Aye Min Soe

ALTHOUGH rice production has slowed due to recent floods, Myanmar’s current stockpiles of rice are expected to last until December, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

More than 500,000 tonnes of rice remain in the country, the ministry’s director-general U Aung Soe said on Tuesday.

The recent floods covered more than 1.4 million acres of rice and destroyed more than 800,000 acres, he added.

Ayeyawady Region, which is the country’s primary source of rice, was not affected by the flooding as severely as other regions because the floods there receded relatively quickly.

“More than 300,000 acres of rice fields were submerged by the floods, but more than 200,000 acres emerged undamaged,” said U Win Myint Naing, the president of the Ayeyawady Region Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

“Furthermore, of the 100,000 acres of rice fields that were totally destroyed, more than 70,000 acres have been replanted,” he added. About 50 percent of the farmers in Myaung U and Minbya in Rakhine State, which was severely affected by flooding, have been able replant rice, according a survey conducted by the Swanyee Foundation.

The survey also warned of a decrease in rice production in flood-affected areas due to local farmers spreading poor-quality seeds, largely taken from their own food supplies, directly on flooded land, rather than onto re-plough land.

The harvest season for rice planted in rain-fed fields will begin in October.—GNLM

The Ministry of Commerce says more than 500,000 tonnes of rice remain in the country.—PHOTO: AYE MIN SOE

Tatmadaw lawmakers hope for peace the most

Ceasefire accord is certain to be approved by 25 percent of parliamentarians, MPC legal counsel says

Ye Myint

YANGON — A quarter of Myanmar’s parliamentarians want peace more than others, said Dr Salai Andrew Ngun Cung Lian, legal counsel at the Myanmar Peace Centre, insisting that the military MPs will approve the national ceasefire accord between the government and ethnic armed groups.

At a press conference of the peace centre on Friday, Dr Ngun Cung Lian expressed the view when answering a question about what will happen to the accord if the lawmakers from Tatmadaw that hold 25 percent of seats in Parliament reject it.

“Basically, no one hates war more than the warrior. The 25 percent of the parliament’s seats, above others who have never fought in the war, prays for peace the most as they suffered the wounds and scares of war”.

The MPC’s legal counsel affirmed that he was pretty sure the 25 percent will support the ceasefire deal.

U Hla Maung Shwe, senior adviser at the peace centre, reaffirmed Tatmadaw’s willingness to sign the ceasefire whatever groups are willing to ink it, citing participation of its top-level representatives throughout the negotiations as indication of wanting to achieve lasting peace.

He quoted Saw Htoo Htoo Lay, political and military adviser to the Karen National Union’s Chairman, as saying that Tatmadaw’s desire and preparation for lasting peace is far beyond a situation they expected in previous years, and ethnic armed groups are lagging behind the Tatmadaw.

On Wednesday, President U Thein Sein and senior leaders of ethnic armed organisations held talks in Nay Pyi Taw on the signing of the truce pact which is expected to occur in early October between the government and each of the 15 groups the government has invited.—GNLM
The mobile libraries are meant to nurture reading habits among rural youth and increase the number of readers in rural villages.—THANT MAUNG

Mobile library visits Zabuthiri villages

NAY PYITAW — The Zabuthiri Township Information and Public Relations Department brought mobile libraries to Latpankhahla and Gomminning villages on 11 September. The visit was part of the department’s effort to bring books to people who are unable to visit libraries due to livelihood constraints.

The mobile libraries, under the supervision of the Ministry of Information, are meant to nurture reading habits among rural youth and increase the number of readers in rural villages. The mobile facilities will visit the two villages every Thursday.—THANT MAUNG

Alaebon village to get new bridge after 30 years

PALAE — A reinforced concrete bridge will be built across the Mokaung Stream in Palae Township, Sagaing Region, at the cost of 20 million kyats. The project will be funded by private donors and carried out by the township’s rural development and irrigation departments.

A villager elder said the bridge project, which will connect Alaebon and New Alaebon villages, was launched by abbots from the villages’ monasteries. He explained that the rural community, especially students, have faced major transportation challenges since the wooden bridge over the stream was swept away by the stream 30 years ago.

The village elder said the bridge will be opened for use throughout the year once it is completed. Members of the public donated 13 million kyats and 200 bags of cement to the fund for the project, and the remaining seven million kyats were contributed by local residents.

Min Khant Soe (Zeya Myay)

Four schools upgraded in Myingyan

MYINGYAN — Four post-primary schools in Myingyan, Mandalay Region, were upgraded to middle schools this morning.

The event to celebrate the upgrade was attended by the region’s Planning and Economics Minister U Aung Zan and Transport Minister U Kyaw San. Headmistress Daw Khin Hla Myint thanked the officials for the upgrade. Myingyan has 193 basic education schools with 39,993 students for the current 2015-2016 academic year.—U Zaw Min Naing

Farmers compensated for Kabo Bridge approach road

KANTBALU — A total of 32 farmers in Sagaing Region were compensated on 8 September for lands and crops they lost to make way for the construction of the Kabo Bridge over the Mu River. The forfeited lands will be used for the construction of the bridge’s approach road in Kantbalu Township.

The farmers received just over 4 million kyats for their lost crops and 12 million kyats for the 8 acres of land they lost. The compensation was presented by the District Road Department at the township’s general administration office. Local officials and village elders attended the occasion.—IPRD

Farmers receive compensation for Ngapali Beach road

THANDWAE — The Road Department of Thandwae District presented 83.38 million kyats as compensation to 32 local farmers on 10 September. The farmers gave up 7.6 acres of their land for the construction of a by-pass road from Ngapali Beach, Rakhine State.

The occasion was held at the district general administration office and was attended by Rakhine State Transport Minister U Hla Han, who gave the closing speech. One farmer who received compensation offered words of gratitude to the department.

The farmers were paid 11 million kyats per acre for their impounded plots.—IPRD

Voters urged to check voter lists on 14 September

NAY PYI TAW — Local election commission offices across the country will release the final versions of their eligible voter lists on 14 September.

Zabuthiri Township has 21,474 eligible voters, including 10,259 females and 11,215 males.

“Voters should check for their names at their respective commission offices on 14 September,” said a commission officer. He added that if a citizen’s name is not included on the list, he or she must submit Form 3 to an election commission office.

Names mistakenly included on the list can be removed using Form 4, and inaccurate personal information can be corrected using Form 4-C. Forms must be submitted no later than two weeks after the lists are released, the commission officer said.

Anyone who is eligible to vote in the election on 8 November is encouraged not to miss the opportunity, he said.—U CHIT KO KO (IPRD)

Blood donors honoured in Kyaukmae

KYAUKMAE — The Blood Donors Association of Kyaukmae, Shan State, honoured donors at its city hall on Thursday.

Blood donor Sayadaw Ashin Kaythala, the abbot of the town’s Moekaung Monastery, gave the keynote speech at the event, and District Health Officer Dr Aung Aung gave an educational talk about blood.

The donors among the members of Sangha were offered monk robes and certificates of honour, while lay donors just received certificates.

U Win, who has donated blood 54 times, spoke on behalf of the donors.

Kyaukmae’s Blood Donors Association has 741 members, who have donated 1,228 bottles of blood since 2011.

U MYINT AUNG

Myawady receives poverty elimination grant

NAY PYI TAW — The Zabuthiri Township, Kayin State, has received 111.5 million kyats to fund projects in one grant and 62.47 million kyats for another one. The township received over 277 million kyats for 39 projects in another one. The township received over 277 million kyats during the 2014-2015 fiscal year.—HEIN LINN AUNG (IPRD)

During the 2014-2015 fiscal year, the government’s Rural Development and Poverty Elimination Fund. This was Myawady’s third grant from the fund in the 2015-2016 fiscal year.

The 50 projects include six to improve local agriculture production, 35 to support rural socio-economic enterprises, five to expand electricity access and four environmental conservation initiatives.

MYAWADY—Myawady Township, Kayin State, has been awarded 111.5 million kyats to fund 50 projects by the government’s Rural Development and Poverty Elimination Fund. This was Myawady’s third grant from the fund in the 2015-2016 fiscal year.

