The Yangon Region government has invited Yangonites to apply for rental apartments at a housing complex in Dagon Myothit (South) Township. According to the regional government, those who live in Yangon with no homes, but have household list certificate (66/6), are qualified for submission of their applications to rent an apartment at the rate of K30,000 a month at Mahabandoola Housing Complex for the long term. Only applicants who own no home in Yangon and want to rent an apartment for the long term will be chosen,” said U Myat Kyaw Kyaw, secretary of the Yangon Region government. Application forms are being issued at township administrator’s offices across Yangon, and the forms are to be sent to Yangon Region government from 1 to 15 February. “I am interested in applying for rental apartments as the rent price is pretty fair,” said U Nyi Phyo Lin who lives in a rented house in Hlinethaya Township. According to the Yangon Region government, it can revoke a lease if anyone who was allowed to rent an apartment there fails to follow its instructions in which re-renting or selling the apartment is banned. The Mahabandoola Housing Complex designated for people with no homes in Yangon has 1,200 apartments. Each apartment is 569 sq.ft.
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker gives local, foreign media press conference

PYIDAUNGSU Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann gave a press conference to local and foreign media persons totaling 119 at Zabuthiri Hall in Parliament Complex, Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. The Speaker answered questions raised by media at the conference. Present also at the press conference were Deputys Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U Nanda Kyaw Swa, Chair of Pyithu Hluttaw Bill Committee U Ti Khun Myat and Secretary U Saw Hla Tun, members of Pyithu Hluttaw Legal Affairs and Special Cases Assessment Commission and officials from the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw Offices.—Myanmar News Agency

Amyotha Hluttaw postpones its session to 2 Feb

THE first regular session of the second Amyotha Hluttaw has been postponed from 1 February to 2 February 2016, the Amyotha Hluttaw’s office announced yesterday.—Myanmar News Agency

Myanmar’s UDE wants to be included in OU5

A PROFESSOR from the University of Distance Education will participate in a meeting on Five Open University-OU5 to be held in Surabaya, Indonesia, from 30 January to 1 February. Dr Thazin Lwin, Professor of the UDE, left Yangon yesterday for Indonesia to attend the meeting. Five Open University-OU5 includes five universities of distance education each from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand. Myanmar’s UDE is expected to be included in the open university system of the group.—GNLM

Myanmar Scouts concludes strategy development workshop

The Myanmar Scouts Federation yesterday concluded a strategy development workshop in Lanmadaw township, Yangon Region, with 50 scouts, including former scouts, from six regions and states. A MGEOFFER from the University of Distance Education will participate in a meeting on Five Open University-OU5 to be held in Surabaya, Indonesia, from 30 January to 1 February. Dr Thazin Lwin, Professor of the UDE, left Yangon yesterday for Indonesia to attend the meeting. Five Open University-OU5 includes five universities of distance education each from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand. Myanmar’s UDE is expected to be included in the open university system of the group.—GNLM

Newly opened power stations in Pathein. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

TWO power stations in Pathein in the delta region were opened yesterday, as part of the equal access to electricity in Ayeyawady Region. The newly opened stations can now provide electricity to over 40,000 houses in 129 villages in the region, thereby helping develop human resources in education, health and economy. The construction of the projects started in March and were completed in November last year. —Tha Oo (Lay Hnyat Hnar)

Weather radar station in Mandalay sees completion of piling work

PILING work for the construction of a radar station near TadaU Airport in Mandalay was completed, according to an official from the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (Upper Myanmar). The radar station is being built with the assistance of Japan International Cooperation Agency-JICA starting last December and is slated for completion in the middle of the year 2017, said U Kyaw Lwin Oo, director of the department. Of three sets to be established in Myanmar, the first weather radar station was opened in Kyaukpyss last October while construction of the two facilities are in progress in Mandalay and Yangon. Upon completion of three radar stations in Myanmar, weather forecast will be more accurate than before as the three stations will be able to exchange information with one another, added the director.—Aung Thet Khing

Myanmar Dental Conference 2016 held

THE 36th Myanmar Dental Conference, set to last for five days, continued in Yangon yesterday with a paper-reading session and public exposition of dental care and equipment as of last Thursday. According to the conference, 47 local and foreign resource persons are set to read out their papers at the conference attended by 400 delegates from across the country. A sport event is scheduled to be held on the final day of the conference.—Aung Thura
VP Dr Sai Mauk Kham attends luncheon in honour of incoming, outgoing MPs

Ayeyawady Region on track to get 24-hour electricity coverage

Than Oo (MNA) & Khin Yadana

AMONG states and regions of the country, Ayeyawady keeps abreast of the high potential of development compared to Yangon and Mandalay as the region has an abundant stock of rice and opportunities for job seekers.

The development of a certain region can be determined by its physical and social infrastructure such as electricity, roads and bridges, water supply, education, health, telecommunication, etc.

Among the fundamental facilities and systems, electrical grids play an important role in implementation of tasks for ensuring better living standards of the people. The Ministry of Electricity implemented many programs for electrification of the whole Ayeyawady Region, using all forms of sources to supply electricity to the region apart from the country’s national grid, said an official from the ministry, adding that only a few townships out of 39 remain to gain access to electricity.

According to the ministry, there are 5,240 villages in the region where electricity is yet to reach.

During the five-year period, five main projects were implemented to supply power to the region. First of all, a project for installation of 30.25-mile long 230KV Athoke-Pathen power line was started last February and was put into service last November. The second project was setting up of a switch bay at Athoke sub-power station and Pathein main power station which was started last February were put into service last November.

Next, the installation of the 76.5-mile 66KV Pathein-Ngayokekaung-Ngapyaung power line, electric power was brought to 739 villages. Moreover, 5,938 villages are expected to have access to electricity through other sources.

The Ministry of Electricity has the potential to become an industrial zone and replaced by the electric power line and 230 KV Kyaiklat industrial zone are expecting to see more development.

Regarding the soaring fuel prices, the ministry said that it would intensify its supervision on the illegal import and distribution of fuel oil. The ministry spoke of the extractive industries with foreign investments, saying that the Southeast Asian oil and gas pipeline project was started in 2009 by the International Environment Management company of Thailand in line with the criteria set by the World Bank.

U Phyo Zin Tun, permanent secretary of the ministry, responded to queries raised by correspondents at the press briefing.—Myanmar News Agency

Energy Ministry holds press briefing

MPT to provide 3G coverage to over 95% of Myanmar by end of March

MYANMAR will host the 34th Senior Officials Meeting on 12-15 July, the Ministerial Level Meeting on 10-23 September and High-Level Officials Meeting on 6-7 December, the Ministry of Energy said in a press briefing yesterday.

The ministry said that it would conduct feasibility studies on the import of liquefied gas in partnership with the World Bank as part of satisfying the rising demand in the industrial sector.

We are about to provide 3G network to over 100% of the country’s population, with over 95% of county to receive coverage by the end of March. Currently only 60% of Myanmar is covered by the 3G network, but this will be increased to nearly the whole country during the next couple of months.

“We are always prioritising the extension of our networks. We are about to provide 3G network coverage for over 90% of the country’s population, with 90% to be connected at the end of March,” said Mr. Koichi Ka-wase, chief commercial officer of MPT-KSGM.

Furthermore, as part of MPT’s special 3G+ promotion, those who top-up their phone balance between January 29 – February 9 with a sum of 1,000 kyats will receive a 20% bonus; a sum of 3,000 kyats, a 30% bonus; 5,000 kyats, a 40% bonus, while any top-up of an amount over 10,000 kyats will receive a 100% bonus added to their balance, it is known from MPT.

“We’re slowly making changes. We are also working towards expanding our network of phone towers to provide for the coming 4G network.” said U Thein Hote, deputy chief of MPT’s business department.

As well as offers on pre-paid phone cards, bonus also apply to those who pay monthly phone bills, with a bonus of 500 kyats received for those who’s bill is between 1,000-2,999 kyats; 1,500 kyats for bills between 3,000-4,999 kyats; a 5,000 kyats bonus received for bills incurred between 5,000-9,999 kyats and a 10,000 kyats bonus added to all those bills 10,000 kyats or over.

