THE SMELL OF INDUSTRY

13 offshore natural gas exploration plots yet to be put for tender

THERE are still 13 plots for tender to be submitted of Myanmar’s 51 offshore oil and natural gas exploration plots, according to the Ministry of Energy.

“At the moment we have 13 exploration plots left but we don’t have a plan to get to invite the tender for these plots” explained U Than Htun, adviser of the aforementioned Ministry.

Permission was granted during the current government’s term of office for the 38 of the offshore oil and natural gas drilling plots to invite tender. It is known there is also 53 plots located onshore.

“Gas from 16 of the 38 offshore plots, which have been permitted [for tender] by the government, will be used domestically. There is a study currently being carried out for exploration with the EITI.” said continued U Thein Htun.

Of those plots which haven’t yet been called to invite tender, 3 are offshore plots while 10 are shallow water plots. Of the total 38 plots of land which oil and gas exploration activities have been permitted, 18 are deep offshore plots which oil and gas are currently being extracted from, while oil and gas is yet to be found in the remaining 20.

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Bilugyun region connects to national grid for 24-hour power supply

CHAUNGZON Township, Bilugyun region situated on the mouth of Thanlwin River gained access to 24-hour electricity provided by the national power grid as of yesterday, Myanmar News Agency reported.

Following the completion of the power line installation connecting Mawlamyine to Chaungzon across the river Thanlwin to connect the national grid, more than a thousand households in the township now enjoy 24 hours of electricity supply, extended from four hours of service a day the region had with the help of two diesel generators.

According to the MNA, the Ministry of Electric Power began its plan to electrify the township since the 2013-2014 fiscal year, and completed the establishment of a sub-power station last June and the installation of all power lines this January.—GNLM

Shwe Yee Htun-1 Well about 30 miles off Ngwesaung Beach, Pathein. PHOTO: SUPPLIED BY MINISTRY OF ENERGY
Parliament gives nod to National Planning bill and four others

The 13th regular session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw passed five bills including the National Planning Bill for the fiscal year 2016-2017, Union Minister for National Planning and Economic Development Dr Kan Zaw replied that there should be an original version for targeted GDP growths of each sector as targets can be met while replacing state-owned investments with private sector ones.

Next the Parliament gave a nod to the National Planning Bill and four other bills that include the Union Budget Bill for 2016, the Pesticide Bill, the New Plan Species Protection Bill, and the Criminal Procedure Amendment Bill. — Myanma News Agency

Banks and financial institutions
draft law discussed

The Joint Bill Committee of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw met at a hall in the Hluttaw complex in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday to discuss the draft Banks and Financial Institutions Law.

The joint bill committee, led by U Nanda Kyaw Swa, chairman of the joint bill committee, held discussions on the draft law sent back by the President with his remarks.

The meeting was also attended by Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Myanmar Daw Khin Saw Oo, the committee’s vice-chairman and members from Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) and Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) and officials from the Hluttaw Office. — Myanma News Agency

13 offshore natural gas exploration ...

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Seventeen companies are currently performing oil and natural gas drilling and offshore exploration activities, while 19 companies have been permitted to carry out similar activity on onshore sites, according to the Ministry of Energy.

Oil and natural gas exploration enterprises are being carried out along the coastlines of Rakhine State and Tanintharyi Region, as well as the offshore region of Moktama, while it is known that approximately 2,000 million cubic feet of natural gas is extracted every day. — Mynmakha News Agency

KBZ listed in world finance 100-2015 at World Economic Forum

KANBAWZA Bank (KBZ) has been announced as one of the 100 best companies for 2015 of the world at the World Economic forum.

At the forum yesterday, which is being held from 18 to 23 January in Davos, Switzerland, London-based World Finance released its “World Finance 100 (2015)”. World Finance announced that KBZ is listed in the “World Finance 100-2015” list, for its achievements in opening many branches nationwide in 2015 within a short time, improving modern banking services, transparency, assisting in local private businesses to develop the country’s economy and private sector, being ranked as the country’s top tax payer for four consecutive years, running business linking with local and international financial institutions, following rules and regulations laid down by international institutions and active participation in and contribution to religion, education, health and social sectors in the country.

Chairman of KBZ U Aung Ko Win was also awarded with the Special Honourary State Excellence Award by the president for the bank’s highest contribution to tax and has won many international banking prizes including the Bank of the Year in Asia 2015.

Along with KBZ, Apple IT (USA), Barclays Bank (England), BMW Company (Germany), BNP Paribas Bank (France), Emirates Airline (UAE) and Qatar National Bank (QNB), ANZ Bank (Australia), Toyota Company (Japan), HSBC Bank (Hong Kong), Sinopec (China) and SingTel (Singapore) are also listed in the “World Finance 100 (2015)”. — GNLM

Rumour over land plots for pensioners dismissed

A MINISTER from the Yangon Region government officially denied a rumour that pensioners will be allocated land plots in the region, affirming that this information is incorrect.

“No announcement was made and no forms were invited”, said Yangon Region Minister for Agriculture and Livestock U Soe Min.

U Kyaw Soe, Yangon Region Minister for Forestry and Energy, and U Zaw Aye Maung, Yangon Region Minister for Rakhine Ethnic Affairs, also said that they were not aware of any such plans.

Due to the rumour spreading, pensioners in Yangon have been mailing the Yangon Region government their applications since last week.

Daw Ngu Thida, deputy general manager of Myanmar Post, said that post offices are just providing services to customers, and application forms are not sold there.

“No one know the details”, said U Nyein, a pensioner from Shwepyi Township who submitted his application by mail following the information shared by one of his friends.

Pensioners are still submitting their applications by express mail at the Yangon Post Office where forms are being sold at K100 a copy by brokers.

“I mailed my application form, so did others,” said Daw Kyi Hla, a pensioner from Dala Township, adding that a copy of form is being sold for K 100 to K500 at copy shops in Dala.

Though authorities refuted the rumour, people gathered at post offices in regions and states in office hours to apply for land plots. Land prices in Myanmar have hiked with booming of the country’s real estate sector since the country’s opening up.— Khin Maung Htwe

A post office in outskirts of Yangon is crowded with people. — Photo: Min Thit
President meets officials from Chinese power generation group

A LAYER of rock which collapsed whilst digging was being carried out in a coal mine, located in Mawlite township of Sagaing Region, has killed one Chinese national and wounded a Myanmar national, according to the local police station.

The incident took place at 10:30am on Saturday in the coal mine being dug by the Ngway Yee Pulay company.

The police station and the mining company has carried out investigations. “The deceased Chinese national Mr. Luo Changjun is 47 years of age and has been living in Myanmar since 16 October 2015, while his identity documents revealed that he was permitted to reside in the northern Shan State until March, 2016.— Myitmakha News Agency

Germany provides 10 m Euros for fast-track Grant

The German Government announced that it will commit 10 million Euros in additional grants for flood-affected areas in Northern Myanmar.

In the announcement from the German Embassy in Yangon yesterday, German Ambassador to Myanmar HE Christian-Ludwig Weber-Lortsch said, “Pov- erty alleviation in rural areas is a priority of our cooperation. We don’t push paper, we make good on our promises, on the ground, with the Government and for the people. That is why we are building bridges and roads to reconnect 32 flood-ef- fected villages in Kalay District for 50,000 people. The project started already, thanks to the unbureaucratic assistance of the Department of Rural Development.”

The Ambassador added that “The Myanmar Government organised free and fair elections and is now enabling a peaceful and democratic transition. That deserves respect and support.”

The Myanmar Government appointed the Ministry of Live Stock, Fisheries and Rural Development as project partner and executing agency.

From the German side, KFW Development Bank will implement the project.—GNLM

Real estate income tax to rise five-fold from April 1

IMPOSITION of income taxes on real estate is set to rise five-fold starting from April 2016, according to the Tachileik Internal Revenue Department.

“The Imposition of land tax on real estate and buildings is going to increase about five times over. It has already been discussed in parliament. As such, whether it’s the buying or selling of property, building construction or the changing of names related to housing, we want people to come and inquire with us before April 1 so that they can be informed on tax issues,” explained U Toe Hlaing, assistant director of the Tachileik Internal Revenue Department. 

Leaves on taxes in regard to paragraph 24 of the tax legisla-tion bill were discussed during the thirteenth session of union parliament held on January 15. Any income from real estate under 30 million kyats will have to pay a tax of 15 per cent; that of between 30 – 100 million kyats will incur a tax charge of 20 per cent, while any income received over 100 million kyats will need to pay a 30 percent tax fee.

