NEW REVENUE STREAMS

Vessels in Ayeyawady, Chindwin rivers charged new toll fees

THE Directorate of Water Resources and Improvement of River Systems has begun collecting toll fees from watercrafts under a new system as of 1 February, according to a directorate official.

“The new toll fees for boats are calculated based on miles the watercrafts have travelled and are meant to be fair for both sides,” said U Win Hlaing, the director of the Directorate of Water Resources and Improvement of River Systems for Upper Myanmar.

According to the new rules, fees are set at K200 for a vessel less than 39 foot long. A vessel weighing less than one tonne will be charged at K48 per mile for the 120-mile route from Twante to Hinthada, and a vessel that weights over one tonne will be charged K36 per mile for the same route.

The directorate is planning to open 10 stations in the Ayeyawady and Chindwin rivers. Currently, stations have been opened in Mandalay, Magway, Pyay and Monywa, and the directorate will open stations in Kalewa and Katha this month, the official said.

Apart from collecting fees, the stations are also tasked with ensuring that boats on the rivers are in good condition and are driving according to the law.—Aung Thant Khaing

EU to implement a five year nationwide police reform program

THE European Union (EU), which has been implementing a series of reform initiatives for the Myanmar police force, will continue with their activities over the coming five year period, expanding to more parts of the country, it is learnt.

“The situation [of the Myanmar police force] in Myanmar cannot be changed in just a couple of years. Changes to the police force require patience. In the next five years we will implement reform programs for the police force on a nationwide scale.” said Ms. Karin Deckenbach.

But the Human Rights Defence Group is quick to point out that the EU has already been working together with the Myanmar police force for some time in implementing its reform activities, which have had little positive affect.

“The Myanmar police force reform programs are yet to show any positive results. Yes, the EU has given training. But, just look at the example of the Letpadan student protests. Reformation of the police force must also come from the side of the government as well. The EU is carrying out its activities but no impact has been felt as yet. The discussion groups and trainings will at least have some benefit though.” commented Ko Aung Naing Oo, international relations officer of the Human Rights Defence Group.

The EU conducted training sessions with the Myanmar police between 2013-15 on cooperation
Equestrian Bronze Statue of Bogoyoke maintained

The equestrian bronze statue of General Aung San, the national hero and the architect of independence, erected in Manawramma Garden is now being maintained as a gesture of heralding his 101st Anniversary birthday. Not only the statue but also the whole garden is being upgraded to enable visitors to enjoy peace of mind while recreating and relaxing on holidays. Renovation and maintenance measures of the garden are being taken by the Mandalay City Development Committee as part of the three objectives to keep the city of Mandalay clean, green and healthy. —Thiha Ko Ko (Mandalay)

Mandalay Mayor Horticultural Competitions to be held on Union Day

THE 14th anniversary of the Mandalay Mayor Cup horticultural competitions will be held at Kandawgyi Garden, Chanmyathazi Township, Mandalay Regional Division on Union Day. Depending on the category, first prize winners will be awarded K150,000 while the second prize winner receives K100,000 and third prize winners will be awarded K70,000. Consolation prize winners will be awarded K30,000 each.

Those wishing to participate in the competitions will have to contact the Kandawgyi Garden Commanding Office not later than 4 pm on 11 February, 2016. —Thiha Ko Ko (Mandalay)

Car accident kills two men on the spot

Two men were killed on the spot in a car accident that occurred on Wednesday between mileposts 100/5 and 100/6 near Kyauktata township, Bago region. According to an investigation, a six-wheel vehicle heading from Yangon to Nay Pyi Taw being driven by Thet Naung, 25, crashed into a tractor being driven by one Mya Zin, 25, with U Sein Win, 55, on board.

The accident killed Mya Zin, 25, and U Sein Win, 55, on the spot. The six-wheel truck driver was deemed guilty of careless driving by local police. —Khin Ko (Kyauktata)

Car accident kills a man in Myeik

A Big Horn vehicle being driven by Wunna Kyaw, 39, ran over two men who were walking on a bridge, killing one and leaving the other injured. The driver lost control at Kyay Nan Tan bridge, Myeik township, Taninthayi on Thursday, causing the accident, according to the police. The accident seriously injured U Soe Maung, 35, and U Tin Hon, 45. They are currently undergoing medical treatment at Myeik General Hospital. U Soe Maung died at the hospital while receiving emergency medical treatment. The driver was deemed guilty of careless driving by police. —Myint Oo (Bai)

Four men arrested in Bayintnaung

AN anti-drug squad in Kalaw discovered 1,580 Yabba pills in the rooms at the Thama hotel and 13 kilograms of Marijuana in a car in ward-5, Kalaw town on Thursday. Police arrested Aung Kyaw Win Sein, Thura Zaw, Tun Oo, Myo Min Nyunt, Myo Khine Oo and Myo Aung.

Similarly, members of the police seized 286 grams of opium from a motorbike on Ta Moe - Kut Khaing road. Charges have been filed against Yan Khit Phan, the driver of the motorbike and Wo Kyn Khaite, his passenger.

Police have filed charges against them under anti-Narcotic law. —Myanmar Police Force

Police said yesterday that they have arrested one of four suspected men who allegedly snatched K17,000,000 from a businessman in Bayintnaung, Mayangon township, Yangon on 20 January. According to investigation, U Aung Tin fell unconscious after he was struck on the head by a man behind him while opening his shop at Bayintnaung market.

On Tuesday the police arrested Ba Khat alias Win Ko Ko and seized gold items from him. When interrogated, the suspect admitted to snatching the money with three other men. Ba Khat arrived at the scene at 4:30 am with Han Lin Aung, Kyaw Thu and Zin Min Thu on 20 February. Han Lin Aung attacked the victim from behind when they saw U Aung Tin opening his shop. They split the stolen money between them.

Local police detained the man while searching for the other suspect Han Lin Aung, Kyaw Thu and Zin Min Thu who managed to escape from the scene. —Myanmar Police Force

Yabba and Marijuana seized in Kalaw

Fruits are displayed on the stand. Photo: Thiha Ko Ko (Mandalay)
VP Dr Sai Mauk Kham celebrates 69th Shan State Day

DURING a visit to Taunggyi, Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham attended several celebrations in honour of the 69th Shan State Day yesterday morning. Shan State Chief Minister U Sai Aung Myat read out the president’s message for the day, while the local finance minister read out the message sent by the chief minister of Shan State.

High-ranking officials of the local government and parliament gave awards and certificates of honour to people and organisations who have won presidential awards for their excellent performance in agriculture, business, regional development, livestock and rescue services.

Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham and his entourage proceeded to the Buddhist University in Taunggyi, where he formally opened the university.

At the ceremony, State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee Chairman Sayadaw Dr Bhaddanta Kumara Bhivansana delivered a speech on the nine moral precepts to the congregation, followed by a recitation of Metta Sutta by monks.

Sitagu International Buddhist Academy’s Chancellor Sayadaw Dr Bhaddanta Nyansissara delivered a sermon. Members of the public also sought merit by offering alms and delicacies monks.

In a meeting with literary and cultural troupes at the Taunggyi Hotel, Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham called for further “consolidating the Union spirit through a sense of oneness with the other ethnic groups”. He urged them to continuously hone their capacity to fit in where they are assigned.

The vice president also inspected the construction of a modern bus terminal and heard progress reports on the project.

In the evening, he attended a dinner hosted at the Taunggyi Town Hall in honour of the 69th Shan State Day.—Myanmar News Agency

Yangon gets new Bus Rapid Transfer route

WITH a fleet of 18 new buses imported from China and South Korea, the Public Bus Company launched its operation of public transport services along one route yesterday.

The first route of the Bus Rapid Transfer (BRT) has 23 stops running from Htaunkkyant to Alampya Pagoda Road via Pyay Road and Bogyoke Aung San Road; the second route has 27 stops running from Htaunkkyant to Pyay Road via Kabaraye Pagoda Road, Bogyoke Aung San Road, Botataung Pagoda Road, Strand Road and Phonegyi Road.

Despite original plan to begin the service with 65 buses, the line launched with a fleet of just 18 buses, as the rest are being delivered from different countries, added the chairman of the bus company.

Another 45 buses will arrive at the end of February, he added.