Myawady previously received 42 million kyats for 25 projects in one grant and 62.47 million kyats for 39 projects in another one. The township received over 277 million kyats during the 2014-2015 fiscal year.—HEIN LINN AUNG (IPRD)

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The farmers were paid 11 million kyats per acre for their impounded plots.—IPRD
Union culture minister advises workshop on Bagan ancient city management

NAY PYI TAW — Union Minister for Culture U Aye Myint Kyu, attended a coordination meeting for a workshop organised by the ASEAN Committee for Culture and Information (COCI) on Saturday. The workshop, titled “Ancient Cities Network: Preservation and Conservation Management of the Bagan Ancient City”, will be held in Bagan from 21 to 24 September.

U Aye Myint Kyu also serves as the chairman of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community of Myanmar. In the meeting, the union minister told participants that the workshop must be in line with UNESCO policies, and he advised them to seek suggestions from cultural heritage management experts from other ASEAN countries. He said the workshop would be part of Myanmar’s effort to include Bagan on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The union minister also said the workshop should include a discussion on disaster management. The workshop will include several experts on the management and conservation of ancient cities from around ASEAN, one representative from the ASEAN Secretary-General’s Office, one expert from the University of Sydney who serves as UNESCO’s advisor on the inclusion of the Bagan and Pyu ancient cities in the list of World Heritage Sites.— MNA

Myanmar National Airlines spreads its wings

YANGON — Myanmar National Airlines (MNA) will introduce international routes to Hong Kong and Taiwan, according to the airline’s managing director Captain U Than Tun. “The second Boeing of MNA will arrive in November, and it will fly the Hong Kong and Taiwan routes,” said U Than Tun.

MNA will fly to Taipei three times per week and to Hong Kong four times per week.

Currently, MNA’s single 737-800 Boeing aircraft flies the Yangon-Singapore route six times per week. The route opened on 17 August.

The airline’s first Next-Generation 737-800 will be leased from US-based GE Capital Aviation Services (GECAS), the commercial aircraft leasing arm of GE.

Myanmar is home to 26 airports and 11 local airlines, three of which fly international routes. MNA is a state-owned airline and one of Myanmar’s national carriers. It is based in Yangon.— Ko Moe

First aid courses aim to empower senior citizens

Khaing Thanda Lwin

YANGON — The Myanmar Red Cross Society will provide basic first aid training to senior citizens nationwide this year, said Daw Khin Khin Shin, Director of MRCS’s First Aid and Safety Department.

“The main aims of the programme are to recognise them as an important resource for society and to encourage older people to become self-empowered,” she said at the celebration of the World First Aid Day, which falls on the second Saturday in September every year.

The effective use of experience of the senior citizens may bring many benefits to the community, she said.

She went on to say the course would help senior citizens care for themselves, their families and neighbours in case of emergency.

“We plan to conduct the course in nine locations where senior citizens can gather easily, but we have not chosen them yet,” said Daw Khin Khin Shin. She added that each course would accept up to 30 participants.

According to the 2014 census, citizens above the age of 65 account for 5.8 per cent of Myanmar’s total population.

At the celebration, MRCS President Dr Tha Hla Shwe said the population of senior citizens is projected to reach 25 per cent of the country’s total population in 2050, according to the figures presented by civic organisations working with the elderly in Myanmar.

According to an international survey taken in 2010, an estimated 524 million people, or 8 per cent of the world’s population, are over the age of 65. By 2050, this number is expected to nearly triple to about 1.5 billion people, which will amount to 16 per cent of the world’s population.— GNLM

Needy elderly together with youth volunteers at home established by Save the Aged.— Photo: STA

ELECTION COUNCILL Make your voice count. Cast your vote. 56 DAYS

Chairman U Soon Maung said his party seeks gradual constitutional amendment that would pave the way for federalism based on democratic norms and equal rights. The party urges all stakeholders to sign the nationwide ceasefire accord sooner rather than later, he said in his party’s speech. He also said his party pledged to introduce a system that would guarantee impartial land ownership rights to farmers and keep limit private land ownership.
Singapore’s ruling party PAP wins general election with a landslide victory

SINGAPORE — Singapore’s ruling People’s Action Party (PAP) won 83 of the 89 parliamentary seats in general election on Saturday with a landslide victory, while the opposition Workers’ Party (WP) retained 6 seats, according to the Elections Department (ELD).

PAP won the election with 69.86 percent of votes, the highest since 2001’s landslide victory of 75.5 percent. Singapore’s Prime Minister, also PAP’s Secretary-General Lee Hsien Loong said this is “a good result for PAP” when he addressed the reporters.

The seats the PAP won were from 15 group representation constituencies (GRCs) and 12 single member constituencies (SMCs). The PAP also retained the remaining SMCs, including the regained Punggol East SMC from the opposition Workers’ Party, and East Coast GRC in which close fight were anticipated. While WP retained Hougang SMC and Aljunied GRC by slim margin.

Singaporeans got an early indication of the final results with nearly 19 percent against the US dollar so far this year. Najib is expected to announce the new measures at around 11:30 pm (0330 GMT) after a weekly meeting of the economic council on Monday, officials at the Prime Minister’s office said on Saturday, without giving details.

Sloping demand from China and a political crisis swirling around Najib have also shaken in-confidence. Malaysia has been gripped by a political crisis to propose edge out incumbent Lee Li Lian. Charles Chong received 51.76 percent of the vote.

PAP also won a resounding victory in Tanjong Pagar GRC, the constituency of Singapore’s founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew before, with 77.7 percent of the votes.

However, the anticipated close fight in East Coast GRC, Marine Parade GRC, Holland-Bukit Timah and GRC, and Fengshan SMC did not materialize. PAP beat WP in these constituencies.

The opposition Workers’ Party defended its stronghold of Hougang SMC, with Png Eng Huat retaining his seat with 57.69 percent of the vote.

WP defended Aljunied GRC, in which votes were re-counted, with a strong team led by its Secretary-General Low Thia Khiang to Aljunied GRC, but WP only won with 51 percent of the votes.

PAP was challenged in all available 89 parliamentary seats for the first time in the island-nation’s history. The 89 seats were split into 16 group representation constituencies (GRCs), where the candidates from a contesting party is required to be fielded as a team, and 13 single member constituencies (SMCs). The ruling People’s Action Party took 81 of the 87 seats in last general election in 2011 with 60.14 percent of the popular votes, which is lower than the 66.5 percent in general election 2006.—Xinhua

Malaysia’s Prime Minister to announce economic measures on Monday

KUALA LUMPUR — Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak is expected to announce measures to strengthen the economy on Monday as falling commodity prices weigh on growth and the ringgit currency plumbs near 18-year lows.

Slowing demand from China and a political crisis swirling around Najib have also shaken investors in Southeast Asia’s third-largest economy in recent months, pushing the ringgit down nearly 19 percent against the US dollar so far this year.

Najib is expected to announce the new measures at around 11:30 pm (0330 GMT) after a weekly meeting of the economic council on Monday, officials at the Prime Minister’s office said on Saturday, without giving details.

Last month, he set up a special economic committee to propose immediate and medium-term measures to strengthen the economy and to restore investor confidence. Malaysia has been gripped by political tensions which escalated in early July after a report that investigators looking into debt-laden state investment fund 1MDB had found that close to $700 million had been deposited in an account held by Prime Minister Najib Razak. Najib, who also chairs 1MDB, has denied any wrongdoing, but the scandal has not died and has weighed on the economy.

Both Najib and Malaysia’s central bank governor have pledged not to impose capital controls. Najib has maintained that Malaysia’s current economic situation was stronger than during the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis. Massive outflows of capital during that crisis forced Malaysia to peg the ringgit at 3.8 to the dollar, which was retained that 2005.

Fitch Ratings said last week that Malaysia’s deteriorating currency position — reflected in the ringgit’s sharp depreciation, falling foreign exchange reserves and shrinking current account surplus — could force it to raise a negative outlook on the country’s credit rating. —Reuters

Over 100 still stranded in flood-hit eastern Japan city

TOKYO — Rescue operations continued Saturday for over 100 people still stranded in the eastern Japan city of Joso after devastating floods, with 15 people remaining unaccounted for.

Of the 22 people missing as of Friday, the safety of seven including two children had been confirmed by Saturday morning, police and local government officials said.

According to local authorities in Joso, Ibaraki Prefecture, over 4,500 residents were staying in shelters as of 9 am on Saturday, after unprecedented rainfall earlier in the week caused the Kinugawa River to burst its banks, causing extensive flooding of residential areas. The death toll remained at three.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe inspected flood-affected areas in Joso from a Self-Defense Forces helicopter Saturday morning. He will later visit one of the shelters before meeting with local officials in Ibaraki and neighboring Tochigi prefecture to discuss disaster restoration needs.