The income tax of real estate will come into effect from 1 April 2016 and will be roughly five times higher than currently imposed tax levies.—Myitmakha News Media

Sagaing Region coal mine collapses, one Chinese miner died, one Myanmar miner injured

President U Thein Sein and union ministers pose for documentary photo with delegation of Chinese power generation group. Photo: MNA
**Baby elephants falling down into water rescued in Kawthoung**

TWO baby elephants that fell into a pond near an oil-palm plantation in Kawthoung District, Taninthayi Region have been saved by the employees of the farm on Saturday.

The accident occurred near a plantation owned by Yuzana Co. in Chaungmon village, Pyigyiymadai Township in the district on Friday. A three-year-old baby elephant and a five-year-old girl elephant fell into a pond while their herd of wild elephants visited the pond for water.

Workers said those elephants tried to save the babies the whole night.

Officials and employees of the farm were able to save the victims with the use of heavy machinery in the evening. Those people then returned the two babies to their herd after they had been rescued, one of employee said.

**Govt plans to establish new airport in MraukU**

A map shows the site for the new airport in MraukU.

**Survey aims to improve life of visually impaired**

**Crime News**

**Uncensored movies seller arrested**

Police seized uncensored movies at a house owned by Aung Moe Kyaw, 32, in ward 4, Pa-kokka town, Magway region, on 16 January. Acting on a tip-off, member of the police searched a house selling and producing the uncensored movies and found uncensored videos totaling 1482 CDs/VCDs, plain CD 211 CDs/VCDs and duplicator. Local police station has filed charges against the man under Television and Video Law Section 32(B).

Similarly, member of the police searched a house owned by Thin Yu Moe, 48, and found two duplicating machines, uncensored video of 8666 CDs/VCDs, Plain CD 1200 CDs/VCDs and 95 CDs/VCDs under duplication. The police searched Kyaw Kyar shop owned by Kyaw Ko Ko Aung, 33, and seized a duplicating machine, unreleased videos 2000 CDs/VCDs and plain CD 40 CDs/VCDs. And, police searched Tun Yadarnar shop owned by Ye Mon Htut, 38, and discovered a duplicating machine, unreleased Myanmar and English videos 2524 CDs/VCDs, censored Myanmar video of 10 CDs/VCDs and K 113,000 earned through the sale of the uncensored movies. Local police station has filed charges against the man under Television and Video Law.

**Car accident kills two, injures two**

A trailer collided head on with a motorbike between 15th and 16th sheet, on Stand Road, Aung Myay Thar San township, Mandalay, on Saturday, leaving two people dead.

The trailer was being driven by Kyaw Thein Oo, 23, while motorbike by Ko Paw Gyi with Nyein Htet and Pyay Phyo Aung on board.

The collision killed Kyaw Thein Oo and Ko Paw Gyi and seriously injured two others. The injured people are being given medical treatment at Mandalay general hospital. The vehicle drivers were deemed guilty of careless driving by the police station.

**Man charged with motorbike theft**

The police have brought charges against a man on suspicion of motorbike theft as he failed to prove that the motorbike belonged to him.

According to investigation, Ma Nwe, 32, lost her motorbike which was kept in front of her house at Htundon ward, Chan Mya Tharzi township, Mandalay, on 5 December. As soon as she knew that her bike was stolen, she informed to Tun Tun San shop from which she bought the motorbike and asked the shopkeeper not to give the documents proving the ownership of the motorbike if someone came to ask for them.

On 16 January, she got the information from the shop, which has led to the arrest of Maung Nohar Kyaw, 19, at Pyigyayagun township, Mandalay. The local police has filed charges against him with theft.

**SAMSUNG Note-5 thief arrested**

Police arrested a young man trying to sell a SAMSUNG GLAXY Note-5 at the corner of 82 and 35 road, Mahar Aung Myay township, on 16 January. When interrogated, Khine Maung Win (a) Mask, 23, failed to prove that the mobile phone belonged to him. The local police station has filed a lawsuit against him.

**Notes**

Local police has filed charges against a man on suspicion of motorbike theft as he failed to prove that the motorbike belonged to him.
Indian PM kicks off assembly poll campaign in NE India

NEW DELHI — Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday kicked off campaign for the assembly polls in the northeastern state of Assam by slamming the Congress party which has been in power in the state for the past 15 years.

"Those who could not do anything in the last 15 years expect me to do everything in 15 months. None of the promises made to people of Assam for 12 to 13 years have been fulfilled. It has become a fashion not to give account of your own work but blame others," Modi said.

The prime minister, who was addressing a political rally in the state’s Kokrajhar District, promised fast-track development in the state. "My three-point programme for Assam is — development, development, development," he said.

The country’s main opposition party Congress has been ruling Assam for over the past 15 years. However, India’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party has seen an increase in its support base in the past two years and has won half of Assam’s 14 parliament seats in 2014.

Experts say it’s a 50-50 chance for the BJP in Assam, and unless it ties with some regional parties, the party will not be in a position to form the majority in the assembly polls. But the party has not yet spelt out any pre-poll alliance. —Xinhua

Japan should see China as partner, not threat: ambassador

 TOKYO — Chinese Ambassador to Japan Cheng Yonghua expressed concern yesterday about the portrayal of China as a threat to Japan and called on Tokyo to see Beijing as a partner in achieving peace and stability in the region.

"I have deliberately taken up a sensitive issue between China and Japan and uses it to create tensions and opposition...not only would [such an act] hurt bilateral ties but it would also influence peace and stability in the region," Cheng said in Japanese in a speech at a Tokyo hotel. "In the end, the real ones who suffer or hurt only themselves."

Ties between the two Asian neighbours have often been beset by disputes over territory and history, although there have been signs of a thaw in recent months.

The ambassador said there had been “negative remarks” about China when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s ruling party and its coalition ally were seeking to enact self-defence legislation last year as well as over territorial issues in the East and South China seas.

Japan, along with other countries, has criticised Beijing’s massive and fast-paced land reclamation in the South China Sea, saying such “unilateral” moves escalate tensions in the area. China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia and the Philippines have conflicting territorial claims in the region.

In the East China Sea, Japan is engaged in a row with China and Taiwan over a group of islets it administers. China stepped up its claim to the islets after Japan purchased a major part of them from a Japanese individual and put them under state control in 2012.

The security legislation, aimed at expanding the activities of Japan’s Self-Defence Forces overseas, was enacted last September in a major shift in Japan’s exclusively defence-oriented post-war security policy.

In arguing for the legislation, Abe cited “an increasingly severe security environment facing Japan,” alluding to China’s growing military assertiveness and North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats.

On North Korea’s fourth nuclear test conducted on 6 January, the ambassador said China, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, will “support” the council in taking “appropriate” action in response to Pyongyang’s violation of previous UN Security Council resolutions banning nuclear tests. Countries such as the United States and Japan are hoping that China, which borders North Korea and is a long-time benefactor of the reclusive country, will be on the same page in seeking a strong and effective UN Security Council resolution against Pyongyang.

Cheng called for dialogue between North Korea, South Korea and Japan, saying six-party talks aimed at denuclearising the Korean Peninsula should be held to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and to protect peace and stability in Northeast Asia.

The six-party talks involving the two Koreas plus China, Japan, the United States and Russia have been on hold since late 2008.—Kyodo News

Indonesia looks to stop militants overseas from returning home

JAKARTA — Indonesian President Joko Widodo is considering a regulation that would prohibit Indonesians from joining radical groups overseas, an effort to prevent a deadlier attack than last week’s militant assault on Jakarta.

At a meeting yesterday at the palace, top political and security officials agreed to review anti-terrorism laws, which currently allow Indonesians to freely return home after fighting with Islamic State in Syria.

Security forces fear that returning jihadis could launch a much more calculated attack than the altercation of militant assults launched on Thursday using two pistols and eleven low-yield homemade bombs. Eight people were killed in the attack, including the four attackers. “We’ve agreed to review the terrorism law to focus on prevention,” parliamentary speaker Zulfiqar Hasan told Reuters.

“Currently there is nothing in the law covering training. There is also nothing currently covering foreign terrorist fighters (not radical groups) and returning. This needs to be broadened.”

Proposed revisions would also tighten prison sentences for terrorism offences, he said.

Widodo said discussions on the new regulation, which would be a stop-gap measure until parliament can revise its anti-terrorism law, were still at “an early stage”.

“This is very pressing. Many people have left for Syria or returned,” he said, but did not say when a decision would be made.

Roughly 500 Indonesians are believed by authorities to have travelled to the Middle East to join Islamic State. About 100 are believed to have returned, most of whom did not see frontline combat.

