Sacred bone relic arrives Mandalay

A SACRED bone relic of the Buddha arrived Mandalay by plane yesterday.
The bone relic was conveyed by Mr Drukpa Thuksey Rinpoche and Buddhist monks from northern India.
The sacred bone relic was taken to the Sitagu International Buddhist Academy in Sagaing by officials from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Sitagu Buddhist missionaries.

"The relic is a piece of the Buddha’s spine. We’ve maintained it with reverence since the days of our forefathers. Upon the invitation by the Sitagu Sayadaw, the sacred bone relic has arrived in Myanmar for the first time. We are proud to bring the sacred relic here," said the Venerable Sonam Wangd, a member of the relic’s entourage.

The bone relic will leave Sagaing today for a tour through Mandalay, Nay Pyi Taw, Meiktila, Okpo, Taungoo and Yangon, where the Buddhist devotees will be able to pay homage to it.

Yangon residents will be able to pay homage to the bone relic at Shwedagon Pagoda.—Khin Yadana

Original price of Malaysian work visas restored

THE Myanmar Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security has agreed to grant work visa to over 8,000 Myanmar workers at the previous price of US$6 after it was raised to $57 on 18 January.
The decision was made after a trilateral discussion on 19 January on the increase in the price of Malaysian visas for Myanmar workers between the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, the Myanmar Foreign Employment Entrepreneurs Federation (MFEF) and the One Stop Centre (OSC) – a joint operation of companies from Malaysia and Myanmar that provide visa services to Myanmar workers seeking employment in Malaysia.

“We held a consultation after we heard from the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security that those 8,000 workers who were permitted to travel and work in Malaysia experienced difficulty as a result of the rise in the price of the visa. Ultimately, we asked [the workers] to pay a visa fee of $6. We must submit the list of workers to Nay Pyi Taw by 22 January. Starting on Monday next week, we will accept all of the 8,000 workers with visa fees of $6," said U Saing Si from the information department of the MFEF.

The negotiations were the result of objections by engineers and workers in December 2015 and January 2016 to plans to raise visa fees. —Khin Yadana

PAY ANYWHERE

MPU, UnionPay to introduce international debit card

A DUAL-FUNCTION debit card to be released by the Myanmar Payment Union (MPU) and China-based UnionPay will be introduced in Myanmar to assist travellers with domestic and international payments, an official of the Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) said yesterday.

Introduced by Asian Green Development (AGD) Bank, the AGD MPU-UnionPay debit card can be used as an MPU card at home and as a UnionPay card outside Myanmar, CBM deputy director-general U Win Taw told reporters.

The debit card can be used at ATMs, and points of sale and online both in Myanmar and abroad. There are 800 ATMs and 3,000 electronic points of sale across Myanmar.

Myanmar introduced MasterCard as the first international electronic payment card in the country in November 2012, followed by Visa in December of the same year, UnionPay in February 2013 and the Japan Credit Bureau (JCB) card in September 2013, all in cooperation with private Myanmar banks.

International bank cards came to Myanmar after the US has eased some of its financial sanctions on Myanmar, before which foreign visitors have been unable to use international credit cards since 2003.

MPU was established in September 2011 by 17 domestic banks in Myanmar, including three state-owned and 14 private banks. The MPU card was first offered to Myanmar citizens for domestic use in November 2012. Meanwhile, international banking card companies are being invited to join the MPU member bank network and sign agreements with Myanmar to enable international e-payment services.—Xinhua

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Over 170 foreigners enrol to study Myanmar at UFL during 2015 – 2016

A TOTAL of 173 foreigners from 12 countries were given permission to study Myanmar language at the University of Foreign Languages (UFL) in Yangon during the academic year of 2015 – 2016, it is known from the academic institution.

According to the records of the UFL, between the years of 1974 – 2015, the university handed out 41 bachelor of the arts degrees and 84 diplomas in Myanmar language, while a total of 1,239 students successfully completed language classes.

A Diploma in Myanmar language for foreigners lasts two years, while a BA is four years in length. Myanmar language classes on the other hand ranged between basic, intermediate and advanced level and run for less than a year. Those who completed the language classes were given a course completion certificate. There are some difficulties though in teaching foreigners. In terms of how we overcome [those difficulties], we practice a visual form of teaching through prompt cards.” explained Dr. Kyi Kyi Moe, professor and head of the Myanmar language department of UFL.

