President U Thein Sein witnesses signing of draft nationwide ceasefire agreement in Yangon

NAY PYI TAW, 31 March—President U Thein Sein witnessed the signing of a draft nationwide ceasefire agreement between the Union Peace-making Working Committee and the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team at the Myanmar Peace Centre in Yangon on Tuesday, according to officials.

Before the signing ceremony, the president cordially greeted members of both sides, calling them the builders of peace as desired by the people.

The draft agreement came after several rounds of talks, which the president described as a significant step towards the signing of the nationwide ceasefire agreement.

The signing will pave the way for political dialogue, he said, adding that potential obstacles can be overcome through negotiations between the two sides.

The move was seen as the “Second Panglong Victory”, which is historic and significant for national consolidation, he noted.

The draft nationwide ceasefire agreement was signed by the UPWC and NCCT. Signatories of the UPWC were U Aung Min, U Thein Zaw, Lt-Gen Myint Soe, Union Minister Lt-Gen Thet Naing Win and Member of Parliament U Khet Hein Nan. Signatories on the NCCT side were U Naing Han Tha, Pado Saw Kwe Htoo Win, Maj-Gen Gnan Maw, Dr Salai Lianmong Sakhoung and Col Khun Okkar.

Peace negotiators vow to strengthen cooperation after approving text for nationwide ceasefire

Peace negotiators from the UPWC and NCCT open the floor to questions from the media at the Myanmar Peace Centre in Yangon on Tuesday.

By Ye Myint

YANGON, 31 March—Peace negotiators from the government and ethnic armed groups concluded talks on a single text for the nationwide ceasefire accord, aimed at ending more than 60 years of internal conflicts in Myanmar, with the release of two joint statements Tuesday.

The single text will be presented to the leaders of both sides for approval, with a specific schedule and a list of signatories to a truce deal to be set after coordination between the Union Peace-making Working Committee and Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team, the first joint statement said.

In the second joint statement following the seventh national ceasefire accord meeting, both sides stressed the need for further cooperation to prevent the recurrence of armed conflicts during the implementation of the peace process.

In his address, U Nai Hong Sar, who led the NCCT, said there are likely to be few amendments to the tentative agreements achieved in the single text while seeking approval of leaders at the ethnic conference which is likely to be held next month, with a specific date yet to be arranged.

The government side will seek no further amendments to the approved single text and is looking forward to setting a date for signing the pact with ethnic armed groups, said Union Minister U Aung Min, who led the UPWC.

The sooner the two sides signed the ceasefire agreement, the quicker the two ongoing political dialogues and coordination meetings on the NCCT side could ensure peace with congratulation.

President U Thein Sein enjoyed a luncheon with members of UPWC and NCCT and left for Nay Pyi Taw in the afternoon.—MNA

Peace deal: Not only high expectation, but also bright daybreak of peace

By Ye Myint

NAY PYI TAW, 31 March—Government-backed Union Peace-making Working Committee and Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team of 16 ethnic armed groups have made a draft ceasefire deal on Tuesday.

Regarding the draft pact, President U Thein Sein said Myanmar has seen an auspicious day with both high expectation and bright daybreak of peace, urging all the participants make more attempts for lasting peace in near future.

Union Minister U Ye Htut also said Myanmar has marked two historic milestones of Tuesday’s draft ceasefire deal and inaugural speech of President U Thein Sein who vowed to open up reform efforts this day of four years ago.

The union minister added while there are a number of presidents and armed group leaders who won the wars in the chronicles, only few number of them could ensure peace for the country, referring to President U Thein Sein and Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing with congratulation.

U Ye Htut noted that all must keep patience to be able to sign ceasefire agreement through dialogues based on the draft deal with ethnic leaders and guarantee lasting peace and ethnic rights.

He also remarked that successive governments in Myanmar tried to resolve internal conflicts in their own ways, while President U Thein Sein attempted for ceasefire with more armed groups through alternative approach. (See page 3)
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw approves Union Budgets bill

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw representatives discuss Union Budget Bill for 2015.—MNA

Netherlands’ Queen Máxima says mobile technology key to financial inclusion

By Aye Min Soe

Yangon, 31 March — Queen Máxima of the Netherlands on Tuesday urged Myanmar to capitalize on the rapid increase in mobile phone services and other digital technologies, saying the country has a “unique opportunity” to overcome challenges and expand its recently adopted Financial Inclusion Roadmap.

“Those countries have relied on traditional infrastructure such as physical structures. Other countries have relied on less-advantaged sections of society,” said. “We know that sustainable and inclusive development never happens overnight, but we also know that by taking lessons from other countries, you can go faster and evade mistakes made elsewhere,” Queen Máxima said.

Today’s students will be the first generation to benefit from the financial inclusion that will be central to making a lasting leap forward for Myanmar, she said.

During her opening address, Queen Máxima also expressed her delight at Myanmar’s efforts for developing a detailed road map to significantly expand financial inclusion responsibly, taking into account the needs of customers as well as banks and government.

After her address at the University of Yangon, Queen Máxima visited the World Vision which is conducting a microfinance programme in 10 villages/wards in Myanmar in Hmawby Township.

She began her three-day visit to Myanmar on Monday and held talks with representatives of banks, microfinance institutions and telecom providers in Yangon.

The UN Secretary-General’s Special Advocate for Inclusive Finance for Development, the Dutch royal told a meeting of ministers, policymakers and students at the Convocation Hall of the University of Yangon that “Myanmar has an exciting chance to leap far ahead with financial inclusion thanks to the rapid rise of mobile phone services and other digital technologies.”

“Other countries have relied on traditional infrastructure such as physical structures. Other countries have relied on less-advantaged sections of society,” said. “We know that sustainable and inclusive development never happens overnight, but we also know that by taking lessons from other countries, you can go faster and evade mistakes made elsewhere,” Queen Máxima said.

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The UN Secretary-General’s Special Advocate for Inclusive Finance for Development will attend the launch of the Financial Inclusion Roadmap in Nay Pyi Taw Wednesday.
Union Minister U Khin Yi, a member of UPWC, recounted peace broker body’s efforts to overcome many differences and disputes to sign the peace deal after nearly four years through eagerness of participant groups and peace roadmap laid by state leaders.

He remarked that development and peace are interdependent, saying ‘No peace will bear no development’, with the expectation of political dialogues after 60 days of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement which is expected to realize on.

U Saw Kwe Htoo Win of Karen National Union also commented the draft agreement was resulted from mutual understandings among the participants, saying he felt hopeful that prospective changes could be made for the welfare of the State.

NAY PYI TAW, 31 March—Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham held talks with Admiral Muhammad Zakaullah NI (M), Chief of Naval Staff of Pakistan and party at the Presidential Palace, here, Tuesday.

They discussed further strengthening friendly ties between governments and peoples between the two countries and promotion of cooperation in trade and maritime security.

Also present at the call were Commander-in-Chief (Navy) Admiral Thura Kyaw Kyaw Tun, Deputy Minister for Defence Maj-Gen Kyaw Nyunt, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs U Tin Oo Lwin and Deputy Minister at the President Office Dr San Lwin.

The Pakistani admiral and party were accompanied by Pakistani Ambassador Mr Ehsan Ullah Batth.

Vice President U Nyan Tun observes hydropower plant in Laos

NAY PYI TAW, 31 March—Vice President U Nyan Tun visited Nam Ngum Hydropower Plant No.1 here on Tuesday and heard briefings on the energy sector of Laos, a 15-year plan for nationwide power supply and the use of solar energy for rural power supply.

After signing in the visitors’ book of the hydropower plant, the vice president observed the generation of electricity at the hydropower plant.

He also went on a boat trip in the Nam Ngum Dam and observed tourist sites and environmental observation activities there.

In 1996, Laos could generate 9,514 megawatts of electricity in 2020, up from 3,329 in 2015. There are five hydropower plants in the Nam Ngum River.

In the evening, the vice president and his wife went to the Myanmar Embassy, where he met staff and their families.
MandalaMy-Myotha road 75 percent complete

Mandala, 31 March—The Department of Rural Development commissioned Dana Phyo Maung DNPP Company to pave the 20-mile-long Natogyi-Myotha road in Natogyi Township, Mandalay Region.

Three construction teams of the company are laying asphalt concrete on the road in sections with the aim of completing it within five months.

