DEVELOP DOMESTIC PRODUCTION

Myanmar Palm oil imports reach 400,000 tonnes a year

Ye Myint

Myanmar imports around 400,000 tonnes of palm oil annually to fill the gap between national edible oil consumption and production, according to an official of the Myanmar Edible Oil Dealers Association.

Domestic production of edible oil made from peanuts is around 500,000 tonnes a year while the country’s edible oil consumption is around 900,000 tonnes, U Sann Linn, vice-chairman of the association, said yesterday.

Annual per capita edible oil consumption is estimated as about 12 kg in Myanmar, which totals around 600,000 tonnes a year for the entire population, he said, adding that about 300,000 tonnes is annually consumed by restaurants and food-processing businesses.

On peanut oil production which is insufficient to meet local demand, the vice-chairman commented that good price obtained for peanut exports is a factor that reduces domestic production.

He also pointed out huge difference in prices between peanut oil and palm oil, making peanut oil unaffordable for most households.

“Peanut oil is priced at K 7,000 or 8,000 a viss (1.6 kilograms) while palm oil can be bought at a price of around K 1,500 a viss.”

A survey conducted by the Myanmar Marketing Research and Development in Yangon, Mandalay and Mawlamyine found that peanut oil is the preferred cooking oil of housewives aged between 25 and 50, but they mostly choose to buy palm oil due to lower price.

According to the vice-chairman, although there are about 3,500 peanut oil mills nationwide, only a small number of mills are in operation. Only when there is greater cultivation of edible oil crops, availability of technology and modern farm equipment and electricity, and banking sector development for growers and millers, can domestic production develop, contributing towards higher consumption of locally produced edible oil, said U Thein Han, former chairman of the association.

The former chairman made the comment in his address at the 23rd annual meeting of the association yesterday.
Parliament Int’l Relations Committee chairman returns from Switzerland

U HLA MYINT OO, chairman of the International Relations Committee of the parliament has arrived back in Yangon after attending the 133rd meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) from 17 to 21 October in Switzerland. The chairman spoke on behalf of the speaker of the Union Parliament, delivering a speech at a meeting last Tuesday. He met with the Hon. Mr Nigel Evans, leader of UK’s delegation on 18 October and the Hon. Mr Saber Chowdhury, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union two days later. The chairman was welcomed home by the Deputy Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw (the Lower House) at the airport.—Myanmar News Agency

Moepwint provides citizenship cards in Myingyan

Under the second Moepwint Special Project, an initiative of the Immigration and National Registration Department of the Ministry of Immigration and Population, 126 citizens including 67 men and 59 women were issued national identity cards at Myingyan town in Mandalay Region on Thursday. The event was held at No 2 Basic Education High School where students and teachers were lectured on the importance of the cards which every adult Myanmar citizen must receive. Local department officials said tours have been made around the township to provide identify cards to adult citizens who do not yet possess one. The project is being conducted with the cooperation of district and township INRDs and local school teachers. —U Zaw Min Naung

Immigration and National Registration officers issue citizenship scrutiny cards to locals in Myingyan. PHOTO: U Zaw Min Naung

Shwemaunggwat Village provided with solar panels

THE Rural Development Department has provided electricity to all 65 households of the remote village of Shwemaunggwat in Tatkon Township by harnessing solar power. A village elder led a ceremony on Thursday to thank the Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development for providing solar panels at a cost of K 12.35 million.—Tin Soe Lwin IPRD

Solar panels provided by the Rural Development Department have reached Shwemaunggwat Village. PHOTO: Tin Soe Lwin IPRD

147th Street Thadingyut Lights Festival begins

AS it is currently Thadingyut (the end of the Buddhist Retreat) Myanmar Buddhists are preparing to hold the lights festival. Residents of 147th Street in Tamwe Township began the festival yesterday by consecrating the Buddha Image kept temporarily in the Street’s hall. To mark the festival the residents will offer alms to over 70 monks on Monday. There will be a period of donation from 27 to 29 October and religious verses will be cited on those days by members of the Buddhist Associations.—Ko Chit

Myanmar parliamentary delegation participates in the 133rd meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) from 17 to 21 October in Switzerland. PHOTO: MNA

NCA support rally in Kyaukme

A TOTAL of 7500 Kyaukme locals of Shan State rallied on Friday in support of the recently signed Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement between the government and eight ethnic armed groups. The NCA was signed on 15 October in Nay Pyi Taw. The rally, which drew townpeople from nine wards and 19 villages started early in the morning and traveled to pay homage to the Union flag at the township sports ground.—U Myint Aung

Locals in Kyaukme shout slogans in support of Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. PHOTO: U MYINT AUNS
Cooperation with UN lays foundation for Myanmar’s foreign policy: Dr Sai Mauk Kham

MYANMAR celebrated the 70th United Nations Day in the capital city of Nay Pyi Taw yesterday morning with Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham addressing the ceremony. Dr Sai Mauk Kham described the country’s cooperation with the UN as the foundation for its foreign policy and stressed the country’s determination to commit itself to the realisation of prosperous and sustainable development. Speaking about UN achievements in the global peace effort the vice president cited the deployment of 16 Peace Corps over four continents.

“Myanmar has opened a new chapter in the peace process by joining the UN Peace Corps in South Sudan and Liberia,” he said.

He noted that the world body is engaged in the fight against poverty, hunger and armed conflict while playing a crucial role in empowering women and other marginalised peoples and protecting the rights of millions. He recognized the UN’s leading role in providing humanitarian assistance to the country’s disaster relief measures. Myanmar encountered a tsunami in 2004, Cyclone Nargis in 2008 and widespread flooding two months ago.

The vice president lauded the UN as a trustworthy body and a welcome addition to the country before praising UN staff for their selfless and exemplary work. He expressed thanks for the UN’s continuing support of Myanmar and for the encouragement received from the international community. Regarding the recent signing of the nationwide peace agreement between the government and the eight armed ethnic groups the vice president said it was a vital step to ending internal armed conflict. Union Foreign Affairs Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin read out a message sent by President U Thein Sein and UN Resident Coordinator Ms. Renata Nicola Lok-Desailien, the message from UN Secretary General Mr Ban Ki-moon before an awards ceremony celebrated students who have won awards in the composition competition held in honour of the 70th United Nations Day.

—Myanmar News Agency

Japanese vaccine to be added to gov’t’s immunisation program

Around 200 children are hospitalised for viral encephalitis every year in Yangon

Khine Thanda Lwin

THE government has added a Japanese encephalitis vaccine to their regular immunisation program according to Dr Kyaw Linn of the Yangon Children’s Hospital.

According to hospital figures around 200 children are treated for viral encephalitis each year. These children come mostly from Yangon, Rakhine and Ayeyawady and the Kayin States. Children under 15 are the most at risk group. Young patients have little chance of a complete recovery. Many die or are left permanently disabled.

“One-third of those infected die whilst two-thirds are left disabled” said Senior Consultant Pediatrician Dr Kyaw Linn. “There is no fluctuation in the rate of outbreaks. It has remained steadily around the 200 mark. The rate would fall if children were vaccinated.”

Mosquitoes, pigs and long-necked birds are known virus carriers. There is no cure for the disease at this time but it can be successfully immunised against. Currently the government is unable to conduct an encephalitis immunisation program nationwide. The vaccine is available only in private hospitals and clinics at a price of about K30,000 (US$23) per injection. Japanese encephalitis (JE) virus is the leading cause of preventable encephalitis in Asia. To reduce the outbreak of JE a Southeast Asia Encephalitis Project will be launched in Myanmar no later than 2017 in cooperation with Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, Dr Kyaw Linn said.