It is known that the Japanese KDDI and Sumitomo company have bought stakes in MPT worth $2 billion.—Myitmakha News Agency
Cattle breeders earn more than K1 million per year

RURAL people in Tatkon Township, Nay Pyi Taw Council Area, are mainly engaged in agriculture and livestock breeding tasks.

After harvesting crops, local farmers focus on breeding of cows on a manageable scale as rural areas in the township have much room for cattle breeding.

Due to climate change, Tatkon, which is one of the dry regions of Myanmar, is seeing less rainfall yearly. Local farmers have begun to invest in sank tube-wells for irrigating various crops.

A partnership breeder said that he tends cows at the reed-mace grove and harvested green gram plantations at Hsinthe creek in the monsoon and cold season.

But he takes care that his cows do not enter the thriving crop plantations.

“I have 10 cows and oxen being bred with a partnership breeder. Cows can become pregnant once a year. I can sell K300,000 per one-year cow and K350,000 per one-year ox. The excrement of cows can be sold for K5,000 per bullock-cart. We can produce one viss (approx. 1.6 litres) of milk per cow daily. As such, I can earn more than K1 million yearly from the selling of young bulls, milk and cow excrement,” said U Hla Aung, owner of cow herd from Thayawhan village.— Tin Soe Lwin (IPRD)

Cargo vessel sank in Twantay

A CARGO vessel heading for Bayintnaung jetty, driven by one U Khin Maung Myint, 57, with eight crew members sank in Twantay Canal, near Tharsi village, Twantay township, yangon on Wednesday.

The accident was caused by permeation of water into the vessel. Total loss amounted to K257,000.

The vessel, called Shwe Thandar, was owned by one U Zayyar, 27. It was 91 feet long, 21 feet wide. The police have filed charges against U Khin Maung Myint.— Aung Min (Dala)

Extreme weather hampers regional development in Kachin State

EXTREME weather is thwarting regional development tasks in Kachin State, according to local residents.

Projects in three regions in Sawlaw Township have temporarily ceased due to the cold weather this month.

The vessel, called Shwe Thandar, was 21 feet wide. The police have found a corpse in a bush near milepost 41/8 and 41/9. On Tuesday police found three men drunk at the Yes restaurant as shown by the restaurant CCTV. When interrogated, Thura Win alias Hassan, 32, admitted to having killed Soe Soe alias Ye Tun Soe, 32. Local police are holding the man while searching for the second suspect who managed to escape.— Tun Hlaing (Myain)

Crime News

POLICE were alerted to a murder with the help of CCTV installed at railway station ward, Taikkyi township on Wednesday. According to an investigation, police found a corpse in a bush near milepost 41/8 and 41/9. On Tuesday police found three men drunk at the Yes restaurant as shown by the restaurant CCTV. When interrogated, Thura Win alias Hassan, 32, admitted to having killed Soe Soe alias Ye Tun Soe, 32. Local police are holding the man while searching for the second suspect who managed to escape.— Tun Hlaing (Myain)

Fire engulfs 18 houses in Mandalay

A FIRE that broke out in Maha Aungmyay Township, Mandalay, yesterday, destroyed 18 houses, according to the Mandalay Region Fire Department.

This is the second such incident this week, following a fire outbreak in Tagundaing Yannar Ward on Tuesday.

According to an investigation, an individual filling fuel into a bucket near a cooking fire inside a house in Nyan Pyar Yi Su Ward caused the fire, according to the department.

It took firefighters 40 minutes to put out the fire with the use of 76 fire engines accompanied by more than 200 firefighters, including auxiliary fire brigade members, according to the department.

Action is being taken against one Daw Khin Hay Yi, the owner of the house, for negligence. More than 220 fires occurred from January to December, 2015 in Mandalay Region, with 81 in Mandalay itself. Fires caused by negligence topped the list.— Aung Thant Khaing

Mobile clinics offer social security services nationwide

THE Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security has offered medical care through mobile clinics to social security policy holders and plans to expand its services to staff of government ministries and to hospital zones in Nay Pyi Taw.

Mobile healthcare services were launched nationwide in February 2014 by the ministry in cooperation with the Thukha Mingala Medical and Diagnostic Center.

“We have collected 5 per cent of the total income of our members,” said Daw Lwin Lwin Khaing, head of the Social Security Department in Nay Pyi Taw.

Mobile healthcare services are liable to pay 2 per cent of their total income, while their employers will have to pay the rest.”— U Phyo Sithu, manager of the mobile medical team, said: “We are scheduled to go to the upper regions, including Mandalay, Kalay, Katha, Kayin and Myitkyina to provide people there with quality care and medical check-ups.”— Min Min Taw

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“The mobile clinic programme aims to promote understanding about the ministry’s social security services to programme members, especially in remote areas. The mobile clinics are equipped to treat chronic diseases such as diabetes and blood diseases.

“People suffering from sickness, senior citizens and patients with chronic diseases are high on the ministry’s list of priorities,” said Daw Lwin Lwin Khaing, head of the Social Security Department in Nay Pyi Taw.

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Extreme weather hampers regional development in Kachin State

EXTREME weather is thwarting regional development tasks in Kachin State, according to local residents.

Linsaw, Lansal and Lakin regions are covered with snow, and the temperature there has reached minus five degree centigrade. Those performing regional development tasks have moved to safer places.— Simikhon-Nan Yi

Crime News

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SINGAPORE — China has built a potent military machine over the past 30 years but is struggling to develop advanced engines that would allow its warplanes to match Western fighters in combat, foreign and Chinese industry sources said.

The country’s engine technology lags that of United Technologies unit Pratt & Whitney, General Electric and Rolls-Royce, said Douglas Barrie, senior fellow for military aerospace at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London.

China’s Defence Ministry, in a brief statement to Reuters, said there was a “definite gap” between Chinese military technology and some developed countries, adding Beijing would continue to strengthen its armed forces.

Western restrictions on arms exports to China prohibit the sale of Western engines for military use, forcing China to rely on homegrown designs or engines Russia has agreed to sell.

“Chinese engine-makers face a multitude of problems,” said Michael Raska, assistant professor at the Military Trans formations Programme at Singapore’s S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.

Among the issues, China’s J-20 and J-31 stealth fighters cannot super-cruise, or fly at supersonic speeds like their closest rivals, Lockheed Martin’s F-22 and F-35 stealth planes, without using after-burners, said two industry sources who follow Beijing’s military programmes closely.

After-burners remove a warplane’s stealthiness, a capability that allows them to escape radar detection. Even the warplane engine that experts consider to be China’s best has reliability issues, said the sources, who declined to be identified because of the sensitivity of the matter.

A Chinese military expert, who has knowledge of the government’s defence policy but who declined to be identified, said Chinese fighter jets could not perform as well as American warplanes because of inferior engine technology.

That puts China at a disadvantage should its warplanes be pitted against US jet fighters or those from security ally Japan in Asia’s disputed waters, the industry sources and security experts said.

Chinese warplanes are likely to come into increasing contact with US fighters over the South China Sea in the years ahead after Beijing conducted its first test flights this month to one of three island runways it is building in the contested Spratly archipelago, security experts said.

In any conflict, China would likely rely on sheer numbers of fighters as well as a growing arsenal of sophisticated missiles that can be launched from warships or land, they added.

To be sure, China has made warplane engine development a priority in recent years, sources said.

The Shanghai-based Galleon, which provides consulting services to the aerospace industry, estimates Beijing will spend $300 billion over the next 20 years on civil and military aircraft engine programmes.

Some sources said China had hired several foreign engineers and former air force personnel to work on engine development, although this could not be independently confirmed. The Chinese Defence Ministry declined to comment.

“In 20 to 30 years time, given the amount of work they have done and the effort they are putting into it, they should have a viable military engine,” said Greg Waldron, Asia Managing Editor at Flightglobal, an industry publication. — Reuters

North Korea activity points to possible space launch: US officials

WASHINGTON — The United States has seen increased activity around a North Korean missile site, suggesting preparations for a possible space launch in the near future, US officials told Reuters on Thursday.

The finding was revealed as Washington shows growing concern that Pyongyang could use space technology to enhance its missile capability and while United Nations Security Council members discuss fresh sanctions against North Korea after it conducted its fourth nuclear test on 6 January.

The officials cited intelligence suggesting movement of components and propellant at North Korea’s Sohae satellite launch facility. A test could take place within a couple of weeks, they said.

