President U Thein Sein sends messages of felicitation to President, PM of Iceland

Myanmar eyes good image in hosting CLMV, ACMECS Summits

Nay Pyi Taw, 16 June—Myanmar is making efforts to successfully host the 7th Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam Summit and the 6th Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy Summit, both of which are slated to be held in Nay Pyi Taw on 22 and 23 June, Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham said Tuesday.

Like the ASEAN summit which was hosted by Myanmar last year, the CLMV and ACMECS reflect the good image of the country, and the central committee and sub-committees are obliged to strive for success in hosting them, the vice president said at a final meeting of the central committee Tuesday in Nay Pyi Taw.

Participants of the final meeting reported on preparations for the summits. About 175 local and foreign journalists are expected to cover the summits.—MNA

Kyimyindine Station upgrade raises heritage, conservation concerns

As the circular railway train approaches Kyimyindine (formerly Kemmendine) Station, signal operator Ko San Win is ready for its arrival, having been notified by the discoloured electric telegraph system as old as the weathered station building.

Ko San Win is one of only a handful of people who know how to operate the point signals that switch the lines on Myanmar’s limited railway network.

It is impossible to change tracks with brute strength alone. It requires timing, experience and the right weather conditions.

As he does every day, Ko San Win signals the arrival of the train to the station master. Everything is OK. Until an automatic system is installed, Ko San Win will continue to play a crucial role. The Yangon-Pyay Railway line began operating on 1 May 1877. In 1876, 18 railway stations including Kyimyindine were built for the Yangon-Pyay Railway line. However, the station building was eventually replaced.

Fifty-two years after the world’s first railway line was built, steam locomotives from England began travelling the tracks to and from Kyimyindine. The Yangon-Pyay Railway was the first line in the country and was operated by the state-owned Yangon and Ayeyawady Delta Railway Company.

The railway station building that can be seen today was built in 1928. Although there were no records of the station’s construction, bricks dated from the year were found during repair work for damage caused by Cyclone Nargis. Despite its designation as a heritage building, the building has not undergone (See page 9)
Myanmar ready to sign multilateral rights treaty

Nay Pyi Taw, 16 June — Myanmar is ready to sign the UN’s multilateral rights treaty, as the country is undertaking a reform process that aims for public-centered development programmes, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs U Tin Oo Lwin told the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw on Tuesday.

President U Thein Sein asked the bicameral parliament to discuss Myanmar’s possible membership of the United Nations General Assembly, which adopted in 1966 the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural that came into force in 1976. Regarding the 2014 annual report of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission, Chairman U Win Mya explained the activities of the commission. Parliamentarians suggested the MNHRC needs to do more across the country and stand as a reliable and independent body for Myanmar people. The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw also approved the Boiler Bill, which had been subject to disagreements between the two houses of parliament, and invited MPs to discuss the amendment of Article 436 (A) and (B) in the 2008 Constitution.—MNA

**Pyithu Hluttaw**

**Authorities to take preventive measures against DHF in Kyaukpyu**

Deputy Minister U Kyaw Kyaw Win, MNA

Nay Pyi Taw, 16 June — Arrangements have been made for dredging drains in urban area of Kyaukpyu, Rakhine State, to prevent outbreak of dengue haemorhagic fever. Deputy Minister at the President Office U Kyaw Kyaw Win replied to questions of U Ba Shein of Kyaukpyu constituency at the Tuesday’s session of Pyithu Hluttaw.

The MP asked about infection of DHF in Sanyya, Zedtaraung and Rakhine Paikseik wards in Kyaukpyu due to blocks of drains in the rainy season, reallocation of new wards for odd-job people and the plan for taking action against illegal use of pavements, sewerage lanes and vacant areas.

He said that local authorities cooperate with Public Health Department and volunteers in carrying out sanitation for prevention of common diseases in the rainy season such as malaria, DHF and elephantiasis in Kyaukpyu and for raising public awareness of health knowledge with health care services at schools and hospitals.

U Kyaw Kyaw Win added that departments concerned will scrutinize the illegal use of pavements and the sewerage lanes in the urban area and seek legal advices from the departments for managing the use of vacant lands. In doing so, local authorities will provide assistance for needy persons in cooperation with social organizations.—MNA

**Myanmar-India transport project under way in Chin State**

Nay Pyi Taw, 16 June — Myanmar is implementing a transit transport project in Chin State that will connect the country with neighbouring India, Deputy Minister for Transport U Han Sem told the Amyotha Hluttaw on Tuesday.

U Mye Tun, MP for Chin State constituency 11, asked about the Union government’ plan regarding the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project in the western Myanmar state.

The deputy minister said the waterway along Kaladan River is being dredged, and discussions are in progress on building a motorway to the Indian border.

The project will link Rakhine and Chin states to India’s eastern seaport of Kolkata, as well as its landlocked northeastern state of Mizoram through a newly constructed river and highway transport system.

U Nyunt Tin, MP of Yangon region constituency 2, proposed to the Upper House to form an independent commission of traffic accident prevention.

U Ohn Tin, MP of Rakhine state constituency 10, complained about the erection of illegitimate party signboards that mimic the name of registered political party. Union Election Commission member U Myint Naing said the electoral body has instructed its sub-commission in Rakhine State to prohibit such illegal signboards.—MNA

**Information for Public Remonstration**

1. National Development Party headquartered at Room No 204 of C Building, Myintna Housing Project, Ward 14, South Okkalapa Township, Yangon Region, has submitted its application for the registration as a political party to the Union Election Commission.

2. It is hereby announced that those who want to remonstrate with the UEC about the party’s name, flag and emblem they may submit a complaint along with the strong evidence within seven days starting from issuance of this announcement in line with the Section 14 (d) of the Political Parties Registration Rules.

By order,
(Tin Tun)
Secretary
Union Election Commission
NAY PYI TAW, 16 June—A Myanmar delegation led by Vice President U Nyan Tun on Tuesday visited the Nuclear Research Institute in Moscow.

The delegation observed cooperation in the use of nuclear technology by organizations and ministries of Russia.

The head of Crisis Center Rosenergoatom spoke to the delegation about control and systematic management of nuclear power by skilled workers at the research institute in cooperation with nuclear agencies from other countries.

The delegation arrived in Moscow on Tuesday morning and was welcomed at the Domodedovo Airport by Myanmar Ambassador to Russia U Tin Yu and officials of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.—MNA

Video highlights importance of nutrition in first 1,000 days

YANGON, 16 June—The non-profit Livelihoods Fund and Food Security Trust Fund and partners launched an educational video Tuesday on the importance of early childhood nutrition.

The 2-minute video developed by LIFT and Leveraging Essential Nutrition Actions to Reduce Malnutrition (LEARN) highlights the impact of nutrition in the first 1,000 days between a woman’s pregnancy and her child’s second birthday.

Researchers say well-nourished children are 10 times more likely to overcome the most life-threatening childhood diseases, complete 4.6 more grades of school and earn up to 46 percent more over their lifetimes. In addition, they are more likely as adults to have healthier families.

A study shows 35 percent of children under age five in Myanmar are malnourished and are shorter than they should be, based on international growth standards. Additionally, almost 9 percent of infants are born underweight, having been malnourished even before birth. On the positive side, the rate of breastfeeding in the country is high.

According to a 2013 LIFT survey, only one in three Myanmar children aged 2 and under eat a sufficiently diverse diet. Since its establishment in 2009, LIFT has helped around 2.7 million people, targeting smallholder farming families and landless rural poor.—GNLN

Chinese journalist delegation visits Nay Pyi Taw

NAY PYI TAW, 16 June—A five-member delegation led by President Mr Tang Yuanjie of All-China Journalists Association-ACIA called on Permanent Secretary U Tint Swe and party of the Ministry of Information at the ministry, here, on Tuesday morning.

The Chinese journalists held talks with officials at Myanmar Radio and Television in Tatkon Township.

They also visited the Gems Museum and the National Landmarks Garden. The Chinese delegation arrived in Yangon on Monday night and proceeded to Nay Pyi Taw on Tuesday morning.—MNA

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Draft Myanmar Companies Law available on DICA’s website

By Ye Myint

YANGON, 16 June — The Directorate of the Investment and Company Administration (DICA) announced Tuesday that the draft Myanmar Companies Law is available on its website in English and Myanmar languages.