As well as 173 new students enrolled in Myanmar language at the university during the year of 2015 – 2016, the total number attending the university that year, including those second and third year students, was 227. “I’ve come from Korea to study Myanmar language. I’m now in my third year of study. My father is also in Myanmar, doing business. That’s why I want to be fluent in the language. I’ve also come here because I’m interested in the country.” said a third year Myanmar major student from Korea, Ma Kyay Sin May.—Myanmar News Agency

MFFG to contribute building for MWCDF

THE 13th regular session of the first Pyidaungsu Hluttaw entered its 33rd day yesterday, with the sessions documenting plans to establish new towns and villages and the government’s second five-year short-term development plan. One MP also read out a report before the parliament.

The parliament outlined the formation and boundaries of five new villages in Mon State and extended two towns in Maungdaw Township, Rakhine State.

Next, an MP read out a report on the findings of Joint Public Accounts Committee regarding the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Development Fund for 2014-2015.

Then, parliamentarians discussed the draft of the second five-year, short-term development plan, which will span from the 2016-2017 fiscal year to 2020-2021.

Union Minister for National Planning and Economic Development Dr Kan Zaw explained the policies of the people-centred plan and called for popular participation in the projects.

The five-year plan is aimed at creating sound foundations for investments and economic development, thereby contributing to Myanmar’s industrialisation, the Union minister said.

Finally, the five-year plan was documented by the parliament.—Myanmar News Agency

Meeting on accommodation for new MPs held

A COORDINATION meeting on accommodation for parliamentarians to the second Parliament session was held at guest house-2 of Nay Pyi Taw Development Committee yesterday, attended by Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Thura U Shwe Mann.

After hearing reports on preparatory works, the Speaker thanked officials concerned who are preparing accommodation, transportation, health and security for the new members in Parliament. Next, those present submitted reports on general matters, and the meeting came to an end with concluding remarks by the Speaker.

Also present at the meeting were Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, chairperson of Pyithu Hluttaw Rule of Law and Tranquility, parliamentarians and officials.—Myanmar News Agency

Authorities and MPs are discussing accommodation for new MPs.

Durability of scorched Mingalar Zay to be tested

THE Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC) and the Myanmar Engineers Association (MEA) will form a committee to test the durability quality of the recently blistered Mingalar Zay.

It is known, in accordance with the invitation of the YCDC, that the special cases inspection committee under the MEA will carry out the inspections on the fire damage of the Mingalar Zay market which is located in Mingalar Taung Nyunt township of Yangon. “The MEA will carry out the inspections. We will wait for [their] results and then request their advice on how to go about properly carrying out restorations. We will plan to carry out restorations as quickly as possible,” explained U San Shwe Htun, Head of the Markets Department of the YCDC.

A committee will be formed which will include the MEA and members of the YCDC’s High-story Buildings Supervision and Markets Departments, while activities will be continued to be carried out to test the strength of endurance of the fire damaged market, it is known from the MEA.

U Nyan Maung San, chairperson of the special cases inspection committee under the MEA, said the aforementioned inspections will start from January 25 and last approximately one week, after which further discussions will be held to find an answer as to the best way to carry out restoration activities.

“We will start inspections after January 25. The colours show the extent of the fire damage which can be seen with one’s own eyes. We will also carry out x-rays of the concrete. We will check the data collected from the x-rays, whether the endurance of the concrete has weakened, and then make a record on the level of endurance,” he explained.

The aforementioned market caught fire in the small hours of January 19, incurring damages of over 36 million kyat, according to estimates revealed by the Fire Department. But it wasn’t the first time the four story building was seen ablaze, it has happened once before on 25 March 2010 but was reopened after restorations were made.—Myanmar News Agency
Ground-breaking ceremony for World Buddhist Library held

A Ground-breaking ceremony for the construction of the World Buddhist Library was held in conjunction with a cash donation ceremony in Pobbathiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw, yesterday.

First, the congregation led by Daw Naing Swe Htoo, wife of Vice-President Dr Sai Mauk Kham, Acting Chief of the General Staff (Arms, Navy and Air) and Commander-in-Chief (Air) General Khin Aung Myint, the Union Ministers U Soe Win, U Ohn Myint, U Win Tun, U Khin Maung Soe, U Zeyar Aung and U Win Myint offered provisions to the members of the Sangha.

Next, they received cash donation for the construction of World Buddhist Library by wellwishers.

The Acting Chief of the General Staff and Union minister drove stakes at the ground-breaking ceremony and sprinkled scented water on them.