The modern bus line was officially opened by Union Minister for Commerce U Win Myint and Yangon Region Chief Minister U Myint Swe.

The Public Bus Company began its business with K10 billion worth of shares owned by the government and K15 billion worth of shares owned by public companies.

According to a press conference recently held for the event, bus fare is set at K300 per head for buses with an air conditioning system. Staff will be deployed to every bus stop, the company announced.

Each bus can carry over 80 passengers. Plans are in place to run a line along Kabaraye Pagoda Road at the end of this month, during the project’s second phase.—GNLM

MRTV to broadcast President’s Award for Excellent Performance live

THE President’s Award for Excellent Performance Programme will be presented at the Myanmar International Convention Centre II in Nay Pyi Taw at 4pm on 9 February. The programme will be broadcast live by Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV) starting at 3:45pm the same day.—Myanmar News Agency

Union Energy Minister visits Yedagun offshore gas field

UNION Minister for Energy U Zeyar Aung inspected a natural gas pipeline near the Myanmar-Thai border yesterday, calling on authorities to ensure the safety of the infrastructure and for the creation of job opportunities for local residents.

The union minister also flew to the Yedagun offshore natural gas rig, located offshore, off Taninthayi coast.

Yedagun Natural Gas Exploration project is a joint venture business shared by the ministry’s Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise and the Petrogas Carigarli Myanmar Limited (PCML).

During his visit, the minister advised workers on how to speed up the implementation of project.—Myanmar News Agency

EU to implement a five year nationwide police reform programme

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Ms. Karen Deckerbach, head of the EU’s media and civil society sector, said the nationwide police reform programs will be conducted in all State and Regions of the country, while long term initiatives will prove to be beneficial for the country.

The public need to understand and accept the police during the reformist period of the Myanmar police force, while police across the country also need to always protect the good people commented U Nay Myo Naing, chief adviser for the EU’s police reform program.

The EU has made it known that there should be the emergence of organisations to monitor the reform process of the Myanmar police force.—Mymnaka News Agency

Stimulants seized in Mingaladon

A CACHE of abandoned stimulants was found near a garbage bin in Pyminnhain Village Tract in Mingaladon Township, Yangon Region, on 5 February, following a police tip-off.

Local police seized over 26,000 WY-labelled yabba pills packed in plastic bags, which were hidden in cement bags.

Police have initiated an investigation into the origin of the drugs.—Myanmar News Agency

Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham opens Buddhist University in Taunggyi. PHOTO: MNA

A BRT Bus seen playing. PHOTO: KHN MANUK WIN

Yedagun offshore natural gas rig. PHOTO: SUPPLIED BY MINISTRY OF ENERGY

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Malaysia’s new Twitter police target critics of PM Najib

KUALA LUMPUR — Digitally savvy Malaysian police have been taking to social media to issue warnings to critics of scandal-hit Prime Minister Najib Razak in an unusual online campaign that critics say is unlikely to work.

Najib is facing the biggest political crisis in his seven-year premiership over a multi-billion dollar scandal at state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), and over deposits of $681 million in his private bank account.

Najib, chairman of the 1MDB advisory board, has denied any wrongdoing and says he did not take any money for personal gain.

Attorney General Apandi Ali last week closed investigations of Najib and said the $681 million was a donation from a Saudi Arabian benefactor and most of it had been returned.

That has not stopped Malaysians taking to social media to voice their exasperation.

A caricature of Najib with a clown face and the words “in a country full of corruption, we are all seditious,” was widely shared recently. The police responded within hours, with an online warning to the artist who drew it, Fahmi Reza, telling him they were watching his Twitter account and he should use it “prudently and in line with the law,” he said.

“The ruling elite of this country has always been intolerant to dissent. They’re always afraid of losing their throne,” Fahmi said. “But the people have changed. The culture of protest and resistance is growing stronger.” Fahmi was not the first person to be warned over social media comment as the police for the first time make use of Twitter to identify people who are being watched and caution them about repercussions.

“Action will be taken against individuals who spread false information,” is a typical warning to appear on Twitter, often accompanied by the Twitter handle of the person it is being directed at.

Responding to criticism of the attorney general’s decision to drop the investigations of Najib, police told another Twitter user: “Investigations will be carried out on the posts made by the owner of this Twitter account.” A police spokesperson confirmed that the Twitter account issuing the warnings was an official Malaysian cyber unit account but she declined to comment on specific warnings, such as the one issued to Fahmi. She referred queries to the head of the police cyber unit but he declined to make any immediate comment. The Home, or interior, Ministry which is in charge of the unit, did not respond to a request for comment.—Reuters

Malaysia’s Prime Minister Najib Razak. Photo: Reuters

More pulled out alive after Taiwan quake, about 120 people still trapped

Rescue personnel work at the site where a 17-storey apartment building collapsed, after an earthquake in Tainan, southern Taiwan on 7 February 2016. Photo: Reuters

WASHINGTON — At least 23 people are known to have died in the quake, which struck at about 4am on Saturday, at the beginning of a Lunar New Year holiday, including 16 found in the collapsed Wei-guan Golden Dragon Building in the southern city of Tainan.

Around 120 people are still beneath the rubble of the commercial-residential block, with most trapped deep in the wreckage, the government said.

Bodies continue to be found, including those of two sisters, aged 18 and 23, Taiwanese media reported.

The building’s lower floors pancaked on top of each other in the 6.4 magnitude quake and then the whole structure toppled, raising immediate questions about the quality of materials and workmanship used in its construction in the 1990s.—Reuters

Abe condemns N Korea rocket launch, eyes tightening sanctions

TOKYO — Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Sunday condemned North Korea’s rocket launch earlier in the day and instructed his government to swiftly consider tightening Japan’s unilateral sanctions on the country.

Japan lodged a protest with North Korea over what Pyongyang says was the launch of an “Earth observation satellite,” through diplomatic channels in Beijing immediately after the 9:31am Japan time launch, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said at a news conference.

The launch is widely seen as a ballistic missile test in violation of UN Security Council resolutions. Aside from a plan to tighten unilateral sanctions on the North, Japan will cooperate with the United States, South Korea and other countries in adopting a new sanctions resolution by the Security Council at an early date, according to officials in Tokyo.

Suga quoted Abe as telling officials to “make preparations so (the government) can swiftly decide (to tighten) sanctions our country imposes (on North Korea).”

The top government spokesman criticised North Korea for pushing ahead with yet another provocation following its fourth nuclear test on 6 January, despite a wave of calls for restraint by the international community.

Suga said the flying object divided into five parts after the lift-off, of which four fell into the sea and the remainder continued flying southward.

North Korea’s official media announced that Pyongyang has successfully put a satellite into orbit, but the government had no reports of damage to the Japanese territory so far from the rocket that flew over the southwestern prefecture of Okinawa.—Kyodo News

A photo shows a wave of calls for restraint by the international community following North Korea’s rocket launch.
North Korean rocket puts object into space, angers neighbours, US

SEOUL/TOKYO — North Korea launched a long-range rocket on Sunday carrying what it has called a satellite, but its neighbours and Washington denounced the launch as a missile test, conducted in defiance of UN sanctions and just weeks after a nuclear bomb test.

The US Strategic Command said it had detected a missile entering space, and South Korea’s military said the rocket had put an object into orbit.

North Korea said the launch of its satellite Kwangmyong-song-4, named after late leader Kim Jong II, was a “complete success” and that it was making a polar orbit of the earth every 94 minutes. The launch order was given by his son, leader Kim Jong Un, who is believed to be 33 years old.

The launch prompted South Korea to announce it would begin talks with the United States on the deployment of an advanced missile defence system to counter China and Russia. But it also prompted North Korea’s main ally, China, to express concern about a system that closely resembled a previously launched rocket, lifting off. Another showed Kim surrounded by cheering officials at what appeared to have been a command centre.

North Korea’s long-range rocket launch, in 2012, put what it called a communications satellite into orbit, but it has now been detected from space.

“One thing we have seen is consistent with a successful repeat of the 2012 [launch],” said a US missile technology expert John Schilling.

“But it’s still too early to tell for sure,” said Schilling, who is involved with the 38 North monitoring project at Johns Hopkins University.

The rocket was launched at around 9:30am Seoul time (0030 GMT) in a southward trajectory, as planned.

Japan’s Fuji Television Network showed a streak of light heading into the sky, taken from a camera at China’s border with North Korea.