Indonesian Police Chief Badrodin Haiti told Reuters in an interview Monday that the country was bracing for the return of these more experienced fighters, who may be capable of carrying out far more sophisticated operations than last week’s attack, which was hampered by poor training and weapons.

Thursday’s bombings and shootings in the heart of Jakarta were the first attack in Indonesia attributed to Islamic State. The last major Islamic attack in the country were in 2009, when suicide bombers struck two luxury hotels in the city.

Even if the new revisions are imposed, Indonesia would still have weaker anti-terrorism laws than some of its neighbours.

Australia has in recent years passed measures banning its citizens from returning from conflict zones in Syria and the Middle East, while making it easier to monitor domestic communications.—Reuters

EU team visits Thailand to assess fishing industry cleanup

BANGKOK — A European Union delegation that is visiting Thailand to weigh its progress in battling illegal and unregulated fishing will not make a decision this week on whether to ban Thai seafood products, the government said yesterday.

Thailand, the world’s third-largest exporter of seafood, faces the risk of the ban after the European Union gave it a “yellow card” in April for failing to clamp down on problems in its fishing industry.

An EU dialogue mission to assess progress is set for Thursday and Friday but the technical team has already arrived, the government said.

The team is monitoring Thailand’s progress after it set up a centre last year to combat illegal fishing, said Vice Admiral Jumpl Lumphigan, a spokesman for the Royal Thai Navy.

“Once they are satisfied they will go back and make a decision,” he said, adding that there was no timeframe for the decision.

The technical team would conduct random checks until the rest of the EU officials arrived on Wednesday, he said.

Last week the government said Thailand had completed “70 per cent of the task” set out by the EU, after having registered most of its fishing vessels and caught crews suspected of human trafficking in the fishing sector.

Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan said Thailand had introduced new laws to avert an EU ban.

“There has been huge progress, because we have solved many problems in terms of the law, and its application,” he told reporters. “Whether they are satisfied or not we will have to see, we’ve done our utmost.”

The EU declined comment, citing the confidential nature of meetings between its officials and Thai authorities. —Reuters
China says Manila exaggerating tensions with aircraft claim

BEIJING — China accused the Philippines yesterday of deliberately trying to scare people by saying China had warned a small civilian plane carrying Philippine officials it was trespassing as they inspected an island in the disputed South China Sea.
The Philippine government had said the incident happened on 7 January to an aircraft inspecting Thitu Island in the Spratlys, where Manila plans to set up surveillance equipment this year, as their aircraft flew near a Chinese man-made island.
Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei repeated that China has sovereignty over the Spratlys and that the Philippines had illegally occupied eight islands there since the 1970s, including Thitu, and had been building on them.
“The Philippines’ comments are just frightening words to scare people, especially exaggarating regional tensions with treacherous intent, and its plots will not succeed,” Hong said, when asked about the warning to the Philippine aircraft.
The Philippines plans to install a $1 million satellite-based system on Thitu to track commercial flights over the South China Sea, after China landed its first test flights this month on a reef it built in the Spratly islands.
Hong said that any activities by the Philippines on the islands it occupies were illegal.
China’s increasing military presence in the Spratlys has stirred fears it could lead to an air defence zone, which would escalate tension with other claimants, and the United States, in one of the world’s most volatile areas.
China claims almost the entire South China Sea, believed to have huge oil and gas deposits, but Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Viet Nam also have claims in the sea, through which about $5 trillion in trade passes every year.
The Philippines and Viet Nam protested against China’s test flights on the Fiery Cross Reef this month.
The concerns about the recent activities in China along with the reclamation activities and construction of air-strips in the disputed territory is shared by other countries as it adds to the tension in the region,” said Hermnio Coloma, Philippine presidential communications secretary.
“It causes concern about the freedom of freedom of navigation and overflight in the area”, Coloma added.— Reuters

Park reiterates need for ‘strong, effective’ punishment for North Korea

SEOUL — South Korean President Park Geun-hye reiterated yesterday the need for the international community to take “strong and effective measures” against North Korea’s recent nuclear test.
South Korean President Park also called for the full possible efforts to counter any provocations by North Korea.
On 6 January, North Korea announced it successfully conducted a hydrogen bomb test, drawing a storm of condemnation from the international community.— Kyodo News

South Korea’s largest labour rights group pulling out from labour reform pact

SEOUL — South Korea’s largest labour rights group has pulled out yesterday from a labour reform agreement, a setback for President Park Geun-hye’s ambitious reform drive just a few months ahead of parliamentary elections.
Park has made the reform of South Korea’s rigid labour practices one of the key goals of her government, to help revive Asia’s fourth-largest economy ahead of an extended slump in exports and slowing population growth.
“The FKTU will no longer participate in the tripartite to coordinate agreements made there are not abided by,” Kim Dong-man, president of the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU) which has a million members, told a news conference.
He criticised the government for breaching an agreement reached in September by representatives of business, labour and the government, referring to the government’s bid to revise labour laws without full negotiations with the labour unions.
The government’s proposed reforms aim to make hiring and firing easier and allow individual negotiations between employer and employee on working conditions. These changes current-ly require consent from the labour unions.
In principle, the government could still push ahead with its attempt to enforce reform measures requiring no law revisions despite the federation’s pullout but such a move could turn public opinion against the government just ahead of the polls.
Labour Minister Lee Ki-kewon told a separate news conference later on Tuesday that the government was open to new negotiations with labour but added it could not wait forever. South Koreans will vote in April to elect all 300 members of the single-chamber National Assembly, in which 53 per cent of seats are now held by the ruling party. South Korea has scored some notable reports on manufacturing and oilseeds.— Reuters

India bans on lentil linked to paralysis as Modi seeks self-sufficiency

NEW DELHI — India is lifting a five-decade-old ban on a type of lentil that has been linked to nerve damage and paralysis, in a desperate attempt by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to cut legume imports and make the nation self sufficient in the edible seeds.
His bid to back-to-back droughts for the first time in over three decades, India’s lentil output has fallen and prices have nearly doubled. Now the government has lifted three varieties of the khesari lentil, which can grow in dry or wet conditions.
But the opposition Congress party, which is trying to pressure Modi over continuing rural hardship, said the government was playing with the health of unsuspecting Indians by allowing the cultivation of khesari.
The varieties developed by Indian scientists, however, contain a lesser amount of a neurotoxin that can damage nerve tissues and weaken the legs of both humans and animals than previous varieties, said Narendra Pratap Singh, director of the state-run Indian Institute of Pulse Research (IIPR).
“Any prudent thought if in a reasonable quantity it can be consumed then why not allow it, particularly when there’s a crisis and we’re importing pulses,” said Singh.
Despite the ban placed on the lentil in 1961, khesari is still eaten in eastern India and neighbouring Bangladesh, mainly as a cheap source of protein for millions of poor people.
“This is how the Modi government is tackling price rise — by lifting the ban on a pulse that’s medically proven to cause paralysis,” Congress party spokesman RPN Singh said on Twitter.
The three varieties now allowed have been ready for the last 10 years and “various experiments on animals have shown there are no adverse long-term effects if consumption is in reasonable quantity,” IIPR’s Singh said. Every year Indians consume about 22 million tonnes of lentils used to make a thick stew called dal, commonly taken with rice or flat bread across South Asia. About a fifth of the volume is imported from countries like Canada, Australia and Myanmar, which grow the legumes mainly to sell to India.
Modi wants India to be self sufficient in lentils and last month approved a scheme to encourage greater cultivation of the legumes. Higher incentives for water-intensive crops like wheat and rice have made India a big grains producer at the cost of other key crops like lentils and oilseeds.— Reuters
Spy agency MI5 named top employer for LGBT equality in Britain

LONDON — Britain’s domestic spy service, MI5, was named yesterday as the best employer for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in a nationwide workplace equality index, followed by Lloyds Banking Group and the National Assembly for Wales.

The Top 100 Employers list by the equality charity Stonewall ranks organisations in Britain based on answers from employees about culture, diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

“We’re thrilled to see such a commitment to lesbian, gay, bi and trans colleagues, but we also know that there is still lots to do,” Ruth Hunt, Stonewall’s chief executive, said in a statement.

According to the survey, only 27 per cent of lesbian, gay and bisexual people felt comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation to colleagues and customers.

Less than half of transgender people said they saw a visible commitment to trans equality at work from senior leaders.

More than 50 per cent of respondents said there were gay role models at work, but only 11 per cent saw bisexual role models. “We know that people perform better when they can be themselves, and it’s been proven that diversity among staff leads to a more productive, positive and creative workplace environment,” Hunt said.