According to sources the Myanmar Highland Company will build the two-storey World Buddhist Library in which the main library hall, a hall to house relics and offices will be included.

An estimated construction cost is K2.5 million. Cash donations from the Manaung Public Company yesterday.

The purpose of establishing the library is to make it a major centre for the study of Buddhism for international scholars who are taking Buddhist studies and conducting researches on Buddhism, said Dr Bhaddanta Dhammadassami who is leading the establishment of the library.

At present, international Buddhist experts have to go to the library of Oxford University that holds a considerable collection of Buddhist materials. It is also planned that the library will keep Buddhist texts written in both Myanmar and several other languages at the library.

Following the completion of construction a park with more than 1,200 trees will be set up near the library with the aim of enabling park goers to have a brief understanding of three pitaka texts while there, said the Sayadaw.—Myanmar News Agency.

Myanmar hosts four-country commercial navigation meeting

MYANMAR hosted the 14th Joint Committee on Coordination of Commercial Navigation on Lancang-Mekong River (JCCCN) China, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Thailand yesterday.

The meeting is set to run for two days in Nay Pyi Taw.

In his address, Deputy Minister for Transport U Han Sein said that the four countries involved in the meeting can derive from their participation in improving water transportation.

Delegations from China, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand are set to discuss an international waterway development plan that can develop commercial navigation of the four upstream countries, the deputy minister added. According to the meeting, matters related to cooperation in rescue and relief works, an emergency plan drawn up by the member countries, transportation of oil and oil-related products and exchange of information among the ports of the four countries will also be discussed.—Myanmar News Agency

Yangon-Manaungkyun flights operating as normal despite loss: airliner says

DESPITE operating at a loss, flights to Manaungkyun are operating as normal, said a director from the Manaung Public Company yesterday.

Our business focuses on regional development, aiming to attract local and foreign investments to the region, said Director U Khin Maung Kywe.

According to the company, flights between Yangon and Manaungkyun are in operation using two aircraft with a seating capacity of 10 passengers each. Yangon-Manaung-Kyaikpun-Sittwe flights are being operated twice a week.

The airliner is running the flights by leasing the two aircraft from Myanmar National Airline.

An airfare ticket for the one and a half hour Yangon-Manaung flight is K77,000 per head. The flight service resumed last month after a long pause.

The company plans to use passenger jets following the extension to Manaung airport.—Ko Moe

Head of Departments appointed

1. The President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has confirmed the appointment of the following persons as heads of service organisations shown against each on expiry of the one-year probationary period.

Name

(A) Dr Daw Khin Naing Oo

Appointment

Yangon University of Economics

Higher Education Department

Ministry of Education

Rector

(B) Dr Kyaw Kyaw Khaung

University of East Yangon

Higher Education Department

Ministry of Education

Rector

(C) Dr Daw Si Si Hla Bu

Myick University

Higher Education Department

Ministry of Education

Rector

(D) Dr Saw Pyone Naing

Sagaying Institute of Education

Higher Education Department

Ministry of Education

Rector

(E) Dr Than Win

Kalay University

Higher Education Department

Ministry of Education

Rector

(F) Dr Aung Win Kyi

Loikaw University

Higher Education Department

Ministry of Education

Rector

(G) Dr Kyi Shwin

Bhamo University

Higher Education Department

Ministry of Education

Rector

(H) Dr Zaw Myint

Department of Myanmar Language Commission

Ministry of Education

Director General

(I) U Tun Than

Myanmar National Protection and Social Security Board

Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security

Director General

(J) Daw Aye Aye Kyi Thet

Office of Judicial Supervision of the Union

Supreme Court of the Union

Director General

2. The President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has appointed General Manager Dr Soe Naing of the No.3 Heavy Industries under the Ministry of Industry as Managing Director of the same enterprise on probation from the date he assumes charge of his duties.—Myanmar News Agency
Betel leaf growers get record price

GROWERS from NyaungU Township in Mandalay Region get a record price for betel leaves that are linked to the lower production this season, a grower says.

Snow was falling heavily during the past three months, which is a major cause of low yields of betel leaf in the region.

“I have never seen before that the leaves are worth over K15,000 per viss this year,” Daw Ohn Kyaw, a betel leaf supplier from Ooayint Village.

“We normally purchase up to 80 viss in NyaungU, Pakokku and Myingyan townships and nearby regions. We have difficulty collecting only 30 or 40 visses during these days in those areas,” she added.

