It is necessary to settle disputes between employers and workers based on commiseration in accordance with the labour dispute settlement law and related by laws

Esteemed workers,
I would like to extend my greetings and honour to workers, who are an important force for Myanmar, by wishing you physical and mental wellbeing on the occasion of world workers’ day designated in honour of workers across the world on 1 May, 2015.

As 1 May is designated as workers’ day to honour workers across the world and ceremonies to honour workers are held every year, it is an auspicious and significant day for all workers in Myanmar.

Esteemed workers,
As nowadays is the time when an emphasis has been placed upon creation of decent job opportunities for citizens in every country, the government of Myanmar in implementing reform measures has also given priority to providing decent jobs to everyone with the aim of socioeconomic development of the people and poverty reduction.

Myanmar, Japan to promote cooperation in development of sports sector

NAY PYI TAW, 30 April—President U Thein Sein received a delegation Thursday led by Mr Toshiaki Endo, Member of Japan’s House of Representatives and Chief Secretary, Diet Members’ League for the Promotion of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, at the Presidential Palace.

They discussed promotion of cooperation in Myanmar’s sports sector, incorporation of sports training with education, and development of human resources.

Also present at the call were union ministers U Wunna Maung Lwin, U Tin Naing Thein, U Tint Hsan and U Ye Htut, and officials.

Myanmar Gems Emporium to run from 24 June to 6 July

YANGON, 30 April — The Ministry of Mines announced Thursday it will hold the 52nd Myanmar Gems Emporium from 24 June to 6 July in Nay Pyi Taw, inviting local and foreign merchants.

The central committee from 1 May will begin scrutinizing jade lots to be displayed at the emporium. Myanmar citizens operating government-approved mining and gem product businesses, as well as members of the Myanmar Gems Entrepreneurs Association, can visit the emporium, according to the Ministry of Mines.

Foreign merchants can register to visit the emporium at the ministry’s website www.mge.gov.mm. Last year’s Gems Emporium generated a record US $3.4 billion and saw the successful auction of 6,007 of 7,454 jade lots, 126 out of 436 gem lots and 224 of the total 342 pearl lots, according to the ministry.

Over 4,000 traders from Thailand, China, Hong Kong, and Japan attended last year’s emporium, according to organizers.

Myanmar has started to hold annual gem sales since 1964.

Accounting: a driver of corporate growth and then of national economic growth

Honouring The Workers’ Day
It is necessary to settle disputes between...

(from page 1)

In doing so, priority has been given to employing the labour force in Myanmar systematically and beneficially, employing those who wish to work in decent workplaces, nurturing disciplined and competently skilled workers and qualified human resource development essential for building a modern nation.

Now we are in 2015, having left 2014 behind. The year 2015 may be an important year in transition for new political, economic and social landscapes in Myanmar and it is an important period for major sectors, including the emergence of a strong labour market after achieving economic development in Myanmar. At a time like this, the skills, experience, knowledge and efforts of Myanmar workers are priceless forces for the country.

As you may all know, the ASEAN Economic Community will be established this year in the region where Myanmar is located. Under these circumstances, skilled workers in the ASEAN region will be able to work in freedom across the region according to the free flow of skilled labour.

In the process for changing the ASEAN region, due to favourable conditions including taking step-by-step reform measures for economic development of Myanmar in respective sectors, invitation of local and foreign investment after policy relaxation, development of Dawei, Thilawa and Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zones, and the geographical location of Myanmar between populous and large markets of China and India, and in an economic corridor of great potential, it can be seen that foreign investment in Myanmar has been increasing, with potential for a further increase in the pipeline.

Under the market economic system of today, a large amount of foreign investment has flowed into Myanmar and the government has given priority to making the best use of labour resources, increasing productivity and developing job opportunities, while measures are being taken for skill development of workers compatible with modern technological advancements.

Similarly, industrial zones are emerging across the country and job opportunities are available for Myanmar citizens in emerging factories, workshops and enterprises because the government is offering assistance for development of industries, manufacturing enterprises and service enterprises of local entrepreneurs as a measure to promote the private sector.

Under such circumstances, the government has amended, annulled and drafted labour laws compatible with the times for development of fair labour practices between workers and employers, aiming at socioeconomic development of all workers by enabling them to enjoy their legitimate rights and creating stable and peaceful workplaces.

Similarly, labour organizations and employer organizations have been allowed to form independently under the labour organization law enacted in 2011, and a total of 1,651 labour and employer organizations, including 1,621 labour organizations and 31 employer organizations, have been formed as of 31 March, 2015, while some labour organizations have formed federations in accordance with the law.

Esteemed workers,

More job opportunities are available due to many new factories, workshops and enterprises in Myanmar today on the one hand, on the other, disputes between workers and employers and demonstrations have inevitably arisen. Under such circumstances, there will be negative impacts on the economy of the country unless these disputes can be handled properly or can be reduced in accordance with the law, because manufacturing industries and livelihood of workers’ families will be hurt. Foreign investment will be hindered and expansion plans of local entrepreneurs will be delayed.

If disputes between employers and workers are settled according to the appropriate laws and by-laws, workplaces will be peaceful without hindrances. It is necessary to settle disputes between employers and workers based on commiseration in accordance with the labour dispute settlement law and related by-laws. If they are settled in accordance with the wish of individuals neglecting the law, this will seriously hurt productivity as well as the interests of both employers and workers.

It is also necessary for employers to build peaceful, safe and healthy work environments by taking into account corporate social responsibility and promoting a system that prevents damage to the social environment, without considering only profits in running their businesses. Only then can a contribution be made to the economic development of the country through a healthy and competent labour force.

Amid changing circumstances in Myanmar, workplace safety and health play an important role. It is necessary to nurture highly competent and healthy labour force to make the best use of increasing local and foreign investment, resulting from step-by-step and sector-wide reform measures for economic development of Myanmar, and invitation of local and foreign investment through relaxation of policies.

Esteemed workers,

The workers are asking for a minimum wage to be set. It is more appropriate to reach agreement on the rate between the employers and employees in the private sector. After some disagreements on this issue, the government has formed the National Committee to facilitate setting a minimum wage and has been holding trilateral talks between the government, employers and employees.

In this measure, foreign agencies such as the International Labour Organization and the International Organization for Migration, as well as local organizations such as the Myanmar Development Resource Institute and the Myanmar Marketing Research and Development Co., Ltd, are working together to set the minimum wage.

The Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security has formed groups of representatives from among employers, employees and experts in respective states and regions, and has been surveying incomes and general expenditure of living costs of households in some 108 townships under different business categories. Local officials are discussing the possible setting of some 108 townships under different business categories.

The negotiation process took time, as the detailed facts are needed in the calculation of the requirements of workers and their family members, current salaries, living costs, variation of these costs, commodity prices, inflation, appropriate social status and fundamental requirements.

If the minimum wage were to be set at a high level, production costs would increase. As a consequence, the workforce might be substituted with mechanical power, leading to high unemployment on one hand. On the other hand, industries would be shut down amid increasing wages. These negative impacts would hit the workforce, and high wages would become a hurdle for the government to attract investment.

Esteemed workers,

The number of migrant workers is now increasing as the destination countries have better economic development, employment opportunities and social status. Meanwhile, international migration plays a key part in poverty alleviation and in creating opportunities for economic development of the country. Therefore, the government is taking necessary measures for Myanmar migrant workers to have labour rights in respective countries by appointing diplomats for these workers.

Moreover, supporting centres have been set up in states and regions to protect the rights of migrant workers and to give them accurate information. These centres provide 24-hour services in Nay Pyi Taw and Yangon.

These centres are helping workers fully enjoy labour rights, a peaceful working atmosphere, capacity development, safety measures, and healthcare, while helping them find local and foreign jobs which are appropriate for their skills, expertise, experiences and capacities. Employment exhibitions are also held in major cities as one-stop centres where both employers and employees can sign employment contracts.

Esteemed workers,

The social welfare programme is playing a key role in enhancing the capacities and health of workers who are the driving force for economic development of the country. As the social welfare programme is important for the workers, it is a support scheme for them.

In accordance with the new Social Security Law which took effect on 1 April 2014, the insurance system for workers is part of the social security programme adopted by the government. The social welfare programme of the government will play a part in the development of social economy of the people and poverty-alleviation programmes. It will also supply all Myanmar workers with health and security measures, through the upgrading of hospitals for workers and social welfare clinics, and through cooperation with local and foreign health facilities. The programme also includes mobile clinics for work sites.

Esteemed Workers,

In accordance with the procedure of the International Labour Organization, the government is implementing reduction of forced labour, rural development programmes and poverty alleviation to support the reform process of the government. Formation of organizations and social dialogue is allowed. Issues concerning Myanmar migrant workers can be addressed in accordance with international practices.

The government is also combating human trafficking, promoting social welfare and fundamental social protection, reviewing and modifying outdated labour laws, setting minimum wages for safety measures of workers, complying with the International Labour Code, collecting the data of fresh graduates preparing for jobs, developing the labour market, strengthening the organizations of employers and employees, developing the skills and capabilities of workers, enhancing small- and medium-sized enterprises, creating job opportunities, attracting responsible investment and improving the socio-economic lives of the workers.

On this 2015 May Day occasion, all the workers are urged to cooperate with the government to reach the goals of these efforts.
Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann pays goodwill visit to U.S.

YANGON, 30 April — At the invitation of Speaker of the House of Representatives of the U.S. Mr. John Boehner, Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw Thura U Shwe Mann left for the United States of America on Wednesday night.

The speaker and party were seen off at Yangon International Airport by Deputy Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw U Nanda Kyaw Swa, Chief Minister of Yangon Region U Myint Swe, Chairman of Pyithu Hluttaw Business and Trade Development Committee U Maung Maung Thein, Speaker of Yangon Region Hluttaw U Sein Tin Win, Deputy Speaker U Tin Aung and officials of the US Embassy.