According to the DICA, the draft Companies Law with two versions in Myanmar and English has been uploaded to its website (www.dica.gov.mm), as the modernization of the country’s century-old Companies Act 1914 has been completed with the support of the Asian Development Bank.

The DICA has sought consultation from businesspeople and members of the public to provide input on modernization of the new legislation by email, post or fax to its offices in Yangon, Nay Pyi Taw and Manda- lay, as well as Shan and Mon states.

Modernising the old Companies Act will be of benefits to businesses in Myanmar, making it easier for them to operate and to access finance, said Mr Winfried Wicklein, ADB country director in Myanmar during a public consultation meeting on the process in Yangon last April.

Mr Christopher Hughes who made a presentation on the draft law at the meeting commented that its reform is as important as the modernisation of the investment law which is also currently in draft form.

—GNLM

OIC Special Envoy visits Myanmar

NAY PYI TAW, 16 June—Union Minister for Foreign Affairs U Wunna Maung Lwin received Mr Syed Hamid Albar, Special Envoy of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Tuesday.

During the call, the foreign affairs minister briefed Myanmar’s position and measures taken in connection with boat people and development programmes in Rakhine state.

The OIC official said the discussion helped understand the situation on the ground of Myanmar, adding that he would be reporting the information to the headquarters.

He also expressed the willingness to provide without discrimination, development and humanitarian assistance to the people in need through Myanmar government, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Union FM sends messages of felicitations to Republic of Iceland

NAY PYI TAW, 17 June—U Wunna Maung Lwin, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, has sent a message of felicitations to His Excellency Mr. Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, on the occasion of the Independence Day of the Republic of Iceland, which falls on 17 June 2015.—MNA

National Development Party, Women’s Party (Mon) apply for registration as political parties

NAY PYI TAW, 16 June—The Union Election Commission has been scrutinizing and passing the applications for registration as political parties. National Development Party and Women’s Party (Mon) applied for registration as political parties to the UEC on Tuesday.—MNA

Only about one in three Myanmar children up to two are eating sufficiently diverse foods.

PHOTO: TIM MITZMAN

By Khaing Thanda Lwin

YANGON, 16 June—The non-profit Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund and partners launched an educational video Tuesday on the importance of early childhood nutrition.

The 2-minute video developed by LIFT and Leveraging Essential Nutrition Actions to Reduce Malnutrition (LEARN) highlights the impact of nutrition in the first 1,000 days between a woman’s pregnancy and her child’s second birthday.

The organizations hope to spread the video’s message to a wide audience across the country.

“Globally, the 1,000 days are referred to as a ‘window of opportunity’ where good nutrition can have lifelong impacts on a child,” said Elizabeth Whelan, LEARN’s nutrition program manager. “Children can benefit from good nutrition during this time.”

Researchers say well-nourished children are 10 times more likely to overcome the most life-threatening childhood diseases, complete 4.6 more grades of school and earn up to 46 percent more over their lifetimes. In addition, they are more likely as adults to have healthier families.

A study shows 35 percent of children under age five in Myanmar are malnourished and are shorter than they should be, based on international growth standards. Additionally, almost 9 percent of infants are born underweight, having been malnourished even before birth. On the positive side, the rate of breastfeeding in the country is high.

According to a 2013 LIFT survey, only one in three Myanmar children aged 2 and under eat a sufficiently diverse diet. Since its establishment in 2009, LIFT has helped around 2.7 million people, targeting smallholder farming families and landless rural poor. —GNI
Top performers in Buddhist culture course honoured

Nay Pyi Taw, 16 June — A ceremony to honour those who passed the township level Buddhist culture course examination was held at Aungthabye monastery in Thabyebin village, Zeyathiri Township, on 14 June.

Vice Chairman of Township Sangha Nayaka Committee Abbot Bhaddanta Jotika and officials presented gifts to prize winners Maung Myo Naing Win, Ma Yu Sanda Myint and Maung Chit Min Thu.

A total of 33 trainees from Thabyebin village passed the course.

Shwe Ye Yint

Farmers hope for rains in Magway Township

Magway, 16 June — Farmers in Magway Township and surrounding rural areas are hoping for more rain amid a dry spell following the last significant downpour on 21 May.

Local farmers are ploughing, weeding and buying fertilizer as they prepare to cultivate sesame and groundnut on their plots.

“Most farmers have spent about K200,000 on labour costs for ploughing and weeding, and use of fertilizers,” a local farmer from Magyikan Village said.

“Each year heavy rain falls across the region enabling cultivation of sesame and groundnut. After that, rainfall declines gradually,” he added.

“Using rainwater last month, sesame and groundnut plants are still thriving on farms,” said a local farmer.

“Based on my experience, I think there may be rain in the region on the early waxing days of Waso,” a farmer from Hsataingkan village said, referring to the period from 17 to 19 June.

Nag, Thandawgon, Hsadaingkan, Magyhsan, Pasouan Pahto and Thabye-san villages in Magway Township face a shortage of water for cultivation.

Zar Zar (Magway)

Retirees gather at annual meeting in Kyaukme

Kyaukme, 16 June — An association of retired government service personnel held its annual general meeting for the 2014-15 fiscal year at the town hall in Kyaukme, northern Shan State, on 15 June.

Chairman of Township Development Supporting Committee U Tin Win urged the retirees to work toward ensuring the longevity of the association.

Township officials presented certificates of honour to well-wishers and prizes to outstanding students related to retirees.

Myint Aung (Ka Ma)

Kawthoung landslide destroys home, injuring resident

Kawthoung, 16 June — A man was seriously injured when his home was destroyed in a landslide following heavy rain on 15 June in Padauk Shwewah Ward, Kawthoung, Taninthayi Region.

U Si Paw was inside his home when it was crushed by debris from the property of his neighbour U Tun Oo. Township and ward officials and rescuers rushed to the scene.

Kyaw Soe (Kawthoung)
Paletthwe paddy yields more than 260 baskets per acre in Nyaungshwe Tsp

Local farmers receive paddy seeds for food sufficiency

Mandalay Region targets 75% rice sufficiency in 2015

Students attend lectures on dangers of drugs

Conference seeks to reduce traffic congestions
Philippine leader tries to resuscitate peace deal with rebels

**Philippine President Benigno Aquino**

SULTAN KIDARAT (Philippines) 16 June — Philippine President Benigno Aquino attempted to revive a stalled peace process with Muslim insurgents on Tuesday, calling on lawmakers to grant autonomy for the predominantly Christian nation’s restive southern region before time runs out.

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) handed in a token 75 weapons at a ceremony on Tuesday, where Aquino attempted to push forward his autonomy proposal for the region, known as Bangsamoro.

The MILF, the largest Muslim rebel group in the Philippines, agreed in March last year to disband its guerrilla force and surrender 15,000 weapons in exchange for control of their economy, culture and politics.

Work on the so-called Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) ground to a halt soon after fighting on the island of Mindanao in January killed 44 policemen and 18 rebels. The killing of the police commandos came Aquino’s greatest political crisis, with calls for him to resign.

Aquino is trying to restart the process before he leaves office in June 2016. “Our Moro brothers and sisters made a commitment, and before us is the concrete proof of their sincerity,” Aquino said in a speech at the “decommissioning ceremony” on Mindanao.

The weapons were handed over to a group of independent monitors, with the government in exchange granting about 25,000 pesos ($555) each to 145 former combatants to begin a new life as farmers. The 45-year conflict has killed 120,000 people, displaced 2 million and stunted growth in the resource-rich southern region.

Al-haj Murad Ebrahim, leader of the 11,000-member rebel group, said the weapons handover was not a sign of weakness. “We begin the long walk towards transformation, not surrender,” Murad said. The rebels fear that the Philippines Congress, which suspended work on the BBL after the January killings, will try to dilute Aquino’s proposed law.

One political analyst saw the ceremony as nothing more than propaganda in an attempt to convince lawmakers and Filipinos to support it. A recent survey showed only 23 percent of the population support the BBL. “Aquino wants to rally support for the BBL, but he is already a lame duck,” said Earl Parreno of the Institute for Political and Electoral Reforms. “Lawmakers would not be willing to risk their re-election to give him his legacy.” — Reuters

Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen greets journalists during a plenary session at the National Assembly in Phnom Penh on 9 April, 2015.— Reuters

The move will come as no surprise to critics of Hun Sen’s Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), who have accused it of constantly abusing its power by prompting authorities, such as judges, the police and military, to stifle opponents.