Local investors eye overseas property market for investment

LOCAL businesspersons express increased interest in outbound real estate market to expand their investment, according to local property agents.

Currently, local real estate market is cool. There are a few clients who bought property to live in.

Prices of condominium apartments in neighbouring countries including Malaysia are cheaper than local condominiums.

Among the projects, Malaysia’s Paradiso Nuova Condominium is commercial hub Iskandar City, which has been established by Chinese and Malaysian governments since 2006, get the attention from global investors including Myanmar.

The Malaysia’s condominium project now sells for approximately K300,000 per square feet.

Every investor from different countries to receive ownership of the property and an opportunity to apply 10-year residency visa, according to the Malaysia law, which is a main reason why the local investors wish to invest in the outskirts of the country.

“I want to purchase a condo flat within the country but the price is very high and it is difficult to possess a high quality condo apartment which was constructed in line with the international norms as there are no condominium law in the country,” said a local entrepreneur.

Singapore includes in top investor lists in Malaysia, followed by Japan, Korea, China and Indonesia.—001(Kyemon)

Police incinerate energy drinks

LOCAL police have destroyed a cache of energy drinks called ‘Ranger’ that was declared unfit for human consumption at a ceremony held at an OSS public service office, Kawthaung on Tuesday.

At the ceremony, over 60 packages of Ranger energy drink were destroyed using a compactor by officials from the Region and Township Food and Drugs Administration.

Four days earlier a number of students were poisoned by the energy drink. The energy drinks were later incinerated by the Township Food and Drugs Administration. — Kyaw Soe (Kawthaung)

Police seize five unlicensed vehicles in Waw

POLICE confiscated five unlicensed vehicles on the Mawlamyine – Yangon road, Waw township, Bago region on Sunday.

Acting on a tip-off, police made a surprise check and found five unlicensed vehicles. The local police have filed charges against the owners.— Myanmar Police Force

Police seize yabba pills

POLICE seized yabba pills (a synthetic-amphetamine based narcotic), car number plates and mobile phones from a car which was parked in front of a house in Magyidan ward, Kyimyindine, on Tuesday.

Acting on a tip- off, members of the police searched the car and found 1600 pills, two car number plates and three mobile phones. The police also seized a motorbike from Sharr Hn Thant and Phway Kyaw. Charges have been filed against the men under the Anti-Narcotic Law.— Tin Maung Oo (Ahlone)

Two people injured by gas device

TWO people were injured during a balloon inflation on Zayarthukha road, Dagon Myothit South, Yangon on Tuesday.

U San Lwin, 48, and Daw Mya Yin,48, were injured when they filled gas into balloons. The local police station have filed charges against U San Lwin.— Myanmar Police Force

Authorities seized heroin and Stimulants

AUTHORITIES seized heroin at a house in Khat Cho village, Wine Maw township, on 18 January. Acting on a tip-off, members of the police searched the house owned by Hein Zaw Htet and found the host and his friend Aung Ko Win with 0.008 kilos of heroin.

The investigations have led to the arrest of another criminal called Nyein Maung, the next door neighbour of Hein Zaw Htet.

Similarly, police further seized 616 pills of stimulants, 0.0319 kilos of heroin and a mobile phone on a vehicle driven by Nyo Min with Ma Daung Naw on board.

Also, police seized 520 pills of stimulants and a mobile phone from Yarzar Tun at ward 40, Dagon Myothit South township. The police station filed charges against them under the Anti-Narcotic Law.— Myanmar Police Force

Police arrested gamblers in Nay Pyi Taw

POLICE arrested two men who were allegedly doing the football gambling in Zawana ward, Popathiri township, Nay Pyi Taw on 17 January. The police searched a house owned by Kyaw Linn Phyo (a) Ko Phyo. The police found the host and his friend Min Thant Zin with a stake of K321,000 and the documents of international football gambling.

Local police filed charges against them.— Ko Ko Yu (Nay Pyi Taw)
Indonesia’s porous border triggers alarm bells in fight against militants

JAKARTA — The ease with which three separate groups of ethnic Uighur militants sneaked into Indonesia is ringing alarm bells for security forces, who are on high alert for a far deadlier attack than last week’s assault on Jakarta.

At least 10 Uighurs, who hail from China, arrived in the world’s most populous Muslim nation over the last 18 months to join Islamist radicals, exposing an extensive support network ready to welcome wannabe jihadis.