The speaker was accompanied by U Hla Myint Oo, U Win Than, Dr Win Myint and U Thein Tun, chairman and members of the Pyithu Hluttaw committees and officials of the Pyithu Hluttaw Office.—MNA

Dy commander-in-chief hosts dinner to Malaysian chief of army

NAY PYI TAW, 30 April — Vice-Senior General Soe Win, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services and Commander-in-Chief (Army), and his wife Daw Than Nwe hosted a dinner to a Malaysian delegation led by Chief of Army General Tan Sri Raja Mohamed Affandi bin Raja Mohamed Noor and his wife, here on 29 April. After the deputy commander-in-chief extended greetings, the Malaysian chief of army spoke words of thanks.

The dinner was accompanied by entertainment performed by the Myawady music band playing songs and dances that represented the cultures of the two countries.

Myanmar, Australia focus on development cooperation

NAY PYI TAW, 30 April — A coordination meeting on Second Myanmar-Australia high level consultation on development cooperation was held at the Lake Garden Hotel, here, on Thursday, with an address by Union Minister for National Planning and Economic Development Dr Kan Zaw.

First Assistant Secretary Mr Craig Chittick of South East Asia Mainland and Regional Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade also spoke on the occasion.

Deputy Minister for NPED Daw Lei Lei Thein discussed development strategies of Myanmar and plans, Mr Craig Chittick, development policies of Australia, plans of Australia to provide assistance to development of Myanmar in coming year, and Counsellor Nick Cumpston of Development Cooperation, assistance programmes for Myanmar.—MNA

Illegal drugs worth K13.466 billion seized

NAY PYI TAW, 30 April — A joint operation team at Wantarpin checkpoint in Mongla township stopped and searched a vehicle driven by U Armay Shin leading to Kengtung on 28 April and found 63,800 stimulant tablets bearing WY letters worth K 1.276 billion and 53 kilograms of ICE worth K 12.19 billion under the driver’s seat and in the fuel tank, and two mobile handsets.

According to preliminary interrogation, the vehicle had been driven from Mongpuak to Mongla by a local and the suspect was asked to drive the car from Mongla to Kengtung before trafficking the illegal drugs to the other country and some local organizations were found to have involved in the case.

The suspect was handed over to authorities and investigation is being launched into case to uncover people and organizations involved behind the scene.—Myawady
Knowledge on population and census disseminated to people

HINTHADA, 30 April — The Township General Administration Department held a census seminar at its hall in Hinthada, Ayeyawady Region, on 28 April. Departmental officials, members of social organizations and ward and village representatives shared knowledge about how to conduct, and utilize data from, censuses. With the assistance of UNFPA and civic social organizations, seminars were also held in Pyapon, Myaungmya and Maubin districts. A plan is under way to hold similar seminars in the entire Ayeyawady Region by May.

Kyaw Kyaw (Hinthada)

Toddy chairs, tables marketable in Tatkon Tsp

TATKON, 30 April — Traditional chairs, tables and beds made of toddy-palm products are on sale along the Yangon-Mandalay Highway roadside between Okshitkon and Nyaunglunt villages in Tatkon Township. Local residents make the products to earn income for their families. They purchase toddy-palms as raw materials to produce chairs, beds and tables. They spend at least 1,500 kyats for one chair. They sell single seat chairs for 3,000 kyats each, double seats for 5,000 kyats, single beds for 4,000 kyats and double beds for 5,000 kyats.

Tin Soe Lwin (Tatkon)

Storm destroys houses, school and buildings in Kyaukdaga Tsp

KYAUKDAGA, 30 April — Powerful winds hit rural and urban areas in Kyaukdaga Township, Bago Region, on 27 April afternoon, damaging a number of homes.

The storm tore roofing from the Basic Education Primary School, 10 houses and one Hindu temple in Inpatle village, 25 houses in Ywathit village, four each in Nyaunggon and Chaungkaw villages and one in Myakyuntha village.

An ox was struck by lightning during the storm in Gawya village. Local people and members of social organizations cleared debris in the township.—Myo Oo (Kyaukdaga)

Two new transformers installed in Meiktila

MEIKTILA, 30 April — Under the arrangements of Mandalay Region Electricity Supply Corporation, electricians and engineers have installed one transformer each on 1st and 6th streets in Pyithaya Ward, Meiktila, Mandalay Region.

“The 200-KVA transformers will improve supply of electricity for local consumption at full capacity,” the township electrical engineer said. “The transformers will distribute electricity to the people from an 11KV power line.

“As a result, more than 450 houses will enjoy full capacity of electricity.”

The newly-installed transformers came into operation as of 27 April.

Chan Thar (Meiktila)

IRD officials clarify issuing of vouchers with receipt number for customers

NAY PYI TAW, 30 April — The Internal Revenue Department under the Ministry of Finance gave talks on issuing of vouchers with receipt number for customers to restaurant and hotel owners at the hall of Pyithaya Township General Administration Department, Nay Pyi Taw Council Area, on 29 April.

Township Administrator U Myo Naing made an opening address. Head of Township Internal Revenue Department Daw Hla Hla San and Staff Officer U Win Ko Ko clarified issuance of receipt numbers to the entrepreneurs and replied to queries raised by businessmen.
International IDEA officials visit Ottara District Election Sub-commission

NAY PYI TAW, 30 April — The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) visited Ottara District Election Sub-commission in Nay Pyi Taw Council Area on 28 April.

Director-General U Tin Tun of Union Election Commission and officials held talks with the international intergovernmental organization on matters related to the 2015 elections.

It was also attended by senior adviser Ms Carine Jaquette from France, project manager Mr Gregory, technical manager Mr Petrer Wolf of Austria, Chairman of Nay Pyi Taw Election Sub-commission U Aung Htet Kyaw and Assistant Director U Kyaw Min Zaw.—Shwe Ye Yint

Faculty members, staff receive computer training

NAY PYI TAW, 30 April — The basic computer and Internet course was kicked off at the information technology department of Yezin University of Agriculture in Nay Pyi Taw Council Area on 27 April.

“Computer science is being taught to students of the Yezin University of Agriculture, so a similar course was given to faculty members and staff for their friendliness in basic computer science,” the university’s rector Dr Myo Kywe said. “More training courses will be given to them.”

“As it is a basic course, teachers from the technology department will teach typing, Adobe Pagemaker and Excel subjects to the trainees,” Head of Information Technology Department U Wunna Aung said. Moreover, the instructors will share knowledge about using the Internet and e-mail.

Altogether 46 trainees are attending the course from 27 April to 15 May.

July Moe;
Photo: Chit Thamee

Kanaung Town to get more than 3,000-foot-long concrete road

MYANMAR, 30 April — Myanma Township Department of Rural Development in Ayeyawady Region is resurfacing the Myanaung-Kanaung road with concrete in fiscal 2014-15.

Under supervision of officials of the Township Department of Rural Development, the 3,900-foot-long and 12-foot-wide road is being covered with concrete to increase the durability of the road, particularly during heavy rains.

Win Bo (Township IPRD)

Midwifery course concludes in Ngazun Township

NGAZUN, 30 April — Mandalay Region Hluttaw MP U Kyaw Tin and officials presented the graduates with their certificates.

The head of Township Health Department, assistant surgeons, health assistance and officials gave practical and theoretical courses to trainees from 25 October 2014 to 27 April 2015.

Chairperson of the supervisory committee Daw Nway Nway Lin spoke about duty and functions of maternal and pediatric healthcare providers.

Five course instructors gave lectures to 70 MCWA members from 14 townships of the district at the two-day course.—Aung Than (Mingala Taungnyunt)

New high school opens in Yebyu Township

DAEWEE, 30 April — A ceremony to inaugurate Basic Education High School was held in Nyinhtaw village in Yebyu Township, Taninthayi Region, on 29 April.

Region Chief Minister U Myat Ko unveiled an archway at the school and a bronze plaque commemorating the opening.

Winner Construction run by U Nyi Nyi Maung was assigned duty to construct the two-storey school building worth US $163,536.

Po Shwe Than
(Daweii)

MCWA members attend healthcare provider course

YANGON, 29 April — Yangon East District Maternal and Child Welfare Supervisory Committee and District Health Department conducted the new generation maternal and pediatric healthcare provider course.

Chairperson of the supervisory committee Daw Nway Nway Lin spoke about duty and functions of maternal and pediatric healthcare providers.

Five course instructors gave lectures to 70 MCWA members from 14 townships of the district at the two-day course.—Aung Than (Mingala Taungnyunt)
Vietnam marks 40th anniversary of war’s end with call for further struggle

Ho Chi Minh City, 30 April — Vietnam on Thursday marked the 40th anniversary of the topping of the former US-backed government in Saigon and the country’s reunification with a ceremony in what is now Ho Chi Minh City, at which Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung urged younger generations to “carry on the glorious revoluntary cause of their predecessors” by building up the country.

Speaking at the ceremony attended by top Communist Party leaders, war veterans and others, Dung called communist forces’ resounding victory in what he called the “great war of resistance” against the United States “a glorious chapter in our great history of national construction and defense.”

“With that victory, we accomplished a historic mission of liberating the South and reunifying the country, bringing Vietnam into a new era — the era of independence and reunification — and building the socialist Vietnam into a strong nation with wealthy people, democratic, just and civilized society.”

Recalling how the United States propped up anti-communist South Vietnamese governments throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, Dung said, “US imperialists imposed neo-colonial regime to turn South Vietnam into a US military base, brutally repressed the revolution in the South and waged devastasting war in the North. They committed countless barbarous crimes, causing immeasurable losses and pains to our people and country.”

“However, the people of Viet Nam did not fear,” he said, echoing independence hero Ho Chi Minh’s famous refrain: “nothing is more precious than indep-pendence and freedom.”

“We would rather endure and sacrifice than lose the independence and be slaves,” he said.

Dung attributed what he also called the “1975 Great Spring Victory” partly to “brilliant and cre-tive” political and mil-tary leadership, support from friendly countries like China and the Soviet Union, ardent patriotism, and “the fighting and win-ning spirit of our people’s armed forces.”

Since the war’s end, Dung said, reunified Viet-nam has succeeded in over-coming a host of challenges, including military ones like its brief but bloody border war with China in 1979 that followed the Vi-etnamese invasion of Cam-bodia in which the geno-cidal Khmer Rouge was ousted from power.