North Korea had notified UN agencies that it planned to launch a rocket carrying an Earth observation satellite, triggering opposition from governments that see it as a long-range missile test. The UN Security Council will hold an emergency meeting on Sunday to discuss the launch, at the request of the United States, Japan and South Korea, diplomats said.

The United States tracked the rocket launch and said it did not believe that it posed a threat to the United States or its allies, defence officials said.

Isolated North Korea had initially given a 2-8 February time frame for the launch but on Saturday changed that to 7-14 February, apparently taking advantage of clear weather on Sunday.

North Korea’s National Aerospace Development Administration called the launch “an epochal event in developing the country’s science, technology, economy and defence capability by legitimately exercising the right to use space for independent and peaceful purposes.”

The rocket launch and the 6 January nuclear test are seen as efforts by the North’s young leader to bolster his domestic legitimacy ahead of a rare ruling party congress in May, which will be the first since 1980.

South Korea said on Sunday it would begin discussions with the United States on an advanced missile-defence system called Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD).

South Korea had been reluctant to discuss openly the possibility of deploying THAAD, caught between its biggest ally, the United States, and its largest trading partner, China, which has expressed concern about a system whose radar could penetrate its territory.

“If THAAD is deployed to the Korean peninsula, it will be only operated against North Korea,” South Korean defence minister official Yoo Je-seung told a press conference with Thomas S. Vandal, commander of the Eighth US Army based in South Korea. US Secretary of State John Kerry said the United States would work with the UN Security Council on “significant measures” to hold North Korea to account for what he called a flagrant violation of UN resolutions on North Korea’s proliferation of ballistic missile technology.

Kerry reaffirmed “ironclad” US defence commitments to allies Japan and South Korea, which have expressed doubt over that claim.

North Korea is believed to be working on miniaturising a nuclear warhead to mount on a missile, but many experts say it is some time away from perfecting such technology.

It has shown off two versions of a ballistic missile resembling a type that could reach the US West Coast, but there is no evidence the missiles have been tested.

North Korea says it has a sovereign right to pursue a space programme.—Reuters

Sri Lankan nationalists protest UN rights chief’s visit on war crimes

COLOMBO — Hundreds of hardline nationalists gathered outside the United Nations’ office in the Sri Lankan capital Colombo on Saturday to protest against a visit by the UN human rights chief who will assess Sri Lanka’s participation was not needed for an impartial inquiry into the war.

The UN says both Sri Lanka’s military and the Tamil Tiger rebels most likely committed war crimes during a 26-year war which ended in 2009. A UN resolution calls for post-war reconciliation and that all alleged war crimes be investigated and tried in special courts by international judges.

However, many Sri Lankans oppose foreign involvement and supporters of former president Mahinda Rajapaksa believe the UN resolution aims to punish the military unfairly despite defeating the Tamil Tigers.

Although the coalition of President Maithripala Sirisena to fulfill the need of Western nations. Al Hussein has come here to take our war heroes to guillotine, but we won’t allow that to happen,” Wimal Weerawansa, the NFF leader told the gathering.

Al Hussein said the launch was “absolutely unacceptable”, especially after the North’s nuclear test last month.

North Korea has said that its fourth nuclear test was of a hydrogen bomb. However, the United States and other governments have expressed doubt over that claim.

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UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein speaks to the media in Colombo, on 6 February 2016. Photo: Reuters

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un reacts as he watches a long range rocket launch in North Korea, in this photo released by Kyodo on 7 February 2016. Photo: Reuters

A North Korean long-range rocket is launched into the air at the Sohae rocket launch site, North Korea. Photo: Reuters

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein speaks to the media in Colombo, on 6 February 2016. Photo: Reuters

UN allies South Korea, Australia and Japan condemned the launch. South Korean President Park Geun-hye said it was an unforgivable act of provocation. Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se said there would be a stepped up effort to include North Korea’s defence capability by legitimising science, technology, economy and defence capability by legitimately exercising the right to use sovereignty right to pursue a space programme.—Reuters

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foreign jades” and “don’t send the military to guillotine”. They also set posters bearing Zeid’s face on fire and threw shoes and slippers at his image.

“We will not allow to set up courts to fulfill the need of Western nations. Al Hussein has come here to take our war heroes to guillotine, but we won’t allow that to happen,” Wimal Weerawansa, the NFF leader told the gathering.

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**Rubio, Christie and Kasich get more debate traction on social media**

NEW YORK — Donald Trump lost his social media dominance for the first time during the Republican presidential debates as the candidates made their eighth showing Saturday night in New Hampshire.

Instead, many on Twitter took to mocking contender Senator Marco Rubio, who came under heavy attack on Saturday from rivals. New Jersey Governor Chris Christie also saw a big bump in his share of the social conversation.

By the end of the night, Trump, who has the most followers, still received the largest share of mentions on Twitter Inc., with 33 per cent compared to Rubio’s 20 per cent. Ted Cruz, a US senator from Texas, came in third, with 15 per cent.

But Twitter said an hour into the debate that Rubio was the most tweeted about candidate on the social media platform, marking the first time a candidate other than Trump came out on top within that time frame.

Overall, Rubio received 10 more mentions per minute on Twitter than he did during the last Republican debate on 28 January, according to social media analytics firm Zimorph.

Three days before New Hampshire’s primary for the 8 November election, many of the mentions were negative as Rubio became a target for continuing to repeat many of the same lines from his campaign stump speech.

“Marco, the thing is this,” said rival Chris Christie, the governor of New Jersey, “when you’re president of the United States, when you’re a governor of a state, the memorised 30-second speech where you talk about how great America is at the end of it doesn’t solve one problem for one person.”

That moment was measured by Twitter as one of the top social moments of the night.

Actress Mia Farrow, @ MiaFarrow, tweeted, “Rubio keeps saying the same thing.”

A Marco Rubio Glitch (@ RubioGlitch) account also emerged, gaining nearly 1,200 followers as of Saturday night as it parodies Rubio as a robot in tweets in Spanish and English.

Rubio also had his worst performance yet with millennials on the popular messaging app Yik Yak, where he had a 44 per cent disapproval rating. In contrast, Ohio Governor John Kasich had his best performance with millennials, earning a 41.4 approval rating, and maintaining the largest share of the conversation on Yik Yak. The debate was also a big night on social media for Christie, who has rarely been a top contender in social mentions.

According to Brandwatch, a social media analytics firm, he had the second highest percentage of positive social mentions, 61.5 per cent, compared to Trump’s 62.5 per cent.

Tyler Freeman (@ tyfreem) tweeted, “#GOPDebate Chris Christie has been most under-rated candidate the whole campaign. He finally stood out tonight. One of the best performances.”

**Dacic: Serbia cannot afford to become refugee centre**

AMSTERDAM — Serbia is a credible EU partner in the refugee crisis, but it cannot afford to become a refugee centre, Serbian First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic said Saturday.

At an informal Amsterdam meeting of foreign ministers of EU member states and candidate countries, Dacic warned that a chain reaction of a drastic drop in border throughput or closure of borders would be particularly dangerous to Serbia and the entire region, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

That would halt the flow of migrants, causing them to stay in Serbian territory in larger numbers and over longer periods of time, which would be an exceptional burden to us, Dacic warned.

Serbia is unable to take back migrants who had transited through its territory as it has neither the funds nor the capacities for this, and it is not the country of first entry either, Dacic said. Serbia can temporarily accommodate several thousand migrants — it has single-handedly ensured additional accommodation for 3,000 migrants and will try to do the same for 3,000 more if it is given concrete financial assistance from the EU, he said.— Tanjug

**Turkey denies existence of information about Serbian snipers**

BELGRADE/AMSTERDAM — Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu denied during a meeting with Serbian counterpart Ivica Dacic on Saturday the existence of official information about Serbian snipers supporting Kurds, the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

Cavusoglu, who met with Dacic on the fringes of an informal Amsterdam meeting of the foreign ministers of EU member states and candidate countries, announced that Serbia will be notified in a timely fashion if the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs obtains information that would suggest otherwise, the statement also said.

The Turkish press reported recently that Serbian snipers are fighting on the side of the Kurdish PKK and that some of them have been taken prisoner in southeastern Turkey, but Interior Minister Elkan Ala dismissed the allegations earlier this week.

