Subdued housing market to bounce back next year, realtors, market experts say

By Ye Myint

YANGON, 2 May — Despite the cooling of the local property market since last year, realtors and market experts predict that property sales activities will bounce back next year. The once-overheated housing market has suffered a slump in sales, spur- ring the view that it will continue to fall this year from its peak. But, hopes are alive among housing agents that the market will return to its previous pace of growth seen in the past few years.

“As a realtor, I see the housing market has been fairly subdued in recent months following the suspension of the 30,000 sq.ft. Yangon city expansion project in late September last year,” said U Khin Maung Than, chairman of Myanmar Real Estate Services Association.

As another cooling factor, the upcoming general election set to be held in late October or early No- vember is keeping investors and developers on the sidelines in a wait-and-see mode, he opined.

Despite there being various reasons for the fluctuations in the property market, the market, as usual, will come alive again after taking a rest for a while, the chairman added.

About five or six months ago, the market started stalling, with home sales muted compared to previous years when prices were on the up and the market was bustling with activity.

But, some economists and the country’s development partners point out that Myanmar’s economy is expected to continue to grow and it is also set to see a vast throng of foreign investors in a range of sec- tors, including construction and hospitality.

Moreover, the start of the ASEAN Economic Community in late 2015 will have a positive effect on the country’s real estate sector, drawing foreign in- vestors to do business in Southeast Asia’s last fron- tier for investment, said market experts.

U Tin Aung, another real estate agent, expressed the view that as the coun- try’s economic potential is yet to be fully realized, there remain many oppor- tunities to fulfill its com- mercial and tourism infra- structure needs, thereby contribut- ing towards de- velopment of the property market.

There are many rea- sons to expect further ex- pansion in Myanmar’s real estate market as drafting of a condominium law is on track to be enacted soon, said U Win Aung, leader of the country’s biggest busi- ness federation.

Yet, there is a need to strengthen some of the rules and regulations in connection with property rights in order to help My- annmar draw more foreign direct investments into this sector, said a legal and tax advisory firm in its press release last year.

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Photo of partially completed apartment in a suburb of Yangon.—PHOTO: YE MYINT

President U Thein Sein, wife Daw Khin Khin Win attend enshrinement of sacred objects, golden umbrella-hoisting ceremonies in Nay Pyi Taw

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NAY PYI TAW, 2 May — President U Thein Sein and wife Daw Khin Khin Win attended ceremonies for en- shrinement of sacred objects and hoisting golden umbrel- la at four holy places in Nay Pyi Taw on Saturday.

First, the congregation led by the President and wife received the Nine Pre- cepts from the vice-chair- man of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee Meiktila Shwebontha Mon- astery Abbot and presented offertories to the members of the Sangha and shared merits gained.

Next, the President unveiled a stone plaque to mark the completion of con- struction of holy places and sprinkled scent on it to- gether with Vice-Presidents Dr Sai Mauk Kham and U Nyan Tun and Command- er-in-Chief of Defence Ser- vices Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.

Then, enshrinement of sacred objects at holy places, hosting golden um- brella atop Tayzaw Datu Pagoda and pouring water at Maha Bawdhi Bo tree followed.

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(See page 3)
Respects paid to faculty members of English Department

KYEE PWAR YAY library in Htugyi hopes for President’s excellent award 2015

Departmental officials focus on farmland management

Thai, Myanmar businessmen exchange views on bilateral trade

Outstanding students visit farmlands in Nyaungshwe Tsp
President U Thein Sein, wife Daw Khin Khin Win attend...

(from page 1)

Awards — President U Thein Sein and his wife Daw Khin Khin Win attended a ceremony to present offerings to a Sayadaw on May 2.

Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann meets US business people, congresspersons

WASHINGTON DC, 2 May — Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann met with US business people and congresspersons on May 2.

Outstanding students visit Popa region, Scouts' get-together in PyinOoLwin

Bagan, 2 May — Camp leader U Soe Myint Tun led outstanding students from Recreation Camp (Bagan) to visit Popa region on May 2. They observed flora and fauna in the region.

Vice-President Dr Sai Mauk Kham and wife presents offerings to a Sayadaw

PyinOoLwin scouts opened their camps in Kandawgyi Gardens on May 2. At the opening ceremony Manda Pagoda took place on the Fullmoon Day of Kason in 2013. Construction of three other holy places kicked off in 2013 and the inauguration ceremony was held today.

Union Information minister receives foreign delegations

Union FM sends felicitations to Poland

Nay Pyi Taw, 3 May — U Wunna Maung Lwin, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, has sent a messages of felicitations to His Excellency Mr. Grzegorz Schetyna, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, on the occasion of the National Day of the Republic of Poland, which falls on 3 May 2015.

Union Minister for Information U Ye Htut holds talks with Mr David N. Saperstein, the US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom

YANGON, 2 May — Union Minister for Information U Ye Htut received Mr Jorgen Lorentzen, director of Norwegian Hedda Foundation, on Saturday morning at the building of Printing and Publication in Theinbyu Road.

Both side discussed establishment of the House of Literature, the first of its kind in Myanmar and supported by the Norwegian government.

The meeting was also attended by U Tint Swe, newly appointed permanent secretary, and director generals of the Ministry of Information, as well as members of the Myanmar Writers and Journalists Association, the Myanmar Poets’ Union, the Pen Myanmar Foundation and the Myanmar Literature Development Organization.

In the afternoon, the union minister received Mr David N. Saperstein, the US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. During the meeting at the building of Printing and Publication in Theinbyu Road, the minister and the ambassador discussed activities of religious organizations and freedom of religious affairs in Myanmar.
Monsoons could bring disease, a second crisis, to Nepal

Thailand’s opposition leader and former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva

BANGKOK, 2 May — Any achievements by Thailand’s ruling junta while in power will be lost without significant changes to the country’s draft constitution, Democratic Party leader and former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said on Friday.

The military toppled an elected government last May and is engineering wide ranging reforms to heal the country’s deep political divisions.

But both the Democrat Party and its rivals have called the junta’s draft charter undemocratic, saying it could herald more turmoil under a weak coalition government.

“If they don’t come up with a constitution that is accepted, and cannot come up with one that can be sustained, they will have lost everything,” Abhisit, who was prime minister from 2008 to 2011, told Reuters in an interview.

“They’ve got the resources to draw politicians away from political parties into groupings that could actually form a new coalition,” he added.

Thailand has been divided for more than a decade between supporters of Thaksin and the Bangkok-based royalist-military establishment, which reared Thaksin’s popularity.

Abhisit said his party had “never had a problem” with Thaksin’s Puea Thai Party but that it should take the opportunity to move away from the “Thaksin agenda”. He added, “I’ve always maintained that the conflict has been between Thaksin and the Thai state. That should give a clue to the people in power, as well as the secret of reconciliation is to get beyond the Thaksin issue.”

LOS ANGELES, 2 May — Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on Friday he will deliver a statement on the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II this summer that will show the future direction of Japan.

Speaking to Japanese reporters in Los Angeles, the fourth and last destination of his weeklong tour of the United States, Abe reiterated that his statement will be based on the position taken by his predecessors, which he has not elaborated.

“I will compile one using a great amount of our wisdom that can show the rest of the world what kind of a country Japan will aim to be toward the 80th, 90th and 100th anniversaries,” Abe said. He also said, “I will stick to the position adopted by successive Cabinets on perceptions of (wartime) history in its entirety. I’ll compile a statement based on it.”

Abe’s use of language over Japan’s wartime behaviour has been a focus of attention during his trip, which also took him to Boston, Washington and San Francisco, amid speculation his phrasing here would indicate the coming war statement.

Abe was apparently referring to the statements released in 1995 by Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama to mark the 50th war anniversary and in 2005 by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, as well as a 1993 statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono on the issue of women who were forced to work at wartime Japanese military brothels.

Murayama and Koi- zumi expressed their “deep remorse” and “heartfelt apology” over Japan’s aggression and colonial rule in other Asian countries before and during the world war, while Kono expressed his “sincere apologies and remorse” to the women euphemistically called “comfort women” in Japan.

Abe suggested last month he would refrain from using exactly the same words as seen in the past statements in his own war statement. He said the high-profile issue of domestic security legislation that would pave the way for Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defence, which was also encouraged by Abe’s government, including revised guidelines on bilateral defence cooperation with the US, would also encourage protests.

Tidey said, warning of a “rocket” when people are not put in place.