Police fear the same network could assist in the return of battle-hardened Indonesian Islamic State fighters from Syria, who could then launch more calculated attacks, similar to that which hit Paris last November.

Indonesia’s sprawling archipelago of 18,000 islands is too vast to control the movements of militants, drug smugglers, human traffickers and refugees, police say.

“There is enough security at the main entry points,” the country’s police chief, Badrodin Haiti, told Reuters. “But there are more traditional points for entering illegally, where usually fishermen bring people in.”

With around 500 Indonesians taking one-way trips to join Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, authorities had not considered the Southeast Asian nation’s porous border to be a pressing security issue until recently.

But last month’s arrest of an Uighur individual, Ali Mehmet, after police found bomb-making equipment in a house in a Jakarta suburb, spotlighted how easy it is for people to be smuggled into Indonesia. Uighurs come from Xinjiang in far western China, a region Beijing says is home to Islamist militants and separatists.

Jakarta says it is working with China to stem the flow of Uighur militants, who police say are responding to a call by Santo’s police chief, Badrodin Haiti, to his band of fighters.—Reuters

North Korea sought to attend ministerial meeting on nuclear test ban

VIENNA — The executive secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organisation has expressed his intention to invite North Korea to the ministerial-level meeting to commemorate 20 years since states began signing the treaty.

In the wake of North Korea’s nuclear test on 6 January, Lassina Zerbo, speaking in a recent interview with Kyodo News, said he is hoping that bringing North Korea to the negotiating table would lead to a ban on nuclear tests and ratification of the CTBT.

Plas are under way for the ministerial meeting to be held sometime between April and June in Vienna. If the invitation is indeed extended to North Korea, this would be the first time the commission has asked Pyongyang to attend.

Zerbo called for the necessity of holding high-level discussions with North Korea and seven other countries that have yet to ratify the CTBT.

Proposing a different approach to North Korea and its nuclear issue, Zerbo said, “By isolating them and not finding a solution, they will still try and do more and more tests.”

Adopted by the General Assembly in 1996, the CTBT aims to establish a verifiable global ban on all types of nuclear explosive tests. The pact has been signed by 183 countries and ratified by 164.

To enter into force, the CTBT must be signed and ratified by the 44 countries that had nuclear reactors for research or power generation while the treaty was under negotiation. Eight of those states — the United States, China, Egypt, Israel, Iran, North Korea, India and Pakistan — have yet to ratify it.

Zerbo also underlined the need to draw up an action plan toward putting the CTBT into force, and asked support from Japan, which co-chaired a conference with Kazakhstan last year pressing the eight countries to sign and ratify the CTBT.—Kyodo News

Police arrest four men for planning to attack Indian capital

NEW DELHI — Indian police yesterday claimed to have arrested four men, with alleged links to Islamic State, for planning to attack strategic locations in the national capital.

“The four young men were nabbed from the northern state of Uttarakhand by a team of Delhi Police Wednesday. They have been brought to the Indian capital,” a senior police official said.

“At the time of their arrest, all the four suspects were all reading propaganda materials about the Islamic State and bomb making,” he added.

The national capital has been put on high alert, with French President Francois Hollande slated to visit India as the chief guest at the Republic Day parade on 26 January.

Intelligence agencies have already indicated that the Islamic State could target the Republic Day celebrations as the French President will be there.”—Xinhua
Tokyo goes for broke in Okinawa poll at US airbase city

TOKYO — Japan’s government is pulling out all the stops to ensure a candidate backed by the ruling party wins a mayoral election in the Okinawan city hosting a US airbase whose planned move elsewhere on the island has set Tokyo and Okinawa at odds.

To help the incumbent’s chances at Sunday’s poll, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s government has dangled prospects of a bigger budget for Okinawa, backing for a Disney resort and aid for impoverished children in Japan’s second-poorest prefecture.

Defeat would galvanise resistance to moving the Futenma base to the less populated Henoko area as agreed with the United States two decades ago.

The opposition candidate in Ginowan, like Okinawa’s governor and many island voters, resents hosting the majority of US troops in Japan and wants the base off Okinawa altogether.

The controversy poses headaches for Abe, six months ahead of a general election in which the ruling party is likely to lose its majority in parliament.

“The incumbent appears in the lead, but his opponent is catching up. ... There is some doubt about whether the government-offered ‘services’ are helping,” said Katsuhiko Nakamura, executive director at Asia Forum Japan, a think tank.