Dacic also met with Croatian Foreign Minister Miro Kovac, and they concluded that discussions about strengthening bilateral and regional cooperation should be continued.— Tanjug

**Australian woman freed after kidnap by al Qaeda in Burkina Faso**

NIAMEY — An Australian woman has been freed after she and her husband were kidnapped by an al Qaeda-affiliated group on 15 January in Burkina Faso, neighbouring Niger’s President Mahamadou Issoufou said on Saturday.

Issoufou presented the freed woman, Jocelyn Elliott, to journalists at a news conference in Dosso, southwestern Niger, and said authorities were intensifying efforts to secure the release of her husband.— Reuters

**Russia says North Korea rocket launch cannot but provoke ‘decisive protest’**

MOSCOW — Russia’s Foreign Ministry said yesterday a rocket launch by North Korea could not but provoke a “decisive protest”, adding Pyongyang had once again demonstrated a disregard for norms of international law.

The ministry said in a statement on its website that such actions dealt a serious blow to the security of governments in the region, and first of all to North Korea itself.

“We strongly recommend the leadership of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea think about whether a policy of opposing the entire international community meets the interests of the country,” the statement read.— Reuters
Haiti’s President Michel Martelly (R) speaks with Senate President Jocelerme Privert after an agreement signing at the National Palace in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on 6 February 2016. Photo: Reuters

“Every time they exercise violence Haiti makes one step backward,” Martelly said of the protesters. Any caretaker government will have to overcome deep disagreements about how the election should be organised and which candidates can participate, since many opposition politicians are convinced the first round vote was riddled with fraud that favored ruling party candidate Jovenel Moïse.

The government deems the allegations

Martelly said the protesters, Jovenel Moïse, and Hutu political leaders had agreed to “cooperate and face the current crisis” and that power-sharing discussions between both sides were already underway. Moïse was expected to be chosen as president of Haiti, expected to be chosen within the following month, ending over power to the winner the following month.

The temporary president, expected to be chosen in the next few days, will be committed to holding delayed presidential elections by 24 April and handing over power to the winner the following month.

A presidential runoff due to be held last month was scrapped after opposition candidate Jude Celestin threatened to boycott the vote over allegations of fraud in the first round, and protesters took to the streets in force.

Port-au-Prince has seen almost daily protests by both opposition and government supporters since January, culminating in the lynching of a former mayor during a march on Friday.

The agreement did not placate all sectors of the opposition. During the signing in an annex of the presidential palace that survived a devastating earthquake six years ago, small groups of anti-government protesters clashed outside with riot police who used a water canon and tear gas to disperse them.

“Despite this agreement, we will need to continue to remain vigilant because there are people who won’t agree,” Martelly said at an event with foreign diplomats at the palace.

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“Despite this agreement, we will need to continue to remain vigilant because there are people who won’t agree,” Martelly said at an event with foreign diplomats at the palace.

“The streets should not be deciding what happens next, elections should be deciding,” Martelly said. “The elections to go forward,” he said.—Reuters

Syrians flee to Turkish border as Aleppo assault intensifies

BAB AL- SALAMA — Russian and Syrian government forces on Saturday intensified an assault on rebel-held areas around the Syrian city of Aleppo that has prompted tens of thousands to flee to the Turkish border to seek refuge.

The assault around Aleppo, which aid workers have said could soon fall to government forces, helped torpedo Syrian peace talks in Geneva this week. Russia’s intervention has tipped the balance of the war in favor of President Bashar al-Assad, reversing gains the rebels made last year.

Any hopes of a ceasefire were dampened by Assad’s foreign ministers, who said it would be all but impossible to stop the fighting while rebels were able to pass freely through the heavily populated Tigris River valley.

Kurdish Peshmerga fighters recaptured the dam two weeks later with the help of coalition airstrikes and Iraqi government forces.

About 450 Italian forces will be deployed to protect the Italian Trevi Group contract to repair the dam, whose deterioration has forced the US military to draft a contingency plan for its potential failure. —Reuters

Iraq’s water minister plays down the danger of Mosul dam collapse

BAGHDAD — Iraq’s minister of water resources on Saturday played down warnings that Mosul dam could collapse, estimating only a “one in a thousand” chance of failure and saying the solution was to build a new dam or install a new concrete support wall.

The US military has warned that a collapse of the 3.6 km-long (2.2 mile) high barrier dam located near Iraqi State-held territory in the country’s north would be catastrophic.

An Italian company has been awarded a contract to make urgent repairs to the dam which has suffered from structural flaws since its construction in the 1980s and requires constant grouting to maintain structural integrity.

“The looming danger to Mosul dam is one in a thousand. This risk level is present in all the world’s dams”, Muhsin al-Shammari said in an interview to al-Sumaria TV.

He said one solution was to build a concrete support wall 150 to 200 metres deep. In the meantime, workers are removing 5 to 6 tonnes of concrete a day at a cost of 7 billion Iraqi dinars ($6 million) a day, he added.

Islamic State militants controlling swathes of territory in northern and western Iraq seized Mosul dam in August 2014, raising fears they might blow it up and unleash a wall of water on Mosul and Baghdad that could kill hundreds of thousands along the heavily populated Tigris River valley.

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About 450 Italian forces will be deployed to protect the Italian Trevi Group contract to repair the dam, whose deterioration has forced the US military to draft a contingency plan for its potential failure. —Reuters

Employees work at strengthening the Mosul Dam in northern Iraq, on 3 February 2016. Photo: Reuters
A big dream for squatters in squalor

Kyaw Thura

Typically, everyone dreams to be better nourished, to be better educated, to enjoy better health and to have better economic prospects. It is the responsibility of governments, especially democratic ones, to enable their citizens to realize these dreams. In this regard, our government has room to improve.

Removing squatters from their homes by force is absolutely against the government’s commitment to eradicating poverty and developing rural communities. No profession is nobler than statesmanship. No responsibility is greater than statesmanship. It is, therefore, necessary for all statesmen to be aware that the root cause of bad governance is the failure to put people at the centre of what they do.

It is clear that one of the primary responsibilities of the government is to serve the needs and hopes of citizens across the country, with no discrimination of gender or religion. All elected representatives are required to swear a solemn oath that they will respect the dignity and worth of their fellow citizens and promote human rights while dedicating themselves to the undertaking of better standards of living.

It is encouraging to see the recent initiative to provide rental housing to squatters along the Ayeyawady River in Mandalay Region. The project signals the commitment of the local administrative bodies to the fight against poverty. According to the Mandalay City Development Committee, the low-cost housing project is under construction for migrant workers living in slums along the river.

The project is said to include the construction of 22 six-storey buildings, with 1,584 rooms in total. Each room measures 10 feet by 20 feet and contains a bathroom, a toilet and a bedroom. The rooms will have to be rented by lot for K30,000 (US$23) per month, as the applicants outnumber the available rooms. Over 1,800 people have applied so far. Low-cost rental housing should be hailed as a move to fulfill the dream of squatters living in squalor. The government should build upon these efforts and improve on them until all squatters have their basic human needs satisfied.

**Write for us**

We appreciate your feedback and contributions. If you have any comments or would like to submit editorials, analyses or reports please email khaunaungyoe@hotmail.com with your name and contact details. Due to limitation of space we are only able to publish “Letter to the Editor” that do not exceed 500 words. Should you submit a longer letter, 500 words please be aware that your letter will be edited.

The Common Good

Ilha Maung

The “common good” is an expression where “good” is a noun rather than an adjective. It is usually a good that most of us, if not all, use. The clean unpolluted air that we all breathe in and need for survival, for example, is a “common good,” and its availability has always been taken for granted.

This may deteriorate the environment. It is easy to make concrete bricks and replace earthen ones in Yesagyo, according to local brick makers.

“We usually have to use firewood to bake earthen bricks. This may ruin the environment. It is easy to make concrete bricks if we have a mould, cement, and sand,” said one brick maker.

A local environmental activist said: “An increase in the use of concrete bricks may help support environmental conservation.”

Normally, a concrete brick is sold for K70 (US$0.06), while an earthen brick costs K100 (US$0.80), a local resident said. The numbers of concrete brick makers and users have increased not only in Yesagyo Township but also in nearby villages.