The teams were also assigned duty to build the Myotha-Tawza ek, Wetlu-Pechet and Pechet-Htan- zin sections, with work 75 percent complete.

The department allotted K1,163 billion for construction of the road to link over 30 villages along its route.

Natogyi, 31 March—The president of Myanmar’s Chinlone governing body met with international sporting federation representatives Monday to discuss the staging of competitive events for the country’s traditional sport.

U Soe Naing, who is vice president of the Asian Chinlone Federation and president of the Myanmar Chinlone Federation, met with Mr. Dato Abdul Halim bin Kader and Mr Boonschai Lorhpipat of the International Sepak Takraw Federation, Dr Chalerm and officials at National Indoor Stadium-1.

They discussed the staging of Chinlone events in the 28th and 29th SEA Games, how to judge winners in competitive Chinlone, approval of rules and techniques, and dissemination of techniques for Chinlone events to enthusiasts.

They viewed Chinlone demonstrations incorporating new techniques and rules.—SPED

Mandalay police try to reduce traffic accidents during Maha Thingyan festival

Mandalay, 31 March—Members of No 11 Traffic Police Branch will control traffic during 2015 Maha Thingyan festival period while Mandalay Region Police Force will take action against drug users and weapon holders.

“Our branch will assign 296 traffic police in downtown Mandalay for easing traffic congestion. Police and local authorities urge local residents to abide by traffic rules and not to drink alcohol during the Maha Thingyan festival,” Police Major Thein Ko Ko of No 11 Traffic Police Branch said.

Traffic police will take action against bikes without number plates and exhaust pipes, as well as unlicenced riders.

Security personnel will be assigned to roads along moats and in Mandalay Royal City, Mandalay Kandawgyi Lake and Taungthaman Bridge, the commander of the district police force told media.

During the 2013 Maha Thingyan festival period, 11 people died and 66 were injured in 30 traffic accidents, but only 23 people were injured in three accidents during the same period last year.

Min Htet Aung (Mandalay Sub-printing House)

Toshiba to supply four power generators and equipment for hydroelectric plant in Myanmar

Tokyo, 31 March—Toshiba Corporation on 30 March announced that its Chinese subsidiary has won a major order to supply turbines and generators for Myanmar Electric Power Enterprise’s Upper Yeywa hydropower plant.

Toshiba Hydro Power (Hangzhou) Co., which manufactures, sells and maintain hydroelectric equipment, will supply four units of its 77-megawatt hydro turbine and generator for the 308MW Upper Yeywa Hydropower Plant that Myanmar Electric Power Enterprise will build northeast of Mandalay.

Deliveries to the project’s EPC contractor, China’s Zhejiang Orient Engineering Co., Ltd., will start in March 2016. Toshiba Group previously supplied a hydraulic turbine for the 28.4MW Sedawgyi hydroelectric power plant in 1989, making this the second commission from Myanmar.—GNLM

ISTAF officials discuss techniques, rules of Chinlone

Yangon, 31 March—The president of Myanmar’s Chinlone governing body met with international sporting federation representatives Monday to discuss the staging of competitive events for the country’s traditional sport.

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They viewed Chinlone demonstrations incorporating new techniques and rules.—SPED
Industrial trainees to undertake 3-year internship in Japan

Mandaly, 31 March — The Directorate of Industries under the Ministry of Industry in cooperation with Myanmar Sankou Co Ltd kicked off the Japanese Language and Mechanical Course No 1 at Mandalay’s No 2 Industrial Training School on Monday. The school has admitted 60 trainees for the training course as of 30 March. The trainees are to study theory and workshop training, Japanese language, as well as Japan’s lifestyle and culture. Upon completion, they will be assigned to factories and workshops in Japan under a three-year internship period.

Director-General U Thwin Myint Maung of the Directorate of Industries spoke at the opening of the training course, which was also attended by Mandalay Region Minister for Electric Power and Industry U Kyaw Myint, CEO Mr Tsuda Shunji of Myanmar Sankou Co Ltd and entrepreneurs of the Mandalay Industrial Zone.

Tin Maung (Mandalay)

Fulltime power supply illuminates rural area

Nay Pyi Taw, 31 March — A ceremony to launch the fulltime supply of electricity was held at Naseimin village in Pobbatuhi Township on Tuesday, with Nay Pyi Taw Council member U Than Htay in attendance.

Township Administrator U Htet Aung Phyo and District Electrical Engineer U Myo Thant Tun switched on the power supply.

The new road, funded with K74.81 million allotted by the Department of Rural Development in the 2014-15 fiscal year, benefits 157 villages from Mezaligon, Htugyi and Nyaunggyo stations in the township.

Township DRD

Earthen road links three stations in Ingapu Tsp

Ingapu, 31 March — The 5.5-mile-long Mezaligon-Ingauk-Ohgwe earthen road was commissioned into service in Ingapu Township, Ayeyawady Region, on 25 March.

Township Administrator U Hlwai Moe Han and officials cut the ribbon to open the new earthen road.

The new road, funded with K74.81 million allotted by the Department of Rural Development in the 2014-15 fiscal year, benefits 157 villages from Mezaligon, Htugyi and Nyaunggyo stations in the township.

Township DRD

Myanaung Tsp authorities to hold Maha Thingyan festival on a grand scale

Myanaung, 31 March — A meeting on crime reduction during the Maha Thingyan festival period in 2015 was held at the hall of Township Police Station in Myanaung, Ayeyawady Region, in the last week of March.

Township Administrator U Min Min Tun and Commander of Township Police Force Police Major Tun Pe outlined plans to check that medical stores are not selling banned drugs and that accommodation providers do not give lodging to people engaging in antisocial behaviour.

Police officers discussed prevention of traffic accidents in the festival period.

Township development affairs supporting committee and departmental officials reported on arrangements for holding the festival on a grand scale.

Win Bo (Township IPRD)

Golf tournament turns out outstanding youth golfers

Yangon, 31 March — The 6th Junior Golf Myanmar Tournament 2015 concluded at City Golf Resort in Insein Township, in the last week of March, with Deputy Minister for Sports U Thaung Htaik in attendance.

At the end of the two-day tournament organized by Junior Golf Myanmar, General Secretary of Myanmar Golf Federation U Aung Hla Han presented first prize to Hein Sithu with 145 strokes, second to Min Naing Soe with 149 and third to Kyaw Zin Tun with 150 in the U-24 event.

Officials also awarded winners in the U-10, U-12 and U-15 events respectively.—GNLM

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Win Bo (Township IPRD)
Indonesia launches military exercises to guard against security threats

JAKARTA, 31 March — Indonesia launched military exercises in the eastern island of Sulawesi, a haven for radical Islamists, as part of the exercise. The drills come amid heightened government concerns over a rising number of Indonesians pledging loyalty to Islamic State (IS) and trying to join the group fighting in Iraq and Syria.

“IS is a potential security threat ... so we’re preparing our forces to respond to that,” said military spokesman Major General Mochamad Fuad Basya. He described the exercises as routine and said similar drills would be held elsewhere in Indonesia.

“The target is to make sure our forces are ready for any threat and for a deterrent effect to radicals in that area,” he said.

Indonesia has the world’s largest Muslim population, the vast majority of which practices a moderate form of the religion. It saw a spate of militant attacks in the 2000s, the deadliest of which was a nightclub bombing on the holiday island of Bali that killed 202 people, most of them tourists.

Police have been largely successful in destroying domestic militant cells since then, but officials now worry about a resurgence in militancy inspired by groups like Islamic State and Indonesians who return after fighting with the group.

The government, which banned Islamic State teachings and activities, launched a campaign last month to erase radical websites and videos this month. Karnavian said.

The home affairs ministry is preparing to revise anti-terrorism laws to allow authorities to closely monitor suspicious travel, Indonesian media reported. Police have said between 200 and 300 Indonesians have left to join IS, but some security experts believe the figure could be higher.

Up to 32 Indonesian citizens were detained in Turkey earlier this month while trying to cross the border into Syria, suspected of trying to join Islamic State.

Singapore teen charged in court over video blasting Lee Kuan Yew

SINGAPORE, 31 March — A 16-year-old boy was charged in a Singapore court on Tuesday for allegedly separately posting an obscene picture depicting Lee in a sexual position.

Police arrested him on Sunday.

He then turned up in court on Tuesday in a black T-shirt with his father. After the court proceeding, the boy’s father commented to reporters outside the courtroom, saying he was very sorry to Lee’s son, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, for what had happened.