Abe told reporters in Joso that the government “will do all it can to swiftly resolve the broken levees and remove water as quickly as possible” from flooded areas. With experts having completed inspections of the breached river banks, repair and water drainage work has started. In the northeastern prefecture of Miyagi, also hit by severe floods, rescuers resumed searching for a man who was missing while driving his car.—Kyodo News

Strong quake shakes Tokyo, no tsunami warning issued

TOKYO — A strong earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 5.2 jolted Tokyo and surrounding areas early Saturday, but there were no fears of tsunami, the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

There have been no reports of damage or serious injury. The quake, which centered in Tokyo Bay at a depth of around 57 kilometers, occurred at 5:49 am, the agency said. The quake’s magnitude and depth were revised from the initially announced 5.3 and 70 km. It registered lower 5 over the Japanese seismic scale of 7 in Chofu in western Tokyo and 4 in central Tokyo areas including the Otemachi business district and Haneda airport. An intensity of 4 was also recorded in parts of the neighboring prefectures of Chiba, Kanagawa and Saitama, according to the agency. The quake caused minor disruption to rail services in Tokyo as subway and some other rail operators temporarily halted their operations after the quake.

The transport ministry said that there was no damage to Haneda airport facilities and flights were unaffected.—Kyodo News

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Iran to take Parchin military site samples with IAEA present

PARIS — UNITED NATIONS — United Nations inspectors will be present with Iranian technicians as they take samples from a key military site, two Western diplomats said, undercutting an objection by US Republicans to the nuclear deal between Iran and world powers.

The diplomats were familiar with details of a confidential arrangement between Iran and the UN nuclear watchdog for inspections at the Parchin site, where some countries suspect nuclear weapons-related tests may have taken place. Iran has denied that allegation, but agreed to accept comprehensive International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections of its suspect sites as part of the historic July deal in exchange for an easing of international sanctions.

An August report by the Associated Press, in its original version, said the agreement on Parchin suggested that IAEA inspectors would be barred from the site and would have to rely on information and environmental samples provided by Iranian technicians. The AP later published what it said was the text of an early draft of the agreement that remains unconfirmed.

The report was seized on by Republicans in the US Congress as proof that President Barack Obama’s administration gave in to Iran on the sensitive issue of inspections to check on Tehran’s suspected ambition to develop a nuclear weapon, after 15 years they have helped the process to get the CTBT into force and then there’s no room for developing nuclear weapons,” he added. — Reuters

Secretary General of the Commission for the Comprehensiv Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) Lassina Zerbo gestures during an interview with Reuters in Vienna May 9, 2014. — Reuters

UNited nations — The head of the body that oversees a treaty to ban nuclear testing worldwide said on Friday he hopes signatories will soon find a way to end a two-decade stalemate that has prevented the pact from entering into force.

More than 160 countries have ratified the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), but since 1996, India, Pakistan and North Korea have all conducted nuclear tests, and are among eight countries including the United States, China and Iran blocking its entry into force. Lassina Zerbo, head of the Vienna-based CTBTO Organization, said it was up to signatory states to make changes to the treaty’s rules. But he suggested that one possibility members could consider was scrapping the unusual requirement for the eight holdout countries to ratify it.

The treaty says that if after three years the treaty has not come into force, states that ratified it should meet to explore ways to accelerate its “early entry into force.”

“If we’re doing this for 19 years, and we haven’t found a way to accelerate the entry into force, we should reflect on whether (that clause) achieves its goal or not,” he told Reuters in an interview. Signatories will meet on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly on Sept. 29 to discuss this issue.

Two diplomats from signatory countries said it was possible to change the rules so the treaty could enter into force without the remaining ratifications. The United States, like Iran, has signed but not ratified the CTBT.

The administration of President Barack Obama has made clear it would like it ratified, but a number of US lawmakers, especially Republicans, oppose ratification of a pact they fear would limit US national security options.

On the question of Iran, Zerbo said Tehran could ratify the treaty to ease concerns about what it will do in 15 years, when limitations expire on its nuclear programme under a deal struck in July with major powers.

“People say that after 15 years, how can we be sure that Iran will not start,” Zerbo said. “The assurance with teeth that Iran can give is to ratify the CTBT.”

“If they ratify the CTBT, which fits with their fatwa not to develop a nuclear weapon, after 15 years they have helped the process to get the CTBT into force and then there’s no room for developing nuclear weapons,” he added. — Reuters

At least 60 killed in Indian restaurant gas explosion

NEW DELHI — At least 60 people were killed in a town in central India on Saturday when a cooking gas cylinder blew up in a restaurant and set fire to explosives stored nearby, police said.

The gas cylinder exploded as people were gathering for breakfast at the restaurant in the town of Petlawad in the state of Madhya Pradesh, about 800 km (500 miles) south of New Delhi, Inspector B.L. Gaur told Reuters.

At least 60 people were injured, Gaur added.

The death toll is expected to rise as rescue workers pull more bodies from under the rubble of the collapsed building, another police official said.

Indian TV channel NDtv said more than 80 people were feared dead, without citing sources.

Gaur said the restaurant was near an area which stored gelatine sticks used at construction sites.

“There was a second explosion, there were more casualties,” Gaur said, adding the blast was so powerful it damaged adjacent buildings and ripped out nearby windows.

Television footage showed a crowd of people standing amid the rubble of a building as excavators started clearing debris from the site. “This is a tragic incident, which has shook me. The causes of the incident will be investigated,” Madhya Pradesh’s chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan told local television channels.

Chouhan has announced compensation for the victims’ families, media reported. — Reuters
Hungary PM slams migrant ‘rebellion’, UN warns of millions more refugees

BUDAPEST / GENEVA — Hungary’s prime minister angrily accused illegal migrants on Friday of “rebeling” against the rule of law in his country as security forces across Europe struggled to control record flows of hungry, scared refugees.

The United Nations called for the swift creation of large-scale reception centres in frontline states such as Hungary and Greece, and one UN agency warned that millions more refugees could arrive in Europe if Syria’s civil war continues to rage.

Many of the tens of thousands of refugees now trekking from Greece via the Balkans and Hungary towards western Europe are fleeing the Syrian war in search of sanctuary, above all in more welcoming and generous countries such as Germany and Sweden.

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said his country, which expects to take in 800,000 asylum seekers this year alone, had finite resources and urged other European countries to do much more to share the burden.

He said Germany expected to receive another 40,000 migrants this weekend. And as politicians from the left and right accused Chancellor Angela Merkel’s government of losing control of the refugee situation, the defence ministry put 4,000 troops on standby to help with the influx.

Citing security concerns, Austria partially shut a highway linking Vienna and Hungary on Friday. Some 3,000 people had crossed the border on Thursday and a further 4,500 arrived overnight, Austrian police said. The rail link to Hungary also remains shut due to “massive overburdening” by the migrants.

Hungary is racing to construct a fence along its border with Serbia by early October to help stem the tide. It also plans to implement much tougher immigration rules from next week.

Prime Minister Viktor Orban, a fiery populist who has framed the crisis as a battle to preserve Europe’s prosperity and “Christian identity”, angrily criticised the behaviour of the mostly Muslim migrants who have been filling up central Budapest and disrupting traffic along roads running westward to Austria.

“They seized railway stations, rejected giving fingerprints, failed to cooperate and are unwilling to go to places where they would get food, water, accommodation and medical care ... They rebelled against Hungarian legal order.” — Prime Minister Viktor Orban

In Geneva, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said it was sending pre-fabricated housing units to provide shelter for 300 families in Hungary but also expressed concern over Budapest’s tough approach, including the possible deployment of troops to tackle the crisis.

“Obviously we expect authorities to respect rights of refugees whether they are the police or army,” said UNHCR spokesman William Spindler.

Syria’s four-year civil war has so far displaced almost eight million people, said Peter Salama of UNICEF, the UN children’s agency, adding: “There could be millions and millions more refugees leaving Syria and ultimately reaching the European Union and beyond.”

So far this year, a record 433,000 refugees and migrants have crossed the Mediterranean to Europe, more than double the total for all of 2014, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said on Friday.