“Our concern though is ... it’s the same technology to develop ICBMs”- (inter-continental ballistic missiles), one of the officials said.

“We are keeping a close eye on these activities by the North Koreans. We’re watching 24/7,” a second official said.

Joe Bermudez, chief analyst at commercial intelligence firm AllSource Analysis, said open source imagery showed increased activity at the site in northwestern North Korea.

Movement of vehicles, construction and other activities suggested test preparations for a rocket engine test soon, Bermudez said. Activities were also noted at the launch pad, however, it was not clear whether a rocket had already been delivered to the site.

North Korea was concealing activities on the site through construction of new buildings and a cover that obscures satellite views of the gantry tower next to the launch pad.

“This is the first time leading up to a potential launch that all the concealment shelters are in place,” said Stephen Wood, chief executive officer of AllSource.

An analysis by 38 North, a North Korea monitoring project at Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies, said the cover near the gantry tower could conceal a rocket, and a rail-mounted shelter has been moved adjacent to the engine-test stand on the site.

The shelter could allow for rocket stages to be assembled and moved to the tower under cover of darkness, a potential launch in late 2016, sending an object described as a communications satellite into orbit. Western and Asian experts said it was part of an effort to build an ICBM.

“low-level activities” throughout the Sohae Rocket Launch Facility. North Korea last conducted a long-range rocket launch in late 2012, sending an object it described as a communications satellite into orbit. Western and Asian experts said it was part of an effort to build an ICBM.

“Not Top Gun yet: China struggles with warplane engine technology

Foreign visitors stand next to a model of the J-31 stealth fighter at the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC) booth at the Aviation Expo China 2015 in Beijing, China, in September 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

A Chinese military expert, who has knowledge of the government’s defence policy but who declined to be identified, said Chinese fighter jets could not perform as well as American warplanes because of inferior engine technology.

That puts China at a disadvantage should its warplanes be pitted against US jet fighters or those from security ally Japan in Asia’s disputed waters, the industry sources and security experts said.

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In any conflict, China would likely rely on sheer numbers of fighters as well as a growing arsenal of sophisticated missiles that can be launched from warships or land, they added.

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Chinese sonar vessel joins search for missing Malaysian jet

SYDNEY — China is set to join the underwater search for a Malaysia Airlines passenger jet missing for almost two years by providing a sonar-equipped vessel by the end of February, Australia's deputy prime minister Warren Truss said yesterday.

Australia's Deputy Prime Minister Warren Truss speaks during a media conference next to a map displaying the search area for missing Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 at Parliament House in Canberra, Australia, in December 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

Sydney's international airport. The Australian-led underwater search is one of the most expensive ever conducted. An initial hunt along a rugged 60,000-sq-km (23,000 sq miles) patch of sea floor off the coast of Perth cost A$120 million but yielded no sign of the plane.

The ATR 72 twin-engine turboprop aircraft with 58 people on board crashed on 23 July 2014 while landing and the co-pilot was dead. The Singapore District Court fined Chinpo Shipping Company (Private) Ltd was fined S$180,000 ($125,698) yesterday for facilitating a shipment of arms to North Korea in violation of UN sanctions.

The Singapore District Court had found Chinpo guilty in December of transferring financial assets or resources that could have been used to contribute to North Korea’s weapon programmes. It also found Chinpo guilty of carrying out a remittance business without a license between 2009 and 2013.

Chinpo Shipping was named by a 2014 UN report as helping arrange the shipment of Cuban fighter jets and missile parts that were bound for North Korea when they were seized in Panama in 2013. It was the largest amount of arms and related material interdicted to or from North Korea since the UN first began imposing economic and commercial sanctions on North Korea in 2006, according to the Singapore District Court.—Reuters

Senior North Korean diplomat leaves for Russia amid nuclear tensions

BEIJING — North Korea Vice Foreign Minister Pak Myong Guk left for Russia yesterday, official media said, as the international community discusses how best to penalise Pyongyang for its fourth nuclear test earlier this month.

It is the first foreign visit by a senior North Korean official reported by the country’s official media since it conducted what it claimed was a long-range missile launch. The vessel is expected to leave Singapore for Australia on 31 January and commence operations towards the end of February.

The seven-member team will take to four the number of vessels scouring a search area that has been expanded to 120,000 square km (46,330 square miles) of ocean floor.

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Date for Indian, Pakistan foreign secretary-level talks yet to be finalised

NEW DELHI — The date for the forthcoming foreign secretary-level talks between India and Pakistan is yet to be finalised, India’s External Ministry Affairs Ministry spokesperson Vikas Swarup said.

“The talks between two sides were cancelled on 14 January, a day ahead of its schedule in wake of the attack on Indian airbase in Pathankot. Swarup then said both sides agreed to reschedule their talks in the “very near future.”—Xinhua

Taiwan air crash investigators blame culture of irresponsibility

TAIPEI — Taiwan investigators yesterday blamed individual pilots and the airline for the deadly crash of a TransAsia Airways aircraft on an outlying island that left 48 people dead in 2014.

Further investigation showed that the chief pilot was overworked in the days preceding the crash. Investigators also discovered that TransAsia has bred a culture of pilot fatigue stemming from poor management by the airline were among the main causes of the crash.

The ATR 72 twin-engine turboprop aircraft with 58 people on board crashed on 23 July 2014 in bad weather during its second landing attempt at Magong Airport on Penghu, a popular island resort destination off western Taiwan.

The accident left 48 people dead and 10 passengers injured. Five more people on the ground were also hurt.

Thomas Wang, chief investigator and spokesman of the Aviation Safety Council, told a press conference that the chief pilot, who appeared to be “overconfident” of his flying skills, did not follow standard operating procedures while landing and the co-pilot failed to question him and remind him of possible risks.

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Thomas Wang, chief investigator and spokesman of the Aviation Safety Council, told a press conference that the chief pilot, who appeared to be “overconfident” of his flying skills, did not follow standard operating procedures while landing and the co-pilot failed to question him and remind him of possible risks.
Dutch suggest EU send migrants straight to Turkey as more arrive without case for asylum

BRUSSELS/ THE HAGUE — The Netherlands floated an idea on Thursday to ferry migrants reaching Greece straight back to Turkey to stop a relentless influx into the European Union as EU officials cited a rise in the numbers of those who would not qualify for asylum.

The 28-nation bloc has all but failed to curb or control the influx of asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa, more than one million of whom arrived in Europe last year, mainly via Greece and heading towards the EU’s biggest economy, Germany.

More than 54,500 people have already reached Europe by sea this year, including 30,068 through Greece, according to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

They keep flowing in despite stormy winter weather making the journey ever more perilous, a fact highlighted by a UNHCR report that 235 migrants were dead or missing already in 2016. On Thursday, 24 drowned when their boat sank off a Greek island close to the Turkish coast.

Much of the EU debate on how to handle the influx has focused on distinguishing people fleeing war, and thus eligible for international protection, from “economic” migrants seeking better lives without being under immediate threat.

“We have seen that the numbers of people arriving in Europe who do not have a genuine claim to asylum have been rising slightly,” a spokeswoman for the European Commission told a regular news briefing on Thursday.

EU nations have grown unnerved by the continent’s worst migration crisis since World War Two, one that has jeopardised the bloc’s Schengen zone of passport-free travel over national borders that has contributed greatly to its vaunted prosperity.

In the latest idea for discouraging migrants from flooding into Europe, the head of a party in the Dutch ruling coalition said it was drafting a plan under which asylum seekers from Sub-Saharan Africa could be dispatched straight back to Turkey.

Diederik Samsom said European countries would have to agree in exchange to take several hundred thousand refugees each year out of nearly 2 million currently in Turkey. The Netherlands now holds the EU’s rotating presidency, and Samsom said it would seek to push for Europe-wide agreement on the plan.

Samsom also said improving conditions for Syrian refugees in Turkey meant it could soon be regarded as a safe country to which asylum-seekers could be returned.

Amnesty International quickly denounced the idea as “fundamentally flawed”, saying it would deny those arriving the right to have their asylum claims properly considered.

“Any resettlement proposal that is conditional on effectively sealing off borders and illegally pushing back tens of thousands of people while denying them access to asylum procedures is morally bankrupt,” said Amnestiy’s John Dalhuisen.