The judge approved his bail at S$20,000 (about $14,500) and set the next court hearing for 17 April.

In a statement late on Monday, the police said it had received more than 20 complaints between Friday and Sunday about the video that “contained, in part, insensitive and disparaging remarks about Christians.”

It convicted, he could be imprisoned for up to three years, or fined, for making insensitive comments about a religion. He could be fined or imprisoned for up to three months, or both, for the charge of posting sexually obscene material and faces a fine of up to $5,000 for the insulting comments.

The senior Lee, Singapore’s founding prime minister who ruled Singapore from 1959 to 1990, died on 23 March and was given a huge state funeral on Sunday.

He is still highly revered in Singapore and also respected internationally for his role in transforming Singapore from a backward colonial outpost to one of Asia’s wealthiest economies.

But he has also been criticized for his authoritarian style of leadership that tolerated little political dissent and also restricted freedom of speech and media.

Heavy rains trigger flood fears in Kashmir; 17 dead

SRINAGAR, India, 31 March — Heavy rains and a landslide in the Himalayan region of Kashmir killed 17 people, police said on Tuesday, as Indian authorities continued working to rescue stranded villagers, with unseasonal rains raising fears of flash floods in the mountainous north.

Fifteen people were killed when a landslide collapsed on a house in Ledhan village, about 40 km (25 miles) from the capital Srinagar, before dawn on Monday. Army and police used shovels and dugs to search for those missing.

The past month has been the wettest in more than a century, and damage to crops has been blamed for a spate of farmer suicides in recent weeks. —Reuters

Western Pacific Partnership (TPP)

Vietnam hit by rare strike at major footwear factory

HANOI, 31 March — Thousands of workers at a major factory in southern Vietnam went on strike for a fifth day on Tuesday in protest over social insurance cover, in rare show of labour unrest in a country positioning itself as a future Asian manufacturing powerhouse.

Witnesses in the industrialized suburbs of Ho Chi Minh City said hundreds of workers massed peacefully inside and outside the factory owned by Pou Yuen Vietnam, a footwear maker for firms that include Nike Inc and Adidas and brands like Lacoste, Converse and Reebok.

Pou Yuen, which employs close to 80,000 workers, is controlled by Chinese shoemaker Yue Yuen Industrial Holdings Ltd, a subsidiary of Taipei-listed Pou Chon Corp. Strikes and protests are rare in communist Vietnam, which has been tightly controlled by one party for four decades. It is known for taking decisive action to thwart the kind of labour and civil unrest that has affected other textile manufacturers in China and Cambodia.

That has earned Vietnam a reputation as a safe bet for firms like Gap, H&M and Inditex’s Zara. Such companies have helped fuel annual export growth of 15.8 percent last year in garments, to $20.8 billion, and 21.6 percent in footwear, to $10.2 billion.

Workers blocked nearby streets on Monday, according to news websites of some state-run media, which has given the issue only limited coverage. VN Express reported several nearby factories closed for security reasons.

The employees are disgruntled about a social insurance law taking effect from 2016, which restricts the scope of entitlements for a lump sum payment if they leave.

The parent companies of the Vietnamese firm gave no immediate comment and city officials were trying to settle the dispute.

“The company has given them a day off today and we are holding dialogue with workers,” Nguyen Tran Phuong Tran, deputy chairwoman of the city’s Labour Union, told Reuters.

The strike is another blow for a factory that was among dozens hit by anti-China rioting last year during a maritime diplomatic row between Hanoi and Beijing.

It comes as Vietnam’s tries to lure big firms with its cheap labour, tax breaks and its looming accession to Free Trade Agreements (FTA) with its biggest export partners.

Vietnam is in the final stages of FTA talks with the European Union and hopes soon to conclude a Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) in a region covering 40 percent of global GDP, including the United States, Japan and Australia. —Reuters

Thai PM asks king’s permission to lift martial law

REUTERS

BANGKOK, 31 March — Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said on Tuesday he has asked for King Bhumibol Adulyadej’s permission to lift martial law which has been in place nationwide since before a May coup.

The law, among other things, bans all political gatherings and gives the military sweeping powers of arrest and detention.

“I have asked for the king’s permission to lift martial law. The power is now with His Majesty,” Prayuth told reporters, adding that he would replace martial law with Article 44 in the interim constitution.

Tour operators had urged the junta to lift martial law, particularly in an attempt to attract many tourists, in order to boost the sector after months of protests in 2014 took a toll on international visitors to Thailand. —Reuters
Iran, powers rush for nuclear deal as clock ticks toward deadline

Lausanne, (Switzerland), 31 March — Iran and six world powers ramped up the pace of negotiations on Tuesday ahead of a deadline for a preliminary nuclear deal that was less than 24 hours away, as both sides warned it was crucial to overcome differences that could wreck an agreement.

For nearly a week the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China have been trying to break an impasse in negotiations aimed at stopping Iran from having the capacity to develop a nuclear bomb, in exchange for an easing of international sanctions that are crippling its economy.

But disagreements on enrichment research and the pace of lifting sanctions threatened to scupper a deal that could end a 12-year standoff between Iran and the West over Tehran’s nuclear ambitions and reduce the risk of another Middle East war.

“We need to get this done now,” a Western official told Reuters on condition of anonymity. “We only have a few hours left to get a framework agreement or the job is going to become much, much more difficult.”

Officials in the Swiss city of Lausanne said talks on a framework accord, which is intended as a prelude to a comprehensive agreement by the end of June, could get lost after Tuesday. They have set a deadline of midnight on Tuesday for a framework agreement, but officials from all sides say it was possible the talks could run past the deadline.

“There still remain some difficult issues,” US Secretary of State John Kerry told CNN. “We are working very hard to work those through. We are working into the night.”

Both Iran and the six world powers have floated compromise proposals but agreement has not been reached. Western officials said Teheran has recently backed away from proposals it previously indicated it would accept, such as placing shipping enriched uranium stocks to Russia.

But a US State Department official said there was never a definite agreement on shipping uranium stocks abroad and other options existed to resolve the issue. Officials close to the talks said dilution of the stockpiled uranium was an option.

The goal of the negotiations is to find a way to ensure that for at least the next 10 years Iran is at least one year away from the ability to produce enough fissile material for an atomic weapon. In exchange for temporary limits on its most sensitive atomic activities, Teheran wants an end to sanctions.

“Our feeling is that this is the moment,” a Western diplomat close to the talks said. “Either we get a deal or not. Because if we don’t come out of this period with some type of framework accord (agreement) it’s going to be difficult to explain why we would even get one on 30 June.”

Iran and the six powers have twice extended the deadline for a long-term agreement after reaching an interim accord in November 2013. They set a goal of securing a framework agreement by the end of March and a comprehensive accord with all technical details settled by 30 June.

Assessments from negotiators close to the talks have been swinging between being pessimistic and optimism since they arrived in Lausanne nearly a week ago. All sides say an agreement is possible but uncertain.

With the US Congress warning it will consider imposing new US sanctions on Iran if there is no agreement this week, there is a sense of urgency in the talks.

“With Congress, the Iranian hawks and a Middle East situation where nobody’s exactly getting on, I’m not convinced we’ll get a second chance if this fails,” the Western diplomat said.

“If we don’t have any type of framework agreement now, it will be difficult to explain why we would be able to have one by 30 June,” he added.

US President Barack Obama has warned that the US could veto any sanctions moves by the Republican-dominated Congress.

Officials close to the talks said the most difficult sticking points remain the removal of UN sanctions and Iranian demands for the lifting of temporary limits on its atomic activities in exchange for temporary limits on its atomic activities.

A US State Department official said “without a specific deadline in mind, our feeling is that there will be no agreement this week, there will be no agreement now, it will be difficult to explain why we would even get one on 30 June.”

Western officials said the two sides had previously been closing in on a preliminary deal that could be summarized in a brief document that may or may not be released.

The six powers want more than a 10-year suspension of Iran’s most sensitive nuclear work. Tehran, which denies it is pursuing warlike activities, has campaigned against the US sanctions proposals.

“The issue is very important for us,” said a key US official.

Even if a framework deal is reached by the Tuesday deadline, officials say it could still fall apart when the two sides attempt to agree on all the technical details for the comprehensive accord by the end of June.

