**President U Thein Sein sends messages of felicitations to Kuwait**

Nay Pyi Taw, 25 Feb—U Thein Sein, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, has sent messages of felicitations to His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jabar Al Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait, and His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al Mubarak Al Hamd Al Sabah, Prime Minister of the State of Kuwait, on the occasion of the National Day of the State of Kuwait, which falls on 25 February 2015.

MNA

**Pyidaungsu Hluttaw speaker receives Asia-Pacific Regional Director of HD Centre**

Nay Pyi Taw, 24 Feb—Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw Thura U Shwe Mann received Singapore-based Asia-Pacific Regional Director Mr Michael Vatikiotis and party of HD Centre (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue) at the hall of Pyithu Hluttaw Building, here, on Tuesday.

Also present at the call were Chairman of Pyithu Hluttaw International Relations Committee U Hla Myint Oo and officials of Pyithu Hluttaw Office.

MNA

**Solar-powered aircraft, Solar Impulse 2, to land in Mandalay on 10 March**

Yangon, 24 Feb—The first around-the-world solar flight, Solar Impulse 2 (Si2), is expected to make a stopover in Mandalay, central Myanmar, on 10 March, according to a pre-arrival press conference on the flight held Tuesday.

The solar aircraft, an idea born in Switzerland, will make its fourth stopover at Mandalay International Airport after taking off from Abu Dhabi of the United Arab Emirates in early March, with three earlier stopovers at Muscat of Oman and Ahmedabad and Varanasi of India. Abu Dhabi will be the start and (See page 2)

**Middle-class people top list for borrowing loans for building houses**

Yangon, 24 Feb—People who borrow money for building houses topped the list of borrowers of Construction and Housing Development Bank, which has offered loans to home buyers, builders and those who want to repair their buildings.

CHD Bank, which became the first bank in Myanmar to grant loans to people who want to buy, build or maintain houses, offers long-term loans with a 12 per cent interest rate plus 1 per cent service charge. “This plan of CHD Bank benefits middle-class people and can create opportunities for the people to own houses,” an official of the bank said. (See Page 2)
FDI in Myanmar hit $3.676 bn in April-Sept 2014

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

Representatives of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw discuss foreign direct investment in Myanmar from April to September 2014.—MNA

Pyithu Hluttaw

UEC: Go through ‘formalities’ in political campaigns

Nav Pyi Taw, 24 Feb—Union Election Commission has reiterated that Hluttaw candidates must abide by the existing laws and electoral laws during their political campaigns for 2015 general election.

U Pe Than, an MP from Myebon Township constituency, asked if Hluttaw candidates could use the words and the issues mentioned in private media for criticism of parliament, government, government department.

Union FM sends message of felicitations to Kuwaiti counterpart

Nav Pyi Taw, 25 Feb—U Wunna Maung Lwin, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, has sent a message of felicitations to His Excellency Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait, on the occasion of the National Day of the State of Kuwait, which falls on 25 February 2015.—MNA

Middle-class people top list for...

YCDC gives authority to township offices to grant permit for construction of buildings.

Photo: Aye Min Soe

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

Health Department to raise health awareness for betel quid chewers

Nav Pyi Taw, 24 Feb—Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) continued its 20th session at its hall, here, on Tuesday.

U Phone Myint Aung of Yangon Region Constituency No 3 asked a question on keeping warnings at betel quid shops for raising customers’ health awareness. Deputy Minister for Health and Sports replied that under the supervision of the Ministry and State Health Department, districts and township Health Services for the workers in accordance with welfare programmes of the ministry. She also said the ministry has issued licenses for 202 overseas employment agencies and licences are annulled if they breached the rules and regulations in their political campaigns. Regarding workers’ affairs, Daw Win Maw Tun, Deputy Minister for Labour, Employment and Social Welfare, said plans are being made to promote health services for the workers in accordance with welfare programmes of the ministry.

Minister of Health and Sports addresses the Health Department officials, as well as officials from different sectors related to health, at the Environmental and Public Health Department. /Photo: Min Min Soe

Ministry of Transport does not have authority to allow extraction of sand and gravel from the river but it replies remarks of town-ship and district authorities to the entrepreneurs. U Ha Shein Bwe of Chin State Constituency No 8 submitted a proposal calling for implementing the small-scale dams to irrigate highland farming and terrace farming in less developed states and the Hluttaw approved the proposal.—MNA

‘Change is possible, not only in technology but also in society and politics. One only has to be ready for a ground-breaking adventure’, the ambassador added.

According to the press conference, a team of techni-cians and scientists from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne (EPFL) worked together to design the solar-powered plan. The global partners Solvay, Omega, Schindler and ABB and local partner FMI made this cost-inten-sive project possible.

With the joint efforts of the government and Swiss Embassy, the first around-the-world solar flight to My-anmar is aimed at helping to inspire energy innovation in Myanmar.—GNLM
Defence Services donate... 
(reapplying knowledge and education for the development of the country and people. Private donors and families of Defence Services donated 140 computers and K20 million for both university and college. Myanmar Economic Corporation and Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd gave K40 million for the students. Then the rector and the principal of university and college donated K3 million for the fallen and the wounded soldiers. The Command-in-Chief said unity was weak among national people due to colonialism, and urged the students to fill the gap for the welfare of the whole country. The university and college have already turned out 13,635 graduates till now, and most of them are working for stability of their respective areas. Private donors for computers and cash include Zaykabar Company, Max, Htoo Foundation, Chan Hein Company, IGE Family, Jewelry Luck Production Company, Gateways Group of Companies, Asia world Company, Eden Company, Kyal Nilar Company, Sky One & Lucky Man, Amazing Company, Nawng Tong Company and Authentic Company.—Myawady

Workshop on Understanding International Standards on Freedom of Expression and Elections held

Union Election Commission Chairman U Tin Aye highlights freedom of expression and elections in meeting with media.—MNA

Myanmar reviews its implementation of anti-corruption activities

Nay Pyi Taw, 24 Feb—A workshop on Understanding International Standards on Freedom of Expression and Elections, jointly organized by the Union Election Commission and Myanmar Journalists Association, took place at the office of the commission on Tuesday. During the workshop, Dr. Pierre and Mr. Oliver Spencer of Article 19 made presentations of international standards, relationship between elections and print and broadcast media, reporting fair and balanced election stories, media ethics, dispute resolution and the role of media in monitoring the elections. Together with U Kyaw Swa Min, MJA’s secretary-2, they answered questions raised by those present. In his speech, Union Election Commission Chairman U Tin Aye pledged cooperation with political parties, civil society organizations, media and observers for successful holding of upcoming elections which is schedule to be held in late October or early November this year. Highlighting the role of media to educate the people about elections, the UEC chairman stressed the importance of transparency, sincerity and trust between the commission and media and called for balanced reporting without having political partisan and cult of personality. He also called on respective sub-commissions to closely cooperate with the media. MNA

Amyotha Hluttaw sets dates for discussion of amendments to education law

Nay Pyi Taw, 24 Feb—The Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) has announced on Tuesday that its bill committee will hold discussions on a bill of amendment to the National Education Law with stakeholders. The bill was brought before the Amyotha Hluttaw by the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) on 20 February.—MNA

The bill committee will enter into discussions with 20 representatives each from the Leading Committee for Democracy Education Movement, 20 interested political parties and the National Network for Education Reform on 5, 6 and 7 March respectively. It will meet with 20 delegates from 20 interested political parties on 8 March and 20 supporters of student protesters on 11 March, followed by 20 enthusiasts each from eager political parties and registered civil society organizations on 13 and 14 March respectively. On 15 March, the committee will discuss with 20 representatives who have advised on the bill of amendment to the education law. According to officials at the office of the Amyotha Hluttaw, transportation and accommodations will be provided to all the delegates in the capital city of Nay Pyi Taw. Interested individuals are requested to contact the office, with discussions scheduled to start at 10am on set dates, the Amyotha Hluttaw said in its announcement.—MNA

Supreme Court of the Union introduces Judiciary Strategic Plan

Nay Pyi Taw, 24 Feb—The Supreme Court of the Union held a workshop on Introduction to the Judiciary Strategic Plan (2015-2017) at its hall in Nay Pyi Taw on Tuesday. Chairman of the Judiciary Strategic Plan Implementation Committee Su-preme Court Judge U Tha Hlay made a speech. Members of the strategic plan implementation committee discussed background history of the plan, its vision, strategic programmes and plans to be implemented together with international partnership organizations within three years. The Supreme Court of the Union has issued a three-year plan on 17 December 2014. The introduction was attended by directors-general who are members of the committee, deputy directors-general, directors, and officials of UNDP, UNICEF, USAID, USAID-PRLP, USAID-EFA, JICA and ICJ. MNA
Buddhist monks recite Pathana treatise till 28 February at Uppatasanti Pagoda

Tourist caravan tours major destinations in Myanmar

Teachers from Laukkai arrive in Mandalay before proceeding to home
Bikers to choose motorcycles at showroom in Myawady

Myawady, 24 Feb — Honda Motorcycle Showroom was opened on Asia Road in Myawady Township, Kayin State, on Tuesday.