Myanmar to attend 25th Asia-Pacific Regional Scout Conference

MYANMAR scouts will take part in the 25th Asia-Pacific Regional Scout Conference in South Korea which will be held from 3 to 8 November according to Dr Tin Nyo, Chairman of the Myanmar Scout Committee.

During the conference the participating nations are expected to extend an offer of membership to Myanmar into the World Scout Bureau, he said at a press conference in Yangon yesterday. —Myanmar News Agency

Physicians gather at Symposium on Viral Encephalitis in children.

Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham delivers speech at the 70th United Nations Day. Photo: MNA

ELECTION COUNTDOWN

Make your voice count. Cast your vote. 14 DAYS
A SELLER of traditional hand-made paper lanterns at Meikhtila’s Central Market says her wares have sold very well in the lead up to the Thadingyut Lights Festival which will take place in late October. Business was much better than last year, she said, adding that Myanmar lanterns sell better than Chinese made ones as they are cheaper. Traditional lanterns, priced from K250 to K700, are made in nearby Myintyan Township. The Chinese lanterns, by comparison, go for between K2500 - K8000 a piece. The Thadingyut Lights Festival is celebrated after the four month Buddhist Retreat which ends on Wednesday. Pagodas, Buddhist houses, roads and community buildings hang the colorful paper lanterns during the festival.

—Chan Tha

Natural Gas Workshop held in Nay Pyi Taw

A LIQUIFIED Natural Gas Workshop (LNG Workshop) was held in Nay Pyi Taw on Friday under the guidance of the Ministry of Energy and the World Bank Group. The workshop, held at the Theingaha Hotel, was opened by the Deputy Minister for Energy U Myint Zaw and the Group’s Practice Manager Ms Julia Fraser. The workshop was attended by deputy ministers of the Ministries of Energy and Electrical Power, the World Bank’s Senior Energy Specialist Mr. Alan Townsend, senior ministry officials and specialists, LNG economic sector development implementation committee members and representatives of foreign LNG companies. The attendees, totaling about 80, conferred for the purpose of developing the LNG market in Myanmar. Their focus was current world demand for and the supply of LNG, its production and market situation, regional differentiation of prices, future LNG production and potential distribution points, market analysis, international LNG marketing ethics, the placement and size of LNG plants and floating storage and regasification units (FSRUs) which are needed to process LNG.

—Ministry of Energy

Successful plantation of navia grass in Meikhtila

THE 20 acre navia grass plantation in Nyuangpinthaya Village of Meikhtila Township is so successful that the plantation is currently distributing grass free of charge to farmers who register an interest in growing according to plantation owner U Khin Maung Win. Grazing cattle on grass is more economical than buying maize to feed them, he said. The grass only needs replacing every five to six years according to U Khin Maung who is in the cattle breeding business. U Khin Maung suggested that the arid Meikhtila Township of Mandalay Region would benefit hugely from growing navia grass in addition to the local breeders and growers.

—Chan Tha

Grazing cattle on grass is more economical than buying maize to feed them. PHOTO: CHAN THA
Football fan Xi calls for more sports cooperation between China, Britain

Chinese President Xi Jinping, accompanied by British Prime Minister David Cameron, visits the City Football Academy in Manchester, Britain on 23 October 2015. PHOTO: Xinhua

Xi visited the Manchester City Football Academy, which is sponsored by the Manchester City Football Club, champion of the Barclay Premier League in 2013-2014 season.

Xi and Cameron enjoyed an exhibition from the Manchester-based National Football Museum in which major historical artifacts, including the first World Cup ball, were on display, according to the official website of the club.

Compared with other sports activities, football spreads in a wider range. Garnering the largest fan number, football has broad influence and is deeply loved by people all over the world, said Xi.

A highlight of the visit was the inclusion into the National Football Museum’s Hall of Fame of former Manchester City player Sun Jihai, a Chinese player who played 13 times for Manchester City between 2002-2008, said the website.

Sun was the first Chinese player to score in the Premier League and was last month named as the club’s ambassador to China.

In 2011, Xi outlined his three wishes to China’s football — to qualify for another World Cup, to host a World Cup and to win a World Cup championship.

While China has yet to achieve those goals, a profound reform in this field has been carried out in the country.

Hailing Britain as a football power and the headstream of modern football, Xi said China should learn from Britain in many aspects.

“Sports exchange is an important part of people-to-people exchanges. I hope the two sides could strengthen their cooperation in sports, including football, to improve people’s health and China-Britain friendship,” said the president. Xi is wrapping up his “super” state visit to Britain, the first one for a Chinese top leader in a decade.—Xinhua

Blasts in Bangladesh target Shias, kill at least one, wound dozens

DHAKA — A series of blasts targeting Shia Muslims in Dhaka killed at least one person and wounded dozens more early on Saturday as they gathered for the holy day of Ashura, police said.

Witnesses said that people ran frantically after blasts, losing their flip-flops and sandals as they scattered. “It is our apprehension that some targeted groups have become more lethal in their activities across South Korea’s northeastern coast where the participants in the reunion event spent last night for preparations.

A convoy of buses carrying the participants, mostly in their 80s and 90s, crossed the demilitarized zone dividing the two Koreas into the North, scheduled to have the first face-to-face at about 3:30 pm in the mountain resort after more than six decades of separation.

Coming from the DPRK to take part in the highly charged event, which was agreed in late August after high-level military talks to defuse tensions that had pushed the Korean peninsula to the brink of armed conflict, will be 188 people.

Only 12 hours of face time will be given to the separated families through six two-hour sessions, including lunch and dinner gatherings in public and communal meetings. Only one private face-to-face will be allowed during the three-day event.

The face time is extremely short for the divided families to overcome the aged and frailty. With some 65,000 South Koreans being on the waiting list for the family reunion, the vast majority of them are highly likely to have no chance to meet their relatives in the North or even know whether they are still alive.

Scores of South Korean participants were on wheelchairs due to their poor health, and some rode ambulances to the North as they have difficulties making the journey by bus.—Xinhua

Japanese arrested for drug, gun possession in Thailand

BANGKOK — A Japanese man has been arrested in Thailand for possessing more than 2 kilograms of an illegal stimulant drug and an unauthorized automatic gun, while three others were apprehended for trying to bribe the police into releasing him, Thai police said Saturday.

Yutaka Itakura, 34, was arrested in Bangkok on Friday with around 2.3 kg of methamphetamine that he was selling to a police spy. Police also found money worth more than $30,000 in his room. He tried in vain to bribe the police into releasing him. Police also arrested three other Japanese men after they came to offer a bribe in exchange for Itakura’s release.

Itakura has been charged with possessing illicit drugs with intent to sell them, selling illegal drugs, possessing an unregistered gun and offering a bribe to police. He could face the death penalty found guilty of the drug-related charges. He is believed to have links with a Japanese gang that runs a drug business in Thailand and is also suspected of using Thai women to transport drugs abroad.

Thai police are coordinating with the Japanese police to investigate how Itakura came to possess the drugs.—Kyodo News
Clinton wins major union endorsement in US presidential race

NEW YORK — US presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton on Friday won a major union endorsement after a momentum-gaining week in her bid to win the Democratic nomination in the November 2016 election.

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees said in a statement it had gathered feedback from members over six months. Polling data showed a majority of members would support Clinton in the Democratic primary.

“What we also heard was AFSCME members want the candidate who will be the most effective champion for working families, and who will be able to deliver a victory in this critically important election,” union president Lee Saunders said in the statement. “AFSCME members believe that candidate is Hillary Clinton.”

Clinton’s poll numbers slid ahead of the first Democratic debate on 13 October, but a solid performance there gave her a swift boost among her party’s voters.

Just over a week later, an emotional Vice President Joe Biden, standing in the Rose Garden of the White House with President Barack Obama by his side, said he would not enter the race for the 2016 election, despite months of deliberation.