JAPAN: Japan not to join China-led investment bank

Tokyo, 31 March — The Japanese government remained cautious about joining a planned Chinese-led Asian development bank on Tuesday, effectively deciding not to indicate its participation by the deadline China has set for accepting founding members.

“There is no need to participate hastily,” Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told a meeting of his Liberal Democratic Party, referring to the proposed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, according to a participant.

Abe also noted to such remaining concerns as governance standards and the screening process for providing loans at the institution.

The prime minister added, “The United States now knows that Japan is trustworthy,” after Tokyo sided with Washington in keeping its careful stance toward the AIIB, though most of other Group of Seven nations such as Britain and Germany have announced they will take part.

Finance Minister Taro Aso said on Tuesday the government has not decided whether to join the AIIB but is giving serious consideration to joining the bank on the condition that “the proposed institution clears such standards and the screening process that we are looking for.”

Finance Ministry officials said an agreement for the bank to be established later this year, with an initial capital of around $50 billion, with China planning to be the biggest stakeholder.

Japan will continue to call on China to provide such explanation in collaboration with other countries “without a specific deadline in mind,” Kishida said.

Chinese President Xi Jinping announced last year a project to set up the bank in Beijing with initial capital of around $50 billion, with China planning to be the biggest stakeholder.

The bank will offer loans for construction of infrastructure, such as roads, ports and railways in developing and emerging countries, and is set to be established later this year, according to China.

The United States, Japan and some other countries have been wary about their participation because the initiative is seen as expanding China’s global influence and as a challenge to Washington-dominated existing institutions such as the World Bank.

While US officials have expressed wariness over the AIIB, telling a Press conference “we have no choice but to be very cautious about participation” unless the proposed institution clears such conditions as securing fair governance and debt sustainability.

As a condition for Japan’s participation in the AIIB, Aso also called for loans to be screened from the standpoint of their environmental and social impact, and for the bank board to approve projects individually. Their remit is now more “prudent” countries to move away from a plan which included being able to have one by the end of March and a comprehensive accord with all technical details settled by 30 June.

Assessments from negotiators close to the talks have been swinging between being pessimistic and optimism since they arrived in Lausanne nearly a week ago. All sides say an agreement is possible but uncertain.

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Ocean warming suggests 50 per cent chance of El Nino

Sydney, 31 March — Recent warming of the Pacific Ocean may signal an El Nino weather event is forming, the Australian Bureau of Meteorology said on Tuesday.

“Climate models indicate the central tropical Pacific Ocean is likely to continue to warm, with El Nino thresholds to be reached or exceeded by mid-year, the weather bureau said.

“There is about a 50 percent chance of El Nino developing in the coming months, which is the normal likelihood,” the bureau said. Should an El Nino eventuate, the system would likely bring below-average winter and spring rainfall over eastern Australia and above-average daytime temperatures over the southern half of Australia. Such climatic conditions would prove a blow for Australian wheat production, which is reliant on rains in winter and spring.

Wheat production is expected to total 24.39 million tonnes in the 2015/16 season starting July 1, Australia’s chief commodity forecaster said this month, up 3 percent from this year’s 23.61 million tonnes. Wheat production from Australia’s east coast has suffered two consecutive seasons of poor production as dry weather curbed yields. Another season of poor wheat production from Australian east coast farmers will also extend the headwinds for GrainCorp Ltd, the country’s largest bulk grain handler. GrainCorp said in February its 2015/16 full-year earnings are expected to total 24.39 million tonnes in the 2015/16 season starting July 1, Australia’s chief commodity forecaster said this month, up 3 percent from this year’s 23.63 million tonnes.

With Congress, the Iranian hawks and a Middle East situation where nobody’s exactly getting on, I’m not convinced we’ll get a second chance if this fails,” the Western diplomat said.

“If we don’t have any type of framework agreement now, it will be difficult to explain why we would even get one on 30 June.”

Western officials said the two sides had previously been closing in on a preliminary deal that could be summarized in a brief document that may or may not be released.

The six powers want more than a 10-year suspension of Iran’s most sensitive nuclear work. Tehran, which denies it is pursuing warlike activities, has campaigned against the US sanctions proposals.

“The issue is very important for us,” said a key US official.

Even if a framework deal is reached by the Tuesday deadline, officials say it could still fall apart when the two sides attempt to agree on all the technical details for the comprehensive accord by the end of June.

A surfer looks at waves as storm clouds move in from the Pacific Ocean at Sydney’s Manly Beach on 26 August, 2014.
How safe is your food?

Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, Regional Director, World Health Organization
South-East Asia Region.

How often do we ask ourselves if the food we are eating is safe? Do we know if it is free of bacteria, viruses, parasites, chemicals, other contaminants, additives and adulterants which can cause over 200 diseases ranging from diarrhoea to cancer? Every year diarrhoea caused by contaminated food and water kills 2.2 million people, including 1.9 million children, globally. Unsafe food and water kills an estimated 700,000 children in WHO’s South-East Asia Region every year. Access to safe food remains a challenge in the Region. Whether as individuals, families, farmers, contributors to and handlers of the food chain or policy makers, we need to make food safety our priority.

Food safety is critical for public health as foodborne diseases affect people’s health and well-being. Unsafe food creates a vicious cycle of disease and malnutrition, particularly affecting infants, young children, the elderly and the sick. Foodborne diseases impede socio-economic development by straining health care systems and adversely impacting national economies, tourism and trade.

Since food passes through multiple hands from the farm to reach our plates, ensuring food safety requires multisectoral collaboration. The approach needs to be preventive - to improve food safety and quality through application of good farming practices by using agro chemicals or veterinary drugs only in the prescribed amount. Good storage, transportation, retail and restaurant practices are equally important to make food safe.

Strengthening food safety policies, enforcement and collaboration among consumers and policy makers in the Region and globally.

The staff officer expressed concern that food safety concerns and policies were not always enforced for food destined for the domestic market. Food safety and quality should be ensured through stringent control and inspection mechanisms for export as well as the domestic market.

Adulteration of food is another problem as food safety is emerging in the Region. The approach needs to be preventive - to improve food safety and quality through application of good farming practices by using agro chemicals or veterinary drugs only in the prescribed amount. Good storage, transportation, retail and restaurant practices are equally important to make food safe.

Food safety is a shared responsibility of members with microfinance institutions, consumers and food safety authorities in partner countries. Some countries have taken novel and notable initiatives such as the mobile food courts in Bangladesh, the establishment of a Food Standard and Safety Authority in India, and certification of street food vendors with a “Clean Food, Good Taste” logo in Thailand.

This year’s World Health Day theme focuses on food safety. Food safety must be a component of national health, food, agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, water, sanitation and environmental-related programmes. Food safety is a shared responsibility. Let us work together to make our food safe and to contribute to better health of people.

People join cooperative society in Aungmyay Village, Hkamti Tsp

HUAMNTHA, 31 March—Staff Officer U Myo Tun of Township Cooperative Department and executive U Kyaw Thein of Township Cooperative Syndicate gave talks on cooperative society to local residents in Aungmyay Village in Hkamti Township, Sagaing Region, on 30 March.

The staff officer explained cooperative policies, microfinance, purchase of agricultural machinery through installment loan. The cooperative society’s executive gave a lecture on socioeconomic development of local residents based on microfinance, and dispersal of loans to rural people.

After the talks, local residents decided to form a cooperative society in the village.—Po Pale Lay

Opinion

Don’t let them to make a fool of you

By Aung Khin

Although it is not a national holiday in any country, April Fools’ Day is celebrated every year on April 1 as a day when people make jokes and play pranks on each other. Those who fall victims of such jokes are called April Fools.

A few years ago, the website of a well-known western media outlet posted a concocted image of penguins flying over a mountain range. Other victims of such jokes are called April Fools.

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Food safety is critical for public health as foodborne diseases affect people’s health and well-being. Unsafe food creates a vicious cycle of disease and malnutrition, particularly affecting infants, young children, the elderly and the sick. Foodborne diseases impede socio-economic development by straining health care systems and adversely impacting national economies, tourism and trade.

Since food passes through multiple hands from the farm to reach our plates, ensuring food safety requires multisectoral collaboration. The approach needs to be preventive - to improve food safety and quality through application of good farming practices by using agro chemicals or veterinary drugs only in the prescribed amount. Good storage, transportation, retail and restaurant practices are equally important to make food safe.

Strengthening food safety policies, enforcement and collaboration among consumers and policy makers in the Region and globally.

