President U Thein Sein accepts credentials of Malaysian, Laotian and Australian Ambassadors

NAY PYI TAW, 26 Feb—President U Thein Sein received Mr Mohd Haniff Bin Abd Rahman, the newly-accredited Ambassador of Malaysia to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. Mr. Lyying Sayaxang, the newly-accredited Ambassador of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Mr. Mohammad Hanif Bin Abd Rahman, the newly-accredited Ambassador of Malaysia to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Mr. Lyying Sayaxang, the newly-accredited Ambassador of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and (See page 3)

Myanmar, Thailand look to take giant leap into digital economy together

By Ye Myint

YANGON, 26 Feb — The Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI) and Thailand’s Federation of the Thai Industries (FTI) inked a Memorandum of Understanding on the ISO/IEC 29110 Software Development Standard for Thailand-Myanmar Industrial Sector Development on Thursday.

The signing of the MoU is aimed at enhancing cooperation in the information and communications technology (ICT) sectors of the two countries, thereby contributing towards achieving business benefits by modernizing information technology and services in Myanmar, said U Thaung Su Nyein, the UMFCCI’s CEC member.

Apart from focusing on the ISO/IEC 29110 software development standard, the MoU also includes seeking ways and means for human resources development in the ICT sector, implementation of an ISO standard in Myanmar and technology transfer from Thailand to develop it, added the CEC member who signed the MoU with his Thai counterpart.

The signing ceremony took place at the UMFCCI building in Yangon during a meeting between UMFCCI officials and a 35-member Thai business delegation that arrived in Myanmar on Thursday to discover potential benefits and create possibilities in the ICT sectors of the two countries. (See page 2)

Most striking workers return to work while some persist

By Aye Min Soe

YANGON, 27 Feb — A majority of factory workers striking for better wages are going back to their jobs while some are continuing their sit-in protest against their employers.

Meanwhile, the Yangon Region Labour Disputes Arbitration Committee, which has worked as a moderator for settling the disputes between the workers and employers, has invited remaining striking workers to come back to the negotiation table.

The striking workers are worried about not getting their salaries as they are facing difficulties for their livelihood due to low payment, said Wah Wah Cho, 26, who participated in the strikes and decided to go back to her job at the factory. (See page 2)
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw discusses national planning bill

NAV PYI TAW, 26 Feb — Pyidaungsu Hluttaw on Thursday discussed the fundamental principles of national planning bill for 2015-16.

Representative Daw Tin Nwe Oo of North Dagom Constituency said that it is important to place emphasis on industrial sector for national development and agriculture sector has encountered shortage of labour force due to seizure of farmland and natural disasters. She added that projects that are not necessary should be cancelled and money should be spent on long term investment like education and health.

Representative Daw Khin Thanda of TadaU constituency said that it is important to give compensation and damages for confiscated land in order to successfully implement policies, measures and objectives of agriculture sector and state-run enterprises that are making losses should be handed over to the private sector for higher productivity and skills of workers.

Representative U Kyi Tha of Gwa constituency said that 42.5 percent of Myanmar’s export earnings came from the sales of natural gas while 23.9 percent came from agriculture sector but industrial sector generated only 11 percent of export earnings. Emphasis should be placed on development of agriculture sector and industrial sector, he added, saying that it is important to get correct data and to link projects for the success of them.

Representative U Tin Maung Oo of Shwepyitha Constituency said that it is important to collect more taxes to reduce inflation and deficit and to issue citizenship scrutiny cards in accordance with the law under Moe Pwint project.

Representative U Thein Lwin of Chaik Constituency said that distribution of fuel oil is monopolized by private entrepreneurs who failed to lower the prices when oil prices fell down in the international market and it is important to open the market to others in order to allow competition.

Representative Daw Dwe Bu of Ingyanngyi Constituency said that it is important to cooperate for development of education and health sectors in areas of national races.

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw session today approved the bills amending the mercantile customs act and inland customs act.—MNA

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker meets Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs

NAV PYI TAW, 26 Feb — Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann Thursday met a delegation led by Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, at Zabathiri Hall of Hluttaw building here.

Also present at the call were Chairmen of Pyithu Hluttaw committees and officials from the Hluttaw offices.

MNA

Myanmar, Japan exchange views on situations of human rights

NAV PYI TAW, 26 Feb—The Third Myanmar-Japan Human Rights Dialogue was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs here, on Thursday, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs U Thant Kyaw delivered the opening statement.

The experts from the Ministries of Home Affairs, Defence, Border Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Information, Labour, Employment and Social Security, Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, Myanmar National Human Rights Commission and the representatives led by Mr Takashi Okada, Deputy Director-General of Foreign Policy Bureau and Ambassador in charge of UN Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan attended the dialogue.

At the dialogue, both sides discussed and exchanged views on the progress made in Myanmar human rights situation, the situation of human rights in Japan and Myanmar-Japan cooperation in the field of human rights.—MNA

YCDC disperse Michaungkan protest

YANGON, 26 Feb — Yangon City Development Committee on Thursday morning dispersed a group staging an illegal protest over Michaungkan land issue by setting up makeshift tents occupying a sidewalk next to Mahabandoola Park in Kyauktada Township in Yangon Region.

As authorities concerned filed lawsuits against protesters at Kyauktada Township police station, respective courts charged protesters with Section 68 of Yangon City Development Committee Law and Section 18 of the law on peaceful assembly and peaceful procession.—MNA

Most striking workers . . .

(from page 1)

YANGON, 26 Feb — Union Minister for Science and Technology Dr Ko Ko Oo held talks with Senior Representative Mr Kyosuke Inada and part of JICA Myanmar Office at his office here, on 23 February to discuss project for development of a comprehensive disaster resilience system and collaboration platform and sending of expert on intellectual property from JICA.

The project will focus on natural disaster risk reduction to conduct research in Bago river basin and Yangon Region.

Yangon Technological University and Tokyo University of Japan coordinated project design matrix-PDM worth US$ 5 million to be provided by Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST)-JICA programme.—MNA

Myanmar, Thailand look . . .

(From page 1)

During the meeting, the Thai side made presentations on the ISO/IEC 29110 software development standard, GS1 standard and website E-business of the Federation of Thai Industries.

Moreover, the Thai delegation conducted business matching activities with Myanmar IT companies before signing a MoU on cooperation between Thailand-Myanmar and Myanmar-Thailand Business Councils.

During their three-day stay in Myanmar, the delegation is scheduled to hold discussions with Myanmar officials on trade, border trade and investment experience and guidelines sharing. Despite having other economic MoUs, the signing of the MoU on cooperation in the field of ICT was the first of its kind between the two federations. Thailand is Myanmar’s second-largest bilateral trading partner.

From 1-4-2013 to 10-1-2014, Myanmar’s exports to Thailand totaled $3546.522 million while its imports from Thailand reached $999,404 million. Up to 31 January 2013, Thailand, which stands second in Myanmar’s foreign investor line-up, has invested $3140.184 million in the existing 46 projects.

U Thaung Su Nyin of UMFCCI and Mr. Pranontha Titavanoco of FTI exchange notes after signing a MoU on the ISO/IEC 29110 Software Development Standard for Thailand-Myanmar Industrial Sector Development in Yangon on Thursday.—PHOTO: YE MYINT

Most striking workers . . .

(from page 1)

Generally, factories are receiving few orders from overseas markets in February, March and April, said Jun Ho Mun, general manager of Costec Garment Factory.

Still, about 100 workers of the factory continue are continuing to strike for better wages, he added.

Ford Glory Garment Factory located in Shwepyitha Industrial Zone saw 65 per cent of its total work force show up for work on Thursday after reaching an agreement with the majority of the striking workers on 23 February, according to FGLLID.

The factory has always kept its doors open to the striking workers. Out of 611 workers of Ford Glory Garment Factory who are on the job at the factory, said Mr Joe Lee, the owner of Ford Glory.

He requested the striking workers to improve the quantity and quality of the factory’s production, promising that the improved production would benefit all including employers and workers, he added.

To settle the labour disputes, the Yangon Region Labour Disputes Arbitration Committee has made efforts since 17 February as a moderator between the workers and employers and has achieved good results, the recent statement of the committee said.