Deputy Commissioner U Lwin Ko Oo, U Thein Htwe Hlaing of JJ Motor Co Ltd and officials cut the ribbon to open the showroom. An official of NXC Myanmar Co Ltd explained sales of Honda brand motorcycles, motor cars, power-tillers, lawn mowers, motorcycle parts, car parts and generators at showrooms in major cities of the nation.

He revealed that the company will extend more showrooms in major cities across the nation.

— Tun Tun Oo (Myawady Town)

MJA, Article 19 organize workshop on press freedom for 2015 election

 Mandalay, 24 Feb —Myanmar Journalists Association and University-based Article 19 jointly organized the workshop on press freedom for 2015 election and freedom of expression at Hotel Mandalay in Mahasaungmye Township on 21 February.

Head of Mandalay Region Information and Public Relations Department U Kyaw Than Tun, Manager U Ye Tun Hmaung of Article 19 and Secretary 2 of Myanmar Journalists Association U Kyaw Swa Min made speeches.

Writer Kyaw Yin Myint and foreign experts from Article 19 gave talks on freedom of expression and media, rights for joining the politics and casting votes, press freedom, role of private media, institutions to control media and monitoring of media over elections.

— Thiha Ko Ko (Mandalay)

Rural primary school gets new building in Twantay Tsp

Twantay, 24 Feb — A ceremony to inaugurate new school building donated by Rotary International District 2620 Group 7 Shizuoka, Hamanako Rotary Club, Japan, was held at Basic Education High School in Kyakhtale Village, Twantay Township, Yangon Region, on 19 February.

The Township Administrator, the township education officer, Japanese wellwishers, departmental officials, the headmaster, teachers, students and local people were in attendance.

The school building was constructed by Shan Maw Myay Co., Ltd. At the opening ceremony, Japanese wellwishers donated stationery to students.—GNLM

HIGER mini-bus introduced in Mandalay

 Mandalay, 24 Feb — A ceremony to introduce HIGER brand business-used mini-bus was held on the lawns of Swan Hotel on 26th street in Mandalay on 21 February.

The mini-bus is manufactured in People’s Republic of China with Toyota technology.

Enthusiasts from Mandalay, Monywa, PyinUlnWlin and Shwebo viewed the vehicle.

Buyers may purchase K20 million per car with the linkage of private banks through installment.

At present, HIGER mini-buses are used as passenger buses with 10/15 seats in giving transport services along Yangon-Mandalay route, Mandalay-Shwebo route and Mandalay-Monywa route.—Maung Pyi Thu (Mandalay)

Organized by Universities’ (Yeizin) Parahita Association, a total of 150 members of the Sangha led by Zaygon Monastery abbot Abhidhaja Maha Rattha Guru Bhaddanta Kavisara offered lights to 108-Buddha Images Aungdawmu Pagoda, recited Paritta and shared merits gained for fallen military servicemen and for those fighting for the mother country in Laukkai region at Maha Withutayama Zaygon Monastery in Pyinmana Township on 23 February.—KO MYO (SHWEPUKKAN)
Indonesia says executions won’t be delayed despite mercy pleas

JAKARTA, 24 Feb — Indonesia’s president said on Tuesday the planned execution of 11 convicts on death row, most on drugs charges, would not be delayed, warning foreign countries not to intervene in Jakarta’s right to use capital punishment.

President Joko Widodo has denied clemency to the convicts despite repeated pleas from Australia, France and China, who have citizens due to be executed soon by firing squad.

“The first thing I need to say firmly is, and should be no objection to it, is the intervention of the death penalty because it is our sovereign right to exercise our law,” President Joko Widodo told reporters.

Widodo said he took calls from the leaders of France, Brazil and the Netherlands about the death penalty but made no mention of Australia. Two Australians are among the 11 on death row.

Indonesia has harsh penalties for drug trafficking and resumed executions in 2013 after a five-year gap.

Shortly before Widodo spoke, a court in Jakarta threw out an appeal by the two Australians against Widodo’s rejection of their request for presidential clemency.

Australia has been pursuing an eleven-hour campaign to save the lives of Myuran Sukumaran, 33, and Andrew Chan, 31, two members of the so-called Bali Nine, convicted in 2005 as the ringleaders of a multi-million dollar heroin ring out of Indonesia.

“According to the judge, the president’s rejection of the (clemency) file is not an administrative act so this court does not have the jurisdiction to accept our case,” said Toh-dung Mulya Lubis, a lawyer for the two men.

“We plan to appeal today’s court decision. We have two weeks to file an appeal. If the law is respected, the execution should be postponed until the legal process is over.”

Australia, which has long had rocky relations with its northern neighbor, has said it would consider recalling its ambassador to Indonesia in protest if the executions take place.

Brazil and the Netherlands have already pulled their ambassadors after Indonesia executed two of their citizens on drug offences last month.

Brazil took the further step of refusing to allow Indonesia’s new ambassador to take part in a credentials ceremony, prompting the Southeast Asian country to recall him back to Jakarta in protest.

Indonesia was also re-evaluating the purchase of fighter jets and rocket launchers from Brazil due to the diplomatic row, the Jakarta Post reported earlier on Tuesday, quoting Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla.

Reuters

Japan to extend stays for Filipino, Indonesian nurses by 1 yr

TOKYO, 24 Feb — The Japanese government decided on Tuesday to allow nurse and caregiver trainees from Indonesia and the Philippines to stay an additional year for further training and to give failed candidates another chance to sit for qualifications exams to work in Japan under bilateral free trade agreements.

The Cabinet decision is aimed at giving the candidates and caregivers from the two countries a better chance to pass the Japanese qualifying exams and eventually work in the country.

The move came in the wake of a low pass rate for the tests due to language barriers, and calls from both the Indonesian and Philippine governments for an extension.

It is the third time the government has decided to give an extra year to prospective health-care workers from the Philippines and Indonesia. A one-year extension was given in 2011 and 2013, which a Japanese official said has helped boost the overall pass rate.

The latest extension applies to 93 nurses and caregivers from Indonesia who arrived in Japan in fiscal 2012 as well as 300 Filipino and Indonesian candidate nurses and caregivers who came to Japan in fiscal 2013.

In fiscal 2013, the pass rate for the nurse exam was 10.6 percent, while the rate for the caregiver test was 36.3 percent.

The move will benefit those who failed the exams but were able to meet certain conditions such as having relatively good scores in the last qualifying exams they took.

Under the bilateral deals, the current length of stay for prospective nurses is three years and that of caregivers is four years. The candidates must pass the exams within the designated period or return to their countries.

The candidates arrive in Japan and take language lessons for six months and receive on-the-job training. Candidate nurses are given three chances to take the exams and caregivers only one. An extension makes it possible for prospective nurses to sit for the test four times and for caregivers twice.

Around 2,200 trainees have so far come to Japan from the two Southeast Asian countries in line with the agreements.