The most pertinent of all the measures is creating awareness among individuals to ensure that their food is safe. In this context, WHO has been promoting ‘five keys’ to food safety—maintain cleanliness, separate raw and cooked food, cook thoroughly, keep food at correct temperature and use safe water and raw materials.

As food supply becomes increasingly globalized, there is an urgent need to strengthen food safety systems in and between all countries. WHO is supporting establishment of a network for food safety authorities in partnership with countries to promote the exchange of food safety information and improve collaboration among food safety authorities at national and international levels.

WHO is also helping countries prevent, detect and respond to foodborne disease outbreaks using the Codex Alimentarius, a collection of international food standards, guidelines and codes of practice covering all the main foods and processes. In addition, WHO is advocating for food safety to be adequately incorporated in national disaster-management programmes and emergencies. Access to safe water and quality food is a major problem during flooding, earthquakes and other natural disasters. There is a likelihood of food in the affected areas getting contaminated and causing outbreaks of food-borne disease.

As part of its Regional Food Safety Strategy, WHO is assisting countries in the Region to initiate, develop and sustain multisectoral approaches and measures for promotion of food safety among all population groups. Some countries have taken novel and notable initiatives such as the mobile food courts in Bangladesh, the establishment of a Food Standard and Safety Authority in India, and certification of street food vendors with a “Clean Food, Good Taste” logo in Thailand.

This year’s World Health Day theme focuses on food safety. Food safety must be an essential component of national health, food, agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, water, sanitation and environment-related programmes. Food safety is a shared responsibility. Let us work together to make our food safe and to contribute to better health of people.

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After the talks, local residents decided to form a cooperative society in the village.—Po Pale Lay
MPs comfort soldiers wounded in Laukkai conflict

PyinOoLwin, March—Pyithu Hluttaw speaker Thura U Shwe Mann visited military-run hospital here on Tuesday to comfort soldiers wounded in Laukkai conflicts which began in February this year.

The speaker acknowledged outstanding bravery of these soldiers in protecting and safeguarding of sovereignty of Myanmar.

U Soe Win, Vice-chairman of National Democratic Force, and U Win Ko, Vice-chairman of Pa-O National League, congratulated the soldiers.

The speaker, the vice-speaker, chairmen of committees, members of parliaments, representatives of ethnic parties and defence services and military officers also provided the wounded soldiers and their family members with cash and kind.—MNA

Amyotha Hluttaw speaker holds talks with Australian Ambassador

Speaker of Amyotha Hluttaw U Khin Aung Myint cordially greets Ambassador of Australia Mr Nicholas Coppel at the hall of Amyotha Hluttaw, here, Tuesday.

Also present at the call were Chairman of Amyotha Hluttaw Public Accounts Committee U Thein Win, member of Hluttaw Rights Committee U Saw Maw Tun, member of Bill Committee U Soe Myint and officials of the Amyotha Hluttaw Office.—MNA

Commander-in-chief meets Pakistani chief of Naval Staff

Nay Pyi Taw, March—Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing met Admiral Muhammad Zakaullah NI(M), Chief of Naval Staff of Pakistan, here on Tuesday morning, according to officials.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing welcomed Pakistan’s willingness to work with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and pledged support for friendly relationship between ASEAN and Pakistan, while creating a new level of cooperation between the naval forces of the two countries.

There exists deep, constructive relationship between the two countries and two armed forces, with the Pakistani admiral saying that the first ambassador to his country was from Myanmar. He expressed appreciation and thanks to Myanmar for its assistance to his country as a fresh sovereignty as well as for its support for the establishment of cooperation between Pakistan and ASEAN.

They also discussed ways of creating greater cooperation between their defence services, and exchange of friendly visits and trainees.

Admiral Muhammad Zakaullah NI(M) won the coveted Sword of Honour from Pakistan Naval Academy and was also awarded Chief of the Naval Staff Gold Medal at his graduation. He is the twentieth Chief of Naval Staff of Pakistan.—Myawady

ASEAN, China discuss implementation of DOC in South China Sea

YANDON, March—ASEAN countries and China exchanged views Tuesday on how to effectively implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea during a two-day working group meeting here.

Myanmar’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the 13th Meeting of the ASEAN-China Joint Working Group on the Implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea discussed practical cooperative projects under the implementation plan for the DOC and considered new initiatives and proposals.

The meeting, which began Monday, aimed to build upon the dialogue among ASEAN member states and China in promoting the DOC and the early conclusion of the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

The 13th ASEAN-China JWG on DOC hosted by Myanmar was co-chaired by Mr Jakkrit Srivall, Director-General of the Department of ASEAN Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, and Mr He Wei, Deputy Director-General of the Department of Boundary and Ocean Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China. Representatives from ASEAN member states, China, and the ASEAN Secretariat participated in the meeting.

The next meeting will be held in May or June in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
Air and sea traffic disrupted as 120 km winds batter Netherlands

AMSTERDAM, 31 March — Spring storms battered the Netherlands with gusts of up to 120 kilometres an hour on Tuesday, causing Amsterdam’s Schiphol airport to cancel flights and the closure of two container terminals at the port of Rotterdam.

Gale force winds sweeping in from the North Sea disrupted land and marine traffic throughout the low-lying country, as the Dutch meteorological office issued a code red warning for the country’s northern and coastal provinces.

A spokesman for Schiphol airport, Europe’s fourth largest, said 80, primarily European, flights had been cancelled because wind had reduced runway capacity, and that delays would mount as flight volumes rose later in the day.

At Rotterdam, Europe’s largest port, two container terminals were closed, with ships forced to queue out at sea. A spokesman said this was a routine precaution when winds rise above gale force seven. Bulk liquid terminals continued to operate.

Near the port of Vlissingen, authorities were preparing to refloat a 300 metre container ship that ran aground in the small hours near the port of Vlissingen on the Belgian border. The crew was in no danger, the waterfront management agency said, according to NOS public radio.—Reuters

Russia’s Lavrov to rejoin Iran talks, sees chance of success

MOSCOW, 31 March — Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said he would rejoin talks on Iran’s nuclear programme in Lausanne later on Tuesday and said there was a good chance of success.

They are probably not 100 percent certain. The chances are high. They would mount as flight volumes rose later in the day. At Rotterdam, Europe’s largest port, two container terminals were closed, with ships forced to queue out at sea. A spokesman said this was a routine precaution when winds rise above gale force seven. Bulk liquid terminals continued to operate.

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Japan and US look to extend naval missions after law change

TOKYO, 31 March — Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s push to revise the constitution to allow Tokyo’s right to collective self defence will pave the way for closer cooperation between US and Japanese forces in Asia, a top US commander said on Tuesday.

Expanded training and joint missions could extend across Asia from Japan through the disputing South China Sea, claimed in whole or part by China, Vietnam, the Philippines and other nations in the region — into the Indian Ocean.

Neither the United States nor Japan have territorial claims in the South China Sea, but the Seventh Fleet operates in the area. A Japanese naval presence there could irritate Beijing.

Lawmakers in Japan are set to approve Abe’s constitutional reinterpretation to authorize Japan’s right to collective self defence (CSD). The Japanese parliament, where Abe enjoys a big majority, will vote on the new security legislation in May.

“CSD makes it easier for the Seventh Fleet and JMSDF to exercise and operate across the Indo Asia Pacific,” Admiral Robert Thomas, commander of the force said aboard his command ship, the USS Blue Ridge, in Yokohama.

The Japanese “have the capacity and capability for operations in international waters and international airspace anywhere on the globe,” he told a media briefing with Admiral Eric Shinseki, commander of the JMSDF. A broader regional military role for Japan is being welcomed by Washington, as it pushes its allies in Asia, including Australia, to do more as China takes an increasingly assertive stance in territorial disputes in the region.

Japan and the United States have said they will decide by the end of June on a new set of guidelines for their decades-old alliance that will give Japan a more prominent role.

The two admirals had earlier discussed expanding the scope of joint operations, in areas such as combating piracy and human trafficking and in humanitarian and disaster relief, Thomas said.

The two countries could also conduct training exercises in more diverse locations, he added. The most powerful naval fleet in Asia, the US Seventh Fleet remains the main counterweight to China’s growing maritime power in Asia. Centered around a carrier battle group that operates out of Japan, the US Seventh Fleet includes some 80 vessels, 140 aircraft and 40,000 sailors, making it the most powerful naval force in the western Pacific.