Abe seeks war anniversary statement showing future of Japan

A man sits on the rubble of collapsed houses following Saturday’s earthquake at Sankhu, on the outskirts of Kathmandu, Nepal on 1 May, 2015. — Reuters

The earthquake last Saturday has left 3 million people needing food assistance and flattened more than 130,000 homes, meaning 24,000 people are currently staying in 13 camps in Kathmandu, UNICEF said.

Most urgently needed are medical supplies, clean water, sanitation, and shelter for those whose homes have been destroyed. Chris Tidey, a UNICEF spokesman, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), some hospitals in the worst affected areas have already become completely destroyed. There is no short-age of staff, but an urgent need for medical supplies, the group said in a statement.

“We must remain vigil-ant in our efforts to prevent and control communicable disease outbreaks, like diarrhoea,” said Dr Roderico Ofrin, head of the WHO’s emergency response, in a statement on Friday.

“With the monsoon rains come, it’s going to be pretty nasty indeed,” Chris Tidey said, warning of a second crisis later in the year if adequate provisions are not put in place.

The prevalence of dis-eases such as diarrhoea, respiratory illnesses, measles and even cholera, which has been endemic in Nepal in recent years, “sky-rocket” when people are living outdoors in heavy rains, Tidey said.

After an earthquake devastated Haiti in January 2010, killing more than a quarter of a million people, the Caribbean island nation was ravaged by diseases including cholera, which killed thousands in the years following the dis-aster. A 2011 report from the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention said the Haiti cholera out-break was likely caused by UN peacekeepers from Ne- pal who had been seen near a major river used for drinking water.—Reuters

CAMBODIA

Cambodia holds Expo to promote local products

PHNOM PENH, 2 May — The 5th edition of One Village One Product Expo kicked off here on Fri-day afternoon, aiming to promote local products to consumers and tourists, of-ficials said.

More than 80 producers from 13 cities and prov-inces have their products, including jewelry, cosmetics, traditional silk, stone and wooden sculptures, food, and fruit, displayed at the three-day event, said Chea Samnang, secretary general of the One Vil-lage One Product National Committee.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the expo, Deputy Prime Minister Yim Chhay Ly said the expo aimed to promote the consumption of local prod-ucts and to seek markets for producers and farmers.

“This is a good oppor-tunity for producers and farmers to promote their products to local consum-ers and foreign tourists,” he said at the event, which was held at a public park in the south of the Royal Palace.

He said the event would also encourage pro-ducers and farmers to in-crease their production and to focus on quality so as to compete with imported goods.
Iran stance and regional policy bring French leader Gulf Arab rewards

PARIS, 2 May — France’s tough line in talks with Iran and a similar analysis to Gulf Arab states over its nuclear crisis has sealed strategic new links in the Middle East that will be cemented when President Francois Hollande attends a regional leaders’ summit next week. Those ties, which Paris has sought to nurture since Hollande came to power in 2012 — were highlighted on Thursday when Qatar agreed to buy French-made Rafale fighter jets in a 6.3-billion-euro (4.60 billion pounds) deal. Hollande travels to Doha on 4 May to sign the contract before heading to Riyadh at King Salman’s invitation to attend a summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) heads of state, a first for a Western leader, at which issues from the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen to Syria’s civil war will top the agenda. “It’s important for us because this shows the appreciation of Gulf countries in our strategic choices with regard to Syr- ia and the fight against Islamic State”, said a senior French diplomat. “We’ve shown we’re a reliable partner that doesn’t shirk its responsibilities in the region. France, a UN Security Council vet-o-holder, has held out for strict conditions on Iran in any deal to ease sanctions on Tehran in return for monitoring and curbs of its nuclear programme. It also rebuked Washington two years ago for backing down at the last minute on bombing Syria over the use of chemical weapons, a decision that enraged Gulf Arab Sunni states. France is part of a US-led coalition against Islamic State militants in Iraq, has thousands of troops in West Africa fighting al-Qaeda-linked groups and has a naval base in the Unit-ed Arab Emirates.”

Hollande’s visit comes 10 days before Gulf leaders travel to the United States for a summit with President Barack Obama. “France has a reputation of being tougher than the Ameri- cans in the Iran negotiations and that can only please the Saudis,” said Francois Heisbourg, a for- mer defence official and special adviser at the Paris-based Stratetic Research Foundation. “It has shown that it has a regional vi-sion and the capacity to act where and when it feels it’s necessary,” he said, adding that the intention was not to sideline the United States but remind Washington it was no longer the world’s sole superpower.

Paris’ shift to the Gulf states first under former president Nicolas Sarkozy and now Hollande has paid off. Over the last year Paris has sealed more than $15 billion dollars of military con- tracts in the region. The Riyadh summit will see further bilateral talks between France and indi- vidual states on business ties, of- ficials said.

“Our American friends are aggressive competitors and have a very efficient diplomacy, but France offers an alternative di- plomacy,” said Eric Trappier, the chief executive of Rafale-maker Dassault Aviation. “It has close strategic inter- ests with some countries and so with a good fighter jet product as well then the stars align.” Trap- pier said, adding there were talks with other Gulf states for the sale of combat jets.—Reuters

German president says Berlin should be open to Greek war reparations

BERLIN, 2 May — German President Joachim Gauck expressed support on Friday for Athen- es’ demands for reparations for the Nazi occupation of Greece in World War Two, even though the government in Berlin has repeatedly rejected the claims.

Gauck, who has little real power in Germany but a penchant for defying convention, said in an interview to be published in Satur- day’s Süddeutsche Zeitung news- paper that Germany should con- sider its historical responsibility to Greece.

“We are not only people who are living in this day and age but we’re also the descendants of those who left behind a trail of destruc- tion in Europe during World War Two — in Greece, among other places, where we shamefully knew little about it for so long,” Gauck said.

“It’s the right thing to do for a history-conscious country like ours to consider what possibilities there might be for reparations.”

Greece’s demand for 278.7 billion euros (206.14 billion pounds) in reparations for the bru- tal occupation of Greece, which would be “foul on deaf ears, but some legal experts say it may have a case.”

Many in Greece blame Ger- many, their former occupier, for the tough austerity measures and record unemployment that have followed from two international bailouts totalling 240 billion euros. “Last month, economy and vice-chancellor Sigmar Gabri- el called the demand “stupid”.

Gabriel said Greece wanted to squeeze some leeway out of its euro zone partners as they set con- ditions for further financial aid to help Greece avoid bankruptcy.

“And this leeway has absolu- tely nothing to do with World War Two or payment reparations,” he said.

German officials have previ- ously argued that Germany has al- ready honoured its obligations, not least with a 115 million deutsche mark payment to Greece in 1960.

Gauck, a former East German pastor, recently caused a stir by condemning the massacre of 1.5 million Armenians by Ottoman Turkish forces a century ago as “genocide”, a term that the Berlin government had long rejected. Tur- key denies the charge.—Reuters

ADB meetings to discuss lending boost, cooperation with other bodies

Baku, 2 May — Financial leaders from Asia-Pacific countries are gathering in capital of Baku for the Asian Development Bank’s annual meeting and related events from Saturday to discuss ways to promote the region’s growth including boosting the institution’s financing capacity and enhancing cooperation with other multilateral lenders. Members of the ADB, which are expected to be held up later this year to help fund infrastructure projects.

Through the ADB, China pledges to mobilize more resour- ces to respond to financing needs well beyond the capacity of ex- isting lenders, though developed countries see the move as another attempt by Beijing to strengthen its role in its region. Though not di- rectly motivated by the ADB, the ADB has been seeking to strengthen its role as the lending body and improve its project scrutiny for faster approval procedures. The ADB estimates the region’s infra- structure financing needs at over $8 trillion in 2010-2020. In 2014, it approved $22.93 billion in lending including co-financing.

ADB members will continue discussions on the proposal floated by the bank’s chairman, which is its Asian Development Fund, which provides concessional loans and grants to developing countries, and Ordinary Capital-based loans, focused on middle-income countries, as a way of leveraging available resources. The ADB says the result will be the expanded ADF equity and OCR funding, and mean a rise of up to 40 percent in the lender’s annual financing.

Japan, the top shareholder of the ADB, is separately consider- ing strengthening its commitment to supporting Asia’s development, according to a source close to the matter. Japanese Finance Minis- ter Taro Aso will likely brief his counterparts including Chinese Finance Minister Lou Jiwei on an outline of Japan’s initiatives in in- creasing its lending, including for medium- and long-term growth,” the source said, though details are still being worked out for an official an- nouncement. Japan’s Prime Minis- ter Shinzo Abe. Other topics of discussion will also include sus- tainable development goals beyond 2015, climate change and disaster risk resilience.—Kyodo News

French President Francois Hollande during a Working Medal of Honour awards ceremony on May Day at the Elysee Palace, in Paris, France, on 1 May, 2015. REUTERS
Kerry says US wants to renew ties with Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, 2 May — US Secretary of State John Kerry said on Saturday the United States wanted to renew ties with Sri Lanka and announced the start of an annual bilateral dialogue after years of tensions with the island nation’s former government.