He has accused NGOs of acting irresponsibly, including supporting the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), which is now challenging the CPP’s dominance.

The new law aims to prevent the funding of “terrorism”, Hun Sen says, but his government has not said if such a threat exists.

Civil society need not worry about the law, he said, adding, “It will protect you, support you and let you act freely.”

Cambodia has been widely praised for turning itself into a promising frontier market from war-torn basket case, cutting its ratio of poor among its population to a fifth in 2011, from half in 2004. NGOs played an important role in the process.

But that progress has fueled a black economy and dubious large-scale seizures of lucrative real estate and farmland, a trend often blamed on businessmen in căhoots with politicians.

New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) said the draft law was designed to muzzle critics and existing laws adequately covered the NGO sector, the development of which it called one of Cambodia’s “most thriving and important achievements”.

But that progress has been so restrictive,” said Sos Rotheang, of the Organization for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, said the NGO law would make it “impossible to do their crucial work.” — Reuters

Cambodian rights groups fear bleak future under new law

**Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen**

Phnom Penh, 16 June — Rights groups in Cambodia are warning of a “bleak future” for local activists, calling on lawmakers to abandon a proposed law that they say feels threatening.

The law, seen by Reuters, requires all NGOs to report their activities and finances to the government, with punishments for breaches ranging from fines and criminal prosecutions to the break-up of the organization.

It allows the government to take wide-ranging action against the NGOs, targeting them for anything from jeopardizing peace and stability and public order to harming national security or Cambodian culture and traditions.

“The law has never been so restrictive,” said rights activist Pen Bonnar, 53, who has become a hero to tens of thousands of Cambodians after 16 years of fighting landgrabbers, illegal loggers, and other forms of injustice. “It will tie us.”

A copy of the draft law, which has been in the works for years, and is due to go to parliament soon.

Rights groups in Cambodia have been alarmed by the determination of the government of Prime Minister Hun Sen, who has ruled the country for nearly three decades, to ram through a new law.

They fear the measure would impede the work of 5,000 foreign and Cambodian non-government organizations. The government has tried to keep secret the latest draft of the law, which has been in the works for years, and is due to go to parliament soon.

The killing of the police and military, to Tokyo and its vicinity. It is unknown whether the volcano spouted a plume due to low visibility, according to the weather agency.

Soeung Saroeun, of the Cooperation Committee of International NGOs, said, “This is the worst and most harmful law.”

Earlier this month, Scott Busby, a US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour, said the NGO law would make it “impossible to do their crucial work.” — Reuters

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe speaks to reporters at his office in Tokyo on 16 June, 2015, about the latest eruption of Mt Asama in central Japan.— Kyodo News

The agency said, however, it will not raise the alert further on its five-level scale as there are no signs of more volcanic activity.

Major Japanese airlines — Japan Airlines Co and All Nippon Airways Co — both said the eruption had no impact on their flight routes.

It is unknown whether the volcano spouted a plume due to low visibility, according to the weather agency.

Surrounded by major tourist spots, Mt Asama last erupted on 27 May, 2009. When it had a minor eruption in February that year, ash showers reached as far as Tokyo and its vicinity.

The latest eruption follows recent volcanic activity nationwide including an eruption on Kuchinoerabu Island in Kagoshima Prefecture, southwestern Japan, on 29 May, and an eruption last September of Mt Ontake in central Japan that killed 57 people and left six others missing. Mt Asama also had a major eruption in 1783 killed more than 1,000 people and destroying over 1,000 houses. More recently, 398 eruptions were observed through 1941 and 287 in 1954.

Kyodo News

Mt Asama appears to have had small eruption: weather agency

Tokyo, 16 June — Mt Asama, a volcano about 140 kilometres northwest of Tokyo, appears to have had a small eruption Tuesday morning, the Japanese weather agency said.

A small amount of ash was confirmed at around 9:30 am to have fallen about 4 km north of the mountain straddling Nagano and Gunma prefectures, the Japan Meteorological Agency said, warning that rocks could fall within 2 km of the crater.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told reporters that the government “will do our utmost to deal with the situation,” and will gather information and enhance safety measures. The eruption came a week after the agency raised the alert for the 2,568-metre volcano from 1, warning that it is potentially active, to 2, advising against approaching the crater, due to volcanic tremors since late April and a surge in sulfur dioxide emissions.

The agency said, however, it will not raise the alert further on its five-level scale as there are no signs of more volcanic activity.

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Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe speaks to reporters at his office in Tokyo on 16 June, 2015, about the latest eruption of Mt Asama in central Japan.— Kyodo News

A minor eruption in August 2008. Medium-scale eruptions in September and November 2004 caused damage to local crops.

A major eruption in 1783 killed more than 1,000 people and destroying over 1,000 houses. More recently, 398 eruptions were observed through 1941 and 287 in 1954.

Kyodo News

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Kyodo News
S Korea’s MERS death toll rises to 19

SEOUL, 16 June — South Korean health authorities said on Tuesday the number of deaths linked to the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus has risen by three to reach 19, while the number of diagnosed cases now stands at 154, with four new cases compared with the previous day’s figure.

Three of the four new patients were infected while visiting Seoul’s Samsung Medical Centre which has been pinpointed as the source of about half of cases of infection by the potentially fatal virus, including the country’s first known case, according to the Health and Welfare Ministry.

Since Sunday, the hospital has partially suspended operations and stopped receiving outpatients in an effort to prevent the virus from spreading.

More than 5,000 people are under quarantine in hospitals or at their homes. Out of the 19 deaths, only four were under the age of 60.

Fifteen patients of those who died had underlying health conditions, the ministry said.

According to the World Health Organization, people with diabetes, renal failure and chronic lung disease, and those whose immune systems have been compromised, are considered to be at high risk from MERS infection.

The government has been making all-out efforts to prevent any further spread of the respiratory illness since a 68-year-old man who travelled to the Middle East became the first South Korean case. His infection was confirmed on 20 May.

South Korea has the second-largest number of MERS patients, after Saudi Arabia, which has reported over 1,000 confirmed cases since the virus emerged there for the first time in 2012.

Japanese subject to MERS home quarantine returned from South Korea

TOKYO, 16 June— Japan acknowledged on Tuesday that its nationals subject to home quarantine for Middle East Respiratory Syndrome in South Korea had returned to Japan, though its officials declined to specify their gender or other details on privacy grounds.

A source close to Japan-South Korea relations has said two Japanese nationals subject to such quarantine had returned to Japan by Monday.

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare said on Tuesday that several Japanese returned to Japan before they were notified of the quarantine. But the ministry said none showed symptoms and that their risk of infection was “low.” “There is no information that Japanese nationals have been infected or are suspected of having MERS,” Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida said at a press conference.

Asked about the Japanese who were subject to home quarantine and returned to Japan, Kishida said authorities are now monitoring their health, and said his ministry will continue to work closely with the health ministry on the matter. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga also sought to allay concerns, saying in a separate news conference that there is “absolutely no problem” with the Japanese returning to Japan since the country has in place what he said were “appropriate measures to prevent infections.”

The two Japanese nationals are believed to be among 20 to 30 foreign nationals who senior South Korean health ministry official Kwon Jun Wook said have been subject to isolation at home. None showed symptoms and all tested negative for the virus, according to the South Korean official. It remains unknown why the two Japanese could be repatriated when South Korea has banned people under quarantine for Middle East Respiratory Syndrome in South Korea had returned to Japan, though its officials declined to specify their gender or other details on privacy grounds.

A source close to Japan-South Korea relations has said two Japanese nationals subject to home quarantine for Middle East Respiratory Syndrome in South Korea had returned to Japan by Monday.

Michelle Obama in London to promote global education drive for girls

LONDON, 16 June — Michelle Obama kicked off a two-day visit to London on Tuesday with a tour of an inner city school as part of the US First Lady’s drive to support education for girls around the world.

Obama arrived in London on Monday evening with her daughters Malia and Sasha and her mother Marian Robinson, and will later meet Queen Elizabeth’s grandson Prince Harry and Prime Minister David Cameron.