Japan’s navy consists of around 120 vessels, including more than 40 destroyers and a submarine force of around 20 boats.

Poland says will train 50 Ukrainian military staff this year

WARSAW, 31 March — Poland will provide training to around 50 Ukrainian army instructors this year, the Polish ministry of defence said on Tuesday, a part of NATO’s efforts to boost Ukraine’s defence capacity as it faces a pro-Russian rebellion in the east.

The Ukrainians will be trained in Poland, the ministry said in a statement, with the courses scheduled to take place in June, September and October this year. Other NATO countries will organize similar courses, the ministry also said.

Earlier this year, Britain said it would send 75 military personnel to Ukraine to help train its army.

Poland has been one of the most outspoken critics of Russian policy towards a pro-Russian separatist rebellion in eastern Ukraine, joining Western allies in accusing Moscow of supplying help to the insurrection — something the Kremlin denies.—Reuters

Spain arrests four including two teens planning to travel to Syria

MADRID, 31 March — Two young teenagers were arrested early on Tuesday in northeastern Spain, the same morning they planned to travel to Syria to fight with Islamist militants there, the Spanish interior ministry said.

Police arrested the two, both aged under 16, and another two suspects in a raid in the Mediterranean city of Badalona, about 11 kilometres from Barcelona.

“A brother of the minors had already traveled to Syria, recruited by jihadist groups, dying in 2014, and is believed to have formed part of the terrorist ranks supporting DAESH (Islamic State),” the ministry in a statement.

The ministry said the teenagers had dropped out of school in Badalona and begun studying at an Islamic centre in Morocco. They were due to travel on Tuesday morning through Morocco to Turkey and from there onto Syria with the full knowledge of those close to them including their mother, the ministry said.

Since the attacks on satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo in Paris earlier this year, Spain has stepped up efforts to prevent recruiters from militant groups targeting young Muslims.

Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

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Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe
**World**

**Saudi-led strikes again hit Yemen overnight**

A SANA resident said that raids struck a gas plant in the central town of Yarim, killing eight people and wounding another 28.

In Riyadh, the campaign’s spokesman, Brigadier General Ahmed Asseri, on Monday showed footage of air strikes hitting what he said were Yemeni army tanks under Houthis control as well as armoured vehicles he said were held by Houthi fighters.

A US official said the Saudis had shown little appetite for a ground invasion if it can be avoided. “The objective here is to get to a point where the Houthis halt their destabilizing actions and come back to the table,” the official said.

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**Buhari builds on early lead in tight Nigerian election**

According to results collated by Reuters, Buhari had notched up 12 million votes. A 72-year-old general, he has campaigned as a born-again democrat intent on cleaning up the corrupt politics of Africa’s most populous nation.

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**Turkey's special forces enter Istanbul courthouse after prosecutor taken hostage**

An unlicensed printer has been detained for a second time in January on suspicion of belonging to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), prosecutors said.

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**Austria charges 14-year-old with terror offences**

In the oil city of Port Harcourt, police fired tear gas at a crowd of 100 female APC supporters demonstrating outside the regional offices of the INEC election commission.

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**Council fears US troop decision will hurt faltering Afghan peace process**

Karbul, 31 March — The official body overseeing the Afghan peace process and other influential players in the region have criticized President Ashraf Ghani for pushing for US troops to stay longer, saying it could hurt the chances of ending the Taliban insurgency.

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**Saudi Arabia’s military spokesman said he could not confirm a camp had been hit, but said jets might have returned fire on anti-aircraft weapons placed in civilian areas. Hadi’s foreign minister, Riyadh Yassin, blamed Houthis for the explosion.**

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**Reuter**
US defence chief to visit S Korea from 9 April: Yonhap

SEOUL, 31 March — US Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter plans to make a two-day visit to South Korea from 9 April, Yonhap News Agency reported on Tuesday.

"Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter is to arrive here on 9 April for a two-day schedule, during which he plans to hold talks with South Korea's Defence Minister Han Min Koo and meet with President Park Geun Hye," a Seoul source was quoted as saying by Yonhap.

Carter is also expected to visit Japan as well. His visit comes amid speculation that South Korea and the United States could discuss the possible deployment of an anti-ballistic missile system in South Korea in the face of strong opposition from China. South Korea's Defence Ministry spokesman told journalists in a press briefing that deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system in South Korea is not on the agenda of Carter's talks with South Korean leaders.

Beijing has been protesting against the deployment of the system in South Korea, claiming it will target China as part of US efforts to expand its military presence in East Asia.

South Korea has maintained strategic ambiguity on the issue so far, saying there have been no consultations with the United States and no decision has been made.

US officials maintain the system is purely defensive and its deployment in South Korea would be aimed at exclusively dealing with the threats posed by North Korea.

Puppet master assumes prestigious teacher's name

Yoshida Tamao, a puppet master of the traditional Japanese puppet theatre, Bunraku, heads to his dressing room at the National Bunraku Theater in Osaka on 31 March, 2015, after assuming his master's name. He was previously called Yoshida Tamame. His master was a living national treasure. — Kyodo News

Dr. Andreas Lubitz, Germanwings co-pilot

DUESSELDORF, (Germany), 31 March — The German pilot suspected of deliberately crashing a plane in the French Alps last week was treated for suicidal tendencies years ago before he received his pilot's licence, German prosecutors said on Monday.

This was the first acknowledgement from German officials that the pilot, Andreas Lubitz, had suffered bouts of depression and it is likely to intensify a debate about how airlines screen and monitor their pilots.

Investigators believe Lubitz, serving as co-pilot on a Germanwings flight from Barcelona to Duesseldorf on March 24th, locked the captain out of the cockpit and steered the Airbus A320 plane into the side of a mountain while passengers screamed in horror. A total of 150 people died in the crash.

Lufthansa (LHAG.DE), the parent of the budget airline, has said it was not aware of anything in the 27-year-old's past that suggested he might have posed a risk. It has confirmed that Lubitz broke off his pilot training in 2009 for nearly a year, around the time he was reportedly suffering from depression and anxiety.

"Several years ago before obtaining his pilot's licence the co-pilot was in a long period of psychotherapeutic treatment with noticeable suicidal tendencies," Duesseldorf prosecutors said in a statement on Monday.

They said that in recent years he had not shown signs of suicidal behaviour or aggressive tendencies in visits to doctors.

Crash pilot had been treated for suicidal tendencies

After searching his family home in Montabaur and apartment in Duesseldorf, and following interviews with friends and relatives, the prosecutors said they had not found any evidence Lubitz was planning such an attack, nor the reasons behind it.

"No special circumstances have come to light, whether in his personal life or his work life, that shed any plausible light on a possible motive," they said.

Lufthansa CEO Carsten Spohr has said the airline prides itself on the rigorous selection methods of its pilot training scheme. The school is currently closed to new applicants, but around 6,000 people apply each year, with just 7-8 percent of them making the cut. Lufthansa has also made clear that Lubitz's medical records were subject to doctor-patient confidentiality and that the airline therefore had no knowledge of what they contained. Under German law, employers do not have access to employees' medical records and sick notes excusing a person from work do not give information on their medical condition.

Some politicians have called for a loosening of these rules in the wake of the Germanwings disaster. But at a news conference in Berlin on Monday, a spokeswoman for the German health ministry said doctors already had the right to break their vow of confidentiality if they thought their patients posed a danger to others.

French investigators said on Monday they were digging an access route to the mountain crash site in order to speed up the investigation.

The head of the French police forensic team told reporters it would take two to four months to identify the victims and that there was no certainty all would be identified because of the high speed at which the plane crashed.

"After a plane crash like this, the state of the bodies is not like after a simple car crash. The bodies are not necessarily whole, as the families know," Colonel Francois Daoust, head of the French Gendarmerie's criminal research Institute, told reporters.

He added that some 400 samples from body parts taken from the crash had allowed police to identify 78 different DNA profiles so far, but no identifications had been made as yet.

The plane's second flight recorder, which contains flight data, has not yet been found.

Kay Krafty, a board member of Lufthansa's German airlines unit, told a German talkshow on Sunday evening that, due to the force with which the plane hit the mountain face, it was possible the recorder's locator beacons had been damaged and were not working properly. — Reuters

Gov’t to address maternity harassment against working women

TYOko, 31 March — The labour ministry has decided to make it unlawful to treat female workers unfavourably at their workplaces within one year in principle after expiry of their child-care leave, according to ministry officials.