Kyodo News

S Korea, US to hold joint military drills

SEOUL, 24 Feb — South Korea and the United States will hold their annual Key Resolve command post exercise on 2-13 March, South Korea’s Defence Ministry spokesman said on Tuesday.

The two Koreas will also hold the Foal Eagle field training exercise from 2 March to 24 April, Kim Min Seok said during a press briefing.

Each year, prior to the joint exercises, North Korea has urged the United States and South Korea to hold the drills, threatening to strike back and claiming that they serve as rehearsals of an invasion into the North.

But Kim said, “The exercises have been held annually as part of regular joint exercises and are entirely defensive in nature, and thus the exercises have nothing to do with North Korea’s position.”

He also said that a notice on the exercises was delivered to North Korea on Tuesday morning, adding that observers from five nations, including France and Britain, will take part in the exercises to check for any violation of the armistice agreement signed at the end of the 1950-1953 Korean War.

The Key Resolve exercise will involve about 30,000 South Korean and 8,600 American troops while the Foal Eagle will mobilize about 200,000 South Korean and 3,700 American troops, mostly from overseas, according to Yonhap News Agency.

Yonhap News Agency
Maldives ex-president’s detention extended; India, US concerned

Malé, 24 Feb — Former Maldives president Mohamed Nasheed will stay in police custody until his trial in a terrorism case is completed, a court ruled on Monday, extending pressures of concern from neighbour India and the United States.

Nasheed was arrested on Sunday after a criminal court said he might flee the country to avoid hear- ings on terrorism charges stemming from the arrest of Criminal Court Chief Justice Abdulla Mohamed during his presidency in 2012.

He was brought to court on Monday, where he complained that police had dragged him there, injuring him in the process.

“I have been shoved to the ground and my arm has been broken,” he told the court. “Take me to a doctor and then you can issue your verdict.”

Judge Abdulla Didi gave Nasheed three days to appoint a lawyer and an- swer terrorism charges. He ordered police to hold him for the length of the trial.

The treatment of Nasheed, the first democ- ratically elected president of the Maldives, prompted comment from New Delhi and Washington.

“We are concerned at recent developments in the Maldives, including the arrest and manhand- ling of former President Nasheed,” India’s Foreign Ministry spokesman said, adding that authorities should resolve their differences within the constitu- tional framework.

New Delhi views the Maldives, a group of 1,190 coral islands southwest of India, as part of its sphere of influence. It has been concerned about China’s efforts to boost its strate- gic presence in the Indian Ocean, including a visit by Chinese President Xi Jin- ping to the archipelago last year.

The US State Depart- ment, which sees India’s concerns about China’s increasingly assertive pos- 

tion in Asia, said US Assis- tant Secretary of State for South Asia Nisha Biswal had spoken to the foreign minister of the Maldives at the weekend to express US concern at Nasheed’s arrest and other events in recent weeks.

“She urged the govern- ment to take steps to restore confidence in their commit- ment to democracy, judi- cial independence, and rule of law,” the official said. “We are concerned for the rights of peaceful protest and respect for due process.”

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki told a regular news brief- ing.

Nasheed resigned as president in February 2012 after weeks of protests against his order to arrest Abdulla Mohamed. A year later he lost an election to the current president, Yameen Abdul Gayoom.

Nasheed’s party called for India to intervene. “The situation has given a le- gitimacy for intervention through mediation,” Ha- mid Abdulf Ghafoor, a party spokesman said.

— Reuters

Japan plans to raise age limit of pilots to 67 amid pilot

Tokyo, 24 Feb — Japan’s transport ministry plans to raise the age limit for airline pilots from 64 to 67 to address a pilot short- age following increasing demand for flights and the growth of low-cost carri- ers, ministry sources said on Tuesday.

The ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism is expected to lift the age limit from late April, the sources said.

The age limit was raised to 64 from 62 in 2004. Faced with the pop- ularity of LCCs, a lack of pilots has led some budget carriers to cancel flights on some routes.

The ministry decided to raise the age limit given the time as well as the cost of several tens of millions of yen needed to train a pi- lot, the sources said.

Under the new rules, airlines must provide stricter health checkups to ensure that pilots aged 65 and over are in good shape, they said.

The ministry also plans to limit these pilots’ maximum flying hours to 80 percent of the usual amount—or 60 hours per month and 216 hours over a three-month period. It also intends to pilot aged below 60 board on the same flights, the sources said.

Another steps the min- istry is considering taking to address the lack of pilots is hiring former Self-Defence Forces pilots and for- 

US government, however, has no details.

“The process on peace negotiation will begin in coming days. I hope we achieve lasting peace which is our nation’s desire,” the statement quoted Abdullah as saying.

It went on to say that achievements since the fall of the Taliban in the 2001 US-backed intervention would not be given up in ex- change for peace.

“I want to assure my people that our achievements are protected and there will be no compro- mise,” Abdullah said.

He did not elaborate, but civil rights advocates fear that the Taliban would demand a rollback of wom- en’s rights and democratic elections in favour of a re-in- troduction of the strict inter- pretation of Islamic law they enforced during their five- year rule.

Ghani—who formed a power-sharing government with Abdullah last year after a bitterly disputed election—is keen to secure a deal in a peace process, lobbying regional players Pakistan, China and other countries to help persuade the Taliban to open negotia- 
sions.—Reuters

US, Iran positive after nuclear talks, say much left to do

Geneva, 24 Feb — The United States made some progress in talks with Iran on its nuclear programme and managed to “sharpen up some of the tough issues”, a senior US official said on Monday, but both sides said much remained to be done.

Negotiators from Iran and major powers agreed to resume talks next Monday at a venue to be de- cided, the official said, speaking after US Energy Secre- tary John Kerry and Foreign Minister Moham- mad Javad Zarif held two- day talks in Geneva.

Zarif told Iran’s Fars news agency: “We had seri- ous talks with the P5+1 repre- sentatives and especially with the Americans in the past three days ... But still there is a long way to reach a final agreement.”

As Kerry’s plane touched down in Wash- ington later on Monday, a senior State Department official said Kerry and Zarif would meet again next week and details were being worked out.

The P5+1 group — the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany—are seeking to negotiate an agreement with Teheran to address concerns that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons technology, some- thing it denies.

“These were very ser- ious, useful and constructive discussions. We have made some progress but we still have a long way to go. We did very much sharpen up some of the tough issues so we can work to resolution,” the senior US administra- tion official told reporters.

Negotiators hope to meet a self-imposed March 31 deadline for an initial political deal, but the US official said that would not “make us rush to an agreement that does not fulfill the objectives that the president has given us.”

The aim of ensuring Iran does not acquire a nu- clear weapon “has to be met and that is not about the declaration of any particular purpose”, the official said.

Iran, which denies hav- ing any nuclear weapons programme, hopes a deal will bring relief from interna- tional sanctions.

Talks say the six major powers for a deal last- ing at least 10 years un- der which Iran would need a year or more to produce enough highly enriched ura- nium for a single nuclear bomb, the so-called “break- out” capacity.

“We have always said we will have a one-year breakout time for a double digit number of years and that remains the case,” the senior US official said on Monday.

Reflecting the tech- nical nature of the latest talks, US Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz and Iran’s atomic nuclear chief Ali Akbar Salehi took part. Helga Schmidt, political director of the European Union’s Ex- ternal Action Service, also attended.

The approaching dead- line has caused divisions between the United States and one of its closest al- lies, Israel, which has called the talks “dangerous” and “astonishing”. The United States has accused it of dis- sorting Washington’s posi- 

tion.

Israeli Defence Min- ister Moshe Ya’alon said in a statement on Monday: “The agreement with Iran as it is coming together now is a great danger to Western world peace and a threat to Israel’s security.”

Ya’alon said the deal would permit Iran to be freed from current econom- ic sanctions on it while con- tinueing to enrich uranium. He called Iran “the most dangerous regime” and a central factor behind insta- bility in the Middle East.