He made no direct ref-erence to Vietnam’s current conflict with China over the Spratly and Paracel islands in the South China Sea except to stress that his country remains “determined to safeguard independ-ence, sovereignty and terri-torial integrity to be worthy of the noble sacrifice of our comrades, fellow heroes and martyrs.”

After three decades of building up a “socialist oriented market-economy” the country has “missing elements that could have contributed to the country’s growth of 7 percent. He also cited achievements in economic infrastructure, social progress and social security, justice and rule of law, poverty alleviation, rural building, electrification and healthcare.”

But the prime min-ister voiced worries over shortcomings such as cor-rup-tion, the widening gap between rich and poor, and environmental degrada-tion, and failure to “create a platform to transform our country into an industrial nation.”

“The growth quality, business environment and the economy’s competitivness remained limi-ted. The socialist-oriented

Japan PM Abe in historic speech vows to uphold past war statements

WASHINGTON, 30 April — Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in a landmark speech to the US Congress on Wednesday, said he will stick to statements by his predecessors expressing “deep remorse” over Japan’s wartime behavior.

Abe admitted that Japan’s actions “brought suffering to the peoples” in other Asian countries before and during World War II, but his speech, delivered in English, did not contain a straightforward apology for Japanese wartime actions.

In the speech at the Hall of the House of Representatives, the Japanese leader also pitched his policy of empowering women while solic-iting US lawmakers’ cooperation so that Japan, the United States and 10 other countries can move forward in concluding a US-led Pacific free trade initiative. Abe became the first Japanese leader to address a joint session of the US Congress, and the spotlight fell on his choice of words regarding wartime history amid speculation his phrasing will foreshadow the statement he issues this summer on the 70th anniversary of Japan’s surrender in the war. “I offer with profound respect my eternal condolences to the souls of all American people that were lost during World War II,” Abe told the audience, which included an American held by Japan as a prisoner of war: “History is harsh. What is done cannot be undone,” said Abe, who visited the World War II Memorial in downtown Washington before he came to Congress. “With deep repentance in my heart, I stood there in silent prayers for some time,” he said.

US Vice President Joe Biden commended Abe for stating Japan’s responsibility for the war, describing the speech as “very graceful” and “much appreciated.” Abe said Japanese must not avert their eyes from the suffering Japan brought to people in other Asian countries. “I will up-hold the views expressed by the previous prime ministers in this regard.”

Abe was thought to be referring to a 1995 statement in which then Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama expressed feelings of “deep re-morse” and a “heartfelt apology” for the damage and suffering Japan caused, especially to people in other Asian countries, and to a similar statement by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi 10 years later which used the same language.—Kyodo News

Philippines may seek clemency anew for drug convict in Indonesia

MANILA, 30 April — The Philippines on Wednesday said it may seek clemency anew for a Filipino drug convict granted a temporary reprieve from a death sentence in Indonesia, depending on the outcome of a related human trafficking case, a foreign ministry spokesman said on Thurs-day.

Mary Jane Veloso, 30, was spared from the firing squad after officials in Ma-nil a asked Indonesian President Joko Widodo to allow her to give evidence to an investigation into the net-work that allegedly recruited her. “Everything will depend on the outcome of the inves-tigation and its conclusion, which will help determine and identify those respon-sible in drug trafficking and human smuggling,” foreign ministry spokesman Charles Jose told a news conference. “We are in a position to file charges and convict them and establish that Mary Jane is a victim, that’s the time we could request again for clemency.”

Manila has sought clemency for Veloso twice, in 2010 and this month before her execution. Widodo, who ignored appeals from Brazil and Australia when the exe-cution of eight other drug convicts went ahead on 29 April, has said the re-prieve for Veloso was “not a cancellation but a postpone-ment.”

But Philippine officials are hoping the developments in Manila will influence Indonesia to reconsider the death sentence. Representatives from the Philippine embassy in Jakarta are due to meet In-donesian legal officials next week to find out terms and conditions of the reprieve granted to Veloso, Jose said.

Philippine President Benigno Aquino told report-ers he has asked the Justice Department to speed up the legal process to prosecute people responsible for Velo-so’s situation, particularly her alleged recruiter, Maria Cristina Sergio. Sergio, who has sought police protection after receiving death threats, denies she recruited Veloso and gave her a suitcase stuffed with drugs, her lawyer Precy Acosta said. “There’s still no case against her, she is under police protective custody,” she said.

Justice Secretary Leila de Lima said Sergio was facing human trafficking, illegal recruitment and fraud complaints and it would take 60 days to complete the pre-liminary investigation.—Reuters
Kits to design toy robots from spare parts

 Turning spare bits into a creative toy, OffBits is all about recycling spare bits and pieces and making them into fun, original toys for a fresh take on creativity and play.

TEL-AVIV, 30 April — The leftover screws from the shelving unit you just built, the extra nuts and bolts from the bicycle you just fixed, or the studs and fasteners you just didn’t want to throw away all have a new future, thanks to an Israeli toy design team.

The creators behind the OffBits, the open-source robot toys that encourage you to tinker, are hoping to add a new sense of creativity to the toy-building community.

The OffBits team spent two years fine-tuning the product, testing it on live audiences at the Mini Maker Faire festival of invention in Jerusalem.

While it may seem strange to buy a small box of little screws and odd pieces, Goren says the OffBits Starter Kits, which contain custom parts and connectors, are your entry into a world of unlimited creativity.

Open-source crowdfunding

To get word out about the new game in town, the OffBits team has launched a Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign. Within the first week, the global community of BitStarter helped the seven startup entrepreneurs cruise past the halfway mark to their $15,000 goal.

Prof Hassom Haick at the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology.

Haick, a professor of chemical engineering at the Technion’s Russell Berrie Nanotechnology Institute, developed the nanotech breath-analysis system NanoNose to detect a range of illnesses. The latest study proved its effectiveness in predicting and diagnosing gastric cancer.

Writing in the prestigious journal Gut, Haick and his lab team describe how they took 968 breath samples from 484 patients, including 99 known to have gastric cancer.

They analyzed each sample twice — once using a standard gas chromatograph-mass spectrometry method (GCMS) and again with Haick’s nanotech technology combined with a pattern-recognition algorithm — for Helicobacter pylori, a bacterium known to increase the risk for stomach cancer.

The tests showed that patients with cancer as well as those at high risk had distinctive “breath prints.”

The nanoarray analysis allowed the researchers to distinguish between patients with gastric cancer, people with precancerous stomach lesions, and healthy individuals, based on the concentrations of eight specific substances (out of 130) in the oral cavity. The method had 73 percent sensitivity, 98 percent specificity, and 92 percent accuracy.

The diagnosis is accurate regardless of other factors such as age, sex, smoking habits, alcohol consumption and the use of anti-inflammatory drugs.

Catching cancer early

This innovative breath cancer-detection technology has significant advantages over the existing detection methods that are time- and resource-intensive, or invasive, such as blood tests.

“Combining the breath-analysis technology for stomach cancer diagnosis, a wide-scale clinical trial is currently underway in Europe involving thousands of participants who have just started becoming cancerous or pre-cancerous tumors,” one of the Haick’s students, Haitham Amal, was quoted as saying.

The study, published in Gut as part of the doctor’s smoking-related research, reported that Haitham Amal, was conducted in conjunction with a Latvian research group headed by Prof. Marcis Leja, based on the largest population sample ever in a trial of this type.

In order to assess the accuracy and effectiveness of the breath-analysis nanotechnology for stomach cancer diagnosis, a wide-scale clinical trial is currently underway in Europe involving thousands of participants who have just started becoming cancerous or pre-cancerous tumors.

“Nanomarray analysis could work with Haick’s non-invasive screening tool for [gastric cancer] and related precancerous lesions as well as to increase the surveilliance of the latter,” the study report concludes.

Haick also is working on related advances such as the SmellPhone mobile diagnostic tool and a portable diagnostic test.

Kits to design toy robots from spare parts

Japan, China, S Korea adopt 5-year environmental action plan

SHANGHAI, 30 April — China and South Korea adopted on Thursday an action plan for jointly tackling environmental issues over the next five years, even as effective trilateral cooperation in other fields remains elusive due to political constraints.

The environment ministers from the three countries agreed to work closely in helping China reduce the density of PM2.5, harmful particles that are smaller than 2.5 microns in diameter, and other air pollutants.

The action plan for 2015-2019 was endorsed by the ministers in Shanghai, under which, among other points, they will set up working groups to conduct together scientific research on measures against air pollution and share expertise among them on monitoring technologies.

Japanese Environment Minister Yoshiho Mochizuki and his Chinese and South Korean counterparts, Chen Jinjing and Yoon Seong Kyu, discussed nine priority areas of cooperation in the action plan, also including climate change, biodiversity and management of chemicals. —Kyodo News

Noninvasive, early detection of stomach cancer

Prof Hassom Haick of the Technion, Israel’s “electronic nose” pioneer, shows how nanotechnology can improve and simplify diagnosis of an often deadly cancer.

Kyo-don Expo finds nearly half opposed to Japan-US defence guidelines

Tokyo, 30 April — Nearly half of people surveyed were opposed to the revised Japan-US defence guidelines announced earlier this week, a Kyodo News poll found on Thursday.

While 47.9 percent said they were against the guidelines, 35.5 percent supported it, according to the telephone survey conducted on Wednesday and Thursday.

In the survey, the approval rating for the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at stood 52.7 percent, down 2.7 percentage points from the previous poll.

On Abe’s bid to enact legislation for Japan to play a greater security role based on the revised guidelines, 48.4 percent were opposed to his doing so during the ongoing parliamentary session through June, almost unchanged from the preceding survey. —Kyodo News

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Tokyo, 30 April — Nearly half of people surveyed were opposed to the revised Japan-US defence guidelines announced earlier this week, a Kyodo News poll found on Thursday.

While 47.9 percent said they were against the guidelines, 35.5 percent supported it, according to the telephone survey conducted on Wednesday and Thursday.

In the survey, the approval rating for the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at stood 52.7 percent, down 2.7 percentage points from the previous poll.