“Kerry arrived in the South Asian country earli-er on Saturday, the first time in a decade that a US secretary of state has visited Sri Lanka. Washington had years of tensions over human rights with former President Mahinda Ra-japaksa, who was ousted by Mithripala Sirisena in a surprise election win in January.

Sri Lanka had also tilted heavily towards Chi-na as Rajapaksa fell out with the West over human rights and allegations of war crimes at the end of the government’s drawn-out conflict with Tamil separatists, which ended in 2009.

Kerry said Washingt-on wanted to work with Sirisena and lauded the new government’s efforts to tackle corruption, build democratic institutions and address the wrongs of the past through a process of national reconciliation.

“I am here today be-cause I want to say to the people of Sri Lanka in this journey to restore democ-racy the American people will stand with you,” Kerry said after meeting Sri Lan-ka Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera.

“We intend to broaden and to deepen our partner-ship with you,” Kerry said while announcing the an-nual dialogue.

Samaraweera called Kerry’s visit a “momentous occasion” and said it “signified the return of our little island nation to the centre stage of international af-fairs”.

Kerry has been credit-ed in Sri Lanka for his role in pressing for peaceful and inclusive elections, and for calling Rajapaksa on the eve of voting to urge him to respect the outcome.

Kerry was due to meet Sirisena later on Saturday as well as Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and Rajavarothyam Sampan-der, who heads the main ethnic Tamil political par-ty. He will also discuss US interest in expanding trade and investment with Sri Lanka, a senior State Department official said.

Sri Lanka exports roughly $2.5 billion in goods, mostly textiles, to the United States a year.

The State Department official said Washington was “encouraged” by the new government’s cooper-ation with the United Na-tions over a UN report on possible atrocities commit-ted during the final stages of the civil war.

The United Nations said Rajapaksa’s govern-ment had failed to properly investigate war crimes. In February, at the request of Sirisena’s government, the UN Human Rights Council agreed to delay the release of the UN report until Sep-tember. Sirisena appears to be more willing to work with the United Nations and his government has said it wants to conduct the war crimes investigation with UN assistance.

“Kerry was a leader in terms of Sri Lanka’s rela-tions with the international community and with the United Nations,” the State Department official said.

“We’ll have to see where this goes with Sri Lanka and its dialogue with the UN.”

LJUBLJANA, 2 May — The German government needs to quickly clear up accusations that its BND foreign intelligence agency helped the United States spy on government officials and firms in Europe such as Air-bus Group, Foreign Minis-ter Frank-Walter Steinmeier said on Friday.

The reports in Der Spiegel magazine that the BND helped the US Na-tional Security Agency over 10 years embarrassed Ger-many and upset many in a country where surveillance is a sensitive topic due to abuses by the Nazis and the East German Stasi.

The magazine also re-port ed in its Friday edition that the BND in 2013 or-dered staff to delete 12,000 internet “selectors” — IP addresses, email addresses and phone numbers of Ger-man government officials — that it had been tracking for the NSA.

“We’ve got to work to clear this up as quickly as possible to know what hap-pened — and what didn’t happen,” Steinmeier said during a visit to the Sloveni-an capital. He said the focus of the investigation should be in parliament.

Steinmeier, a leader of the centre-left Social Dem-ocrats (SPD) in Chancellor Angela Merkel’s right-left government, declined to comment when asked whether the scandal was tarnishing Germany’s reputation.

Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere, a close ally of Merkel and her chief of staff, in 2010 to 2009, denied that he lied to parliament about intelli-gence cooperation with the NSA. His chancellery has said since 2009 it was aware of the NSA interest in spying on European defense firms, even though parlia-ment was told in 2014 it had no information about it.

The SPD’s deputy leader, general secretary Yasmin Fahimi, joined in the criticism of the chancel-lery by left-wing opposition par-ties, which ended in 2009, denied that he lied to parliament about intelligence cooperation with the NSA.

“The chancellery’s su-pervision of the BND was a total failure,” she told the Passauer Neue Presse dai-ly. “It’s responsible to make sure the intelligence agency behaves.”

German media have also reported that BND of-ficials helped US agencies spy on the French presi-dent’s office, the foreign ministry in Paris and the European Commission.

Airbus Group said on Thursday it planned to com-plain to German authorities over reports the BND had helped the United States to spy on it and other Europe-an firms.

When allegations emerged in 2013 that the United States had bugged Merkel’s mobile phone, she declared: “Spying among friends is not at all accept-able.”

Colombo, 2 May — US Secretary of State John Kerry said on Saturday the United States wanted to renew ties with Sri Lanka and announced the start of an annual bilateral dialogue after years of tensions with the island nation’s former government.

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Sri Lanka exports roughly $2.5 billion in goods, mostly textiles, to the United States a year.

The State Department official said Washington was “encouraged” by the new government’s cooper-ation with the United Na-tions over a UN report on possible atrocities commit-ted during the final stages of the civil war.

The United Nations said Rajapaksa’s govern-ment had failed to properly investigate war crimes. In February, at the request of Sirisena’s government, the UN Human Rights Council agreed to delay the release of the UN report until Sep-tember. Sirisena appears to be more willing to work with the United Nations and his government has said it wants to conduct the war crimes investigation with UN assistance.

“Kerry was a leader in terms of Sri Lanka’s rela-tions with the international community and with the United Nations,” the State Department official said.

“We’ll have to see where this goes with Sri Lanka and its dialogue with the UN.”

EXPLORE EXPO Milano 2015 kicks off with aim of sustainable development

Photo taken on 1 May, 2015 shows the opening ceremgne of the Expo Milano 2015 in Milan, Italy. The Expo Milano 2015 kicked off here on Friday with the aim to give a concrete answer to the vital need for mankind to ensure enough healthy food for all while respecting nature.— XINHUA

MILAN, Italy, 2 May — The Expo Milano 2015 world exposition kicked off here on Friday with the aim to give a concrete answer to the vital need for mankind to ensure enough healthy food for all while respecting nature.

“The Expo Milano 2015 will be a platform for building common grounds for present and future cooperation on this global challenge,” President of the International Exhibitions Bureau (BIE) Ferdinand Nagel said.

In fact, Expo Milano 2015 starts from the consid-eration there are still about 870 million undernourished people in the world but on the other hand there are also those who die from disorders associated with excessive food intake, Milan Mayor Giuliano Pisapia stressed.

Thus at the centre of the Italian six-month event there is the idea that for the first time in its centuries-old history, a world exposition is not simply an exhibition of human progress, but the opportunity to promote collab-oration between nations, organizations and businesses to develop strategies to im-prove the quality of life and support the environment.

The exhibition area, which extends over an area of about one million square meters located northwest of Milan, will be a live stage from morning to night with thousands of performances, concerts, workshops and exhibitions. The Expo Site will be open from 10 am to 11 pm local time every day of the week to ensure visitors can experience all the cultural and dining offerings pre-sented by all participants and partners.

Another of the most in-novative projects introduced by Expo Milano 2015 are “clusters,” or shared exhi-bition areas which group countries devoid of self-built pavilions around themes that characterize specific regions such as the Bio-Mediterra-nean, islands and arid areas.

“We came from Venice, around 300 km from here. We decided to buy the tickets for the opening day as we wanted to enjoy this cul-tural experience from the be-ginning,” a man told Xinhua while visiting the site with his wife and three children on Friday.

“Our country of origin is Romania and we also have links with Moldavia,” the man, Igor Baranovitch, said. “The issue of a sustainable development is crucial for all countries of the world and we are happy to be here to share our views,” he added.

Xinhua
Int’l anti-terror coalition kills 17 in northern Syria: activists

DAMASCUS, 2 May — At least 17 civilians were killed and over 40 others wounded on Friday by the airstrikes of the US-led anti-terror coalition on a village in northern Syria, a monitor group reported.

The warplanes of the anti-terror alliance struck the village of Berimhali in the northwestern countryside of Aleppo Province in northern Syria.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the death toll could rise due to the large number of critically wounded people.