The First Lady will visit a school in east London, Mulberry School for Girls, where she will discuss her Let Girls Learn initiative which aims to reduce the number of girls who do not go to school in an effort to improve their financial stability, health and independence.

Writing in the Financial Times newspaper, Obama described the 62 million girls who do not attend school as suffering a heartbreaking injustice that deprives them of a chance to develop their potential.

“I intend to use my remaining time as First Lady — and beyond — to rally leaders across the globe to join us in this work,” she said. “Because every girl, no matter where she lives, deserves the opportunity to develop the promise inside of her.”—Reuters

Vietnam to study over hosting of Southeast Asian Games in 2021

HANOI, 16 June — Vietnamese Prime Minister has agreed on studying the hosting of the 31st Southeast Asian (SEA) Games in 2021, said Vietnamese government office on Tuesday.

“Hosting SEA Games 31 in 2021 is the responsibility of Vietnam with the regional community, and will contribute to promoting the country’s image as well as high performance sports,” reads the office’s announcement on the government website.

The Vietnamese Prime Minister assigned Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism to coordinate with relevant agencies to build a hosting plan for SEA Games 31 to submit to the Politburo for approval of the hosting.

The plan will include the number of sports and events, which are in the programme of Olympic and Asian Games, as well as clarify training programs of Vietnamese athletes for the SEA Games 31.

Regarding infrastructure for the sport event, the Prime Minister asks for using existing facilities, upgrading them if necessary and not to construct new buildings from state budget.

According to former local report, the games are expected to be organized in Vietnam’s southern Ho Chi Minh City, the country’s economic and sports hub.

The SEA Games has been held every two years, starting in 1959 in Thailand. According to the Southeast Asian Games Federation (SEAGF)’s Charter, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members will take turns to host the Games. Vietnam first hosted the games in 2003. The 28th SEA Games are taking place in Singapore on 5-16 June.—Xinhua

A worker (R) disinfects an escalator at Busan’s train station on 16 June, 2015. South Korean health authorities reported the same day the 19th death linked to the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus and four new cases, raising the total number of cases to 154. KYODO NEWS

Health-care workers in protective clothing disinfect an internet cafe in Seoul on 16 June, 2015, following an increase in the number of diagnosed cases linked to the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus. South Korean health authorities reported the same day the 19th death and four new cases, raising the total number of cases to 154. KYODO NEWS

US first lady Michelle Obama greets US Ambassador to Britain Matthew Barzun at Stansted Airport, southern England on 15 June, 2015.—REUTERS

Michelle Obama in London to promote global education drive for girls
Defeat can teach valuable lessons

By Aung Khin

Myanmar football has been on the rise in recent years, with the country recently contesting its first World Cup at the U-20 tournament in New Zealand. Although Myanmar’s U-23 team could not grasp gold at the 28th SEA Games in Singapore, the side successfully defeated a number of regional rivals that it had not overcome for some years. After being forced to settle for silver in a 3-0 defeat to Thailand, most Myanmar football fans accepted the result and were happy with the overall performance of the team, which continued to fight until the final whistle.

The Myanmar players showed will to succeed and a good deal of skill, but were outperformed by stronger opponents who went on to claim their 14th football gold in the biennial games, and 10th in the last 12 editions.

The objectives of the SEA Games include promoting cooperation and understanding among countries in the Southeast Asian region. However, the event has also highlighted the role of government agencies in the development of sports in respective countries. As Myanmar has transformed into a multi-party system in politics, the private sector has begun supporting the sporting sector. While it is a start, much more needs to be done. Not only athletes, but also coaches and managers should be exposed to competition at an international level.

The support of government agencies is crucial, as private firms face certain limitations. It takes time for a tree to bear fruit, and the results of such support may not be borne out for several years. While there is no shame in defeat, provided the game is played in the right spirit, it does show us how we can improve.

Write for us

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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.

Hot Pursuit vis-à-vis Populism in Statecraft

(Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)

Sonu Trivedi

News channels, newspaper headlines, opeds, blogs and social networking sites have been inundated by articles and commentaries on India’s cross border operations against insurgents in Myanmar. Though in the history of Independent India, it is not the first time that the Indian army has been offensive in cross border operations, but never has the media been so provocative. Hot pursuits, surgical operations and pre-emptive attacks are essential in the Global War Against Terrorism and in the present case against the insurgent groups based in North-eastern Indian States, but given the media hype and propaganda the entire purpose of what ought to be a “secret mission” seems to have been defeated. Implementing it in a subtle manner and breaking the stereotyped ‘soft-state’ image would have certainly given a boost in tackling terrorism and maintaining peace in the sub-continent. On the contrary, it has turned out to be a show of strength and machismo justifying nationalist sentiments and populist blaming Government in India.

Paradoxically, India has been overtly involved in augmenting soft power diplomacy. As a result of globalisation of popular culture, Indian soft power has steadily grown over decades. Buddhism, Bollywood and Yoga have long been a part of Indian cultural heritage offering immense possibilities for projecting its soft power image. In its present bid of projecting Yoga on the world map, celebrating International Day of Yoga on 21st June is going to further enhance its soft power diplomacy at the global level.

Ironically, the present show of strength illustrates a case of ‘throwing the baby out with the bath water’. In its bid to outmaneuver the rebel camps on the border, Indian security establishment in its counter offensive operation seems to have been taken in by the media. Covert armed operations bear fruits when covert media frenzy and actions. But the ongoing drama and public rhetoric has been adverse to India’s international image and diplomacy running into the risk of antagonising a friendly neighbour and compromising on bilateral ties. The lessons are obvious and must be used with caution before replicating it elsewhere.

The facts and figures emerging out of post-cross border operation offers no credibility meaning and speaks of inherent contradictions and inconsistencies about the causalities inflicted. There seems to be no clear answer to that question. The details are likely to be mucky given the secrecy in the security establishments and diplomatic sensibilities. But what is sure is that the use of force and military interventions as an instrument of statecraft and inter-state relations is back not only in India’s security establishments but in the sub-continent as well.

Attempting a military solution to what really is a social and political issue of decades long exclusion of India’s northeast may further complicate the matter. India has been fighting a long six decade war with its own people resulting in a tragic engagement and leading to a vicious cycle of violence. Northeast’s tryst with violence has been a product of bloody confrontation between the insurgentary groups and security forces and political narrative of unending power struggle between the Centre and the State. Added to this, the persistent centralising drives have been responsible for the ‘failed’ state of affairs in the Northeast.

The Indian state has failed to address the root cause and provide an economic environment conducive to the new generation of youth who could realize, express and hope for a better life. Lacking basic means of livelihood, economic opportunities the newly educated youth have taken to arms. The current situation highlights in lying this major structural problem in the political system created by the centralising drives of the Indian state in a society which is pre-dominantly characterised by diverse ethnic groups and focusing the systemic gap in the lopsided development strategy of the nation. Political interventions, dialogues, negotiations, accommodation and inclusive developmental economic policies could certainly be an alternative for channelizing the energies in the right direction.

Though scoring a major shift in India’s existing ‘soft’ stand on anti-terror operations, success of this well coordinated, coherent and covert military retaliation has been marred by the criticism of (alleged) unilateral action, violation of sovereignty (if any) of what may be regarded as a ‘distant neighbour’ having shared frontiers and breast beating by the government, thereby setting a dangerous precedent and putting the region on a ‘short fuse’. Willingness of the Government to overdo hard and high risk options and characterising it by responding to public opinion through social media has questioned the traditional wisdom of Statecraft and intelligence and military capabilities. Success of such an operation must be shared appropriately and responsibly.

National interest expressed in terms of ‘power’ is a dominant realist paradigm in international relations theory, but institutions, structures, procedures and norms has its own substance in global politics. Role of institutions in facilitating cooperation amongst nations offers a nuanced approach of accommodation in international relations theory of ‘Complex Interdependence’. This reinforces the need to focus on particular ‘sensitivities’ and ‘vulnerabilities’ of actors involved. If compromised in the name of ‘national interest’ and played as a populist measure, it may lead to blunders in the game of International politics.