Yangon Region Labour Minister U Zaw Aye Maung has pledged that the committee would push the factories to increase workers’ wages when their income rises.
BANGKOK, 26 Feb — Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham, together with Chief Minister of Kayah State U Khin Maung Oo and deputy ministers, visited the National Health Centre in Bangkok on Thursday morning.

Deputy Secretary General Dr Weerawat Phancrut of the centre explained comprehensive healthcare system to the vice president and party who later visited the call centre room and the data centre room. The deputy secretary general of the centre hosted a luncheon to the vice president and party at the Ratchakaw Authentic Thai Restaurant.

In the afternoon, the vice president met with Health Minister Prof Dr Rajata Rajatanavin of Thailand. Present at the meeting were the chief minister, deputy ministers U Tin Oo Lwin, Dr Win Myint, U Htin Aung and Dr Sai Kyaw Oo and officials.

They held discussions on cooperation in health and health for people in border areas and control measures for contagious diseases in border areas. Health officials from Thailand explained the public healthcare system, health management systems and cooperation in public health sector to the vice president and party.

In the evening, the health minister of Thailand hosted a dinner to the vice president and party at the Shangri-La Hotel in Bangkok. — MNA

Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham views public health management systems in Bangkok

President U Thein Sein accepts credentials... (from page 1)

Mr Nicholas Coppel, the newly-accredited Ambassador of Australia to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, at the Presidential Palace, Nay Pyi Taw, on Thursday.

Also present on the occasions were Union Minister at the President Office U Thein Nyunt, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs U Winna Maung Lwin and Director-General U Thuraing Thant Zin of the Protocol Department.— MNA

President U Thein Sein accepts credentials from newly-accredited Laotian Ambassador Mr. Lyying Sayaxang.

MNA

UN to cooperate in peace and national reconciliation processes of Myanmar

Vice President U Nyan Tun greets UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Mr Jeffrey Feltman called on Vice President U Nyan Tun at the Credentials Hall of the Presidential Palace, here, on Thursday afternoon.

They discussed implementation of remaining tasks in reviewing process on human rights, necessary technical assistance for graduation of Myanmar from status of least developed nations, and cooperation in peace and national reconciliation processes.

Also present at the meeting were Deputy Ministers Commodore Aung Thaw, U Tham Kyaw and U Kyaw Kyaw Wint.— MNA

The government is considering a workshop on formulation of administrative reform framework allowing all stakeholders to take part in comprehensive discussions, he added.

There is no shortcut for the success of a reform process, said the Union minister who pointed out that it took at least 20 years to make a success story in developing countries that initiated reform process.

Reform process should be implemented in the projects in some departments and townships based on international experiences of making a success story in the process, he said.

Although it is necessary to study practices that other countries followed, a reform model of the country is needed to be agreed with its own situations. It is also required to properly and smoothly manage the high expectation of the people.

Next, a UNDP representative made a presentation of the administrative reform framework (draft) and members of the committee made suggestions. Then, the UNDP representative elaborated on the agenda for the planned workshop and those present made supplementary reports.

During the first and second meetings of the committee, compilation of data based on public desires for the administrative reform and coordination with the ministries concerned were carried out. — MNA

Administrative reform coordinating committee meets

Nay Pyi Taw, 26 Feb — Administrative Reform Coordinating Committee held its third meeting at the President Office on Thursday.

The third meeting is aimed at developing an administrative reform framework as a sound foundation is imperative for the emergence of good governance that requires a comprehensive administrative reform process, formulation of a basic foundation for the country’s sustainable development goal, a framework paving the way for coordination between the stakeholders and an exact timeframe for implementation process, said Union Minister at the President Office U Hla Tun.

The government is considering a workshop on formulation of administrative reform framework allowing all stakeholders to take part in comprehensive discussions, he added.

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Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham holds talks with Health Minister Prof Dr Rajata Rajatanavin of Thailand.— MNA

Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham views public health management systems in Bangkok
New library ready to give service to local people in Pobbathiri Tsp

NAY PYI TAW, 26 Feb — A new building of library was inaugurated in Thabyesan Village in Pobbathiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw Council Area, on Thursday morning.

Deputy Director of Information and Public Relations Department Daw Thin Thin Zin, Township Administrator U Htet Aung Phyo and village library committee member U Tun Shein formally opened the new building.

Nay Pyi Taw Council member U Than Htay and officials visited the library and viewed books and publications.

Deputy Director Daw Thin Thin Zin explained construction of village libraries and advantages of reading. The library is 30 feet long and 26 feet wide, funded by the Nay Pyi Taw Council.

Shwe Ye Yint

Villagers in Yinmabin Township to get new rural health branch

YINMABIN, 26 Feb — With the aim of providing accommodation to government staff, stakes were driven for construction of a rural health branch and staff quarters in Chaungzon Village, Yinmabin Township, Sagaing Region, at the end of January and construction started on 9 February.

Under the supervision of Yinmabin District management committee chairman U Zaw Myo Nyunt, township administrator U Myint Tun and departmental officials inspected construction of the rural health branch and staff quarters and gave instructions to officials on timely completion of the buildings.

“The Ministry of Health allotted K60 million of budget in 2014-15 fiscal year to construct a 41 feet long, 30 feet wide and 11 feet high rural health centre and one 38 feet long, 25 feet wide and 11 feet high staff quarter, two water tanks, one tube-well, four toilets, fencing and roads. Upon completion, the rural health branch will provide medical treatment to about 2,800 local people from four villages in Yinmabin Township,” said a local.

People from the villages wish appointment of health staff at the rural health branch as soon as possible.

Tun Ko Ko (Yinmabin)

Commission to supervise elections of members of MCDC

MANDALAY, 26 Feb — Under Section 16 of Mandalay City Development Committee Law, Mandalay Region government on 6 February formed a MCDC election commission with participation of U Khin Maung Kyaw (Director of Region General Administration Department) as Chairman, together with members retired township administrator U Aye Kyu, advocate U Soe Myint, gold foil maker U Ohn Maung, trader U Aung Thaik, loom industry owner U Than Myint and secretary retired deputy commissioner U San Myint Aung.

The commission held the meetings on 10 and 19 February on electoral process for municipal election. The commission issued a MCDC formation rules on 22 February.

Thiba Ko Ko (Mandalay)

India-Myanmar Expo 2015 to be displayed from 27 Feb to 1 March

MANDALAY, 26 Feb — The second India-Myanmar Expo 2015 will be held from 27 February to 1 March at the Mandalay City Hall.

The trade fair will be jointly organized by Engineering Exports Promotion Council formed with over 1,200 engineering companies of India, Indian Consulate General (Mandalay) and Mandalay Region Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Min Htet Aung (Mandalay Sub-printing House)
Mandalay, 26 Feb — A cash donation for military servicemen and their families, service personnel who sacrificed life for the nation in Kokang Self-Administered Zone, northern Shan State and family members was held at the hall of Mandalay Region Government on 23 February.

On behalf of wellwishers, U Than Win of Mann Myanmar Co explained the purpose of donations. At the ceremony, Construction Entrepreneurs Association donated K10 million, U Than Win, Chairman of Mann Myanmar Co and family K10 million and U Myo Hlaing Oo of Thanti Tithsa Co K5 million to the chief minister who returned certificates of honour.

So far, wellwishers in Mandalay Region have donated K216.665 million for the Tatmadawmen, families and state service personnel. Officials send necessary foodstuffs to the military servicemen in Laukkai region.

Tha Ha Ko Ko
(Mandalay)

Shan plateau with mist-covered mountain ranges attracts tourists

Taunggyi, 26 Feb — Shan plateau is a great tourist destination, sharing border with Kachin State, Laos, Thailand, China, Kayah and Kayin States, Mandalay and Sagaing regions and Nay Pyi Taw Council Area.

Taunggyi-Inlay-Kalaw-Pindaya route is located in southern Shan State. Tourists may visit there by flights from Yangon, Mandalay and Bagan in addition to highway buses.

Among the tourist destinations in Shan State, Inlay Lake is a great attractive area located at an altitude of 2,950 feet. It has been designated as an ASEAN heritage park.