“If the LDP’s favoured candidate does hold onto the mayoralship in Ginowan, it won’t move all the hurdles to relocating the base. “I don’t think if the incumbent wins that it is a vote of support for the Henoko relocation, it is just a vote in favour of getting rid of the base and getting a Disneyland in its place,” said Jerry Curtis, Burgess Professor Emeritus at Columbia University.

“But if the opposition wins it is a huge defeat for Abe.”

—Reuters

Coral reefs are seen along the coast near the US Marine base Camp Schwab, off the tiny hamlet of Henoko in Nago on the southern Japanese island of Okinawa, in October 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

Thai authorities arrest four activists over attempted protest

BANGKOK — Thai authorities arrested a group of activists wanted for attempting to demonstrate against the military last month, police said yesterday, the latest arrest of dissidents in the junta-ruled country.

They were the latest arrests by the army, which took power in a May 2014 coup and has since curbed basic freedoms and cracked down on critics.

The junta, known as the National Council for Peace and Order, has defended the need to curb criticism at a politically sensitive time for the country.

Sirawith Seritiwat, a student leader, gestures as he arrives at the Thai military court in Bangkok, Thailand, on 21 January. PHOTO: REUTERS

Sirawith Seritiwat, a student leader, gestures as he arrives at the Thai military court in Bangkok, Thailand, on 21 January. PHOTO: REUTERS

The Indian police have temporarily suspended kidney transplants for foreigners at government and private hospitals after a racket in India was linked to six local doctors.

Health Minister Dr Rajitha Senaratne ordered a full investigation into claims by the Indian police that the doctors attached to some private hospitals had conducted kidney transplants for Indians who were involved in a major kidney racket.

The police have filed cases against six Sri Lankan doctors in relation to the kidney racket on the charge of conducting paid kidney transplants in violation of ethics.

The Indian media reported that the police have identified the Sri Lankan doctors who have allegedly performed 60 transplants.

Police in Nagapattinam, India arrested the kingpin in the kidney racket, Suresh Prajapathi, and two of his cronies, who facilitated the transplants.

The police also arrested Prajapathi’s accomplice Dilip Umedamal Chouhan who used to help conduct health tests on donors at various diagnostic centres in Ahmedabad, India. —Xinhua

Cambodia to interview Montagnards for refugee status

PHNOM PENH — Cambodia’s Ministry of Interior is set to interview 171 Montagnards, who have sought refugee status in the country, Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sar Kheng said Wednesday.

Speaking during a meeting with James Lynch, regional co-ordinator for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to South-East Asia, Sar Kheng said the government granted refugee status to 13 Montagnards in March last year and will interview the remaining 171 others for refugee status, according to a report posted on the National Police website. Those Montagnards fled Viet Nam into Cambodia early last year.

James Lynch said the 13 Montagnards, who have already received the refugee status, would be sent to a temporary camp in the Philippines before dispatching them to the third country. Montagnards are mostly Christian ethnic minority groups that live in Viet Nam’s mountainous Central Highlands region. —Xinhua

Sri Lanka suspends kidney transplants for foreigners

COLOMBO — Sri Lanka’s Health Ministry yesterday temporarily suspended kidney transplants for foreigners at government and private hospitals after a racket in India was linked to six local doctors.

Health Minister Dr Rajitha Senaratne ordered a full investigation into claims by the Indian police that the doctors attached to some private hospitals had conducted kidney transplants for Indians who were involved in a major kidney racket.

The Indian police have filed cases against six Sri Lankan doctors in relation to the
Red tape, political risks could stall investment in Iran

DUBAI — A multitude of business regulations — 182,000 by one minister’s count — stands in the way of a rapid flow of foreign investment into Iran after the lifting of nuclear sanctions ended its long isolation from global commerce.

Other factors that could stall investment include residual sanctions, a shortage of project finance, and political risks ranging from protectionism to the potential collapse of the nuclear deal, lawyers and consultants say.

Some foreign firms have already signed letters of intent with Iran since the international sanctions imposed over its nuclear programme were lifted on Saturday and many more want to trade with its market of about 80 million people.

But major foreign investment will take at least six months to arrive, experts say, as companies navigate the web of bureaucracy, opaque ownership structures and powerful Iranian lobbies that bristle at foreign competition.

“It has been under sanctions so a lot of international business practices are not as common there as they are in other emerging markets,” said Farhad Alavi, managing partner at Washington-based Akzivis Law Group.