Israel has the Middle East’s only nuclear arsenal and has threatened to attack Iran if it is not satisfied over plans for Teheran’s nuclear programme. —Reuters

Afghan chief executive backs Taleban peace effort ‘in coming days’

KABUL, 24 Feb — The head of Afghanistan’s pow- er-sharing government last Monday to a tentative push to begin peace talks with Taleban insur- gents, an effort he said “will begin in coming days”.

Chief Executive Abdul- lah Abdullah’s backing of the nascent process to negoti- ate an end to the 13-year- old insurgency is crucial be- cause many of his supporters represent the vehement an- ti-Taleban wing that fought against the hardline US-backed fighters when they held power until 2001.

Last week, a Pakistani army delegation brought word to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani that Taleban leaders had signalled they were willing to open talks, ac- cording to senior Pakistan and Afghan officials. The demands of the insurgents are not yet clear.

Previous attempts to open talks have been fruit- less, and no date or firm plan for talks has been set in the most recent effort. Ghani himself has made only oblique references in public statements to the process.

However, Abdullah’s official said Monday that he had confirmed the effort, though it

Afghanistan’s Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah
Who is responsible for equitable development?

By Kyaw Thura

Naturally, people show a propensity for leading an easy life and depend too much on their government to realize equitable development on their behalf. In fact, no form of government is capable of saying a mantra for equitable development to materialize on all fronts. It goes without a question that people are more inclined to take than to give. Everyone dreams of enjoying a higher socioeconomic status, but not everyone is willing to prepare themselves to achieve their goal.

Peace is of the essence when it comes to equitable development. For peace to prevail in a community, there must be economic growth. For business to grow, there must be reliable human resources. For human resources to be available, there must be sound education. The time is ripe for us to have the sense to understand that poor education leads to generating a massive waste of both human talent and economic potential. There is thus no better way to develop than improving educational outcomes and securing long-term economic benefits.

A glance is enough to notice that all attempts to bring about higher educational achievement end in vain, especially in areas of conflict. Philosophically speaking, not a soldier nor an enemy is killed or wounded in battle. Nor is a civilian. In layman’s terms, they are all human beings! There is nothing worse than the fact of people killing people. Encouraging social integration and ending any form of discrimination will enable us to arrive at the ultimate human fantasy. Thus, the point is that all human beings are responsible for the dream of equitable development to come true.

Write for us

We appreciate your feedback and contributions. If you have any comments or would like to submit editorials, analyses or reports please email wallace.tun@gmail.com with your name and title.

Due to limitation of space we are only able to publish “Letter to the Editor” that do not exceed 500 words. Should you submit a text longer than 500 words please be aware that your letter will be edited.

Doctors on front lines for health and climate

By Ms Helena Molin Valdes

Air pollution has become part of life for people across large parts of Asia. Thick smog chokes cities and their inhabitants as black exhaust from diesel engines clogs the air on daily commutes. In rural areas, views of mountains and valleys are often obscured by a haze that comes from distant urban and industrial sources as well as from local cooking and agricultural fires. Air pollution contributes to climate change, and it also threatens the health and quality of life of those forced to live with it.

Doctors now find themselves on the front lines of two increasingly connected issues: protecting human health and the earth’s climate. This coming May, at the World Health Organization’s 68th World Health Assembly, countries are poised to adopt the first resolution on air pollution and health. This resolution will help mobilize the health sector to coordinate action to reduce the nearly 7 million premature deaths annually due to air pollution, including 2.6 million due to outdoor air pollution and 3.3 million due to indoor pollution in tiny particles (‘soot’) that are created during incomplete combustion in sources such as cooking and heating stoves, heavy-duty diesel vehicles, open burning, and brick production. Black carbon is a key component of fine particulate matter (PM 2.5). When inhaled, PM 2.5 penetrates deep into our lungs, increasing the risk of respiratory infections, heart disease, stroke, and lung cancer. Black carbon particles also contribute to climate change by absorbing sunlight and warming the atmosphere. In the Himalayas, black carbon contributes to the melting of glaciers and to changes in monsoon cycles – with implications for water availability and agricultural production.

Reducing human exposure to black carbon from cookstoves alone could cut premature deaths in the Himalayan region by as much as three-quarters of a million people per year, possibly many more. Broadening the focus to include diesel engines, brick production, and other pollution sources and the number goes even higher. The effect on agriculture is just as dramatic: more than 15 million metric tons of staple crops could be added to the region’s food supply with the reduction of black carbon and other pollution.

So methane is a very powerful greenhouse gas, especially in the short term, with a warming potential up to 20 times that of carbon dioxide. About 60% of methane emissions are from human sources – primarily agriculture (livestock rearing and rice production), fossil fuel production and distribution, and municipal waste and wastewater treatment. While methane itself does not directly affect health, it reacts in the atmosphere with other gases to create tropospheric ozone. When inhaled, ozone can worsen bronchitis and emphysema, trigger asthma, and permanently damage lung tissue. It also attacks plants, leading to substantial declines in agricultural productivity.

A global resolution on air pollution and health would put health professionals in a unique position to bring about higher educational achievement end in vain, especially in areas of conflict. Philosophically speaking, not a soldier nor an enemy is killed or wounded in battle. Nor is a civilian. In layman’s terms, they are all human beings! There is nothing worse than the fact of people killing people. Encouraging social integration and ending any form of discrimination will enable us to arrive at the ultimate human fantasy. Thus, the point is that all human beings are responsible for the dream of equitable development to come true.

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**Myanmar Good Governance Forum kicks off**

**NAV PI TAW, 24 Feb** — The Myanmar Good Governance Forum, jointly organized by Ministry of Home Affairs and UNDP, kicked off at Myanmar International Convention Centre-2, here, on Tuesday.

Union Minister for Home Affairs Lt-Gen Ko Ko explained reform processes in politics, economy and social affairs in Myanmar.

Country Director Tothi Kurbano of UNDP and Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Brig-Gen Kyaw Zan Myint explained assessment on regional governance.

**Military columns seize arms and ammunition, stimulant tablets from Kokang insurgents**

**NAV PI TAW, 24 Feb** — Tatmadaw columns combed along Kongyan-Laukkai road for safety of the people. On Tuesday morning, Tatmadaw fought against some troops of Kokang insurgents and two military servicemen were injured in the incident. The injured were sent to military hospital for medical treatment.

In another clash between Tatmadaw column and Kokang insurgents near China-Myanmar border post No 144, and some troops of Kokang insurgents at a place two miles southwest of Laukkai on Tuesday morning, the military columns seized one China-made sub-machine gun, 38 rounds of assorted ammunition, TNT bar and mines from the insurgents.

The military columns arrested Shauk Law Han, 29, believed to be hardcore of Kokang insurgents near Malishuwah village and seized 8,000 stimulant tablets to be sent to Kokang insurgents at Honzihat Vil-lage near China-Myanmar border post No 144.

**A map shows clashes between Tatmadaw columns and Kokang insurgents in Laukkai region**

**Railway civil construction course kicks off**

**NAV PI TAW, 24 Feb** — Ministry of Rail Transportation and Sumitomo Corporation of Japan jointly conducted the railway civil construction course for the fourth time at Nay Pyi Taw Railway Station on Monday morning, with an address by Deputy Minister for Rail Transportation U Myint Thein.

An official of Sumitomo Corporation of Japan extended greetings.

Altogether 34 trainees from various sections of Myanmm Railway attended the course.

**State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee sends suggestions for bill amending the NEL**

**YANGON, 24 Feb** — State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee has suggested that the bill amending the National Education Law can endanger the future of the Buddhist universities in the country as the bill has allowed the unions of universities to govern their institutions by themselves.

The committee has also suggested to amend the para (h) under the Section-4 of the National Education Law as a clause in the billing amending the NEL allows the students to choose and decide the university they want to go as is deviated from the international standard.

The committee has also pointed out that doing assessment of teachers by students is not in conformity with Myanmar traditional culture.

The committee has also suggested to delete the sub-para (bb) under the Section-5, Chapter-4, which allows teachers to apply the area they want to be posted, warning that that can cause no teachers in far-flung areas.

The committee has suggested to substitute the word “mother tongue” in sub-para (aa) and sub-para (bb) under the Sub-section (e) with “ethnic language”.