“There is no excuse for breaking the law and flouting international obligations in the process.” — Reuters

Ethiopia drought relief needs $500 million for support beyond April: WFP

ADDIS ABABA — The drought relief effort in Ethiopia needs about $500 million to fund programmes beyond the end of April to support 10.2 million people facing critical food shortages this year, the UN World Food Programme said on Thursday.

“Ethiopia is battling one of its worst droughts in decades that in parts of the country eclipses the 1984 crisis, when rain failures and conflict caused famine that killed an estimated 1 million people.

This time, the Horn of Africa nation is at peace and has an economy that has grown rapidly for more than a decade, helping the government put in place agriculture, health and social programmes to build resilience against lean periods.

But the scale of this drought, blamed on the El Niño weather phenomenon, is even overwhelming those measures.

“We are really on the cliff’s edge as we speak,” WFP Country Director John Aylieff told Reuters, saying the $500 million had to be raised by the end of February so resources could be in place by the end of April.

“It’s a really tall order for donors to suddenly mobilise the immense amount of resources needed for the Ethiopian crisis this year. I would also say it is a tall order for the mother in the highlands of Ethiopia to watch her children waste away.”

The government, WFP and a group of charities such as Save the Children are working on the relief effort. The government is already spending about $300 million and other funds have come from the United States, Canada, European states and others. About $38 million was committed this week, the WFP said.

But more is needed when international aid budgets are stretched by crises such as the Syria conflict.” — Reuters

Forty pct of Germans want Merkel to resign due to her refugee policy

BERLIN — Forty per cent of Germans want Chancellor Angela Merkel to resign due to her refugee policy, which saw the country take in 1.1 million asylum seekers last year, an Insa poll for Focus magazine showed yesterday.

The poll of 2,047 Germans, which Insa conducted from 22 January to 25 January, showed 45.2 per cent believed Merkel’s refugee policy was not a reason for her to resign. — Reuters

US, Russian defence officials discuss air safety over Syria: Pentagon

WASHINGTON — Senior US and Russian defence officials held a video conference on Thursday to discuss military air safety over Syria as the two sides carry out separate air strikes targeting rebel forces in the country, the Pentagon said.

“The two sides discussed measures to enhance operational safety … including the means to avoid accidents and unintended confrontation between coalition and Russian forces whenever the two sides operate in close proximity,” Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook said in a statement.

The two countries approved a memorandum of understanding on flight safety over Syrian airspace last year. They discussed implementation issues in a video conference in October.— Reuters

Turkey detains 25 suspected IS militants along Syrian border

ANKARA — Turkey on Wednesday captured 25 suspected Islamic State (IS) militants in two separate operations along its border with Syria, the Turkish General Staff said Thursday.

Border units detained 21 suspected IS members in the southeastern province of Kilis as the group, along with 22 children, tried to illegally enter Turkey from Syria, the General Staff said in a statement.

Also on Wednesday, authorities captured four others who were trying to enter Syria from Turkey and believed to have been set to join the IS. Turkey has stepped up efforts against extremist militants following persistent criticism of what was described as slack control of the flow of jihadist fighters across its border with Syria.— Xinhua

Man arrested with handguns at Disneyland Paris

PARIS — A man was arrested carrying two handguns and a copy of the Koran at the Disneyland Paris amusement park outside Paris on Thursday, French officials said.

France remains in a state of emergency after Islamist gunmen and suicide bombers killed 130 people in a series of jihadist attacks in and near Paris in November last year. A police source said the 28-year-old man of European origin arrested at Disneyland had been carrying the guns, one of them a automatic handgun, concealed in a bag with the religious text. The Interior Ministry said police were also searching for a woman who may have been with the man, correcting a previous statement that she had been arrested.

“Firearms were discovered in the bags of a man as he went through the metal detector during a routine security check at one of our hotels,” Disneyland Paris spokesman Francois Banon said.

Euro Disney (EDEP.PA), whose main shareholder is US-based Walt Disney Co (DIS.N), runs the amusement park. The man was unknown to police before the incident at the park’s New York Hotel, the source said.— Reuters

American gets 20-year imprisonment in South Korea for 1997 murder

SEOUL — An American received a 20-year jail term, the longest prison sentence under the South Korea law, on Friday for murdering a South Korean student about two decades ago.

The Seoul Central District Court sentenced Arthur Patterson, 37, to 20 years in prison for stabbing a South Korean college student to death in April 1997. The student was 22 years old at that time.

Patterson was with Edward Lee when the South Korean college student was killed 19 years ago at a Burger King restaurant in the popular foreign district of Itaewon. Lee was acquitted in 1998 due to lack of evidence. Patterson, who fled to the United States in August 1999 while under investigation, was arrested in May 2011 and was extradited to South Korea in September 2015.

The ruling said Lee’s confession of witnessing Patterson stabbing the victim was unreliable.—Xinhua
The incumbent government is leaving on March 30 this year, passing over the baton to the incoming government to be constitutionally formed by the winning party, the National League for Democracy. The hand-over is praised as the first of its kind throughout the history of the country since independence. In retrospect, our country saw its first free and fair election in 2010, which gave birth to a democratically elected government for the first time. It is safe to describe that transition to democracy as the first move to strike a balance between the government and the parliament. These two bodies of decision makers have done everything in their capacity to establish a democratic system that values responsibility, accountability and harmony.

One of the remarkable achievements in the government’s commitment to democratic reform is none but the successful holding of the elections in 2015. In his address to the parliament two days ago, President U Thein Sein regarded that success as the second move of the country’s democratic reform. Another achievement is concerned with the signing of the nationwide ceasefire agreement between the government and the eight ethnic armed organisations. Accordingly, the Union Peace Conference is now being convened in Nay Pyi Taw, with the participation of both signatories and non-signatories of ethnic armed organisations, except three or four.

Given the realities of the political situation in the country, the onus is on any incoming government to make continuous efforts to bring about stability and prosperity. More importantly, all political parties should ask themselves why they entered political life. To serve the interests of the people and the country as a whole, right?

Ask yourselves

Kyaw Thura

The following is the full text of the State of the Union Address delivered by the President at Pyidaungsu Hluttaw on 28 January, 2016.

I would like to extend well wishes and good health to respected Chairman of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, Chairman of the Amyotha Hluttaw and members of the Hluttaw.

I delivered a speech as a new president at the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw five years ago on March 30, 2011. Starting from that day, all of us have worked hard to build a new, disciplined and modern democratic nation after drifting away from a multi-party democracy system for over five decades. Starting from that day, we began implementing a very different political system and governance principles. Just as our country embarked on democratic transition, many countries in the Middle East started their “Arab Spring” of democratic transition. After five years, Middle Eastern countries that are in the nascent stage of democratic transition are further away from their original goal of democracy because of instability arising from armed conflicts, the situation of millions of refugees having to flee from conflict and the surge of anarchism and extremism across the region. However, our country has been able to incrementally implement democratic transition in a peaceful and stable manner even though some difficulties and challenges remain. This is a unique success of Myanmar’s democratic transition and it will serve as a model for the global community. This is also a success for the people of Myanmar.

Members of the Hluttaw:

In my 2011 inauguration speech, I promised to implement policies and processes that reflect the prevailing conditions in order to build a more stable and developed nation. As promised, we have carried out political, economic, administrative and private sector development reforms in order to fulfill the wishes of the people to have peace, stability and development.

Political stability is most important for the ongoing political reforms. Even though there may be individuals and organizations inside and outside the country who are not yet ready to accept the Seven-Step Roadmap and the Constitution, I have urged in my speech for all of us to work together—despite our differences in conviction and opinion—on issues of common concern in the interests of the country as well as encouraged everyone to get into positions of authority fairly and legitimately by contesting in the democratic elections. Likewise, I have also emphasized that our government is opening the door and extending a hand for peace. Because of these convictions, our government released prisoners of conscience so that all citizens can participate in the political process. Our government also amended necessary laws and held the 2012 interim elections so that the political parties that didn’t contest in the 2010 general elections can participate in the political and legislative activities in the Hluttaw. Because of these actions, individuals and organizations that didn’t or weren’t able to contest in the 2010 elections were able to contest in the 2012 interim and 2015 general elections and as a result were able to assume executive and legislative duties in accordance with the Constitution.

