Plan to speed up oil and natural gas production

NAY PYI TAW, 14 May—President U Thein Sein on Thursday received a delegation led by Mr. Peter Coleman, CEO and Managing Director of Australia-based Woodside Company, at the Presidential Palace.

Their discussions focused on adding momentum to oil and natural gas production in Myanmar, social development tasks for local residents and construction of infrastructure. They also discussed training for young people, including programmes to send outstanding youths overseas for further study, in order to improve the level of human resources in the oil and natural gas field.

Also present at the meeting were union ministers U Soe Than and U Zeyar Aung, deputy minister U Tin Oo Lwin and officials.—MNA

Peace negotiating team for ethnic armed groups set to meet in Chiang Mai

By Ye Myint

YANGON, 14 May — The Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team representing a coalition of 16 ethnic armed groups plans to meet later this month in Chiang Mai, Thailand, NCCT member Daw Saw Mya Yazar Lin said Thursday.

“An NCCT meeting in Chiang Mai is scheduled for 23 May, and the meeting is likely to be held on that day unless it is rescheduled due to unexpected reasons,” the NCCT member told The Global New Light of Myanmar in a phone interview.

The NCCT meeting is aimed at preparing the submission of a draft national ceasefire accord, signed in late March by the NCCT and the government’s Union Peace-making Work Committee, to ethnic leaders at a summit also expected to be held in the same month, Daw Saw Mya Yazar Lin said adding that all NCCT members are expected at the pre-summit meeting.

“The review of the draft peace deal, prior to putting it forward to the summit, as well as matters related to the ethnic armed group’s negotiating team will be among the topics at the meeting,” she told The GNLM.

During a meeting entitled “A Forum for Peace and National Reconciliation” in Yangon last week, NCCT deputy leader Pado Saw Kwe Htoo Win said the ethnic conference, which will bring together all ethnic group leaders including non-NCCT members, is likely to take place in the third week of May at one of three tentative places, with Lohkella expected to host the conference.

The draft ceasefire deal approved by the UPWC and NCCT on 31 March was the culmination of 16 months of peace talks between the two negotiating teams.

Since the signing of the single text document for a nationwide ceasefire with the NCCT, the government has indicated its readiness to finalize the deal as soon as possible, while the NCCT has stated that it must first be put before a conference of all ethnic parties.

By Aye Min Soe

PWNTHU, 14 May — The Three Millennium Development Goals Fund announced a US $15 million project Thursday to build 100 rural health centres across Myanmar, driving stakes for the first of them in Kawton Village in Seikpyu Township, Magway Region.

The health facility is one of 17 centres comprising one rural health centre (RHC) and 16 sub-centres to be built in Magway Region, with another 48 sites already indentified in Chin State, Sagaing Region, Kayah State and Ayeyarwaddy Region.

In total around 100 RHCs and sub-health centres will be built, along with staff accommodation to be able to provide critical primary health care to poor and vulnerable communities across Myanmar around the clock.

The project aims to complete the 100 facilities by the end of 2016.

The Ministry of Health will provide each facility with medicine, one midwife and two public health supervisors, aiming to reduce out-of-pocket expenditure for rural people seeking access to health care services, according to the Ministry of Health.

The government has been implementing the rural health care development plan since 2011 to improve the country’s health and reduce poverty.

There still remain some requirements for providing quality basic health care services to people in rural areas, said Dr. Yin Thanlar Lwin, Deputy Director General of the Department of Public Health of the Ministry of Health, in her opening remarks at the groundbreaking ceremony for the health care facility.

Myanmar envisions universal health care coverage in 2030, she added.

As the government has expanded the number of (See page 2)
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw urged to extend period of state of emergency in Kokang

Nay Pyi Taw, 14 May — Union Minister for Defence Lt-Gen Wai Lwin on Thursday called for the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw to extend the period of the state of emergency imposed in line with the presidential ordinance for another 90 days as the situation in the self-administered Kokang area has not yet returned to normal.

More time is needed as security, stability, economy and the legal system in Kokang of Shan State are still below normal, the defence union minister said.

A state of emergency with a three-month period of martial law has been declared in the area since 17 February 2015. The period is due on 17 May.

The proposal is expected to be brought to parliament for approval on 15 May.

The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw approved four bills on rights of disabled persons, population control and health care, inland vessels, and nursing and maternity.—MNA

Pyithu Hluttaw discusses special allowances for defence services personnel

Nay Pyi Taw, 14 May — The government has no plan at the moment to give allowances equal to their salaries to defence services personnel who are discharging duties in military and security operations, Deputy Minister for Defence Maj-Gen Kyaw Nyunt said at Pyithu Hluttaw session on Thursday.

The deputy minister was responding to a question raised by a representative whether the government has plans to give special allowances for military operations.

However, all defence services personnel, from privates to generals, are entitled to the allowances of K 10,000 per month for hardship and risks involved in their job, the deputy minister added.

Salaries for defence services personnel are the same for those who are discharging duties in military operation and those who are performing ordinary duties, according to the deputy minister.

Deputy Minister for Health Dr Daw Thein Thein Htay responded to the question whether the government has plan to treat hepatitis-C.

The deputy minister said that there is no plan at the moment to treat hepatitis-C but plans are underway to conduct a survey for outbreaks of hepatitis in the entire country in 2015 in order to collect country representative data in cooperation with Department of Healthcare, Department of Public Health, Medical Research Department, Heart Foundation, Clinton Health Foundation.

Based on the data from the survey, future tasks will be selected and implemented, the deputy minister said.

Representative U Thein Nyunt submitted the bill to repeal the Law for Protection of State Constitution 1959.—MNA

Amyotha Hluttaw discusses measures to ease traffic congestion in big cities

Nay Pyi Taw, 14 May — Dr Myat Nyana Soe of the fourth constituency in Yangon Region on Thursday asked the Amyotha Hluttaw about measures to ease the increasing traffic congestion in big cities.

U Chan Maung, Deputy Minister for Rail Transportation, responded that the Yangon Region government’s efforts to solve the problem include the construction of flyovers, designation of no-parking roads and bus lanes, installation of Japanese-model automatic traffic control systems, and increased tolls for vehicles entering Yangon. Regarding a question about vehicle registration and registration renewal, the deputy minister said vehicle inspection fees range from K5,00 to K10,000, and registration fees from K15,00 to K40,000.—MNA

General Hla Htay Win meets French delegation

Nay Pyi Taw, 14 May — Chief of the General Staff (Army, Navy and Air) General Hla Htay Win received Deputy Director Mr Thierry Vankerk-Hoiv of Security and Defence Cooperation of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DCSF) at the hall of Bayintnaung Yeiktha, here, on Thursday.

They discussed further strengthening bilateral relations between two armed forces of Myanmar and France, cooperation in non-military training courses and exchange of visits between the two armed forces. It was also attended by senior military officers of the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services, French Military Attaché Lt-Col Thierry Poignant and officials.—Myawady

3MDG launches project . . .

(from page 1)

health care facilities yearly, the number of rural health centres has reached 1,696 and the number of sub-health care centres 8,640 this year, according to the Ministry of Health.

According to the health ministry’s standard, at least four rural health centres (RHCs) are established in one township with at least four sub-centres under one RHC.

As a rural health centre can currently provide medical coverage to 21,000 people while a sub-centre more than 4,000 people, the

National Health Plan for fiscal 2015-2016 is close to meeting its target, Dr Yin Thandar Lwin said.

Poor health infrastructure in rural areas has been highlighted as a factor undermining health service delivery. Well-located, high-quality rural health facilities will provide primary care to communities who often find it difficult to access health services, with a focus on maternal, newborn and child health, as well as communicable diseases, according to the 3MDG.

The 3MDG Fund is a US $334 million fund established in 2012 to support the Ministry of Health’s plans to strengthen health systems and accelerate service delivery, particularly to the poorest and most vulnerable communities in Myanmar. It is supported by Australia, Denmark, the European Union, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, and managed by UNOPS (United Nations Office of Project Services).

Also attending the groundbreaking ceremony were State Health officials, Mr Sanjay Mathur, Director and Representative of UNOPS in Myanmar and Dr Paul Sender, Director of the 3MDG Fund.—GNLM

Dr Mathur and UNOPS and UNOPS Mr Sanjay Mathur drives a stake into the ground for construction of a sub-health centre in Kawton Village in Seikgya Township, which is expected to be completed in December.—PHOTO: AYE MIN SOE
UES meets CSOs for 2015 general election

YANGON, 14 May—The meeting on cooperation between the Union Election Commission and civil society organizations was held at the Myicase Hotel in Yangon on Thursday morning.

At the meeting, Chairman U Tin Aye of the UEC said that collection of voters’ lists was successful thanks to active cooperation of civil society organizations and rules for local observers was also drafted with the cooperation of CSOs.

Collection of voters’ lists have been completed for 75 percent of the country and the first announcement of voters’ lists in Yangon Region was made on 30 March and the second, third and fourth announcements are due to be announced on 8 and 14 May.