Tourists may take relaxation in Inlay Lake by motorboat so as to enjoy scenic beauty of traditional housings, rowing of boat by leg of Inn ethnics, floating islands where various vegetables are being cultivated by local people and traditional foods. Significantly, they can visit Inlay Phaungdaw U Buddha images. As a centre at Inlay region, the visitors may go trips to Kalaw, Pindaya, Phakkon, Loikaw and so beautiful towns.

The tourists will have the opportunities to visit 2,478 Mewedaw Kakku pagodas, 24 miles from Taunggyi. Moreover, they can tour villages of Pa-laung, Pa-O, Danu and Taungyoe ethnics around Kalaw Township and visit paddy, wheat, rice, orange and other plants. In fact, villages and towns in Shan State have different beauties from other regions and states with Shan mountain ranges covered with mist in the background.—MoH&T

New highway bus line runs along Taungtha-Welaung-Myingyan-Mandalay route

Taungtha, 26 Feb — La Pyae Hein bus line launched a highway bus service to run along Taungtha-Welaung-Myingyan-Mandalay route as of 18 February.

The bus line runs six highway buses daily. Ticket is K4,500 per passenger. In commemoration of the launching the bus line, passengers are allowed to take the buses three day along the route free of charge. Thanks to new bus lines, transport service a narrows development gap between rural and urban areas in the townships.

Htay Myint Maung

Rode to Mandalay caravan proceeds to Bagan via Natogyi

Natogyi, 25 Feb — A tourist caravan of classic motorcars namely “Rode to Mandalay” that made trips to Bagan from Mandalay proceeded to Taungtha Township via Natogyi on 24 February.

The caravan comprising 61 classic vehicles was scheduled to Bagan passing a 45-mile-long Mandalay-Myingyan route. However, the caravan passed Natogyi and went to Myingyan-Bagan road via Taungtha.

Township Administrator U Kyaw Naing and Commander of Township Police Force Police Major Soe Win provided necessary assistance to the tourists.—Htay Myint Maung

Agriculturists disclose experiences on use of Trichogramma in cultivation of crops

Nay Pyi Taw, 26 Feb — The Trichogramma-based multi-crop protection course for cultivation of Paledhwe summer paddy, jointly organized by Crops Protection Branch of Agriculture Department under the Ministry of Agriculture and Europe Aid Funded Project, kicked off in Ohhtehintaung Village in Singaing Township, Mandalay Region, on 25 February.

Deputy Director Dr Kyin Kyin Win of Agriculture Department explained use of Trichogramma in protection of various species of crops. Dr Ko Ko of Crops Protection Branch briefed the attendees on prevention of pests at the paddy plantations with the use of best species of Trichogramma gathered from Greater Me-kong Subregion countries.

The training course was held on 25 and 26 February, attended by 350 farmers. Deputy Director Dr Kyin Kyin Win and officials shared their experiences on prevention of pests at crops plantations and replied to queries raised by farmers.

Ko Pauk
(Okkar Myay)
**Regional**

**Oldest Japanese-made steam train transferred to Kyoto museum**

The oldest Japanese-made steam train in existence is transferred by trailer to Kyoto Railway Museum, which will open in the spring next year, from a closed Osaka museum on 26 Feb, 2015. Enthusiastic railway fans observed the transfer of the train built in 1903. —Kyodo News

**China’s top court unveils deadlines for legal reform**

Beijing, 26 Feb — China’s top court set a five-year deadline on Thursday for legal reforms to protect the rights of individuals, prevent miscarriages of justice and make its judiciary more professional as the ruling Communist Party seeks to quell public discontent. A statement on the Supreme Court’s website promised specific deadlines for each goal, including support for a “social atmosphere of justice” by 2018.

It gave more details of a decision reached at a four-day meeting last year, when it reached at a four-day meeting last year, when it gave more details of a decision that has a wide impact.

Zhou Qiang, President of China’s Supreme People’s Court, said Abdul Rahman Kabi- r said on Thursday. Under the current legal framework, the SDF can inspect ships and their cargoes in times of contingencies in areas around Japan, and ask them to change course if necessary.

UN Security Council requests for approval by the flag state are required to conduct such operations, and foreign military ships are not included.

The government made the proposal to Liberal Democratic Party Vice President Masahiko Komoto, and senior lawmakers said on Thursday. Under the current legal framework, the SDF can inspect ships and their cargoes in times of contingencies in areas around Japan, and ask them to change course if necessary.

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**Philipine military kills 14 Abu Sayyaf militants in Mindanao**

Manila, 26 Feb — The Philippine military has killed 14 Abu Sayyaf militants and wounded 19 others in ongoing offensives in the southern island of Sulu in Mindanao from Wednesday, a military spokeswoman said on Thursday.

The Abu Sayyaf, estimated to be no more than 500 in strength, was formed in the 1990s and has since carried out, among others, deadly bombings and kidnappings-for-ransom, including of foreign nationals, making it one of the Philippines’ most serious security threats.

Both the US and Philippines governments regard the Abu Sayyaf as a terrorist organization with links to al-Qaeda and the latter’s Southeast Asian cell Jemaah Islamiyah.

Muyuela said two government troopers were killed and 16 others were wounded in the ongoing clash. —Kyodo News

**Avalanches kill 186 in Afghanistan**

Kabul, 26 Feb — More than 180 people have been killed in north Afghanistan in some of the worst avalanches there for 30 years, officials said on Thursday, with heavy snow set to last for two more days after an unusually dry winter led to fears of drought.

Officials warned of an imminent humanitarian emergency in areas most severely hit by the bad weather, with snow sweeping through villages and blocking off roads.

“We haven’t seen this much snow, or this many avalanches, for 30 years,” said Abdul Rahman Kabiri, acting governor of the mountainous province of Panjshir, north of Kabul, where 186 people were killed and more than 100 injured in avalanches.

Despite bringing misery to so many people, the snow is vital for Afghanistan, where much of the rural population dependent on agriculture relies on snow melting in the mountains to sustain crops in the spring and summer.

Farming drives the troubled Afghan economy, with about three quarters of the people living in rural areas, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimated in 2004. Irrigation is not extensive in Afghanistan, most of which is semi-arid, and aid efforts over the past decade or more have focused on trying to extend it, with mixed results. —Reuters

**Gov’t aims to expand ship inspections as support for foreign forces**

Tokyo, 26 Feb — The government is considering expanding the scope of ship inspections conducted by the Self-Defence Forces as Japan seeks to increase its logistical support for foreign troops undertaking global peace missions, senior ruling party lawmakers said on Thursday.

Under the current legal framework, the SDF can inspect ships and their cargoes in times of contingencies in areas around Japan, and ask them to change course if necessary.

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**Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew still in intensive care in hospital**

Singapore, 26 Feb — Singapore’s elder statesman Lee Kuan Yew is still in the intensive care unit of a hospital three weeks after being admitted with a severe pneumonia, the government said on Thursday.

The 91-year-old Lee “is still warded in ICU at Singapore General Hospital,” said a statement from the office of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, his son.

Lee’s doctors “have restarted him on antibiotics, and are continuing to monitor him closely,” the brief statement said. On Wednesday evening, several state-owned media quoted government sources dispelling rumors that he had died.

The senior Lee was Singapore’s prime minister from 1959 until 1990 and has been credited for the small island state’s transformation from a colonial backwater into Southeast Asia’s wealthiest economy.

In a book he wrote, “One Man’s View of the World,” published in 2013, Lee revealed that he had an “advance medical directive” signed by his lawyer and a doctor that gave instructions that if he has to be fed by a tube and that it is unlikely that he will ever be able to recover and walk about, “my doctors have to remove the tube and allow me to make a quick exit.” —Kyodo News

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**Singapore’s former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew’s condition remains unchanged**

Singapore, 26 Feb — Singapore’s elder statesman Lee Kuan Yew is still in the intensive care unit of a hospital three weeks after being admitted with a severe pneumonia, the government said on Thursday.

The 91-year-old Lee “is still warded in ICU at Singapore General Hospital,” said a statement from the office of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, his son.

Lee’s doctors “have restarted him on antibiotics, and are continuing to monitor him closely,” the brief statement said. On Wednesday evening, several state-owned media quoted government sources dispelling rumors that he had died.

The senior Lee was Singapore’s prime minister from 1959 until 1990 and has been credited for the small island state’s transformation from a colonial backwater into Southeast Asia’s wealthiest economy.