In order to promote peace as I have promised, we officially invited the Ethnic Armed Organizations to the peace table in August 2011. Without setting any preconditions, we were able to hold state and union level peace talks on free and equal terms. We were able to incrementally build mutual trust through these negotiations and our government was able to sign 39 state and union level peace agreements with 15 Ethnic Armed Organizations. We were also able to reduce the number and scope of the conflict to some extent. As a next step, we were able to sign a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement on October 15, 2015 after negotiating for over one year so that we can begin to hold political dialogues participated by the government, Hluttaw, Tatmadaw and Ethnic Armed Organizations. The door for peace is always open for the Ethnic Armed Organizations who are not yet ready to sign the agreement.

To launch the political dialogue process, we held the Union Peace Conference on January 12, 2016 based on the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and in accordance with the timeframe contained in it. The holding of the Union Peace Conference represents one of the most important functions our government needed to do in transferring power to the incoming new government based on the results of the 2015 election results. The issues discussed in the Union Peace Conference will serve as good foundations for the future peace dialogues held under the new government.

Members of the Hluttaw:

I also promised in 2011 to establish a market economy; reform and implement suitable fiscal and monetary policies as well as tax and revenue policies; and reduce the gap between the rich and the poor as well as the differences in the standard of living between the urban and rural areas.

As a result, we began developing and implementing people-centered development plan starting from the 2011-2012 fiscal year. To improve socioeconomic conditions, our government placed a priority on 7 sectors...
President U Thein Sein’s State of the Union Address to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

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such as access to electricity, access to drinking water, agriculture and livestock, job creation, tourism, and development of trade and investment. In order to promote sustainable development, our government developed a Long-Term (20 years) National All-Round Development Plan, 2011-2030; Myanmar Urban Development Vision; 2010-2035 Industrial Development Vision; and other related conceptual plans, master plans and legal policies with the help of international organizations. These plans were submitted to the Hluttaw as well as shared with the general public. In order to ensure the accuracy of the statistical data needed to develop and implement these plans, our government also carried out the Nationwide Census Project for the first time in over 30 years. This Nationwide Census Project is a success because it will not only aid our government in collecting data on economic and social phenomena in developing sound economic plans.

The main difficulty our government encountered in promoting development is the continued impact of the two-decades-long economic sanctions imposed against our country. In order to remove these sanctions, our government has proved to certain countries that did not initially view our democratic reforms positively that we are trying to institute a genuine democratic system. Our government has also encouraged these countries to acknowledge the positive changes and to render support to our efforts. I have traveled to the United States, European Union member countries and other friendly countries and have explained our reforms to their political and legislative leaders in person. Because of these efforts, our new government was able to gain the support of the international community. After Australia and Norway lifted economic sanctions, the European Union and other countries followed suit. Our compatibility with the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) benefits for our domestic goods exported to the European Union is just one indicator among many which have lifted many of the sanctions as well as suspended some others.

The lifting of the economic sanctions has positively contributed to the development of our country. The lifting of the economic sanctions, enactment of suitable foreign direct investment laws and implementation of a developing economic zone projects, domestic investment in our country increased from MMK 241.57 billion in 2011 to MMK 5179.91 in 2015. Likewise, foreign investment increased from US$ 4.64 billion in 2011 to US$ 22.12 billion in 2015. According to an IMF report, the per capita income increased from a little over US$ 800 in 2011 to US$ 1,270 in 2015.

Members of the Hluttaw: For citizens to enjoy the benefits of the political and economic reforms, our government also implemented administrative reforms.

In the health sector, spending increased from MMK 86.58 billion in 2011 to MMK 814.17 billion in 2015. Moreover, white papergraded access to healthcare, 225 hospitals were opened and 100 hospitals were upgraded within the last five years. Similarly, 421 ward and township clinics, 223 village-level health, maternal, child department, and regional departments, 44 state-level hospitals, and 9 nursing and midwifery schools were opened.

Additionally, to improve access to high-level healthcare close to where people live, 15 state/county hospitals and 150 state/county/1,000-bed hospitals. The Yangon General Hospital was also upgraded to a 2,000-bed facility. At the same time, 150 hospitals were upgraded, free healthcare programs were also expanded.

Members of the Hluttaw: As the telecommunications sector is an important component of a developing economy. Therefore, during our government’s term in office, we focused on increasing mobile and Internet usage. Not only did this enable better communications, but it also increased the public’s access to information and general knowledge. People living in the rural areas can now access the latest market and weather updates thereby narrowing the information gap between urban and rural dwellers, and contributing to the development of the rural areas. Since the government permitted openness and use of mobile and Internet operators, mobile usage has increased from previous 4-5% to about 80% today. SIM cards became less expensive and the price of each card falling from MMK 1.5 million to about MMK 1500. Soon, Mobile Banking will be expanded further, opening new opportunities for people in the rural areas.

One of the most important components of administrative reform was the delivery of governance services. People living in the rural areas can now access the latest market and weather updates thereby narrowing the information gap between urban and rural dwellers, and contributing to the development of the rural areas. Since the government permitted openness and use of mobile and Internet operators, mobile usage has increased from previous 4-5% to about 80% today. SIM cards became less expensive and the price of each card falling from MMK 1.5 million to about MMK 1500. Soon, Mobile Banking will be expanded further, opening new opportunities for people in the rural areas.

The one weakness in our country’s development is access to electricity. Our government drafted a National Power Policy and a long-term implementation plan in cooperation with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the National Electricity Plan was developed in cooperation with the World Bank. In the last five years, power generation grew to 1822 MW enabling 422 towns and villages access to electricity. Due to these improvements, Chin and Rakhone State are now connected to the national grid for the first time since independence. Furthermore, rural electrification is now bringing power to 10421 villages. Under the master implementation plan, 1.7 million households will have access to electricity between 2015-2020.

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Asia stocks jump, yen weakens as BOJ stuns with negative rates

TOKYO/SYDNEY — Asian shares jumped and the yen swooned after the Bank of Japan stunned markets yesterday by adopting negative interest rates in its boldest step yet to reinflate the economy.

Spread betters predicted the cheer would spread to European markets, with Britain’s FTSE 100 FTSE seen opening 0.6 per cent higher, Germany’s DAX DAXI expected to rise 0.5 per cent and France’s CAC 40 CAC seen gaining 1.0 per cent.

The yen fell across the board and the yield on the benchmark Japanese government bond plunged to a record low after Japan’s central bank said it would charge 0.1 per cent for excess reserves parked with the institution, an aggressive policy pioneered by the European Central Bank.

“The BOJ will cut the interest rate further into negative territory if judged as necessary,” the bank said in a statement announcing the decision.

The move surprised investors, most of whom had believed policymakers were too cautious to ever adopt such a radical measure. Their reaction sent the dollar surging about three yen to a session high of 121.495 JPY=. It was last up 1.7 per cent at 120.92 yen.

The dollar was last up 0.4 per cent against a basket of currencies at 98.855 DXY, though still down about 0.7 per cent for the week.

The euro EUR= slipped about 0.2 per cent to $1.0913, off track to gain about 1.1 per cent for the week.

Japan’s Nikkei share index .N225 slipped 0.2 per cent after the announcement before ending up 2.8 per cent, to mark a 3.3 per cent weekly gain, while the benchmark 10-year JGB yield JP10YT= mark 10-year JGB yield JP10YT-.N= touched an all-time low of 0.090 per cent.

“The yen could weaken further and stocks could gain after the BOJ eased today, so long-term government bond yields will face both downward and upward pressure after today’s move,” said Akito Fukunaga, chief fixed income strategist at Barclays in Tokyo.

The BOJ’s move gave a lift to bourses across the region, even though economists at HSBC and elsewhere doubted it would give a boost to Japan’s real economy or inflation.

MSCI’s broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan MIAPJ00000US added 1.8 per cent, up 2.7 per cent for the week.

The Shanghai Composite Index .SSEC rose 2.9 per cent, while the CSI300 index .CSI300 of the largest listed companies in Shanghai and Shenzhen added 3.2 per cent, bouncing from steep losses early in the week.

The buying spread to US debt markets as investors wagered the BOJ decision and a stronger dollar would make it even harder for the Federal Reserve to hike rates four times this year, as originally envisioned by its policy board.