It said the recent killings add to the previous estimates, which indicate that 66 civilians were killed by the international coalition airstrikes against the positions of the Islamic State (IS) group in Syria since the coalition started its strikes in September 2014.

Separately on Friday, a total of 12 Kurdish fighter of the People’s Protection Units (YPG) and 35 IS militants were killed during clashes that erupted between both sides in the northern province of al-Hassakah, said the Observatory.

The UK-based watchdog group said the YPG advanced against the IS in some areas in al-Hassakah, a predominantly-Kurdish province.

Meanwhile, the Observatory said the Syrian government forces gunned down a rebel commander known as Khalid al-Hayani, who leads the Badr Martyrs brigade in the northern city of Aleppo.

It added that Al-Hayani and his group are the main responsible for shelling the government-controlled areas in Aleppo with mortars and other improvised rocket shells known as the Hell Cannon.

The Observatory said 586 people, including 130 kids, were killed last year alone as a result of the rebel shelling on the government-controlled areas in western Aleppo.

57 militants killed in latest operations in Afghanistan

KABUL, 2 May — About 57 Taleban militants have been killed in fresh military operations across Afghanistan, said the country’s Interior Ministry on Saturday morning.

“Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) carried out operations in Urzugan, Zabul, Herat, Ghazni, Helmand, Logar, Kunduz, Sar Pul, Badakhshan, Farah, Paktia, Khost and Baghlan provinces over the last 24 hours. As a result 57 armed Taleban members were killed, 35 wounded and two others were arrested by the ANSF,” the ministry said in a statement.

The ANSF also recovered and defused seven roadside bombs planted by the militants in addition to seizing weapons, according to the statement.

The state did not disclose if there were any casualties on the side of security forces. The Taleban militant group has yet to make comments.—Xinhua

United Nations, 2 May — Russia criticized Western and Arab members of the UN Security Council on Friday for paying “lip service” to humanitarian needs in Yemen after the council was unable to agree on a Russian-drafted statement calling for pauses in fighting to allow delivery of aid.

In the latest sign of increasing tensions between Russia and the West, who are already at odds over Syria and Ukraine, Russian UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin said his three-paragraph statement on Yemen was met with “a procrastination reaction.”

“I was prepared to drop a reference to (a call for) an immediate cease-fire, just at the very least they need to have periodical humanitarian pauses to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian supplies, they couldn’t even agree to that,” Churkin said after the closed-door consultations on Yemen.

“If you cannot agree to a motherhood and apple pie statement what can you agree on,” he said. “They pay lip service, they say ‘things are very bad, but what can we do about it.’”

Churkin said members were consulting with their capitals over the statement but he was sceptical about any agreement.

Violence has been spreading across Yemen since last year when Houthis seized the southern port city of Aden and effectively removed President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. The United Nations says about 12 million people need help.

The Iran-allied Houthis and soldiers loyal to former Yemen President Ali Abdullah Saleh have been fighting alongside each other on the Arabian peninsula. A Saudi-led coalition launched air strikes against the Houthis last month.

The United States said it fully supports the unimpeded delivery of aid to Yemen, including through humanitarian pauses.

But let’s be clear – it is the ongoing, unilateral actions of Houthis and forces loyal to former president Saleh that are responsible for the humanitarian crisis,” said a US official.

“The Houthis and Saleh forces have sought to undermine the political transition process and have been aggressively expanding and occupying territory since mid-2014,” he said.

Earlier this month the Security Council imposed an arms embargo targeting the Houthis and soldiers loyal to Saleh.

The Russian draft statement also expressed support for the new UN envoy to Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, who last week replaced Jamal Benomar and is charged with trying to broker peace in Yemen. —Reuters

Russian UN envoy — West, Arab states pay ‘lip service’ on Yemen aid

Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vitaly Churkin addresses members of the UN Security Council during a meeting about the Ukraine situation, at the UN headquarters in New York, on 6 March, 2015.—Reuters

Over 200,000 South Sudanese have fled to Ethiopia since start of conflict, UN says

A vehicle is burned in a street in Guadalajara city, Jalisco state, Mexico, on 1 May, 2015. Three soldiers and a state police officer were killed on Friday in a day of violence, fires and blockades in Guadalajara city, in the western state of Jalisco, said the Secretariat of National Defence.—Xinhua
AWARENESS IS ULTIMATE VALUE OF LIFE

BY AUNG KHIN

Raising awareness is the highest value of practice in life. If awareness and preparedness cannot be developed, consequences could not be filtered or reduced during bitter experiences. In this study, knowledge and awareness play roles in prevention of life-threatening incidents. While decreasing the tragic events of violence, awareness should be raised to save lives around the world.

Cyclone Nargis made landfall in Myanmar on May 2, 2008, crossing the south of Myanmar over two days. The severe destructive cyclone in some decades seriously hit Ayeyawady delta, leaving the death toll of more than 90,000. In addition, thousands of households failed to keep record of residents who were affected in accordance with official figures. A total of 37 townships were utterly affected by the cyclone.

The UN estimated that as many as 2.4 million people were affected, including from separation of family members to forcing people to leave home. As people who experienced such powerful disaster, awareness and preparedness measures were not in ready due to the lack of such knowledge.

The affected people hoped for a return to normalcy in the affected areas. However, the humanitarian assistance could not live up their expectation, these people had to seek jobs away from home, and some of them fell into victims of human trafficking gangs.

Although natural disaster cannot be stopped, knowledge and awareness are very important to prevent loss of lives in the future.

AWARENESS PROGRAMMES

Awareness programmes should be fully launched as severe disasters could cost many lives, along with many complications impacting on the development of the country.

WRITE FOR US

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

Due to limitation of space we are only able to publish "Letter to the Editor" that do not exceed 500 words. Should you submit a text longer than 500 words please be aware that your letter will be edited.
Accounting: a driver of corporate growth and then of national economic growth

Hlut Aung is the Secretary and the rest are CPAs. The objectives of the Institute are:

(a) To promote and develop the accounting profession and education to the international standards;

(b) To educate and require the members to maintain high standards of professionalism in the performance of their accounting and auditing assignments;

(c) To ensure that our members strictly observe both the letter and spirit of the code of professional conduct and ethics, as prescribed by MAC and Myanmar Accounting Standards;

(d) To ensure that our members practice their profession with impartiality, integrity and independence, thereby rendering high-quality professional services to their clientele;

(e) To widen the horizons of our members on accounting, auditing and related subjects by regularly conducting continuing professional education programs; and

(f) To contact and communicate with professional accounting institutes of not only ASEA member countries but also other advanced countries for exchange of the latest developments in accounting, auditing and related fields.

In the past, it has been the policy of MAC to allow only commerce graduates who have passed DA (Part II) Exams to practice higher accounting education. It also serves as a bridge for non-commerce graduates to cross over to the CPA profession, as they have passed DA (Part II) Exams. These 2-year DA courses had been conducted by MAC for non-commerce graduates. Over the years a total of over 3,000 DAs have been produced. In the coming academic year, not only B.Com, but B.B.A and also B. Act graduates will be allowed to attend the CPA course.

Of course, this is the right step that MAC has taken to open up opportunities for all aspiring graduates who have attained the minimum professional level of accounting education in the country, who also aimed to produce sufficient numbers of CPAs to meet the growing needs of the corporate bodies as our economy takes off into sustained growth under the current pro-free-market economic reforms of the Government. No doubt, diversity in the educational backgrounds of its members will contribute much to the advancement of our accounting profession beyond all our expectations.

Over 4,000 CPAs have been produced by the MICPA within a 3-year period for annual registration as CPAs and as practicing accountants with the MAC. These seminars are geared to enhancing the professional competency and efficiency of all MICPA members in all aspects.

Moreover, in an effort to disseminate knowledge of accounting standards among members of the accounting profession, over the years a series of seminars has been held by the MICPA on accounting and auditing standards, professional ethics, company law, taxation, etc. since the program of “continuing professional education (CPE)” was launched for its members who are required to re-invent the CPE hours prescribed by the MICPA within a 3-year period for annual registration as CPAs and practicing accountants with the MAC. These seminars are geared to enhancing the professional competency and efficiency of all MICPA members in all aspects.

Moreover, it has forged ties with professional accounting bodies in Asian countries by seeking membership in the Asian Federation of Accountants, thereby harmonizing the Myanmar accounting and financial reporting standards with theirs across all types of industries. Moreo-
Reducing daily serving of sweetened drinks helps lower type 2 diabetes risk

LONDON, 2 May — Replacing a habitual daily serving of soft drinks and sweetened milk beverage with water or unsweetened tea or coffee can help reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes, according to a research report released on Friday by the University of Cambridge.