Chairman U Tin Aye urged political parties and CSOs since 7 May and will conduct the courses soon. The chairman urged political parties and CSOs to conduct multiphase voter education courses after completion of the courses.

The chairman also pointed out the need to make concerted efforts for voter education and promised to hold 2015 election in a free, fair and transparent manner after inviting observers from CSOs in accordance with rules and regulations.

In conclusion, the chairman urged CSOs to cooperate for success of 2015 general election and help public to vote properly.

After demonstration of the voting process, the chairman responded to queries raised by CSOs.

Mr Ross Attri of IFES explained voter education and voter information technologies at the meeting.

Present at the meeting were the UEC chairman and officials, 48 CSOs and 6 international organizations.

Chinese State Counsellor concludes visit to Myanmar

YANGON, 14 May—Chinese State Counsellor and Secretary General of the China’s State Council Mr Yang Jiyi and party offered flowers, water and lights to the Buddha image at Shwedagon Pagoda, here, on Thursday morning and presented cash donation to members of the pagoda board of trustees.

The Chinese guests left Yangon International Airport in the afternoon.

Plan to hold consultation on drawing frameworks for administrative reform

NAY PYI TAW, 14 May—The consultation on drawing frameworks for administrative reform will be held in Nay Pyi Taw on 23 and 24 May, focusing on topics of capacity building for government service personnel, improvement of public service, decentralization, transparency and accountability, Union Minister at the President Office U Hla Tun told the coordination meeting of administrative reform committee, here, on Thursday.

The committee chairman union minister said that participants need to discuss endeavours of the government, achievements, main challenges and future plans, adding that discussions in the consultation must be a long-term strategic foundation for the development of the State in third wave reform process.

Vice chairman of the committee Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Brig-Gen Kyaw Zan Myint and member of Union Civil Services Board U Khin Maung Aye, members deputy ministers, Adviser to the President Dr Zaw Oo and officials together with region and state ministers and Adviser to the President Dr Aung Tun Thet participated in the discussions.

Housing projects to build more than 33,000 apartments in Dagon Seikkan Tsp

NAY PYI TAW, 14 May—Union Ministers at the President Office U Soe Thane and U Tin Naing Thwin inspected housing projects in Dagon Myothit (Seikkan) Township on 9 May.

A plan is underway to complete six housing projects in Dagon Myothit (Seikkan) Township—Ayeyawun-Yadana Project will have 19,600 apartments; Kan-n-Shweli project, 1,398; Ponnami-Shweli project, 6,189; Ayeyawun-Shweli project, 1,064; Yuzana—low-cost housings 1, 2 and 3, 3,608 and downtown centre, 1,500, totalling 33,359 apartments in this fiscal year. Yuzana Garden Housing Project has built 18,000 apartments. These apartments will accommodate about 256,800 people.

The union ministers held a meeting with deputy ministers from respective ministries at the hall of the President Office on 13 May. They gave instructions on timely completion of infrastructures, schools, hospitals, power supply, telecommunications, growing of trees and greening works, markets, shops, apartments, car parks, bus lines and combine office in 2015-16 fiscal year.

MNA

Myanmar to host 7th Summit of CLMV, 6th Summit of ACMECS in Nay Pyi Taw

NAY PYI TAW, 14 May—The Myanmar International Convention Centre-1 will host the 7th Summit of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV), the 6th Summit of Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) and related meetings here on 22 and 23 June.

Local and foreign correspondents wishing to attend the summits are asked to fill in media registration forms for the 7th CLMV Summit and 6th ACMECS Summit at www.moi.gov.mm from 15 to 31 May. Media accreditation will be issued at Sky Palace Hotel from 10 am to 4 pm on 21 June.

International correspondents may apply for visas at respective Myanmar embassies. For further information about the summits, contact the Political Department under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 09-250966078, 09-5177092 and 09-79937603.

For information about media accreditation for local-based foreign new agencies and local media, contact News and Periodicals Enterprise on 067-412125 and 412126.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing arrives back in Nay Pyi Taw

NAY PYI TAW, 14 May—A Myanmar military delegation led by Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing arrived back in Yangon via United Arab Emirates, leaving Nikola Tesla international airport from Belgrade, Serbia on 13 May.

On arrival at Nay Pyi Taw Airport in the afternoon, the senior general was welcomed back by Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice-Senior General Soe Win, senior military officers of the office of the Commander-in-Chief and the commander of Nay Pyi Taw Command.

Lt-Gen Mya Tun Oo of the Office of the Commander-in-Chief (Army), Chief of Staff (Navy) Rear-Admiral Tin Aung San and senior military officers also arrived back on the same flight.

Mynawdy

Union Minister U Hla Tun speaking at coordination meeting of administrative reform committee.—MNA

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing being welcomed back by senior military officers at Nay Pyi Taw Airport.—Mynawdy

Union Minister U Hla Tun speaking at coordination meeting of administrative reform committee.—MNA
Citizens urged to pay tax to the state dutifully

\[ \text{Mohnyin, 14 May — Citizens need to pay tax to the state dutifully in order to build a modern, developed nation, Kachin State Minister for Finance U Nyunt Aung told a ceremony to clarify tax rules at Seinle Yadanar Hall in Mohnyin in the first week of May. Head of Kachin State Internal Revenue Department U Aung Win spoke about tax law amendments. The talk was attended by more than 700 people including departmental officials, representatives of political parties and businesses. — GNLM-001} \]

Laterite placed on inter-village road in Falam Tsp

\[ \text{Falam, 14 May — Falam Township Department of Rural Development in Chin State has assigned Surbon Company to build the 1.4-mile Ciaunghen-Zamwal Road, allocating K90.75 million from the fiscal 2014-15 budget. Head of Falam District Department of Rural Development U Maung Maung Naing Min and Head of Falam Township DRD U Lal Hope Thang inspected progress in placing laterite on the road. The laterite road will benefit 453 people from 92 houses in Ciaunghen and Zamwal villages. — Zo Hay Hsaw} \]

Region Minister attends to agricultural needs of local farmers

\[ \text{Zalun, 14 May — Ayeyawady Region Minister for Planning and Economy U Hla Khaing and departmental officials held a meeting with local authorities to meet the requirements of farmers and farmers at the hall of Zalun Township General Administration Department on 10 May. Farmers and local authorities spoke about their requirements and the difficulties they face, while departmental officials reviewed the reports. The region minister coordinated with departmental officials to meet the requirements of farmers. The meeting was attended by farmers from 61 village-tracts. — Ngwe Than (IPRD)} \]

Muse to implement economic zones

\[ \text{Muse, 14 May — District authorities spoke about land management issues relating to the establishment of economic zones at the Muse District General Administration Department on 12 May. Muse District’s deputy commissioner U Kyaw Kyaw Tun spoke about authorized departments for land management while the head of District Settlement and Land Records Department explained matters related to land plots. Officials highlighted land management for New Star Light economic zone, farmland matters in Swansaw Ward in Muse and the economic zone of Tun Mao Lon Company. — Mong (IPRD)} \]

Districts in Mandalay Region ready to announce voter lists

\[ \text{Mandalay, 14 May — Mandalay Region will publish electoral rolls for respective townships on 8 June, following the collection of all necessary voter information, sources said. Although a plan is under way to announce the voter list on 1 June, the Union Election Commission decided to release the voter list across the nation on 25 May, 8 June and 22 June respectively, Deputy Director U Kyaw Kyaw Soe of Mandalay Region Election Sub-commission said. Voter lists will be posted at ward administrator offices and sub-commission offices in seven townships in Mandalay District, four in Kyaukse District, five in PyinOoLwin District and four in PyinOoLwin Township. When we check the computerized data from households registration sent by wards and townships, we found dead persons on voter lists,” the deputy director said. “We will distribute applications to voters in order to enable those whose names have been left off the lists to file complaints.” Eight townships in Yamethin, Mekitila and NyaungU districts will announce voter lists on 22 June. — Aung Ye Thwin} \]
IKBZ compensates people injured in traffic accidents

Mandalay, 14 May — A ceremony to compensate people injured in traffic accidents was held at Chanmyathazi Township on 11 May.

Insurance companies sell travel insurance at K300 per unit to highway passengers. On 6 May, a bus from Yadanabon left for Mandalay collided with another bus line leaving Kyaukpadaung in front of Hset Thit bus terminal. On 6 May, A driver, a bus conductor and two passengers were injured in the incident. Deputy Manager U Myo Thant Zaw of International KBZ Insurance presented K1,640,000 to cover medical costs for the injured persons.

Officials of the insurance service on 12 May presented K720,000 to U Wunna Lwin for treatment of a fracture to his left leg at Meiktila General Hospital.

Residents of parched region receive drinking water

Myawady, 14 May — A mobile medical team will give checkups to drug-resistant TB patients.

