is pending in a federal court in Los Angeles. Honest wants the lawsuit dismissed.

The Buonaseras said they sued after buying Honest’s Conditioning Detangler and Shampoo & Body Wash at a Costco store in Manhattan’s Harlem neighbourhood. They said they contacted Honest in mid-September, and sued after the Santa Monica, California-based company failed to correct its advertising.

Honest raised $100 million in an August funding round, and, according to a published report, has worked with Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley on a possible initial public offering. The Buonaseras’ complaint refers to that plan. — Reuters
Ronaldos riled by questions about Barca trio, away goals

ROME — Real Madrids Cristiano Ronaldo was riled by comments about Barcelonas forwards and reacted angrily when asked at a news conference on Tuesday about his away goals ahead of the Champions League tie at AS Roma.

The Portugal international was asked if Barca’s free-scoring attacking trio of Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez and Neymar had the edge over Real’s strikers because they get on so well together.

“How do we know that (their relationship) is that way? It is only because that is what is written,” he said.

“I don’t have to go to dinner with (Karim) Benzema, or for (Gareth) Bale to come to my house. What we need is to get on the field. We don’t have to give each other kisses.”

“This thing about the little meals, the little hugs, the little kisses. To me that doesn’t mean anything.”

Ronaldo later walked out of the news conference after replying sharply to a question about his recent lack of away goals on the eve of Real’s last 16 first-leg clash in Rome.

Ronaldos broke the competition’s record for the most goals scored in the group stage earlier this season when he hit 11, and is also the Champions League’s all-time top scorer with 88 goals in 121 appearances.

But he was unhappy when asked why he had not scored away since Real Madrid’s 2-0 La Liga victory at Eibar on 29 November. “Who else has scored more goals away from home than me since I arrived in Spain?” said Ronaldo. “Name one player who has scored more than me? “No answer? Ok. Thank you everyone,” he added, before excusing himself from the news conference.

Ronaldo has netted 32 goals in all competitions so far this season — 21 at home and 11 away. He has featured in four away games for Real since his goal against Eibar without finding the net, struggling to shine in recent La Liga matches against Real Betis and Granada.

“It’s understandable that people have doubts,” Ronaldo had said earlier. “Its like with a son when you give him everything and then when you take it away, he cries.

“I hope that I can keep this form up right until the season’s end.”

Real coach Zinedine Zidane reaffirmed Ronaldos importance to the team this week after the forward scored twice in a 4-2 win over Athletic Bilbao at the Bernabeu on Saturday.

Serena withdraws from Qatar Open with flu

SERENA WILLIAMS will miss next weeks Qatar Open because of the flu, she said on Tuesday, marking the second consecutive tournament the world number one misses due to illness.

Williams, a finalist at the 2013 tournament where she lost in three sets to Victoria Azarenka, was the top seed at the 21-27 February tournament in Doha. “I unfortunately have to withdraw from the Qatar Total Open as I have come down with the flu and do not feel 100 per cent,” Williams said in a statement released by tournament organisers.

“I need to take this time to recover but I do look forward to returning to Doha and seeing my fans soon. The 34-year-old American announced last week that she would miss the ongoing Dubai Championships with the flu.

She has not played a competitive match since she was stunned in the Australian Open final by German Angelique Kerber. The world number one’s withdrawal comes as another blow to tournament organisers after Maria Sharapova pulled out with an arm injury.

PSG’s Cavani shows his worth with winner against Chelsea

PARIS — Paris St German substitute Edinson Cavani, criticised by French media a lacking composure in front of goal, responded in style to earn a 2-1 home win over Chelsea in their Champions League last-16 first leg on Tuesday.

The Uruguay forward, who has scored only once in Ligue 1 this year, fired a low angled shot past goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois in the 78th minute after John Obi Mikel had cancelled out Zlatan Ibrahimovic’s opener at the end of the first half. That did not surprise PSG coach Laurent Blanc, who brought Cavani on for Lucas four minutes before he got the winner.

“I’m not just saying it because he scored tonight, I always say it, Eddy is a player who can score,” Blanc told a news conference.

“He was going through a tough period so I hope it will give him his confidence back.”

PSG knocked Chelsea out on away goals at the same stage last year after the Blues had prevailed the previous season in the quarter-finals and have the edge going into the second leg.

It was Chelsea’s first defeat in 13 games since Dutchman Guus Hiddink took over from the sacked Jose Mourinho but they will fancy their chances at Stamford Bridge on 16 February.

With Chelsea’s inspirational captain John Terry ruled out with a hamstring injury, Branislav Ivanovic moved from full back to central defence and wore the skipper’s armband. Marco Verratti started for PSG having only just recovered from a groin injury, while Blanc chose to field Marquinhos on the right side of defence in place of the Serge Aurier, who has been suspended for insulting Blanc and several team mates.

Chelsea had the best chance midway through the first half when striker Diego Costa’s point-blank header was instinctively palmed on to the bar by PSG keeper Kevin Trapp. Ibrahimovic, who was sent off in London last year and picked up a yellow card on Tuesday, broke the deadlock six minutes before halftime with a low free kick deflected past Courtois by the heel of Obi Mikel, who had fouled Branislav Lucas.

But Chelsea hit back just before the interval when Costa deflected a corner into the path of Mikel, who controlled the ball before firing home his first goal in 14 months.

Lucas was replaced in the 74th minute by Cavani who had an immediate impact, collecting Angel Di Maria’s perfect pass on the right and scoring with a low shot through Courtois’s legs.

Reuters