One bag of cement can yield 250 bricks, said a brick maker from Ward 8 in the township.—Pe Tun Zaw
Farmers in Lewe Township expect good harvest, profits from winter crop

FARMERS in Lewe Township, Nay Pyi Taw Council Area, who saw losses in revenue due to downward prices and a low yield last year, have anticipated the fetching of good prices for their crop this year.

Regarding the decrease in last year’s harvest, experts from the government’s agricultural department have made field trips to villages in Lewe Township this cultural season, educating them on the systematic use of pesticides, timing of the cultivation and number of seeds per acre for growing.

“To make the pesticides more effective, farmers should spray pesticides on the crops in the early days of a month when pests mate”, said U Than Tun, an assistant staff officer of Lewe Township Agricultural Department.

The experts also advised the farmers to start to grow crops in first week or last week of December to be able to harvest the crop before the rainy season to minimize the losses and wastages when they harvest.

Harvesting can begin about 90 days after growing. The farmer will harvest the crop with a 15 to 20 baskets per acre rate of yield in the first week of March and expect to get around K 45,000 per basket. The winter crop is grown on around 38,000 acres in Lewe Township which has more than 61,000 acres of paddy in the rainy season.—Ko Pauk (Okka Myay)

PLenty of natural scenic beauties of Myanmar, cultural heritages, traditional customs, and hospitality of Myanmar people fascinate the tourists to come and see Myanmar. A large number of Chinese tourists will visit Myanmar beginning on Chinese New Year, which falls on 8 February, and will visit 15 places of tourist attractions in the country.

Using 130 motor vehicles, a total of 441 Chinese people plan to visit Pyin Oo Lwin, Mandalay, Bagan, Inle, Yangon, Ngwe Saung and Muse townships during the trip.

Last year, most Chinese tourists only visited Muse and nearby areas.

To develop the country’s tourism industry, the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism has arranged tourism options based on nature, culture and social heritage.

Development in tourism industries can be attributed to ancient cultural heritage tourism, adventure tourism, nature based tourism, coastal and maritime tourism, etc.—MNA

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

The report Myanmar’s largest Lake becomes a Ramsar site (GNLM, Jan 2) is indeed a bright ecological feather in the cap of Myanmar and a victory for the dedicated environmentalists, ecologists, conservators, foresters and the ordinary citizens in raising the profile of the nation to the world as an eco-friendly society. The declaration of the Ramsar site not only adds Myanmar to the global map of distinguished Ramsar sites across the globe but also opens up opportunities for eco-tourism and much needed foreign exchange for the nation too. The Ramsar site will not only add to the successful conservation of the rich biodiversity of the nation but will also add to the employment opportunities for the locals; as thousands of eco-enthusiasts and inquisitive local, regional and international tourists will flock to the site to catch a glimpse of the rich biodiversity and ecological serenity of the Indawgyi Lake and the adjacent areas. It will portray the benefits of successful eco-environmental conservation and management in one hand; and boost the local economy on the other. My heartiest congratulations to the people of Myanmar and the related government departments and local NGOs for making this a reality! Kudos to the GNLM staff and editorial board for their consistent efforts in covering both national and global news report on ecological and environmental conservation efforts and approaches with great sincerity and dedication. This has great impact in educating the public about ecological sensibility. Keep up the good work.

Thanking you
Sincerely yours
Saikat Kumar Basu

Capacity Building Course for government servants in Taungoo

TO improve the capacity of the staff, a refresher course for capacity building of government servants has been conducted at the office of the Information and Public Relations Department (IPRD) of Taungoo District.

The staff from the Information and Public Relations Departments are attending the course which will last for six days from 1 to 6 February. Staff Officers of the District and township IPRDs are giving lectures on the following subjects — Office Letter Writing and Management, Public Relations, Management of the Public Libraries, Book Keeping, Civil Service law, Printing and Publishing Law, Media Law and History in the national development.—Shwe Win (Pyay)
China says EU should take steel dumping claims to WTO

BEIJING — China’s Ministry of Commerce said that claims it was dumping steel in Europe should be put to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), responding to reports that the European Commission (EC) was preparing to impose duties on imported Chinese steel.

WTO members should fulfill their treaty obligations and stop using “surrogate countries” to pursue anti-dumping claims, a Ministry of Commerce spokesman said, according to a statement released on the ministry’s website on Saturday. The EC is set to impose provisional duties later this month of up to 16 per cent on China, and of up to 26 per cent on Russia, following its investigation into alleged dumping by the two countries.

Reuters reported that provisional measures are due to be announced by 14 February and definitive duties, if imposed, at the conclusion of the investigation, by 12 August. Such duties would typically apply for five years.

The Commission’s investigation follows a complaint from Eurofer, the European steel association, which said Russia and China were dumping the steel — selling it below market prices at home or below the cost of production — on the EU market and thereby damaging the local industry.

The global steel industry is facing over-capacity, and the Chinese government is willing to discuss “in good faith” with WTO members “to create a fair, just and predictable international market environment,” the statement said.— Reuters

Japanese manga goods store opens in Bangkok

BANGKOK — A Japanese manga and animation goods store opened in Thailand on Saturday, featuring authentic products such as stationery, accessories, CDs, posters and limited items related to popular comic books and anime shows.

About 400 customers lined up before the opening of the first Thai branch of “animate” — a store chain operated by Japan Manga Alliance Co. — at the MBK Centre, a department store in the heart of Bangkok.

The 560-square-metre store sells about 30,000 items, including Japanese comic books translated into Thai and model figures imported from Japan.

It also has a section specialising in products of the popular “One Piece” manga series.

Jiratikarn Auncharoen, a 24-year-old longtime fan of Japanese anime and manga, told Kyodo News that she had earlier visited an “animate” shop in Tokyo and was glad that a branch opened in her country.

Bangkok store manager Akhiro Sotokawa said he was grateful to see many customers come to the shop on the opening day, adding, “I want Thai people to buy authentic items, not counterfeit ones.”

Japan Manga Alliance was set up last September by four major Japanese publishers Kadokawa Corp., Kodansha Ltd., Shueisha Inc., Shogakukan Inc. — and manga and anime goods vendor Animate Co.—Kyodo News

BlackBerry cuts 200 jobs in Ontario and Florida to trim costs

TORONTO — BlackBerry Ltd is cutting 200 jobs at its home-town headquarters in Ontario and in Florida in order to trim costs, it said on Friday, as the smartphone maker moves to turn around its fortunes and put more emphasis on its enterprise software business.

“As BlackBerry continues to execute its turnaround plan, we remain focused on driving efficiencies across our global workforce,” the company said in an emailed statement.

The company declined to comment on what percentage of its workforce is affected by the cuts. According to a filing, the company had 6,225 employees as of 28 February, 2015.

In a final attempt to revive its handset business BlackBerry released its first Android-based device in November. It has stated plans to release at least one more Android-based phone this year.

BlackBerry Chief Executive John Chen has said he will make a decision on whether the company’s handset business is viable in the financial year beginning in late February.

BlackBerry has staked its turnaround on enterprise software and more aggressively licensing its trove of patents.—Reuters

Twitter users decry reported plan to prioritise tweets

NEW YORK — The hashtag #RIPTwitter became the top trending US item on Twitter on Saturday, after a report from BuzzFeed said the company is planning to change how it displays users’ tweets.

The BuzzFeed report, which went live on Friday night and did not disclose the source of its information, said the social media platform will reorder tweets to prioritise those it believes more users will want to see. Currently, Twitter arranges tweets in chronological order.

The response to the news on Twitter was overwhelming-ly negative, with the hashtag #RIPTwitter suggesting many users of the microblogging site believe the changes would make Twitter too much like Facebook (FB.O), which arranges content through the use of an algorithm.

“Dear Twitter, don’t try to be like Facebook, we don’t like Facebook #RIPTwitter,” tweeted ana (@dearauthenticity) on Saturday.

Clearly the motto ‘if it ain’t broke don’t fix it’ is something twitter isn’t familiar with #RIPTwitter,” tweeted EldestSalvatore (@EldestDamon) on Saturday.

A spokesperson for Twitter declined to comment.

Twitter has come under increasing pressure to boost user growth, as it struggles to attain advertising revenues equaling those of its larger Facebook rival.