A mobile medical team will give checkups to drug-resistant TB patients, who are resistant to the drug Rifampicin, in six wards and 32 villages in Taungtha Township of Taninthayi Region. According to health officials, the five-day course till 15 May will include 10 subjects of cosmetics and personal goods production.

A number of experts on tuberculosis gave lectures on the treatment of drug-resistant patients.

According to a health-care plan, the mobile medical team will check TB patients for resistance to the Rifampicin TB drug in Myawady from 18 to 22 May. A driver, a bus conductor and two passengers were injured in the incident. Deputy Manager U Myo Thant Zaw of International KBZ Insurance presented K1,640,000 to cover medical costs for the injured persons.

Officials of the insurance service on 12 May presented K720,000 to U Wunna Lwin for treatment of a fracture to his left leg at Meiktila General Hospital.

Residents of parched region receive drinking water

Muse, 14 May — A mobile team comprising departmental officials seized fake groundnut oil and various commodities without custom duty on the detour near Asia World Toll Gate in Muse, northern Shan State, on 9 May. They seized 10 boxes of fake groundnut oil, 30 boxes of dried grape, 30 bags of flour, six boxes of sodium, eight boxes of jelly, three bags of plastic bags, three boxes of milk powder as well as various boxes of other foodstuffs.

Chin ethnic youths learn cosmetics, personal goods production

Haka, 14 May — The Chin State Small Scale Industries Department conducted a cosmetics and personal goods production technique course at the hall of the Chin State Cooperative Department in Haka on 11 May.

In his speech, Chief Minister of Chin State U Hong Ngau said the Small Scale Industries Department was formed with the aim of providing technical assistance for the establishment of cooperative societies and small-scale industries and developing vocational techniques in the state. The course will contribute to create job opportunities for local people, he added. It was reported that the department will conduct more vocational courses suitable for the region.

The chief minister and party viewed cosmetics and personal goods displayed at the hall.

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The chief minister and party viewed cosmetics and personal goods displayed at the hall.

According to the officials, the training course will include 10 subjects concerning manufacturing of cosmetics and personal goods to 23 trainees on the five-day course till 15 May. — Chin State IPRD
Death toll from Philippine factory fire rises to 72: fire official

MANILA, 14 May — The death toll has risen to 72 in a fire that gutted a rubber slipper factory in the Philippine capital of Manila, a firefighter said on Thursday, as police vowed swift action against those responsible for the mishap.

Wednesday’s fire reflects poor occupational health and safety standards that are a challenge for Southeast Asia’s fastest growing nation to tackle, analysts say.

As many as 72 bodies have been pulled from the wreckage of the two-story factory, fire official Sergio Soriano Jr said on radio, shortly after Resil Dela Gatchalian, mayor of Valenzuela city in Manila, announced a toll of 58, with 13 missing.

Estimates by local government and fire officials have been in conflict since Wednesday, complicated by the difficulties of retrieving bodies from the wreckage. Police said the fire started when sparks from a welding machine set ablaze the main entrance of the factory, triggering a huge explosion, followed by billows of black smoke and flames.

“The first has done the job,” Sermand said by telephone from Kathmandu. “The second has finished the work.”

A UH-1Y Huey helicopter flies into the Tribhuvan International Airport after a search and rescue operation in Kathmandu, Nepal on 15 May, 2015.—REUTERS

Chinese president meets Indian PM

XI’AN, 14 May — Chinese President Xi Jinping met with visiting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Xi’an, capital city of Shaanxi Province and Xi’s hometown, on Thursday afternoon.

“This is the first time I have treated a foreign leader in my hometown and I hope you have a happy stay,” Xi said when the meeting started.

Xi welcomed Modi and thanked him for the warm reception he received in his India visit in last September, during which Modi accompanied him to visit his home state of Gujarat.

“That left me with deep and good impression,” Xi said.

Xi said during his September visit they reached an important consensus on promoting the bilateral strategic partnership of cooperation and forging a closer partnership of development.

Both sides maintained frequent high-level contact and engagement, promoted cooperation in priority areas including construction of railway and industrial park, strengthened exchanges, controlled the bordering areas and kept good communication on international and regional affairs, Xi said.

China-India relations are experiencing stable development and facing broad prospects, the president added.

He said he believed Modi’s visit will push forward the bilateral strategic partnership to achieve new progress, which has potential for greater development.

Modi said he was glad to visit China. He cited his trip in some historical places of interest in Xi’an and spoke highly of the cultural exchanges between the two ancient civilizations.

This is the first China visit for Modi, who made a vow to visit during his first year as prime minister.

On Friday, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and top legislator Zhang Dejiang will also meet Modi in Beijing. Invited by Li, Modi’s tour will last three days.—Reuters

Choppers, drone hunt for missing US Huey, Nepal quake toll rises

CHIRIKOT, 14 May — Military helicopters flew over eastern Nepal and a team sent up a drone on Thursday to search for a missing US Marine Huey chopper, as the death toll rose from the Himalayan country’s second big earthquake in less than three weeks.

A Reuters correspondent flew with a Nepali military helicopter along the Tamakoshi river that runs by the town of Chirikot, in the Dolakha district that was worst hit by Tuesday’s 7.3 magnitude quake.

In Koshikhet village, a US civilian team was using a drone to search for the missing Marine Corps UH-1Y, or Huey as the model is better known, which was carrying six Marines and two Nepali soldiers.

“We are using infrared vision to look for hotspots and any signs of life,” said drone operator Shepherd Eaton, from GlobalMedic, a US aid agency that specializes in search and rescue.

The search, involving US, Indian and Nepali military choppers and a battalion of 400 Nepali soldiers, has faced criticism for diverting resources away from relief efforts.

So far, no sign has been found of the Huey, which was on an aid mission in Dolakha district near Trivati when it lost contact on Tuesday.

“We are still trying to locate it. There is no evidence to prove that it has crashed,” said Marines spokeswoman Captain Casandra Geseci.

The death toll from Tuesday’s tremor reached 91, Nepal’s home ministry said on Thursday.

Another 2,428 people were injured in the quake, which struck 17 days after a huge earthquake killed more than 8,000 people and damaged or destroyed hundreds of thousands of buildings in the impoverished Himalayan nation.

Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, visiting Dolakha district, said massive landslides made relief work difficult. “Still, we are fighting,” he said.

Medicines Sans Frontieres emergency coordinator Dan Sermand said Tuesday’s tremors caused serious damage to buildings in remote areas that had already been weakened.

“The first has done some damage. The second has finished the job,” Sermand said by telephone from Kathmandu.

MSF deployed two helicopters, each with two medical teams, to Dolakha to stabilize and evacuate the injured. Civilian helicopters were not asked to join the search for the missing US chopper.

Home Ministry official Laxmi Prasad Dahal told Reuters on Wednesday he feared the search was diverting resources from relief and rescue operations.

Relief workers and aid were only slowly reaching remote parts of Nepal, where many roads have been made impassable by landslides.

In Mabu village, the Nepali search helicopter stopped to find out if the locals there had any information about the missing helicopter.

“You are the only person we have seen so far,” said Bhagawat Gurung, 18, a villager, when asked whether any aid workers had reached them.

Tuesday’s earthquake, which was followed by several aftershocks, struck just as Nepalis were coming to terms with the devastation wreaked by last month’s 7.8 quake.—Reuters
Japan Cabinet to approve bills for greater SDF role

Tokyo, 14 May — The Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is set to approve security bills on Thursday that would significantly expand the scope of overseas operations by the Self-Defense Forces in what would represent a major change to Japan’s post-World War II exclusively defense-orientated security policy.

Following Cabinet approval, the government is expected to submit the bills to the Diet on Friday. If passed, the legislation would remove geographical restrictions on where the SDF can operate, and under certain conditions allow it to defend its security ally — the United States — and other friendly countries for the first time since the war.

The proposed legislation was reflected in Japan-US defence guidelines revised on 27 April amid an increasingly severe security environment in the Asia-Pacific region, with concerns over China’s growing territorial ambitions and military buildup as well as North Korea’s missile and nuclear weapons development.

The government will present two bills to the Diet — a new permanent bill that would allow the SDF to provide logistical support for foreign militaries in international peacekeeping activities and the other comprising revisions to 10 existing laws.

Abe’s promise in an address to the US Congress on 29 April the legislation would be enacted in the summer has angered opposition lawmakers, but the bills are likely to pass the Diet given the majority held by his Liberal Democratic Party and its ruling coalition partner Komeito party.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said on Thursday the government believes it is important to get the bills enacted “at all costs” during the current Diet session through 24 June, a period speckled by lawmakers to be extended for a month or so.

“Protecting peace, safety and (people’s) lives is the most important responsibility of the government,” Suga, the top government spokesman, told reporters.

But with nearly half, or 48.4 percent, of respondents in a Kyodo News survey in late April showing opposition to the prime minister’s bid to enact the bills during the current Diet session, Abe vowed Thursday to fully explain the legislation to the public through Diet deliberations.