“The European Commission, backed by Germany and France, wants EU member states to accept mandatory quotas to share out some 160,000 refugees but the plan faces stiff resistance in some capitals. On Friday the UNHCR said the number of people requiring relocation had now risen to 200,000. Speaking in Prague, Steinmeier said the EU needed a “fair mechanism of redistribution of migrants (still coming)”. “This challenge cannot be borne by one country. We have to invoke European solidarity,” he told a joint news conference with the foreign ministers of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland - countries opposed to the EU’s proposal for mandatory quotas.

Greece has come under fire from Orban and other east European leaders for opening its door to Syrian asylum seekers, saying such generosity will only encourage many more to come.—Reuters
Gulf-trained Yemen unit joins battle in central province

SANAA — A Gulf-trained unit of Yemeni forces loyal to exiled President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi has joined the battle in the central energy-producing Marib province for the first time, a senior provincial official said on Friday.

The official, who declined to be identified, said the unit had joined the front line in the al-Jafena area of Marib.

Since a Houthi missile attack killed at least 60 Gulf Arab soldiers at a camp in Marib east of Sanaa on Sept 4, the Saudi-led coalition has stepped up air strikes on the capital and increased its deployment of troops, which Yemeni officials say number a few thousand, ahead of an eventual push towards Sanaa.

On Friday, a lid was lifted off a battle fired by the Houthi militia and forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh killed 10 people and wounded 224, according to the provincial official.

Meanwhile warplanes from a Saudi-led alliance bombed Yemen’s Houthis-held capital Sanaa on Friday, extending nearly a week of relentless bombardment on the city in over five months of war.

Saudi Arabia and other Arab states intervened in Yemen’s civil war on March 26 to halt the nationwide spread of the Houthis, who captured Sanaa a year ago and forced the government into exile in Riyadh after advancing on its southern stronghold of Aden.

It was the direct involvement of UAE ground forces, alongside Yemeni troops trained in Saudi Arabia and equipped with sophisticated heavy weapons, that allowed the coalition to break months of stalemate to take Aden in July, diplomats say.

The Houthis, who hail from the Shi’ite Muslim Zaydi sect, consider their rise a revolution. But they are fiercely opposed by the Sunni Muslim Gulf Arab states which believe the group is bent on spreading Islamic influence.

More than 4.5 million people have been killed in the war.— Reuters

At least 107 killed by falling crane at Grand Mosque in Mecca

RIYADH — At least 107 people were killed when a crane toppled over at Mecca’s Grand Mosque on Friday, Saudi Arabia’s Civil Defence authority said, less than two weeks before Islam’s annual haj pilgrimage.

At least 238 people were wounded, Saudi Arabia’s Civil Defence body said.

“All those who were wound-
ed and the dead have been taken to hospital. There are no casual-
ties left at the location,” General Suleiman al-Amr, director gener-
al of the Civil Defence Authori-
ty, told al-Ikhbariya television.

Strong wind and rains had uprooted trees and rocked cranes in the area, he said.

A statement by a spokes-
man for the administration of the mosques in Mecca and Medina said the crane smashed into the part of the Grand Mosque where worshippers circle the Kaaba - the black-clad cube towards which the world’s 1.6 billion Muslims face to pray.

Pictures circulating on so-
cial media showed pilgrims in bloody robes and debris from a part of the crane that appeared to have crashed through a ceiling.

Saudi authorities go to great lengths to prepare for the millions of Muslims who converge on Mecca to perform the sacred pilgrimage. Last year, they re-
duced the numbers permitted to make the haj pilgrimage on safe-
guards because of construc-
tion work to enlarge the Grand Mosque.

The haj, one of the largest religious gatherings in the world, has been prone to disasters in the past, mainly from stampedes as pilgrims rush to complete rituals and return home. Hundreds of pilgrims died in such a crush in 2006.

Saudi authorities have since spent vast sums to expand the main haj sites and improve Meca-
ca’s transport system, in an effort to prevent more disasters.

Security services often ring Islam’s sacred city with checkpoints and other measures to prevent people arriving for the pilgrimage without authorisation.

Those procedures, aimed at reducing crowd pressure which can lead to stampedes, fires and other hazards, have been inten-
sified in recent years as security threats grow throughout the Mid-
dle East.— Reuters

UNICEF gets 10 mln USD donation for Syrian refugees in Lebanon

BEIRUT — The United States announced Friday it has donat-
ed 10 million US dollars to sup-
port the education project of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

The US Ambassador to Lebanon David Hale announced in a joint press conference with Leba-
non’s Minister of Education Elias Bou Saab that the donation aims to support the ministry’s plan in offering education for Syrian refu-
gees in Lebanon.

“The donation is a US con-
tribution to the education fund af-
iliated to UNICEF in Lebanon to register children in schools,” Hale said.

“This donation falls in the framework of UN programs to guarantee long term educational opportunities,” he said, pointing out that this project “would be executed all over the country, and secures education to children from nursery to brevet certificate.”

For his part, Bou Saab ex-
pressed thanks to the United States for this donation and their continu-
sual support, emphasizing the im-
portance “to give refugees hope in a time when the country was fac-
ing a serious crisis due to the influx of more than 1.2 million refugees, including 450,000 children."

According to the United Nations Higher Commission for Refugees, Lebanon hosts more than 1.2 million refugees who fled their home country since Syria collapsed into civil war in 2011.— Xinhua

Islamic State calls for targeting Japanese diplomatic missions

TOKYO — The Islamic State extremist group urged its follow-
ers in a recent edition of its Eng-
lish-language magazine to target three Japanese diplomatic mis-
sions, the Japanese government said Friday.

“I have instructed all Ja-
pan’s diplomatic missions, not only the three missions cited, to be on alert and boost security,” Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida told a press conference, vowing that the government will take “all possible measures to ensure security” in the target locations.

The group’s online publica-
tion “Dabiq” singled out Japan as part of a US-led “crusader co-
alition” and called on its follow-
ers unable to take part in combat in Iraq and Syria to seek other opportunities such as “targeting Japanese diplomatic missions in Bosnia, Malaysia, and Indone-
sia.”

Referring to the coalition, the magazine listed 62 countries and entities including Japan.

The group called on its fol-
lowers to target Panamanian diplomatic missions as well as Saudi diplomats.

Earlier this year, two Japa-
nese hostages were killed by Is-
lamic State militants.

In Jakarta, Indonesian For-
ing Minister Spokesman Am-
manath Nasir told a press con-
ference that he was not aware of the threats, but will take meas-
ures if and when he receives de-
tails from the Japanese mission in the capital.

“For all foreign missions in Indonesia, we impose different levels of security measures, de-
pending on the condition and the level of threat received by those missions,” Nasir said.

“Regarding the latest threats to Japanese missions in several countries, including in Indo-
esia, we will pay attention to them, but I haven’t received any details, and we are still trying to confirm these threats,” he added.

Malaysian Assistant Direc-
tor of the counter-terrorism unit in the police Special Branch Ayoob Kehar Mydin Pritchay said they are aware of IS threats as outlined in “Dabiq.”

“The Royal Malaysian Po-
lice has and will continue to take action to step up security in all the key assets in the country in-cluding foreign missions and public places,” he said in a state-
ment late Friday.— Kyodo News

Saudi Arabia receives 2.5 million Syrians amid Syrian crisis

RIYADH — Saudi Arabia announced on Friday it has received 2.5 million Syrians since the beginning of Syr-
ian crisis in 2011, Saudi Press Agency reported.

The Syrians have not been treated as refugees. They have been given the freedom to move across the country, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

The Syrians have been given residency permits, which give them the rights to receive free medical care, to join the labor market and to attend schools and universities.

And it was contained in a royal decree in 2012 that in-
structed public schools to ac-
cept Syrian students. Accord-
ing to government statistics, the public school system has accepted more than 100,000 Syrian students, the statement highlighted.

Moreover, aid provided by Saudi Arabia to Syrians in and outside Syria, totals around 700 million US dollars.

Saudi Arabia’s announce-
ment came as the migrants’ crisis in Europe deepens, and the world urges the Gulf states to do more to deal with the increasing number of Syrian refugees who are fleeing their home country.— Xinhua

Members of a Saudi emergency crew stand near damage caused by a collapsed crane at the Grand Mosque in the Muslim holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia September 11, 2015.— Reuters
Opinion 13 September 2015

Creating a more sustainable future through education

By Kyaw Thura

WHEN discussing education, the first thing that enters one’s mind is an image of children in a classroom. Most of us tend to overlook the teacher education.