President Hassan Rouhani, who championed the nuclear deal, has ordered his government to facilitate foreign investment but also warned of the “long road” to Iran’s economic integration with the world.

Rouhani said on Sunday his oil-producing country needs $30-$50 billion a year in foreign investment to meet its economic growth target of eight per cent.

It attracted an average of only $1.1 billion of foreign direct investment annually between 1996 and 2004, before major economic sanctions were imposed on it, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

Economy Minister Ali Tayyeb-Nia said on Monday the government was trying to “re-move laws that obstruct business”.

This will not be a small task, he said, adding that there are about 182,000 items of business regulation. — Reuters

France acts to secure road above Calais refugee ‘jungle’

CALAIS, (France) — French bulldozers have begun to clear a 100-metre (110-yard) strip next to a road that passes above a migrant camp in Calais, as local authorities attempt to secure a busy traffic route between France and Britain.

Thousands of refugee fleeing war and poverty in Africa and the Middle East have gathered in or near the northern coastal town over the past year, using it as a stopover point before trying to enter Britain in the hope of a better life.

Many have tried repeatedly to cross the English Channel by jumping onto lorries, hiding on trains before they enter the Channel Tunnel or walking through the tunnel, where security was ramped up in October.

Since then, incidents on the road between Calais and its port have become more frequent, especially near a slum known as the “jungle” where around 4,000 refugees camp and where the strip is now being cleared, the authorities said.

Police said migrants were often disrupting traffic at night, hoping to get onto lorries.

A spokesman for the Pas-de-Calais region said clearance of the site, which started on Monday, would take two weeks to clear, adding there had been no forced evacuations so far. “We estimate that 500 to 700 people have agreed to move their tents”, he said.

“We respect the law, we can’t deal with the police anyway. Some communities said they would not leave but after discussions they agreed,” said one of those displaced, 38-year-old Muhammed from Sudan.

With the migrants facing squalid conditions, freezing temperatures and reduced access to free food, those displaced were being reminded of their rights to apply for asylum or move to a shelter made of shipping containers, the Pas-de-Calais spokesman said.

The shelter, designed to accommodate up to 1,500 people, was opened last week.

Many refugees told Reuters they were reluctant to move there because access is controlled by handprint technology. — Reuters

Cambodia cancels two concessions for offshore oil

PHNOM PENH — The Cambodian government has cancelled two concessions for offshore oil — Block B and Block F — held by a foreign company last year because it failed to comply with the terms of agreements, a local newspaper reported yesterday, citing a senior official.

Meng Saktheara, secretary of state of the Ministry of Mines and Energy, said the two offshore licenses were held by Malaysia’s operator Resourceful Petroleum.

“The company did not perform according to, and failed to fulfill, the obligations stated in their Petroleum Agreements (PA),” he was quoted as saying by the Khmer Times.

Block B with an area of 6,300 sq km was given on concession to Resourceful Petroleum and Thailand’s PPTEP in 2005, while offshore Block F with an area of 7,000 sq km was given to Resourceful Petroleum and China’s CNOOC in 2007. — Xinhua

Tour bus crashes in Tokyo, hurting 24

TOKYO — A tour bus with 30 people aboard crashed into a centre divider and a traffic light pole on a road in central Tokyo on Wednesday, injuring 24 passengers, police said.

The police arrested the bus driver, 58-year-old Tadashi Sugawara, at the scene. Sugawara told the police that he was “absent-minded.”

The tour bus, operated by a company in Saitama Prefecture, was on the way back to JR Kamata Station in Tokyo’s Ota Ward after a one-day tour to Lake Kawaguchi in Yamanashi Prefecture and other destinations. It was carrying 28 passengers, the driver and a tour attendant.

The accident took place around 400 metres southeast of the station. — Kyodo News

No casualties from northwest China 6.4-magnitude earthquake

MENYUAN — No casualties were caused by a 6.4-magnitude earthquake that struck a county in northwest China’s Qinghai Province early yesterday morning, local authorities said.

The tremor jolted Hui Autonomous County of Menyuan at 1:13am. It damanged 54 houses, including 20 with cracks in the walls, said county head Huang Jicheng.