One revision under the legislation would alter the law on contingencies in areas surrounding Japan, removing the geographical constraint and allowing the SDF to extend logistic support not only to US forces but other foreign militaries responding to situations that gravely affect the peace and security of Japan.

Another revision would allow Japan to exercise, in a limited scope, the right to collective self-defence, or coming to the aid of allies under armed attack even if Japan itself is not attacked.

In exercising such a right, three conditions must be met. They are 1) when an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs and as a result threatens Japan’s survival and poses a clear danger to fundamentally overturn people’s right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness; 2) when there is no other appropriate means available to repel the attack and ensure Japan’s survival and protect its people; and 3) use of force limited to the minimum extent necessary.

The three conditions were part of a landmark Cabinet decision in July last year that interprets the Constitution to enable Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defence.

The move is in line with Abe’s policy of making proactive contributions to peace based on the principles of international cooperation.

Successive governments have interpreted the war-renouncing Constitution to mean that Japan possesses the right to collective self-defence but cannot use it.

The new permanent bill on international peace assistance would enable the dispatch of SDF personnel abroad in a more timely fashion. So far, the government has been required to enact a special law each time it wants to dispatch the SDF for overseas logistical support such as refueling to assist US-led antiterrorism operations in the Indian Ocean near Afghanistan.

The Cabinet is also set to decide on Thursday to introduce a system of giving approval by phone for the swift dispatch of the SDF to cope with so-called “gray zone” incidents, which fall short of military attacks on Japan but include, for instance, attempts by armed groups disguised as fishermen to take control of a remote Japanese island.

Beijing police warn “strange outfits” on subway may cause stampedes

Beijing, 14 May — Beijing police are patrolling the city’s subways and trains to stop people wearing face masks, strange costumes and forming flash mobs, warning commuters that such actions could jeopardise public safety by causing stampedes.

State news agency Xinhua said law enforcement teams, which started the patrols on 1 May, and have encountered 83 cases of “improper behaviour”, including hawking, begging and the distribution of advertising flyers.

Costumes and masks are likely to attract the attention of other passengers, Xinhua quoted Liang Jianwei, vice head of the Beijing municipal traffic administration corps, as saying. “When a lot of people stop to watch, the risk of stampedes increases,” Liang said.

Passengers should avoid forming flash mobs, the article quoted Liang as saying.

“Although such behaviour is not banned by law, passengers should not be too wilful,” Liang said. Police will warn against “problematic behaviour” when they come across it, Liang said.

Last October, state media cited Beijing police as saying that people face arrest for wearing Halloween fancy dress on the subway as it may cause crowds to gather and create “trouble.”—Reuters

Protesters gather as Japan set to approve security reforms

Tokyo, 14 May — Japanese civic groups held protests on Thursday against security bills the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is set to approve later in the day, saying legislation to expand the scope of overseas operations by the Self-Defense Forces would undermine the country’s pacifist Constitution.

Some 500 protesters gathered in front of the prime minister’s office in the morning, holding placards and calling for the bills to be scrapped.

“This will be security legislation that enables the Self-Defense Forces to engage in warfare overseas,” said Shingo Fukuyama, 68, representing one of the protest’s organisers.

“If a war starts, it will be our generation that will be dispatched,” said a 23-year-old graduate school student in Tokyo participating in the protest.

“I cannot tolerate this.”

The legislation will mark a drastic shift in the country’s security policy, lifting limits on where the SDF can operate and allowing it to defend its main security ally, the United States, and other friendly countries under certain conditions for the first time since World War II.

“Abe’s government is downplaying the Constitution, and it makes me worry that Japan could end up in a shambles,” said a 66-year-old female participant who declined to be named.

The Cabinet made a decision in July to reinterpret the Constitution to enable collective self-defence, or coming to the aid of allies under armed attack even if Japan itself is not, under certain conditions.

The move has prompted scholars to criticize the reinterpretation as running counter to constitutionalism.—Kyodo News

Demonstrators gather in front of the prime minister’s office in Tokyo on 14 May, 2015 to protest the Cabinet’s planned approval of security legislation later in the day. The legislation would significantly expand the scope of overseas operations by the Self-Defense Forces. —Kyodo News

Passengers wait for a train at a platform of a subway station during a rush hour on the first working day after Chinese Lunar New Year holiday in Beijing, on 25 Feb, 2015. —Reuters

Beijing police warn “strange outfits” on subway may cause stampedes
One main reason is that it will be the first general election to be conducted under a democratically elected government.

Another point is that the government has promised to allow foreign observers, such as the US-based Carter Centre and the European Union, to monitor the upcoming general elections. The military government did not allow foreign observers at the 2010 elections, but it invited observers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to the 2012 by-elections.

During the past five years, the government has engaged in political reforms, winning high praise from the international community and resulting in the relaxations of some economic sanctions against the country. To add fresh momentum to political reform, the government should remain steadfast in its determination to hold a free and fair election, using it as an opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to political reform.

All in all, people, especially in this age, are smart enough to welcome politicians who inspire their hearts and minds, particularly those who aspire to be generous winners and gracious losers.

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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.

Letter to the Editor
Who is the most unlucky culprit?

Sir,

Dr. Aung Soe @ Aung Kyaw Moe
Retired State Medical Superintendent

May 16 is General Practitioners’ Day. General Practitioners or Family Physicians are front-line soldiers who combat diseases and assist in laying healthy environment. As such, they are clinicians as well as public health persons. Family Medicine is a basic entity, or a specialty for general practitioners.

The basic doctors produced by the Medical Universities are simply not capable of entering into practice as full-fledged Family Physicians. They need to be equipped with the relevant knowledge, skills and attitude to become competent Family Practitioners who are capable of handing health needs of families. Those practitioners, after realizing their discrepancies and shortfalls in their day to day practice, expressed their concerns on updating and or upgrading their competencies. However, there is limited possibility for all general practitioners to be dispersed throughout the country to attend the post graduate courses offered by the Medical Institutes.

Perhaps it is a necessity to prepare the basic doctors practicing in the community with a systematic training programme specially designed to impart essential knowledge, skills and attitudes deficient in competent general practitioners to be able to provide Comprehensive High Quality care in response to the needs of individual person, families and communities they serve.

Emergence of “Family Medicine” has been hailed as a rediscovery of the family, social and cultural aspects of health and disease, and the recognition of the “family” as a focal point of health care, and the right for place integrating preventive, promotive and curative services.

As such Department of Family Medicine in Medical Colleges is a necessity. IMACGP – 1989 states.

Family medicine has evolved at different rates in different parts of the world. For many decades the doctor that the people knew was the family doctor. He was the doctor that was around. He was the one to look after all members of family “from cradle to grave”, whatever it was to deliver a baby into the world or to treat an illness or to provide counsel.

The development of medical science and the hospital at the turn of the previous century not only led to better understanding of man, disease and ways of dealing with medical problems but also resulted in specialization of medicine and careful attention to fragmentation of care, high health care cost and an impersonal approach, it is said.

Family Medicine / General Practice has made it relevant for the last 50 years. Family medicine is a discipline concerned with the personal, primary comprehensive and continuing health care of the individual in relation to his family, community and environment, as defined by College of Family Physicians, Singapore, 2002.

The general practitioner/ family physician cares for the individual in the context of the family, and the family in the context of the community, irrespective of race, culture or social class. He/ she is clinically competent to provide the greater part of their care, taking into account the cultural, socio-economic and psychological background. In addition, he/ she takes personal responsibility for providing comprehensive and continuing care for his/ her patients.


The general practitioner deals with patients presenting with undifferentiated problems and provide continuing, comprehensive, whole-person care to individuals, families and their community, according to Royal Australian Collage of General Practitioners, 1991.

The General Practitioner provides personal primary and continuing medical care to individuals, families and a practice population irrespective of age, sex and illness. He will attend his patients in his consulting room, in their homes and sometimes in a clinic or hospital. His aim is to make an early diagnosis and integrate physical, psychological and social factors in his consideration about health and illness. He will undertake continuing management of his patients with chronic, recurrent and terminal illnesses. He practice in co-operation with other colleagues. He will know how and when to intervene through treatment, prevention and education to promote health of his patients and their families. He will recognize that he also has a professional responsibility to the community. The above mentioned abstract is from General Medical Practice, Walton + Beeson, Oxford University Press 1986.

Family Medicine is neither an amalgam of several disciplines or a unique discipline in itself. It is a discipline that transcends specialties as it integrates into a new whole, Dr. Wayne Watson of College of Family Physicians, Canada, wrote in Repor of the PG Family Medicine Education 1990.

A family physician provides multiple health care services to the general public, including:

A. Acute and Emergency care
B. Behavioral problems care
C. Chronic and continuing care
D. Domiciliary care
E. Elderly (palliative) care
F. Follow-up care
G. General care and
P. Preventive care

As doctors of first contact, GPs has to be conversant with illnesses that may cause death and serious life-threatening emergencies. The anxiety and fear of the patient or close ones that may accompany the situation will require expert management as well.
General Practitioners Helping . . .