It should be noted that teaching in the 21st century has become a more challenging and demanding profession than ever before. Teachers must play a greater role in inspiring the students of post-millennial generation, who are in closer contact with new technologies, than any other previous generation.

Education activists have called for governments to place greater emphasis on improving their education systems by employing competent teachers who can produce enthusiastic students. However, our education system is rife with educational malpractice associated with faulty assessment criteria. Teachers who enter the world of education with little preparation and passion are found to leave the profession quickly, but the damage they cause is not always repairable.

Nevertheless, teachers are still regarded as the greatest source of student empowerment for the simple reason that they are in a position to help learners develop critical thinking skills and widen their understanding of the world around them. Accordingly, teachers are the only people with the ability to make a big difference in how students learn.

It is therefore important for all teachers at various levels to value themselves and cherish their noble profession. Only then will they be able to create a more sustainable future through education.

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

Due to limitation of space we are only able to publish “Letter to the Editor” that do not exceed 500 words. Should you submit a text longer than 500 words please be aware that your letter will be edited.

Boondoggle, Bogus persons and Charlatans inflict on society

Tommy Pauk

It is a marvelous opportunity for man to use modern sciences, technologies, life styles, space exploration and telecommunications in the 21st century. From Stone Age to IT age, humans have striven hard for sustainable human race development. Due to man’s concerted efforts, the human life style has been improved through prehistorical age to IT age. The tremendous successes and developments that humanity are the achievement for all mankind. This shows that humans are brilliantly capable of inventing, innovating, and transforming new things and new environment for human society. The fabulously advanced electronic communications and transportsations are helping global people make their life easier, smoother and more comfortable. Human’s superiority and capacity maintain the homosapiens and other living things. The advancement of human society and significant breakthrough of space exploration are milestones of human capabilities. The human advancement has been handed down from generation to generation.

The passage from ancient civilizations to technology of modern civilization was so full of hardship or obstacles or difficulties, but humans could have overcome all that stuff victoriously. The current generation, the possession of modern technologies, must pay tribute to the relentless work of the succeeding generations. Similarly, the next generation must take the legacy of human achievement from the current generation. Thus we humans will be able to maintain the sustainable skills, advanced knowledge and humanity successfully.

In addition, we must be able to bridge the generation gap. Analyzing the trend of the development of human life style, there and even always appeared in human history e.g. the misuse of atomic energy in the WW II. (Converted into mass destructive atomic bombs which were dropped in Japan) These days, some countries misuse nuclear energy as weapons and the proliferation of nuclear weapons threaten the global peace or dominate the developing countries. The use of nuclear energy for military means is strictly prohibited by International treaty. Instead of making own effort to acquire a specific knowledge, some persons exploit a situation for easy advantage on others while they are in power. They, humans attempt to upgrade or advance our society especially for social welfare, economy, human settlement, food technology and education etc. While doing so, we might make mistake or waste the time, money and effort due to un-systematic method or wrong decision to implement some project or plan. Such situation is caused by reckless and inefficient decision makers. The worst thing is a boondoggle, a piece of work or project that is unnecessary, and that wastes time and public funds. Furthermore, a boondoggle is a wasteful or impractical project or activity often involving graft. If a particular society encounters various boondoggles, its budget will dwindle down certainly. Any type of government which carries out or handles the gigantic boondoggles must be sued or denounced for it by the majority people or public concerned in the world. That boondoggle was denounced as a scandalous waste of public money and he can blow up or destroy them by using intense explosives.

Naturally and characteristically, there are individual differences in humans. According to their good characters or bad characters in humans, their achievements may vary distinctly. Charlatans are the ones who pretend to have special knowledge or skills e.g. a person who does not know about public management or Public Administration but he has unjustly taken the position for these areas, he or she is a complete charlatan indeed. Otherwise, they have been selected by the despotic rulers to hold the key positions. Nothing beneficial is done by them for general public. This situation prevails in the society ruled by dictatorial regimes. They retain their authorities or positions or illegal assets gained through kleptocratic practice. They usually blow their own trumpet in the society concerned. In reality, they make themselves rich and powerful by stealing public funds and national resources.

Some of the unqualified and unconsidered medical practitioners, legal practitioners, car drivers and teachers can be called charlatans. Besides, the charlatans in the public service are neither well-versed nor versaatile, but they grab the higher rank positions unfairly. Actually, they are very loyal to their masters i.e. dictators, a very handful of group whereas they are not loyal to the majority of the people concerned, the original owner of the state power. Moreover, they are known as bootlickers, obsequious or servile persons. The charlatans are the henchmen of dictatorial regimes. They retain their authorities or positions or illegal assets gained through kleptocratic practice. They usually blow their own trumpet in the society concerned. In reality, they make themselves rich and powerful by stealing public funds and national resources.

Wishful thinking??? May every society be free from corrupt government, dishonest and immoral persons!!!!!

Tommy Pauk is the pseudonym of U Thein Swe, who is B.A. (English) and (Registered Law) R.I. degrees holder. He has English Teaching experience at Yangon University English Department and Workers’ college in Yangon, now is working as freelance writer and English Teacher cum Translator/Interpreter for foreign firms.
Public Participation For Democracy

Htun Tin Htun

“I understand democracy as something that gives the weak the same chance as the strong.” “To safeguard democracy the people must have a keen sense of independence, self-respect, and their one-ness.” “In true democracy every man and women is taught to think for himself or herself.”

“The spirit of democracy cannot be established in the midst of terrorism, whether governmental or popular.” (Mohandas Gandhi)

Participatory political decision making and politicians’ transparency, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness are of paramount importance. Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and its Members will this year mark International Day of Democracy on 15 September with a call for “Public Participation for Democracy”. The theme has been chosen to reflect the critical importance of public engagement in democracy to help ensure better political decision making and politicians’ accountability to the people. The focus will not only be on the rights and responsibilities of individual citizens to engage in democracy, but also why it is important for civil society to actively participate.

Understanding the values and requisites of inclusiveness, representativeness, responsive- ness and effectiveness is crucial in the development of good/green/clean governance. The theme of this year “International Day of Democracy” will emphasize both formal and informal ways to engage in democracy, such as voting and petitioning, and the dynamic use of social media for political conversations, IPU is urging parliaments to seize the opportun- ity to engage with citizens and civil society organizations/ groups to explore key ques- tions, including how to widen existing opportunities for in- teractive and how to draw in groups currently less engaged — such as women, young peo- ple and minorities.

Building capacity and ca- pabilities of the resources in the planet can make a difference, to be the world better, happier and safer. Par- liament is unique. It is made up of men and women who have been elected to represent the people. They adopt laws and hold the government to account. Parliament is therefore the cen- tral institution of democracy and constitutes an expression of the very sovereignty of each na- tion. Parliament is a political in- stitution. It is a place for political, and often confrontational, debate. But it is also a place where, at the end of the day, national policies are forged and conflicts in socie- ty are resolved through dialogue and compromise.

Lifelong learning for the de- velopment, enhancement, victo- ry, endurance, lasting, outstand- ing, perpetuation, modernism, expedience, nobility and tranquil- ity is natural gift for all citizens of our planet. Parliament is a complex institution. It functions at different levels and many ac- tors influence what it does. Mem- bers of parliament, the Speakers and leadership, political parties and groups, Secretary clerks and administration all play a part in shaping its work. No two parliaments are the same. They differ in form, role and function- ing. They differ in culture, tradi- tion and culture of each individual country. Yet they all share the same ambition: to give people a voice in the management of pub- lic affairs.

IPU was established in 1889, with its official emblem/logo with “Better parliaments, Stronger democracies.” Parliament is the business of the Inter-Parlia- mentary Union. The IPU brings together all parliaments in the world and devotes time, ener- gy and resources to study the par- liamentary institution. It develops principles and criteria for demo- cratic parliaments to help them to assess their performance. It builds capacity in parliaments and helps them to strengthen and modern- ize the institution. Parliament is a time-honoured institution. Many parliaments can trace their roots back to several centuries past. All parliaments need to keep in tune with the times. (Global Par- liamentary Report, The chang- ing nature of parliamentary rep- resentation, April 2012. Anders B. Johnson Secretary General Inter-Parliamentary Union)

Citizens must have access to information about parliament- ary proceedings, legislation, and policy, and be able to engage in continual dialogue with par- liamentarians. Parliaments are the indispensable institutions of representative democracy around the world. Whatever their country-specific rules, their role remains the same: to repre- sent the people and ensure that public policy is informed by the interests and values they represent. Effective parliaments shape policies and laws which respond to the needs of citizens, and sup- port sustainable and equitable development. For parliaments to be truly representative, elections must be free and fair.