The committee has suggested to delete the sub-section (c) under the Section-34 of the Chapter-6 of the bill amending the NEL as it has given special rights to schools related to other religions.

Besides, the committee’s statement also mentioned that if schools are given rights for compiling curriculums by themselves, the quality of students can not be equi-table and has suggested to delete the Sub-section (g) under the Section-39 of the Chapter-7.

The SSMNC has also supported the Sub-section (c) under the Section-49 of the National Education Law which guarantees that outstanding students would be honoured.

**Workshop on promoting road safety awareness on 25 Feb**

**NAV PI TAW, 24 Feb** — The Road Transport Administration Department under the Ministry of Rail Transportation with international brewer KEINEKEN is about to launch the first phase of a road safety awareness campaign using cartoons.

The workshop will be held at the Lake Garden Hotel, here, on 25 February.

Officials from relevant ministries such as the Home Affairs, Rail Transportation, Health, Construction, Information and Education as well as international experts, representatives of NGOs and of the private sector, and well-known cartoonists are expected at the work-shop.

The workshop is the first phase of a road safety awareness campaign that brings 18 years old will be invited to take part in the cartoon competition on the topic of road safety. Details on how to enter the competition will be shared through Facebook and other media in the wake of the workshop. The best cartoons will be awarded prizes during the UN Global Road Safety Week in early May 2015.

Road safety is a major issue in developing countries like Myanmar, where there were more than 3,700 deaths on the roads in 2014 according to the RTAD. — MNA

**Students who came back from Laukkai sit for examinations**

**NAV PI TAW, 24 Feb** — Ministry of Education has arranged examination centres for students who fled from Laukkai region to various areas.

The ministry allowed examinations of one student at No 1 Basic Education High School in Tatkon, one at Kawkareik BEHS No 2, one at Kawkareik BEPS No 231, and three at Hlegu BEHS (Mingon).

A total of 49 students will sit for matriculation examination at Lashio exam centre, one at BEMS No 9 centre, one at Hlegu BEHS (Mingon) centre, two at Kyakmaraw BEHS centre and one at Mingala-don BEMS No 4 centre in addition opening Kunlong exam centre.

Those wishing to sit for the exam may contact township education officers and dial 01-6553509 and 09-5061776 of Staff Officer U Myo Myint Aung of Department of Myanmar Board of Education and 067-430168 and 09-256088251 of Assistant Director Myat Soe Aung of the same department in Nay Pyi Taw. — MNA
Hollande urges Internet firms to help fight online hate speech

PARIS, 24 Feb —

French President Francois Hollande urged Internet companies like Google and Facebook on Monday to fight hate speech online, but his choice of words and “generic hair,” a sketch with only “blank faces” and “generic hair,” was met with criticism from some who called for more detailed portrayals.

Hollande, who addressed the high court in his speech at the CRIF hearing, said a new law against jihadism would be unveiled in March. He also pressed major Web firms Google and Facebook to agree on how to fight the spread of hate speech online at a conference in April.

“There is no such thing as virtual hatred when it is spreading,” he said, referring to racism, anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial. “Major Internet firms must face up to their responsibilities.”

Hollande added that criminal courts should handle cases of hate speech rather than those specializing in press freedoms. 

Reuters

Turkey criticises Britain over missing schoolgirls

ISTANBUL, 24 Feb —

Turkey criticized Britain on Monday for taking three days to inform it about three London schoolgirls who travelled to Syria last week and who have been arrested in Britain in 2009.

Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc said he hoped the girls would be found, but that it would be Britain, not Turkey, to blame if they were not.

“It is a condemnable act for Britain to let three girls travel to Istanbul and then let us know three days later... They have taken the necessary measures,” Arinc told reporters after a cabinet meeting.

The three London schoolgirls arrived at Istanbul airport on 17 February and British authorities, concerned that they were travelling to join Islamic State fighters, informed Ankara on 20 February, Arinc said.

British teenage girls Shamima Begun, Amira Abase and Kadiza Sultana (L-R) walk through security at Gatwick airport before they boarded a flight to Turkey on 17 Feb, 2015, in this combination picture made from handout still images taken from CCTV and released by Metropolitan Police on 22 Feb, 2015.—Reuters

British spies in US terror trial must be faceless in sketches: judge

NEW YORK, 24 Feb —

Five British MI-5 officers expected to testify anonymously in wigs and makeup in the US trial of an accused al-Qaeda operative may be portrayed in courtroom sketches with only “blank faces” and “generic hair,” a federal judge said on Monday.

US District Judge Raymond Dearie in Brooklyn, New York, ordered media sketch artists at the trial of Pakistani-born Abu Naseer to refrain from detailed portrayals of the officers with Britain’s domestic counterintelligence agency, calling them “committed, lifelong operatives.”

“The situation is due to speak.

It rekindled tensions in a country which is home to Europe’s largest Jewish and Muslim minorities, and just weeks after political leaders called for a spirit of “national unity” in response to a series of attacks by Islamist militants that left 20 people dead, including three attackers.

“We need to say things clearly: all violence today is committed by young Muslims,” Roger Cukierman told Europe 1 radio. “Of course, it’s a tiny minority of the Muslim community and Muslims are the first victims.”

Cukierman had been asked whether the far-right National Front party bore any responsibility for anti-Semitic acts. Five minors were arrested last week for having caused hundreds of tombs earlier this month in a Jewish cemetery in eastern France.

Hollande, who did not address the spat directly in his speech at the CRIF dinner, called upon public representatives to measure their words carefully.

In an address focused on discrimination, he said a new law against jihadism would be unveiled in March. He also pressed major Web firms Google and Facebook to agree on how to fight the spread of hate speech online at a conference in April.

There is no such thing as virtual hatred when it is spreading,” he said, referring to racism, anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial. “Major Internet firms must face up to their responsibilities.”

Hollande added that criminal courts should handle cases of hate speech rather than those specializing in press freedoms.

Reuters

Turkey was able to do little to track the movement of three people who had entered as tourists, he said.

The search is ongoing. It would be great if we can find them. But if we can’t, it is not us who will be responsible, but the British.

Thousands of foreigners from more than 80 countries have joined the ranks of Islamic State and other radical groups in Syria and Iraq, according to Turkey.

Turkey has said it needs more detailed and faster information from Western intelligence agencies to intercept them.

Reuters

US Senate Democrats invite Netanyahu to meeting during visit

WASHINGTON, 24 Feb —

Two senior US Senate Democrats invited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday to a closed-door meeting with Democratic senators during his upcoming visit to Washington, warning that making US-Israeli relations a partisan political issue could have “lasting repercussions.”

Senators Richard Durbin and Dianne Feinstein extended the invitation “to maintain Israel’s dialogue with both political parties in Congress,” according to a letter to the Israeli leader obtained by Reuters.

Netanyahu has faced criticism at home and abroad for his plans to address Congress on Iran’s nuclear programme on 5 March, just two weeks before Israeli elections. He accepted the invitation from Republican leaders in the US Congress, who consulted neither Democrats in Congress nor Democratic President Barack Obama’s administration.

US lawmakers deprecated move threatens to undermine the important bipartisan approach towards Israel — which as long-standing supporters of US-Israeli troubles us deeply,” the two senators wrote.

“Such a move would send a message to Israel that the US-Israeli relationship is only one of many,” they added.

The letter was sent on Monday evening. Officials at the Israeli Embassy could not immediately be reached for comment.

Reuters

Ex-Panamanian supreme court chief pleads guilty to corruption

PANAMA CITY, 24 Feb —

A former president of Panama’s supreme court has pleaded guilty to charges of illicit enrichment as well as falsifying documents and will serve a five-year jail sentence, authorities said Monday.

Alejandro Moncada has been under house arrest since October and accepted the charges as part of a deal between his defence team and the prosecution, congressman Pedro Miguel Gonzalez, the prosecutor in the case, told a news conference.

Under Panamanian law, supreme court judges can only be investigated by members of the country’s Congress.