Generally, patients present to the GP's ambulatory not in the traditional way of “disease” but as “illness” which may have the following characteristics:

(a) The patient often presents more than one problem at the same visit.
(b) The problems are often not pressed in order of priority. The most serious problem may be left until the end of the consultation – or not even mentioned at all.
(c) The most sensitive problems may be expressed in metaphorical language.
(d) The problem is not necessarily the same as the disease. Thus some of the problems patients bring to their GP are not related to pathophysiology but are emotional or social in origin and may have to be 

defined in “non-diagnostic” terms, e.g. “work stress” or “failure to cope”.
(e) The problem may not allow for precise definition because the symptoms and signs are not conclusive, and expensive and invasive investigations are not warranted. One is not going to look for X-rays for every patient with backache, or barium meals for every patient with epigastric discomfort. Therefore, the problem is defined in “non-diagnostic” terms, e.g. “lumbago” or “indigestion”.

As one faces modern life, one is forever finding situations where one want to follow two or more contradicting paths. Desires push in one direction, concepts of what would be wise or ethical to do push in other direction. Coping with the resultant internal conflicts may reveal behavioral problems which could be classified in many ways; ignorance, denial, repression, defense, escape, withdrawal, regression, developing physical ailments etc.

May all GPs be competent and updated enough to provide health-care to the community as front-line first contact doctors.

Coordination meeting on financial development and foreign exchange rates held

NAY PYI TAW, 14 May — Coordination meeting on current foreign exchange rate and financial development of Myanmar was held at the Central Bank of Myanmar on Thursday morning.

Present at the meeting were Union Ministers U Soe Thane, U Tin Naing Thein, U Win Myint, Dr Kyan Zaw, U Win Shein, Governor U Kyaw Kyaw Maung and deputy governors of the CBM, directors-general, deputy directors-general and officials from private banks.

At the meeting, Union Minister U Soe Thane said that the Central Bank of Myanmar is an independent financial institution and is adopting and implementing financial policies of the country together with the Ministry of Finance.

Then, the union minister added that the government recognizes the important roles of banks in national development but private banks are required to abide by rules and regulations of the CBM, which helps solve problems of private banks.

Later, union ministers and the governor took part in the discussions on formation of a taskforce of experts for information sharing among departments, current exchange rates and ethics of banks.

Officials of private banks reported their difficulties to the meeting.

MNA
Obama seeks to reassure Gulf allies on Iran, security at summit

A senior government official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Reuters there was tentative agreement on a meeting between Gruevski, his ethnic Albanian coalition partner Ali Ahmeti and opposition leaders Zaev and Menduh Thaci, “It’s an initiative by the international community,” the source said.

A spokesman for Ahmeti said the meeting would go ahead at 2.30 pm (1230 GMT), and would be chaired by the ambassadors of the United States and the European Union. There was no immediate word from Zaev’s Social Democrats as to whether he would attend.

Last weekend, a police raid on an ethnic Albanian neighbourhood in northern Macedonia left 22 people dead — 14 ethnic Albanians described by the government as “terrorists” and eight police officers — and deepened impressions of a country on the brink.

On Tuesday, Interior Minister Gordana Jankulova and Macedonia’s intelligence chief, Saso Mijalkov, resigned, saying they hoped the move would help end the crisis. The two have been at the centre of the wire-tap scandal.

Gruevski’s conserva-
tive VMRO-DPMNE party offered on Wednesday to create an ad hoc parliamen-
tary committee to probe the allegations of wrongdoing — on condition the Social Democrats end a boycott of parliament in force since an election in 2014 that Zaev says was rigged.

Zaev says he will not stop until Gruevski steps down. — Reuters

West pushes Macedonian government, opposition towards crisis talks

US President Barack Obama (L) welcomes Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef as he plays host to leaders and delegations from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries at the White House in Washington on 13 May. 2015.—Reuters

WASHINGTON, 14 May — President Barack Obama will seek to convince Saudi Arabia on Thursday that the United States is committed to their security despite deep concern among Arab leaders about US efforts to broker a nuclear deal with Iran.

During a rare, high-pro-
file summit at the Camp David presidential retreat in Maryland, Obama will meet with representatives from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Oman, all members of the Gulf Co-
operation Council, to dis-
cuss security cooperation.

Tension over US policy toward Teheran, Syria and the Arab Spring uprisings will loom over the meet-
ings, which have already been overshadowed by some countries’ decisions to send lower-level leaders.

Saudi King Salman pulled out, sending Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef and Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Sal-
man instead.

The White House has said such decisions were not snubs and has portrayed the summit as a working meetings rather than sym-
bolic photo sessions.

Arab leaders are con-
cerned that lifting Western sanctions as part of a nu-
clear deal with Iran would empower Teheran to act in destabilizing ways in the region.

The United States and five other world powers are in talks with Teheran to curl its atomic programme. The Obama administration would like GCC support for the deal to help convince a skeptical US Congress it has broad backing in the region.

Although he will not offer a security treaty as some Gulf leaders desired, Obama will seek to allay their fears about the US commitment to their de-

ence needs.

“That will be the es-

sence of the conversations,” White House spokesman Josh Earnest said on Wednesday.

“And much of what the president has in mind is helping the GCC countries use the hardware that they have to better coordinate their efforts and better pro-

vide for the security of their citizens.”

White House officials said on Monday the summit would produce announce-
ments on integrating ballistic missile defence systems and increasing joint military exercises. — Reuters

US Marines look to nurture integrated Asia-Pacific amphibious forces, China excluded

TOKYO, 14 May — The US Marine Corps is bring-

ing together foreign com-

manders from amphibious forces deployed mostly in the Asia-Pacific for a con-
ference aimed at taking in-

itial steps to integrate their operations, with China excluded from the event, according to officials and plan-
ning documents.

The effort centres on a first-of-its-kind conference between the Marine Corps and military officials from 23 countries that opens in Hawaii on Monday. More than half the nations attend-

ing are from Asia, including some embroiled in territori-

al disputes with China such as Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam.

On the agenda will be amphibious assault tactics, including ship-to-shore as-
saults, and a demonstration of shore landing tactics, said a USMC spokesman in Hawaii. A planning doc-
ument prepared by a consul-

tant to the US military and reviewed by Reuters notes that China “should not be invited” because it’s a “competitor” to the Unit-

ed States and some of the countries attending.

Washington has grown increasingly critical of Chi-

na’s assertiveness in the disputed South China Sea, especially its land reclaim-

ation around seven reefs in the Spratly chain. Satellite images show at least one airstrip under construction.

A US official said on Tues-
day that the Pentagon was considering sending US military aircraft and ships to assert freedom of navigation around the reefs.

Asked about Chi-

na’s exclusion, the Marine spokesman said US law pro-

hibited military-to-military ex-

changes with China at such events. US defence of-

icials added that it was not unusual to exclude Chinese military personnel from par-

ticipating in some training hosted by US forces. China took part in US-led Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) na-

val exercises last year with more than 20 countries, but one defence official noted its participation was limited to things like humanitarian relief and search and rescue operations.

China’s Defence Min-

istry had no immediate com-

ment.

Amphibious forces specialize in launching mar-

itime operations including beach landings from boats and helicopters and are often used to deliver and coordinate aid following natural disasters. The vast island-

dotted and disas-


ter-prone geography of Asia lends itself to such opera-

tions.

A key goal of the Ha-

waii meeting would be to lay the groundwork for mul-

tilateral amphibious exercises, including drills between participant nations, even without US involve-

ment, the planning docu-

ment said.

On Tuesday, the visit-

ing military officials will observe a US Marine ex-

ercise involving helicopter carriers, landing ships and other vessels that will cre-

ate an offshore sea base that could be used in combat or to coordinate disaster relief.

Bragadier Richard Spencer, deputy command-

er of the British Royal Ma-

rines, who will attend the conference, said it would be a success if it paved the way for participating nations to run joint disaster relief ef-

forts using marine forces.

“My inclination would be to start with a relatively realist level of ambition ... I would rather set a low bar and achieve it,” Spencer told Reuters on the sidelines of a defence conference in the Japanese city of Yo-

kohama. The US Marines were the “logical integrator” for amphibious capabilities in Asia, which would inter-

est allies like Japan, South Korea and Australia, said Michael Green, senior vice presi-

dent at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

“(It would) also be help-

ful to other partners dealing with vulnerabilities from natural disasters to en-

croachment and coercion by large maritime claimants,” he said. China claims most of the South China Sea. The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Tai-

wan also claim parts of the waterway. China last month defended its Spratlys recla-

mation, saying the new islands would provide civil-

ian services such as search and rescue facilities.

Vide Beijing is also at log-

gerheads with Japan over uninhabited islands in the East China Sea.

Reuters

A US official said on Tuesday that the Pentagon was considering sending US military aircraft and ships to assert freedom of navigation around the reefs.