The conclusion was based on a previous study which included more than 25,000 men and women aged 40-79 years living in Norfolk, UK.

Study participants recalled everything that they ate and drank for seven consecutive days covering weekdays and weekend days, with particular attention to type, amount and frequency of consumption, and whether sugar was added by the participants, the researchers said.

They found that if study participants had replaced a habitual daily serving of soft drinks with a serving of water or unsweetened tea or coffee, the risk of diabetes could have been cut by 14 percent, and by replacing a habitual serving of sweetened milk beverage with the same unsweetened drinks, that reduction could have been 20 percent to 25 percent.

Dr Nita Forouhi, of the Medical Research Council (MRC) Epidemiology Unit, University of Cambridge led the study. Forouhi said it adds further important evidence to the recommendation from the World Health Organization to limit the intake of free sugars in our diet.

This new research adds to previous research in the field and Diabetes UK, which collected information from food frequency questionnaires across eight European countries. That previous work indicated that habitual daily consumption of sugar sweetened beverages was linked with higher risk of type 2 diabetes, consistent with the new findings.

Forouhi acknowledged the limitations of dietary research, which relies on asking people what they eat, but their sample size was large with long follow-up and has a detailed assessment of diet that was collected in real-time as people consumed the food/drinks, rather than relying on memory.

The research paper has been published in the journal Diabetologia.—Xinhua

Shell signs 10 billion pound bridge loan

LONDON, 2 May — Shell’s company logo is pictured at a gas station in Zurich on 8 April, 2015.—REUTERS

Shell’s share price rose on the back of strong growth in demand for oil from Asia that has lifted its profit, pushing the shares in London and Amsterdam higher on Monday.

The major oil and gas group said on Friday it had agreed a 10.07 billion pound bridge loan with banks backing its 47 billion pound takeover of BG Group.

The two-year loan replaces a 3.025 billion pound interim bridge loan that was provided in early April by Bank of America Merrill Lynch. The bridge loan will be used, along with existing cash, to cover the 13.2 billion pound cash portion of the cash and share deal.

Shell said the loan will be made with the four main banks supporting the deal. The financing pays an initial margin of 13bp over LIBOR rising to 25bp after three months, to 25bp after six months, to 30bp after nine months, to 40bp after 12 months, to 50bp after 15 months, to 60bp after 18 months and to 70bp after 21 months.

There are also ticking fees of 20 percent of the applicable margin on undrawn, unencumbered amounts.

Reuters

As youth vaping rises, teens cite the allure of tricks

New York, 2 May — On a recent morning, Roger Tarazon and several friends gathered a few blocks from their Queens, New York, high school. Some smoked traditional cigarettes, but Tarazon and a few others puffed on electronic vaping devices.

“Sometimes I use it to relax,” the 18-year-old senior said of the device. He also uses it to perform tricks with the vapor, blowing smoke rings or creating funnel of smoke that look like miniature tornadoes.

“I don’t do it to show off,” he said. “I just do them because I’m bored.”

Tarazon’s embrace of such tricks reflects a growing trend among US teenagers, whose use of e-cigarettes tripled in the last year alone. New research provided to Reuters has found that performing tricks is one of the top two reasons young users say they consider the devices cool.

Public health officials have warned for several years of the attraction of flavored nicotine liquid to young users say they consider the devices cool.

Forouhi acknowledges the limitations of dietary research, which relies on asking people what they eat, but their sample size was large with long follow-up and has a detailed assessment of diet that was collected in real-time as people consumed the food/drinks, rather than relying on memory.

The research paper has been published in the journal Diabetologia.—Xinhua

Japanese automakers, except Honda, post gains in US sales in April

NEW YORK, 2 May — Japanese automakers, except Honda Motor Co, registered sales of new cars in the United States in April along with the overall market’s expansion on the back of strong replacement demand, steady sales of sport utility vehicles and widely available low-cost loans, data by research company Autodata Corp showed on Friday.

Overall sales totaled 1,454,951 vehicles, up 4.6 percent from a year earlier. The figure represented the strongest April result since 2005 and extended the US market’s upward trend for 14 months in a row. The monthly result translated into annualized sales of 16.5 million units after seasonal adjustments.

Skeptics in the industry fear that the market may face a setback if gasoline prices start rising again or the US central bank raises interest rates, but a Toyota Motor Corp official was optimistic about the outlook.

“The auto industry remains one of the economy’s bright spots,” Bill Fay, Toyota group vice president, said in a monthly sales call. “And while there have been some mixed economic signals, we believe the industry is well positioned for a very good summer selling season.”

Toyota marked a 1.8 percent increase to 203,329 units, making it the third largest player in the US market. Nissan Motor Co sold 109,848 units, up 5.7 percent, making it the sixth biggest-selling automaker.

Toyota’s RAV4 and Nissan’s Rogue were among those SUVs that registered strong sales in the month.

Honda was the only loser among major carmakers from Japan and the United States, posting a 1.8 percent drop to 130,088 units, down to sales of its key model Accord. Honda was the fifth biggest-selling automaker.

Forouhi acknowledges the limitations of dietary research, which relies on asking people what they eat, but their sample size was large with long follow-up and has a detailed assessment of diet that was collected in real-time as people consumed the food/drinks, rather than relying on memory.

The research paper has been published in the journal Diabetologia.—Xinhua

A man uses an E-cigarette, an electronic substitute in the form of a rod, slightly longer than a normal cigarette, in this illustration picture taken in Paris in May 2013.—REUTERS

An electronic cigarette is said to be “cloud com-petitions,” are increasing in popularity.

The contests, in which adult vapers, as they call themselves, compete to perform the best tricks and create the biggest and densest vapor clouds, are becoming a regular feature at local vape shops. Some regional competitions offer thousands of dollars in prize money.

Thousands of videos demonstrating expert vaping and how to perform tricks have been posted on YouTube and Instagram. “Even if (teenagers) don’t attend these events they are exposed to a lot of these issues,” Krishnan-Sarin said. 

Reuters
Scientists monitor undersea volcanic eruption off Oregon coast

PORTLAND, 2 May — An undersea volcano about 300 miles (480 km) off Oregon’s coast has been spewing lava for the past seven days, confirming forecasts made last fall and giving researchers unique insight into a hidden ocean hot spot, a scientist said on Friday.

Researchers know of two previous eruptions by the volcano, dubbed “Axial Seamount” for its location along the axis of an underwater mountain range, Oregon State University geologist Bill Chadwick said on Friday. But those 1998 and 2011 eruptions were detected months or years afterward, Chadwick added.

Last year, researchers connected monitoring gear to an undersea cable and, for the first time, allowed them to gather live data on the volcano, whose peak is about 4,900 feet (1,500 meters) below the ocean surface. “The cable allows us to have more sensors and monitoring instruments than ever before, and it’s happening in real time,” said Chadwick, who also is affiliated with the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

In the past, researchers left battery-operated monitoring stations in place for several years, but were unable to analyze the data only by retrieving those devices.

Pressure sensors detected that an eruption was underway on 23 April. After monitoring hundreds of thousands of small earthquakes each day near Axial Seamount, they detected more than 8,000 tiny quakes over a 24-hour span on 23 April, Chadwick said.

As midnight approached, pressure sensors detected the seafloor dropping — a sign that magma was erupting — and the swallowed volcano was deflating like an emptying balloon. In total, the seafloor has dropped 8 feet (2.4 meters) in the past week.

Though the eruption has slowed, the volcano still seemed to be expelling magma as of Friday, he said, leaving Chadwick and scientists wondering where the lava was going.

“We know it didn’t erupt in the caldera, or crater, because that’s where most of our sensors are, and they all survived,” Chadwick said.

Temperature fluctuations and seismic readings are consistent with an eruption north of the volcano’s crater, he said. “But we probably won’t know until this summer, when we get out there with a ship and are able to look around.”

WASHINGTON, 2 May — It may not be space debris, errant asteroids, supply shortages, thruster malfunctions or even the malevolent aliens envisioned in Hollywood films that thwart astronauts on any mission to Mars. It may be the ubiquitous galactic cosmic rays.

Researchers said on Friday that long-term exposure to these rays that permeate space may cause dementia-like cognitive impairments in astronauts during any future round-trip Mars journey, expected to take at least 2-1/2 years.

In a NASA-funded study, mice exposed to highly energetic charged particles like those in galactic cosmic rays experienced declines in cognition and changes in the structure and integrity of brain nerve cells and the synapses where nerve impulses are sent and received.