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Australia’s Prime Minister Tony Abbott addresses members of the media after a party room meeting at Parliament House in Canberra on 9 Feb, 2015.

REUTERS

SYDNEY/JAKARTA, 26 Feb — Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott struck a conciliatory tone on Thursday after speaking to Indonesian President Joko Widodo about the looming execution of two convicted Australian drug traffickers.

Abbott said he spoke with his “friend” Widodo on Wednesday evening, adding that the Indonesian leader “absolutely understands our position... and I think he is carefully considering Indonesia’s position”.

Widodo has denied clemency to 11 convicts on death row, including Australian, French, and Brazilian nationals, ratcheting up diplomatic tensions amid repeated pleas for mercy.

Abbott had previously angered Jakarta by linking his pleas for clemency for the pair to Australia’s aid to Indonesia after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Jakarta responded by warning Australia to represent their request for presidential clemency.

Meanwhile, two justices took calls from Brazil, France, and the Netherlands this week, has warned nations against interfering in Indonesia’s sovereignty.

Brazilians have a citizen executed last month and another in among the next group on death row, along with a French national, the Australians and seven others. A Dutch citizen was executed last month.

“We are keeping communications open with Brazil and we anticipate only good things in our relations with other countries,” Nasir said. Indonesia has harsh penalties for drug trafficking and resumed executions in 2013 after a five-year gap. On Tuesday, a court in Jakarta threw out an appeal by the two Australians, Myuran Sukumaran, 33, and Andrew Chan, 31, against Widodo’s rejection of their request for presidential clemency.

Lawyers for the members of the so-called Bali Nine group of Australians, convicted in 2005 as the ringleaders of a plot to smuggle heroin out of Indonesia, have said they plan to appeal against that decision.—REUTERS

S Korean court rules adultery law unconstitutional

SEOUL, 26 Feb — South Korea’s Constitutional Court on Thursday ruled unconstitutional an adultery law regarding marital infidelity as a criminal act, abolishing a law enacted in 1953.

In the nine-member apex court, seven justices voted to scrap the law while two supported retaining the legislation.

Under the landmark ruling, about 5,000 people who were punished after 31 October, 2008, when the court last upheld the law, can seek to have their sentences overturned.

South Korea has been one of the few non-Muslim countries to retain such an archaic law. Adultery as a crime in South Korea was punishable by up to two years in jail.

Any unmarried person who knowingly had sexual relations with someone who is married was also liable for prosecution.

Critics demanded repeal of the law on the grounds it encroaches on individuals’ privacy to make decisions on their own sexual activities.

Supporters of the law argued it should be upheld to protect the maintenance of a family and women’s rights.

“The adultery law vio-

lates the Constitution by infringing on people’s rights to make own decision on sex and also on freedom of being guaranteed with se-
crecy for privacy,” the ma-

jority ruling said, according to Yonhap News Agency.

“No only the an-

ti-adultery law gradually-

ly losing its place in the world, it no longer reflects our people’s way of thinking,” the ruling said.

How to maintain a married life and a family should be left to the free affection of those involved, the ruling said.

Meanwhile, two justic-es who voted to retain the law said in their ruling that the law “needs to safeguard sex morals and maintain the system of a marriage and a family.”

The law has been de-

liberated by the Constitu-

tional Court four times and was upheld each time be-

fore on grounds that social morality would be weak-

ened. In 1990 and 1993, three out of nine Consti-

tutional Court judges voted to scrap the law, but in 2001 only one did. In 2008, the law was upheld by a slender majority.

It is rare for people to be jailed, but that does not stop thousands of angry spouses from filing crimi-

nal complaints each year.

More than 100,000 people have been punished for violating the law since 1953.—KYOOGO NEWS

Dubai, 26 Feb — A court in the United Arab Emirates has sentenced six Iranians, three of them in absentia, to life in prison for kidnapping a British business-

nessman who went missing in Dubai in 2013, newspa-

pers reported on Thursday.

Abbas Yazdi, a busi-

nessman of Iranian descent who owns a general trading company in Dubai, disap-

peared in June 2013 and his wife, Atena, told a UAE newspaper at the time that she feared he may have been kidnapped by Iranian intelligence officers.

Iran has denied any role in Yazdi’s disappearance.

Prosecutors in Dubai have said the defendants attacked and drugged Yaz-

di and smuggled him out of the country to Iran through a port in the UAE emirate of Sharjah.

The Gulf News identi-

fied the three who stood tri-

al as “RA” aged 32, “KG”, 52, and “NA” 55, and said they had denied the charges of kidnapping, assault and theft.

“RA” however admitted he had driven the car used in the abduction, the newspa-

per said.

It identified the three convicted in absentia as “HB”, “BN” and “IN.” The newspaper added that a fur-

ther defendant, identified as “SH”, who had planned the kidnapping, had died in custody.

UAE newspaper 7 Days has cited Yazdi’s wife as saying the trader and investor, 44 at the time of his disappearance, was a close childhood friend of the son of former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

British media had re-

ported that, at the time of his disappearance, Yazdi was giving evidence by video-

link to an international arbitration tribunal in The Hague intended to settle a long-running commercial dispute involving United Arab Emirates-based Crescent Petroleum and the National Iranian Oil Company.

There is no suggestion that this involvement in the arbitration is connected to his disappearance, British media have said.—REUTERS

Japanese investors in China look to Bangladesh for new investment

DIKA, 26 Feb — Japa-

nese companies invested in China feel there are better trade opportunities coming in Bangladesh this year and are considering Bangladesh as their next destination after India, according to a recent survey by the Japan External Trade Organiza-

tion.

JETRO’s Dakha office, in a release highlighting the survey results, stated most Japanese firms currently oper-

ating in China are attract-

ed by low production costs in Bangladesh. According to the sur-

ey, 71.7 percent of Japa-

nese firms in China want to take advantage of opportu-

nities in Bangladesh in 2013. According to the survey, Bangladesh has the lowest wage levels among competing countries, with wages in the manufacturing sector in Bangladesh averaging $100 a month.

In addition, around 84 percent of the CEOs in the survey think Bangladesh has the widest room for cost-cutting. In comparison to Japan, the cost of pro-

duction in Bangladesh is less than half at 48.7 percent, while it is 77 percent in China and 71 percent in Vietnam. The average rate of productivity in Bangla-

desh is 31.6 percent, while it is 44.4 percent in China and 42.1 percent in India.

The rate in Sri Lanka is 77.8 percent and 68.4 percent in Pakistan, the study adds.

The survey, however, suggests worker efficien-

cy in Bangladesh can be improved through basic education and vocational training.—KYOOGO NEWS
Educational benefits are beyond doubt

By Kyaw Thura

Myanmar has witnessed dramatic structural reforms in politics, economy and education in the past few years. These efforts have got the country back on track to democracy, with the result that it now basks in the adulation of the international community.

Despite improvements in other sectors, the educational policy is found still lying in tatters. Universities and schools receive low budgets, thereby making their management difficult and their development sluggish.

It is however an encouraging sign that the country is restructuring its university system in collaboration with international institutions with the aim of pumping more investments into upgrading schools and universities nationwide. The efforts to tie up with foreign institutions will enable the country to secure more funds and other resources. In addition, Yangon University has now come alive with students taking various courses, with foreign professors and experts engaged in updating syllabuses and curricula in several disciplines.

In a sense, the opening in itself is a trap. It is impossible to let every institution come in and play a dominant role in our educational reform. Take private primary and secondary schools. Most of them are run by foreign investors, with wealthy families being their prime target and making enormous demands on ordinary families.

This highlights that the government needs to do something serious in promising more spending on education in order to raise the education standard. When it comes to the education system in the country, much remains to be done.

For our education to move forward and keep abreast of international standards, all that stakeholders need to do is create an education environment where teachers teach and train, and students learn and practise. Whether education can enrich the social welfare of the grass roots of society is beyond doubt.

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.

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**DEMOCRACY**

Kyi Mun

1. (C&U) (country with principles of) government in which all adult citizens share through their elected representatives.
2. (C&U) (country with) government which encourages and allows rights of citizenship such as freedom of speech, religion, opinion, and association, the assertion of the rule of law, majority rule, accompanied by respect for the rights of minorities.
3. (C&U) (society to which there is) treatment of each other by citizens as equals.