Last month, Twitter came under fire when it announced a new feature that would allow users to post tweets up to 10,000 characters long, up from its previous limit of 140 characters.— Reuters
More than 3,100 pregnant women in Colombia have Zika virus: government

BOGOTA — More than 3,100 pregnant Colombian women are infected with the mosquito-borne Zika virus, President Juan Manuel Santos said on Saturday, as the disease continues its rapid spread across the Americas.

Brazil is investigating the potential link between Zika infections and more than 4,000 suspected cases of microcephaly, a birth defect marked by an abnormally small head size that can result in developmental problems. Researchers have identified evidence of Zika infection in 17 of these cases, either in the baby or in the mother, but have not confirmed that Zika can cause microcephaly.

There are so far no recorded cases of Zika-linked microcephaly in Colombia, Santos said. The government is now undertaking a previous projection for up to 500 cases of Zika-linked microcephaly, based on data from other countries battling the disease, he said.

"Much remains unknown about Zika, for which there is no vaccine. An estimated 80 per cent of those infected show no symptoms, and those that do have a mild illness, with a fever, rash and red eyes."

There were 25,645 people infected with Zika in Colombia, Santos said during a TV broadcast with health officials. Among them were 3,177 pregnant women.

"The projection is that we could end up having 600,000 cases," Santos said, adding there could be up to 1,000 cases of Guillain-Barre syndrome, a rare neurological disorder that can weaken the muscles and cause paralysis. Scientists are studying a possible link between the disorder and Zika.

The Colombian government will be working across the country to fight mosquitoes — fumigating and helping families rid their homes of stagnant water, the president said.

The province of Norte de Santander, along the eastern border with Venezuela, had nearly 5,000 Zika cases, the highest in the country, an epidemiological bulletin published on Saturday showed. That province also had the highest number of pregnant women with Zika — nearly 31 per cent of total cases.

Colombia’s Caribbean region, which includes popular tourist destinations Cartagena and Santa Marta, had more than 11,000 cases of the virus, according to the bulletin.

The government has said pregnant women with Zika are eligible to access much-restricted abortion services.

Many women struggle to find abortion providers even when they meet strict legal requirements and illegal abortions are widespread. On Friday, local media reported the first abortion because of Zika infection.

Colombia’s health minister, Alejandro Gaviria, has said he believes three deaths are connected with Zika. — Reuters

Eating soy may protect against reproductive effects of BPA

BOSTON — Eating soy foods may help protect against reproductive effects of bisphenol A (BPA), a chemical in many plastic consumer products and lining the inside of some canned foods, according to a study of women undergoing fertility treatments.

"The results were actually exactly what we were expecting to find," said lead author Dr Jorge E. Chavarro of the Harvard School of Public Health-Nutrition in Boston.

BPA is known to mimic estrogen in the body, and therefore it’s believed to disrupt conception and implantation of a fertilized egg in the womb, the researchers write in the Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism.

Experiments in rodents suggest that soy, which also interacts with estrogen receptors, could offset or mitigate those effects of BPA, that study said.

"We wanted to follow-up on the results of two experimental models in rodents where two independent groups had found that some adverse reproductive effects of BPA could be prevented by placing the mice on a soy-based diet," Chavarro told Reuters Health by email. "We wanted to see whether a similar interaction occurred in humans."

The researchers studied 239 women who underwent in vitro fertilization cycles between 2007 and 2012. The women completed dietary questionnaires and provided urine samples before egg retrieval for each fertility cycle.

The questionnaire included assessment of the women’s intake of 13 soy-based foods, including tofu, soy burgers, miso soup, soy protein and soy bars. Consumption of these items ranged from never or less than once per month to twice daily.

Almost three quarters of the women said they consumed at least some soy foods.

Most women underwent one IVF cycle, 18 per cent underwent two cycles and 11 per cent underwent three cycles.

As urinary BPA levels increased, the women who did not eat soy foods had lower rates of implantation, clinical pregnancy and live birth. But for women who did eat soy, increasing BPA levels were not tied to fertility outcomes.

"We still need to evaluate whether the same is also true for couples trying to get pregnant without medical help or whether risks extend to the health of children," Chavarro said.

In one of the previous mouse studies, BPA was able to switch on and off certain genes and soy prevented BPA from doing so, Chavarro said.

"We cannot be certain whether this is the same mechanism operating in our case or whether other mechanisms yet to be identified could also be at play," he said.

BPA is safe in the current levels occurring in foods, according to the US Food and Drug Administration.

"Based on nationally representative surveys we know that more than 90 per cent of Americans are exposed at varying levels," but exposure to BPA can be minimized by switching from consuming canned foods to their fresh or frozen counterparts, replacing hard polycarbonate plastic food containers with glass or metal containers, and not handling thermal receipts such as those used in supermarkets, ATMs and gas stations, Chavarro said.

It is important to confirm these findings, since this is the first time that an interaction between BPA and diet has been reported in humans, he said. But soy on its own, regardless of whether or not it interacts with diet, appears to be beneficial to women who are trying to become pregnant, he said. — Reuters

Ancient wildebeest cousin boasted bizarre dinosaur-like trait

WASHINGTON — In an ancient streambed on Kenya’s Rusinga Island, scientists have unearthed fossils of a wildebeest-like creature named Rusingoryx that boasted a weird nasal structure more befitting of a dinosaur than a mammal.

Researchers said on Thursday the crescent-shaped protrusion atop the head of Rusingoryx, which named Africa’s savannah tens of thousands of years ago, was unlike anything on any other mammal, past or present. Instead, it resembled the head crests of a group of duckbilled dinosaurs called hadrosaurs.

The hollow structure may have enabled the horned, hoofed grass-eater to produce a low trumpeting sound to communicate over long distances with others in its herd, Ohio University paleontologist Haley O’Brien said.

“This structure was incredibly surprising,” O’Brien said. “To see a hollow nasal crest outside of dinosaurs and in a mammal that lived so recently is very bizarre.”

The fossils of Rusingoryx, about the size of its close cousin the wildebeest, date from about 55,000 to 75,000 years ago. Hadrosaurs with similar nasal structures, Lambeosaurus and Corythosaurus, lived about 75 million years ago.

O’Brien said the structure was an example of “convergent evolution” in which disparate organisms independently evolve similar features, like the wings of birds, bats and the extinct flying reptiles called pterosaurs, to adapt to similar environments or ecological niches.

Rusingoryx led a lifestyle similar to hadrosaurs: herbivores both likely travelling in herds. Many scientists think hadrosaurs also used their crests to communicate vocally with one another.

The researchers said Rusingoryx’s nasal apparatus may have allowed it to deepen its normal vocal calls into “infrasound” levels other species may not have been able to hear. “Vocalizations can alert predators, and moving their calls into a new frequency could have made communication safer,” O’Brien said.

The researchers examined six adult and juvenile Rusingoryx skulls. The bony crest, laying on the top and front of the skull, was mostly hollow inside. It contained nasal passages that followed the outside of the structure then took an S-shaped pathway down into the soft tissue part of the airway.

The nasal passage then sat atop a pair of large sinuses.

At least 24 Rusingoryx individuals were found at the site. University of Minnesota paleoanatomologist Kirsten Jenkins said butchered bones and stone tools there indicated humans may have caused their deaths. Jenkins said hunters may have driven a herd into the stream for an ambush.

The research was published in the journal Current Biology. — Reuters
Contest picks brains of technologists to fight forced labour

NEW YORK — A cell phone tool to survey working conditions of Ghanaian fishermen and a mobile system to collect forced labour data are among the finalists in a global competition to harness technology to identify enslaved workers in supply chains, organizers said on 1st February.

The contest, Rethink Supply Chains, aims to send a message that efforts to make supply chains transparent and slave-free create market opportunities, said Catherine Chen, director of investments at Humanity United, a non-profit participant in the project.

Some 18.7 million people around the world are estimated to be trapped in forced labour in the private economy, generating $150 billion in annual profits, according to the International Labour Organisation.

Five finalists were selected among dozens of applicants, including software companies, regulatory-compliance consulting firms and mobile application developers, from 11 nations.

Many were already trying to develop fixes to other social and economic problems, said Chen.

“It’s exciting to be able to activate those technology companies and technologists themselves and get them thinking about another social issue,” she said.