He will serve a jail term of 60 months, Gonzalez said, adding that it was not yet clear whether he would have to go to prison or could see out the sentence under house arrest.

Moncada came under investigation after media reports said he had bought apartments for some $1.7 million in cash without being able to justify where the money came from. Separate investigations into laundering against Moncada were dropped.

Defence lawyers told reporters that Moncada, who had long denied the charges against him, accepted the deal because of his health, which has deteriorated in recent months.

Moncada, due to sit in the supreme court until 2020, was appointed by former President Ricardo Martinelli, a bitter rival of current President Juan Carlos Varela.

Gonzalez is himself wanted by US authorities on charges he shot and killed US Army Sgt Zak Hernandez in June 1992. He was acquitted at a 1997 trial in Panama. US authorities said Gonzalez’s trial was marred by jury-rigging, witness intimidation and government harassment.

Reuters

President Barack Obama’s administration.

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Reuters
**Gunmen in Afghanistan halt buses, seize 30 passengers**

KANDAHAR, 24 Feb — Unidentified gunmen in southern Afghanistan stopped two buses traveling to the capital, Kabul, and seized around 30 people belonging to the ethnic Hazara minority, a bus company official said on Tuesday.

Hazaras, who largely follow the Shi’ite sect of Islam, were persecuted by the Taliban during the 1990s, when the militant Sunni Islamists ruled most of Afghanistan.

Outbreaks of sectarian violence have been rare since the Taliban were ousted by an American-led invasion in 2001, but many Hazaras continue to complain of discrimination and harassment by majority Sunni Muslim groups.

The passengers were forced to leave the buses late on Monday night, after producing documents that showed they belonged to the Shi’ite minority group.

“Our drivers stopped for the gunmen because they were in army uniforms,” Ahmad Khaled, a company official said.

**Islamic State in Syria abducts at least 90 from Christian villages**

AMMAN, 24 Feb — Islamic State militants have abducted at least 90 people from Assyrian Christian villages in northeastern Syria, a monitoring group that tracks violence in Syria said on Tuesday.

The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the militants carried out dawn attacks on two villages near the Assyrian Christian town of Tel Tamr.

The group also detained a group committed atrocities against the Yazidi community.

**Separatists say they start withdrawing weapons in east Ukraine**

DONETSK, (Ukraine), 24 Feb — Separatists said on Tuesday they began withdrawing heavy weapons from the frontline in east Ukraine under a ceasefire deal, but the Ukrainian military, which says it won’t pull back until fighting stops, reported further shelling.

Fighting has eased in eastern Ukraine in recent days after the rebels initially ignored a ceasefire that was due to start on 15 February and stormed a government-held town.

After taking the town, the Moscow-backed rebels have consistently indicated they want the truce to take effect. Kiev says the rebels are still shooting, which the rebels deny.

Western countries have not given up on the ceasefire deal to end fighting that has killed more than 5,600 people, but have warned of new economic sanctions against Moscow if the rebels adhere.

**NZ to send over 100 military personnel to train Iraqi forces**

SYDNEY, 24 Feb — New Zealand will deploy over 100 military personnel in noncombatant roles to Iraq as part of an international coalition fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, Prime Minister John Key announced on Tuesday.

“The Iraqi government has requested support and Cabinet has agreed this week to deploy personnel to Taji Military Complex north of Baghdad to train units within the Iraqi Security Forces,” Key said in a statement, adding that it would likely be a joint mission with Australia.

The personnel will fill a noncombat, “behind the wire” role to train Iraqi Security Forces so that they will be better prepared to fight, according to the statement.

Up to 106 personnel will be deployed to Taji and others including staff officers will be sent to coalition headquarters and support facilities in the region. The total deployment for the two-year mission, expected to begin in May, will come to a maximum of 143 personnel.

New Zealand is one of about 62 countries united in the international coalition against the ISIS, movement.

Kyodo News

**Japan to extend $6 mil in emergency aid for Syrian refugees**

TOKYO, 24 Feb — Japan will extend $6 million in emergency aid for people displaced by war in Syria, including those seeking refuge in neighbouring countries, the Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.

The measure is part of a recent pledge by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to expand humanitarian assistance to the Middle East in the fight against terrorism in partnership with the international community.

With the aid, Japan will offer blankets, stoves and food to such people in fight ISIS, Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon following a cold snap in January, according to the ministry.

Japan will extend the aid through the UN World Food Programme and five other international organizations, it said.

Kyodo News

**Military vehicles of the Iraqi security forces make their way on the outskirts of Baiji, north of Baghdad on 8 Dec, 2014.** — Reuters

**A military truck transports a destroyed tank near Artemivsk, eastern Ukraine on 22 Feb, 2015.** — Reuters
Ice storm hits parts of Texas, cancelling flights, crippling traffic

Reuters correspondent Michael Georgy, who first met her during one of those reporting assignments, said: “I really can’t afford to miss a day, but then again I don’t think it’s worth my life or my car trying to make it.” She said.

Reuters reporter Maria Golovchina, who first met her during one of those reporting assignments, said: “I really can’t afford to miss a day, but then again I don’t think it’s worth my life or my car trying to make it.” She said.

Japanese A-bomb comic gets published in Egypt

Maher El-Sherbini, a professor at the department of Japanese and Japanese literature at Cairo University, speaks on 23 Feb, 2015, at a signing event in Cairo to commemorate the publication of an Arabic version of “Hadashe no Gen” (Barefoot Gen), a Japanese comic series about the 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima, in Egypt. — KYODO NEWS

He completed his master’s and doctorate’s degrees at Hiroshima University and has translated experiences of A-bomb survivors and Japanese novels. — KYODO NEWS

Belongings of Japanese killed by Islamic State returned

The captors released images online showing the decapitated bodies of Yukawa and another Japanese hostage, Kenji Goto. The member of the rebel group told Kyodo News in a telephone interview that the group hopes Yukawa’s belongings will be returned to his family through the embassy. — KYODO NEWS

Reuters journalist Maria Golovchina dies in Pakistan aged 34

LONDON, 24 Feb — Maria Golovchina, Reuters bureau chief for Afghan- stan and Pakistan who was widely loved and admired for her courage, compassion and professionalism, died in Islamabad on Monday. Maria, 34, was found collapsed and unconscious in the bureau and was rushed to hospital, but medical teams were unable to save her. In a career spanning more than a decade with Reuters, Maria was always on the move, reporting from some of the world’s most dangerous places with a calm authority that other, more experienced journalists could only admire.

She was driven by a hunger to understand what made human beings tick, be it during the throes of revolution in Libya or in the pre-dawn calm of southern Pakistan as Sufis cleansed a revered shrine with rose water before their ecstatic rituals began.

As a friend and colleague Peter Graff put it: “Emotionally, Maria spent more time in prison than she deployed for her craft. It burned in her white hot. It is what sustained her legendary stamina for work, play and learning.”

The daughter of Russian expatriates, raised in Japan and the US, speaks her third language, English, Maria joined Reuters in Tokyo in 2001 and subsequently worked in London, Singapore and Seoul as part of the graduate trainee programme.

She was posted to Russia from 2002 to 2005, where she covered the early years of the Putin presidency, the Moscow theatre siege and a spate of bomb attacks by Chechen rebels across the region.

She became Chief Correspondent in Central Asia, in 2005, reporting on Uzbekistan’s crackdown on opposition protests, Kyrgyzstan’s revolutions and instability in Tajikistan.

Maria died a stint in Afghanistan during the 2009 presidential election and later went on that began in Iraq. Her eye for telling details helped her to build understated yet powerful accounts of complicated and distressing events.

She moved to the London editing desk in 2010, where fellow editors remember her as an open, engaging friend who combined warmth with a fierce commitment to getting news out quickly and accurately. She missed one of 2011 covering the war in Libya, putting her hand up to travel to Tripoli despite the attendant risks.

Reuters correspondent Michael Georgy, who first met her during one of those reporting assignments, said: “I really can’t afford to miss a day, but then again I don’t think it’s worth my life or my car trying to make it.” She said.