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**Draft of Myanmar national prevention of violence against women law to be submitted to Hluttaw in April or May**

By Khaing Thanda Lwin

Yangon, 26 Feb — A draft of Myanmar’s national prevention of violence against women law will be submitted to the Pyithu Hluttaw (lower house) in April or May this year, according to an organizing body, Daw Myint Swe, leader of the Violence Against Women Working Group, of the Myanmar Women’s Affairs Federation (MWA). The main aim of the law is to promote the elimination of violence against women.

“The law covers a total of 20 chapters such as prevention of all forms of violence, tough penalties and rights to inheritance,” said Daw May Sabei Phyu of the Gender Equity Network (GEN), who called on the policymakers to include provisions on marital rape and other forms of partner abuse. Since 2013, the law has been drafted by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement in cooperation with UN Gender Theme Group, the GEN, the MWAF and other organizations.

According to the GEN’s research paper released on Monday, a majority of Myanmar women experience some forms of both physical and psychological violence from their partners. It is found that a number of those victims have to financially rely a lot on their spouses.

“This study can help the policymakers in drawing up the evidence-based policies in the country,” said Daw May Sabei Phyu, adding that continued efforts will be made to make sure that officials concerned thoroughly understand these suggestions.

She said the organization will disseminate the law to the public when it comes out.—GNLM
Nay Pyi Taw, 26 Feb — U Wunna Maung Lwin, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, received Mr. Handunnethi Rannulu Piyasiri, Ambassador of Sri Lanka, who will be leaving soon upon completion his tour of duty, today at 16.30 hrs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nay Pyi Taw.

During the meeting, they discussed and exchanged views on enhancing their friendly ties and relations and cooperation in a cordial manner.

MNA

Union FM meets Sri Lankan Ambassador to Myanmar

ITBMU offers suggestions on proposed national education bill

Nay Pyi Taw, 26 Feb — The International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University has suggested sticking to a clause embedded in the National Education Law that requires social and religious organizations to seek approval from relevant ministries to run schools, warning that its exclusion will amount to losing control over religious schools. The proposed national education bill has excluded that clause.

The university called for leaving out some paragraphs concerning the use of ‘mother tongue’, stressing possible different shades of interpretation. “It will mean different races like Chinese and Bengalis are allowed to use their own languages in schools.”

Another suggestion is concerned with the reconsideration of the abolition of a proposal that holds the government accountable for capacity enhancement of teachers and acquisition of international experience.

MNA

NNER, CSOs discuss bill amending national education law

Yangon, 26 Feb — The National Network for Education Reform held a discussion with civil society organizations over the bill amending the National Education Law agreed by the four-party talks at House of Media and Entertainment in Rotahtaung Township in Yangon on Thursday afternoon.

Organizer James of the discussions said that he believes it would be more beneficial for Hlutaw representative to learn the points of view and decisions of civil society organizations over the bill and the discussions were held to explain the bill more comprehensively.

At the discussions, Dr Thein Lwin of the NNER said that the network was linked with individuals and organizations that were interested in education reform and the network had held discussions in 25 places across the country to draft the bill. Then, Ko Nanda Sit Aung of the Action Committee for Democracy Education Movement explained the situations of student protestors.

U Thein Baw, who attended the discussions, said that negotiations would be smooth if both sides discussed without prejudice and tolerance was essential to resolve further issues but it was important to tell the truth at the discussions and in the future, adding that it would be smooth if the truth was told.

MNA

Myanmar Gazette

Nay Pyi Taw, 26 Feb — The President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has transferred the following heads of service organizations shown against them from the date they assume charge of their duties.

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The President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has appointed the following persons as heads of service organizations shown against each on probation from the date they assume charge of their duties.

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Tatmadaw accelerates military operations in Laukkai

Nay Pyi Taw, 26 Feb — Tatmadaw columns have speeded up their military operations to comb area of insurgents, forcing them to hide in jungles and mountains and ambush the Tatmadaw columns.

On 25 February, the insurgents ambushed Tatmadaw columns in the northeast of Laukkai, between Chinshwehaw and Lonhtan and at 23 mile-point between Laukkai and Kongyan and skirmishes erupted.

In the afternoon on the same day, the military column moving to Laukkai to reinforce the Tatmadaw forces in the area was ambushed by KIA (Kachin) and SSA (Wanghai) troops near Namslam and Tatmadaw columns are combing them out of the area.

On Thursday morning, a skirmish broke out between a Tatmadaw column and Kokang insurgents near Manchu village in Laukkai and Tatmadaw troops are pursuing the insurgents.

During the skirmishes, Tatmadaw troops seized a body of insurgents, one M22, 5 Chinese grenades, 286 bullets and 13 MN-DAA uniforms while 4 officers and other ranks of the Tatmadaw lost lives and three others were injured.

A map show clashes between government’s troops and Kokang insurgents in Laukkai region

Khin Cho Win

A map show clashes between government’s troops and Kokang insurgents in Laukkai region.

Myawady
German conservatives back Greek aid extension in test vote

BERLIN, 26 Feb — An overwhelming majority of German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s conservatives supported an extension of the Greek bailout in a test ballot on Thursday, one day before a vote in the Bundes tag lower house of parliament, according to participants.

In the test ballot, 22 lawmakers in the conservative bloc opposed the extension and five abstained. In total, there are 311 lawmakers in the bloc, which includes members of the chancellor’s Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its sister party, the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU). The Social Democrats (SPD), who share power with Merkel’s conservatives, voted unanimously for the extension in their test vote, participants told Reuters.

The coalition has a big enough majority to easily win the vote on Friday to extend the rescue by four months. Still, many lawmakers, including Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble, have expressed concern in recent days about whether Athens can be counted on to stick to its reform promises.—Reuters

Protests continue in Venezuela as teen shot by police is buried

SAN CRISTOBAL, (Venezuela), 26 Feb — Sporadic protests flared in different parts of Venezuela on Wednesday, a day after a policeman shot dead a teenager during a demonstration against President Nicolas Maduro’s government in the volatile city of San Cristobal.

The worst unrest was again in San Cristobal, where distraught relatives of 14-year-old Klubert Roa held a wake and funeral following his killing on Tuesday.

Witnesses said dozens of masked protesters faced off with security forces in streets blocked with rubbish and tires, and two police motorcycles were burned in the Andean city, a center of last year’s anti-Maduro protests and violence that killed 43 people.

Local authorities declared a day of mourning and many shops stayed closed in fear of trouble as well as to honour Roa.

“My son was neither an opposition supporter nor a ‘Chavista,’ he was my son, the apple of my eye,” his father, Erick Roa, said at the funeral. “They killed an innocent person.”

Some 200 students and neighbours are camp ing out at the site of Roa’s death and have installed an altar in his honour.

Maduro, the successor to late socialist leader Hugo Chavez, condemned Roa’s death but also charged that violent radicals in San Cristobal and elsewhere are seeking to oust him.

The exact circumstances of Roa’s death remain unclear. Relatives and students insist he was a bystander to the protests and targeted at point-blank range, while authorities say he was shot when police were cornered by thugs. A 23-year-old policeman has been detained and charged.

The case has exacerbated tensions amid a severe economic crisis and government crackdown on opposition leaders it accuses of conspiring to topple Maduro with US aid. Foes say Maduro is panicked at his falling popularity and the prospect of losing control of parliament in a vote later this year.

In Caracas, dozens of opposition supporters rallied at the Interior Ministry and marched to the Vatican envoy’s office.

In the western city of Maracaibo, hundreds of opposition members burned a truck carrying medicines, Maduro said. “Is that a democratic struggle or terrorism?” the president asked during a rally in the southern city of Guayana.

In Tachira’s town of Rubio, protesters hijacked and burned a truck belonging to state oil company PDVSA that was transporting gas, authorities said.

Venezuela’s perpetually political tensions spiked last week with the arrest of Caracas Mayor Antonio Ledezma, whom the government accused of backing a coup attempt.—Reuters

Kiev likely to order heavy artillery withdrawal

KIEV, 26 Feb — Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko is likely to order government forces to start pulling back heavy weapons in the country’s east on Thursday under a 12 February peace deal, a military source said.