Clearly, the political leader- ship required to fulfill this vision of a brave new world will have to be as much in the hands of the world’s parliamentary leaders as in those of heads of government. Speakers of Parliaments will de fact become the vanguard of parli- amentary action. After their quinquennal World Conference on key global issues ends in New York, their individual leadership in mobilizing parliaments will be crucial in the face of conflicting views and requires parliaments to seize the oppor- tunity of the 2015 Inter-Parliamentary Union General Assembly in Luxemburg). May the Fra- gant and Sweet Flowers and Fruits of Peace and Democrac- y be with you!!!

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Thae Su

HOW do you define the re- sponsible speech? The con- cept that this implies that anything at all can be said, because it is ‘free’, but this is incorrect. Just because it is free, it does not mean that we can say whatever we want whenever we want to. Free speech should not in- cite hatred, violate the principles of human rights or unfairly hurt some- one’s reputation. And each govern- ment around the world sets what it considers reasonable limitations on the concept of free speech.

Some people do not take the time to read what is written in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, so I will say so for you. The declaration defines freedom of speech in Article 19 as the rights to communicate one’s opinions and ideas without fear of government retaliation or censorship.

Everyone has the right to free- dom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold op- inions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media, regardless of geography.

However contrary to what many assume, freedom of speech has limits. We have the rights to express ourselves freely so long as our expressions do not abuse other people’s rights or reputations. If we do so, we may face legal action. If what our words abuse others’ rights, reputation or morals, we cannot claim to be exercising our rights to free speech. That would be like say- ing that the rights to drive a car in- cludes the rights to endanger others by speeding.

We need to think carefully about the impact our words may have on others. Since the democratic government took office in 2011, Myanmar’s media has gained new freedoms of speech. But the media must be responsible and carefully weigh up whether printing certain things will be of benefit or detriment to the public.

Freedom of speech must be exercised responsibly and respect- fully. And we need to consider both the possible consequences and our genuine motives before we speak out. Without fulfilling our responsi- bilities, the public will be denied the true value of freedom of speech. So it can be said that freedom of speech is not the opposite of responsible speech, but rather the very same thing. (The author is from the Minis- try of Foreign Affairs residing in Nay Pyi Taw.)
Trillenium takes virtual reality into online shopping

LONDON — Hrvoje Prpic is wandering through a fashion boutique trying to pick out a new accessory. Only he’s not actually there. He’s sitting in a trendy London coffee shop wearing a virtual reality headset that he believes could be the future of online shopping.

The 43-year-old is the founder of Trillenium, a start-up that creates virtual stores for brands aimed at marrying the experience of real-life shopping with the convenience of e-commerce on smartphones and computers.

“Shoppers can tour the virtual store by focusing their gaze on products, browse items from different angles and socialize with friends online, bringing to life an e-commerce industry currently dominated by search boxes and static pictures,” said Dave Evans, a retail analyst at Kantar Worldpanel.

“Currently the dot.com experience is pretty sterile. So if they can improve the experience, you might dwell a bit longer, spend a bit longer online exploring products because you can get closer to them, and buy more,” said Dave Evans, a retail analyst at Kantar Worldpanel.

“Trillenium’s technology is still in its early stages, but Prpic believes it will be taken on by other firms in the coming years,” Evans said. “We do have some clients that are interested in having Trillenium as well, but we are aiming only at the biggest for now. So there are maybe three or four names that we want to have, but not more than that,” he said.

Trillenium has raised 335,000 pounds so far from Seedrs as well as two business angel investors. The company hopes to raise an additional 1.8 million pounds in separate funds from venture capitalists.

In three years, Prpic hopes to launch a multiple platform service where clients can use his technology to build and customize their own stores from a template. “This is the end goal,” he said. —Reuters

Cash banned for foreigners’ property trade in Vietnam

H O C H I M I N H C I T Y — Foreigners buying or selling houses in Vietnam are required to carry out the transaction through banks in the country and not in cash, local newspaper Vietnam News reported Saturday.

Foreigners can get mortgages if they meet banks’ requirements, the State Bank of Vietnam, the central bank, said in a document it has issued to guide the sales of houses by foreign individuals and organizations.

The tenor of the loans cannot exceed the time they live and work in Vietnam, while for organizations and other legal entities, it will not exceed their licence period.

Amendments to the Housing Law that took effect on July 1 permit foreigners and overseas Vietnamese to buy housing if they have a visa to enter Vietnam. They can buy, lease out, gift, and inherit property.

There are a few restrictions, one of which is that combined foreign ownership should not exceed 30 percent of an apartment project. —Xinhua

Honda shifts Giorno mini motorbike production to Japan from China

KUMAMOTO, Japan — Honda Motor Co on Friday started producing Giorno scooters with 50 cc engines, so far manufactured in China, at a plant in southwestern Japan in line with its plan to shift production of "mini" motorbikes to Japan from China amid the weak yen.

The factory in Otsu, Kumamoto Prefecture, will make all of Honda’s domestically produced mini motorbikes with emissions of 50 cc or less, the company said.

“Giorno marks the first step in the return to domestic production. We would like to produce various kinds of motorbikes at the Kumamoto factory,” said Shunji Asayama, an operating officer and director of the company, in a ceremony held at the factory.

The Giorno scooters, targeted at women, will hit the market from Oct. 16. The Japanese motorcycle maker shifted manufacturing of mini motorbikes to China and Vietnam from around 2002 when the yen was appreciating, producing 90 percent of them abroad.

Honda is now aiming to produce about 80 percent of its mini motorbikes in Japan by shifting production in stages, taking into consideration transportation costs and other factors in addition to the weaker yen. Honda sells all of its mini motorcycles in Japan — Kyodo News
Pentagon official cites concern about business outlook for ULA

WASHINGTON — A senior Pentagon official on Friday expressed concerns about Aerojet Rocketdyne Holding Inc.’s reported $2 billion bid for United Launch Alliance (ULA), a 50-50 rocket launch venture of Lockheed Martin Corp and Boeing Co, and said the deal would require a careful review.

Aerojet Rocketdyne, which makes rocket engines, submitted the cash bid to buy ULA, the sole provider of launch services for U.S. military and spy satellites, in early August, sources familiar with the matter told Reuters on Tuesday.

Officials at Lockheed, Boeing, Aerojet and ULA have declined to comment on the bid, which caught many by surprise. Wall Street bankers and industry executives also question whether the reported price tag overstates the value of ULA, and may have been a tactic to open negotiations with Aerojet Rocketdyne.

The U.S. Defense Department would undertake a detailed review if the deal proceeds, looking at any financial liabilities, potential impact to the supply chain, projected research funding levels and other issues, said the official, who asked not to be named since the offer has not been publicly announced.

"The government would be very engaged in trying to understand that business case," said the official, offering the Defense Department’s first public comments on the bid. The official said the Pentagon’s view was “more negative.”

“We’re hoping that we’ve been too conservative,” the official said.

Aggressive high blood pressure treatment may save lives: US gov’t study

WASHINGTON — Lowering blood pressure below a commonly recommended target may significantly reduce the risk of heart disease and deaths, particularly for patients aged 50 years and older, US government researchers announced Friday.

The findings came in what the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) called “a landmark clinical trial,” the Systolic Blood Pressure Intervention Trial (SPRINT). The NIH said in a statement that the study, which began in the fall of 2009, was halted earlier than planned “in order to quickly disseminate the significant preliminary results.”

“This study provides potentially lifesaving information that will be useful to health care providers as they consider the best treatment options for some of their patients, particularly those above the age of 50,” said Gary Gibbons, director of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), part of the NIH and the primary sponsor of SPRINT.

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is a leading risk factor for heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, and other health problems. Currently, the well-established clinical guidelines recommended a systolic blood pressure of less than 140 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg) for healthy adults and 130 mm Hg for adults with kidney disease or diabetes.