A US official said on Tuesday that the Pentagon was considering sending US military aircraft and ships to assert freedom of navigation around the reefs.
**WORLD**

**Taliban claim attack on Afghan guesthouse that killed 14**

Friday, 15 May, 2015

The Afghan Taliban claimed responsibility on Thursday for an attack on a popular guesthouse in Kabul that killed at least 14 people, including foreigners attending a dinner and arriving for a concert.

Four Indian nationals, a Briton, an American and a Kazakh national were confirmed among the dead in a five-hour assault at Park Palace guesthouse in an upscale neighbourhood of central Kabul.

The attack heightened a sense of insecurity in the Afghan capital and throughout the country as the Taliban step up attacks following the withdrawal of most foreign troops.

Kabul’s police chief said 44 people were rescued.

A day after the assault, there was still confusion about how many gunmen attacked. A statement from President Ashraf Ghani’s office said there were three gunmen, while Kabul police said they could confirm just one.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in an emailed statement that one of the insurgents’ operatives carried out the attack with the aim of killing foreign citizens in retaliation for the United States and its allies supporting the Kabul government of President Ashraf Ghani.

“The occupying forces should realize that they are not safe from our attacks under any cover or in any location,” Mujahid said.

The death toll rose from five to 14 on Thursday as more bodies were found.

“It was one attacker and we are still investigating how he got in,” police criminal investigation chief Farid Afzali Kabul said.

A Kabul security official put the number of dead at 14, and the number was confirmed by the United Nations Assistance mission in a statement.

The US and Indian embassies and Kazakhstan’s Foreign Ministry confirmed their citizens were among the dead, and an Afghan with British nationality was also killed.

“With regret we can confirm that a British dual national was killed in last night’s attack on a Kabul guesthouse,” a British embassy spokesman said on Thursday.

The shooting started on Wednesday night as some guests gathered for a dinner at the guest house and others were arriving for a concert.

A spate of similar attacks in Kabul last year has dampened the city’s once-vibrant social scene. Last year, a suicide bomber detonated at a French cultural centre performance, killing one person.

In March 2014, Taliban gunmen killed nine foreign citizens in retaliation for the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo’s publication of cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad.

**Afghan policemen keep watch at the site of an attack in Kabul on 14 May, 2015.**

**Reuters**

**Yemen truce broadly holds, but reports of violations**

Cairo/ Aden — A five-day truce in Yemen appeared to be broadly holding on Wednesday, despite reports of air strikes overnight by Saudi-led forces and continued military activity by the Iranian-allied Houthis group.

Witnesses in the southwestern city of Abyan said warplanes had hit positions there after the Houthis seized the area following the start late on Tuesday of the ceasefire, which is intended to ward off a humanitarian catastrophe.

Residents of the southern provinces of Shabwa and Lahij, who have witnessed heavy ground clashes between local militiamen and the Houthis, also reported air strikes overnight.

Saudi Arabia and the Houthis told observers of a ceasefire violations along the mountainous Yemeni-Saudi border, but residents and officials in the border area appeared to have largely died down. An alliance of Gulf Arab nations has been bombing the Houthis militarily and allied army units that control much of Yemen since 26 March in what they say is an attempt to restore exiled President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi.

Saudi Arabia and its Sunni Muslim allies believe the Houthis are a proxy for the influence of Iran. However, there was no immediate word of any new supplies reaching the impoverished nation, that has been beset by more than four years of political chaos and violence. An Iranian-flagged ship that Tehran says is carrying humanitarian supplies for Yemen could reach the port of Hodeida within four to five days, raising the prospect of a possible confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudi Arabia, seeking to prevent arms from reaching the Houthis, says it will not let any ships pass without authorisation. Iran says it won’t let Saudis search the vessel and has said its warships will escort the vessel. — Reuters

**Rebel fighters from ‘Jaysh al-Sunna’ move in a convoy amid a street in the city of Idlib as they head towards what they said is an offensive to take control of al-Mastouma military camp which is controlled by forces loyal to Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad beside Idlib city on 12 May, 2015.**

**Reuters**

**Hezbollah, Syrian army make big gains in border battle**

Beirut, 14 May — Lebanon’s Hezbollah and Syria’s army made big advances against insurgents in mountains north of Damascus on Wednesday, Hezbollah and Syrian state media said, shoring up President Bashar al-Assad’s grip on the border.

The gains in the crucial Qalamoun region close to Lebanon against groups including the al-Qaeda-linked Nusra Front follow significant defeats for Assad elsewhere, notably in Syria’s northwest near the Turkish border.

Hezbollah, an Iranian-backed Shi’ite group with a powerful militia, has been a vital ally for Assad in the four-year-long conflict that has become a focal point for the struggle between Teheran and Sunni Saudi Arabia, which has backed the insurgency.

Hezbollah fighters and the army seized Talat Moussa, the highest peak in the area targeted in the offensive. Sources briefed on the situation said that move had effectively secured control of the entire area some 50 km (30 miles) from Damascus.

“Now only the final stage of the operation is left,” one of the sources said. Syrian state TV credited the advance to the army and “the Lebanese resistance”, an unusual public acknowledgement of Hezbollah’s role in the battle for an area used by the insurgents to ferry supplies to Syria and Lebanon. It also said that the army was pursuing the remnants of the insurgents in the town of Fleta.

Hezbollah has unleashed heavy firepower in the offensive, including concentrated rocket bombardments. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a British-based group that tracks the conflict, says this had forced many insurgents to withdraw. The offensive had been expected for some time but was awaiting the end of winter and aimed to crush one of the risks facing Assad, who has lost much of the north and east in the war estimated by the United Nations to have killed 220,000 people.

The Observatory put the death toll in the fighting at dozens on both sides. A source briefed on the situation said Hezbollah had lost four fighters.

Since March, forces backing Assad have relinquished wide areas of Idlib province in the northwest at the border with Turkey, another country that supports the insurgency. The president also lost the Nasib crossing with Jordan to rebels.

Islamic State, the single most powerful insurgent group in Syria, has also been launching attacks on both government-held and rebel-controlled areas in central Syria, as it steps up efforts to expand beyond its strongholds.

The Observatory said the militants killed about 70 government troops in an attack on Syrian army-held areas in Homs province overnight. At least 40 Islamic State fighters were also killed in and around the town of al-Sukhna, some 300 km northeast of Damascus. — Reuters
Amtrak train in Philadelphia wreck was travelling at twice speed limit

PHILADELPHIA, 14 May — An Amtrak train that derailed in Philadelphia, killing seven people and injuring more than 200, was travelling at twice the speed limit when the engineer slammed into a curved stretch of track, a US railroad safety investigator said on Thursday.

Park Ro-byug, South Korea’s ambassador to Russia, was named as new ambassador to Russia, Seoul’s foreign ministry said on Thursday.

Park served as the country’s special representative for South Korea-US nuclear cooperation in the past four years.

Amtrak train in Philadelphia wreck was travelling at twice speed limit

Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter reacted with outrage to the news of the crash, saying it was “insane,” the mayor said.

The engineer, among those killed in the crash generally, then submitted to questioning for several hours, said NTSB investigators.

The engine was found to be stopped in the crash site, said NTSB investigators.

Emergency workers and Amtrak personnel inspect a derailed Amtrak train in Philadelphia on 13 May, 2015.—REUTERS

Former South Korean premier summoned for questioning over bribe-taking

SEOUL, 14 May — Former South Korean Prime Minister Lee Wan-koo was summoned by prosecutors on Thursday for questioning over allegations of involvement in a bribery scandal.

The bribery scandal was triggered by a suicide note that Sung Wan-jong, former head of a bankrupt construction company, left in his pocket, which listed the names of eight current and former aides to Park, including Lee and presidential chief of staff Lee Byung-kee, and the amounts of money allegedly given to each of them.

Sung’s apparent suicide came as he was about to be questioned by prosecutors over allegations that he embezzled company money to create a slush fund to bribe politicians and government officials.

Park has ordered state prosecutors to launch a thorough investigation to get to the bottom of the scandal.

Lee Wan-koo is the second called into questioning among eight politicians listed on the business executive’s memo.

Lee Gyeongsang Province Gov Hong Joopyo was quizzed last week.

In January, Park appointed Lee, then parliamentary floor leader of the ruling Saenuri Party, as prime minister in a move widely seen as an attempt to boost his declining approval ratings.

The bribery scandal implicating the former prime minister and close confidantes of the president is certain to deal a major blow to Park’s leadership three years into her five-year tenure.

In South Korea, executive power rests mainly with the president, with the prime minister serving primarily as coordinator of the Cabinet.

S Korea names nuclear energy negotiator as new ambassador to Russia

SEOUL, 14 May — South Korea’s chief negotiator for civil nuclear energy pact with the United States was named as new ambassador to Russia, Seoul’s foreign ministry said on Thursday.