The irradiated particles in galactic cosmic rays, remnants of star explosions called supernovas, can penetrate spacecraft and astronauts’ bodies. Earth itself is protected by its magnetic atmosphere.

University of California, Irvine radiation oncology professor Charles Linolf said “without a doubt” people would face the same issues as the mice.

“Astronauts may incur cognitive impairments that lead to performance decrements, confusion, increased anxiety and longer-term problems with cognitive health,” said Linolf, whose study appears in the journal Science Advances.

This could compromise mission critical activities, especially if unanticipated situations arise during deep spaceflight, Linolf said. The mice, genetically altered to have green fluorescent neurons to help structural analysis, were exposed to the rays at the NASA Space Radiation Laboratory at the Brookhaven National Laboratory in New York and then analyzed six weeks later. In addition to the brain neuron and synapse changes, the mice exhibited decreased performance on learning and memory tests.

They also lacked curiosity and were sluggish in experiments involving objects placed in a box with them.

“Previous studies show synaptic impairment or loss of synapses is an early and invariant feature of Alzheimer’s disease, and there is a strong correlation between the extent of synapse loss and the severity of dementia,” said University of California, Irvine neuroscience post Vipan Kumar Parikh.

NASA says it is developing the capabilities needed to send humans to an asteroid by 2025 and Mars in the 2030s.—Reuters

Tesla moves into batteries that store energy for homes, businesses

LOS ANGELES, 2 May — Tesla Motors Inc (TSLA.O) on Thursday unveiled Tesla Energy, a storage systems division that the electric vehicle maker could help bring home energy storage to the masses.

Chief Executive Elon Musk said the company’s goal was to “fundamentally change the way the world uses energy on an extreme scale.” He introduced the products to a crowd of business partners and journalists at a Tesla facility near Los Angeles.

In Tesla’s view, such storage systems could become part of a fossil-fuel-free lifestyle in which people can have solar panels on their roof generating electricity to power their home and recharge their electric car batteries.

The smallest battery unveiled on Thursday, known as Powerwall, is housed in a six-inch-wide container that is meant to be hung inside a garage or on the outside wall of a house. At $3,500 for a 10 kWh model, excluding inverter and installation prices, the Powerwall can be used for backup power or to store solar energy.

Tesla’s lead installation partner for the home battery will be SolarCity Corp (SCTY.O), the solar installer backed by Musk. The company will also partner with many others, Musk said.

Tesla has several hundred batteries installed with SolarCity systems in California already.

The growth of those projects has been helped by a subsidy from California’s public utility regulator.

Utilities have also been seeking out energy storage to help manage increasing amounts of renewable energy on the grid. To address that market, Musk unveiled what he called the “powerpack,” a 100 kWh battery block that is meant to help smooth out power from intermittent solar and wind energy production or add energy to the grid quickly when demand levels are high.

Tesla already has several utility-scale battery deployments on the grid in California, which requires its biggest utilities to source large amounts of energy storage.

Musk told reporters Tesla expected to have a low but growing gross margin in the fourth quarter of this year and added that battery products would be “mass producible” some time next year.

“A cost effective home energy storage system it could prove far more valuable, and profitable, than anything the company is doing with automobiles,” Karl Brauer, a senior analyst with auto industry intelligence firm Kelley Blue Book, said.

Tesla will initially manufacture the batteries at its automobile factory in California but will move production to its planned “gigafactory” in Nevada next year.

Deutsche Bank estimated sales of stationary battery storage systems for homes and commercial uses could yield as much as $4.5 billion in revenue for Tesla. Analysts expect Tesla will build stationary storage systems around the same basic batteries it will produce for its vehicles at the large factory the company is building in Nevada.

Though valued at just $200 million in 2012, the energy storage industry is expected to grow to $19 billion by 2017, according to research firm IHS CERA.

Tesla is not the only player in energy storage. Cadia Energy, which rose from the ashes of a failed EV maker and is now owned by Fortress Investment Group, and Siemens (SIEGn.DE) are among the many companies going after shares of the stationary storage market.
Experts assess why some buildings collapsed, others withstood Nepal quake

KATHMANDU, 2 May — Most buildings that collapsed during last Saturday’s devastating earthquake in Nepal were either hundreds-of-years-old heritage structures or recently built guesthouses, even as private residential buildings stood strong, bearing the tremors.

Much loss of life and property could have been averted had some basic precautions been taken, both by the government and the local people, say construction experts here. According to them, despite witnessing a similar destructive quake in 1934, the government woke up to the need of spreading quake awareness among the residents only a decade ago by enacting building codes and other regulations.

Unfortunately, however, they were not followed sincerely by the people at large. They feel the government should have restricted entry of people into the hundreds-of-year-old heritage structures, while people should have carefully followed by laws and regulations before building structures, besides using better construction materials and modern technology.

The heritage buildings that collapsed included over 80-year-old Dharahara tower and temples more than 300 years old. Admitting laxity on the part of the government, Department of Archaeology spokesman Ram Bahadur Kunwar, 42, said all those buildings were too weak to withstand such a strong earthquake, so entry should be restricted.

He said peoples’ entry into Dharahara tower was banned for more than 10 years, but it was reopened around six years ago after a safety study concluded it could withstand a magnitude 7 quake.

“Unfortunately, this earthquake was of more intensity, and hence it fell, causing so much loss of life and property,” he said.

Kunwar said Kathmandu Valley had hundreds of buildings that were more than 100 years old, and the wear-and-tear of most of them, particularly old temples, was apparent before the quake hit. “We were taking all possible care to up-keep their maintenance. We were still in the process of banning entry of public into such structures, but this tragedy struck before we could take a final decision,” he said.

His department’s priority now is to repair those structures that are partially damaged, and then use modern construction technology to reconstruct those that collapsed. Amit Sidhi, 54, an architect in the Department of Urban Development, is of the view that no solid structure on the planet can be fully and completely quake-proof.

“But yes, we can make strong structures which give enough time to people to run out to safety before it collapses. It’s high time we took to modern construction technology in rebuilding the damaged buildings and the new ones too,” he said.

“The foundation of a building should be strong, and weight should go on decreasing as its height rises in terms of floors, whereas currently it’s the other way round, particularly in commercial buildings. Then, we should use columns stronger than beams and adopt the technology of interlocking columns and beams. Square and rectangle shaped buildings are safer than L-shaped structures,” Sidhi lamented that when people erect buildings to be used as guesthouses or let out for other business purposes, they tend to use inferior materials, as compared with structures they would build for their own residence.

Dhruva Thapa, 56, president of the Nepal Engineers Association, said some buildings in areas like Gangubas and Bhaktapur, were damaged because they were built on once low-lying land that was subsequently filled with soft garbage.

“These areas had loose soil underneath which could not bear the quake, and the result was that the structures caved in,” he said.

Thapa’s association is now organizing orientation programs for civil and other engineers to carry out rapid visual building assessments and re-building assessments of standing structures that have cracks, in order to ascertain the extent of damage done.

“One once we do a thorough assessment, we would advise the people whether the buildings are liveable or not, or how much repair is required to make them safe. We’re seeking foreign experts too on this,” he added.—Kyodo News

Britain’s Duchess Kate gives birth to daughter, both well, palace says

LONDON, 2 May — Britain’s Duchess of Cambridge, the wife of Prince William, gave birth to a daughter on Saturday, the couple’s Kensington Palace residence announced.

The baby, their second child, weighed 8 lbs 3 oz and William was present at the birth, it said in a Twitter statement.

“The Royal Highness Britain’s Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, carries her son Prince George alongside her husband Prince William as they visit the Sensational Butterflies exhibition at the Natural History Museum in London, on 2 July, 2014. Reuters

“Her Royal Highness Britain’s Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, carries her son Prince George alongside her husband Prince William as they visit the Sensational Butterflies exhibition at the Natural History Museum in London, on 2 July, 2014. Reuters

and her child are both doing well,” the palace added.

She gave birth at 8:34 am (3:34 am ET), some 2-1/2 hours after having been admitted in the early stages of labour to the private Lindo wing of St Mary’s Hospital, West London, the palace said.

Both families of the couple had been informed, it said, including the new baby’s great-grandmother Queen Elizabeth, her grandfather Prince Charles and William’s brother Prince Harry.

A ceremonial crier announced the birth of the new baby, who will be fourth in line to the throne after Charles, William and his older brother George.

Britain’s Duchess Kate gives birth to daughter, both well, palace says

No name for the newborn has yet been announced.