His decision removed a major potential obstacle to Clinton’s hopes to avoid a protracted, damaging primary fight.

And on Thursday, Clinton’s cool-headed testimony before a sometimes testy, 11-hour Congressional hearing on Benghazi earned her not just compliments but cash: The hour after the hearing ended was the best fundraising hour of the campaign, even without a specific appeal to donors, according to a Clinton aide.

Nevertheless, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, who is pressing Clinton on her left, also gained support after Biden’s announcement.

Sanders has collected union endorsements of his own, including National Nurses United and a number of local unions throughout the country.

Forty-seven percent of Democrats favour Clinton as a nominee, versus 31 percent for Sanders, according to a five-day rolling poll by Reuters/Ipsos through 23 October.—Reuters

Witness in US terror trial of London cleric spared prison

NEW YORK — A former follower of radical London imam Abu Hamza al-Masri avoided prison on Friday after providing what a US prosecutor said was over a decade of “unprecedented” cooperation in terrorism investigations that led to the conviction of his onetime mentor.

James Ujaama, 49, was sentenced to time served by US District Judge Katherine Forrest in Manhattan after testifying last year at Abu Hamza’s trial about his role trying to establish a training camp that prosecutors said was aimed at supporting al Qaeda.

“Aftek you leave this courtroom today, you will leave this matter behind you,” Forrest said.

Ujaama, who already spent six years in prison, initially pleaded guilty in 2003 in federal court in Seattle, where he lived, to conspiring to provide goods and services to the Taliban and agreed to cooperate.

Out of prison, he fled to Belize in 2006 in violation of the plea deal, an act Forrest attributed to his fear of testifying. Following his arrest, Ujaama pleaded guilty in 2007 to more serious terrorism-related charges but continued cooperating.

He testified in 2014 against Abu Hamza, who was convicted on terrorism-related charges and sentenced in January to life in prison.

Ujaama also cooperated against two of Abu Hamza’s followers, Oussama Abdullah Kassir, who following a trial was sentenced in 2009 to life in prison, and Haroon Aswat, who pleaded guilty and was sentenced last week to 20 years in prison.

Prosecutor John Cronan said that testimony was only a fraction of Ujaama’s overall cooperation, which largely remains confidential.

“The cooperation here was extraordinary, largely unprecedented, and the court should sentence him accordingly,” Cronan said. At Abu Hamza’s trial, Ujaama testified that he discussed with Abu Hamza in 1999 creating a training camp in Bly, Oregon, which prosecutors said was intended to support al Qaeda.

In a fax to Abu Hamza, Ujaama said the land “looks just like Afghanistan,” and that Oregon was a “pro-militia and fire-arms state” where stockpiling weapons for training would be easy.

Following that fax, Abu Hamza directed Aswat and Kassir, both of whom lived in London, to travel to Oregon to assist establishing the camp, prosecutors said. Peter Offenberg, Ujaama’s lawyer, said his client intended to assist the Taliban, not al Qaeda.

Ujaama is studying for a doctorate and in court said he wanted “to move on with my life.”

“I wish I had never gotten involved with Abu Hamza, and I think he’s a bad man,” he said.—Reuters

EU’s Juncker wants decisions on Balkan refugee crisis on Sunday

BERLIN — European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said he wanted to get a group of EU leaders to agree on short-term measures to tackle the migrant crisis in the western Balkans at a summit on Sunday.

Concern is growing about hundreds of thousands of migrants arriving in Europe, many from war zones in the Middle East, and camping in western Balkan countries in ever colder conditions as winter approaches.

Juncker has summoned EU leaders from the region and Chancellor Angela Merkel from Germany, which is taking in more refugees than any other EU state, for talks on Sunday.

“They will discuss urgently needed, common operative answers to the current humanitarian demands and decide on short-term measures,” Juncker told German newspaper group Funke, which includes the Hamburger Abendblatt.

“We need more cooperation and a closer agreement between the countries in the region to master the situation,” he said.

The situation for migrants deteriorated after Hungary sealed its borders with Serbia and Croatia, leaving many stranded in other overwhelmed states.

Merkel, a driving force behind the Sunday meeting, will argue for distributing migrants within the EU directly from initial registration centres, according to Der Spiegel weekly.

German media have also reported that Juncker will present a 16-point plan at the talks, including an undertaking not to send migrants from one country to another without prior agreement, according to the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.

In the interview, Juncker also praised Merkel for focusing on the refugee crisis, which he has described as a bigger challenge for Europe than the Greek debt debacle.

“I very much value the fact that the chancellor has not been driven off her course by opinion polls. Because this is not about short-term popularity but about substance,” he said.—Reuters
Kerry sees new Syria talks next week, does not rule out Iran role

VIENNA — US Secretary of State John Kerry said on Friday he expects new talks on Syria to begin as soon as next week, and did not rule out participation by Iran, President Bashar al-Assad’s closest ally, which has been kept away from past peace conferences.

Along with counterparts from allies Saudi Arabia and Turkey, key, Kerry met for two hours on Friday in Vienna with Sergey Lavrov, foreign minister of Russia, which has transformed momentum in the 4-year-old Syrian civil war by bombing Assad’s enemies.

So far all diplomatic efforts to end the conflict have founded over the demand by the United States, European countries, Arab states and Turkey that Assad leave power as a pre-condition for peace, which he refuses to consider.

“What we agreed to do today is to consult with all parties and aim to reconvene, hopefully as early as next Friday, with a broader meeting in order to explore whether there is sufficient common ground to advance a meaningful political process,” Kerry told reporters.

“I am convinced ... that today’s meeting was constructive and productive and succeeded in surfacing some ideas, which I am not going to share today, but which I hope have a possibility of ultimately changing the dynamic.”

Asked if a meeting next week could include Iran, Kerry said he would not speculate on who might attend. But he added: “We want to be inclusive and err on the side of inclusivity rather than exclusivity.”

Iran has not been invited to previous international peace conferences on Syria, all of which ended in failure, while the war, which has so far killed more than 250,000 people and driven millions from their homes, has raged on.

Russia has long maintained that Iran should be included in Syrian peacemaking. Lavrov said he hoped Iran, as well as Egypt, would be invited to the next round of talks.

“We requested that future contacts take place in a more representative format,” he said in comments broadcast on Russian television.

South Africa’s Zuma caves in on fees amid violent student protests

PRETORIA — South Africa’s President Jacob Zuma on Friday ruled out university fee increases next year after a week of angry protests by students across the country in the first signs of the post-apartheid ‘Born Free’ generation flexing its muscle.

Police fired rubber bullets, tear gas and stun grenades at students who hurled rocks and lit fires on the grounds of Union Buildings, where the government has its offices in Pretoria, demanding Zuma come outside and address them.

But security officials feared for his safety, and Zuma remained inside, making the fee freeze announcement to the media instead.

“We decided against it because it was not safe,” a state security official told Reuters. “There were students there with stones.” A second source confirmed the change of plan.

The protest caps a week of angry demonstrations over the cost of university education — prohibitive for many blacks — amid frustration at the inequalities that persist two decades after the end of white-minority rule.

“The matter at hand was agreed that there will be a zero increase of university fees in 2016,” Zuma said after meeting in private with student leaders and university management.

Some of the more than 12,000 students who gathered at Union Buildings in Pretoria welcomed Zuma’s announcement, but others said the measure fell short of their demand for free education.

“It’s a partial victory. It’s not a victory worthy of celebration. It just means that we are safe for this year,” Busiswe Mashaqa, 29, a student at Fort Hare University said.

“There are many issues that need to be addressed and affordability is the main issue.”