Nonetheless justified in flushing out militant outfits, neutralising the insurgents and guarding the sanctity of borders and lives of soldiers and citizens, the triumphalism evokes responsible response with due regard to geographical boundaries and diplomatic sensibilities. Such pre-emptive operations and swift retaliation can be a ‘State of Exception’ in Agamben’s term increasingly subjecting people to extra-judicial state violence, rather than the order of the day. Diplomacy as an element of statecraft can never be compromised for hard options indeed!

(Sonu Trivedi teaches at Delhi University)

Although Myanmar men’s U-23 football team was defeated in the final match of the SEA Games, the team made a strong impression on opposing teams.

Cartoonist
Bahan Aye Min
Kyimyindine Station upgrade raises . . .

Kyimyindine, according to a railway official.

For the moment, however, Kyimyindine Station operates as it has for decades. The station serves about 2,000 people a day including migrant workers and labourers from the far bank of the Kyimyindine River. Many passengers use the station as a transit point for changing from train to buses.

A railway worker recently expressed concern about the upgrade works, particularly its impact on the heritage aspect of the station.

“The buildings are ancient. Ladders in flag boxes were manually made. Priority should be given to conservation of ancient buildings, even if high-rise apartments and car parking are necessary for modern lifestyle,” the worker said.

The worker said he and others had voiced their concerns through official channels, but had not received any response.

“We have given our opinion for a long time but there has been no response, although it has been said that the conservation tasks would be carried out with Japanese International Cooperation Agency loans,” the worker said.

“It is also necessary to upgrade the operations of railway staff, as well as the status and dignity of the station.”

Tenders have been invited to build warehouses at Kyimyindine Station, which will also eventually accommodate all warehouses currently at Yangon Station. In addition, the steel overpass of the station is deteriorating and the rickety overpass is in need of repair.

Among the voices calling for the station’s preservation is a 94-year-old former railway worker.

“The history of Kyimyindine Station cannot be separated from the history of railways in Myanmar,” the retired worker said. “While we are glad to see new developments emerging, the old station should be preserved for years.”

We can see ancient station buildings like Kyimyindine Station in London today.”

Contemplating his uncertain future, Ko San Win described the signalling skills that make him indispensible for the time being.

“When it is too hot, railroads broaden and we have to be careful about the timing,” he said. “Some times, it is very difficult to lift up points and we have to do it manually.”

“As I have grown up among the railway families, I am happy to work here.”

“It is good news that new developments will be built and automatic systems will be installed, but we don’t know what will happen to us signal and telegraph workers.”

With new developments emerging in economic, political and social fields, it is important to balance progress with the needs of society, according to Deputy Minister for Culture Daw Sanda Khin.

“When new developments, ideologies of citizens on heritage and society change,” Daw Sanda Khin said. “We have to find equilibrium before going ahead.”

Indian Embassy holds competition to celebrate World Yoga Day

By Ye Myint

YANGON, 16 June — Yoga enthusiasts young and old showed their flexibility Tuesday in a competition hosted by the Indian Embassy in Yangon to promote the UN-designated day for the ancient physical, mental and spiritual practice.

The competition in the run-up to World Yoga Day on 21 June was the first of its kind in Myanmar and attracted 30 participants ranging in age from 6 to 56.

“The competition aims to show how much progress yoga practitioners in Myanmar have made,” yoga teacher and competition judge U Khin Maung Sae said.

Competitors performed five mandatory poses, as well as one of their own choosing, added promote access to financial services by SMEs, which is crucial for promoting sustainable and inclusive growth in Myanmar,” said Thierry de Longuemar, ADB Vice President for Finance and Risk Management. “Strengthened risk management will also help promote the development of the financial sector.”

ADB to help Myanmar banks boost risk management capacity for SME lending

YANGON, 16 June — The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Myanmar Banks Association are holding a 4-day workshop, starting on Monday at Chatrium Hotel in Yangon, to help local commercial banks raise their risk management capacity for lending to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

“With sound risk management, financial institutions will be able to provide commentary on the event.

A special programme arranged for International Yoga Day celebrations around the world will be demonstrated at the event, he added. The United Nations designated 21 June each year as the International Day of Yoga, through a resolution in December, 2014.

According to the Embassy, there are 18 Yoga clubs and centres in Yangon. —GNLM

The workshop is organized as part of ADB’s Technical Assistance for Enhancing Regional Capacity for Risk Management project, which will complement ADB’s non-sovereign operations in Myanmar. ADB’s operations in Myanmar focus on infrastructure development, education and skills development, and private sector development, including access to finance.

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—GNLM
Russia says will retaliate if US weapons stationed on its borders

MOSCOW/WARSZAW, 16 June — A plan by Washington to station tanks and heavy weapons in NATO states on Russia’s border would be the most aggressive US act since the Cold War, and Moscow would retaliate by beefing up its own forces, a Russian defence official said on Monday.

The United States is offering to store military equipment on allies’ territory in eastern Europe, a proposal aimed at reassuring governments worried that after the conflict in Ukraine, they could be the Kremlin’s next target.

Poland and the Baltic states, where officials say privately they have been frustrated the NATO alliance has not taken more decisive steps to deter Russia, welcomed the decision by Washington to take the lead.

But others in the region were more cautious, fearing their countries could be caught in the middle of a new arms race between Russia and the United States.

“If heavy US military equipment, including tanks, artillery batteries and other equipment really does turn up in countries in eastern Europe and the Baltics, that will be the most aggressive step by the Pentagon and NATO since the Cold War,” Russian defence ministry official General Yuri Yakubov said.

“Russia will have no option but to build up its forces and resources on the Western front line.”

Yakubov said.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said: “We hope that reason will prevail and the situation in Europe will be prevented from sliding into a new military confrontation which may have dangerous consequences.”

The Pentagon said Monday that the US military was in the process of deciding where to store a battalion’s worth of military equipment in Europe. The decision is part of a long-term effort to maintain equipment for a heavy brigade in the region to facilitate US rotational training with NATO allies.

“This is purely positioning of equipment to better facilitate our ability to conduct training,” said Army Colonel Steve Warren, a Pentagon spokesman, noting that two battalions of equipment already were stored there.

On Monday night, in the middle of a new arms race between Russia and the United States.

“We have listened to the views expressed by MPs across the house and decided that we won’t hold the referendum on 5 May, 2016,” a spokeswoman for Cameron’s Downing Street office said.

The decision to rule out the 5 May vote comes after Cameron told parliament last week he thought voters were capable of making two decisions on one day, suggesting the referendum could be held on 5 May.

But European lawmakers from Cameron’s Conservatives had feared he might try to secure a “yes” vote by holding the vote as early as next May, the same day as elections in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, in order to limit the time available to debate any deal he secures.

On Monday night, in a policy shift, his government tabled an amendment to a law paving the way for the referendum which rules out holding the referendum on the same day as the local elections.

Cameron has promised to renegotiate Britain’s relationship with the 28-nation bloc before holding an in-out referendum by the end of 2017. He has said he would be open to holding the vote before then if he can complete the renegotiation early.

“We have listened to the views expressed by MPs across the house and decided that we won’t hold the referendum on 5 May, 2016,” a spokeswoman for Cameron’s Downing Street office said.

The move will be interpreted as a tactical one designed to preserve unity in Cameron’s ruling Conservative Party which is riven by differences over Europe and follows another U-turn by Cameron on the subject earlier this month.

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Syrian Kurds claim capture of border town from Islamic State

The capture of Tel Abyad by the Kurdish YPG and smaller Syrian rebel groups means the Syrian Kurds effectively control some 400 km (250 miles) of the Syrian-Turkish border that has been a conduit for foreign fighters joining Islamic State.

While the advance has brought the well-organized YPG deep into Islamic State’s stronghold of Raqqa Province, it has also concerned Turkey, which is worried the expansion of Kurdish sway risks inflaming separatist sentiment among its Kurdish minority.

Redur Xelil, the YPG spokesman, told Reuters that Tel Abyad was “un-der complete control”. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based group that monitors the war, said most of the town was under YPG control with only a handful of Islamic State fighters inside. Xelil said in “most of them entered Turkey.”

The YPG has been the only significant partner to date in Syria for the US-led alliance that is bombing Islamic State. The YPG now controls the border from Syria’s far northeastern corner to just east of the town of Jarablus. That is Islamic State’s last remaining border crossing with Turkey.

While Islamic State was being driven back in Hasaka, it was advancing elsewhere in Syria against government forces, notably in Palmyra, which the jihadists seized from the government in mid-May.