MI5 Director General Andrew Parker said diversity was vital for the organisation as it allowed the intelligence agency to use the skills of the best people. “Diversity is vital for MI5, not just because it’s right that we represent the communities we serve, but because we rely on the skills of the most talented people wherever they are, and wherever they may be,” Parker said in a statement.

According to the survey, the majority of lesbian, gay and bisexual respondents who revealed their sexuality at work experienced greater job satisfaction and a higher sense of achievement.

More than 60,000 employees from over 400 organisations took part in the 12th annual survey which serves as a tool for employers to evaluate their progress on LGBT equality. The legal and housing sectors dominated the top 10 places on the index, while Wales and the East Midlands had the most organisations outside of London featured on the list.— Reuters

Sweden opens corruption probe over foreign minister’s apartment contract

STOCKHOLM — The Swedish Prosecution Authority will open a preliminary investigation over whether an apartment rental contract given to Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom by a trade union constituted a bribe, the authority said in a statement yesterday.

Wallstrom rented an apartment in Stockholm in a building owned by trade union Kommunal from April 2015. While a popular minister among voters, she is one of Sweden’s most controversial politicians due to her open criticism of Israel.

“I welcome the investigation. I have nothing to hide and it is good that this will be resolved. I continue to do my job,” Wallstrom said in a written statement to news agency TT.

Chief prosecutor Alf Johansson told TT there were no suspects at this point.

“First, I will investigate whether a crime has been committed, and in connection with that see if someone can be regarded as a suspect,” Johansson told TT.

Apartement contracts are hard to get in Stockholm, where construction has not been fast enough to accommodate a huge number of new inhabitants over the last few decades.— Reuters

Germany wants to discuss concerns about new Polish govt

BERLIN — German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said yesterday that the German government wanted to discuss its concerns about the new Polish government with Warsaw.

“There is perhaps no such sensitive a neighbourly relationship as that we have in Poland. That does not mean we are not going to speak about the things that concern us, but it can influence the way we speak about them,” Steinmeier told reporters.— Reuters

About 3,500 slaves held by Islamic State in Iraq — UN report

GENEVA — An estimated 3,500 people, mainly women and children, are believed to be held in slavery in Iraq by Islamic State militants who impose a harsh rule marked by gruesome public executions, the United Nations said yesterday.

The militant group, which also controls large parts of neighbouring Syria, has committed widespread abuses that may “in some instances, amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and possibly genocide,” the report said.

The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq and UN human rights office estimated that 3,500 people were “currently being held in slavery by ISIL numbers”. “Those being held are predominantly women and children and come primarily from the Yazidi community, but a number are also from other ethnic and religious minority communities,” said the joint report issued in Geneva.— Reuters

Iran’s Khamenei welcomes sanctions lift, warns of US ‘deceit’

DUBAI — Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, on Monday welcomed the lifting of international sanctions against Iran, but warned that Tehran should remain wary of its old enemy the United States.

Khamenei wrote to President Hassan Rouhani to congratulate him on implementing the nuclear deal, which resulting in US, European Union and United Nations sanctions being lifted over the weekend, state television reported.

“I reiterate the need to be vigilant about the deceit and treachery of arrogant countries, especially the United States, in this nuclear issue and other issues,” Khamenei added.— Reuters

Fighting between Syrian army, Islamic State kills scores: monitoring group

BEIRUT — The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights group said scores of Syrian government forces have been killed in three days of fighting with Islamic State in the east of the country, where the jihadist group has attacked government-held areas.

Syrian officials could not be reached for comment.

The Britain-based Observatory said 120 members of the Syrian government forces and 70 Islamic State fighters had been killed in clashes since Saturday.

The official news agency SANA reported on Monday that government forces had recaptured some residential areas taken by Islamic State in Begayliya, near the city of Deir al Zor, and killed a number of fighters.— Reuters

9 injured in pileup involving 26 cars in South Korea

SEOUL — At least nine people were injured yesterday in a pileup involving 26 cars on an expressway in the southwestern part of South Korea, according to Yonhap News Agency.

Among the nine, two were seriously hurt in the accident, which happened at around 12:50pm in Jeongeup, North Jeolla Province.

Snow was falling in the area at the time of the incident. An official from a fire station said that earlier reports of some 60 cars being involved in the pileup were incorrect.— Kyodo News
Three Bridges in Myanmar of world fame Part II

Maha Saddhama Jotika dhaja
Sithu Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt

(Continued from Part I)

To the east of the Lake, on a vast land amidst the local villages is Yadanapon University, founded about 3 decades ago. A portion of the lake was drained off and land filled to construct a motor road across the lake. The lake and natural surrounding were very badly spoiled. In High monsoon the lake’s flood water spilled over to Yadanapon University making classrooms un-useable. In summer because the water is reduced, water transport in the lake faces difficulties. Recently, there is media report that fishes and other water creatures die due to pollution.

Today with the boom of Myanmar tourism, U Pein Wooden Bridge has become a business centre, shops, eateries, cafeterias, beer bars, fermented toddy juice hats, local snacks, souvenir shops, sellers of local products, cotton, silk fabric, local snacks, souvenir shops, esteries, cafeterias, beer bars, fermented toddy juice hats, local snacks, souvenir shops, sellers of local products cotton, silk fabric, local snacks, souvenir shops, esteries, cafeterias, beer bars, fermented toddy juice hats, local snacks, souvenir shops, sellers of local products cotton, silk fabric, local snacks, souvenir shops, esteries, cafeterias, beer bars, fermented toddy juice hats, local snacks, souvenir shops, sellers of local products cotton, silk fabric, local snacks, souvenir shops, esteries, cafeterias, beer bars, fermented toddy juice hats, local

Espirit de Corps should not be counterproductive

Khin Maung Aye

WORKING in teams is part of our daily life be it in business organisations, in educational institutions, in sports and so on. It is common knowledge that teamwork brings about spirit and strong sense of togetherness are more likely to achieve success. Nevertheless, there arises a question as to how we actually build this team spirit or espirit de corps.

There is no doubt that high team spirit is a desirable trait for any team. The benefits are straight forward. As each and every member wants the team as a whole to succeed, they are highly motivated, committed and co-operative, which has led them to exert their utmost effort. As a consequence, they perform their best in the most effective and efficient manner. Another obvious benefit is that all members are satisfied with what they do; they have job satisfaction.

Quite evidently, the high spirited teams may spread out their energy, the esprit de corps and morale to other groups in the work environment, thereby exerting a positive influence upon the spirit and culture of the entire organisation. On the other hand, this team spirit can be counterproductive because this kind of spirit can evolve into group ethnocentrism and can cause dysfunctional competition and conflict between groups. Their pride as the conquerors and their elitist behaviour can have negative impact on the organisation as a whole.

It is, therefore, worth recalling a practice of socialist labour emulation in the days of the socialist regime led by General Ne Win. The factories, mills and work establishments were ardently vying with one another, exerting their utmost effort to increase their productivity. Since they were bent upon enhancing the quantity to win the best productivity award, they were forced to compensate the quality for quantity. They did not bother very much in regard to quality control. This is the darker side of the labour emulation.

Such being the case, it is of utmost importance to build the team spirit in a healthy way. There should be a mechanism to avoid the extremes, bringing co-operation and co-ordination, not harming the unity among different groups across the organisation.

Write for us

We appreciate your feedback and contributions. If you have any comments or would like to submit editorials, analyses or reports please email khinmaungaye@hotmail.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.
Bagan restorations to be completed in February

The Archaeological Department under the Ministry of Culture has announced that the restorations to some of the pagodas in Bagan will be completed in February 2016. The project is receiving emergency funding from UNESCO. UNESCO provided US$30,000 for the restoration of temples that were damaged by weather in November 2015.

"The pagodas, which are in need of emergency maintenance, are being restored with $30,000 of financial assistance from UNESCO. The Bagan Conservation Group and the Archaeological Department are joining forces to carry out six restoration activities, including efforts to conserve ancient wall paintings featured inside the pagodas and masonry, which is coming away from the ceilings," explained U Thein Lwin, the deputy managing director of the department. Priority has been given to the Sular Mani, Taunggyi Ni and Lawkha Hteitpan pagodas, as they require emergency restoration on the artistic handwork, featured relics and wall murals.

The Ministry of Culture also announced that the Indian government is assisting with the restoration of the Ananda Pagoda, removing dirt and imperfections from wall paintings, as well as restoring the brick walls of the pagoda, and the grounds around it, to their original state.