William, 32, was born at the same hospital to the late Princess Diana in 1982. He and Kate, 33, met as students at St Andrews University in Scotland, married in a spectacular ceremony at Westminster Abbey in April 2011 and have since become global stars.

When Kate leaves hospital, the couple will initially return to Kensington Palace for a couple of days before heading to Anmer Hall, their country mansion on the Queen’s Sandringham estate in Norfolk, eastern England.

Experts assess why some buildings collapsed, others withstood Nepal quake

Thailand lifts controls on Japanese food imports

THAILAND has eliminated in principle its controls on imports of Japan-produced foods imposed after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, the farm minister said on Friday.

The lifting of the controls, which still apply to beach meats, may spur Japan’s exports to Thailand, a major importer of Japan’s food products, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. Thailand’s import of Japanese food reached $34.8 billion yen ($290 million) worth of Japanese farm and other food products in 2014.

Thailand had forced Japan to provide documentation for food products from the three prefectures of Miyagi, Fukushima and Gunma proving they were radiation free, and certificates of origin for products from the other 44 prefectures.

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Thailand lifts controls on Japanese food imports
Flash floods kill five as torrential rains hit Australia’s east coast

PERTH, 2 May — Flash floods killed five people in south-east Queensland when their cars were swept away following a rain storm on Australia’s east coast, police said on Saturday. The death included three men, one woman and a eight-year-old boy, while more than 30 other people were rescued from cars stranded on flooded roads in and around Caboolture, 44 kilometres (27 miles) north of Brisbane.

Three die in grenade attacks in Burundi capital, more than 10 hurt

BUJUMBURA, 2 May — Two Burundi police officers and a civilian were killed in two separate grenade attacks in the capital late on Friday, a police spokesman said, after the president warned of tough measures against those behind street protests.

More than 10 people were wounded, deputy police spokesman Pierre Nkurunziza said in a phone message. The three were killed in the Kamenge district of Bujumbura but another area was also hit, he said. One of the dead policemen was a senior officer. Bujumbura has been rocked by six consecutive days of demonstrations against President Pierre Nkurunziza, who on Friday warned of “severe sanctions” against those protesting over his decision to seek a third term in office.

The protests have sparked the biggest political crisis since an ethnically fueled civil war ended in 2005. The presidency has called the demonstrations an “insurrection”.

Opponents say Nkurunziza is violating the constitution and the Arusha peace deal by seeking a third five-year mandate at elections on 26 June.

Pre-vote fears have driven more than 26,000 Burundians to neighboring Congo and Rwanda, officials say.

The United Nations, which has voiced concerns about human rights given the recent violence, has said it continues to monitor the situation.

New direct Beijing-Budapest air route opens with Friday landing

BUDAPEST, 2 May — Air China’s Beijing-Budapest route was officially inaugurated on Friday evening, when its Airbus A330-200 landed at Budapest Ferenc Liszt International Airport.

Airport officials were on hand to greet the first flight, welcoming it with an archway of water as the craft glided into its slot on the tarmac.

Hungary’s Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Peter Szijjarto, Chinese Ambassador to Hungary Xiao Quan attended the welcoming ceremony.

The Airbus A330-200 is used by the national airline Aer Lingus, former head of Ireland’s national airline Aer Lingus, Christoph Mueller, former head of Ireland’s national airline Aer Lingus, will become the airlines first foreign CEO on Friday.

WEATHER REPORT

BAY INFERENCe: Weather is partly cloudy in the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL EVENING OF THE 3rd May, 2015: Weather will be partly cloudy in Lower Sangaing, Magway and Bago Regions and rain or thundershowers are likely to be isolated in the remaining Regions and States. Degree of certainty is (60%).

STATE OF THE SEA: Seas will be moderate in Myanmar waters.

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Likelihood of rain or thundershowers in the Southern Myanmar areas.
BB King in hospice care at his Las Vegas home

LOS ANGELES, 2 May — Veteran blues guitarist BB King said on Friday he was in hospice care at his home, less than a month after he was hospitalized for diabetes-related issues.

In a message posted on his official Facebook page, the 89-year-old singer said he was receiving care at his Las Vegas residence.

“Thanks to all for your well wishes and prayers,” he said in the post.

King was taken to a hospital in April after suffering from dehydration as a complication of diabetes. He left shortly after and said he was “feeling much better” at the time.

Born in Mississippi, the singer is known as the “King of the Blues” and is considered one of the greatest guitarists of all time, with artists such as Eric Clapton citing him as an influence.

Last October, King was forced to cancel eight live performances after falling ill on stage in Chicago. He was diagnosed with dehydration and suffering from exhaustion.—Reuters

TJ Miller to host Golden Trailer awards

“Silicon Valley” star TJ Miller will celebrate the very best in Hollywood teasers as host of the Golden Trailer Awards.

REUTERS

LONDON, 2 May — “Silicon Valley” star TJ Miller will celebrate the very best in Hollywood teasers as host of the Golden Trailer Awards.

Awards including Trasher Theater, Summer Blockbuster 2015 and Most Romantic Trailer will be decided at the Saban Theater in Beverly Hills on 6 May, reported Digital Spy.

The Golden Fleece Award will be given to the trailer judged to be better than the actual film it advertises.

A panel of Hollywood filmmakers and actors will take part in this year’s gala, including “Scandal” star Tony Goldwyn, “Jurassic World” director Colin Trevorrow and “Game of Thrones” producer David Benioff.

“Furious 7”, “Jurassic World”, “Ted 2”, “John Wick” and “The Interview” are among the films nominated in multiple categories this year.

The Golden Trailer Awards have been held annually dating back to 1999.—PTI

Nina Dobrev’s exit from “The Vampire Diaries” is tasteful

LONDON, 2 May — Vampire Diaries’ actress Nina Dobrev has teased Nina Dobrev’s “tasteful” exit from the show.

Malarkey, who plays Enzo in the CW supernatural drama, suggested that fans who have been watching from the start will appreciate Elena’s goodbye scenes, reported Digital Spy.

“It’s pretty under wraps. I think it’s a really tasteful way to do it. She gets to say goodbye to everybody, in a certain way,” Malarkey said.

“You get to see some scenes with her and a lot of other characters. It’s going to be a chance for the fans to recall a lot of those relationships and how they’ve progressed over the years.”—PTI

Hilary Swank, Tom Wilkinson to star in Holocaust denial drama

LOS ANGELES, 2 May — Actress Laura Linney is the latest addition to “Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2.”

“The Big C” actress is joined by returning cast members Megan Fox and Will Arnett who will get on screen love interests played by Stephen Amell and Alessandra Ambrosio respectively, reported Ace Showbiz.

Michael Bay returns as a producer, while Dave Green (“Earth to Echo”) is attached to direct the second chapter scheduled for a 3 June, 2016 release.

The movie is currently in production. Fox who reprised her role as April O’Neil is seen channeling her inner Britney Spears on the set. Josh Applebaum and Andre Nemec from the first film return to write the script.—PTI

Witherspoon, Vergara team up in female-driven ‘Hot Pursuit’

LOS ANGELES, 2 May — Hollywood actresses Reese Witherspoon and Sofia Vergara are teaming up for “Modern Family” star Sofia Vergara in “Hot Pursuit,” a female-driven comedy directed, produced and led by a strong presence of women on set.

Academy Award winner Witherspoon, also one of the film’s producers, plays an uptight police officer who has to protect the more outgoing widow of a drug boss, played by Colombi- an-born Vergara.

“It’s not just that it’s better, you know? It’s just that it’s comfortable,” Vergara said at the film’s premiere on Thursday night, when asked about having more women involved in a production.

“We all were taking care of each other like ‘Oh you need to sit straight because your dress isn’t looking good.’ You know (with things) like that that (as girls) we’re always like watching (out) for each other,” Witherspoon has been vocal about the empowerment of women in Hollywood. She has been quoted as saying she began her production company after she saw “six of my favourite actresses fighting over a really crappy role.”

“It’s an easier kind of communication working with just women,” Witherspoon said at the premiere. “We have just a kind of a short hand. We think the same things are funny. It’s also we just enjoy the process, it’s fun.” “Hot Pursuit” is scheduled for US release on 8 May.—Reuters

Laura Linney joins ‘Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2’
**Martial artists gather in Vancouver for CAN-AM championships**

VANCOUVER, 2 May — The 36th annual Canadian-American International Championships opened Friday evening in the Olympic Oval in Vancouver’s suburban city of Richmond, with hundreds of international martial artists attending the grand opening ceremony.