Kenneth Matshili, 21, a student in Pretoria, said: “It’s better that we resolve the issues once for all. I am saying I want free education for all in our lifetime.”

Tuition fees vary across universities, but can run as high as 60,000 rand ($4,500) per year for medical students in a country where white households still earn six times more than black households, according to official figures.

But low growth since a 2009 recession has forced the government to keep a lid on spending, meaning that it has little spare cash to offer students in the form of enhanced subsidies. The government, which subsidises universities, has said it cannot afford the free education that students are demanding.

South Africa’s Zuma caves in on fees amid violent student protests

Kosovo lawmakers flee tear gas as opposition protests EU-brokered accord

PRISTINA — Opposition politicians in Kosovo released tear gas in parliament for the second time in a day at midnight on Friday to obstruct a scheduled session as police clashed with hundreds of protesters in Pristina streets demanding cancellation of an EU-brokered agreement with Serbia.

The parliament session scheduled for 4 pm (1400 GMT) had been postponed for later in the evening after opposition politicians released tear gas in parliament, sending lawmakers rushing from the debating chamber in the third such incident in two weeks.

The session was due to be held at midnight but was cancelled after opposition MPs opened two canisters, releasing tear gas.

At about the same time, the police fired tear gas at hundreds of protesters who gathered in front of the parliament building throwing petrol bombs.

The opposition is protesting against a European Union-brokered agreement with Serbia, from which Kosovo declared independence in 2008, and a separate accord demarcating Kosovo’s border with Montenegro.

“We will continue to resist until these two agreements are cancelled,” Donika Kada Bujiu of the opposition Alliance for Integration said.

The agreement with Serbia, which grants ethnic Serbs in Kosovo greater local powers and the possibility of funding from Belgrade, represents a threat to the small country’s independence.

The head of a visiting mission from the International Monetary Fund, Jacques Minane, said the IMF was concerned at the developments in parliament and that they would damage investors’ confidence.

“This is delaying the approval of important legislation, some of which is critical to the government’s economic reform agenda and to the viability of Kosovo’s Fund-supported program,” Minane said.

In June Kosovo reached a deal with the IMF for a 185 million euro ($204 million) stand-by deal.

The United States, the biggest supporter of the young state, has said recent developments will hurt Kosovo’s ambition to join the European Union.
PEOPLE tend to judge one another by appearances rather than behaviour. More often than not judging by appearance is entirely misleading. It is in fact behavioural change that can help us tackle major social and political obstacles through the pollination of ideas and the development of a common understanding.

The upcoming election on 8 November is heralded as being the bellwether for sweeping democratic reform. There has, however, been widespread speculation concerning the impact the election will have on the country’s future. At a time when stark ideological differences between political figures and groups in Myanmar act as potential triggers for instability and conflict it is the responsibility of all voters to be informed and to be aware that there exist unscrupulous and dubious political factions.

If change is the name of the game in politics today we must be always aware of the fact that we have real options and a real chance for change if the people can work together. The government, the parliament, the political parties, the civil society and the common people are all responsible for positive behavioural change and for positive national development. The need to make the change happen plays a critical role in deciding the path our country will take over the next five years. It is therefore necessary for all of us to collectively and individually reshape our behaviour in a positive way. We cannot have a responsible government and a civil society unless we accept positive behavioural change as an integral part of the journey to peace, prosperity and stability.

Write for us
We appreciate your feedback and contributions. If you have any comments or would like to submit commentaries, analyses or reports please email wallace.tin@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.

Giving more attention to research at universities

Myo Myint

In this Age of Globalization, universities all over the world are playing many critical many functions. Geoffrey Boulton and Colin Lucas (2008) in their paper “What are universities for?” published in LERU, point out that as crucial national assets, governments all over the world consider universities as “vital sources of new knowledge and innovative thinking, as providers of skilled personnel and credible credentials, as contributors to innovation, as attractors of international talents and business investment into region, as agents of social justice and mobility, and as contributors to social and cultural vitality.” Among the many functions enumerated above, two functions, teaching and research are still considered as the core functions of universities. As Boulton and Lucas note, research and teaching “interact powerfully to generate emergent capacities that are adapted to the needs of the times, embodying and creating the potential for progress through the ideas and the people that will both respond to and shape an as yet unknown future.” In Myanmar, the majority of higher education institutions are universities and all of them offer both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, while the more prestigious ones like Yangon University and Mandalay University also offer doctoral programmes. Research is given its due place in all the universities. It is compulsory for all post grad students at Myanmar institutions to conduct small scale research as part of their studies. Similarly, faculty members are encouraged to do individual and collaborative research by offering research grants, holding annual research conferences at universities, selecting best research papers, publishing annual university research journals and holding research competitions at university. Lower Myanmar, Upper Myanmar and national levels. However, despite the support and drive to do research, many faculty members who have submitted research proposals fail to keep to the deadline for their researches, and many are unable to complete their researches before their transfer to other institutions. This may be due to the fact that even there is a follow-up system in place at universities regarding the completion of researches, there is no penalty system and there is lack of understanding by faculty of the importance of research to them or to the country. At one time, as incentive, research was one of factors considered in giving promotion and so faculty members were more enthusiastic about doing research which has waned since it no longer plays a role in promotion. In addition, research methodolo...
Authorities send mixed messages about Yangon curfew

Jacob Goldberg

If you ask Yangon residents why the city’s bars and restaurants close close at 11pm, they will likely cite at least one of several theories, some of which have alternatively been dismissed and corroborated by different local authorities.

The first theory that municipal authorities imposed the curfew following an incident in May in which an American citizen was sexually assaulted by a taxi driver after exiting a bar frequented by foreigners. On May 21, the American embassy released a security notice to US citizens in Yangon, offering them a series of tips for avoiding unwanted encounters with taxi drivers.

Following the list of tips, however, the notice says: “Burma continues to be a safe country to visit. The recent incidents are not typical.” So is the crackdown on Yangon’s nightlife, which some bar owners say has brought about a 40 percent slump in their profits, a safety measure against something that rarely happens?

This question, and the observation that beer stations, KTV joints and nightclubs continued to stay open in the months following the imposition of the curfew, on expat haunt, has led some to believe that the curfew is a buffer against instability in the run-up to Myanmar’s national election. Perhaps, the sceptics say, the assault incident was a pretext for imposing tighter social control on the people of Myanmar’s largest city.

Such scepticism is warranted. Back in July, The Myanmar Times quoted Yangon Region government advisor U Aung Kyaw Soe as saying neither explanation for the curfew was valid and that the recent enforcement of the closing time is not the result of any new laws.

“Clubs and bars are allowed to open until 11pm and no later. This hasn’t changed – clubs and bars have not been ordered to close early because the election is drawing near, or because of an incident,” the advisor told The Myanmar Times.

However, U Maung Naing, the head of the Mayangon Township Administration Office, who is responsible for the enforcement of the curfew in his township, suggested the opposite.

“The authorities have enforced the law starting in September in an attempt to tighten security in the region as the election draws near,” he told The Global New Light of Myanmar.

But wait. What happened in September? Haven’t bars had to close at 11pm since May?

One owner of a Yangon bar that is popular among expats offered an explanation. (He declined to be identified in this article.)

“Expat bars were targeted after the sexual assault incident in May. Nightclubs and other locally oriented bars have only been subject to the curfew over the last couple months,” he said.

The bar owner also mentioned that locally owned bars and nightclubs were subject to the curfew only after a violent incident that took place at DJ Bar, a popular nightclub, and after recent spikes in the city’s methamphetamine trade.

U Maung Naing, however, denied that the curfew was related to any specific crimes in Yangon. Also puzzling is that fact that while beer stations around the city have begun closing, or at least turning off their lights, at 11pm, big clubs like DJ Bar remain open hours past that.