Fed fund futures <FFF:> rose to imply a rate of 51 basis points by year end, compared to 90 basis points a month ago. Futures for US 10-year bonds < GO12> rose 5 ticks.

The promise of extra global stimulus gave an added fillip to oil, which had already risen for three sessions on talk of a possible deal to pare back excess supply.

US crude CLC1 added about 2.2 per cent to $33.95 per barrel, while Brent futures LCOc1 firmed 2.6 per cent to $34.76.

S&P 500 e-mini futures ESc1 were up 0.9 per cent in late Asian trade, potentiising possible gains ahead for Wall Street. On Thursday, the semalance of stability in oil combined with some solid company results and lifted the Dow DJI= 0.79 per cent, while the S&P 500 .SPX added 0.55 per cent and the Nasdaq Composite .IXIC rose 0.86 per cent.

Facebook (FB.O) surged 15.5 per cent in its biggest one-day leap since 2013 after a Smith Moore, while Alphabet (GOOGL.O) climbed 4.28 per cent. Microsoft (MSFT.O) rose 4.5 per cent in late trading after beating forecasts, while Amazon (AMZN.O) slumped 12 per cent as , profits missed analysts’ estimates by a wide margin.

Reuters
Protesters march, France eyes business deals as Iran’s Rouhani visits

PARIS — France and Iran hailed the sale of Airbus planes and the renewal of a decades-old carmaking venture as symbols of thawing relations on Thursday while protesters in Paris tried to get human rights onto the agenda.

President Hassan Rouhani was accompanied on his official visit to Paris, the first by an Iranian president since 1999, by ministers and business leaders who announced deals including a joint venture between carmakers PSA Peugeot Citroen (PEUP.PA) and Iran Khodro and plans for Iran to buy 118 Airbus (AIR.PA) passenger planes to update its ageing fleet.

His visit after a step-back in Rome for more deals follows an agreement between Iran and the west on Iran’s nuclear programme, allowing the lifting of sanctions this month.

The deals were signed at a ceremony attended by Rouhani and French President Francois Hollande.

Construction group Bouygues (BOUY.PA) and airport operator ADP (ADP.PA) are set to build an extension for Tehran airport, while Vinci (SGEF.PA), another building firm, is lined up to design, build and operate new terminals for the Mahshid and Ispahan airports.

French oil company Total said it would buy some 200,000 barrels of Iranian crude from the OPEC producer.

There were also deals in shipping, health, agriculture and water provision, all signed despite continued diplomatic tensions.

The Airbus deal alone is worth $27 billion at list prices and injects a factory near Tehran, Peugeot and Iran Khodro plan to modernise a factory near Tehran and be producing cars by mid-2017.—Reuters

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV PERLA VOY NO (005W)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV PERLA VOY NO (005W) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 30.1.2016 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.

Shipping Agency Department MYANMA Port Authority Agent for: M/S Orient Oversea Container Lines

Claim Day Notice

MV TUSON VOY NO (08/15)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV TUSON VOY NO (08/15) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 30.1.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of A.I.P.T-1 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.

Shipping Agency Department MYANMA Port Authority Agent for: M/S RK Shipping & Trading PTE LTD.

Syria peace talks derailed as opposition stays away

AMMAN/BEIRUT/GENEVA — The Syrian opposition said it will not attend peace talks due to begin in Geneva yesterday, derailing the first attempt in two years to hold negotiations aimed at ending the five-year-long war. An opposition council convening in Riyadh said its delegation would “certainly” not be in Geneva on Friday, saying it had not received convincing answers to its demands for goodwill steps including an end to air strikes and blockades.

The failure to get talks off the ground on time reflects the challenges facing peace-making as the conflict rages unabated on the ground.

The Syrian government is clawing back territory from rebels with military help from Iran and Russia. It has said it is ready to attend the negotiations, which UN envoy Staffan de Mistura plans to hold in an indirect format.

Another opposition representative said the delegation might turn up if their demands were met in a day or two, but the chances of that appeared vanishing slim.

The turn of events is a bitter blow to De Mistura, whose office had issued a video message that he had sent to the Syrian people, in which he said the talks were expected to happen “in the next few days”.

A spokeswoman for his office, speaking before the opposition statement, said the talks would begin on Friday as scheduled.

George Sabra, a member of the opposition High Negotiations Committee (HNC), said: “For certain we will not head to Geneva and there will be no a delegation from the High Negotiations Committee tomorrow in Geneva.”—Reuters

Rivalries, squabbles hinder Libya’s unity government

TUNIS — A month after it was agreed in Morocco, a UN-backed plan for a united Libyan government is struggling to take off.

Efforts to push the hard-fought compromise through show the enduring regional rivalries and power struggles that have bedevilled Libya since the 2011 overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi.

While foreign pressure builds to tackle a threat from Islamic State militants, Libya’s internationally recognised parliament, based in the east, has rejected a main article in the UN accord as well as a proposed list of ministers.

It is not yet clear whether a rival parliament in Tripoli will participate and its chief said on Thursday that separate negotiations without UN involvement were the “only solution”.

A new government would need to move to Tripoli in order to exercise power effectively but armed groups hold sway there and brigades of former anti-Gaddafi fighters still settle feuds in the streets with anti-aircraft cannon.

The conflict between the armed groups who loyally back both political sides has left room for Islamic State to take control over Sirte, Gaddafi’s home city, and parts of the coast.

This month they attacked Libya’s biggest oil terminals and made the most deadly single raid since Gaddafi’s fall.

“This government has to fill the vacuum,” UN envoy Martin Kobler said. “If the politicians are discussing problems day and night and they do not act on the ground, those like Daesh (Islamic State) will use the political vacuum to expand their power.” Any progress was expected to be bumpy. Hardliners in both camps rejected the agreement at the outset. Divisions emerged last week in the Presidential Council, whose nine members were drawn from different regions to steer through the UN plan.—Reuters
Trump debate flap throws US Republican party into deeper chaos

DES MOINES — As seven Republican presidential candidates squared off here for the final debate before voters begin winnowing the field, Donald Trump presided over his own, separately rallying a mile away in front of a packed house of cheering supporters.

It would be hard to find a more ideal metaphor for the forces tearing asunder the Republican Party.

For months, Trump has chosen to operate in his own political universe, violating the conventional wisdom that governs presidential campaigns, thumbing his nose at conservative institutions ranging from the Fox News Channel to the National Review and advocating policies at odds with party orthodoxy.

And whether he wins the Iowa caucuses on Monday, Trump has promised to continue to push out the established political order as the presidential race intensifies ahead of the 8 November election.

Most national opinion polls have him with more than 30 per cent of the Republican primary electorate — and those voters are showing little sign of switching to anyone else.

“I think he will have made a permanent impact on the process,” Newt Gingrich, the former speaker of the US House of Representatives and a 2012 presidential candidate, told Reuters. Trump’s campaign, he said, “is one of those great disruptions that reshapes everything.”

Tensions within the Republican Party between grassroots conservatives and the Washington establishment have been simmering since the Tea Party movement arose during President Barack Obama’s first term, catapulting presidential contenders Senators Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio and Rand Paul to office, among others.

But Trump’s insurgent candidacy has carved new fissures into the party, splitting conservative talk-radio hosts, religious leaders, and Washington pundits, with some sounding the alarm while others implore the party to respond to the anger toward Republican incumbents among voters who are fueling Trump’s rise.

The billionaire businessman has mounted his campaign on the notion of the fading American working-class, arguing they are under threat by both free trade deals favored by Republicans that encourage companies to send jobs overseas and by waves of illegal immigrants that work for low wages.

“People are upset. People believe that promises made have not been promises kept. There comes a point when you’ve had it,” said Iowa Republican Party Chairman Jeff Kaufmann, who has appeared at Trump rallies. Trump’s candidacy threatens to scramble the Republican coalition built since the presidency of Ronald Reagan, one that worked to unite evangelical Christians and other social conservatives, economic conservatives, and military hawks behind a standard-bearer.

The New York real estate tycoon and former reality TV star does not check many of those boxes.

He shocked evangelicalists here when he told them he has never asked God for forgiveness and spends little time on issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage.