Maria became UK chief correspondent and, having lived on the road for so long, put down roots of a kind by buying a flat in London. One problem was that she barely had any furniture of her own, and was thrilled when a colleague gave her an Afghan stool as a present. The stools did not tie her to London for long, however, as curiosity and compassion drove her over seas again, this time to her final assignment based in Pakistan. — Reuters
A photo displayed at the Newseum in Washington, an interactive museum of news and journalism, shows freelance Japanese journalist Kenji Goto carrying a video camera. He was killed by the Islamic State militant group earlier this year after being taken hostage. —Kyodo News

WASHINGTON, 24 Feb — Japanese freelance reporter Kenji Goto, murdered by Islamic State militants, is the subject of an exhibit at a US museum along with three other journalists also slain by extremists.

The exhibition at news and journalism museum Newseum describes Goto, who smiles in a photo holding a TV camera, as a veteran war reporter who entered Syria in October 2014 “to cover the civil war and seek the release of a friend.”

Goto’s photo was exhibited at a specially created corner together with those of the other three journalists — Americans James Foley, Steven Sotloff and Luke Somers.

The museum commemorates more than 2,000 journalists from various countries who died while working at the Journaлистs Memorial exhibit showing their names on a glass monument. Jonathan Thompson, a Newseum spokesman, said Goto’s name would eventually be engraved on it. The Islamic State group earlier this year posted a video online of the purported murder of Goto following a similar online movie apparently showing the beheading of Haruna Yukawa, the Japanese man whose release Goto had purportedly secured.

Kyodo News
I thought I was replacing Judi Dench in new 007 film

**Los Angeles, 24 Feb** — Monica Bellucci, who has been cast alongside Daniel Craig in the latest Bond movie “Spectre”, initially believed she was auditioning to replace Judi Dench. Bellucci, 50, said she had been summoned to meet director Sam Mendes to discuss a role in the upcoming film, reported *Daily Telegraph*. “I just blurted out: I’m not a girl, I’m a woman, I’m a mature woman. Do I have to replace Judi Dench? ‘Why do you call me? I’m 50 years old. What am I going to do in James Bond?’” she said. “He said, ‘For the first time in history, James Bond is going to have a story with a mature woman. The concept is revolutionary,'” she added. Bellucci added she had told Mendes he would be a “hero among women” for taking a stand for older actresses, after deciding her wanted a woman of a similar age to Bond to play alongside him.

**Los Angeles, 24 Feb** — Pop sensation Lady Gaga’s white gown at Oscar Awards took 1600 hours to make. The ‘Applause’ hitmaker stood out on the red carpet at the Dolby Theater in Los Angeles in her white crystal-embellished gown, which she’d accessorised with red gloves.

And she took to her Instagram account on Sunday evening to share with her fans how long the stunning dress took to make.

She wrote alongside a photograph of her on the red carpet, “I will never forget tonight. #Oscars thank you Azzedine Alaia for this stunning piece. It took 1600 hrs of embroidery and 25 people in Paris, he’s never before made a dress for the Oscars.”

“What an honour. The gloves were hand dyed Crimson, baby orchid blooms hand painted in my hair and killer pear shaped diamonds by Lorraine Schwartz. (sic),” she wrote. The 28-year-old singer, who got engaged to her beau Taylor Kinney on Valentine’s Day, took to the stage at the glamorous ceremony to perform a medley from ‘The Sound of Music’.

**Los Angeles, 24 Feb** — Reality TV star Kim Kardashian, who is taking piano lessons, has planned to surprise rapper husband Kanye West by learning one of his songs!

Kardashian, 34, took to Twitter to share the news with fans. “Just finished my piano lesson in time to watch the Oscar’s red carpet!” Short-ly thereafter, she added, “I’m going to surprise Kanye by learning one of his songs! He’s hardly on social media so he won’t know I’m tweeting this.”

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**Los Angeles, 24 Feb** — Former couple Jennifer Lopez and Marc Anthony came together to celebrate their son Max and daughter Emme’s seventh birthday. “Party time! Happy 7th Birthday to the coconuts!!” Lopez, 45, captioned an Instagram photo of the foursome. Emme’s seventh birthday. “Party time! Happy 7th Birthday to the—PTI

**Los Angeles, 24 Feb** — Former couple Jennifer Lopez and Marc Anthony came together to celebrate their son Max and daughter Emme’s seventh birthday.—PTI

**Los Angeles, 24 Feb** — Sunday’s Academy Awards telecast on ABC drew its smallest audience in six years with 36.6 million average viewers, according to Nielsen data on Monday. The oscars telecast on ABC banked on a medley from ‘The Sound of Music’. The ‘Applause’ hitmaker stood out on the red carpet at the Dolby Theater in Los Angeles in her white crystal-embellished gown, which she’d accessorised with red gloves and she took to her Instagram account on Sunday evening to share with her fans how long the stunning dress took to make.—PTI

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ABC banked on actor Neil Patrick Harris, who has earned plaudits as host of TV’s Emmy Awards and theatre’s Tony Awards, to build on momentum of comedi-an Ellen DeGeneres, who helped last year’s show attract 43.7 million viewers, its biggest audience since 2000. The Oscars annually attracts the biggest non-sports TV audience in the United States, but the show this year drew the lowest viewership since 2009. ABC is signed on to broadcast Hollywood’s biggest awards show through 2020.

Harris, 41, who has a strong following among younger viewers as the star of sitcom “How I Met Your Mother,” was seen as a bridge between older viewers and the younger audiences advertisers covet most. The telecast reached 60 million US viewers overall, according to Nielsen figures.

The telecast opened with a surprise reunion of Meryl Streep, who won best actress for “The Devil Wears Prada” in 2006, and Harry Belafonte, who performed on the Oscar stage in 2004 for “The Sound of Music.”

Lopez and Anthony split in 2011 after seven years of marriage. They both filed divorce papers asking for joint legal and physical custo-dy of the twins. The ‘American Idol’ judge went on to date backup dancer-turned choreographer Casper Smart, whom she split from in June 2014 after two years together. Anthony is engaged to model girlfriend Shannon De Lima.—PTI

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Middle East investment boosts European shirt revenue

LONDON, 24 Feb — Middle East investment is swelling the coffers of Europe’s top football clubs, whose income from shirt sponsorship has soared to over 687 million euros (503.73 million pounds) this season — 20 per cent up on 2013-14, according to analysts Repucom.

The German-based global strategy company says in their European Football Jersey Report that companies in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar invested about 160 million euros this season, almost a quarter of the total spent by companies worldwide sponsoring the shirts of Europe’s top six leagues.

The figure is a 20 per cent rise on the 570 million euros revenue of last season but sponsorship in the English Premier League has jumped by 36 percent, while clubs in Spain’s top division have also seen their revenues rise by 30 percent.

The increase in England’s figures were largely driven by Chevrolet’s deal with Manchester United, worth at least 54 million euros a year.

“The rise in foreign money in European football is nothing new, however investment in shirt sponsorship is increasing more rapidly than ever,” said Glenn Lovett, the president of Repucom.

“The investment in 2014-15 growing 20 percent over last season, the investment in shirt sponsorship has increased faster than at any time in the last 15 years.”

Although the rise in revenue for the English clubs is the biggest across the top six leagues, there is more foreign investment in Spain’s Primera Liga than anywhere else.

Approximately 86 per cent of all revenue spent on shirt sponsorship there comes from outside Spain.

The report says that apart from the major European Leagues, the MLS in the United States “is starting to attract big business” with sponsorship deals there of 45 million euros, making it larger in terms of revenue than the Eredivisie in the Netherlands, whose market share has slipped to 42 million euros.

The report says that individually UAE companies comprise the biggest shirt sponsor from one nation, followed by revenues from German companies (112 million euros) and US companies (82 million euros).

While England’s revenue has soared 36 percent and Spain’s 30 percent, there have also been increases in Italy (21 percent), France (13 percent) and Germany (nine percent).

The only major European league to see a fall in revenue was in the Netherlands, which saw a five percent drop in its income to 42 million euros.