U Maung Naing shed some light on this discrepancy.

“The curfew affects all licenced bars, including foreigner bars and restaurants, because they are legal. For example, KTV establishments must follow the curfew order because they have been granted licences by the authorities to operate their businesses. But, for massage businesses and nightclubs, they have no licences and are [technically] illegal,” the Mayangon Township official said, subtly referencing the well-known fact that Yangon’s most prominent businesspeople, those with the deepest connections to the government, frequent and own some of these establishments.

So if expat bars came under the curfew immediately following a sexual assault incident that elicited a statement from the US embassy, and if locally owned bars were included following violent and drug-related crimes, yet the authorities deny that these incidents are related to the enforcement of the curfew, what are we left with?

The only theory with any official support is that the curfew is related to the upcoming election. Why, then, would some authorities deny this?

Perhaps the case of Yangon’s 11pm curfew offers some insight into how the Myanmar government prefers to impose social control. Reasons for the curfew were not given when expat bars were first subjected to it. The community was forced to rely on the sexual assault incident as a justification, even if many still have doubts about it.

The next stage was the imposition of the curfew on locally owned establishments in September, which was hardly recognised as a separate event. The small expat community had been given four months to become accustomed to the curfew before it was quietly imposed upon millions of local residents.

The curfew is not a real curfew – people do not need to be in their homes when the clock strikes 11. It is unclear what Nay Pyi Taw might be seeking to achieve by removing Yangonites from venues for social engagement at 11pm, even during election season. Whatever the answer is, the people on top are certainly doing a good job of maintaining the curfew’s air of mystery.
Suicide bomber kills 16 at procession for Shi’ite holiday in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD — A suicide bomber killed 16 people in Pakistan on Friday at a procession in Sindh Province for the Shi’ite Muslim holiday of Ashura, police said.

The blast, which also wounded dozens, was the second in two days to hit the festivities surrounding Ashura.

No one immediately took responsibility for Friday’s bombing, but a Sunni Muslim militant group, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, had claimed responsibility for Thursday’s attack and threatened more violence against Shi’ites.

Fears of sectarian violence have been heightened this year since Taliban splinter groups pledged allegiance to Islamic State, a Sunni Muslim militant group based in Syria and Iraq that has repeatedly attacked Shi’ites.

Analysts say Pakistani groups hoping for patronage want to impress Islamic State.

Local police official Muhammad Saeed said that 16 people including two children had been killed in the early evening blast in Jacobabad district, about 450 km (280 miles) north of the city of Karachi.

“Yes, it was a suicide attack on the procession,” Saeed told Reuters by telephone.

Another police officer, Niaz Ali, said at least 20 people participating in the procession were wounded.

A suicide bombing at a Shi’ite mosque in the southwestern province of Baluchistan on Thursday killed at least 10 people.

Security has been beefed up across Pakistan for the two days of Ashura. Shi’ites were holding public gatherings and marches in most major cities on Friday and Saturday to commemorate the death of Hussain, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad.

Mobile phone services were being suspended in major cities on both days in a bid to foil remote-controlled bombings. Police also set up extra checkpoints and restricted movement in some areas.

Shi’ite Muslims make up about 20 percent of Pakistan’s population. The rest are mostly Sunni Muslims.

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which once enjoyed the support of Pakistan’s military, has been killed in Syria, including an IRGC commander, was killed on Thursday, the hospital sources said.

An IRGC commander, Usman Saifullah Kurd, told local newspapers on Friday that the group would “carry out suicide and other attacks, even on Ashura day.”—Reuters

Russia wants Syrian elections, prepared to help Free Syrian Army

MOSCOW — Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Saturday the Kremlin wanted Syria to prepare for parliamentary and presidential elections and that Moscow was ready to provide air support to the Free Syrian Army.

Lavrov’s comments represented a dramatic shift in Russia’s position and followed a meeting in Vienna on Friday with the United States and other countries to discuss a political solution to the Syria crisis.

“External players can not decide anything for the Syrians. We must force them to come up with a plan for their country where the interests of every religious, ethnic and political group will be well protected,” Lavrov told Russian state TV.

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Two Iranian fighters killed in Syria

ANKARA — Two members of a unit of Iran’s elite Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) have been killed in Syria, including an ex-bodyguard for Iran’s former president, Iranian media reported on Friday.

“Today, two of IRGC’s Ansar forces were martyred in Syria. Reports of the martyrdom of 15 people are wrong,” Iran’s Tasnim news agency quoted Ramezan Sharif, a spokesman for the IRGC, as saying.

“Abdollah Bagheri Niaraki and Karimi were martyred in Syria while protecting a religious site near Aleppo.”

The spokesman gave no first name for Karimi.

Niaraki, who for a while was the bodyguard of former hardline president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was killed on Thursday, the semi-official Fars news agency reported. Iran is the main regional ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and has provided military and economic support during Syria’s four-year-old civil war.

“From now on, we will refer to military advice” to the Syrian army in its fight against Islamist State militants and other rebel groups, and that it has sent fighters only to defend Shi’ite shrines.

Sources told Reuters this month that hundreds of troops had arrived since late September to take part in a major ground offensive planned in west and northwest Syria, in the biggest deployment of Iranian forces yet.

Sharif said the presence of the IRGC “has increased since the recent field developments in Syria”, but gave no further details.

Four Iranian commanders were killed this month fighting in Syria, and an IRGC commander was killed in June.—Reuters

Nine killed after mortars hit protesters in Benghazi

BENGHAZI — At least nine people were killed and dozens more injured in Libya’s second city Benghazi on Friday when mortar shells hit a protest against a United Nations proposal for a unity government to end a political crisis, medical sources said.

Four years after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi, Libya is caught in a conflict that pits the internationally recognised government and its armed backers against a rival government set up by an armed alliance that took over the capital last year. Waving banners and placards, more than 2,000 people had taken to Benghazi’s al-Keesh square to demonstrate against the UN proposal when at least seven mortar shells hit the crowd, the hospital sources said.

More than 20 were wounded.

Benghazi has become one front in Libya’s multi-sided war, with General Khalifa Haftar’s Libyan National Army forces fighting an alliance of Islamist fighters and former anti-Gaddafi rebels. Indiscriminate shelling and rocket attacks sometimes hit civilian areas in the city, which is split into areas controlled by the rival armed factions. In some neighbourhoods, life continues as usual, with banks and restaurants open, while fighting has reduced other areas to rubble. The United Nations has proposed a proposal for a national unity government, but the rival political factions have thus far refused to accept the plan, which attempts to reach a deal have stalled as both sides face resistance from within their ranks.—Reuters
Answering the call of love: Low tones go a long way

WASHINGTON — The howler monkeys whose guttural calls re-verbaterate through Central and South American rainforests possess a secret that the males of the species may prefer to be left unrevealed.

Howler monkeys make among the loudest, deepest sounds of any land animal, and males use their roars to attract the ladies for mating and intimidate other males.

But scientists on Thursday said they have discovered a curious paradox: males that make the lowest-frequency calls are considered the most alluring to potential mates but are endowed with the lowest reproductive potential. The research focused on a cup-shaped bone, the hyoid, located above the larynx that creates a resonating chamber to amplify vocalizations.

Among nine howler monkey species studied, those with the biggest hyoid produced the deepest and lowest-frequency calls, but also had the littlest testes for sperm production.

“We discovered that the largest hyoid bones were found in howler monkey species with the smallest testes volume, and vice versa,” University of Utah anthropologist Leslie Knapp said.

University of Cambridge biological anthropologist Jacob Dunn called it an “evolutionary trade-off” for male howler monkeys between vocal tract and testes size.