The fighting near the border has forced more than 18,000 people to cross into Turkey from Syria, aid workers say. A further 5,000 are believed to have crossed on Monday, according to a Reuters photographer at the scene.

Soldiers directed the people, many of whom were elderly, women and children, through a passage in a barbed wire fence to a border facility, he said.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan has voiced concern about the latest YPG offensive, saying Kurds were taking over areas from which Arabs and Turkmen were being expelled, and accused them of the West of backing Kurdis-“terrorists”. He has also said the outcome could eventually threaten Turkey’s border.

Turkey views the YPG as part of the PKK, which has fought a decades-long insurgency against Ankara and is considered a terror-ist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.

A Turkish official and humanitarian worker had said US-led air strikes were partly to blame for the re-took displacement of mainly Arab residents from the border area. The US Emb-assy in Ankara defended its strategy from accusa-tions that it was hurting civilians, saying they were only targeting the militants and their activities.

British police hunt for family of 12 suspected of travelling to Syria

London, 16 June — British police said on Tuesday they were hunting for three sisters and their nine children whose family fear they may have travelled to Syria to join a relative believed to be involved in the fighting there.

Khadja Dawood, Sagra Dawood and Zohra Dawood and their children, aged between three and 15, from Bradford, northern England, were reported missing five days ago.

According to media reports, the group dispar-appeared after travelling to Medina in Saudi Arabia and there are now concerns they may have tried to join a brother of the three sis-ters who is suspected to be fighting with Islamic State militants in Syria.

“One of the possibili-ties is they travelled to Turkey to travel to Syria,” Balsal Khan, the lawyer acting on behalf of the women’s husbands, said in a statement. “The sus-picion, and main concern, is that the women have taken their children to Syria.”

Naz Shah, the local member of parliament, told Sky News she had met the women’s husbands and that they were shocked to have discovered their families were missing.

“If they have gone to Syria then the alarm bells are really, really loud,” she said, saying work had to be done to understand why the women had taken such action without their husbands’ consent.

British authorities es-timate more than 700 Brit-isons have travelled to Syria, with a significant propor-tion thought to have joined Islamic State which has taken over vast areas of the country and neighbouring Iraq.

Families are among those to have travelled, and police said of those arrest-ed on their return to Britain last year, 11 percent were women and 17 percent were under 20. “We are ex-tremely concerned for the safety of the family,” said Assistant Chief Constable Russ Foster, of West York-shire Police. “Their fam-i-ilies are gravely worried about them and want them home.”

Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) fighters walk with their weapons at the eastern entrances to the town of Tel Abyad in the northern Raqqa countryside, Syria, on 14 June, 2015, after taking control of nearby Salak town from Islamic State fighters. — Reuters

Reuters

Somali students sit for national exams for the first time in 25 years

Mogadishu, 16 June — About 7,000 Somali students sat for their final school examination for the first time in 25 years on Monday as the Horn of Africa nation seeks to re-vive its education system.

Acting Premier Abdu-lahi Amed Jama said the country was making steady progress in reforming its education system. “It is a great day for us taking centralized ex-amination from our sec-onary schools today. This is the progress our country is making now, I wish you success in the exam,” Ahmed told the candidates in Mogadishu before the examination kicked off. The Internal Security Minister, Abdiriskar Omar Mohamed, told reporters that the soldiers that have been deployed to beef up security and thwart any terror threats where the examinations are taking place. —Xinhua

Rebels shelling kills 18 Syrians in Aleppo

Damascus, 16 June — At least 18 people were killed on Monday when rebel forces shelled residential areas in Syria’s northern city of Aleppo, the state news agency SANA reported.

The rockets slammed into the government-controlled districts of Sarian and Faisal in Aleppo, said SANA, adding that children were among those killed.

The rockets were fired from the rebel-held Bani Zuait district in Al-Safa added. Meanwhile, Syria’s Information Minister Omran al-Zoubi slammed the firing as “terror-ism”, which, he said, is sup-port-ed by the Turkish gov-ernment, which emerged as one of their main backers of the militant groups in Syria.

Aleppo, Syria’s second largest city and once an econom-ic hub, has become carved out between the rebels and the government troops. Tens of civilians have been killed by similar rebel shelling dur-ing the crisis, while the re-bels accuse the government troops of shelling rebel-held areas with crude barrel bombs that also killed tens of civilians as well. —Xinhua

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Yemeni al-Qaeda leader killed in suspected drone strike — CNN

Dubai, 16 June — The Yemeni leader of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Nasser al-Wuhayshi, has been once an ac-crue of Osama bin Laden, was killed in a suspected US drone strike, CNN reported on Monday, citing two Yemeni national secu-rity officials.

If confirmed, it would be a major blow to one of the most active branches of the network founded by Osama bin Laden, had claimed the attack on a French satirical magazine and plotted against interna-tional airlines. CNN said the attack occurred on Friday in the Hadramat region in eastern Yemen.

Reuters could not in-dependently confirm the report, but some supporters of the group have published mourning notices on social media.

“Nasser al-Wuhayshi, may God accept him,” one supporter identified as Abu Gundi wrote on Twitter under the hash-tag Martyred and for the first time in the 1990s to join Al-Qaeda.

There, he met Bin Lad-en and acted as his aide-de-camp until 2001, when the group was scattered after the US-led invasion of Af-ghanistan following the 11 September attacks on the United States. He became head of AQAP in 2009, several years after a daring prison break from a jail in Yemen.

The group has orches-trated a number of spectac-ular attacks inside Yemen in recent years, targeting gov-ernment ministries, military camps and institutions in which hundreds of people were killed... —Reuters
Joksimovic: Opening of chapters additional impetus on EU path

BELGRADE, 16 June — Serbian Minister without Portfolio for European Integrations Jadranka Joksimovic said on Monday that opening the first chapters in the EU accession talks by the end of the year would be an additional impetus for accelerating reforms in Serbia.

Joksimovic and Serbia’s chief EU negotiator Tanja Miscevic spoke with Ernst Rechil, the German Foreign Office’s envoy for Southeastern Europe, about the continuation of the negotiations with the EU, the Serbian government said in a statement.

Serbia has made significant progress in the European integration process, the officials said in the discussion.

Rechil noted the significance of continuing the implementation of the Brussels Agreement so that Chapter 35 can become one of the first chapters opened.

In the implementation of the Brussels Agreement, it is important that both sides demonstrate a readiness for compromise, Joksimovic said and underscored the significance of regional stability and improved cooperation, where, as they said, Serbia has been an important contributor, the statement said.—Tanjug

Alaska wildfires destroy dozens of homes, menace highway

JUNEAU, (Alaska), 16 June — Two fast-spreading Alaska wildfires have forced a series of evacuations, destroyed up to 45 homes and forced authorities to restrict traffic on a major highway connecting two of the state’s largest cities, state officials said on Monday.

As many as 200 firefighters have been battling a 6,500-acre fire about 40 miles (64 km) north of Anchorage since Sunday afternoon. About 137 miles (220km) south of Anchorage, crews are fighting a much smaller, but equally dangerous blaze that threatens nearly 200 homes.

Additional specially trained firefighting teams from the lower 48 states and Canada were scheduled to arrive on Monday night and begin assisting on Tuesday, Alaska Forestry Division spokesman Sam Harrel said.

Crews have been battling the fires on the ground and from the air, with help from the three Alaska National Guard Blackhawk helicopters, according to state reports.

Harrel said the larger fire was ignited by human activity but the specific cause is being investigated. Dry and warm weather accelerated the blaze, he said.

It started on Sunday afternoon near Willow, where the Eidaard, Alaska’s famed sled-dog race, typically kicks off. It initially covered about two acres, but within 11 hours had engulped 6,500 acres, according to the fire service division.

Harrel said flames quickly jumped from one 30- to 40-foot spruce tree to the next, forcing a temporary closure of the Parks Highway, which links Anchorage in the state’s south central region to Fairbanks in Alaska’s eastern interior.

Residents along a 22-mile (35 km) stretch have been evacuated. The highway remains subject to intermittent closures and remained closed on Monday morning, Harrel said.

Governor Bill Walker had surveyed the area by air and issued a disaster declaration for the affected area.