On Abe’s bid to enact legislation for Japan to play a greater security role based on the revised guidelines, 48.4 percent were opposed to his doing so during the ongoing parliamentary session through June, almost unchanged from the preceding survey. —Kyodo News
Accounting: a driver of corporate growth and then of national economic growth

Kyaw Thura

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hese days much has been talked and written about the economic development of the developing countries. Many theories of economic development, past and present, have been advocated by economists for adoption by those countries. As far as I can remember, they cited as crucial factors in economic growth industrialization, natural resources, foreign investment, education, etc. Though I am only a professional accountant, I have no doubt that these factors are the drivers of economic growth, as economists say. As we all know, most of the now economically advanced countries, both in the West and the Far East, are industrialized countries. However rich a country may be in natural resources, unless it has a well developed industrial base, it does not have much hope of rapid economic progress as compared with the countries where such an industrial base has been established. It is common knowledge that an industrialized country can turn what natural resources and raw materials it possesses into finished products that can fetch much higher prices on world markets than when they are exported as raw materials. Other factors, equally important as they are, may contribute to economic development in their own ways. However, I must confess that as I am not myself an economist, the factors I have mentioned above as crucial to economic growth may not be complete and there may be other factors as important that I am not aware of. Anyway I would like to add to the above list “accounting”, which may be included in the foregoing of education. Personally speaking, I have not a shadow of doubt that those are the drivers of economic growth over the past centuries for most of the present economies of America, Canada, and Europe in the West and China and Japan in the Far East.

Now I would like to explain why I think “accounting” plays a vital role in the economic growth of the corporate world, which in turn would lead in its own way to the economic growth of the country. As most of us will know, accounting keeps track of the daily business transactions and records of the corporate bodies. Then the professional accountants will translate those accounting data into meaningful financial statements by using their technical expertise. The financial statements show their operational results in terms of profit and loss as well as their financial status at the end of the fiscal year. By making a detailed study of the financial statements, the shareholders and stakeholders as well as prospective investors, both local and foreign alike, will surely be able to assess the financial health of respective corporate bodies. Moreover, they show how much capital has been invested, how much profit or loss has been accumulated over the years, whether or not it has the potential to continue as a going concern in the long term in terms of financial and operational performance, how much debt has been incurred, how much is receivable from the debtors, whether it is solvent or not, how much are the assets worth—in fact, the net worth, either surplus or deficit, of the whole corporate body (that is, total assets—total liabilities) can be known at a glance. As we all know, it is commonly acknowledged that without efficient and effective financial management and control that can be provided only by accounting professionals, no commercial enterprises of any kind can be run successfully in this highly competitive world of multinationals. A business enterprise which is run without proper financial management and control will no doubt be like a boat without a rudder that is set adrift in a stormy, turbulent sea. Without a rudder to guide it, it will go in any direction that the winds blow and will never reach the destination that has been set.

Much emphasis has been placed on the foreign investment as one of the important factors in rapid economic development. But foreign investors, who are much shrewder than we, are not interested in how much they make their investments blindly in our country. It is more than likely that they will first explore the accounting culture of our corporate world. They will undoubtedly probe if the corporate bodies follow the international accounting standards (IAS) and international financial reporting standards (IFRS) in preparing their financial statements, showing transparency, and accountability as well as a true and fair view of their financial status as of the end of the fiscal year. Of course, accounting culture is one of the factors they will seek out as part of the economic and social environment and situation, which are politically and socially stable and free from all kinds of internal strife and conflict that are damaging to the prospects of their capital investment in the country. They will also find out if our country has sound banking and internet-connected communications systems, as well as a body of free-market-oriented corporate and tax laws, which are the key to their successful business operations. Foreign investors are most interested in whether there are adequate, creditable corporate laws that allow repatriation of profits earned from their investments in any type of industries.

What is more, for management’s part, they may make a detailed analysis of their operational results and financial position with the help of the professional accountant, as shown by their financial statements, and thus determine the growth of their business activities by diversifying into new promising lines of business. Towards this end, management has to make budgetary projections of economic benefits likely to be derived from business expansion and diversification in the long run, based on the financial statements. Here, too, the professional accountant’s input is needed. Thus, decisions may be taken by management on whether to raise funds needed for expansion and diversification either by borrowing long-term loans from the banks or by issuance of new shares or stocks via the Stock Exchange. All these things are made possible only by the professional accountant by using management accounting techniques of analysis, which can, of course, contribute much to the growth of the corporate bodies, thereby promoting the growth of our national economy, too. From all this it is clear how important are the role of “accounting” and that of the professional accountant as drivers of economic growth of the corporate world. There is no denying that the economic growth of the corporate bodies will create more job opportunities and, as a consequence, greater wealth for all in the country, which in turn will provide a good source of tax revenues for the Government.

So with the growth of the corporate world, our national economy will grow proportionately, too, because the growth of the corporate bodies and that of our national economy are intertwined with and interdependent on each other. In this context, we have a Myanmar saying: “As the water level of the pond rises, so does the lotus.” Another saying is: “The stalks of the lotus depend on the island for their existence and vice versa.” Now there comes the crucial question of how and where these professional accountants are channeled out to successfully handle the accounting and financial side of the business affairs of the corporate bodies. To answer this question, on whether to adopt a brief account of the Myanmar Institute of Certified Public Accountants (MICPA) that churns out the professional accountants to meet the needs of the growing number of business enterprises which have sprung up in the wake of the opening up of the economy to private investments, local and foreign alike.

MICPA

The accounting profession dates back to the days of the British rule in Myanmar. The British system of accounting, which itself is a legacy of the British rule, has been followed throughout the years from pre-independence days. Up until recent times, before the International Accounting Standards and International Standards on Auditing were introduced, the so-called generally accepted accounting and auditing standards were usually adopted by all state-owned commercial enterprises and private commercial enterprises in Myanmar.

As regards the accounting profession in Myanmar, under the Burma Auditors’ Rules of 1956, it is stipulated that a Registered Accountant (RA) courses were opened, to which matriculants and University graduates were admitted. Those who passed the final RA exam were awarded specific RA certificates and permitted to practice accounting and auditing after serving a prescribed period of apprenticeship with the registered audit firms.

To be continued
**Myanmar government, people donate foodstuffs, personal goods for earthquake victims of Nepal**

**YANGON, 30 April** — A special aircraft of Myanmar Tatmadaw will transport foodstuffs and personal goods donated by Myanmar government and people from Mingala-don Airbase on 1 May to provide them to the earthquake victims through Nepalese government.

According to the Yangon Region Relief and Resettlement Department, the aircraft will carry 240 boxes of instant noodle, 39 boxes of assorted cereals, 27 boxes of instant coffee packages, 26 boxes of wafer, three boxes of candy, 80 cards of purified drinking-water bottles, three boxes of clothes, 35 bales of blankets, 20 bales of T-shirt and other donations weighing 6,010 kilograms.

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**Myanmar Real Estate Services Association holds its first annual meeting in Yangon on Thursday. — Photo: Ye Myint**

The Myanmar Real Estate Services Association (MRESA) held its first annual meeting on 5 April, the government in cooperation with the establishments of low-cost housing by the state where a property association representing those associations have been formed in the country’s regions and states including Nay Pyi Taw except Chin State where a property association is expected to be formed next month.

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**Samsung aids programme to teach out-of-school children**

**YANGON, 30 April** — Samsung Electronics pledged more than US $50,000 worth of assistance Thursday to a local non-profit organization dedicated to providing an education to children unable to attend school.

The donation covers a mobile education bus equipped with the South Korean manufacturing giant’s electronic devices such as television and tablets, as well as one-year salaries for teachers of the Myanmar Mobile Education Project (MyME).

“We believe this donation is to provide a modern and innovative environment for the students and to further enhance the learning process,” Samsung head of marketing Mr Richard See said at a donation ceremony in Yangon on that day. “We hope our efforts will have long lasting value to MyME and create positive impact on students”.

Since 2014, MyME has provided an education and outreach programme via mobile classrooms to out-of-school children.

The organization has four buses for mobile schools, including a car donated by Samsung.

“Currently more than 20 teachers are providing education services to over 400 youths in Yangon and Mandalay regions, mostly to children working at teashops and restaurants,” said Director U Tin Maung Maung Aye of MyME.

A teacher said, “The teaching programme is classified into three levels for beginners, level I and level II. The syllabus includes basic literacy in beginner level, English language skills, maths, hygiene and social dealing in level I, and a computer and Internet course, and vocational training in level II.”

“We designed all courses to develop critical thinking skills through innovative, interactive instruction,” the director of MyME said. “MyME is educating youths every day, especially in the evening when children finish their work.”

“We have no big difficulties, but our main difficulty is that teachers have to negotiate schedules, as the students’ free times are different,” U Tin Maung Maung Aye told the media at the donation ceremony.

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**Realtors gather to strengthen business networks in Myanmar property market**

The MRESA, a national association representing real estate associations to be implemented in future.”

The association has not yet started drafting the proposed law, which would be the first of its kind in Myanmar, and is still at the planning stage of selecting those who should be involved in the process, the chairman added.

Since the start of this year, the overheated property market has cooled with sales slumping, spurring the view that Yangon’s real estate boom is about to end.

Despite such predications, sale and rental prices for apartments and houses in the Yangon’s main townships and suburbs remain unchanged.

On 5 April, the government announced new income tax rates on property transactions with reductions following the approval of the Parliament. Thanks to the reductions, agents and market observers predicted the cooling property market will be alive again.

MERSA member U Aung Tin said there are positive signs despite the current sluggish state of Yangon’s property market.

“The country’s real estate market is expected to grow again, as the country is also expecting to see economic growth and development in the years ahead,” he said. He also highlighted the importance of public-private partnership for property market stability with the establishments of low-cost housing by the government in cooperation with developers.

The MRESA, a non-governmental organization representing those Realtors gather to strengthen business networks in Myanmar property market

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Marchers protest police violence in Baltimore, New York

**Baltimore, 30 April —** Protesters marched against police violence in cities from New York to Denver on Wednesday, and a large demonstration in Baltimore ended peacefully two days after rioting over the death of a black man injured in police custody.