“We expect the statement by the president later today,” the source said. Separatists say they have started to pull back heavy weapons under the agreement. Kiev has said its forces will start pulling back their big guns only when the shooting stops, and fighting has eased considerably in the past few days.—Reuters

Russian fighters jets to stage exercises over Barents Sea

MOSCOW, 26 Feb — Russian fighter jets will take part in exercises on thwarting a potential missile attack in the Barents Sea, RIA news agency said on Thursday.

It said MiG-31 jets were taking part in the initial part of the exercises in the Pechora region and the next stage would be launched in the next few days from the Monchegorsky airfield in the Murmansk region of northern Russia.

The Barents Sea is off the coasts of Russia and Norway, and NATO states have voiced concern over an increase in Russian military exercises and “near misses” with Russian military aircraft since the conflict in east Ukraine began.—Reuters

Colombia peace deal should ensure criminals held to account — Annan

BOGOTA, 26 Feb — Those responsible for crimes committed during Colombia’s 50-year war must be held accountable as part of a peace deal between the government and Marxist rebels, ex-United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan said on Wednesday.

Annan, who led the international organization for nine years, visited Colombia to meet with President Juan Manuel Santos, judicial authorities and the head of the opposition, former President Alvaro Uribe. He has no official role in Colombia’s peace process but is hoping to promote progress.

The ex-secretary general will now head to Cuba, where he will meet with negotiators from the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebels at the talks, a bid to end the five-decade conflict which has killed 220,000 people and displaced millions.

“All those who committed crimes should be held accountable,” Annan said at a Press conference. “However, justice should be adapted to Colombia’s context at the same time that it respects international laws.”

A Greek national flag flutters as Greek Orthodox priests make their way on main Constitution (Syntagma) square in Athens on 25 Feb, 2015. REUTERS

Whether the rebels will serve jail time is a thorny issue at the two-year-old negotiations. The guerrillas have said they will not accept prison sentences for what they say is a political struggle against state aggression.

But opposition figures including Uribe say that the FARC must pay for human rights violations committed during the conflict.

Santos has said the country needs to find a middle ground which allows those who committed massacres, rapes, forced displacements and disappearances to confess, ask for forgiveness and provide reparations to victims.

“We are conscious that no one measure is appropriate for everyone,” said Annan. “Ending such a long war isn’t easy. Passions and tensions will not disappear immediately and dialogue is important to control tensions and avoid differences.”

Negotiators have so far reached partial agreements on land reform, political participation for ex-rebels and an end to the illegal drugs trade. Discussions on victim reparations and demobilization are ongoing.—Reuters

Colombia’s President Juan Manuel Santos (L) shakes hands with former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the presidential palace in Bogota on 23 Feb, 2015. REUTERS
Four bombs explode in Cairo, one killed

CAIRO, 26 Feb — One person was killed and two were wounded when a bomb exploded outside a restaurant in the residential Imbaba district of Cairo on Thursday, the Egyptian Interior Ministry said in a statement.

Three other bombs exploded in the nearby and mainly middle-class district of Mohandeseen, the interior ministry said. They caused limited damage to mobile phone shops, but no injuries.

While most of the worst attacks in Egypt have hit the Sinai peninsula, a remote but strategic region bordering Gaza, Israel and the Suez Canal, smaller blasts have become increasingly common in Cairo and other cities.

Television footage on Thursday showed the facade of a small restaurant damaged, and shrapnel along a street. There was no claim of responsibility for the attacks. — Reuters

A US-led coalition has struck Islamic State in eastern Syria and Iraq and Syria, its top general said on Thursday, as the group as one of the bridges between land it controls in Iraq and Syria.

Islamic State now controls ten Christian villages,” Observatory head Rami Abdulkhader said by phone, using an acronym name for Islamic State. “They have taken the people they kidnapped away from the villages and into their territory,” he said.

Islamic State has not claimed any of the abductions. The Observatory tracks the conflict using a network of sources on all sides of the civil war which spiralled out of Syria’s three-year-long conflict as the group as one of the bridges between land it controls in Iraq and Syria. — Reuters

Suicide bomb strikes top NATO envoy team in Afghanistan

KABUL, 26 Feb — A suicide bomber rammed a car laden with explosives into a vehicle belonging to NATO’s top envoy in Afghanistan, killing one Turkish soldier and wounding at least one person, Turkish officials said.

The explosion struck in the heart of the heavily fortified capital Kabul, close to the German, Iranian and Turkish embassies, razing windows and putting embassy staff on high alert.

The NATO Senior Civilian Representative and former Turkish ambassador to Afghanistan could not immediately be reached by phone. Details on his location at the time of the attack were unclear.

“A car bomb attack has been carried out on the vehicle of the security team of Turkish envoy Ismail Aramaz,” the Turkish military said in a statement.

The Taleban swiftly claimed responsibility but appeared to have mistaken the Turkish security team for a US convoy, clarifying on Twitter that they had not intended to kill any other country’s citizens.

“The purpose of today’s attack in Kabul was a convoy of US troops. The embassy or any other country nationals were not objective,” Taleban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid tweeted.

The Senior Civilian Representative’s vehicles are factory-made, armored Mercedes SUVs. The Afghan interior ministry said the one targeted belonged to the Turkish embassy and the driver had been killed in the explosion.

A security report circulated among international security sources in Kabul showed the car had caught fire after the blast, and was burning on its side at the edge of the road just outside the so-called Green Zone.

It was the second time a diplomatic vehicle has been targeted by insurgents in the capital in recent months, after a British embassy car was attacked by a suicide bomber in November.

Afghanistan has taken over full responsibility for efforts to end the Taleban insurgency with the withdrawal of most foreign troops at the end of last year. — Reuters

US charges three with conspiring to support Islamic State

NEW YORK, 26 Feb — Three men were charged on Wednesday with conspiring to support Islamic State, including two who planned to travel to Syria to fight on behalf of the radical group, US authorities said.

One of the men, Akhbor Saidakhmetov, 19, of Kazakhstan, was arrested on Wednesday at John F Kennedy International Airport in New York, where authorities said he was attempting to board a flight to Turkey on his way to Syria.

Another defendant, Abdurasul Hasanovich Juraevbov, 24, of Uzbekistan, previously purchased a ticket for a March flight to Istanbul, said Loretta Lynch, US Attorney in Brooklyn.

FBI Director James Comey said there are “troubled souls.”

“ISIS now controls ten Christian villages,” Observatory head Rami Abdulkhader said by phone, using an acronym name for Islamic State. “They have taken the people they kidnapped away from the villages and into their territory,” he said.

Islamic State has not claimed any of the abductions. The Observatory tracks the conflict using a network of sources on all sides of the civil war which spiralled out of Syria’s three-year-long conflict as the group as one of the bridges between land it controls in Iraq and Syria. — Reuters

Islamic State in Syria has ab ducted 220 from Christian villages this week

BEIRUT, 26 Feb — Islamic State militants have abducted at least 220 people from Assyrian Christian villages in northeastern Syria over a three-day offensive, a monitor that tracks violence in Syria said on Thursday. The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the abductions took place when Islamic State took 10 villages inhabited by the ancient Christian minority near Hasaka, a city mainly held by the Kurds, over the past three days.

Hundreds of Christians have now fled to the two main cities in Hasaka Province, according to the Syrian National Council, a Syrian Christian group.

“ISIS now controls ten Christian villages,” Observatory head Rami Abdulkhader said by phone, using an acronym name for Islamic State. “They have taken the people they kidnapped away from the villages and into their territory,” he said.

Islamic State has not claimed any of the abductions. The Observatory tracks the conflict using a network of sources on all sides of the civil war which spiralled out of Syria’s three-year-long conflict as the group as one of the bridges between land it controls in Iraq and Syria. — Reuters

Islamic State is targeted to join Islamic State and Syria has abducted 220 from Christian villages this week
India unveils populist yet reformist railway budget

NEW DELHI, 26 Feb — India on Thursday unveiled its railway budget for the next financial year, in what is being billed as a populist yet reformist one.

Indian Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu presented Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government’s first full-fledged budget in the country’s fourth largest railway network in the next five years. The Minister also pledged to make the world’s fourth largest railway network an abode of cleanliness and spelt out measures to improve passenger safety like installation of closed-circuit TV cameras in stations and launching a pan-India helpline.