By Monday morning, Harrel said, about 25 primary homes had been destroyed and as many as 20 secondary homes were also lost.

There are about 170 residential structures in the evacuation area, according to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. These include year-round residences and seasonal cabins, said borough spokeswoman Patty Sullivan. The borough also reported more than 200 people checking into evacuation centers, including residents and tourists, Sullivan said.

A second blaze, a 640-acre grass fire in the town of Sterling, began in the early afternoon, quickly destroying six structures and threatening 200 homes, Harrel said.—Reuters

Bangladesh upholds death sentence for top Islamist for war crimes

DHAKA, 16 June — Bangladesh’s Supreme Court on Tuesday upheld the death penalty for a top Islamist party leader over atrocities committed during the war of independence more than four decades ago, paving the way for his execution.

Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahed, 67, secretary general of the Jamaat-e-Islami party, was convicted in 2013 on charges of genocide, killing intellectuals, torture and abduction during the 1971 war to break away from Pakistan, a ruling that triggered violent protests by supporters.

Mojahed, a minister during former premier Khaleda Zia’s rule from 2001-2006, could be hanged within months, lawyers said.

“Everyone in Bangladesh is pleased over this verdict,” Attorney General Mahbubul Alam told reporters. “There’s no bigger crime than to eliminate the nation’s intellectuals.”

Defence lawyer Khandaker Mahbub Hossain said he would seek a review of the judgment and the Jamaat called for a 24-hour nationwide strike on Wednesday in protest.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina opened an inquiry into crimes committed during the war in 2010, paving the way for prosecutions by a war crimes tribunal that Islamists have denounced as part of a politically motivated campaign aimed at weakening Jamaat-e-Islami’s leadership.

Two Jamaat leaders have been executed, one in December 2013 and another from Pakistan, a ruling that triggered violent protests by supporters.

Asia’s largest war crimes tribunal’s procedures fall short of international standards, the tribunal’s procedures fall short of international standards.

The two sides also confirmed that the community of Serb municipalities is vital for the Serb community in Kosovo-Metohija.

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Unstable atmospheric conditions cause strong wind north of Tokyo

MAEBASHI, (Japan), 16 June — Unstable atmospheric conditions generated cumulonimbus clouds on Monday over extensive areas north of Tokyo, causing thunder, heavy rain and strong wind, the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

Strong winds damaged building roofs and windowpanes and uprooted trees in Iseaki and Maebashi, Gunma Prefecture, local authorities said. In Iseaki, wind also turned over two cars, injuring a 67-year-old woman in one of the vehicles and a 74-year-old man about to get into the other vehicle.

A 38-year-old woman in Iseaki said, “I was at home and looked out to find the outside almost white with falling hail. I also saw the door of a shed blown away and I was very afraid.”

About 3,300 households were temporarily without electricity in Iseaki and elsewhere after the wind broke a power cable, Tokyo Electric Power Co said.

The meteorological agency said the severe weather was caused by two cold air masses — one of minus 9 C and up to 5,500 meters high over the Kanto-Koshin region in eastern Japan, and another of minus 12 C above the Tohoku area in northeastern Japan — while temperatures at ground level topped 30 C in some locations.

That huge temperature difference made atmospheric conditions extremely unstable, producing cumulonimbus clouds in the Kanto and Tohoku areas.

Kyodo News
Leader of major organized crime syndicate faces tax evasion charges

KITAKYUSUI, (Japan), 16 June — The leader of Kudo-kai, one of Japan’s major crime syndicates, was seized a fresh arrest warrant on Tuesday for allegedly hiding hundreds of millions of yen collected from members affiliated with the group and evading income tax, police said.

It marks the first time police have built a case against a crime syndicate official for suspected violation of the income tax law by regarding dues collected from members as taxable income.

Satoru Nomura, a 64-year-old chief of Fukuoka pachinko parlors operating on their turf as well as from illegal gambling dens in the city, was arrested on a rest warrant, while three others, including Masakichi Yamamuta, a 64-year-old member of the group, were arrested on suspicion of managing the dues.

Nomura allegedly had around 227 million yen in collected in dues between 2010 and 2013 and evaded around 88 million yen in income tax, the police said. He has already been indicted on murder and other charges.

Members affiliated with organized crime syndicates often collect protection money from restaurants and pachinko parlors operating on their turf as well as from stimulant drugs dealers. The police believe that Nomura was a member of the Kudo-kai’s debt collection as an “antiscandal” system that could motivate crimes. “We estimate the dues to amount to hundreds of millions of yen a year. We will work to solve how the system works.”

With its members implicated in numerous shootouts against law-abiding citizens, Kudo-kai has been designated by local public safety commissions as a particularly dangerous gangster group.

Nomura has been indicted over the shooting death of a former local fishery cooperative leader in 1998 and attacks on a female nurse in 2013 and a dentist in 2014.

Public trust in nuclear power energy in the world’s fifth-biggest user of nuclear power has been undermined by a 2012 scandal over the supply of reactor parts with fake security certificates and the 2011 Fukushima crisis in Japan.—Reuters

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S Korea’s nuclear reactor operator to shut oldest unit permanently

SEOUL, 16 June — South Korea’s nuclear operator said on Tuesday it had decided to permanently shutter its oldest nuclear reactor, the nearly 40-year-old Kori No 1 unit, in line with a recommendation by a government-led advisory panel.

Such a shutdown would be the first permanent closure of a plant in South Korea since the country launched its nuclear industry nearly four decades ago.

A spokesman for Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power Co Ltd said the company had decided not to seek a second extension for the plant on the country’s southeastern tip, after its operating permit expires in June 2017.

Last Friday, the advisory panel recommended the closure of the 587-MW reactor, which contributes around 0.5 percent of South Korea’s total power generating capacity.

The operator, which is part of state-run utility Korea Electric Power Corp (KEPCO), had been widely expected to accept the panel’s suggestion.

Public trust in nuclear energy in the world’s fifth-biggest user of nuclear power has been undermined by a 2012 scandal over the supply of reactor parts with fake security certificates and the 2011 Fukushima crisis in Japan.—Reuters
‘Jurassic World’ scores biggest box office opening in history

LOS ANGELES, 16 June — Dinosaurs stomped to a box office record over the weekend as “Jurassic World” notched the biggest movie debut in history, with a global total of $524.1 million, Universal Pictures said on Monday. “Jurassic World,” which rebooted the dormant “Jurassic Park” franchise nearly 15 years after the first trilogy ended, grossed $208.8 million at the North American box office, topping the $207.4 million record set by “Avengers” in 2012. At the international box office, “Jurassic World” opened to $315.3 million, exceeding the previous $314 million record set by “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2” in 2011. “Jurassic World,” starring Chris Pratt and Bryce Dallas Howard, was made for $150 million by Comcast Corp’s Universal Pictures and Legendary Pictures. It adds a capital- ist twist to a world where dinosaurs still roam among humans within an island theme park. The film easily surpassed early projections for a $121 million opening, drawing both fans of the original trilogy and a new generation of moviegoers. “Jurassic World” becomes yet another box office hit this year for Universal Pictures, following February’s erotic “Fifty Shades of Grey,” April’s “Furious 7” action release and May’s “Pitch Perfect 2.” The studio notched two more records this weekend, becoming the fastest to reach $1 billion within a calendar year at the North American box office and $3 billion worldwide. Shares of Comcast were up 4 cents at $58.30 in afternoon trading. Reuters

Isle of Wight Festival honours Jimi Hendrix with record attempt

LONDON, 16 June — Britain kicked off its summer music festival season on the Isle of Wight with a world record attempt in honor of Jimi Hendrix 45 years after his last UK performance at the venue. As a sideshow to performances by groups such as Fleetwood Mac, Blur and The Prodigy, thousands of music fans donned masks bearing the face of the guitar hero to try to get the most people wearing the same mask in the same place. Hendrix played at the Isle of Wight Festival shortly before his death aged 27 in September 1970. Footage from that performance was beamed on Saturday from the stage, renamed “The Electric Church” for the occasion in honor of his music. A spokeswoman said organizers were still establishing whether a world record had been set. Proceeds from the masks, one pound each, will go to children’s charity Well Child, with 5,000 pounds ($7,750) raised so far. Electronic music band The Prodigy were among the first acts to perform at the 11-14 June festival off the English south coast, followed by Tame Impala Blur and rock band Fleetwood Mac who closed the event. “Happy” singer Pharrell Williams also performed. The festival is considered the first major music festival in the British summer calendar ahead of Glastonbury later this month. — Reuters