The protests were the latest actions against racial profiling and police use of lethal force sparked by the deaths of African-American men in Cleveland; Ferguson, Missouri; New York and elsewhere in the past year.

New York City police arrested more than 60 people as protesters roved in separate groups through Manhattan, blocking traffic in a few areas. Smaller protests occurred in Boston, Houston, Ferguson, Missouri, Washington, DC, Seattle and a handful of demonstrators were arrested in Denver.

In Baltimore, 3,000 National Guard troops and police stood by to enforce a 10 pm curfew as thousands of peaceful marchers converged on the city.

The march capped a day of calm in a city that two days earlier saw its worst rioting in decades.

Protesters in the mostly black city of Baltimore sought answers about the fate of Freddie Gray, 25, who died after suffering spinal injuries while in police custody. Police are due on Friday to give their findings on Gray’s death to prosecutors but said no information will be made public.

“Can’t stop, won’t stop, put killer cops in cell blocks,” chanted protesters in the biggest march in Baltimore since Gray died on 19 April, a week after his arrest and injury.

Nineteen buildings and dozens of cars burned, stores were looted and 20 officers were hurt in Baltimore on Monday in a spasm of violence hours after Gray’s funeral.

“This is for everyone who died wrongly at the hands of police,” said Noy Brown-Frisby, a 35-year-old hairstylist who attended Wednesday’s march with her young daughter.

But she recognized that high crime in the city of 620,000 people complicates relations with the police.

“There is so much tension. The crime is so high that when there is interaction between police and the community it becomes volatile,” she said.

In New York City, police on scooters used batons to try to keep protesters on sidewalks and arrested people who moved into traffic. The demonstrations from Union Square to Times Square and elsewhere, were reminiscent of similar demonstrations in December after a grand jury decided against charges in the case of Eric Garner, an unarmed black man who died after a police officer put him in a chokehold.

Many Baltimore citizens were hoping to find out the details of Gray’s death on Friday when police have said they would conclude their investigation. “The best (outcome) would be one where the officers were disciplined and officials realized what happened and owned up to their wrongdoing,” said Larry Little, 22, a Baltimore resident who joined the march on Wednesday.

Gray was arrested on 12 April after fleeing from police in a high-crime area. He was carrying a switchblade knife. He died a week later.

But police said on Wednesday that information would be turned over to the state attorney’s office and could not be made public because prosecutors still have to decide whether to bring charges.

The US Department of Justice is conducting a separate probe into possible civil rights violations in Gray’s death.

The *Washington Post* reported that a prisoner who was in the same van as Gray, but who could not see him, heard him banging against the walls and believed he was intentionally trying to injure himself. The newspaper cited a police document.

With police and National Guard troops patrolling Baltimore’s streets on Wednesday, schools reopened and business resumed.

Baltimore’s Major League Baseball team, the Orioles, filled the Camden Yards stands for a game against the Chicago White Sox in an empty stadium, a sign of the tenuous security situation.

Police have arrested close to 270 people since Monday, 18 of them on Wednesday. Police Commissioner Anthony Batts said more than 100 people had been released without being charged, because officials could not keep up with the paperwork, but he said charges would be brought later.

A person is arrested by police officers near Union Square on 29 April, 2015, in New York City. People gathered to protest the death of Freddie Gray, a Baltimore man who was critically injured in police custody.—*Reuters*

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**United Nations, 30 April —** Britain has informed a United Nations sanctions panel of an active Iranian nuclear procurement network linked to two blacklisted firms, according to a confidential report by the panel seen by Reuters.

The existence of such a network could add to Western concerns over whether Teheran can be trusted to adhere to a nuclear deal due by 30 June in which it would agree to restrict sensitive nuclear work in exchange for sanctions relief.

Talks between six major powers and Teheran are approaching the final stages after they hammered out a preliminary agreement on 2 April, with Iran committing to reduce the number of centrifuges it operates and other long-term nuclear limitations.

“The UK government informed the Panel on 20 April 2015 that it is aware of an active Iranian nuclear procurement network which has been associated with Iran’s Centrifuge Technology Company (TESA) and Kalay Electric Company (KEC),” a Panel of Experts said in its annual report.

The panel monitors Iran’s compliance with the UN sanctions regime.

KEC is under UN Security Council sanctions while TESA is under US and European Union sanctions due to their suspected links to banned Iranian nuclear activities.

Iran, which has been under sanctions for years, has a long history of illicit nuclear procurement using front companies and other methods of skirting sanctions.

That has enabled it to develop a substantial atomic programme in spite of aggressive international efforts to curtail it, UN diplomats say. But analysts and Western intelligence officials say sanctions have slowed the development of Teheran’s nuclear programme.

The United States and the International Atomic Energy Agency have repeatedly said that Teheran has so far complied with the terms of a limited agreement struck in November 2013 between Iran and the six powers involving some reductions in its nuclear activities, including enrichment. The panel’s document did not contain further details on the British report.

Nuclear enrichment centrifuges are used to puturify uranium for use as fuel for power plants or, if purified to a very high level, in weapons.

Teheran denies allegations from Western powers and their allies that it is amassing the capability to produce nuclear weapons under cover of a civilian atomic energy programme.

The panel said that the British information about the Iranian procurement network was received too recently for it to conduct an independent investigation of the allegations.

UN sanctions in place since 2006 bar Teheran from pursuing sensitive nuclear activities, including uranium enrichment, as well as ballistic missile work. There are also US and EU sanctions on Iran, which have crippled its economy.

Officials at the UN missions of Britain and Iran were not immediately available for comment.

The panel said it had received no new reports from UN member states of confirmed cases of non-compliance involving Iranian nuclear procurement. However, it cautioned that the lack of such reports could be due to multiple reasons.
Heavy fighting in Yemen, Saudi Arabia trains tribal fighters

A member of the Southern Resistance Committees takes position during clashes with Houthis fighters in Yemen's southern city of Aden on 29 April, 2015.—Reuters

ADEN / DOHA, 30 April — Saudi Arabia has been training and airdropping arms to Houthis rebels’ tanks and snipers killed at least 12 civilians overnight in Yemen’s Aden as they advanced toward the centre of the city, residents said, and a Saudi-led coalition airdropped arms to anti-Houthi fighters in the city of Taiz. The Houthis took the capital Sanaa in September, demanding a more inclusive government, and swept south, rattling top world oil exporter Saudi Arabia and its allies, who fear what they see as expanding Iran influence in the region. Arab coalition air strikes have, over the last month, backed local fighters in Aden and nationwide battle Shi’ite Houthis. Heavy clashes shook the Khor Maksar district in Aden, seen as the main bulwark against the Houthis and dozens of families fled the district on Wednesday. “The world, the coalition and the United Nations need to step in urgently to save our neighbourhood, which has truly become a disaster area after this indiscriminate shelling,” resident Ali Mohammed Yahya said. About 200 km (120 miles) to the north, Arab aircraft dropped weapons for tribal and Islamist militias fighting the Houthis in the city of Taiz. Talks between the Houthis and exiled, Riyadh-based President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi collapsed in early April and he fled. Chaos then set in as the Iran-allied Houthis fought their way south, battling loyalist army units, regional tribes and al-Qaeda militants. Sources in the region told Reuters Saudi Arabia had trained Yemeni armed tribesmen to fight the Houthis, in sign of its growing involvement in the country’s ground war after a month of air operations. Three hundred tribal fighters trained across Yemen’s border with the kingdom were deployed this week back to their tribes in the Sirwah district of central Marib province and made gains against the Houthis, a Yemeni official source told Reuters. “You cannot win a war against the Houthis from the air — you need to send ground forces in, but now there’s a programme to train tribal fighters on the border,” said a Doha-based military source familiar with the matter. Despite weeks of bombing, the Houthis have retained their dominant position on battle fronts across Yemen, and no visible progress has been made toward peace talks. Yemen’s government in exile, which seeks to re-establish its authority in the disputed region of al-Qaida, is recognized by the United Nations. It has been excluded from the January communique and was angered that this person should not be a part of your future,” said a US diplomatic mission in Sanaa. “You cannot tell (Syrians) that this person should not be a part of your future,” he said. “This will prevent a negotiation from taking place.”

Libya’s Benghazi, cradle of anti-Gaddafi revolt, torn by chaos that followed

BENGHAZI (Libya), 30 April — When Libyan government forces and Islamist militants battled with artillery guns right in his district, Khalil al-Barassi knew it was time to pack up. He moved his family into an abandoned schoolhouse, where they live on aid from the Red Crescent, while the city around them falls to pieces. After a year of war, Libya’s second-largest city Benghazi is divided into areas controlled by forces loyal to one of two rival Libyan governments, and areas held by Islamist fighters led by the group called the Islamic State. The city was the birthplace of the revolt that toppled dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, with residents who pride themselves on a willingness to rise up and defend themselves from exploitation. But with rockets crashing daily into its boulevards, neighbourhoods reduced to rubble and around

Muammar Gaddafi’s former palace, once a “symbol of decadence” of the dictator, is now an arms depot for the war’s convoluted sides. Some of the rebels’ weapons, like Barassi’s, were once state-of-the-art, outdated weapons such as Toyota trucks mounted with outdated weapons such as rockets, which they see as expanding Iran influence in the region. Arab coalition air strikes have, over the last month, backed local fighters in Aden and nationwide battle Shi’ite Houthis. Heavy clashes shook the Khor Maksar district in Aden, seen as the main bulwark against the Houthis and dozens of families fled the district on Wednesday. “The world, the coalition and the United Nations need to step in urgently to save our neighbourhood, which has truly become a disaster area after this indiscriminate shelling,” resident Ali Mohammed Yahya said. About 200 km (120 miles) to the north, Arab aircraft dropped weapons for tribal and Islamist militias fighting the Houthis in the city of Taiz. Talks between the Houthis and exiled, Riyadh-based President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi collapsed in early April and he fled. Chaos then set in as the Iran-allied Houthis fought their way south, battling loyalist army units, regional tribes and al-Qaeda militants. Sources in the region told Reuters Saudi Arabia had trained Yemeni armed tribesmen to fight the Houthis, in sign of its growing involvement in the country’s ground war after a month of air operations. Three hundred tribal fighters trained across Yemen’s border with the kingdom were deployed this week back to their tribes in the Sirwah district of central Marib province and made gains against the Houthis, a Yemeni official source told Reuters. “You cannot win a war against the Houthis from the air — you need to send ground forces in, but now there’s a programme to train tribal fighters on the border,” said a Doha-based military source familiar with the matter. Despite weeks of bombing, the Houthis have retained their dominant position on battle fronts across Yemen, and no visible progress has been made toward peace talks. Yemen’s government in exile, which seeks to re-establish its authority in the disputed region of al-Qaida, is recognized by the United Nations. It has been kicked out of the January communique and was angered that this person should not be a part of your future,” said a US diplomatic mission in Sanaa. “You cannot tell (Syrians) that this person should not be a part of your future,” he said. “This will prevent a negotiation from taking place.”
Climbing to reopen on Everest after quake, avalanche

KATHMANDU, 30 April — Climbing will reopen on Mount Everest next week after damage to routes caused by avalanches that were set off by a huge earthquake, one of which killed 18 climbers at base camp, senior officials said on Thursday.