“There will be no hike in passenger fares. But there will be an SMS service to inform passengers about train timings and Wi-Fi services will also be available at 400 railway stations,” Prabhu said, but he did not announce any additional trains, in a clear move away from tradition.

On investments of 137 billion US dollars over the next five years, he said that the infusion would include funds raised by market borrowing. “Spending will be focused on improving and expanding existing railway lines,” he said.

Spelling out passenger safety, the minister said that surveillance cameras would soon be introduced in select trains and suburban trains for women safety. “We will also start an all India toll free helpline number 182 for safety related complaints,” he said.

In accordance with Modi’s “Clean India campaign,” he announced a series of measures in this regard, including replacement of ordinary toilets in trains with bio toilets in the future. He also appealed to commuters to keep trains clean.

In the beginning of his budget speech, he laid out four goals — sustainable improvement in customer experience, making railways a safer means of travel, expansion of capacity and modernizing rail infrastructure, and attaining financial sustainability.

The Indian prime minister has hailed the budget, saying that arrangements have been made for women’s security, helpline, better food and how to make world class railway stations. “Rail budgets used to focus on adding number of coaches but now it’s development centric. We want services that are transparent. The railways minister has taken step towards corruption-free future,” Modi said. The Indian Railways cross-covers the country from north to south, carrying millions of passengers daily. —Xinhua

Two Japanese in most powerful Asian businesswomen list from Forbes

SINGAPORE, 26 Feb — Two Japanese women have made it onto international business magazine Forbes’ list of Asia’s 50 most powerful businesswomen this year, the magazine said on Thursday.

Mayumi Kotani, president of Japanese industrial robot maker Yushin Precision Equipment Co, was lauded by the magazine for her success in a male-dominated manufacturing sector.

Takako Suzuki heads ST Corp, a major Japanese maker of mothproofing agents, deodorizers and air fresheners founded by her father.

The magazine said her company reaped over $400 million in sales in the year through March 2014 and also practices gender diversity, with four women among its nine board directors. Forbes said its selection is based on factors such as the women being active in the upper echelons of the business world in Asia, wielding significant power, and having access to robust financial resources.

China dominated the list, with women keeping the mainland, followed by India and Thailand with six each on the list. —Kyodo News

Russian’s Gazprom says can exempt rebel-held areas from Ukraine gas contract

MOSCOW, 26 Feb — Kremlin-controlled Gazprom said on Thursday it would exempt gas supplies to rebel-held regions from its main contract with Ukrainian Naftogaz, days before Kiev raises gas volumes it has already paid for. The dispute flared up last week when Gazprom said it started direct gas supplies to the regions of eastern Ukraine held by pro-Moscow rebels. Gazette magazine said Naftogaz would have to pay for these supplies to the rebel-held areas. But on Thursday, Gazprom spokesman Sergei Kupriyanov said: “We are ready at the moment to exclude our gas supplies to Donbass from our discussions (with Ukraine).”

He also told the Russian-24 TV channel that Ukraine had prepaid for Russian gas until the end of the week. Gazprom and Ukrainian state energy firm Naftogaz have accused each other of not sticking to agreements on gas supplies.

Kiev has said it was unable to control gas flows to east Ukraine and pay for it. It has earlier accused Gazprom of reducing gas supplies to Ukraine.

When asked if Russia in theory would be ready to supply gas to east Ukraine free of charge, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: “I can not speak of supplies now. But of course, these issues would be urgently considered if needed.”

President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday that Russia would halt gas supplies to Ukraine if it did not receive advance payments, raising the possibility of onward deliveries to Europe being disrupted for the fourth time in a decade.

Europe received around 147 billion cubic meters of Russian gas last year — about a third of its total needs — with roughly 40 percent shipped via Ukraine. The Gazprom spokesman said that Ukraine had only 206 million cubic meters left for which Kiev had already paid.

“With the current level of supplies, prepayment will be enough only up till the end of the week. If Kiev doesn’t make new payments, we, naturally, won’t be able to continue supplying Ukraine with gas,” he said.

Moscow cut off supplies to Kiev last June and restored them only in December, after a Europe-an brokered deal secured supplies through the winter. Under the deal, Ukraine is required to pay in advance for gas. The so-called winter gas deal is due to expire at the end of next month, with Kiev managing to reduce its dependence on direct Russian gas supplies over the last year. —Reuters
US envoy Kennedy sends letter to thank Japanese woman for doll set gift

Tokyo, 26 Feb — US Ambassador to Japan Caroline Kennedy sent a letter on Thursday to thank a 92-year-old woman from Kitami, Hokkaido Prefecture who gifted a set of traditional Japanese dolls decades ago that is now on display at the envoy’s residence in Tokyo.

The letter was delivered to Tsuyako Matsumoto, who now lives in a nursing home in Kitami, by JoEllen Gorg, principal officer at the US Consulate General in Sapporo City, on behalf of Kennedy. — Kyodo News

Weather Report

Forecast valid until evening of the 27th February, 2015: Light rains are likely to be isolated in Kachin State, weather will be partly cloudy in Upper Sagrai and Taninthayi Regions, Northern Shan and Chin States and generally fine in the remaining Regions and States. Degree of certainty is (60%).

Outlook for subsequent two days: likelihood of slight increase of night temperature in the upper Myanmar areas.

Bank Holiday

All Banks will be closed on 2nd March (Monday) “Peanut Day” and 4th (Wednesday) “Full Moon of Tahunang Day” 2015 being public holidays under the Negotiable Instruments Act.

Central Bank of Myanmar
Madonna falls off stage during Brit Awards performance

**London**, 26 Feb — Pop diva Madonna, who fell onstage at the BRIT Awards in London, says she is “fine” after a scary tumble.

Madonna, 56, took to Twitter to blame her tight Armani cape behind her fall from the stage during her night performance on Wednesday.

"Armani hooked me up! My beautiful cape was tied too tight! But nothing can stop me and love really lifted me up! Thanks for your good wishes! I’m fine!,” she wrote.

This was the pop superstar’s return to the awards ceremony after 20 years. She was marred by the fall at the beginning of her set, which prompted audience members to gasp and dancers to surround her after she fell backwards down stairs.

Madonna carried on with the show but appeared to be limping during a dance routine.— PTI

**Los Angeles**, 26 Feb — Actor Jon Voight has expressed his desire to work in a film directed by his daughter Angelina Jolie.

The 76-year-old ‘National Treasure’ actor praised the ‘Unbroken’ director’s skill, reported E! online.

"I think her direction is extraordinary. I had my mouth open. I said, ‘Holy smokes. This is really something.’ She’s a director that really lifted me up! Thanks for your good wishes! I’m fine!,” Voight said at Vanity Fair’s Oscars party.

The actor also slammed the Oscars for snubbing Jolie’s name from the best director nominations list.

Los Angeles, 26 Feb — Jon Voight has expressed his desire to work with Angelina Jolie.—PTI

Imagining Dragons out Drake from Billboard 200 throne

**Los Angeles**, 26 Feb — Alt-rockers Imagine Dragons knocked rapper Drake from the top spot of the weekly US Billboard 200 album chart on Wednesday, after a strategically placed commercial with retail store Target during the Grammy Awards drove up exposure.

“Smoke + Mirrors,” the sophomore album from the Las Vegas band, sold 172,000 copies and 172,000 songs, and was streamed 7.6 million times, bringing its total unit tally to 195,000, according to figures from Nielsen SoundScan.

The Billboard 200 chart tallies album sales, song sales (10 songs equal one album) and streaming activity (1,500 streams equal one album).

Sales of “Smoke + Mirrors” were aided by a Target commercial featuring a live performance by Imagine Dragons during the 8 February CBS telecast of the Grammy Awards, music’s top accolades. Nielsen Music said the band’s commercial reached 10.5 million in the 18-49 demographic that advertisers covet.

Drake’s “If You’re Reading This, It’s Too Late” dropped to No 2 this week with a unit tally of 187,000, while the “Fifty Shades of Grey” soundtrack, which features Beyoncé and Ellie Goulding, dropped one spot to No 3 with 165,000 units.