Park Ro-byug, South Korea’s ambassador to Russia, will serve as the country’s special representative for South Korea-US nuclear cooperation in the past four years.

Amtrak train in Philadelphia wreck was travelling at twice speed limit

The crash seemed likely to heighten moves to expand positive train control, or PTC, systems, designed to prevent high-speed derailments.

No such system was in effect at the site of the Amtrak crash, officials said.

“We feel that had such a system been installed in this section of track, this accident would not have occurred,” Sumwalt said.

Positive train control automatically slows or even halts trains moving too fast or heading into a danger zone. Under current law, the rail industry must adopt the technology by year-end.

The crash came a day before the House Appropriations Committee approved a transportation budget for the next fiscal year that included a funding cut for Amtrak.

Amtrak train in Philadelphia wreck was travelling at twice speed limit

Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter reacted with dismay to the disclosure of the train’s speed, calling it “astounding, devastating.”

“One-hundred, sixty miles per hour in a 50 mile-per-hour zone — that’s just insane,” the mayor said.

Authorities have offered no explanation for the crash, said NTSB investigators.

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S Korea names nuclear energy nego
Three killed in cracker factory explosion in central India

NEW DELHI, 14 May — At least three people were killed in an explosion at a cracker factory in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh late Wednesday night, a senior police official said on Thursday.

“The blast occurred at the cracker factory in the state’s Balaghat district, triggering a massive fire in the area, in which some 12 houses were gutted,” he said, on condition of anonymity. While three factory employees were charred to death, some injured have been admitted to a local hospital, the official said.

A probe has been ordered into the incident, he added. Fire often breaks out in cracker factories, mostly illegal, because of the poor safety standards.—Xinhu

First direct flight links Inner Mongolia, Japan

HOHOT, 14 May — China’s Spring Airlines will launch the first direct flight between Hohtot, capital of north China’s Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, and Nagoya in Japan, on 30 June.

The Airbus A320 aircraft, which has 180 seats, will travel between Hohtot and Nagoya via north China’s Shijiazhuang City every Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday, officials with Hohtot Baita Airport announced on Thursday.

The outbound flight will depart from Hohtot at 8:25 pm and arrive in Nagoya at 1:45 am. The return flight will depart from Nagoya at 1:50 pm and land in Hohtot at 7:25 pm. —Xinhua
### French Deneuve film opens Cannes Film Festival

CANNES, (France), 14 May — A raw tale of France’s juvenile justice system starring Catherine Deneuve kicked off the 68th Cannes International Film Festival on Wednesday. Emmanuelle Bercot’s “La Tete Haute” (“Standing Tall”) was shown to a packed Theatre Lumière after last year’s winner of the Best Actress prize at Cannes, Hollywood star Julianne Moore, declared the festival open. Also on the red carpet were jury members Sienna Miller and Jake Gyllenhaal, as well as “La Tete Haute” actors Deneuve, Benoit Magimel, Sara Forestier and Rod Paradot. This year’s festival will pay tribute to the late Ingrid Bergman, who would have turned 100 this year, and the feature film jury is chaired by American writer-directors Joel and Ethan Coen. Moore received her award, for her performance in “Maps to the Stars”, from French actor Lambert Wilson, having been unable to attend the award ceremony last year. — Reuters

### Singer Sarah Brightman calls off flight to space station

CAPE CANAVERAL, (Fla), 14 May — British soprano Sarah Brightman called off plans for a flight to the International Space Station, citing family reasons, the singer said in a statement on Wednesday. Brightman began training in Russia’s Star City in January for a ride aboard a Russian Soyuz capsule and 10-day stay on the station, a $100 billion (63.5 billion pounds) research laboratory that flies about 260 miles (418 km) above Earth. The trip would have cost her about $52 million, said Space Adventures, the privately owned US travel agency that arranged the expedition. “Ms Brightman said that for personal family reasons her intentions have had to change and she is postponing her comonaut training and flight plans at this time,” a statement on the singer’s Facebook page said. Brightman was to be the eighth paying tourist to visit the station, a project of 15 nations. One passenger, Microsoft Corp co-founder Paul Allen, who profited off the American economic meltdown in the mid-2000s, reported to the United States for a ride aboard a Soyuz rocket accident investigation. It was not known if Brightman’s decision to cancel her training and flight is related to the launch delay. — Reuters

### Mumford & Sons hold off Groban for Billboard 200 top spot

LOS ANGELES, 14 May — British folk band Mumford & Sons notched its second chart-topping album on the weekly US Billboard 200 chart on Wednesday, keeping singer Josh Groban from the coveted top spot. “Wilder Mind,” the third studio album from the Grammy-winning quartet, sold 231,000 albums, 78,000 songs and was streamed 15.4 million times, totalling 249,000 units, according to figures from Nielsen SoundScan. Groban held steady at No 2 this week as his latest album “Stages” sold another 101,000 units. The 54th installment of the “Now Music” franchise, featuring current hits by Taylor Swift and Maroon 5, debuted at No 3 with 71,000 units. The Billboard 200 chart tallies album sales, song sales (10 songs equal one album) and streaming activity (1,500 streams equal one album). Rapper Tech N9ne’s “Special Effects” entered the chart at No 4 this week, the only other new entry in the top ten of the Billboard 200 chart. Last week’s chart-topper, Zac Brown Band’s “Jekyll + Hyde,” dropped to No 5 this week. — Reuters

### Johnny Depp’s pet dogs face death threat for skipping Australian quarantine

SYDNEY, 14 May — Australia’s farm minister has given film star Johnny Depp two days to send his pet dogs home to the United States so they can go through quarantine on their return, or face having them put down. Depp, 51, is in Australia to film the fifth of his blockbuster Pirates movies, “Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales”. Last month, he flew in his Yorkshire terriers, Pistol and Boo, on his private jet, without declaring them to customs. Depp cannot sidestep Australia’s tough animal import laws just because he is one of the world’s most famous stars, Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce said on Thursday. “Depp has to either take his dogs back to California or we’re going to have to put them down,” Joyce told media. “He’s now got about 50 hours left to remove the dogs. He can put them on the same charter jet. It was not immediately clear where the dogs were. Government officials went to Depp’s rented house on Wednesday following a tip-off after the dogs were seen on the way to a grooming salon, Australian Broadcasting Corp reported. The incident highlights tough biosecurity laws in Australia, which has had no reported cases of canine-borne disease rabies. But it may threaten the future of a production worth $250 million. The Walt Disney Company (Australia) Pty Ltd, the Australian arm of the company co-producing the movie with Jerry Bruckheimer Films, did not answer a telephone call to seek comment. Lynne Benzie, the president of Village Roadshow Studios, where the movie is being filmed, did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Filming of the latest installment of the $3.7-billion (2 billion pounds) box office franchise started in February but was interrupted a month later, when Depp flew back to the United States for treatment of a hand injury. He broke the animal import laws on his return, Joyce said. — Reuters

### Selena Gomez to have cameo in Brad Pitt’s ‘The Big Short’

LOS ANGELES, 14 May — Pop star Selena Gomez will reportedly make a guest appearance in “The Big Short”, which co-stars Brad Pitt, Christian Bale and Ryan Gosling. The film, which is shooting in New Orleans, follows wealthy opportunists who profited off the American economic meltdown in the mid-2000s, reported Entertainment Weekly. Gomez, 22, is apparently playing a Manhattan professional. It appears she will appear in a cameo as her participation in the shoot, which took place at Hamish’s Casino in the French Quarter, was for only a day. In 2013, the singer-actress admitted to Ellen DeGeneres that she was starstruck when she first met Brad Pitt after he came to meet her after a concert. “The Big Short”, a dramatic departure for director Adam McKay, also stars Mansa Tornoe, Steve Carell and Scarlett Johansson. According to a source, Jay Z and Beyonce are also scheduled to film cameos later this week. — PIT
Defence best form of attack for Sevilla at Fiorentina

FLORENCE, Italy, 14 May — The best way for holders Sevilla to defend their 3-0 lead in Thursday’s Europa League semi-final, second leg at Fiorentina is to go on the attack, full back Jorge Andujar said on Wednesday.

Sevilla thumped the Italian side at the Sanchez Pizjuan last week and are on the brink of a second consecutive appearance in the final of Europe’s second-tier club competition, which will press touching distance of a record fourth triumph.

“The attitude will be the same as you have seen throughout the season,” Andujar, who is known as ‘Coke’, told a news conference previewing the clash at the Stadio Comunale Artemio Franchi in the Tuscan capital Florence. “We know we face a very tough match despite our goal advantage and the best way to protect it is to go for victory and do things the way we know,” he added. “We know that Fiorentina are a great club, with a lot of people behind them and a great history. “Considering who they are it’s normal that they believe in a comeback but that’s why we are here.

“We have to work to try to win because we don’t know how to play any other way,” Fiorentina must pull off a feat that has only been achieved once before if they are to make the showpiece in the Polish capital Warsaw on 27 May.