"Next week, expeditions will continue," said Tuls Prasad Gautam, chief of the mountaineering department at the tourism ministry.

At an informal meeting of officials and climbing groups, it was agreed that there was "no additional risk" to climbers as a result of the earthquake, which has killed thousands of people in Nepal.

A team called the Icefall Doctors would within one week fix the route through the treacherous Khumbu icefalls, taken by climbers scaling the south side of Everest, Nepal's highest peak at 8,848 m (29,035 feet).

Others have, however, hedged down in hope of pressing ahead despite the humanitarian tragedy unfolding in Nepal, where more than 5,000 people have died in the quake and its aftermath.

The team said that 60-70 foreign climbers remained at base camp, but expected climbers to regroup and more than 350 to try to reach the summit. With their local sherpa mountain guides, some 700 would scale Everest in total, he said, a normal number for the spring season.

Gautam said that most of the ropes buried under avalanche snow on the Khumbu icefalls would be pulled out and used.

If it was not possible to use the old ropes, new ropes and ladders would be laid that have already been brought to Everest base camp.

The mountaineering department has extended the season into early June for those holding 90-day permits to climb Everest. Typically the monsoon season is on or after 1 June, with heavy cloud cover making climbing impossible.

Ang Tshering Sherpa, head of the Nepal Mountaineering Association, confirmed that the Icefall Doctors were working on the route up to the advanced camps from which climbers mount their final assault on the summit.

Ex-AUM cult member sentenced to life in prison over 1995 sarin attack

HONG KONG, 30 April — Vietnam is arming its expanding submarine force with land attack missiles that could be capable of reaching Chinese coastal cities.

The independent Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) recently updated data on its website to show Vietnam’s acquisition of the Russian-made land attack variant of the Klub missile for its state-of-the-art Kilo attack submarines.

SIPRI arms researcher Siemon Wezeman said the entry was based on an earlier but little-noticed filing Vietnam made last year to the United Nations’ register of conventional arms.

Regional military attaches and analysts see the move as a further sign of Vietnam’s determination to counter the rise of China’s military and part of a broader trend of Asian countries re-arming amid rising territorial tensions.

The choice of weapon is a more assertive one than the anti-shipping missiles Vietnam was expected to obtain.

While those would potentially target Chinese ships and submarines in the South China Sea, the land attack weapons are capable of precision strikes at a range of 300 kilometres, making China’s coastal cities potential targets in any conflict.

Carl Thayer, an expert on Vietnam’s military at the Australian Defence Force Academy, said the move was a “massive shift” beyond more routine anti-ship tactics.

“They’ve given themselves a much more powerful deterrent that complicates China’s strategic calculations,” he said, adding it was surprised by the move.

Vietnam is the first Southeast Asian nation to arm its submarine fleet with a land attack missile.

The Vietnamese defence and foreign ministries have yet to respond to questions submitted by Reuters. Vietnamese military officials have previously described Vietnam’s arms build-up, including the submarine purchases, as defensive.

Moscow-based Almaz-Anatey, parent company of the missiles’ manufacturer Novator, declined to comment on any weapon sales to Vietnam.

Rather than risk an attack on cities such as Shanghai, it is more likely Vietnam would see higher ports and airfields, such as the naval base at Sanya on China’s Hainan Island and facilities on land reclamations China is building in the South China Sea, as potential targets, Thayer said.

While communist parties rule both Vietnam and China, Hanoi has long been wary of China, especially over Beijing’s claims to most of the potentially oil-rich South China Sea.

Beijing’s placement of an oil rig in waters claimed by Vietnam last year sparked riots in Vietnam and infuriated Hanoi’s leadership. Its coast guard ships and fishing boats were routinely chased away by larger Chinese ships during the stand-off.

The two navies routinely eye each other over disputed holdings in the sea’s Spratly islands, which straddle some of the world’s busiest shipping lanes.

Before obtaining the latest weapons, Hanoi’s previous land attack capabilities were limited to a handful of ageing Scud missiles and more limited weapons fired by Russian-built Su-30 aircraft.

Ambassador to Russia Chikahito Harada will represent Japan on Abe’s behalf.

Japan has invited Putin for a visit but it was put off last year due to Russia’s annexation of the Crimean region of Ukraine, an act condemned by Tokyo and other members of the international community. Suga said the rescheduling of Putin’s visit has yet to be decided.

Global Russia’s involvement in the Ukraine crisis, US President Barack Obama has decided not to take part in the 9 May ceremony, South Korean President Park Geun-hye is also unlikely to attend.

In contrast, Chinese President Xi Jinping plans to attend and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is also reportedly planning to do so.—Kyodo News

Vietnam buys submarine-launched land attack missiles to deter China

TOKYO, 30 April — Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has sent a letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin to tell him he will not be able to attend a 9 May ceremony in Moscow to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe, Japan’s top government spokesman said on Thursday.

“The letter conveyed (Abe’s) intention to skip the ceremony due to a scheduling conflict,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said at a news conference.

Suga declined to elaborate further on the substance of the letter. On Tuesday, Suga said that Abe, who was invited to the ceremony, has decided to skip it to attend to Diet and other affairs returning from an eight-day official trip to the United States through 3 May.

Abe writes to Putin to inform him of absence from WWII ceremony

TOKYO, 30 April — A former AUM Shinrikyo cult member was sentenced on Thursday to life in prison for his involvement in the group’s 1995 sarin nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway system.

The Tokyo District Court handed down the ruling on Katuya Takahashi, 57, in the first case tried before a combination of lay and professional judges over the terror attack, which killed 13 and left more than 6,000 people injured.

Prosecutors had sought life imprisonment for Takahashi, who was indicted on murder and other charges for allegedly acting as a driver for one of the cult members when he released the deadly agent in subway cars on 20 March, 1995. Takahashi had pleaded not guilty, saying he did not know sarin would be used.

Captured in Tokyo in June 2012 after 17 years on the run, Takahashi was the last to be arrested among the AUM Shinrikyo members who were on a special wanted list after the subway attack, which was masterminded by cult founder Shoko Asahara.

During his trial before six citizen and three professional judges, 27 people, including six death row inmates, testified.

Takahashi is the AUM’s last remaining citizen in court, and the third professional referee. As the hearing is not expected to last long, the case is likely to be decided.

At a press conference in Moscow to mark the anniversary of Russia’s victory in World War II, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said he would not be able to attend the ceremony amid territorial tensions.

Takahashi’s execution was set for 9 May, but Abe wrote a letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin to inform him of his absence.

Takahashi, the last member of the AUM Shinrikyo cult who has been indicted on murder and other charges for allegedly acting as a driver for one of the cult members who released the deadly agent in subway cars on 20 March, 1995, was said to have been sentenced to death.

Tomomitsu Niimi, a 51-year-old death row inmate, said participants had used the word the “thing.”

During the trial, Takahashi described Asahara as “guru,” suggesting that he was still under the influence of the founder’s teachings. Asahara, 60, whose real name is Chizuo Matsumoto, was convicted and is on death row.

All the other AUM members who were sentenced to life imprisonment or death were executed.

Photo shows Katuya Takahashi, a former member of the AUM Shinrikyo cult who has been indicted on murder and other charges for allegedly acting as a driver for one of the cult members who released the deadly sarin nerve gas in Tokyo subway cars in March 1995.

Kyodo News

Trekker stay stand in Everest Base Camp, approximately 5,300 metres (17,388 ft) above sea level, in Solukhumbu District, Nepal, in this file picture taken on 6 May, 2014.—Reuters
Brazilian executed in Indonesia unawares what was happening until end

SYDNEY, 30 April — A Brazilian man executed in Indonesia for drug trafficking who was diagnosed with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder did not understand what was happening to him until his final moments, a priest assigned as his spiritual adviser told Australia’s ABC radio on Thursday.

Rodrigo Muxfeldt Gulaarte was among eight people convicted of drug offences from several countries who were executed shortly after midnight on Wednesday morning. Brazil had made repeated personal pleas for Indonesia to commute his sentence on humanitarian grounds, citing his mental illness.

Father Charlie Burrows, a local priest who accompanied Gulaarte in his final hours, told ABC he thought he had prepared the Brazilian for the execution.

“I thought I’d got him ready, that he was going to be put in chains, because he didn’t like being touched ... I said to him, well I’m 72, when you get up to heaven you’ll know where I’m going to live, prepare a garden or something.” Burrows said.

Gulaarte was calm as he was handcuffed by warders but became agitated when he was handed over to police outside the jail who put leg chains on him, Burrows said.

“I thought he’d got the message he was to be executed but ... when the chains started to go on, he said to me, ‘Oh father, am I being executed?’” Burrows said.

Burrows, who witnessed the execution of another Brazilian prisoner in January, said Gulaarte continued to hear voices in his final days telling him everything would be fine.

“He believes the voices more than he does anybody else,” he said.

Gulaarte was caught entering Indonesia in 2004 with six kilograms of cocaine hidden in surf boards, and was sentenced to death in 2005.