“This means that different species of howler monkeys either invest in one of these traits or the other, but not both,” Dunn said.

“I think it makes sense that when it comes to reproduction, you can’t have everything.”

Howler monkeys, found from southern Mexico to Argentina, spend most of their time in tall trees with the help of their gripping, prehensile tails, munching leaves, fruits and flowers. Their howls can be heard 3 miles (5 km) away.

“Howls sound a bit like the roar of a lion, but many howlers produce even deeper and more complex sound,” Knapp said.

“Deeper howls suggest large body size, so howlers with deep howls give the impression that they are bigger than they really are. This is an advantage for males that are competing to mate with females.”

Males in species that live in “harem” groups of one male and multiple females have a very large vocal tract but small testes. Males in species with multiple males and females per group have smaller vocal tracts but larger testes.

“This is probably because the females in these species will mate with several males, and so the males have evolved to produce more sperm to increase their chances of fertilizing an egg,” Dunn said. The research appears in the journal Current Biology.

WHO experts signal victory over one of three polio strains

GENEVA — The world should stop vaccinating children against one of the three strains of the crippling polio virus as part of a drive to eradicate the disease once and for all, a group of health experts has advised the World Health Organisation.

The group is now recommending switching to a vaccine that only protects types 1 and 2, between 17 April and 1 May 2016, as type 3 has not been detected since 1999 and the use of vaccine can occasionally, inadvertently, aid the spread of the disease in countries with poor vaccine coverage.

“This week a momentous decision was made. And the decision was to go ahead and make the switch because we think we can eradicate polio. This is a huge step towards that,” the chairman of the group, Jon Abramson, said on Friday.

The world has only once managed to eliminate a disease, which was smallpox, but now was the time “to pull the trigger and go for polio eradication”, Abramson said.

A global vaccination campaign has all but beaten all three types of the wild polio virus, with only Pakistan and Afghanistan reporting cases this year.—Reuters

World’s first malaria vaccine delayed as WHO experts urge caution

GENEVA — The world’s first malaria vaccine is promising but should be used on a pilot basis before any wide-scale use, given its limited efficacy, World Health Organisation (WHO) experts said on Friday.

The decision is likely to delay a possible broad roll-out of the shot for between three and five years.

GlaxoSmithKline’s Mosquirix could, in theory, help stop millions of cases of malaria in young children in Africa at risk of the deadly mosquito-borne disease.

However, it is less effective than vaccines against many other diseases and there is uncertainty as to whether countries can effectively administer the four doses needed.

Jon Abramson, chairman of the WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts, or SAGE, said experts recommended there should be three to five demonstration projects in children aged five to 17 months before considering wider use.

These projects could involve up to 1 million children and would likely take three to five years to run, he added. SAGE did not recommend the use of Mosquirix, also known as RTS,S, in young babies.

Committee experts said it was vital to give all four doses of the vaccine to ensure optimal efficacy, even though getting children back for multiple repeat shots could be challenging.

“If we can’t get four doses of this vaccine into the children, we’re not going to be using it,” Abramson told reporters.

“What we are recommending is that before we have wide spread use of this vaccine — and we wouldn’t necessarily use it in a very low incidence area, but in all medium and high areas — that we know that we can get that fourth dose in.”

Hopes that GSK’s vaccine could wipe out malaria were dampened when trial data in 2011 and 2012 showed it reduced malaria episodes in babies aged six to 12 weeks by only 27 percent and a further 32 percent in children aged five to 17 months. Part of that could be down to genetics.

GSK said it was ready to work with the WHO to support the pilot implementation of the vaccine. “We hope this will provide the additional information needed about how to best deliver the vaccine in a real-world setting,” a spokesman said.

Abramson said the vaccine was likely to cost around $5 a dose, or $20 for a four-dose course, which is four times the cost of an insecticide-treated bed net. It could be funded by the GAVI international vaccine alliance, though no decision on this has yet been made.

“If this vaccine is not effective and we use it widely we will have spent a ton of money which could have been better placed,” Abramson said.

Medical charity Medecins Sans Frontieres said SAGE was right to be wary about using a costly intervention with a patchy record.

Adrian Hill, a vaccine expert at Oxford University’s Jenner Institute, told Reuters: “This really underscores the need for work on developing other promising malaria vaccine candidates to be accelerated.”

Alternative malaria vaccines are still at least five to 10 years away from being licensed.

This year alone, there have been an estimated 214 million new cases of malaria, with around 438,000 deaths.

GSK has said it will not make any profit on Mosquirix, since a planned mark-up of just 5 percent on the cost of production will be reinvested in research on tropical diseases. The shot also contains an adjuvant, or booster, made by US biotech company Agenus.—Reuters
Massive storm Patricia hits Mexico’s Pacific coast but skirts big cities

Ivory Coast’s Ouattara calls for massive vote turnout amid no-show fears

Claims day notice

MV Mathu Bhum VOY NO (1009W)
Consignees of cargo carried on MV Mathu Bhum VOY NO (1009W) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 25.10.2015 and cargo will be discharged to the premises of M.L.P where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claims Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

Shipping Agency Department
Myanmar Port Authority
Agent for: M/S Mol (‘SPORE’) PTE LTD
Phone No: 2301185

MV KOTA TENAGA VOY NO (309)
Consignees of cargo carried on MV Kota Tenaga VOY NO (309) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 25.10.2015 and cargo will be discharged to the premises of H.P.T where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claims Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

Shipping Agency Department
Myanmar Port Authority
Agent for: M/S Advance Container Lines
Phone No: 2301185

MV West Scents VOY NO (094N)
Consignees of cargo carried on MV West Scents VOY NO (094N) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 25.10.2015 and cargo will be discharged to the premises of A.W.P.T where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claims Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

Shipping Agency Department
Myanmar Port Authority
Agent for: M/S Interasia Lines
Phone No: 2301185
Former Japanese WWII soldier owes survival to foot injury

SENDAI — A former Imperial Japanese Army soldier says he owes his survival in World War II to a foot injury he suffered while recalling his experiences as a prisoner in a camp in Korea.

Like many Japanese boys during the war, Nobuo Yokota, now 88, voluntarily joined the army when he was 17 years old. From 9 August, 1945, he fought against Soviet army troops in Manchuria and in the northern part of the Korean Peninsula.

“The Soviet tanks were big and fast, and ours were no match,” Yokota recalled.

Informed of Japan’s defeat by the Allied Powers on 16 or 17 August that year, he saw that some of his fellow soldiers were happy as they believed they could return to Japan. But Yokota and others became prisoners of war and were forced to walk for five days without food to a camp in Komusan. The camp was a school building surrounded by barbed wire and the prisoners initially slept in outside trenches.

As the prisoners had to live on a small amount of beans served once a day, many of them died of malnutrition.

Life in the camp was extremely tough in the winter. When the temperature fell 20 C below zero, it was impossible to dig graves for fellow prisoners who died.

While he was working on a railway construction site, a wooden sleeper fell from a freight car and landed on Yokota’s foot. At the hospital he was sent to he was ordered to do odd jobs, such as delivering meals to an ailing prisoner infected with typhus. The patient was covered in lice.

When Yokota imagined that he would eventually fall into the same state and die, he became more eager than ever to return to his home in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture.

One day at the hospital, Yokota was visited by a friend who bid him farewell, saying that he was returning to Japan. Yokota later learned that the friend was among the prisoners sent to labor camps in Siberia.

As many prisoners died in Siberia, Yokota believes he might have died there if he had not had the foot injury.

Yokota returned to Japan in March 1947, arriving at the port of Sasebo, Nagasaki Prefecture.