According to the ministry, evening dinner ceremonies and tourist services are prohibited from being held on the grounds of Myanmar heritage buildings, and legal action will be taken against government departments and travel companies that do not comply with this regulation.—Myitmakha News Agency

Three Bridges in Myanmar of world fame Part II

>>from page 8

The great Bridge was designed by Sir A.M.Rendell and Co. of London, England and Pennsylvania and Maryland Bridge and construction Co of U.S.A constructed the Bridge. Construction materials were shipped from New York, U.S.A. Thick jungles were cleared and with many difficulties the Bridge was constructed crossing very steep and high ravines. But it took only nine months to complete construction.

A total of 4311 tons of iron and steel and one and a half million iron wedges were used. Ten 120 foot oblong iron frames, seven 60 ton oblong iron frames, sixteen 40 ton posts oblong iron frames and sixteen steel posts from the main structure. The Bridge is 2260 feet long and the height from the lowest ground level to the rail line on the bridge is 1100 feet high. It is learnt that under the post No. 12 of the bridge an under-ground stream flows. From that stream to the bridge is 870 feet high.

The total cost of the construction of the Bridge was Indian Rupees [1698200] or English pounds [113200]. This Bridge not only provides an important link in transport and communication between Myanmar Proper and Northern Shan State, but also a major transport rail way line to Namtu Silver Mines.

When the Second World War reached Myanmar, the Japanese army invaded Myanmar and the British retreated to India. The British bombed the bridge when they used “scorch earth” tactics during their retreat. Again, when the Japanese invaders had to retreat in the last phase of the Second World War they exploded the Bridge.

When the Second World War was over, and Myanmar regained her independence, the Department of Myanmar Railways repaired and renovated the Bridge. The repair and renovation work began in 1948 and completed in 1950. In August of 1950 the Bridge was back into operation. The cost of repair was Myanmar kyats 32 hundred thousands.

Gokhteik Bridge crossing deep ravines with sub-terracean stream and rivers flowing right under is foundation is the marvel of the world. It was the favorite object of visual and performing artists. Gokhteik bridge appeared in travelogues, photographs and paintings of the world. The Bridge was sung, and shown in songs and in films.

The writer of this article still re-captures Myanmar stant films in which film heroes Tin Pe, Tin Ngwe, Tin Swe, Chit Swe and Shwe Ba showing their stant while riding the train crossing Gokhteik Bridge.

Among songs sung in praise of Gokhteik Bridge one particular hit was named “Kamboza” composed by Nan-daw Shye Saya Tin and sung by a nationally famed singer-dancer Liberty Mya Yin. The following are some excerpts and chorus:

Crystal clear Brook
Cascading from Jungle nooks
Constantly flowing down and down
Day in, day out creating nostalgia.

Petite Shan girl is a guide
So he thinks of me with delight
He is Nan Shey Ko Gyi Tin.

Dress me with a scarf around.
And a Paline basket on shoulders down
Me, his sister Liberty Mya Yin.

Chorus
In Theimni and Lashio towns
Clouds are gathering to rain down.
It couldn’t be seasonal rain.
Gokhteik of Kamboza on tops glides
River Duthawaddy is always alive.

Gokhteik Bridge today [2016] is 113 years old [1903-2016] deserving its rightful entry not only in the Guinness Book of world wonders but also in UNESCO engravings of World Cultural heritage.

(Meaning to be continued)

Myanmar Development Institute (MDI) officially launched

MYANMAR Development Institute (MDI) was officially launched, with a workshop to announce its master plan at Nay Pyi Taw recently, according to Korea International Cooperation Agency-KOICA.

In collaboration with Korea Development Institute (KDI), KOICA is implementing the one of the flagship projects named ‘Establishment of MDI’ from 2014 to 2019 with 20 million USD.

MDI will play a role of national think-tank in Myanmar as it is a decision maker to plan national socioeconomic and country policy after its launching.

At the ceremony to unveil the signboard of the MDI to mark its official launching, Union Minister of Ministry of Science and Technology, Dr. Khin San Yi said, “With lots of expectation, we are glad to have a chance that Korea, which was the least developed country but have developed to one of OECD member in 30 years, share its development experiences.”

Korean Ambassador of the Republic of Korea, Mr. Lee Back-Soon remarks, “The active researches and its operation by both Myanmar government officials and representatives of MDI will lead success of MDI establishment, and I expect MDI supports the economic development in Myanmar.”

MDI Central Working Committee Chair, Dr. Zaw Oo, announced MDI master plan including its vision, promoting system and research subjects as a policy think-tank, and requested MDI Central Committee, composed by nine ministries, to bring sustainable support and discussion.—GNLM
Suicide bomber kills at least ten in northwest Pakistan

PESHAWAR (Pakistan) — A suicide bomber blew himself up close to a police checkpoint in northwest Pakistan yesterday, killing at least ten people and wounding more than 20, officials said.

The bomber rammed his motorcycle into the roadside checkpoint in the Jamrud area of Pakistan’s volatile Federally Administered Tribal Areas, local government official Munir Khan told Reuters.

“He was riding an explosives-laden motorcycle and hit the checkpoint and the vehicle of the line officer,” Khan said.

Among the dead were at least five police officers including the line officer whose vehicle was targeted by the bomber, and a journalist, officials said.

The attack took place in an area where security forces have stepped up their fight against Pakistani Taliban and other militant groups along the border with Afghanistan, following the massacre of more than 150 people, mostly children, at an army-run school in December 2014.

A spokesperson for the Hayatabad Medical Complex in Peshawar, where the wounded were evacuated, said earlier that the hospital had received six bodies, including that of a child.

No one has claimed responsibility for the blast. Last month, a suicide bomber attacked a government office in the region.

The army says it killed more than 500 PKK rebels in the campaign, adding to a death toll of more than 40,000 people killed since the PKK took up arms in 1984. The pro-Kurdish HDP party says some 100 civilians have been killed in the fighting.

“The process is to a large extent completed,” Davutoglu was reported as saying on Tuesday, as he outlined plans to make Cizre an administrative centre of Sur district.

Hundreds of locals have left the town hit by conflict, many complaining of indiscriminate operations.

Davutoglu’s comments were published after the governor of Sirnak province said a round-the-clock curfew in the town of Silopi, near the Iraqi border, would only be enforced between 6 pm (1600 GMT) and 5 am (0300 GMT) from Tuesday.

The town of Cizre, further west near the Syrian border, and the Sur district of the region’s largest city in Diyarbakir remain under 24-hour curfew.

Davutoglu said there were plans to make Cizre the administrative centre of Sirnak province, as the mountainous town of Sirnak was in a confined area, as part of a “master plan in the fight against terror”, Milliyet newspaper reported.

There was a similar plan to move the administrative centre of Hakkari province, on the Iraqi and Iranian borders, to Yuksekova because of better security and service infrastructure there, he said.

The PKK, which says it is fighting for autonomy for Turkey’s Kurds, is designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and European Union.

Ankara launched a peace process with the PKK’s jailed leader Abdullah Ocalan in late 2012, but it ground to a halt early in 2015 amid a general election.

Turkey’s leaders have said they will continue negotiations until the militants are defeated.

President Tayyip Erdogan said last week some 300 police officers and soldiers have died in the conflict since July.
China fourth quarter growth weakest since 2009 as policy misstep fears grow

BEIJING — China’s economic growth in the fourth quarter slowed to the weakest since the financial crisis, adding pressure on a government that is struggling to restore the confidence of investors after perceived policy missteps jolted global markets.

Concerns about China’s policy making ability have shot to the top of global investors’ risk lists for 2016 after a renewed plunge in its stock markets and yuan currency CN¥=CFX1 stoked worries that the economy may be rapidly deteriorating.

After being a major locomotive of global growth in recent years, China is located in the midst of a protracted slowdown. Weak exports, factory over-capacity, slowing investment, a soft property market and high debt levels are among突出问题 for the government as it tries to transition from a centrally planned economy to a more market-oriented model that will require leaders to cede a large degree of control.

Growth in fourth-quarter gross domestic product (GDP) eased as expected to 6.1 per cent from a year earlier, down from 6.9 per cent in the third quarter and the weakest pace of expansion since the first quarter of 2009.

Full-year growth of 6.9 per cent, envisioned by Western standards, was China’s poorest showing in quarter of a century.

Other data yesterday suggested the world’s second-largest economy lost more steam in December, dashing hopes that a year-long flurry of government stimulus would finally kick in.

That said, there were no signs of a meltdown that some traders have feared.