Imagine Dragons was the only new entry in the top 10 of this week’s album chart. On the digital songs chart, which measures online downloads sales, Mark Ronson and Bruno Mars’ “Uptown Funk!” climbed back to No 1 with 257,000 downloads after being knocked off last week by Ed Sheeran’s “Thinking Out Loud.”

Taylor Swift donates USD 50,000 to New York public schools

**New York**, 26 Feb — Country star Taylor Swift has made a donation of USD 50,000 to New York public schools.

The 25-year-old singer, who has been named a Global Welcome Ambassador for NYC, has given the sum she earned from the sales of her single ‘Welcome to New York’ to support public education in the Big Apple, reported New York Daily News.

Swift made a pledge to donate proceeds from the song during an appearance on ‘The View’ last October.

“Welcome to New York” is good, because I’m donating all of my proceeds to New York City public schools,” the Pennsylvania-born star said back then.

The donation is a one-time deal only. But Swift’s generosity was greatly appreciated.

“We’re deeply appreciative of this kind gesture to donate her proceeds of the single ‘Welcome to New York’ to benefit NYC public schools,” said DeVora Kaye, a spokeswoman for the Department of Education.—PTI

Pop star JJ Lin encourages Singapore students to hone bilingual-bicultural competencies

**Singapore**, 26 Feb — Addressing some 1,000 Singaporean teenage students at the China-Quotient Student Forum 2015 on Wednesday afternoon, Singaporean singer-songwriter JJ Lin encouraged students to upkeep their bilingual-bicultural competencies and pursue their dreams.

Speaking in Chinese, JJ Lin Junjie, 2014 Business China Young Achiever Award recipient, encouraged the students to capitalize on the vast opportunities made available to them within the educational framework, continue to hone their bilingual-bicultural competencies and work hard to realize their potentials.

Jointly organized by Business China and St Andrew’s Junior College (SAJC), the China-Quotient Student Forum 2015 was held at Cultural Centre of SAJC.

Themed “Daring to Dream, Acting with Bilin
guism and Biculturalism”, the highly interactive forum attracted youths and students from more than 20 Junior Colleges, IP Schools, Polytechnics, Universities and other Institutes of Higher Learnings (ILHS).

AKB48 Theater welcomes 1 millionth visitor since opening in 2005

**Tokyo**, 26 Feb — The AKB48 Theater in Tokyo’s Akihabara district, the base for all-girl pop group AKB48, on Wednesday welcomed its 1 millionth visitor since opening on 8 December, 2005.

There were only seven people in the audience during the first performance in the 250-seat theater of the group, which has churned out a host of million-seller singles in recent years.

Yui Yokoyama, a 22-year-old leading member of AKB48, thanked fans of the idol group and said, “We will join forces to achieve 2 million and 3 million visitors from now on.”

The 1 millionth visitor to the theater was a 19-year-old university student from Osaka Prefecture.— Kyodo News

Imagine Dragons perform during the half-time show at the CFL’s 102nd Grey Cup football championship between the Calgary Stampeders and the Hamilton Tiger Cats in Vancouver, British Columbia, on 30 Nov, 2014.— Reuters
Japan's Nishikori reaches last 8 in Acapulco

Acapulco (Mexico), 26 Feb — Japan's world No 5 Kei Nishikori reached the quarterfinals of the Mexico Open on Wednesday with a comfortable straight-sets win over Taipei in the second round of the Mexico Open in Acapulco on 25 Feb, 2015. — Kyodo


German company to help Albania build power line connection with Italy

Tirana, 26 Feb — Albania has signed an agreement with a German company for a power line connection project between Albania and Italy, Albanian Daily News reported on Thursday.

Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama greeted the agreement signed by Albanian Minister of Energy and Industry Damian Gjiknuri and German company Max Streicher as “good news”.

An agreement was signed in Germany on a power line connection with Italy. This is key to energy restoration in the country,” Rama wrote in his Twitter account. The connection project, at a cost of up to 200 million euros, is seen with much interest by the European Union because it can provide energy security and integrate the Southeast Europe region with the European energy market.— Xinhua

Average weekly Australian income rises to 1,477 Australian dollars

Sydney, 26 Feb — The average weekly earnings for full-time workers in Australia rose 2.8 per cent to 1,477 Australian dollars (1,160 US dollars) in the 12 months up to November, the Australian Bureau of Statistics said on Thursday.

That equates to an annual income of 76,804 Australian dollars (60,262 US dollars).

The average ordinary full-time gross earnings for men came in at 1,587.50 Australian dollars (1,246.86 US dollars) a week, while women earned 1,289.40 Australian dollars (1,012.09 US dollars), the statistics agency said.

The agency said factors contributing to the pay rise include variations in the proportion of full-time, part-time, casual and junior employees, variations in the occupational distribution within and across industries, and variations in the distribution of employment between industries.
University students join rowing contest

YANGON, 26 Feb — Yangon Universities’ Boat Club organized the Inter-University/College (Yangon) Rowing Contest at Inya Lake in Kamayut Township, here, on 25 February.

Rector of University of Economics Dr Daw Khin Naing Oo extended greetings and greeted the rowers. Student rowers participated in 62 matches of the men’s and women’s singles events, men’s and women’s doubles events, four-oar event, men’s and women’s two-oar event and Myanmar traditional Dragon boat event.

The final matches of rowing contest will be held tomorrow in conjunction with the prize presentation ceremony.—Khin Cho Win

Mon athlete secures champion in decathlon event

NAY PYI TAW, 26 Feb — Union Minister for Sports U Tint Hsan visited a gymnasium to inspect preparations for a marathon event for Eternal Factory workers.

U Tint Hsan visited stadium and inspected construction of gymnasiums where a marathon event is being organized. He inspected preparations of gymnasiums where weights and boxing events are being held.

Minister U Myat Thein and other sportswomen and sportswomen attended the ceremony.—MNA

Monaco heap more Champions League agony on Arsenal

LONDON, 26 Feb — AS Monaco gave Arsenal a lesson in patient, counter-attacking football to win their Champions League last 16 first leg match 3-1 in London on Wednesday, heaping more European agony on Arsene Wenger.

Arsenal boss Wenger, a former manager at Monaco, is now facing elimination at this stage of the competition for the fifth straight season after the shattering home defeat.

French midfielder Geoffrey Kondogbia put the visitors ahead after 38 minutes, when he crashed in a long range shot that took a deflection off Arsenal defender Per Mertesacker, leaving goalkeeper David Ospina helpless.

Monaco, who had won eight of their last nine matches in all competitions, flew out of the blocks against his old team, testing the resilience of Monaco’s rock-solid defence with a series of early raids.

Monaco’s rock-solid defence with a series of early raids.

Alexis Sanchez (C) of Arsenal controls the ball during the UEFA Champions League Round of 16 first leg match between Arsenal and Monaco at the Emirates Stadium in London, Britain, on 25 Feb, 2015. Monaco won 3-1.—XINHUA

The union minister attended the lifting of Karate-Edo contest and greeted athletes and referees. He watched participation of Yi Nway Tun of Shan State and Yin Hua of Chin State in the women’s singles Kata event.

The union minister inspected construction of the Sports University near Nay Pyi Taw Sports Training Centre. He also attended a coordination meeting on formation of Coach Association at the centre.

Defence Services Inspection and Auditor-General (Army, Navy and Air) Lt-Gen Soe Thein presented prizes to winners in the men’s marathon event and enjoyed Karate-Edo, weightlifting and boxing events.—MNA

An athlete enters finishing line in men’s marathon at Wunna Theikdi Stadium in Nay Pyi Taw.—MNA

Two boxers compete for title at Wunna Theikdi Stadium.—MNA


State/Region Gold Silver Bronze Total

Yangon 79 53 40 172
Mandalay 45 48 58 151
Bago 23 22 27 72
Magway 20 13 14 47
Nay Pyi Taw 15 8 17 40
Ayeyawady 14 18 35 67
Rakhine 12 15 25 52
Kayin 12 7 8 27
Mon 11 25 27 63
Kayah 11 11 13 35
Sagaing 8 15 16 39
Kachin 8 11 13 32
Taninthayi 7 12 23 42
Shan 4 13 27 44
Chin 3 2 2 7