“I was lucky because I was lucky,” Yokota said. “Defeat in the war was truly miserable and I don’t want to remember anything about it.” — Kyodo News

WEATHER REPORT

BAY INERENCE: Weather is partly cloudy in the Andaman Sea and South Bay and generally fair elsewhere in the Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL EVENING OF THE 25th October, 2015: Rain or thundershowers will be isolated in Upper Sagain, Bago, Yangon, Ayeyawady and Taninthayi Regions, Kachin, Shan, Rakhine and Mon States and weather will be partly cloudy in the remaining Regions and States. Degree of certainty is (80%).

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

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Likelihood of continuation of isolated rain or thundershowers in Bago, Yangon and Ayeyawady Regions.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 25th October, 2015: Partly cloudy.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 25th October, 2015: Isolated rain or thundershowers. Degree of certainty is (80%).

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 25th October, 2015: Partly cloudy.

BOGOTA — The last time Dario Sierra knew his 84-year-old father was alive was during a phone call with a rebel from Colombia’s FARC guerrilla group demanding he pay a $135,000 ransom for his father’s release.

Thirteen years on, the old man is still missing.

“All I know is that 14 guerrillas kidnapped him from his home, tortured him, and then killed him when I couldn’t pay the ransom within two weeks,” said 69-year-old Sierra.

“I’ve searched for his body in all the corners and mountains of Colombia. The truth remains buried. People say I’m the old man looking for another old man. It’s been 13 years of pain.”

According to the official victims register, 45,000 Colombians have disappeared, victims of a five decade war between government troops, right-wing paramilitary groups, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and other guerrilla groups.

For decades the relatives of the disappeared have campaigned for the government to stop the extortion and locate the remains of their loved ones.

Hopes have now been raised that the whereabouts of the disappeared will come to light. Negotiators at peace talks between the government and FARC leaders agreed last week to create a special unit to search for the remains of their loved ones. A final deal to end a war that has killed over 200,000 people is signed.

“The government as well as the (FARC) insurgency will collaborate to speed up the work of locating, identifying and handing over the remains of the victims,” Ivan Marquez, rebel leader and chief negotiator told reporters in Havana, Cuba, where peace talks are taking place.

The agreement addresses the issue of victim’s rights as part of peace talks, which reached a breakthrough in late September when the two sides vowed to sign an accord by March 2016.

“What was agreed seeks to alleviate this pain, and the profound pain of the families of the disappeared,” Humberto de la Calle, the government’s top peace negotiator, told reporters in Bogota.

The government also said it would speed up efforts to exhume the bodies of people who had been killed in fighting with security forces and who were then buried in unmarked graves known as “N.N.” in cemeteries across Colombia.

The relatives of the disappeared say burying the remains of their loved ones is crucial to healing the wounds of war and to salvaging some kind of reparation and justice.

“Just 10 years ago, the issue of forced disappearances wasn’t even talked about in Colombia. The truth about what happened to the missing is fundamental to us,” Teresita Gaviria, whose son disappeared 16 years ago, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in a telephone interview.— Reuters
American singer Redfoo entertains Myanmar music fans

YANGON — American singer Redfoo performed at International Music Festival at Shwe Hu Tint compound in Yangon yesterday.

Accompanied by Malaysian DJ Darren Ashley and singers from other countries and local signer Ar T and DJ Wine, Redfoo entertained Myanmar music lovers.

The festival is aimed at enabling our people to enjoy a joint performance of local and international artists but also raising funds for flood victims in the country, said organizer Ko Terry Tin. Despite ticket prices lacke, numbers of music fans thronged the event jointly organized by Polyphonic Music & Entertainment.—Maung Sein Lwin (Myanma Alinn)

Commemorative concert featuring Chinese pianist marks UN’s 70th anniversary

UNITED NATIONS — To mark the 70th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, the world body held a commemorative concert featuring Lang Lang, a renowned Chinese pianist, in the United Nations General Assembly Hall on Friday.

As we shine a light on this milestone anniversary, let us reaffirm our commitment to a better and brighter future for all, the United Nations chief as a United Nations Messenger of Peace in 2013 with a compound in Yangon yesterday.

As part of the UN Day celebration and the “Turn the World Blue” campaign, the United Nations General Assembly Hall and Secretariat Building will be awash in blue, the official colour of the UN, on Friday and Saturday.—Xinhua

Kevin Costner says his first novel aims for the ages

WASHINGTON — Oscar-winning director Kevin Costner has turned novelist in a big way, kicking off with an adventure yarn set against the backdrop of World War One. It tells of a group of adventurers on a global quest to find a mythical city.

The “idea that this book is going to be read 150 years from now... might be lofty,” Costner told reporters in Washington on Friday, flanked by Baird and illustrator Rick Ross.

“It might not take its place among the books that we love so well, but we wanted it to,” “The Explorers Guild,” Costner’s first novel, incorporates comic-book style illustrations by Ross, an artist Costner said he found on the classified ad website Craigslist.

“I love the idea of the physicality of heroes trying to use their wits and their resources to get themselves out of trouble,” said Costner, who compared the book to Jules Verne’s “Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea.”

Costner pitched the story as an animated film about eight years ago, but said Hollywood was not interested. He ended up using his own money for the book project.

“I’ve found that some of the things that I have loved the most, I have had to pay for,” said Costner, who also funded his film “Dances with Wolves.”

The movie won seven Academy Awards in 1991, including an Oscar for Costner in his debut as a director.

Subtitled “Volume One: A Passage to Shambhala,” Costner and Baird said “The Explorers Guild” might be the first of a series.—Reuters

Chris Rock’s Lamar Odom joke hints at what’s in store at Oscars

NEW YORK — Comedian Chris Rock gave a glimpse of the provocative humour he may bring as host of the Oscars ceremony with a tweet about sports and reality TV celebrity Lamar Odom that drew both scorn and applause on Friday.

“There’s to Lamar Odom on being the first guy in history to have coke and hookers save his marriage,” Rock tweeted to his 3.5 million Twitter followers, adding “Stay strong Lamar.”

The tweet came in the week that Odom, 35, and his estranged wife Khloe Kardashian, 31, called off their divorce as the former basketball star recovers from collapsing into a coma at a Nevada brothel after reportedly using cocaine.

Rock, 50, was named this week as host of the 2016 Academy Awards ceremony in February. It will be his second stint at the helm of the movie industry’s biggest night after a 2005 performance that made headlines for his barbed comments about race and politics.

LOS ANGELES — Katy Perry always celebrates her birthday partying out with friends, but this year the singer has decided to keep it low key and will attend Iowa campaigning for presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.

The singer, who will be turning 31 on 25 October, has opted for a week-long celebration with more than 70 friends in Marrakech, Morocco last year, said The Hollywood Reporter. “I’ve always done big parties, and I always love a themed birthday. But I went so crazy last year, it’s time to tone it down and not make it so much about me,” Perry said.

The “I Kissed a Girl” hitmaker will attend the Democratic Party’s Jefferson-Jackson Dinner in Des Moines, Iowa, for the presidential candidate on her birthday.—Reuters

Katy Perry to spend her birthday with Hillary Clinton

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Not sure if I should consider this inappropriate or hail you as a God damn genius,” replied one man, Jeff Rothman. “HAHAHA! I love it...!!! That’s the Chris Rock we know...Cheers!!!” tweeted Fernando Zapata.

Others took Rock to task, with Posh saying “shame on u!!!” and Chanti tweeting “how insensitive.”

Odom, a former National Basketball Association star player, is said to be making progress but faces a long period of rehabilitation with concerns over his kidneys and other organs, celebrity media have reported. TMZ.com said he underwent two emergency surgeries in Los Angeles on Thursday. Odom’s and Kardashians 2009 courthouse marriage were featured in the reality shows “Keeping Up With the Kardashians” and “Khloe and Lamar.” The couple split up in 2013 amid rumors of cheating and drug abuse by Odom but divorce papers signed in July were never finalized and were withdrawn earlier this week.—Reuters

Photo: Maung Sein Lwin

Photo: Reuters
New York D. Meyer, restaurateur and CEO of the Union Square Hospitality Group, speaking on CNBC about New York restaurant tipping.