Zhang Yiping, an economist at China Merchants Securities, said the struggling property market — a major driver of demand for materials from cement to steel — was mostly to blame for the difficulties China is having boosting performance.

“The policy to boost the property industry conducted in 2015 hasn’t taken effect yet. I see more downward risks for China’s economic growth in 2016, and they actually look fairly severe.”

Property investment rose just 1 per cent, a near 7-year-low, while new construction plunged 14 per cent.

The China statistics bureau told a news conference that the 2015 growth had been “hard won”, adding that the structural adjustment of the Chinese economy is at a crucial stage.

That highlights the difficulties Beijing will face in getting policy — be it monetary easing, reforms, increased fiscal spending or cutting debt — to translate into actual growth in 2016.

Premier Li Keqiang said in December the government would “take a knife” to loss-making zombie companies as part of efforts to reduce overcapacity in the system, but that would require tough political decisions such as allowing more bankruptcies and potential layoffs.

Other top priorities Beijing has announced for 2016 include shrinking a glut of unsold homes, deleveraging balance sheets, reducing costs for businesses and encouraging new technology.

And analysts say policymakers will need to improve their communication with markets, after the People’s Bank of China sowed confusion globally this month by allowing the yuan to weaken sharply then intervening to stop the fall. Its intent is still not clear.

Even if Beijing hikes spending and cuts interest rates again as widely expected, analysts expect growth will cool further this year to 6.5 per cent. Some China watchers believe real growth levels are already much lower.

Some analysts argue that Beijing has been too cautious in lowering rates and freeing up cash in the banking system, keeping real interest rates too high given low returns on investment.

After six rate cuts since November 2014, China’s main policy rate is still fairly high at 4.35 per cent.—Reuters

Investors eye growing number of online UK estate agents

LONDON — Britain’s resilient property market is fuelling increasing numbers of online estate agents, and investors are warming to a new business model whose fees often undercut those of traditional estate agents.

Further property sector growth is likely as a global slowdown decreases the likelihood of British interest rates remaining at record lows. The sector’s reputation as a “safe haven” grew after the 2008 credit crisis when investors poured money into bricks-and-mortar.

Research firm Hardman says that online estate agent Purplebricks has become the fourth-biggest UK estate agent by number of property transactions since launching in mid-2014.

It charges much cheaper fees than traditional estate agents like Foxtons and Savills, and capitalises on the growing trend for online searches.

Already, around 90 per cent of property is sold when customers contact a traditional estate agency after a search on websites like Rightmove and Zoopla. Hardman analyst Mike Foster said.

Some analysts compared the “disruptive” technology-driven new businesses with the likes of ride-hailing service Uber, which is challenging old-fashioned taxi services.

Other unlisted online real estate companies, estimated by market research analysts to generate about $6 billion in annual agency fees, include EstatesDirect.com, set up by Poundland founder Steve ven Smith, HouseSimple.com and eMoov.co.uk.

Purplebricks listed on the London market in December. The stock has lost ground since then, partly hurt by a broader sell-off on world equity markets, but some analysts expect the shares to gradually recover.

“It’s not unusual to see some negative reaction in shares of a fairly new and innovative company at a time when the broader market sentiment is pretty bearish,” said David Battersby, investment manager at Redmayne-Bentley.

“But I believe that the experiment is going to have a huge traction,” Star investor Neil Woodford’s involvement with Purplebricks gives the company more credibility.

Woodford Investment Management, which manages 14 billion pounds, took up a 29 per cent stake in Purplebricks because of the company’s potential to grow.

FinnCap analyst Duncan Hall played down the threat from new online players, saying many customers still prefer face-to-face meetings with traditional estate agents.

But other analysts, such as Gavin Jago at Peel Hunt, point out that some of the new online firms have formed partnerships with local experts, combining the ease of online searching with traditional customer service.

Jago said the lower, fixed prices of online players will increase pressure on commission rates charged by traditional agencies.—Reuters

Taxi drivers in Hungary demand Uber to be shut down

BUDAPEST — Taxi drivers in Hungary’s capital demonstrated on Monday against ride-hailing service Uber, whose growing popularity they find unpalatable amid new regulations setting a fixed tariff for traditional taxi firms that is higher than Uber’s.

Taxi block a main road in Budapest’s city centre, Hungary, on 18 January 2016. Photo: Reuters

Uber blocked a major road crossing in central Budapest and drove around in city streets blocking much of the road traffic in the capital’s center. They said they would stay put until Uber was no longer downloadable to smartphones in Hungary.

Uber Technologies Inc’s [UBER.UL] service has triggered protests by taxi drivers from London to New Delhi as it upends traditional business models that require professional drivers to pay steep licensing fees to drive cabs.

Late in the afternoon the protest appeared to be weakening with some drivers leaving and those remaining divided about the resolve to continue in the face of police requests to open up the blockade, according to Reuters photographers at the scene.

About 140 vehicles took part in the demonstration, organisers said. Drone pictures by Drone Media Studio, published on the news web site 444.hu, showed a few dozen taxis blocking the thoroughfare.

In a statement posted on Facebook, the organisers demanded that Uber be banned in Hungary and Uber drivers be penalised for what they saw as breaches of the regulations for taxis.

“We stand up for our rights and demand an end to this lawlessness,” the protest organisers said in the statement. “We demand that the Uber application be switched off. Just get it done, period.”

The government will put the issue on the agenda of its meeting on Wednesday and consider all proposals, Prime Minister Viktor Orban’s chief of staff told state news agency MTI.

MTI also reported an Uber statement that said the protest by the taxi drivers underscored the need for new regulation that respects the presence and positive effects of new technologies.

Uber has attracted 80,000 users and 1,200 drivers in Budapest since its 2014 launch in the city, MTI quoted the company as saying last week.—Reuters
Australia says El Niño likely to end in Q2, La Niña may follow

SYDNEY — A strong El Niño weather pattern will likely end in the second quarter of 2016, with climate indicators either returning to normal or making way for La Niña conditions after that, the Australian Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) said yesterday.

La Niña is the opposite of the better-known El Niño weather event characterised by warmer waters in the tropical Pacific with knock-on effects that can cause billions of dollars of damage to food and water supplies around the globe.

Lashings by blizzards. From the site, which is frequently done before World War I.

Martin Passingham, leader of the region done before World War I. of Hobart. "All of these things really do tell the story more thoroughly." Two members of Mawson’s team had lost their lives by the time Australia’s first expedition to the Antarctic sailed back in 1913, after completing its scientific studies.

The Mawson’s Huts location, which the explorer termed the “home of the blizzard” for its ferociously winds, is recognised as a historic site and monument under the Antarctic Treaty. “The reason why Australia admisters claim to 42 percent of Antarctica is all because of Mawson and what he did here,” Passingham said.

British-born Mawson, a geology professor who gained fame for his feats of polar endurance, had been on an expedition to the Antarctic with explorer Ernest Shackleton from 1907 to 1909, and pioneered research in radioactive minerals.—Reuters

Antarctic restorers uncover century-old artifacts left by early explorers

Fisherman Gabriel Barreto stands on the shore of the Magdalena river, the longest and most important river in Colombia, in the drought-hit city of Honda, on 14 January. PHOTO: REUTERS

SYDNEY — Conservationists in Australia’s oldest Antarctic outpost have scraped away a hundred years of snow and ice to unearth items, from bullets to a bowl of peas, that reveal the harsh conditions battled by early explorer Douglas Mawson and his team.

Six restorers have painstakingly moved the equivalent of a 5-tonne truck of ice, or 30 cubic metres (39 cubic yards), out of a hut that was the base for critical geological and scientific surveys of the region done before World War I.

“You walk into the workshop now and the smells are very, very strong,” Martin Passingham, leader of the two-month restoration effort, told Reuters by satellite telephone from the site, which is frequently lashed by blizzards.

“The removal of the ice has let all of that smell come out of the floor and timbers,” he added. “You get a feeling of how people moved around the building and how cramped it would have been, with so many of them.”

Mawson’s Huts is Australia’s most isolated Antarctic outpost, perched on the edge of Commonwealth Bay, 2,696 km (1,675 miles) south of the Tasmanian capital of Hobart.

One of six complexes surviving in the world from the ‘Heroic Era’ of Antarctic exploration, it was used during 1912 and 1913 by Mawson’s expedition, which charted the region’s coastline and first described several of its bird and animal species.