The other three finalists were an online platform for reporting conditions of fishing crews at sea, a system to utilize internet reporting to uncover labor exploitation and a mobile platform to look at remittances to combat human trafficking.

The winner of the $250,000 prize offered by the Partnership for Freedom, a venture including Humanity United and the US government, will be announced in April.— Reuters

S Korea, US to stage largest-ever annual war games in March

SEOUL — Combined forces of South Korea and the United States plan to stage their largest-ever joint annual war games that are scheduled to kick off in early March, mobilising a nuclear-powered US aircraft carrier.

A senior South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff official told senior members of the ruling Saenuri Party yesterday that this year’s Key Resolve and Foal Eagle exercises will be carried out in the largest-ever scale, mobilising the highest-tech weapons.

The joint annual military exercises are scheduled to kick off on 7 March that will run through 30 April.

The Key Resolve command post exercise and the Foal Eagle field training exercise have been denounced by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) as a rehearsal for northward invasion.

In an apparent show of force against the DPRK’s recent nuclear test and long-range rocket launch, the USS John C. Stennis, a US nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, will be mobilised during the upcoming drills, a South Korean military official was quoted by Yonhap news agency as saying.

South Korea and the United States are considering additional deployment of strategic assets during the exercises, including F-22 stealth fighters and B-2 stealth bombers capable of carrying nuclear bombs.

Pyongyang yesterday launched a Kwangmyongsong-4 Earth observation satellite into orbit aboard a long-range rocket, which Seoul and Washington see as a long-range ballistic missile, in defiance of international warnings. The rocket launch came about a month after what the DPRK claimed was its first H-bomb test on 6 January.— Reuters

DUBAI — The family of an Iranian-British former BBC journalist who was detained last week in Tehran were told yesterday that he was in the capital’s Evin prison, a friend told Reuters.

Bahman Daroshafaei, 34, a translator and former BBC Persian service reporter, was detained on Wednesday at his home, according to the opposition website Kaleme.com.

‘His family went to Evin prison today. They managed to talk to someone on the phone who said Bahman was in Evin but he would not be able to contact his family for another week or so,’ said the friend, who was in direct touch with the family but declined to be named.

Daroshafaei’s family said they had not been informed what the charges against him might be.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in London on Thursday that he did not know about the case.

Some opposition activists have suggested that Daroshafaei’s arrest, on the eve of the first visit to Britain by an Iranian foreign minister in 12 years, might have been orchestrated by hardliners to thwart an improvement in relations as Iran emerges from international isolation under the moderate government of President Hassan Rouhani.

After living in London for several years, Daroshafaei returned to Iran in 2014 to be near his family.

His friend said six plain-clothed officers had arrested Daroshafaei at his home and confiscated his computer, hard drives and mobile phone.

A few of Daroshafaei’s friends in Tehran and London said they had received messages on social media in the last few days purporting to come from him. One said that she had been hacked after clicking on a link she received from Daroshafaei’s account.

Britain reopened its embassy in Tehran last year after Iran agreed with world powers to curb its nuclear programme in return for a lifting of sanctions. It has made no comment about Daroshafaei’s detention.

Another Iranian-British citizen, Kamal Foroughi, remains in detention after being arrested in 2011 while working in Tehran as a business consultant.— Reuters

VIENNA — Five Czech skiers were killed in a huge avalanche that swept away their group of 17 in the Austrian skiing region of Tyrol on Saturday, police said.

The avalanche, which the regional TV station ORF Tyrol said was 2 km (1.25 miles) wide and 5 m (16 feet) deep, came down shortly after noon at the Wattener Lizum region, about 40 km (25 miles) southeast of Innsbruck.

Two people were injured but out of acute danger, while 10 others survived unharmed, police said.

The experienced Czech skiers were taking part in a so-called ‘freeride camp’ and had been repeatedly warned about the danger by locals, according to ORF.

The entire skiing region had been on a ‘level three’ avalanche alert, out of a maximum five, and several avalanches were also reported elsewhere.— Reuters

Five Czechs killed as huge Austrian avalanche buries 17

An avalanche warning sign is pictured in Wattental valley in Austria’s skiing region of Tyrol on 6 February 2016. Photo: Reuters
South Africa farm ministry: won’t declare national disaster over drought

BUENOS AIRES — Argentina is facing a severe challenge in attracting investors amid global economic instability, volatile financial markets and tumbling oil prices, a report says. “The deterioration of the international context impacts the region, including in the Argentinean government’s strategy to minimize the impact of its macroeconomic reforms,” economic consulting firm Ecolatina said in a report on Friday.

The Argentinean government has rolled out a series of measures to improve investment incentives, including an infrastructure plan which would require long-term, low-interest international loans. It has also sought to remove internal restrictions on foreign exchange operations, clarify rules for the private sector, boost the profitability of the agricultural sector and resolve Argentina’s conflict with nuclearexports in the United States. “Finding financing on capital markets and attracting foreign investors would directly help (Argentina) to overcome its own contraction,” explained the firm, adding that gaining access to foreign exchange markets could strengthen the country’s internal reserves. Such extra financing could also help make up some of the fiscal deficit currently affecting the country, Ecolatina reported.

According to the consultancy, the speed at which the Argentinean economy will pick up largely depends on how much investment it secures in the second half of 2016. “It is probable that Argentinean authorities will have to rethink their strategy. The low price of oil has complicated matters for energy companies and export countries,” said the report.

The appreciation of the dollar has also generated additional exchange pressures for emerging economies,” it said.—Xinhua

Argentina facing stiff challenge in efforts to enter international financial markets

Ministry of Energy
Myanmar Petroleum Products Enterprise
Invitation for Opened Tender (1/2016)

1. Open tenders are invited for supply of the following respective items in United State Dollars (CIF Yangon) and Myanmar Kyats (M PPE Warehouse Yangon).

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Tender documents are available at our office starting from 8 - 2 - 2016 during office hours and for further detail please contact: Phone: 067-411487.

Ministry of Energy
Myanmar Petroleum Products Enterprise
Planning Department

BUENOS AIRES — South Africa will not declare a national disaster in response to a drought that has hurt agricultural production, the country’s deputy minister of agriculture, forestry and fisheries Bheki Cele told Reuters yesterday.

“As we are experiencing this kind of drought, for some reason God has been kind and late rains did come, and we think the 6 million tonnes (of maize) we were looking to import — we have downgraded that to four,” he said in an interview on the sidelines of a conference in Dubai. “The only hope is that rains continue — if they do we might be out of the woods,” Cele said, adding: “We will not declare a national disaster.”

He said the ministry was looking at Mexico as a source of white maize imports, but that if ample rain continued, total maize imports might go below the currently projected 4 million tonnes.

South Africa’s ports are fully prepared receive maize imports, he added.—Reuters
Inarritu wins DGA award for ‘The Revenant,’ stoking its Oscar hopes

LOS ANGELES — Hollywood’s directors named Alejandro Inarritu the best film director of 2015 for “The Revenant” at a gala ceremony on Saturday, helping focus the race for the Oscars.

The Directors Guild of America (DGA), the leading industry group representing film and television directors, also chose Matthew Heineman as the best documentary maker for “Cartel Land.”

Past DGA feature film award winners have often gone on to claim the best director Oscar and see their films win best picture from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

It was Inarritu’s second consecutive DGA win after taking home the prize last year for “Birdman,” for which he also won the best director Oscar. That film also took home the best picture Academy Award.

So far this year industry awards from the Screen Actors Guild, the Producers Guild and now the DGA have gone to different films, with actors choosing “Spotlight” and producers honoring “The Big Short.”

Heading into the DGAs, Oscar watchers had narrowed this year’s race to Inarritu’s dark drama, which stars Oscar favourite Leonardo DiCaprio, Tom McCarthy’s journalism tale “Spotlight” and financial farce “The Big Short.”

The Oscars will be handed out in Hollywood on 28 February in a star-studded television show viewed around the world which is one of the most-watched TV programs in the United States.

But Oscar buzz, which is typically the focus of Hollywood’s awards season, has been overshadowed since January by claims of a lack of racial diversity in Academy Award voting after no actors of colour were nominated in key acting and directing categories for a second straight year.

The controversy led to a revival of the #OscarsSoWhite hashtag on Twitter, as well as calls for an Oscar boycott by the likes of director Spike Lee and actress Jada Pinkett Smith.