**Photo: Reuters**

NEW YORK — The centuries-old tradition of tipping at New York restaurants predates the Statue of Liberty. A seashell woven into the fabric of a city that often sets social trends for the rest of the country.

But now restaurateur Danny Meyer, owner of tourist hotspot Shake Shack, upscale Union Square Cafe and The Modern, is tipping the tables on gratuities, saying he will eliminate them at 13 of his New York City restaurants and increase base wages for cooks and servers while raising base prices. Gratuities generate tens of billions of dollars a year for servers, and the practice is not expected to disappear overnight.

Some restaurateurs have already discontinued tipping while others ended discretionary tipping by including a base tip on the check. But tips on merit remain still widespread.

Experts said such a move by a man like Meyer is sure to start the industry evolving as much a given as cut-rate tipping by including dumb-bells and a mini gym ball.

Lotte Shopping's rival CJ O Shopping, owned by CJ, reported a profit in the first quarter of the year, while the likes of Amorepacific and LG Household & Health Care saw a decline in profit.

Alaska tribe to get back totem pole taken by US actor in 1930s

JUNEAU — A totem pole taken by the Hollywood actor John Barrymore from an Alaska tribe 84 years ago is being returned to the village after decorating the yards of Californians for years and being stored in the basement of a museum in Hawaii.

The 30-foot-tall carved wooden obelisk belonging to the Tlingit tribe in Alaska is being returned home, said Univer-

ity of California professor emeritus Steve Langdon, who has spent years tracking down the pole. Langdon said a book published in 2001 contained a photograph showing Barrymore's crew members loading the pole onto his yacht with a caption that he "purchased it at the ancestral village of Tuxecan on Prince of Wales Island."

Apart from that, Lang- don said he has been una-

ble to find evidence from the tribe or beyond that suggests it was a legitimate acquisition.

Barrymore, a screen actor and grandson of actress Drew Barrymore, put the pole on display in the garden of his California mansion, Langdon said.

In 1944, American ac-

tor Vincent Price and his wife bought it from Barry- more’s estate and installed it in their yard, where it stayed until 1981 when the couple donated it to what would become the Hono-

lulu Museum of Art. Langdon said.

Langdon tracked the pole to the museum after finding a photo showing Price beside it in a yard. He went to Hawaii on behalf of the tribe in 2013.

"It became clear from his research that the totem pole was a sacred object of cultural patrimony and we immediately decided the totem pole should be returned home," said Stephan Jost, director of the Honolulu Museum of Art.

Reuters
**Thakayta win Sepak Takraw Cup**

THE FINAL matches of the novice class Sepak Takraw competition took place at Thuwanna Indoor Stadium on Friday. Thakayta Township beat Botataung Township and won the championship shield. Yangon Region Chief Minister U Myint Swe was present to award it to the winning team.

Best player award went to Tin Maung Latt of the Thakayta team. Yangon Region Planning and Economic Minister U Than Myint honoured the donors who sponsored the event.—Myanmar News Agency

**Myanmar to encourage cricket**

“We will be selecting outstanding cricket players to play in the State and Region level matches and those who excel in that competition will be considered for the SEA Games.” said U Michael Kyaw Min from MCF. Last year’s tournament winner was Basic Education High School No 2 in Thakayta Township.

The federation has been training cricket coaches and referees to help foster interest and participation in the game here in Myanmar and has been holding annual cricket tournaments for schools in the Yangon Region since 2006.—Ko Moe

**Halep and Sharapova drawn together at WTA Finals**

SINGAPORE — Top seed Simona Halep was pooled with grand slam winners Maria Sharapova and Flavia Pennettta in a formidable looking Red Group for the end-of-season WTA Finals on Friday.

With world number one and defending champion Serena Williams opting out after narrowly missing out on a rare calendar Grand Slam, Romanian Halep is the highest seed for the eight woman end-of-season championships which begin on Sunday.

Halep, who lost to Williams in the final last year after beating the American in the pool stage, was drawn against Italian Pennetta, who lifted a shock US Open title after compatriot Roberta Vinci beat Williams in the last four.

The Romanian, winner at Indian Wells earlier this year, will also take on Russian multiple grand slam winner Sharapova, who lost in the Australian Open final to Williams in January.

Poland’s Agnieszka Radwanska, who won her 16th career title in China last week, rounded out the group from which the top two will advance to the semi-finals after round robin play.

Awaiting them will be the heavy hitters of the White Group, where Wimbleton finalist Garbine Muguruza of Spain and twice champion of the grass court major Petra Kvitova were pooled together.

They were joined by Germany’s Angelique Kerber, who completed the rare feat of winning WTA titles on green clay, red clay, grass and hard courts this year. Czech Lucie Safarova, who only qualified for the singles field on Thursday, was the other player in the group.

Safarova, the world number nine and French Open runner-up, will also play in the doubles with American partner Bethanie Mattek-Sands where she has been drawn in the same pool as Muguruza and partner Carla Suarez Navarro.

**Rookie Stegmaeir leads second round in Las Vegas**

LAS VEGAS — PGA Tour rookie Brett Stegmaeir vaulted into the lead when play was suspended in fading light late in the second round at the Shriners Hospitals for Children Open in Las Vegas on Friday.

On a day when Tony Finau made an albatross, Stegmaeir upstaged his better-known rivals to pick up six shots in 15 holes at TPC Summerlin in the Nevada desert.

The 32-year-old from Connecticut, in only his fifth start on tour, was among 14 players unable to finish before darkness.

Stegmaeir, on 11-under, heads fellow Americans Chad Campbell (67), Morgan Hoffmann (66) and Tyler Aldridge (68) by one stroke. Aldridge, a journeyman who has played most of his competitive golf on satellite tours in the United States and Canada, nearly holed out with his second shot at the par-four 18th, taping in from six inches for his third birdie in the final four holes.

He was delighted to be in contention for a maiden PGA Tour title after playing just one full season on the US circuit, back in 2009.

“I’m very pleased,” the 31-year-old told Golf Channel.

“I am hitting the ball well, putting well and things are going my way. It feels great (to be back on the PGA Tour).

“It’s been a while and I’ve put a lot of hard work in. I’m just looking forward to what’s to come.”

American world number five Rickie Fowler, the highest-ranked player in the field, opened with a one-over 72 on Thursday, but bounced back with a 65 that featured an 80-foot putt for eagle at the 13th to move within six shots of the lead.

“It’s nice to have a tee time tomorrow,” Fowler said after ensuring he would make the cut.

“I didn’t hit the centre of the (club) face a whole lot yesterday. (Today) I made a couple of good swings, got things going, made a few putts.”

Big-hitting compatriot Finau had the shot of the day when he holed out with his second shot from 235 yards at the par-five 13th.

Finau was not far away from a second albatross two holes later when he drove the green at the par-four 15th where his ball landed a few feet left of the pin.

He birdied the hole, but double-bogeyed the next and, with one hole left, will miss the cut unless he birdies the 18th hole on Saturday morning.—Reuters

**Thakayta Township team became champions of the novice class Sepak Takraw competition, beating Botataung Township team. Photo: MNA**

**Myanmar to encourage cricket**

We will be selecting outstanding cricket players to play in the State and Region level matches and those who excel in that competition will be considered for the SEA Games,” said U Michael Kyaw Min from MCF. Last year’s tournament winner was Basic Education High School No 2 in Thakayta Township.

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