If firms insist there were circumstances necessitating such treatment of female workers, those firms will be obliged to explain the situation, the officials said.

So far in Japan, even if female workers were unfairly denounced or reassigned without due causes in so-called maternity harassment, firms have often forced them to accept it by citing the workers' lack of ability and other reasons. Last October, the Supreme Court ruled that demotion due to pregnancy is prohibited in principle by law and is unlawful unless women accept it without compulsion or there are special circumstances necessitating it.

On the basis of the landmark decision, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare has reviewed its views on the law for equal employment opportunity for men and women and distributed new guidelines to labour bureaux across the country. — Kyodo News

Chiba, (Japan), 31 March — Narita International Airport plans to double the number of passport control counters handling arriving passengers at Terminal 2 in busy hours starting on Wednesday, an airport source said on Monday.

The terminal has been alternating between its two immigration control sections following a sharp drop in foreign travelers at the country’s main international gateway after the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear plant disasters in 2011.

Both sections of the terminal will now open every day from around 1 pm to 5 pm, the busiest time for arrivals at the airport serving Tokyo, with up to 40 counters handling both foreign and Japanese travelers, the source said.

The terminal has been experiencing an increase in traveler numbers, with up to several hundred people queuing to clear immigration at peak hours on some days. There had been growing calls to address this issue out of concern it was giving arriving passengers an impression of Japan. The decision to open more passport control counters was made after talks between officials from customs, immigration and quarantine services, according to the source.

Osaka, 31 March — A puppet master of the Japanese puppet show, Bunraku, assumed his late teacher’s name on 31 March, 2015.

Yoshida Tamame, 61, has now become the heir of Yoshida Tamao, a living national treasure who passed away in 2006.

Since becoming a disciple of Tamao in 1968, Tamame continued his practice under the master. Assuming the name of Tamao, he visited the grave of his master in the city of Osaka.

A gala performance of the successor to his predecessor’s name will be held at the National Bunraku Theater in Osaka from 4 to 26 April and at the National Theater in Tokyo from 9 to 25 May.

The theater in Osaka, which opened in 1934, is the only place in the world where the traditional Japanese puppet show can be seen.
China orders military to keep barracks simple, guard against excess

BEIJING, 31 March — China ordered its military on Tuesday to build barracks as simply and economically as possible and avoid using ostentatious or imported building materials, as part of a broader crackdown on graft and excess.

China’s armed forces, the world’s largest, have become a focus of President Xi Jinping’s campaign to root out deeply-ingrained graft including bribery, which often takes the form of lavish gifts to officials or extravagant spending of government funds.

The guidelines on construction were in line with demands for the military to be thrifty and “guard against luxury”, the Defence Ministry said in an update to building rules carried on its website.

Colours used should be sober, plain and unifor- mies, and new barracks must be well-connected to the Internet and be energy efficient, it said.

“Materials used should be economical, last a long time, look good and be useable,” the ministry said. “High-end materials and luxurious construction is banned; put priority on using Chinese products, and high-end products from abroad are banned.”

The anti-graft drive in the military comes as Xi steps up efforts to fight corruption in the armed forces. 

China’s anti-corruption drive has been an annual meeting of China and South Korea will go ahead from 1 to 3 April. It is the first meeting of the three ministers to be held in Japan. 

China’s logistics department, the Japan Tourism Agency, said on Tuesday.

The trilateral meeting, launched in 2006 in Japan’s Hokkaido to promote tourism, was suspended in 2012 after Beijing declined to participate amid a confrontation with Tokyo over their territorial claims. 

The aborted 2012 meeting was to take place in Fukushima Prefecture to overcome the negative effects of Japan’s March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, and subsequent Fukushima nuclear crisis, but the venue this time is in Tokyo due to scheduling requirements, the Japan Tourism Agency said.

Kyodo News

Japan, China, S Korea tourism ministers to meet in April in Tokyo

Japan, China, South Korea tourism ministers are to meet in April in Tokyo.

There is a significant rise in tourists from China and South Korea to Japan, but (visitors) from Japan to both those countries have been on the wane. We will discuss mutual expansion of tourism in the countries,” he said.

The trilateral meeting, launched in 2006 in Japan’s Hokkaido to promote tourism, was suspended in 2012 after Beijing declined to participate amid a confrontation with Tokyo over their territorial claims. 

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Kyodo News

Ancient Chinese culture textbooks available in middle schools

BEIJING, 31 March — Textbooks on ancient Chinese culture will soon be available to middle school students to boost their knowledge of the past, a local newspaper said.

The list of cultural books was organized by the Ministry of Education and carried out by the Ancient Chinese Culture Centre. It will be available next semester for schools to adopt should they choose, the Beijing News said on Tuesday.

It is the first textbook dedicated to ancient philosophy and classic Chinese culture.

Currently, middle school students are taught modern literature with a minimal focus on classics. The textbook will help middle school students understand classics by Lao Tze, Confucius, Mencius and others. It will also analyze the differences between the East and the West, comparing the concepts of Confucius’ benevolence and Socrates’ virtues, as well as Mencius’ ideas of moral and profit versus Jeremy Bentham’s Utilitarianism.

The textbook came as ancient Chinese culture re gains popularity in society amid extra emphasis by the government.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has stressed on several occasions the importance of traditional Chinese culture, saying that the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation needs the prosperous Chinese culture.

Xinhua
Comics skewer apologetic Justin Bieber at celebrity roast

New York, 31 March — Pop sensation Justin Bieber, the subject of some unflattering headlines in recent years, suffered the slings and arrows of fellow entertainers, from Kevin Hart to Martha Stewart, as they hosted his Comedy Central Roast of Justin Bieber at Sony Studios in Culver City, California on 14 March, 2015.—Reuters

Films bind nations together: Amitabh Bachchan

Cairo, 31 March — Underlining the importance of cultural exchange through cinema, Bollywood megastar Amitabh Bachchan says films play a major role in bringing nations together.

On a three-day visit to Cairo for the ‘India by the Nile’ festival, Bachchan, the most popular Indian star in Egypt, said he is proud to be a part of the film fraternity which binds nations together.

“Cinema is a great integrator. When we sit inside darkened halls, we never ask the cast, creed, colour or religion of the person sitting next to us. We enjoy the same films, sing the same songs, we cry at the same emotions, we laugh at the same jokes,” Big B said in an interview at the India House here.

“If it just sort of disappears, it is a hopeless role. It is not worth doing. It is not worth reading the script.”

Roger Moore denies making racist comment about Idris Elba

London, 31 March — Actor Roger Moore has denied accusations that he said “something racist” about “The Wire” star Idris Elba.

“The actor took to Twitter to refute the allegations.

His quotes from an interview with Paris Match seemed to suggest that he thought Elba should not play James Bond as he wasn’t “English English.”

According to the interview, Moore had said, “A few years ago, I said that Cuba Gooding Jr would make an excellent Bond, but it was a joke! Although James may have been played by a Scot, a Welshman and an Irishman, I think he should be ‘English-English.’ Nevertheless, it’s an interesting idea, but unrealistic.”

Helen Mirren fights to rescue stolen art in ‘Woman in Gold’

New York, 31 March — Before Helen Mirren directed play elderly Jewish World War II refugee Maria Altmann in the new film “Woman in Gold,” the Academy Award-winning actress checked the last page of the screenplay to see if the character was there.

“If it just sort of disappears, it is a hopeless role. It is not worth doing. It is not worth reading the script.”

The film tells the story of Altmann’s against-the-odds battle with the Austrian government to regain paintings by artist Gustav Klimt that the Nazis stole from her family during World War Two.

The most famous of the works, “Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I,” was a 1907 oil and gold painting of Altmann’s aunt.

One Direction’s Niall Horan, Harry Styles offered solo deals?

London, 31 March — Boy band One Direction’s two members Niall Horan and Harry Styles have reportedly been offered “huge deals” from record label Syco to pursue solo careers.

One Direction bosses fear the band will split next year following Zayn Malik’s shock decision to quit.

Even though the group’s fifth album is expected to be released as intended in time for Christmas, it is being said Horan and Styles are being groomed for solo success, reported Daily Star.