Following its January nominations, the Academy unveiled changes to membership rules that are meant to bring greater diversity, but the cloud of racial bias in Hollywood has continued to dominate awards talk.

DGA president Paris Barclay noted the controversy in his opening remarks, saying the DGA had long championed “the important fight for equal opportunity.”

In addition to film directors, the DGA also handed out television honors. Chris Addison won for best TV comedy direction for “Veep,” while David Nutter won for the award for TV drama series for “Game of Thrones.”

Beyoncé releases new song ‘Formation’

LOS ANGELES — Pop diva Beyoncé dropped a brand new single titled “Formation” on Saturday.

Produced by Mike WiLL Made-It and Apl.de.ap, the song is the 34-year-old singer’s first new track since 2014’s “7/11,” said The Hollywood Reporter.

The music video, shot primarily in New Orleans, also features a cameo from Beyoncé and Jay Z’s 4-year-old daughter, Blue Ivy.

“Formation” is written by Swae Lee from Rae Sremmurd.

The video starts with Beyoncé on top of a police car in a flooded street and cuts to a man holding a newspaper with Martin Luther King Jr’s face on the cover with the title “The Truth.”

Last month, Queen Bey starred in the music video for Coldplay’s single “Hymn for the Weekend.”

Naomi Campbell’s runway tip for Gigi Hadid

LONDON — Model Naomi Campbell gave Gigi Hadid a catwalk masterclass before the Victoria’s Secret fashion show.

The 20-year-old model had a major confidence boost after she got a “terrifying” lesson from Campbell, reported Female First. “I was with Naomi a couple of weeks before the VS show. She said, ‘Don’t apologise, don’t do it. You are perfect the way you are. Everyone said my walk was weird too.’” Gigi said.

She went on to recall the ramp walk practise session she had with Campbell at her hotel.

“I go to her hotel and we end up practising walking in the hallway of the hotel. Italian families are coming out to watch and she’s like, ‘Don’t look at them, keep walking, they’re your audience.’

“The elevator would open and the water would come out. ‘Don’t look at him, he’s your audience, do a spin and keep going.’ It was terrifying, walking in front of this Italian grandmother and her kid,” she said.—PTI

Solange Knowles loses wedding ring

LONDON — Singer Beyoncé Knowles’ younger sister Solange lost her wedding ring during a New Orleans Mardi Gras celebration.

The 29-year-old singer misplaced her art-deco inspired diamond ring on 4 February when it flew off her hand as she threw beads into the crowd, reported Female First.

Solange had designed the ring with jeweller Lorraine Schwartz for her 2014 wedding to Alan Ferguson.

She was. Honorary Muse in the Krewe of Muses parade at Mardi Gras and the group put out an appeal on social media for the ring.

They wrote on Facebook, “Honorary Muse Solange lost her wedding ring between Toledano and Foucher. Reward if found! Contact info@kreweofmuses.org.”

Solange and Alan tied the knot in an intimate ceremony in New Orleans in 2014 surrounding by 50 of their closest friends and family members.—PTI
Endangered monkey dies under anesthesia at H.K. theme park

HONG KONG — An endangered golden snub-nosed monkey on loan from mainland China has died under anesthesia at a Hong Kong’s Ocean Park, the theme park’s officials said Friday.

Hu Hu, who was 5 years old, “could not be revived” after she went into cardiac arrest during an examination under anesthesia for a problem with her right shoulder Thursday.

“This was a very unfortunate outcome and all the staff members who have cared for her are deeply saddened,” park official Suzanne Gendron said.

Hu Hu was observed to be favoring her right shoulder on Tuesday and did not respond to initial treatment with pain medications.

The decision for a medical checkup was made after discussing with Chengdu Zoo in western China’s Sichuan Province, which loaned Hu Hu and two other monkeys from Sichuan to the Ocean Park as part of a collaboration to breed this iconic endangered species.

“We understand this was an unfortunate accident,” said Yu Jianguo, assistant director of Chengdu Zoo. “We believe Ocean Park will take the most stringent measures in the necropsy of Hu Hu to understand the cause of death and avoid similar situations.”

Two other golden monkeys — female Le Le, 6, who arrived at Ocean Park with Hu Hu in 2012 and male Qi Qi, 5, who arrived in 2015 — remain in good health, the zoo’s officials said.

Fewer than 16,000 golden monkeys, a protected species endemic to China, are believed to be left in the wild, according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Most are in Sichuan, while smaller populations exist in Gansu, Hubet, Shaanxi provinces. — Kyodo News

Rio Carnival enters 2nd day, attracts millions of revelers

RIO DE JANEIRO — On the second day of Rio’s riotous five-day Carnival, Brazilians once again showed their ability to party in whatever circumstances.

Despite economic distress and Zika virus threats, the parade at Sambadrome was packed and “bloco”, or street parties, filled the city streets with music. On Friday evening, the first parade of the Carnival went off without a hitch, with giant floats decorated with Egyptian God Anubis and with threatening archers towering above legions of dancers. On Saturday, around 1 million people lined the streets for the classical Cordao do Bola Preta, the city’s oldest bloco, along its traditional route through town.

Thousands also gathered for one of the most traditional blocos, the Bandada Ipanema, which meandered its way through the streets of one of Rio’s most well-heeled neighbourhoods. While Zika virus threats appeared not to have dampened the festive atmosphere, the municipal government did advise revelers against kissing each other for fear of spreading the virus.

To what extent the famously passionate Brazilians will take the advice remains to be seen. The Globo daily newspaper said in an editorial: “A Carnival without a kiss is like a beach without sun...it’s no fun at all.”

It is also noteworthy that the municipal police said they received some 120 reports of robberies in the main venues of carnival celebrations.—Xinhua
Leicester rock Man City to race clear, Spurs second

LONDON — Leicester City’s unlikely assault on a first Premier League title gathered momentum with a ruthless 3-1 demolition of Manchester City helping them storm five points clear at the top on Saturday.

Defender Robert Huth scored twice and Algerian magician Riyad Mahrez fired his 14th league goal of the season as Leicester sent a clear message of intent to those who still doubt they have the quality to become champions.

Bookmakers have now made Claudio Ranieri’s men 5,000-1 outsiders at the start of the campaign, favourites to go all the way.

Tottenham Hotspur moved above Manchester City into second at 10-un.

Lee grabs Phoenix Open lead, Mickelson five back

SCOTTSDALE — New Zealand’s Danny Lee used a hot start to grab his first 54-hole lead in a PGA Tour event at the Waste Management Phoenix Open on Saturday while three-time winner Phil Mickelson vaulted into contention.

Lee made three consecutive birdies from the second hole to build a big cushion en route to a four-under-par 67 at the TPC Scottsdale in Scottsdale, Arizona, and 13-under 200 total.

Japan’s Hideki Matsuyama (68) and American Rickie Fowler (70) were tied in second at 10-under.

“I’m very confident with my putting at the moment and it seems like my ball-striking worked well today as well, so it was a fun day,” Lee told PGA Tour Radio.

“My iron game’s really good right now and I’ve been putting well since I switched to a claw grip (two years ago), so it seems like everything’s going smoothly right now.”

Bryce Molder (64), in a tie for fourth with fellow American Boo Weekley (65), stormed into the clubhouse with five birdies in the final seven holes in front of a raucous gallery, vaulting within four shots of the lead with the lowest round of the week.

Mickelson (65), who started the day a distant eight strokes off the pace, finished a bogey-free round in style with a 30-foot birdie at his final hole, the par-four ninth, to sit five strokes off the pace.

The man they will all chase on Sunday is 25-year-old Lee, who was born in South Korea before moving to New Zealand at the age of eight.

Lee was hailed in some circles as the next Tiger Woods when he turned professional in 2009 after winning the US Amateur Championship the previous year.

He had already won on the European Tour as an amateur, but had a rough adjustment to the professional ranks and took a few years to make his mark after temporarily losing his way.

Lee posted his first PGA Tour victory last July at the Greenbrier Classic and has risen inside the top 50 in the world rankings.

Fowler, meanwhile, took consolation with being in striking distance despite struggling with the speed of the greens.

“Pleased to get that round out of the way,” said the world number four. “I didn’t have my best stuff out there, saw a lot of putts slide by. “I was giving the greens a little too much credit and they were a little slow.”——Reuters