The 42-year-old’s family presented several doctors’ reports to the Indonesian authorities attesting to his mental illness, and Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff had made personal pleas on his behalf. Rousseff recalled Brazil’s ambassador to Jakarta after the first execution in January.

Burrows joined other spiritual advisers and family members in a tent near the field on the prison island of Nusakambangan where the executions took place. They heard the men singing before shots rang out simultaneously and were comforted that there were no subsequent single shots that would have indicated one of the prisoners needed to be shot in the head.

Burrows said all eight men refused blindfolds and were handcuffed at the front to allow them to shake hands with a large number of warders who had gathered outside.

“They might have seen the executions in very dark colours; it was a very dark night,” Burrows said. “They only had flashlights on the prisoners, and when we were going to meet them we were falling over stones because of the dark.” — Reuters

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India, Japan sign action plan for investment, trade promotion

MOSKVA, 30 April — India and Japan on Thursday signed an action agenda for bilateral investment and trade promotion.

Indian Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and visiting Japanese Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Yoichi Miyazawa, focuses on further strengthening bilateral trade relations.

Miyazawa said it contains five key items including the development of select townships in India as Japanese industrial townships, promotion of investment and infrastructural development, and further development and cooperation in information technology.

He also mentioned that the signing of the action agenda marks a further improvement in the trade relationship between the two countries and follows up Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Japan last year.

The Indian commerce minister said that the signing is in line with Modi’s vision of “Made in India.” She added that the interaction with the Japanese trade minister also involved a strong partnership and dialogue between the private sectors of the two countries represented by a strong delegation of corporate chiefs from both sides.

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WEATHER REPORT

FORECAST VALID UNTIL EVENING OF THE 1st May, 2015 Rain or thundershowers are likely to be scattered in Upper Sagra founded Tanahigus Regions, Kachin, Shan and Mon States, isolated in Lower Sagra and Mandalay Regions Chin, Rakhine and Kayin States, partly cloudy in the remaining Regions and States. Degree of certainty is (60%).

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Continuation of rain or thundershowers in the Northern Myanmar areas.
Alabama Shakes rock their way to top of Billboard 200

Los Angeles, 30 April — Southern rockers Alabama Shakes scored their first chart-topping album on the weekly US Billboard 200 chart on Wednesday.

“Sound & Color,” the second album by the band, sold 91,000 albums, 27,000 songs and was streamed 3.6 million times, totalling 96,000 units according to Nielsen SoundScan.

The album’s success comes after the band was one of the standout groups at the annual Coachella 3-day music festival in Southern California earlier this month. The soundtrack to Universal Pictures’ April blockbuster “Furious 7” held its spot at No 2, selling 62,000 units, while rapper Yelawolf’s new album “Love Story” debuted at No 3 with 58,000 units.

The Billboard 200 chart tallies album sales, song sales (10 songs equal one album) and streaming activity (1,500 streams equal one album). No other new entries cracked into the top ten of the Billboard 200 chart this week, and last week’s chart-topper, Shawn Mendes’ “Handwritten,” dropped to No 17.

On the Digital Songs chart, which measures online download sales, Wiz Khalifa and Charlie Puth’s “We Don’t Talk Anymore” is the tribute to late actor Paul Walker on the “Furious 7” soundtrack, held steady at No 1. With 316,000 downloads sold last week.

Ex-fiancé of Sofia Vergara defends lawsuit over frozen embryos

Los Angeles, 30 April — The ex-fiancé of actress Sofia Vergara, one of the stars of the hit ABC comedy “Modern Family,” has defended his lawsuit seeking to take two frozen embryos the couple created before separating.

In a New York Times column published on Wednesday, businessman Nick Loeb said that after the pair split in 2014, he sought to take the embryos to have them carried to term — assuming all financial and custodial responsibilities — but she refused.

“When we create embryos for the purpose of life, should we not define them as life, rather than as property?” he wrote.

Representatives for the Colombian-born Vergara, who last September earned the distinction of being the highest paid US television actress for three consecutive years, could not be immediately reached for comment.

Loeb said he decided to write the op-ed after news of the case, which he broke in the media.

Son of former US ambassador John L Loeb Jr, Loeb said he and Vergara agreed to attempt in vitro fertilization and have a surrogate bear children from their embryos. He said the couple’s first two attempts were unsuccessful, so they intended to keep the embryos frozen.

Vergara, who has happily spoken of her circumstances, is content to leave the embryos frozen indefinitely as she has no desire to have children with her ex, which should be understandable given the circumstances, he said in the statement.

In Wednesday’s column, Loeb wrote the two had signed an agreement stipulating the embryos could only be used if both parties consented. He is seeking to have that form voided.

Loeb said he intends to move to and build a new family, but added: “That doesn’t mean I should let the two lives I have already created be destroyed or sit in a freezer until the end of time.”

“Hot Pursuit,” a comedy starring Vergara and actress Reese Witherspoon, is set to open next week.

One Direction’s new songs will be like Oasis: Liam Payne

Los Angeles, 30 April — One Direction member Liam Payne has said the songs in the group’s new album will have similar feel as 1990s British pop band Oasis.

“The boys we’ve been writing with have come up with some great, great songs. Kind of like, a bit Oasis-y, which is ace. I love that!” Payne said.

The 21-year-old singer indicated a mellower vibe for the upcoming album which will follow 2014’s “Four,” reported Entertainment Weekly.

“The songs have come out a bit more chill because I think we want this to be quite a long-lasting album that you can listen to any time. Anytime you can throw on an Ed (Sheeran) song and it can always make sense. We’re trying to do that,” he said.—PTI

‘Granny hair’ vibe: women embrace trend by going many shades of grey

New York, 30 April — While many people try to hide their grey hair, spending hours eradicating the signs of advancing age, growing grey may no longer be like Oasis’.

Many fashion blogs and magazines say the look is the “hottest” hair colour trend has been embraced by women worldwide with thousands posting pictures on social media sites under #grannyhair.

“Granny hair is basically silver hair, any tone of grey in your hair: steel grey, silvery grey, really really white, platinum-ish with either violet or silver undertones.” New York hair stylist Jan-Marie Arteca said. “That’s the trend.”

Fashion designers such as Jean-Paul Gaultier, Chanel and Gareth Pugh have all styled their models with silver hair and many have since followed suit.

Spotted on celebrities such as Lady Gaga, Pnk, Rihanna, Nicole Ritchie and Kelly Osborne, the grey, white or lavender tinge has been embraced by celebrities such as Lady Gaga, Pink, Hollywood beauty Jessica Alba.

I have made people cry: Jessica Alba

Los Angeles, 30 April — Hollywood beauty Jessica Alba says she is not always the nicest boss when it comes to her billion-dollar business empire, the Honest Company.

Featured on the cover of More magazine, the 34-year-old “Sin City” star shared she is all business when work needs to get done, reported EOnline.

“Sometimes I’m a little more iron fist than velvet glove. I’m straight to the point. I’ve made people cry,” she said.

Standing by her leadership practises, the actress believes sometimes showing tough love is necessary, but she’s working on being a bit more understanding.

“I have to say, ‘This isn’t personal’. This is what needs to get done, and it’s just as simple as that. And… We’re not crying anymore. I’m learning to tone myself down,” she added.—PTI

Japanese actor Ken Watanabe attends a Press conference at New York’s Lincoln Centre Theater on 29 April, 2015, as he was nominated for the Tony Award for Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role in a Musical. Watanabe, who is starring in “The King and I”, said he is proud of being selected as one of five nominees. The award ceremony will be held on 7 June.—Kyodo News

New York, 30 April — Japanese actor Ken Watanabe said on Wednesday he feels honoured after being nominated for the prestigious day for a Tony Award for his role in the Broadway musical “The King and I.”

“It is truly an honour to be recognized as one of five (nominees in the Best Leading Actor in a Musical prize),” Watanabe, said in Japanese at a press conference at the Lincoln Center Theater in New York, where the show is on.

“The King and I” itself earned nominations in nine categories of the awards, the winners of which will be announced on 7 June.

In the musical set in the 19th century in what is now Thailand, Watanabe plays the king of Siam, who develops a bond with teacher Anna Leonowens, who is invited to the country to teach his children English.

After the opening of the musical in mid-April, Watanabe received scathing remarks about his English skills, but he said in the press conference, “You don’t have to be a native speaker. (What is important is) to make sure the meaning can be conveyed.” Commenting on how rare it is for a Japanese actor to be chosen for a lead role in a Broadway musical, Watanabe said, “I was chosen because they wanted something different,” adding sometimes differences can help spark new things.

Kyodo News
Visitors enter a bunker at the entrance of which is an art installation, in Konjic, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on 24 April, 2015. — Reuters

**Bosnian artists plan Cold War museum in Tito’s secret bunker**

Konjic, (Bosnia), 30 April — A group of Bosnian artists plan to turn a former atomic-bomb bunker, once the best kept secret of socialist Yugoslavia, into a vast museum dedicated to the Cold War.

A labyrinth of tunnels, dark chambers and heavy steel doors, the Atomic War Shelter built by Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito has hosted art exhibitions since 2011. But now the artists plan something new.

“We want to make a Museum of the Cold War, a hybrid museum that will be both military and artistic,” said Edo Hozic, who has driven efforts to open the shelter to the public. “Once inside, we’ll travel through time.”

Built 280 m (920 ft) below ground over 6.500 square feet (604 square metres), the shelter is almost invisible to passersby outside the town of Konjic in southern Bosnia, 40 km (25 miles) from Sarajevo.

Tito, who led former Yugoslavia from the end of World War Two until his death in 1980, exploited the Cold War to balance the country between East and West and build alliances worldwide.

The shelter’s existence became public when Yugoslavia fell apart in war in the 1990s and it became the military property of independent Bosnia. It has since been turned over to an ammunition factory in Konjic, which wants to use two of its storage sites, though the bunker itself is a national heritage site.

Last week, Hozic opened the Third Biennale of Contemporary Art in the bunker, with works by 25 artists focussing this year on alternative ways of life during the Cold War, such as war protests and the environmental and women’s movements.