Sevilla’s La Liga rivals Valencia hammered FC Basel 5-0 after extra time in the second leg of their Europa League semi-final last season to become the only team to overturn a 3-0 first-leg deficit in aUEFA Cup/Europa League knockout tie.

If Sevilla clinch the trophy, they would win a record fourth title, eclipsing Inter Milan, Juventus and Liverpool, who all have three.

London, 14 May — An emotional Anfield will witness the end of an era on Saturday when Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard makes his final home appearance after more than 700 games and 17 years playing for his boyhood club.

Tickets that normally cost 47 pounds ($73.52) are on sale on the internet for more than 1,300 pounds such is the demand to see the Gerrard’s last match on home soil against Crystal Palace after his exceptional, glittering, one-club career.

Last week the former England skipper was part of a guard of honour saluting champions Chelsea at Stamford Bridge and this week Palace’s players are expected to line up and applaud him as he leads the team out of the Anfield tunnel for the last time.

After Saturday’s match, Liverpool have one game left at Stade de France on the final day of the Premier League season on 24 May when Gerrard, who turns 35 at the end of the month, will bid farewell to his adoring fans before joining LA Galaxy.

With Chelsea having won the title and Burnley and Queens Park Rangers already relegated, the only issues still to be decided are who fills the third relegation spot and the destination of the three Europa League places.

London, 14 May — Manchester United’s “one-year experiment” without Champions League football has not seriously harmed profitability although it was painful, the club’s group managing director Richard Arnold said on Wednesday.

United’s worst Premier League finish in 2013-14 meant they were absent from Europe’s blue-riband club competition this year, giving further ammunition to critics of the Glazer family who bought the club 10 years ago.

Marking the anniversary of the Glazers’ takeover of England’s biggest club, the Independent Manchester United Supporters Trust (MUST) this week issued a statement accusing the Americans of “ownership crimes” saying they had saddled the club with debt. However, Arnold said the owners’ “long-term vision” meant the three-times European champions remained strong, on and off the pitch, and were still competing for the world’s top prizes.

“Yesterday was the 10-year anniversary of the our current owners and that long-term approach they’ve taken, the vision they’ve shown and the decisions they’ve made have borne out on and off the pitch and they’re still strong,” Arnold said at the Daily Telegraph Business of Sport forum in London. “(MUST) would have their view. I wouldn’t agree with it. It’s a unique position to be in, the way that fans feel about a club and that is at heart of everything we do.” — Reuters

Japanese city renews efforts for UN listing of kamikaze pilot letters

TOKYO, 14 May — A Japanese city will press ahead to get the UN World Heritage to register letters by World War Two kamikaze suicide pilots alongside documents including the diaries of Anne Frank and the Magna Carta.

The Wednesday announcement by Kampei Shimoide, mayor of the southern Japanese city of Minamiyama, comes after South Korean outrage at Japan’s proposed UNESCO World Heritage listing of early industrial sites, some of which used forced labour during World War Two.

An unsuccessful bid last year by the city, which hosted an airfield from which hundreds of pilots launched suicide missions 70 years ago, was condemned by China, where memories of Japan’s occupation run deep.

Both China and Korea suffered under Japanese rule, with parts of China occupied in the 1930s and Korea colonized from 1910 to 1945.

Our project is in no way what ever being undertaken in an attempt to glorify, romanticize or otherwise rationalize the historical legacy of the pilots,” Shimoide told a news conference, referring to the letters and wills from the pilots preserved at the Chiran Peace Museum. — Reuters
**Murray runs rings around Chardy to advance in Rome**

**Rome, 14 May** — Andy Murray is more afraid of losing his wedding ring than a tennis match these days but that did not stop him from storming to a 10th successive win on clay at the Rome Masters on Wednesday.

Fresh from winning back-to-back titles in Munich and Madrid, Murray was once again sporting his wedding ring tied around his shoelaces as he beat France’s Jeremy Chardy 6-4, 6-3.

“I won’t lose it if it’s tied to my shoelace,” Murray told Sky Sport Italia.

“As soon as the match is over I put it back on.”

“If I’d keep it in my bag I’d have lost it already.”

Murray, who married Kim Sears last month, faced two break points in the sixth game of the opening set as Chardy tried to create another early upset after knocking out Roger Federer in the same round here 12 months ago.

But Murray held on to breeze through the rest of the match by outfoxing Chardy with his touch, powerful serve and backhand dropshots.

“I felt a little tired at the start but my condition got better as the match went on,” added Murray, who had never won a clay court title until his recent golden run.

“I’m a little surprised with my clay results. I hope to keep it up (my form) until Roland Garros.”

Murray will play Belgium’s David Goffin in the next round, after he saved three match points against Frenchman Jo-Wilfried Tsonga before coming through 6-2, 4-6, 7-5.

Second seed Federer did not face a single break point in a comfortable 7-6(3), 6-4 victory over Uruguay’s Pablo Cuevas and will now play giant South African Kevin Anderson in the third round.

Seven-time Rome champion Rafael Nadal, who is still searching for his best form this season, swatted aside Turkish qualifier Marsel Ilhan 6-2, 6-0.

That set up a third-round clash against big-serving American John Isner, who progressed following a 7-6(6), 6-4 win against Argentina’s Leonardo Mayer.

“It’s going to be very difficult,” Nadal said. “I hope to continue progressing.”

In the women’s event, former world no. one Victoria Azarenka had trouble closing out the match against fifth seed Caroline Wozniacki and needed five match points before edging past the Dane for the third time this year 6-2, 7-6(2).

Second seed Simona Halep crushed American Alison Riske 6-3, 6-0, while seventh seed Ana Ivanovic fell to Russia’s Daria Gavrilova after a three-hour battle.

The former French Open champion saved seven match points but eventually fell 5-7, 7-6(2), 7-6(7).

**Real reject Morata fires Juve into final**

**Madrid, 14 May** — Juventus shattered Real Madrid’s dream of a record-extending 11th European crown when Alvaro Morata scored against his former club to secure a 1-1 Champions League draw with the holders on Wednesday and send Juve into the final 3-2 on aggregate.

Cristiano Ronaldo netted a 23rd-minute penalty to give Real the upper hand before Morata stunned the Bernabeu when he rifled a shot into the roof of the net off goalkeeper Iker Casillas 12 minutes into the second half.

Spain forward Morata, a Real academy graduate considered surplus to requirements, also scored in the Italian champions’ 2-1 win in the first leg in Turin and Juve will bid for their third triumph in Europe’s elite club competition when they face Barcelona in Berlin on 6 June.

Real pushed desperately for the goal that would have taken the game to extra time but squandered a host of chances and Juve remained on course for a treble of European and domestic league and Cup titles.

“Many people said Juve was not a team that deserved to be here and we have proved them wrong after game again,” Juve midfielder Arturo Vidal told reporters.

“They (Real) have some spectacular players but we are a very united team,” added the Chile international.

“We all know what Barcelona are, they have an incredible side, but we will see who is the best and we will put our lives on the line.”

After Ronaldo’s penalty following a clumsy Giorgio Chiellini foul on James Rodriguez, Real could have been further ahead at the break.

Ronaldinho, Gareth Bale and Karim Benzema all wasted chances on a warm afternoon but squandered a host of chances and Juve remained on course for a treble of European and domestic league and Cup titles.

Chances came thick and fast at both ends and Rodriguez powered a shot narrowly over the crossbar. Real keeper Iker Casillas saved brilliantly from Claudio Marchisio and Bale nodded over when well placed.

“Juventus deserve to be in the final while we missed our chance,” Real defender Sergio Ramos told Spanish television.

“After the first goal it seemed like the tie was won but that wasn’t the case at all,” added the Spain international, whose side now face the prospect of ending the season without winning any of the Champions League or Spanish league and Cup.

Ronaldo, level with Lionel Messi on 86 goals for the season, swatted aside Turkish qualifier Marsel Ilhan 6-2, 6-0.

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“It’s going to be very difficult,” Nadal said. “I hope to continue progressing.”

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**Nishikori picks up 30th win of season in Rome**

**Rome, 14 May** — Kei Nishikori won his 30th match of the season by advancing to the third round of the Internazionali BNL d’Italia on Wednesday.

Facing up-and-coming Jiri Vesely for the first time, Nishikori was made to work for a 7-6 (5), 7-5 victory that lasted more than 2 hours, 10 minutes. Nishikori was on the brink of losing the first set, down 5-4 before saving three set points to win in a tiebreak.

Fifth seed Nishikori managed to hold serve throughout the second set, breaking his Czech opponent for the third time at 5-5 and going on to book a spot in the next round against Viktor Troicki on Thursday.

“He played better than I expected which was why the match was so close,” Nishikori said of the 21-year-old Vesely. “I managed to win a tough match and that gives me confidence. I’ll be more aggressive next time.”

Nishikori withdrew from the tournament with an injury last year and then fell at the first hurdle in the French Open.