The SPRINT study, which recruited more than 9,300 people aged 50 and older from the United States and Puerto Rico, aimed to examine how maintaining a systolic pressure of 120 mm Hg will impact cardiovascular and kidney diseases.

Between 2010 and 2013, the SPRINT investigators randomly divided the study participants into two groups. The standard group received an average of two different blood pressure medications to achieve a target of less than 140 mm Hg. The other group received an average of three medications with the goal of getting below 120 mm Hg.

The study population was diverse, but did not include patients with diabetes, prior stroke, or polycystic kidney disease, the NIH said.

It showed that the intervention for a target of 120 mm Hg reduced rates of cardiovascular events, such as heart attack and heart failure as well as stroke, by almost a third and the risk of death by almost a quarter, as compared to the target of 140 mm Hg.

“Our results provide important evidence that treating blood pressure to a lower goal in older or high-risk patients can be beneficial and yield better health results overall,” said Lawrence Fine, head of the NHLBI’s clinical applications and prevention branch. “But patients should talk to their doctor to determine whether this lower goal is best for their individual care.” —Xinhua


A congressional ban on use of Russian-built RD-180 rocket engines for military and spy satellite launches has further complicated the company’s outlook.

ULA this year announced plans to develop a new US-powered rocket that could better compete with SpaceX, but that effort will require about $1 billion in investment.

ULA hopes to use a new engine being developed by Blue Origin, which is owned by Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon.com, but is also continuing to work with Aerojet Rocketdyne, which is working on a separate engine called AR-1.

Lockheed and Boeing are funding the development effort on a quarter-by-quarter basis, reflecting their own concerns about ULA’s future business outlook and whether US lawmakers will allow ULA to use more of its existing stock of Russian engines.

ULA officials argue that it would be cheaper to integrate its new AR-1 engine into its existing Atlas rocket than to build a new rocket and engine, but space experts caution that such integration efforts can also be difficult and costly.

“This is truly rocket science,” the defense official said. —Reuters

Record-setting cosmonaut, two visiting crewmen head home from space station

CAPE CANAVERAL — A Russian Soyuz capsule carrying the world’s most experienced space flier and two rookie crewmates returned from the International Space Station on Friday, with a pinpoint parachute landing in Kazakhstan, a NASA TV broadcast showed.

The capsule departed the station at EDT/2139 and touched down at EDT/0051 southeast of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan.

Strapped inside was former station commander Gennady Padalka, 57, returning from his fifth spaceflight with a record 879 days in orbit. The previous record was set by six-time flier Sergei Krikalev, who has a career total 803 days in space.

Joining Padalka for the ride back to Earth were two rookies, Kazakhstan cosmonaut Aydyn Aimbetov and Danish astronaut Andreas Mogensen of the European Space Agency, who spent less than 10 days in orbit.

“I expected this to not be easy. A year is a long time,” Kelly said. “You have to pace yourself.”

NASA and Russia are using the year-long mission to get better insights into how microgravity affects human physical and mental health, and what countermeasures may mitigate any harmful effects.

In a decade, NASA intends to begin flying astronauts farther beyond the space station, a $100 billion research laboratory that orbits about 250 miles (400 km) above Earth. The long-term goal of the US space program is a human expedition to Mars in the 2030s. —Reuters
BARCELONA — Hundreds of thousands of people packed the streets of Barcelona on Friday to call for Catalonia to break away from Spain, two weeks before a referendum on independence scheduled to be held on Sept. 27.

Musharraf, who is living in Dubai, had been under house arrest since last year after he was convicted of treason, and was appealing the sentence in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. His lawyer, Ali Muhmmad Khan, said the sentence was set aside on appeal.

Musharraf, who was not attending the court because of illness, was sent to prison in 2005 and freed in March 2009 after a court acquitted him in a separate treason case.

Musharraf’s lawyer said he would appeal the decision in the Supreme Court.

Musharraf, who led Pakistan as army chief from 1999 to 2001 and then as president from 2001 to 2008, was arrested in March 2011. He has been under house arrest since then.

Musharraf, who was once a dominant figure in Pakistani politics, was arrested last year on charges of treason, which carry the death penalty.

Musharraf’s lawyers said the decision was politically motivated and that he would appeal it.

Musharraf, who was once a dominant figure in Pakistani politics, led a military-backed government from 1999 to 2008. He was arrested in March 2011 on charges of treason, which carry the death penalty.

Musharraf, who was once a dominant figure in Pakistani politics, led a military-backed government from 1999 to 2008. He was arrested in March 2011 on charges of treason, which carry the death penalty.
Osaka, London, 3 other cities mull hosting expo in 2025

PARIS — Osaka, London, Paris and two other cities are considering hosting the World Expo in 2025, the secretary general of the International Exhibitions Bureau indicated Friday in a meeting with Osaka Gov Ichiro Matsui. Vicente Loscertales of the bureau, known by its French acronym, the BIE, said the other cities are Rotterdam in the Netherlands and Canada’s Toronto, according to a Japanese official accompanying Matsui.

Matsui told the BIE secretary general that he would like to decide whether to bid for host status after listening to the views of various people, the Japanese official said.

Osaka was the venue of the World Expo in 1970. Matsui is expected to make a decision in fiscal 2015. The BIE is tasked with overseeing international expos including selecting the host countries of future expos.

One person shot, one more stabbed at US capital’s main railway station

WASHINGTON — One man was shot and another woman was stabbed at Washington DC’s Union Station Friday as the country was commemorating the 14th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, according to local police.

The stabbing and shooting happened early Friday afternoon and were isolated incidents, said the police source.

The woman was stabbed by the man when she was in the passageway connected to the train station. A security for the Securities and Exchange Commission, located next door to the station, then chased the perpetrator before the man turned on him with a knife.

The guard fired one shot at the man in the leg, according to the police. “We believe this is a domestic-related incident,” said Metropolitan Police Department’s Jeff Brown at a press conference. “Obviously with this being 9/11, fears were heightened.”

Security was revamped nationwide Friday as the country was commemorating the 14th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Virginia.
I was honoured to be part of ‘Bad Blood’ video: Cindy Crawford

Supermodel Cindy Crawford says she jumped at the chance of starring in pop star Taylor Swift’s much-talked about video of her song “Bad Blood.”

The 49-year-old supermodel was approached by the “1989” pop star to play the part of the Headmistress in her “Sin City” style mini-movie and Crawford said, “Sign me up” before Swift, 26, even had a chance to explain the concept to her, reported Female First.

“Taylor got in touch with me and asked me to do it. Before she even explained the idea I was like, ‘Sign me up!’ I was honoured that she asked me. I really was. I think she was honoured that I said yes.”

Despite Swift having signed up a galaxy of her star friends for “Bad Blood” — including Lena Dunham, Selena Gomez, Kendall Jenner and Cara Delevingne — she was desperate for the queen of the 90s catwalk to take part.

And Cindy loved being able to “connect” with the singer and her friends.

“I thought it was pretty cool that in some ways the young generation looks up to me. And it was a great way for me to connect to the younger generation … Taylor’s social media is huge. It was fun.”

She said she wanted to pay homage to my generation, so that was nice.”

Madonna kicks her new tour off in rebel style

LOS ANGELES — Queen of Pop Madonna has kicked off her Rebel Heart Tour in Montreal.

The 57-year-old iconic singer, who has been wowing audiences for over three decades, belted out a selection of old and new and even performed Material Girl from the first time since her Blonde Ambition Tour in the 1990s.

DJ and producer Diplo warmed the crowd up with an hour’s introduction set before the lady of the hour opened the show with a video in which she discussed topics including censorship and dictatorship.

Her entrance was as flamboyant as her fans know her persona to be and she descended on to the stage in a cage and then gave concert-goers two of the most energetic hours they may have ever seen.

Ending the show on a high note, Madonna draped a Canadian flag around her as she sang “Holiday” to a crowd who lapped it all up. Her Rebel Heart album came out in March of this year and the tour continues to March 2016 where it finishes in Australia.—PTI

A portrait of mankind, in Venice film ‘Human’

VENICE — French photographer and film director Yann Arthus-Bertrand leaves after attending “France is committed to climate. Go COP21!” event at the Elysee Palace, in Paris, France, September 10, 2015.—Reuters

French photographer and film director Yann Arthus-Bertrand leaves after attending “France is committed to climate. Go COP21!” event at the Elysee Palace, in Paris, France, September 10, 2015.—Reuters

Britney Spears extends Las Vegas show for two more years

BEIJING — American pop star Britney Spears is staying in Las Vegas for at least another two years to continue her stage shows, according to media reports on Friday.