One display, the Time Chamber by British artist Delaine Le Bas, featured candles and 1960s music in a chamber turned into a hippie room complete with Flower Power garments.

“The art works cover the period of the Cold War, everything that this bunker slept through during its long isolation,” Hozic said. The proposal to create a museum has been submitted to the government, and ministers have given verbal support.

Albertan artist Helidon Gjergji said: “I think it’s a visionary idea (that) should be a role model for others.”

Bosnian soldiers, who would once have guarded the top secret site from prying eyes, now watch over art lining its walls.

“The project would lose sense if the army was not present,” said Sandra Miljevic-Hozic, the chief coordinator of the project and Hozic’s wife. — Reuters

**US movie theater shares may lose steam despite blockbusters**

New York, 30 April — US movie theater stocks are unlikely to continue their blistering run despite a wave of popular first-quarter titles and the expected success of “The Avengers” sequel and “Star Wars” in the coming months. Shares of major names such as AMC Entertainment Holdings, Carmike Cinemas and Cinemark Holdings are all sharply outpacing the broader US stock market. But that success may signal limited room for the shares to rise further, even if company results come in ahead of expectations.

“No one anticipated the box office would do so well in the first quarter, but by now the good news has been priced in,” said David Miller, managing director at Topika Capital Markets in Los Angeles. “It’s hard to see further upside from here.” Studies typically do not release major films in the first quarter, but runaway successes such as “American Sniper” and “Fifty Shades of Grey” coaxed back audiences after a disappointing 2014, which featured the weakest summer box office since 1997, according to box office data company Rentrak.

The total US box office gross in the first quarter rose 2.85 percent from the previous year to reach $2.47 billion, according to Rentrak. Despite off-voiced concerns that video streaming services like Netflix could lure consumers from theaters, that impact has yet to manifest itself, analysts said. The 2014 slowdown was attributed to a weak slate of films.

AMC, scheduled to report after the market closes on Wednesday, is expected to post first-quarter earnings growth of 37.2 percent and revenue growth of 5.4 percent, according to Thomson Reuters data. Those expectations have contributed to the stock rising 23.7 percent year-to-date, well above the S&P’s 2.7 percent rise.

AMC has a price-to-earnings ratio of 25.82, which exceeds the 18.67 ratio of its entertainment industry peers. StarMine’s measurement of intrinsic value — which looks at anticipated growth over the next decade — calculates that AMC should trade at $25.42, 21.6 percent below its Tuesday closing price.

Carmike Cinemas and Cinemark Holdings, which will report in early May, are seen posting strong revenue growth for the quarter. But the shares of both are up more than 20 percent in 2015, giving them elevated S&P’s 2.7 percent rise.

“Your mind is just... every day, you think every waking, sleeping hour, you’re living in Afghanistan. And you just sometimes need something to switch that focus,” he told Reuters Television.

At Hougoumont Farm, which Evans’s former regiment, the Coldstream Guards, helped to defend against the first assault of the battle, soldiers and veterans now dig alongside archaeologists from Britain, Belgium, France and Germany.

“They’ve been there, they’ve seen it,” Evans said. “A different time and a different place, but they understand the confusion; they understand how ground is so important to cover and to make it advance.”

Metal detectors and digging have so far uncovered coins, buttons, and English and French musket balls that the project’s lead archaeologist, Tony Pollard, believes to be from the first shots fired during the battle. — Reuters
Mayweather, Pacquiao trade compliments not shots

LAS VEGAS, 30 April — Floyd Mayweather Jr and Manny Pacquiao appeared more focused on conserving energy and dispelling animosity than stirring the pot for their upcoming mega-fight as the two boxers exchanged their way through a low-key media conference on Wednesday.

Back in the same room for the first time since 11 March when they came together to promote Saturday’s welterweight championship bout, the two fighters traded compliments rather than jab and even shared a laugh during the traditional ‘stare-down’ photo opportunity.

“This fight sells itself. I don’t have to do that,” the undefeated Mayweather (47-0) told reporters of taunting his opponent.

“This fight is not good versus evil, (it’s) not fighter who is at the top going against another fighter at the top.” Any buzz surrounding the event was sucked out of the edgy MGM Grand Ka theatre as a dozen other people involved in the fight promotion took turns at the microphone before Mayweather and Pacquiao finally had a chance to speak.

Even Pacquiao manager Freddie Roach, who can normally be counted on for a provocative comment, offered up a bland cliche.

“Floyd. I wish you the best of luck, Manny I wish you the best of luck, may the best man win,” Roach

The boxers’ fashion sense was as contrasting as their styles in the ring.

The attacking Pacquiao arrived on stage dressed sharply in a blazer and trousers while Mayweather, recognized as one of the best defensive fighters of all-time, chose his ‘Money Team’ track suit.

But their messages were uniform, with both men thanking God and everyone involved for what is expected to be the biggest grossing prize fight ever.

“It’s nothing personal... just doing our jobs trying to put our names in boxing history,” said Pacquiao.

With Mayweather and Pacquiao subdived, promoters and broadcast giants HBO and Showtime, who share the pay-per-view rights, tried to provide a few fireworks by trumpeting their fighters and all things connected to them as the gold medal standard.

Those shots, however, were mostly duds and Mayweather put the spotlight where it belonged.

“I believe in my skills, I believe I am going to be victorious.”

“I went to training camp expecting I was going to win this fight and I’m pretty sure he did the same. It is an intriguing matchup.” — Reuters

Djokovic pulls out of Madrid to rest before French Open

Novak Djokovic of Serbia reacts after defeating Tomas Berdych of the Czech Republic during their final tennis match at the Monte Carlo Masters in Monaco on 19 April, 2015.— REUTERS

LONDON, 30 April — Chelsea came from behind to beat Leicester City 3-1 on Wednesday and move to within one win of clinching the Premier League title for the first time in five years. Chelsea were labeled as “boring” by Arsenal fans during the 0-0 London derby on Sunday and they were below par against a Leicester side chasing a fifth successive league win to boost their chances of survival in top flight. The Portuguese forward scored in each half to round off the dominating performance.

Chelsea have 80 points from 34 games with last season’s champions Manchester City second on 67. Third-placed Arsenal also have 67 but they have played a game less.

Leicester remained 17th with 31 points from 34 games, one point ahead of 18th-placed Sunderland but Nigel Pearson’s side have played a game more.

“I think maybe we are scared to win the league. Drogba told Sky Sports. “Two wins and then we get the trophy but this was difficult. We have to give credit to Leicester.”

“In the second half we came back and we wanted to make sure the game against Crystal Palace is the one that gives us the title. We don’t get enough credit. We are top of the league, we have the most points and people find us boring.” — Reuters

Real keep heat on Barca after Almeria strol

Chelsea on brink of title after win at Leicester

John Terry celebrates with team mates after scoring the second goal for Chelsea during their Barclays Premier League at King Power Stadium on 29 April, 2015.— Reuters

Madrid, 30 April — World number one Novak Djokovic has withdrawn from next week’s Madrid Open for a second consecutive year to rest before the Rome Masters and the French Open, organizers of the clay Masters event said on Wednesday.

“The Serb announced that... he will take time out to rest before continuing with his planned calendar at the Rome and Roland Garros tournaments,” a statement on the Madrid Open’s official site (www.madrid-open.com) said.

Djokovic has been in imperious form this year, following up his triumph at the Australian Open with victories at the Masters events in Miami, Indian Wells and Monte Carlo.

With Rafa Nadal yet to conquer.

Novak Djokovic of Serbia reacts after defeating Tomas Berdych of the Czech Republic during their final tennis match at the Monte Carlo Masters in Monaco on 19 April, 2015.— Reuters

Madrid, 30 April — Real Madrid kept alive their hopes of overtaking La Liga leaders Barcelona when a James Rodriguez stunner set up a tense 3-0 home victory over struggling Almeria on Wednesday.

Barca have 84 points, with Real on 82 and Atletico 75, six ahead of Sevilla, who won 3-1 at La Liga debutants Eibar to climb above Valencia into fourth. Valencia can reclaim Spain’s fourth Champions League berth, which carries a place in qualifying for Europe’s elite club competition, if they avoid defeat at mid-table Rayo Vallecano on Thursday.

Almeria held out until the stroke of halftime at the Bernabeu when Rodriguez pounced on a loose ball and lashed a shot into the top corner from just outside the penalty area.

The European champions, depleted by injuries, doubled their lead on the stroke of halftime when Mau ro Dos Santos diverted the ball into his own net under pressure from La Liga top scorer Cristiano Ronaldo.

The Portuguese forward failed to add to his tally and stayed on 39 for the season, one more than Barca’s Lionel Messi who struck twice on Tuesday.

Full back Alvaro Ar beloa netted a rare goal to make it 3-0 five minutes from time, his third in 167 La Liga games for Real, when he turned the ball past goalkeeper Rup en Martinez from a Javier Hernandez centre.

“We are not sure that Barca will drop any points but we are certain that we can win our last four games,” Real coach Carlo Ancelotti told a news conference.

“I don’t have to do that,” the undefeated Mayweather (47-0) told reporters of taunting his opponent.

“This fight is not good versus evil, (it’s) not fighter who is at the top going against another fighter at the top.” Any buzz surrounding the event was sucked out of the edgy MGM Grand Ka theatre as a dozen other people involved in the fight promotion took turns at the microphone before Mayweather and Pacquiao finally had a chance to speak.

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Now we begin a very important phase of the season, when every game is the most important,” add ed. “It’s about those face a tough trip to Sevilla on Saturday and play at Juventus in their Champions League semi-final, first leg three days later.

Malaga’s hopes of catching sixth-placed Vil larreal and securing a place in the Europa League suffered a setback when they lost 1-0 at Celta Vigo.

Echle pulled away from the relegation zone and dealt a stinging blow to Deportivo La Coruna when they thumped the visiting Galician side 4-0.

Deportivo are 18th, two points behind Almeria and four ahead of 19th- placed Granada, who host Espanyol on Thursday.

Cordoba, beaten 1-0 at Levante on Tuesday, are five points adrift at the bottom and on the brink of relegation.— Reuters