“In the main hut there is stuff everywhere, a coal shovel beside the stove, jars and containers of food on the shelf, wooden spoons left on the kitchen bench,” said Passingham. “All of these things Pro-China lawmaker says Beijing must answer on missing HK booksellers

HONG KONG — One of Hong Kong’s staunchest pro-Beijing lawmakers said a bookseller’s tearful confession on state television to a hit-and-run accident more than a decade ago in China is unlikely to appease public concerns that he may have been abducted.

The Sunday evening broadcast on China Central Television ended months of mystery over the fate of Gui Minhai, a naturalised Swedish citizen, after he was last seen in October outside his apartment in the Thai seaside town of Pattaya.

In the strongest statement yet by anyone in Hong Kong’s pro-China camp, Legislative Council President Jasper Tsang said the taped confession by Gui was not enough.

“The China Central Television (CCTV) report did not seem to be able to calm the public. As the case drags on, there will be more speculation,” Tsang said late on Monday.

He said if more details did not come to light, the Hong Kong government should seek assistance from the central government in Beijing. CCTV could not be reached for comment.

Since late last year, four other associates of the Hong Kong-based publisher that specialises in selling and publishing gossiply political books on China’s Communist Party leaders have been unaccounted for.

Hong Kong police confirmed late on Monday that they had been advised by authorities in China’s southern Guangdong Province that one of them, British passport holder Lee Bo, was in the mainland.

Police said Guangdong officials also sent them a letter from Lee addressed to the Hong Kong government, and that Lee’s wife confirmed the writing was his.

Police said it was similar to one purportedly sent to his wife in which he said he “voluntarily” went to the mainland.

The disappearances have prompted fears that mainland Chinese authorities may be using shadowy tactics that erode the “one country, two systems” formula under which Hong Kong has been governed since its return to China from British rule in 1997.

“We should not speculate and criticisms should be based on fact,” Hong Kong leader Leung Chun-ying said yesterday. “I and SAR government are also very concerned about the case.”

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei said yesterday that he had nothing more to add about Gui’s case as Chinese media had already given a “rather detailed” report on his case.

On Lee’s case, he said he “did not understand” it.

Hong Kong was returned to China with a guarantee that it would have greater freedoms and separate laws from the mainland for 50 years.

The publishers’ books are banned on the mainland, although they are popular with Chinese tourists in Hong Kong.

“We will continue to raise this case at the highest levels,” a British Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s spokesperson said in an email response to Reuters, referring to Lee.

Sweden and the United States have also expressed concern over the disappearances.— Reuters
World’s oldest man Yasutaro Koide of Japan dies at 112

NAGOYA — Yasutaro Koide, a former tailor recognized by Guinness World Records as the oldest living man in August 2015, died at the age of 112 of chronic heart failure at a hospital in Nagoya, central Japan, in the early hours of yesterday, his relatives said.

Koide was recognized as the oldest man following the death last July of then-reigning oldest man in Japan, according to the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry.

At that time, he said the secret to longevity is “not pushing oneself and being happy about everything.”

Koide’s death makes 111-year-old Tokyo resident Masamitsu Yoshida the oldest man in Japan, according to the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry.

Koide’s death makes 111-year-old Tokyo resident Masamitsu Yoshida the oldest man in Japan, according to the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry.

The cause of the fire, which struck on the seventh floor of the building and spread through the attic to the roof, was so far unknown, the official said.

By mid-morning, the fire had been brought under control, he told Reuters.

“There is no longer any risk of it spreading, but the operation will still take a very long time,” he said.

The firemen had had great difficulty accessing the part of the building affected, he said.

The Ritz had no comment as the incident was still indicated yesterday.

The hotel was last renovated over a decade beginning in 1979 after its purchase by tycoon Mohamed Al-Fayed.

The latest work to restore the Ritz, which opened in 1898 and was the first Paris hotel to boast electricity on all floors and bathrooms that were inside rooms, began in August 2012 and is being overseen by interior architect Thierry W. Despont.

It includes the building of a "discreet tunnel" that will enable the rich and famous to come and go in privacy. It was at the Ritz that Diana, Princess of Wales, spent her last night in 1997 before the car crash that killed her.

PARIS — Flames ripped through the top floor of the luxury Ritz Paris hotel yesterday, as around 60 firefighters battled to put out a fire which threatened the work of a 3-1/2-year restoration programme just weeks ahead of a planned re-opening.

Some 150 workers were evacuated from the site in the chic Place Vendome square in central Paris at around 0500 GMT, where about 15 fire trucks were on the scene.

Paris fire service spokesman Captain Yvon Bot said on French television:

"The cause of the fire, which struck on the seventh floor of the building and spread through the attic to the roof, was so far unknown, the official said."

By mid-morning, the fire had been brought under control, he told Reuters:

"There is no longer any risk of it spreading, but the operation will still take a very long time," he said.

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It was at the Ritz that Diana, Princess of Wales, spent her last night in 1997 before the car crash that killed her.

—Reuters
Michael Jackson collection of 100 drawings to be sold

NEW YORK — A collection of King of Pop Michael Jackson’s drawings is to go up for sale.

Joseph McBratney claims to have privately amassed over 100 drawings by the late “Thriller” hitmaker — who died in June 2009 aged 50 — including sketches of The Beatles, the late Princess Diana, Abraham Lincoln, Charlie Chaplin among others, reported the New York Post.

“It’s a big responsibility, I put this collection together. (I want to create) a non-profit endowment to help kids. It would be a shame for this beautiful property to be anything else but a healing property for suffering kids and adults who would never have the chance to be in recovery or treatment,” he said.

McBratney, who has also been known as Joe Brat, first began collecting the drawings after buying some of the “Billie Jean” star’s memorabilia on eBay, and then directed to a Mexican woman by a dealer, who didn’t speak English but said she’d acquired a number of the sketches while working for Sony.

All the pictures are signed by the star and the collector said he has had them authenticated by an autograph authentication service. McBratney also wants to stage an exhibition of the drawings...—PTI

The Eagles guitarist Glenn Frey died at 67

LOS ANGELES — Glenn Frey, the prolific guitarist, singer, songwriter and founding member of the Eagles, died on Monday at age 67, the American rock band known for “Hotel California” and dozens of other hits said on its website.

Frey died in New York City of complications from rheumatoid arthritis, acute ulcerative colitis and pneumonia, the band said.

The Eagles, whose album, “Their Greatest Hits 1971-1975,” is the second-best-selling record of all time in the United States, helped create the freewheeling soundtrack of 1970s America and remain ubiquitous on rock radio nearly half a century later.

Their blend of rock with coun-try music influences fueled their success with hit songs such as “Desperado,” “Already Gone” and “Take It to the Limit.”

Frey collaborated with drummer Don Henley to co-write many of the band’s biggest hits. While Henley most often sang lead vocals for the band, Frey played guitar and piano, was key to the band’s harmony as a back-up vocalist, and at times sang lead.

His performances on “Take It Easy” and “Peaceful Easy Feel-ing” on the band’s debut album in 1972 helped rocket the Eagles to fame, and he later sang lead on hits “Lyin’ Eyes” and “Already Gone.”

Frey died a little more than a week after another rock great, David Bowie, died at age 69 in New York, apparently of liver cancer.

Detroit-born Frey and Henley co-founded the Eagles in 1971 in Los Angeles after playing backup for rock singer Linda Ronstadt.

Henley in a statement praised Frey as the “one who started it all” for the Eagles.

“Glen was the spark plug, the man with the plan,” Henley said.

He had an encyclopedic knowl-edge of popular music and a work ethic that wouldn’t quit. He was funny, bullheaded, mercurial, generous, deeply talented and driven.

The band’s original members also included Bernie Leadon and Randy Meisner. Several other musicians, including Joe Walsh, joined in the 1970s.

After the Eagles disbanded in 1980, Frey had a successful solo career, recording songs the “One You Love” and “The Heat Is On.” Several of his compositions were for films or TV shows, and Frey took on a side career as an actor, including a small part in 1996 film “Jerry Maguire.”

In 1994, the Eagles reunited and released an album titled “Hell Freezes Over.” The name jokingly referred to Henley’s previous state-ment that the band would only get back together when “hell freezes over.”

Henley said he viewed Frey as a kind of brother, but acknowledged that, like in many families, “there was some dysfunction” in the relationship.—Reuters

Winstons on DiCaprio Oscar nod: ‘It’s going to be Leo’s year’

LONDON — Leonardo DiCaprio has been nominated five times for an acting Oscar and the movie he stars in, “The Revenant” won the golden statuette last month.


DiCaprio, won a Golden Globe for “The Revenant” and is seen by many pundits as the one who will win the best actor Oscar at the Academy Awards ceremo ny on February 28.