He has threatened to slap tariffs on imported goods to protect American jobs and raise taxes on hedge-fund managers. He has decrived the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and has sounded reluctant to deeply involve US forces in the conflict in Syria.

“Is he attracting people of all kinds of backgrounds who have never thought of themselves as Republican,” Gingrich said. “I think it’s very hard for traditional political observers to understand (what’s happening).”

Early during Thursday’s debate in Des Moines, it seemed that the seven Republicans on the stage worked collectively to try an attack voters in Iowa and elsewhere off of Trump, with some dismissing him as an entertainer and others blasting his policy stances. His absence loomed over the entire event.

And Trump demonstrated the sway he holds over the race when it was revealed that Fox News executives had made an 11th-hour pitch to woo him back onto the debate stage, handing him a rhetorical victory of sorts even as his rivals seemed to relish his absence.

He also was joined at his event in Des Moines by two other Republican presidential candidates, Mike Huckabee and Rick Santorum — perhaps an acknowledgement that Trump’s campaign may be a juggernaut now that may not be able to be stopped and that it might be time to climb aboard.

Tremors in US Northeast caused by sonic boom, not quake

NEW YORK — Two fighter jets from a US Navy base in Maryland may have caused a series of sonic booms on Thursday night, New Jersey coast guard prompted hundreds of residents to report earthquake-like tremors.

A spokeswoman for Naval Air Station Patuxent River said an F-35C and an F-18 were conducting routine flight testing over the Atlantic Ocean on Thursday afternoon, which may have caused sonic booms.

People from New Jersey to Connecticut posted on social media and called local police departments to report a series of tremors starting just before 1:30pm.

The US Geological Survey, which monitors earthquake activity, said no quake had struck. The agency reported at least nine sonic booms had been recorded over 90 minutes starting at 1:24pm near Hammonton, New Jersey, about 35 miles (56 km) southeast of Philadelphia. A sonic boom is produced when an airplane travels faster than the speed of sound, or 768 miles per hour (1,234 km). Waves can hit the Earth and cause shaking, which is sometimes mistaken for an earthquake, according to the USGS. Two days ago, residents in Charleston, South Carolina, also reported feeling tremors, likely caused by sonic booms from F-18 fighter jets on a training run from a nearby military base, according to media reports.

In New York, seismologists at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory at Columbia University confirmed no earthquake had occurred in the region on Thursday. The observatory measured vibrations and low-frequency sound waves consistent with about eight sonic booms from approximately 1:20pm to 2:40pm, said Won-Young Kim, a research professor there.

He said residents on the ground likely would not have heard the booms but would have experienced 15 to 20 seconds of shaking during each one.

The tremors produced numerous emergency calls to local police departments, some of which took to Twitter to ask residents not to flood their lines with more reports.

No serious damage was immediately reported.

Test aircraft from the naval air station fly almost daily along the same route, according to the base’s spokeswoman, but most sonic booms are never heard by people on the ground who may be in a different atmospheric conditions, however, can make the sound travel.

Some Twitter users offered a lighthearted response to the person using the handle @VixenRogue quipped: “Aliens are invading New Jersey. What’s the best way to let them know the other 49 states are just fine with this?”

---Reuters
Auto Telephone numbers of Yangon South Dagon Exchange Area will be changed

To provide better quality and upgraded services for its auto telephone numbers, Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications will substitute IP System NGN (Next Generation Network) with MSAN (Multi Service Access Node) of South Dagon KY Exchange. Hence, the numbers which start with (595xxx) of South Dagon Exchange will be replaced with the numbers which start with (234-8xxx) of Ahlone ZXSS10SS1B (SoftSwitch) Exchange on 19th February, 2016. Those new numbers will have both voice call and ADSL internet access. Current ADSL users do not need to register again. New ADSL users will need to register to Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications for internet access.

Static IP of South Dagon KY Exchange Area will be changed into Static IP Range (172.x.x.x) Network. For further information and preparation for changes, Current ADSL Static IP users are requested to contact telephone numbers (01-650870 and 01-662707) of ADSL office at the Information Technology Department of Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications.

Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications

Auto Telephone numbers of Yangon Htauak Kyant Exchange Area will be changed

To provide better quality and upgraded services for its auto telephone numbers, Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications will substitute IP System NGN (Next Generation Network) with MSAN (Multi Service Access Node) of Htauak Kyant KY Exchange. Hence, the numbers which start with (600xxxx) of Htauak Kyant KY Exchange in Yangon will be replaced with the numbers which start with (943-7xxx) of Mayangone Soft-X3000 (SoftSwitch) Exchange on 12th February, 2016. Those new numbers will have both voice call and ADSL internet access. Current ADSL users do not need to register again. New ADSL users will need to register to Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications for internet access.

Static IP of Htauak Kyant KY Exchange in Yangon will be changed into Static IP Range (172.x.x.x) Network. For further information and preparation for changes, Current ADSL Static IP users are requested to contact telephone numbers (01-650870 and 01-662707) of ADSL office at the Information Technology Department of Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications.

Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications
Leonardo DiCaprio meets pope to talk about environment

VATICAN CITY — There have been 13 popes named Leo in the history of the Roman Catholic Church but perhaps none of them was as famous as the Leo who entered the Vatican on Thursday — Hollywood star Leonardo DiCaprio.

DiCaprio, who is known as Leo, was received by Pope Francis, the Vatican said, without giving details.

But the one-line announcement was enough to send photographers and television crews scrambling to stake out the Vatican’s gates to try to catch him coming out.

Footage issued later from Vatican television showed that the audience was connected to their mutual concern about the environment and climate change.

DiCaprio, speaking Italian, thanked the pope for receiving him and then, switching to English, gave him a book of paintings by 16th century Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch. Pointing to one painting, DiCaprio told the pope it had hung over his bed as a boy and said “through my child’s eyes it represented our planet.”

“It represents to me the promise of the future and enlightenment and it is representational of your view here as well,” he said. He later gave the pope a check for an undisclosed sum which appeared to be a donation for papal charities.

Last week, the 41-year-old Oscar nominee was honoured at the 22nd Annual Crystal Awards held at the World Economic Forum in Davos for his foundation’s support of conservation and sustainability projects.

The pope wrote a major Catholic Church document known as an encyclical last year in defence of the environment and has often said that time was running out for mankind to save the planet from the potentially devastating effects of global warming.

The pope gave DiCaprio a copy of his encyclical and asked the actor to pray for him.—Reuters

Warren Buffett, Schwarzenegger reunite on ‘Celebrity Apprentice’

NEW YORK — Billionaire investor Warren Buffett has signed on as an advisor on the eighth season of NBC’s “The Celebrity Apprentice,” more than a decade after advising new host Arnold Schwarzenegger during his successful 2003 run to become California’s governor.

Buffett will join Jessica Alba, Tyra Banks, Los Angeles Clippers owner Steve Ballmer, and Patrick Knapp Schwarzenegger, an entertainment lawyer and Arnold Schwarzenegger’s nephew, to offer guidance to the 16 contenders in the reality competition.

Among the celebrities competing to become Schwarzenegger’s apprentice are Laila Ali, the boxing champion and wellness expert who is a daughter of Muhammad Ali; football stars Eric Dickerson and Ricky Williams; retired basketball star Lisa Leslie; singers Boy George and Motley Crue’s Vince Neil; actor Jon Lovitz, and reality TV stars Nicole “Snooki” Polizzi and Kyle Richards.

The winner will receive a $250,000 check to give to charity. Scheduling has not been announced.

Buffett, 85, has run Berkshire Hathaway Inc since 1965 and owns nearly one-fifth of the company.

He has appeared regularly on TV in recent years as his fame and fortune have grown.

Schwarzenegger is taking over “Celebrity Apprentice” from Donald Trump, the Republican presidential candidate who also hosted the NBC show “The Apprentice.” NBC is part of Comcast Corp.

Buffett did not immediately respond to a request for comment through his assistant.—Reuters

Canadians cry foul as Sting, not Drake, to perform at All-Star Game

TORONTO — Canadian sports fans cried foul yesterday after the National Basketball Association snubbed local rap star Drake in favor of the British singer Sting to headline the halftime show at its upcoming All-Star Game in Toronto.