The three-day event is the longest-running martial arts competition in Canada and attracted more than 600 athletes from around the world to the city.

A person films Van Gogh’s ‘L’Allée des Alyscamps’, estimated in excess of $40 million, ahead of a spring auction sale to be held at Sotheby’s in New York City on 1 May, 2015.— Reuters

**Record prices for paintings, sculpture eyed at NY auctions**

The $140 million estimate for Picasso’s “Women of Algiers (Version ‘O’),” a cubist work last auctioned in 1997 when it nearly tripled expectations, is the highest pre-sale price ever accorded an auction offering.

Close behind, Giacometti’s 1947, 70-inch (180-cm) bronze, “Man Painting,” is set to sell for $130 million, which would easily eclipse his record for sculpture of $104.3 million held by “L’Homme qui marche.”

Both will be sold at Christie’s on 11 May, a sale billed as “Looking Forward to the Past,” which augments its Impressionist/modern and contemporary auctions. The 35 lots are expected to fetch half a billion dollars.

The high prices we see are a reflection of both rarity and surging demand,” said Jussi Pylkkänen, Christie’s global president. “Asian collectors have been increasingly active lately, bringing a new competitive dynamic, especially when it comes to top-quality masterpieces.”

Sotheby’s top offering is Mark Rothko’s untitled yellow and blue 1954 oil, which is expected to sell for as much as $60 million. It is also featuring six Monets expected to total more than $78 million, led by “Nympheas,” estimated at $30 million to $45 million. In all, some $2 billion worth of art will be offered to well-heeled, increasingly global collectors competing for an ever-shrinking supply of such-sorted works, ranging from van Gogh andPicassos to Rothkos and Warholks.

**England star Rio Ferdinand mourns death of wife at 34**

LONDON, 2 May. The 34-year-old former Manchester United player and England captain Rio Ferdinand has died, the player announced on Saturday.

Ferdinand was playing for London club QPR and later today the club’s team will be wearing black arm bands in their Premiership game against Liverpool at Anfield. Ferdinand said his wife died at a London Hospital after battling breast cancer. In a brief statement, issued on QPR’s website, the player, describing his wife as his soul mate, said: “Rebecca, my wonderful wife, passed away peacefully after a short battle with cancer at the Royal Marsden Hospital in Lon- don. She leaves behind three children, Lorenz, nine, Tate, six, and four-year-old Tia. Ferdinand added: “She was a fantastic loving mother to our three beautiful children. She will be missed as a wife, sis- ter, aunt, daughter and grand- daughter. She will live on in our memory, as a guide and inspiration. “Myself, my par- ents Janice and Julian, along with Rebecca’s parents Les- ley and Stephen, would like to thank our families, friends and my club colleagues who have rallied around in these desperate days, weeks and months.”

Ferdinand also thanked the staff who treated his wife at the hospital, adding: “I would also like to express my gratitude for the dedication and expertise of the staff led by Professors Johnstone and Clarke at the Royal Marsden. Their valiant efforts to prolong Rebecca’s all-too-short life will not be forgotten. Our grief, as a fam- ily, is total. We would appreci- ate being allowed to mourn privately.”

Ferdinand, one of the country’s most popular and respected players, was born and brought up in London and won more than 80 caps as an England player. He made more than 300 appearanc- es with Manchester United between 2002 and last year when he signed with QPR. Xinhua
Drogba can’t wait for ‘crazy’ Chelsea Sunday

LONDON, 2 May — Veteran striker Didier Drogba is expecting a “crazy” Stamford Bridge atmosphere when Chelsea attempt to clinch the Premier League title for the first time in five years with a win at home to Crystal Palace on Sunday.

The 37-year-old former Ivory Coast international is dreaming of an avocado sandwich to celebrate — London rivals Palace, just like 2010 when Chelsea wrapped up the championship with an 8-0 home drubbing of Wigan Athletic.

“It will remember when we had to play Wigan to win the title, the atmosphere was crazy,” Drogba told the club’s in-house television channel. “I think Sunday is going to be the same and I hope we are going to score a lot of goals for the fans.”

“It’s a derby as well. Crystal Palace are going to come and show what they can do and try to disturb us but really I think Sunday has to be a blue day.”

Drogba was on the bench for much of this season until top scorer Diego Costa suffered a hamstring injury in a 3-2 victory at Hull City on 22 March and since then the Ivorian has featured regularly in the starting lineup.

“I can’t wait for Sunday,” he said. “We just want to win the league now, that’s most important thing.”

“Everybody is focusing on Sunday and to come quick because we really want to play that game.”

Jose Mourinho’s Chelsea have a 13-point lead at the top of the table with five matches left to play.

— Reuters

Wenger accuses Mourinho of lacking respect

LONDON, 2 May — Arsene Wenger hit back at Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho’s thinly-veiled criticism of his Arsenal record on Friday, accusing his old adversary of a lack of respect. Arsenal fans chanted “boring, boring Chelsea” after Sunday’s 0-0 draw with Mourinho’s men at the Emirates, a result that virtually sealed the Premier League title for Chelsea.

The Portuguese responded by saying “boring is not winning the title for 11 years”, referring to Wenger’s failure to finish top with his north London club since 2004.

Asked about Mourinho’s comments ahead of third-placed Arsenal’s clash with Hull City on Monday, Wenger told reporters: “The biggest thing for a manager is to respect other managers. Some people have to improve on that. The Frenchman has never beaten the Chelsea boss in 13 attempts and the pair have often clashed. Last year Mourinho labelled Wenger a “specialist in failure” while at Stamford Bridge this season the duo were involved in pushing and shoving in the technical area.

Arsenal have not lost in the league since a 2-1 defeat to north London rivals Tottenham Hotspur in February but despite their fine run of form they are 13 points behind champions-elect Chelsea. Wenger said it could have been a different story but for injuries at the start of the season.

“We have made progress so I look at it in a positive way,” he added. “What you want to show during the season is that you are getting better. We were faced with a big challenge especially with Chelsea out in front.

“We had injuries to key players after the World Cup. We needed to find balance in the team. Looking back we dropped big points... and that was a big disappointment.”

Chelsea can seal the title with a win against Crystal Palace at Stamford Bridge on Sunday and Wenger believes their ability to grind out results is what sets them apart. “Once you are fighting for the championship you win some games because you smell you can do it, games that you don’t necessarily win if you are fourth or fifth. That doesn’t always represent the value of the team,” Wenger said.

“Manchester City had ups and downs and started stronger than us and were in front for a long time. Manchester United had a slow start and became stronger.”

— Reuters

Federer reaches last four in Istanbul

ISTANBUL, 2 May — Roger Federer was given a fright before reaching the semi-final of the inaugural Istanbul Open on Friday, eventually beating Spain’s Daniel Gimeno-Traver 7-6(3), 6-7(5), 6-3.

The Swiss world number two, the top draw at the new claycourt event, needed two hours 28 minutes to win after fighting back from behind eighth seed Diego Schwartzman.

Argentina Schwartzman won only seven points in a dreadful opening set against Colombia’s fourth seed Santiago Giraldo but triumphed 6-2, 6-2. Second seeded Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov eased into the semis with a straightforward defeat of Croatian Ivan Dodig and will face Pablo Cuevas on Saturday. Organizers will no doubt be hoping for a Federer-Dimitrov showdown on Sunday as the tournament tries to establish itself on the ATP Tour. Federer, who was photographed on the bench for much of this season with his form, is clearly a fan, even if he was not completely happy with his form.

“They were perfection playing conditions today,”

the 17-times grand slam champion said. “Almost no wind, beautiful sunshine; not hot, not too cold.”

“Just because it’s nice weather doesn’t mean you’re going to play nice. I wish it was like that, but it’s not as simple as that. It was a good fight today.”

— Reuters

Rory survives, Spieth knocked out at Match Play

SAN FRANCISCO, 2 May — World number one Rory McIlroy fought back from two holes down with two to play to beat Bily Horschel at the WGC-Match Play Championship on Friday, while Masters champion Jordan Spieth was knocked out by Hunter Mahan in the opening round.

He faces Australian Schwartzman in the penultimate hole, leaving Spieth needing to win the 18th, which was unable to do, Westwood will play compatriot Danny Willett next up. Hunter Mahan, the 2012 champion and 2013 runner-up, advanced to the final 16 for the fifth straight year with a crushing 5&4 win over fellow American Matt Kuchar. Mahan has destroyed his group, winning 7&6 over Stephen Gallacher and 5&3 over Ben Martin over the opening two days.

He will face Australian Schwartzman in the penultimate hole.

Reuters