“I do think it probably will be, I think you can sort of feel it. And I think that everyone wants it for him and it would be amaz- ing,” Winstons told Reuters at the Critics’ Circle Film Awards in London on Sunday night.

But it’s also slightly difficult for me too because Michael Fass-bender has been nominated...and I think his performance is so extra-ordinary. But...I think you can sort of feel the temperature, it’s probably going to be Leo’s year.”

Winstons, 40, who also starred with DiCaprio in “Revolutionary Road” in 2008, is herself Oc-sar-nominated for “Steve Jobs” in the best supporting actress cat-egory.

“They were like the golden tickets this year, they were really very coveted spots I think, par-ticularly in this category and so I am absolutely thrilled,” she said.

On Sunday, Winstons picked up the supporting actress of the year award for her portrayal in “Steve Jobs” of the late Apple co-founder’s colleague Joanna Hoffman.

Other winners at the Critics’ Circle Film Awards included “45 Years” co-stars Charlotte Rampling and Tom Courtenay who took the actor and actress of the year prize.

Action adventure “Mad Max: Fury Road” won film of the year with the movie’s George Miller taking the director of the year award.—Reuters

K-pop agency says did not force Taiwan star to apologise over flag

SEOUL — A South Korean entertainment agency behind a 16-year-old singer who triggered a fresh rift between China and Taiwan by holding a Taiwan flag said on Monday it did not force her to apologise.

Chou Tzyu, the only Tai-wanese member of South Korean K-pop girl band Twice, inadvertently shot to the top of Taiwan’s election agenda at the weekend. In a video released late on Friday by JYP Entertainment Corp that quickly went viral, Chou said she felt proud to be Chinese and that there was only one China, fueling suspicion that the agency may have pressured her to apologise to avoid upsetting fans in mainland China, a key market. The video shows Tzyu apologising and bowing. She had held the flag in a TV show.

“An individual’s conviction cannot or must not be forced by a company and such a thing did not happen,” JYP Entertainment, one of South Korea’s top talent management companies, said in a statement on Monday.

“AFTER Tzyu’s parents came to South Korea and discussed with Tzyu, they made a final decision and went ahead with announcing her position,” JYP added. China considers self-ruled Taiwan a breakaway province of “one China”, ruled in Beijing, ineligible for country status or its own flag.

Taiwan president-elect Tsai Ing-wen, from the pro-independ-ence opposition Democratic Pro-gressive Party, told reporters as she cast her vote that Chou’s video has seriously hurt the feelings of Taiwan people.

In Beijing, China’s Taiwan Affairs Office said the spat was “used” by certain political forces in Taiwan to “stir up the feelings of people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.”—Reuters

Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet pose at the European premiere of ‘Revolutionary Road’ in Leicester Square in London in 2009. PHOTO: REUTERS
Wellington — New Zealand’s booming tourism industry is emerging as a cornerstone of an economy hit by declining dairy exports, but the hordes descending on silver screen locations such as Hobbiton are stretching the small island nation’s resources.

While the growing numbers of visitors bring in much needed revenue, there is increasing public criticism as campers litter parts of the pristine countryside and locals blame foreign drivers for causing carnage on the roads.

“The biggest problem is the mess they leave behind,” said Chris Choa, spokesman for Tasman District Council in the South Island, where “freedom campers”, who park overnight in areas that have no facilities, have riled residents as they use bushes for toilets.

Until recently, dairy was the backbone of the island nation’s economy, representing around 25 per cent of exports. But dairy prices have dropped sharply since 2014, relative to 2.4 million tourists came in 2014.

The upcoming Chinese New Year will mark an expansion of over 2 per cent in 2015, indicating an all-over peak period for the country, the Cypriot Statistical Service said on Monday.

Based on the passengers survey carried from the beginning of January to the end of December last year, the Statistical Service said a total of 2.7 million tourists came to Cyprus, relative to 2.4 million in 2014. A sizeable increase was recorded in December 2015, with 78,348 visitors compared to just 56,863 in December 2014, an increase of 37.8 per cent.

The spike is partly attributed to the cancellation of trips by tourists to Egypt following the downing of a Russian jet over Sinai Peninsula on 31 October and the tourist embargo imposed by Russia on 24 November by Turkish jets. Cypriot minister of tourism Yiorgos Lakkotrypas said the increase of tourist arrivals in the last year improves the prospects of 2016, noting “we can proceed to the sustainable development of the sector.”

The increase of tourist arrivals for the whole year helped the Cyprus economy mark an expansion of over 2 per cent against the 1.5 originally forecast. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, tourism contributes to a quarter of Cyprus’ economy, both directly and indirectly.—Xinhua
Education key to preventing match-fixing: Murray

MELBOURNE — Young tennis players need to be educated about the implications of match-fixing and the sport needs to be more proactive in talking about the issue, world number two Andy Murray said yesterday.

The start of the Australian Open has been overshadowed by a report accusing tennis authorities of failing to take action against players repeatedly flagged up to the Tennis Integrity Unit (TIU) over suspicions of matches being thrown.

Speaking after he eased into the second round at Melbourne Park, Murray said Novak Djokovic’s revelation that he had been offered $200,000 to throw a match in the early years of his career highlighted the temptation facing young players.

“I think when people come with those sums of money when you’re that age I think sometimes people can make mistakes,” the Briton told reporters. “I do think it’s important that from a younger age players are better educated and are made more aware of what they should do in those situations and how a decision like that can affect your career, can affect the whole sport.”

Australian teenager Thanasi Kokkinakis told local radio in Melbourne on Tuesday that he had been approached on social media about throwing matches.

“You read some stuff on your Facebook page, just these randoms from nowhere saying, ‘I’ll pay you this much to tank the game,’” the 19-year-old told 3AW Radio. “You don’t really take it seriously.” Tennis authorities on Monday rejected suggestions they had suppressed match-fixing cases and backing the TIU’s ability to fight corruption in the sport. The profile given to match-fixing by the report’s release on the opening morning of the year’s first grand slam is nevertheless likely to see corruption tackled with more vigour, perhaps with a funding boost to allow the TIU to expand beyond its current six staff.

Murray, who said he had never been approached, was of the view it would have been better if the first the players had heard of the matter had not been through the media. “You have to go and speak to the players rather than them reading about it in the newspapers or listening to it on the TV or the radio,” he said. “I think the more proactive you are with educating young players the better...” — Reuters

De Gea's brilliance not lost on United team mates

LONDON — Manchester United goalkeeper David de Gea has often been the rock holding his side’s defence together during a difficult season, and the Spaniard’s string of saves in the 1-0 win at Liverpool again proved his value to the club.

The impressive 25-year-old Spanish international was targeted by Real Madrid all through the close season and when a proposed move fell through at the last minute, his team mates were naturally delighted to see the world class keeper stay.

“David is a very important player in our squad. We are very happy to have him and happy that he didn’t go last summer. He is fully committed to this football club,” midfielder Morgan Schneiderlin told the club’s website (www.manutd.com).

“When you have a player like this in goal, it’s good for us, because we know we are not going to concede many goals and he is going to make some saves.” — Reuters

Arsenal mentally stronger than ever, says Walcott

LONDON — Pundits have been lining up to question Arsenal’s mental toughness and their willingness to dig deep in big games, but Theo Walcott says leadership figures in the dressing room have given the Premier League leaders a sense of self-belief.

While Arsene Wenger’s side have built a reputation for flair and attacking football over the years, they have also found it difficult to maintain a title challenge, with critics pointing to fragile defending and a lack of grit.

Arsenal, who last lifted the title in 2003/04 when they went through the league season unbeaten, lead the standings on goal difference from Leicester City but failed to pad their advantage on Sunday when they were held 0-0 at Stoke.

“The mental strength in this dressing room’s the strongest it’s ever been,” Walcott told the club’s website, adding that the arrival of goalkeeper Petr Cech from Chelsea last June had added some steel to the side.

“When you have the likes of Petr Cech come into the dressing room as well, he just enhances that. He’s a leader in that dressing room as well.

“We’ve just got to look at him because he’s obviously been at the top level and won many things. We all have the belief he’s got that we can push on.”

With just seven points separating the leaders from fifth-placed Manchester United after 22 games, Walcott said the title race was wide open.

“You can’t tell what’s going to happen this year, it’s just so tight,” the England international said. “The amount of teams that could potentially win this league, it’s probably going to be the most exciting Premier League for a neutral ever.

“No one can call it at this moment in time but we’re top of the league and we can be proud of that.” Arsenal host champions Chelsea, who are 14th, in the league on Sunday.— Reuters