Within minutes of the announcement, Twitter posts mocking the league’s decision to go with Sting, a 64-year-old, Grammy Award-winner, since Drake, 29, is the Toronto Raptors’ global ambassador, and will be in his hometown for All-Star Weekend, from 12-14 February.

“Canadians have six of the top 10 songs on the Billboard charts right now — and the NBA hires Sting to perform halftime. Brutal,” read a tweet by local sportscaster Jim Lang. “Does anyone under the age of 35 even know who Sting is?”

Drake, a fixture in his courtside seats at Raptors’ games, will nonetheless be involved as the coach of Team Canada, which will include Australian Open semifinalist Milos Raonic and former NBA champion Rick Fox, in the 12 February celebrity game. Comedian Kevin Hart will coach Team USA, which includes actors Michael B. Jordan and Jason Sudeikis.

“Really @Toronto2016? Sting? What were your backup options, Cher and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra? How about some TORONTO talent!” wrote former Toronto Mayor Rob Ford on his Twitter page.—Reuters

Jennifer Aniston to lead ‘The Fixer’

LOS ANGELES — Actress Jennifer Aniston will star in the ‘The Fixer’ by Fox 2000 pictures. The 46-year-old actress will also produce along with Steve Barnett, Bernie Goldmann and Kristin Hahn, said The Hollywood Reporter.

Aniston will play sports manager Denise White in the movie, for which Fox has bought the pitch from “Dallas Buyers Club” screenwriter Melissa Wallack. The story revolves around White, a former Miss USA contestant who went on to found a sports firm for high-end athletes.—PTI
Clockwork lion unveiled in London to highlight big cat plight

LONDON — The four bronze lions of London’s central Trafalgar Square got a temporary addition on Thursday, with a clockwork sculpture of the animal unveiled to highlight the plight of big cats.

The statue, made of clockwork mechanisms, will stand in the square for just a day before being auctioned off to raise money for National Geographic’s Big Cats Initiative, which says it aims to halt the decline of big cats in the wild.

According to the initiative’s website, there are likely some 30,000 lions in the wild. Among their threats are poaching and loss of both prey and habitat.

“I think most people don’t believe actually lions are in danger,” said Jeff Ford of television channel National Geographic.

A pedestrian photographs a lion sculpture installed by National Geographic Wild to highlight the threat to endangered big cats, in Trafalgar Square in London, on 29 January 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Spain looks beyond record visitor numbers to boost tourist spend

MAGALUF (Spain) — Set back from the white sand beach which first attracted tourists to Magaluf in the 1960s, a smart new development is rising — part of the Mallorcan resort’s plan to transform itself from an alcohol-fueled fleshtown awash with young Britons to a high-end holiday destination for families and couples.

Old buildings are being torn down and pedestrian streets laid in one project which forms part of a 187 million euro ($204 million) turnaround campaign.

Magaluf’s vision shows how Spain’s tourist industry is looking beyond record visitor numbers and aiming to boost spending per head in a sector that accounts for 11 per cent of Spain’s economic output and employs two million people.

That means improving the quality and offering a wider range of activities than just drinking and soaking up the sun.

“A tourism model based on sun and sand and competing on the lowest price is all very well, but it’s not sustainable in the long term,” said Ricard Santoma, dean of Barcelona-based Sant Ignasi School of Tourism and Hospitality Management.

“The challenge is to attract tourists who want to spend a little more.”

The success of the sector is vital for Spain to ensure its economy can grow again this year and further shrink a 20.9 per cent unemployment rate at a time of political instability.

The country has yet to appoint a prime minister after inconclusive elections more than one month ago.

More foreigners visited Spain than ever before in 2015, official figures showed on Friday, as militant violence in countries such Egypt and Tunisia encouraged European holidaymakers to seek warmer climes.

The country hosted over 68 million international tourists last year, its third consecutive year of record-beating numbers.

Spain’s popularity as a holiday destination looks set to continue, with 2016 bookings to Spain by Britons up more than a third at the end of December, according to the Association of British Travel Agents. The British are the most numerous tourists to Spain by nationality.

However, data on how much tourists are spending is muddled. Government statistics show spending per tourist rose 2.4 per cent from January to September, the latest data available, while industry association Exceltur calculated a 1 per cent fall in spend per head in 2015, the 15th year in a row of declines. —Reuters

Barbie gets curvy in real-world body makeover

NEW YORK — Barbie, the world’s most famous doll, has a new body. In fact, she has three new bodies — petite, tall and curvy.

Some 57 years after the impressively busy and narrow-waisted blue-eyed Barbie doll was first introduced, California-based toy maker Mattel on Thursday released the new models, which it says better reflect a changing world.

Parents and feminists have long criticized Barbie’s original shape as setting an unrealistic body image for girls, despite modifications over the years.

The new dolls have seven skin tones, 22 eye colours, 24 hairstyles and new clothes and accessories. They are available for order on website barbie.mattel.com starting Thursday and will reach stores later.

“We are excited to literally be changing the face of the brand,” Evelyn Mazzocco, senior vice president and global general manager of the Barbie brand, said in a statement.

“These new dolls represent a line that is more reflective of the world girls see around them — the variety in body type, skin tones and style allows girls to find a doll that speaks to them.

“We believe we have a responsibility to girls and parents to reflect a broader view of beauty,” she said.

The new curvy Barbie has a bigger bust, behind, thicker thighs and a protruding tummy. She landed on the cover of Time magazine on Thursday with the headline “Now can we stop talking about my body?”

The classic Barbie doll, which was launched in 1959 as a doe-eyed teen in a zebra-striped swimsuit, will remain as part of the Mattel line.

The launch of the new range follows two years of declining sales of Barbie dolls around the world as children increasingly turn to other dolls, electronic toys and tablets.

On her way to becoming a global pop culture icon, Barbie has tried out more than 180 careers, ranging from teacher to astronaut and US president.

African-American Barbies and other ethnic versions were introduced starting in the late 1960s. —Reuters

New Barbie doll body shapes of tall (L), curvy (2nd R) and petite (R) are seen next to the traditional Barbie (3rd R) in this image released by Mattel on 28 January. PHOTO: REUTERS
Martina Hingis and Sania Mirza win Australian Open doubles title

Switzerland’s Martina Hingis (L) and India’s Sania Mirza pose with the trophy after winning their doubles final match at the Australian Open tennis tournament at Melbourne Park, Australia, on 29 January.

The Swiss was then broken while serving for the title, though they sealed it on their fourth championship point when Hradecka’s running forehand sailed over the baseline, the third time she was broken in the set.

“You have won two grand slam doubles so you were very tough,” Hingis said of the Czech pair. “I know everyone will say break, break, break but you guys have the best returns in doubles.” — Reuters

Hradecka dropped serve in the first and fifth games of the second set, to give the top seeds a 4-1 lead, and while Mirza lost her next service game they never looked like relinquishing control with Hingis dominant at the net.

The Swiss and Indian pair have now won seven consecutive doubles title and are also the reigning Wimbledon doubles champions.

The day before the tournament started, Hingis was knocked out of the Australian Open first round against Maria Sharapova.

“Even if I don’t win, I really can’t imagine winning a Grand Slam,” Hingis said. “I’ve been playing well for the past eight months but I’ve been really focused on my fitness. I think most will say, ‘oh, Serena Williams will win’. But I think I can win.” — Reuters

Williams seeking to join Graf with Australian Open win

MELBOURNE — Serena Williams is on course to match Steffi Graf’s major haul in the Australian Open on Saturday, but German seventh seed Angelique Kerber will be hoping she can prove and to develop her men’s game.

Williams met six times with the American winning five, though Kerber’s 6-4, 6-2 victory in Cincinnati in 2012 was one she would not forget.

“I thought she played unbelievable in that match,” Williams said. “I think from that on out I’ve been really focused that she’s someone that I, and everyone, has to take very seriously.” — Reuters

Kerber, who saved a match point in her first round clash with Japan’s Misaki Doi, will enter her first grand slam final with immense confidence, believing a ‘nothing to lose’ attitude had got her this far.

It was that attitude that helped her overcome a 2-5 second set deficit in her quarter-final against Victoria Azarenka and gave her a first win over the Belarusian in their seventh match.

“Nothing to lose’ means I can go out there and try to play like I’m playing, without pressure,” the 28-year-old said. “I think most will say, ‘oh, Serena will win’.” — Reuters