“The album is a guarantee but next year is all up in the air. Harry and Niall are already being groomed for solo success and both could have huge solo careers if they wanted,” a source said.—Reuters

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Actress Helen Mirren arrives at the 72nd Golden Globe Awards in Beverly Hills, California on this on 11 Jan, 2015 file photo.—Reuters

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Prefectural mascot Kumamon demoted after failing to shed weight

KUMAMOTO, (Japan), 31 March — Kumamoto Prefecture’s black bear mascot Kumamon has been demoted from the rank of sales manager to assistant sales manager as a penalty for failing to lose weight. Kumamoto Gov.

Ikuo Kabashima said Monday. The winner of a 2011 online popularity contest involving around 350 local mascots from across Japan, went on a diet last October after the governor pointed out that Kumamon was too fat.

Kumamon’s weight and body fat remained unchanged from six months earlier as the mascot failed to stay the course, sneakily eating Valentine’s Day chocolates and other treats. By contrast, the governor lost 4.6 kilograms in the same period as he walked to the prefectural government building every morning and continued to eat healthy bento lunches made by his wife.

Earlier this month, the southwestern Japan prefecture announced that sales in 2014 of products featuring Kumamon rose 1.4 times from the previous year to at least 64.3 billion yen ($535.4 million).

Kumamoto has granted permission to around 18,700 merchandisers to use the official mascot on their products.

Kyodo News

Brazilian club abandon World Cup stadium in Salvador

SÃO PAULO, 31 March — Esporte Club Bahia, one of the biggest clubs in Salvador, said on Monday they were abandoning the stadium that was rebuilt for last year’s World Cup and returning to use the city’s old municipal ground.

The club said their fans had not been respected at the stadium and their 1-0 win over Campinense on Saturday would be their last match there.

“Kumamon,” Kumamoto Prefecture’s popular black bear mascot, holds a letter of appointment in Tokyo on 30 March, 2015, after Kumamoto Gov. Ikuo Kabashima announced Kumamon’s demotion from sales manager to assistant sales manager as a penalty for failing to lose weight. The mascot had been on a diet since October 2014 after the governor pointed out that it was too fat.—KYODO NEWS

The Fonte Nova was rebuilt at a cost of 600 million reais ($200 million) and hosted six matches in the 2014 World Cup and three in the Confederations Cup a year earlier.

Several of the stadiums built for Brazil’s World Cup have been underused since the tournament ended and at least one has been closed because of structural problems.—Reuters

Qatar 2022 World Cup may not need cooling systems

Doha, 31 March — A winter World Cup in Qatar may not require cooling systems to lower temperatures in the stadiums as proposed in the bid for a summer tournament, said an executive from the Gulf state’s 2022 organising committee.

Earlier this month, soccer’s world governing body FIFA ended more than four years of uncertainty over the timing of the World Cup in Qatar by announcing it would be played in November and December with the final on 18 December.

One of the biggest challenges of hosting the tournament in the summer months, when temperatures at times exceed 40 degrees Celsius, was cooling down the stadiums but with the shift to the winter the organisers committee is reassessing the situation.

“The temperatures are lower in the winter so the demand for cooling would be lower,” Dario Cadavid, technical assurance and integration manager at Qatar’s 2022 Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy told Reuters in an interview.

“It’s very possible that during that time of the year that cooling isn’t required for the winter,” he added, without giving any details on the potential cost savings of using less energy if the cooling systems are not used. Qatar always said a summer World Cup was viable thanks to revolutionary air cooling technologies it is developing for stadiums, training areas and fan zones but there was still widespread concern for the health of players and fans.

However, Cadavid downplayed those concerns.

“In order to provide safety for the players we need to provide a temperature between 26 and 29 degrees... our target is 26 degrees,” he said.

Whether it is used at the finals or not research on cooling technologies is continuing because Qatar wants the 2022 stadiums to be available for local league games all year, said Cadavid who described this aspect of the bid as the “legacy” element.

There are fewer local matches scheduled each week in the summer than there will be at the World Cup and they require less planning so maintaining cool temperatures in the stadiums will require lower amounts of energy, according to Cadavid.

...matches in the summer for the local leagues are less frequent than a tournament... you have two matches per week so less demand for energy,” he said.—Reuters
Williams sisters head into last eight in Miami

Miami, 31 March — Sisters Serena and Venus Williams marched into the quarter-finals of the Miami Open after straight-set wins at Key Biscayne on Monday.

World number one Serena beat 24th seeded Russian Svetlana Kuznetsova 6-2, 6-3 producing 29 winners and 20 unforced errors. Kuznetsova, who owns two grand slam titles, had beaten Serena twice in their previous nine meetings but the outcome of this contest never looked in doubt.

“I know Svetlana is super tough and we always have super tough matches,” said Serena.

“It seems like I’m cruising but don’t think I’m cruising. I have my matches and I’m really focused in my matches because all these players I play are really good,” she added.

Djokovic, Nishikori and Raonic reach last 16 in Miami

MIAMI, 31 March — Defending champion Novak Djokovic defeated Belgium’s Steve Darcis 6-0, 7-5 on Monday to power into the last 16 of the Miami Open along with Japan’s Kei Nishikori, Canada’s Milos Raonic and American John Isner.

The Serbian world number one, who just like last year won at Indian Wells before heading to South Florida, will face Alexander Dolgopolov, a 7-5, 6-4 winner over Brazilian Thomaz Bellucci, in the fourth round.

Djokovic, who is seeking a fifth win at Miami, wrapped up a one-sided first set in 26 minutes but faced a stern test in the second.

Darcis broke to go ahead 5-4 but after the Serb levelled up the set, he broke back and held on to secure the match.

“I managed to come back in the right moment,” Djokovic said.

“I kind of elevated the intensity and started playing a little bit more with depth on the ball. ‘He’s got a lot of variety, especially from his backhand side.’

“So I was handling it really good for first 30 minutes, then started to make some unforced errors and started to play a little bit more neutral, a little bit slower, and he got into the match.

“I complicated my own life in the second set but in the end of the day, it’s a win.”

Fourth-seed Nishikori had even less trouble as he crushed Serbia’s Viktor Troicki 6-2, 6-2 in 63 minutes.

Troicki, who needed medical treatment to his left side during the match, struggled to cope with Nishikori throughout with the 25-year-old converting five of his six break points.

“I was almost perfect on the court. It is so exciting that I am playing well here,” said Nishikori.

“Maybe he was hurting a little bit but I was still putting him under pressure with my return.”

Raonic also moved into the fourth round after a hard-earned 6-1, 5-7, 7-6 (3) win over French 31st seed Jeremy Chardy.

Raonic was broken when serving for the match at 5-4 in the second and then Chardy went on to force the third set.

“He started playing more freely and I sort of went the other way,” said Raonic.

“He played really good in the second set and I think he played better than I did in the third.”

Isner provided an upset as the 22nd seed won 7-6(2), 6-2 over ninth seeded Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov while Belgian 18th seed David Goffin beat Poland’s Jerzy Janowicz 6-4, 6-3 and Spain’s sixth seed David Ferrer got past Czech Lukas Rosol 6-4, 7-5.

FA end plan for combined British team at Rio Games — report

LONDON, 31 March — The English Football Association have scrapped plans to send a combined British football team to compete at next year’s Rio de Janeiro Olympics because of opposition from other home nations, the BBC reported on Monday.

The BBC said the FA had written to the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish associations to inform them.

Britain fielded a unified football team managed by the FA, after a 52-year absence, at the London 2012 Olympics although at the time it was seen as a one-off move to mark the home Games.

Several Welsh and Scottish players played at London 2012 without the blessing of their national associations.

Debate has raged over a British soccer team, with the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish FAs concerned that agreeing to unite for the Olympics would jeopardise their independent status within football’s world governing body FIFA.

Woods drops out of world’s top 100

NEW YORK, 31 March — Tiger Woods has dropped outside the top 100 in the world golf rankings for the first time since 1996.

The 39-year-old former world number one and 14-times major champion, who has not played since pulling out of the Farmer’s Open in early February due to back problems, has slipped to 104th in the rankings.

The American first topped the list in 1997 and has spent 683 weeks as world number one, more than twice as long as any other player. Woods’s last major title was the 2008 US Open but he won the PGA Tour events in 2013 and topped the rankings in May 2014 before suffering injury problems and a loss of form.

He shot a round of 82 at the Phoenix Open in January, the worst of his professional career. Woods hopes to return to play in next week’s US Masters, the first major of the year.