Chelsea to appeal against Matic red card v Burnley

LONDON, 24 Feb — Chelsea are to appeal against the red card shown to Nemanja Matic during Saturday’s 1-1 Premier League home draw with Burnley, according to Sky Sports.

Matic was sent off in the 70th minute at Stamford Bridge for his violent reaction to a studs-up challenge from Burnley’s Ashley Barnes.

But the FA said on Twitter that no action would be taken against Barnes as the incident was seen by the officials.

“A criminal tackle. Matic is a very lucky guy,” said Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho after his midfield player escaped injury.

The 26-year-old Serbian international rushed at Barnes and pushed him to the ground but he was defended by his manager.

“Football is about emotions and clearly Nemanja Matic had a reason to lose his emotions,” Mourinho said.

“What are the consequences of his push? Nothing. The consequence for Matic from the tackle? It could have been the end of his career.”

The FA added on Twitter: “In the vast majority of challenges for the ball, no retrospective action is taken as the incident has been seen by the match officials.

“Retrospective action is introduced as deterrent for ‘off the ball incidents’ (for example kicks, stamps etc) committed out of sight of officials.

“Whole game in agreement that, in vast majority of cases, match officials are best-placed to deal with incidents to avoid re-refereeing.”

Chelsea must submit their appeal to the FA by 1300 GMT on Tuesday. Unless it succeeds, Matic will miss Sunday’s League Cup final against Tottenham Hotspur at Wembley.

He will also be banned for Premier League matches against West Ham United and Southampton.—Reuters

Conjoined twins separated at Texas hospital after marathon surgery

HOUSTON, 24 Feb — In surgery lasting more than 24 hours, a Texas hospital medical team has separated nearly 1-year-old twins who were joined at the abdomen and shared a liver, diaphragm, pelvis, intestines and the lining of the heart, officials said on Monday.

The girls, Knataley Hope Mata and Adeline Faith Mata, born in April 2014, were separated on 17 February at Texas Children’s Hospital, with a team including 12 surgeons, six anesthesiologists and eight surgical nurses.

“This surgery was not without its challenges with the girls sharing several organ systems,” said Dr Darrell Cass, pediatric surgeon and co-director of Texas Children’s Fetal Centre. He said this was the first successful separation surgery for conjoined twins with this particular configuration.

The team had been preparing for months for the complicated surgery, drawing up three-dimensional models of their organs and holding simulations of the surgery that was carried out in carefully choreographed stages, he said.

The team worked for about 23 hours on Knataley and 26 hours on Adeline with the official separation occurring approximately 18 hours into the surgery, the hospital said.

Conjoined twins occur once every 200,000 births and most do not survive. About 40 percent to 60 percent of conjoined twins are stillborn, and about 35 percent live only one day, according to the University of Texas Health Science Center.

Mortality rates for twins who do live and then undergo separation vary, depending on their type of connection and the organs they share, it said.

The girls remain hospitalized and no release date has been set.—Reuters

The girls were joined at the heart, stomach, intestines, liver, diaphragm and pelvic region, and shared a number of important organs and veins, including some major arteries.

They were born with a single lung and heart, which divided as the girls developed in the womb.

On Monday, about 12 hours before their separation surgery began, the girls were joined at the abdomen, pelvis and chest. The surgeons then divided the girls’ liver, intestines and other abdominal organs.

The operation involved surgeons and pediatricians from the Fetal Center of Texas to develop a plan to separate the twins while ensuring their safety.

During the surgery, the girls were kept separate by a sheet and a curtain to maximize safety and minimize the risk of complications.

The surgery also involved anesthesiologists, nurses and technicians who performed simulated separations to improve the safety of the twins and their team.

The surgery was performed in stages, with each stage lasting about four hours.

During the final stage, the surgeons separated the twins’ connecting organs to allow the girls to live independently.

The operation was completed in approximately 18 hours, with the girls stabilized and monitored by the surgical team.

The girls were then transferred to the intensive care unit, where they are recovering and will be monitored closely for any complications that may arise.

The separation surgery was a significant milestone in the management of conjoined twins, as it is one of the most complex and challenging procedures in pediatric surgery.

In the past, conjoined twins were often managed with a fusion of the shared organs and tissues, but the advances in medical technology and surgical techniques have made separation surgery a viable option in some cases.

The surgery was performed by a multidisciplinary team of surgeons at Texas Children’s Hospital, which is one of the leading centers for the care of complex congenital anomalies.

The hospital has a team dedicated to the care of conjoined twins, with expertise in surgical, medical and anesthesia care.

The girls’ parents, who were both present in the operating room throughout the surgery, were overjoyed by the successful outcome.

The parents expressed their gratitude to the hospital staff, the surgeons and the entire team for their care and support during the operation and the ongoing recovery process.

The hospital has extensive experience in the care of conjoined twins and has successfully performed similar surgeries in the past.

The girls’ story has also brought attention to the importance of providing specialized care for children with complex congenital anomalies, as well as the role of research in improving surgical outcomes.

The hospital is committed to advancing the care of children with complex anomalies through research and innovation, and the successful surgery is a testament to the hospital’s expertise and dedication to providing the best possible care for its patients.

The hospital is actively involved in the medical community and is frequently sought after for its expertise in the care of conjoined twins.

The hospital has a comprehensive team of surgeons, specialists and support staff who work closely together to provide the best possible care for children with complex congenital anomalies.

The hospital is also committed to sharing its expertise and knowledge with the medical community through ongoing research and educational initiatives.

The hospital is one of the few centers in the world that specializes in the care of conjoined twins, and it has a dedicated team of surgeons and specialists who work together to provide the best possible care for these children.

The hospital has a strong partnership with other medical centers and institutions, including universities and research institutions, to advance the care of children with complex congenital anomalies.

The hospital is proud of its commitment to providing the best possible care for children with complex congenital anomalies, and the successful separation surgery is a testament to the hospital’s expertise and dedication to providing the best possible care for its patients.
Athletes actively participate in martial arts, boxing, indoor sports events

Players taking part in women’s volleyball tournament at Wunna Theikdi volleyball training hall.

MNA

Monaco’s Berbatov seeks goals on London return

LONDON, 24 Feb — Dimitar Berbatov will be hoping for a goalscoring return against his former arch-enemies Arsenal when AS Monaco come to the red half of north London for their Champions League Round of 16 first leg match on Wednesday.

The Bulgarian is still remembered with affection for the 46 goals he scored for Arsenal’s local rivals Tottenham Hotspur in a two-year spell at White Hart Lane before a 30 million pounds ($46.05 million) move to Manchester United in September 2008.

He scored twice for Fulham at the Emirates in a 3-3 draw in November 2012 and, though he turned 34 in January, the Bulgarian heads back to London as Monaco’s top scorer this season.

Monaco head to Arsenal buoyed by their 1-0 derby win at Nice on Friday which sees them fourth in Ligue 1 with just one defeat in their last 17 matches in all competitions.

They also won 1-0 at the Emirates last August when Radamel Falcao, now on loan at Manchester United, scored the only goal in the pre-season Emirates Cup tournament against the hosts.

But there will be very little similarity between that warm-up summer run-out and the real business of the Champions League on Wednesday.

Monaco’s Belgian winger Yannick Carrasco is having treatment on a bruised right thigh while their France defender Layvin Kurzawa is also being treated for bruised quadriceps.

Monaco coach Leonardo Jardim told Britain’s Sunday Sun newspaper: “Everyone considered us the favourite but we were too loose and the real business against Arsenal was a huge test for us.”

It’s normal that everyone thinks Arsenal will qualify, I too think Arsenal are favourites but in football sometimes money and the favourites don’t win.”

Arsenal’s French manager Arsene Wenger, who coached Monaco between 1987 and 1994, has warned his players not to underestimate the visitors as his current team, in the last 16 for the 15th consecutive year, attempt to end a quarter-final hoodoo.

It was a 20-goal difference with Monaco losing five and Arsenal scoring only once in their last nine meetings in the Champions League in 2004. Monaco were also beaten by Arsenal in the 2017 FA Cup and Carabao Cup.

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