Her a stage show “Britney: Piece of Me” — named after her 2007 hit, is very popular among audiences, but her contract will end by the end of 2015.

“I was not really sure,” Spears said, “I haven’t made up my mind. I really love doing the show.

It’s a lot, a lot of fun, but I’m kind of torn right now. I don’t really know what I want to do.”

Planet Hollywood offered the 33-year-old star a new deal in July, but Spears hadn’t made her final decision until about three weeks later. Finally, pop princess Britney Spears made it very clear that she loves her life in Las Vegas, and that was a big reason for extending her residency at Axis at Planet Hollywood through December 2017.—Xinhua

Jay-Z celebrates Beyoncé’s birthday with Italian getaway

LOS ANGELES — Star couple Beyoncé Knowles and Jay-Z left for Italy for a belated birthday celebration.

The happy couple was joined by their daughter Blue Ivy, Beyoncé’s cousin Angie Beyonce and BFF Kelly Rowland who brought along her husband Tim Witherspoon and their son Titan, reported Ace Showbiz.

The birthday girl took the group to lunch at La Conca del Sogno in Nerano. Beyonce was photographed wearing a zebra-print mini dress topped with a white coat.

Meanwhile, Jay-Z who could be seen staying by her side wore a black-and-white T-shirt. The two wore matching sunglasses during the getaway.

On her actual birthday on September 4, Beyoncé received a lot of greetings and special presents from family and fellow celebrities.

Her family created a special playlist to celebrate the singer’s 34th birthday.—PTI

Tom Cruise to star in Doug Liman’s new sci-fi movie

BEIJING — American actor Tom Cruise has joined Doug Liman to develop the director’s sci-fi movie Luna Park, according to media reports on Friday.

Doug Liman, who directed Tom Cruise in Edge of Tomorrow and the upcoming Mena, is to work with the international super star again.

The director’s long-gestating sci-fi project Luna Park Luna Park is about renegade employees who take a trip to the moon to steal an energy source.

It’s not clear when Luna Park could go before the cameras for the actor has a busy schedule at the moment. He’ll soon start shooting Jack Reacher 2, and a sixth Mission: Impossible movie is in the works.—Xinhua
Vatican opens museum at papal summer estate and rail link to Rome

CASTELGANDOLFO, (Italy) — If you’ve ever wanted to see the lavish papal summer estate south of Rome - which the frugal Pope Francis has never used into a museum and linked it to Rome via a train. Both were inaugurated on Friday and one of the main draws is a chance to stand at the window overlooking a large courtyard from where popes before Francis blessed crowds every Sunday for weeks during their summer breaks.

Seven large rooms in the now unused villa house a papal portrait gallery and pontifical artefacts, such as intricately embroidered liturgical vestments, elaborate thrones going back hundreds of years, and several pair of papal slippers, including those worn by Pope Pius V, who died in 1572.

Recalling a time when popes preferred pomp, visitors can also inspect the costume of the “mazziere”, or mace bearer, a sort of papal bouncer whose job during the Middle Ages was to elbow people to the side if they got too close as the pontiff passed.

Pope Francis, a workaholic who has also renounced the papal apartments in the Vatican in favor of a suite in a guesthouse, does not take vacations. His stunning of Castelgandolfo led to a drastic decline in tourism that hurt the local economy.

Opening the palace doors “was the pope’s initiative,” said Antonio Paolucci, head of the Vatican Museums. “Francis said ‘I won’t go to Castelgandolfo because I have too much to do at the Vatican’ and so he told me to open the palace and the grounds to the public.”

The people of Castelgandolfo were certainly disappointed that the pope decided not to spend his summers here. This is a chance to draw attention to the city again and help the economy,” Paolucci said.

A special train will run on Saturdays from the Vatican to Castelgandolfo, about 55 km (20 miles) south of Rome.

Tourists can see the Vatican Museums and gardens and then take the train to the Castelgandolfo estate and the satellite museum.

For the inaugural run on Friday, Italy’s state railways used a 100-year-old, coal-powered locomotive that belted out dark clouds of smoke as it left the Vatican pulling antique carriages, including one used by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

At 136 acres (55 hectares) the Castelgandolfo estate is about 25 percent larger than Vatican City, with woodlands and a working farm with about 100 cows producing 1,300 liters of milk a day. —Reuters

Dunhuang heritage still alive in new age

BEIJING — As a world-renowned sacred Buddhist site, there is almost too much to explore in the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, Gansu province. The exquisite sculptures and murals in its hundreds of caves make it a grand art gallery and a miracle of history.

In addition to preserving the grottoes there is still much to do such as passing down the ancient cultural heritage and keeping it alive in the modern age. Two representative inheritors have shared their efforts in carrying forward the traditions.

Du Yongwei is a local sculptor creating Dunhuang colored sculptures. He is one of a few left who still use the traditional methods inherited from ancestors.

The traditional manner means first using red willow from the Gobi desert to make a frame, filled with needlegrass and reed. This is then molded with Dengan soil. All materials are sourced locally and the sculptures produced can last for more than 1,000 years, like the sculptures in the Mogao Grottoes. The technique was listed as a provincial intangible cultural heritage of Gansu province in 2008.

Du is now considering how to use traditional techniques to create new-style sculptures which can combine the essence of the old with modern beauty. He tries using metal and soil to create sculptures such as flying Apsaras and other characters which are popular.

He is also teaching art students the traditional technique and invites them to his workshop for hands-on experience. As there are only a few artists still using the traditional technique, he is worried, saying: “I hope the traditional techniques can keep being handed down and I’m making my best efforts for that”.

Numerous painters are copying murals from the Mogao Grottoes, but Gao Shan’s paintings will definitely impress. Entering his workshop, visitors have the illusion of being in one of the Mogao caves.

He draws on paper pasted to the wall to make it feel like painting a mural, and when finished, he can easily take it down. His paintings create the texture of murals, which feel more like relics rather than new creations. At the same time he replaces missing parts of the original figures and adjusts the characters’ skin tone to make the overall painting more enjoyable to modern people’s eyes.

The adjustments are not easy and he is exploring ceaselessly. Now he has eight apprentices, and one has been learning for 12 years. He is still studying himself and new challenges keep popping up.

“There are over 300 mural caves in the Mogao Grottoes, and I have only copied murals in less than one tenth of them yet”, Gao says.—Xinhua
National women’s soccer team trains for Olympic qualifer

MANDALAY — Myanmar’s national women’s soccer team will take part in the second leg of qualifiers for the 2016 Olympics seen in training session in Mandalay.—Tin Maung

Cavani scores twice but PSG’s 100 percent record goes

PARIS — Champions Paris St Germain dropped their first Ligue 1 points of the season on Friday when, despite two goals from Edinson Cavani, they were held to a 2-2 home draw by Girondins Bordeaux.

Cavani gave the capital club the lead in the 27th minute when he sent a right-foot shot high into the net. Wahbi Khazri laid on the equaliser three minutes later as his cross was met by Henri Saivet’s head six metres out.

PSG went back in front after 54 minutes when Uruguay striker Cavani found the top corner from a free kick.

Saivet was sent off for a second bookable offence in the 77th minute but Bordeaux’s 10 men fought back to level through Khazri a minute later.

PSG are still top with 13 points from five matches while Bordeaux occupy ninth position on six points.

Stade de Reims and Stade Rennes, who are joint second on six points.

Naismith hat-trick gives Everton victory over Chelsea

LONDON — Everton sent Chelsea crashing to their third Premier League defeat of the season on Saturday, striker Steven Naismith scoring a hat-trick in a 3-1 win after coming on as a first-half substitute at Goodison Park.

The result left the champions with four points from their opening five matches after their worse start to a season since 1988. Everton moved up to third in the table before the later matches.

Naismith replaced the injured Mo Besic and headed Everton in front in the 17th minute to complete a 19-pass move that cut Chelsea to ribbons.

The Scotland forward doubled Everton’s lead five minutes later before Nemanja Matic brought Chelsea back into the game with a superb 25-metre strike.

Chelsea failed to build on that goal, however, and Naismith wrapped up the points for the home side with another well-worked goal after 83 minutes, shooting wide of keeper Asmir Begovic who was replacing the injured Thibaut Courtois.—Reuters