‘Kung Fu Panda 3’ first teaser reveals villain Kai

LOS ANGELES, 16 June — The first teaser trailer for the highly-anticipated animation “Kung Fu Panda 3” has arrived. Although the trailer is in Chinese, fans still can enjoy several scenes of the movie which reveal some new characters and give a look at the Furious Five, reported Ace Showbiz. The trailer opens with Master Shifu seemingly warning the Furious Five that there will be a war. It continues with scene where the main villain, Kai aka The Collector, smirks. Kai has an enormous body with evil spirit that goes around stealing the bodies of other kung fu masters. It also shows the Furious Five fighting with other enemies on the roof of a building as well as fea- tures Mei Mei, the female panda who is rumoured to be Po’s love interest. At the end of the trailer, Kai is seen destroying a Chinese building with a huge statue. According to the official synopsis, “when Po’s long-lost panda father suddenly reappears, the reun- ed duo travels to a secret panda paradise to meet scores of hilarious new panda characters. “But when the super- natural villain Kai begins to sweep across China defeating all the kung fu masters, Po must do the impossible-team to train a village full of his fun-loving, clumsy brethren to become the ultimate band of Kung Fu Pandas!” Jennifer Yuh Nelson, who directed “Kung Fu Panda 2”, returns as director while Melissa Cobb is tapped as producer. The voice cast includes Jack Black, Gary Oldman, Dustin Hoffman, David Cross, Angelina Jolie, Michelle Yeoh, Danny McBride, Lucy Liu, Seth Rogen, Jackie Chan, James Hong and the newly-added voice cast members Bryan Cranston, Rebel Wilson and Mads Mikkelsen. The movie is slated for a US release on 29 January, 2016. — PTI

Selena Gomez teases new single ‘Good For You’ on Instagram

LOS ANGELES, 16 June — Pop star Selena Gomez has teased her fans with new details about her next single “Good For You.” The 22-year-old singer took to Instagram and posted a blurry image of herself lying on the ground, reported Billboard. “Now, who would like the first look of my new music video?” she captioned the picture. The “Come and get it” hitmaker also shared a black and white photo of herself sitting on a stool against a bare white wall. She hashtagged the pic #IMready.

Rihanna dines with soccer star Karim Benzema in Santa Monica

LOS ANGELES, 16 June — Pop star Rihanna and soccer player Karim Benzema were spotted dining together in Santa Monica, California. The “Four Five Seconds” singer grabbed dinner with the Real Madrid player and friends at an Italian restaurant where Rihanna is a frequent patron, reported People Magazine.

Rihanna and Benzema, both 27, travelled separately to the popular restaurant. The dinner date was the second time this week the pair was spotted together. Last week, Rihanna and Benzema were caught getting cozy at a performance. According to a source, Rihanna and Benzema were “drinking and cud- ding during the show” in a booth near the back of the venue. The friends interacted on social media during the 2014 World Cup when the singer tweeted her support at the soccer star. — PTI
Germany take top spot in Group B with Thailand rout

UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador David Beckham visits Cambodia to support vulnerable children

Blatter could remain FIFA head if suitable candidate not found
Victorious Myanmar athletes back from 28th SEA Games

Yangon, 16 June — Athletes from international rowing, Taekwondo, men’s hockey, archery, bowling, sailing and badminton teams arrived back Yangon International Airport on 14 June and those of Sepak takraw, Squash and basketball teams on Tuesday.

The international rowing team of Myanmar won 2 silver and 5 bronze, Taekwondo team 1 silver and 1 bronze, men’s hockey team 1 bronze and Sepak Takraw team 1 gold and 3 silver in the 28th SEA Games.

The victorious athletes were welcomed back by officials of Sports and Physical Education Department.—SPED

Chile draw 3-3 with Mexico in Copa thriller

SANTIAGO, 16 June — Hosts Chile had to come from behind twice before themselves being pegged back by Mexico in a thrilling 3-3 Group A clash at the Copa America on Monday.

Mexican striker Matias Vuoso and Chile midfielder Arturo Vidal both scored twice in a game that roared from end to end and never let up in intensity.

The result leaves Chile and Bolivia on four points, ahead of Mexico on two and Ecuador bottom without a point.

Chile face Bolivia in their final group game in Santiago while Mexico face Ecuador in Rancagua, both on Friday.

Vidal said Chile were improving as the tournament wore on.

“It was a tough match, an end-to-end match, but the important thing is that we played better than in our opening game and we’re getting better,” Vidal said. “Now comes the match against Bolivia and we need to be at 100 percent.” Both sides went on the offensive from the outset and it was the Mexicans who took the lead in the 21st minute.

Jesus Corona crossed from the left, Juan Carlos Medina knocked the ball back across the face of goal and Vuoso stabbed a left-foot shot past goalkeeper Claudio Bravo from close range, silencing nearly 50,000 fans in Santiago’s national stadium.

That stunned silence did not last long as a minute later the Chileans were level. Vidal escaping his marker at a corner to power an unstoppable header into the bottom right-hand corner.

In the 28th minute Bravo tipped a Gerardo Flores header onto the underside of his crossbar and the Chilean defenders scrambled the ball to safety but with their next attack, the Mexicans restored their lead.

Raul Jimenez’s looping header from a corner should have been saved by Bravo but the keeper was off his line and the ball ended up in the net.

Chile pulled level again three minutes before the break, Vidal crossing from the right for Eduardo Vargas, who escaped some suspect Mexican marking to plant another firm header into the back of the net.

Chile then took the lead for the first time in the match in the 55th minute with Vidal scoring from the penalty spot after he had been pulled down in the box by Gerardo Flores.

Mexico refused to give up and on 66 minutes Vargas scored his second, beating the offside trap and running on to a long ball from Adrian Aldrete before chipping the ball over Bravo.

The Chileans poured forward in search of a winner and Alexis Sanchez appeared to have found it when he met a cross from the right and slammed the ball home from close range, but the linesman ruled he was offside.

“Maybe it was a good match for the spectators but we were hoping for another kind of match and another result,” Bravo said.—Reuters

Young keeper shines in long-awaited win for Bolivia

VALPARAISO, 16 June — The standout player of Bolivia’s first Copa America win since 1997 was delighted to have finally secured three points for his country and said the victory is a huge help in making sure they reach the quarter-finals of this year’s tournament.

“Our objective was to finally win a Copa America match after so long,” goalkeeper Romel Quiñonez said of their 3-2 win over Ecuador in Valparaiso.

“We haven’t qualified for the tournament. ‘If an end-to-end match, improving as the tournament wore on. ‘But this is a big step for-...’

FIFA to keep ‘Handshake for Peace’ at U-20 World Cup

WELLINGTON, 16 June — FIFA will continue to use the ‘Handshake for Peace’ at the under-20 World Cup in New Zealand despite the Nobel Peace Centre ending its cooperation with football’s governing body.

Team captains have shaken hands before and after games at the age-group tournament, which sees Brazil playing Senegal and Serbia facing Mali in Wednesday’s semi-finals.

“We have not received any communication from the Nobel Peace Centre and so where we stand at the moment we will continue to do so (the handshake) for the remainder of the games,” said Monika Huser, FIFA’s media and communications manager for the tournament. “If anything changes we will inform you.”

Huser said teams at the women’s World Cup in Canada would also continue to perform the handshake and FIFA staff in New Zealand were in ‘constant contact’ with head office in Zurich and their colleagues in Canada.

The Nobel Peace Centre, which had behind the initiative that had been enthusiastically promoted by FIFA President Sepp Blatter over the past three years, ended their co-operation with the scandal-plagued FIFA on Monday.

The Oslo-based Peace Centre, however, added that their agreement would not end immediately.

Huser would not comment on whether FIFA, which is under investigation by Swiss and US authorities for bribery and corruption, had an opinion on the move.

Blatter, who resigned earlier this month just days after being re-elected for his fifth term because of the developing scandal, was not expected to visit New Zealand for the end of the tournament.—Reuters

FIFA U-20 World Cup Semi-finals Match Schedules for 17 June 2015 (all times local)

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