The epicenter, 33 kilometres away from the county seat, is unpopulated, Huang said. Telecom services and traffic in the country remain normal. Local civil affairs authorities have sent more than 700 tents to the quake-affected region. Witnesses say many scared locals have run outdoors and some stay in cars, despite a freezing temperature of minus 20 degrees Celsius. — Reuters

German vice chancellor warns of economic disaster in Europe if borders closed

DAVOS, (Switzerland) — German Economy Minister Sigmar Gabriel said on Wednesday that Austria’s decision to cap the number of people allowed to claim asylum and step up border controls was a “cry for help” from Europe.

Gabriel, who is also deputy to Chancellor Angela Merkel in Germany’s coalition government, added that there was only a European solution to the refugee crisis and that closing borders across the continent would lead to an “economic catastrophe.” — Reuters

State of emergency likely to be extended in France

PARIS — The state of emergency in France is likely to be extended beyond the end of February, the head of French parliament said on Wednesday, citing French President Francois Hollande.

“He said it (the extension) it looked quite likely,” Claude Bartolone told journalists after meeting Hollande.

A state of emergency in France was declared after the terrorist attacks that killed 130 people in Paris in November.

Emergency measures that give authorities extra powers to assign house arrests and conduct raids without a judicial warrant were set to expire on 26 February. — Reuters
Win Sein

Earthquake is a frightful thing that everybody is afraid. Think of a situation under which a big earthquake has struck your town suddenly, the casualties involved, the damages to the houses, roads, the disruption of communication system and other things like the total breakdown of water supply and important infrastructure. The intensity of suffering by the victims is getting worse and worse day by day because of the slow relief and rescue efforts.

Most of the largest known earthquakes have been centered around the Pacific’s Ring of Fire. Among the world’s 25% of the largest earthquakes, 3 of which are from this area of the Ring of Fire in the last 11,799 years. The Ring of Fire is the direct result of tectonic plates, which are the distortion of earth’s crust due to forces within it and the movement and collision of the lithospheric plates which are the outer layer of the earth’s crust. These plates which constitute the outer layer of the planet Earth, are constantly in motion atop the mantle [the part of earth between the crust and the core]. Sometimes they collide, pull apart or slide alongside each other, resulting in creating convergent boundaries, divergent boundaries and transformed boundaries, hereby resulting in an outbreak of earthquake of small or great magnitude. It is common knowledge that earthquakes are usually caused when rocks underground suddenly break along a fault. This sudden release of energy causes the seismic waves that make the ground shake. When two blocks of rocks or two plates are rubbing against each other or when two blocks of the earth suddenly slip past one another, the surface where they slip is called the fault, which resulted in an earthquake.

Countries lying within the Pacific’s Ring of Fire are shown below:
- Chile
- Mexico
- United States
- Antarctica
- Russia
- Japan
- Philippines
- Japan
- New Zealand
- Papua New Guinea
- Indonesia
- Canada
- Peru
- Taiwan
- Quatamania

The loss of lives and properties from big earthquakes has given a hard hit to the Governments that were encountered by the disasters. Therefore, the governments are searching for clues to be able to predict early signs of earthquakes in order that they can issue early warning of the potential outbreak of damaging earthquakes to take timely response to the disasters, enabling people to minimize loss of lives and properties. The U.S. has conducted field, laboratory and theoretical investigations of earthquake mechanisms and fault zones. Ultimately, scientists would like to be able to specify a high probability for a specific earthquake on a particular fault within a particular year. Scientists estimate earthquake probability in two ways by studying the history of large earthquakes in a specific area and by finding the rate at which strains accumulate in the rocks.

If a region has expressed four magnitude 7 or larger earthquakes during 200 years of recorded history, and if these shocks occurred randomly in time, then scientists would assign a 50 per cent probability [that is just as likely to happen and as not to happen] to the occurrence of another magnitude 7 or larger quake in the region during the next 50 years. But in many places, the assumption of random occurrence with time may not be true because the strains are released along one part of the fault system. It may actually increase another part. Four magnitude 6.8 or larger earthquakes and many magnitude 5—6.5 shocks occurred in the San Francisco Bay region during the 75 years between 1836 and 1911. For the next 68 years [until 1979] no earthquakes of magnitude 6 or larger occurred in the region between 1979 and 1989. There have occurred four magnitude 6 or greater earthquakes including Loma Prieta earthquake. This clusters of earthquakes have led scientists to estimate that there is a probability of a magnitude 6.8 or larger earthquake occurring during the 30 years in the San Francisco Bay [twice as likely as not]

As population increases, expansion of urban development and construction works has encroached upon areas susceptible to earthquakes. With a better understanding of the cause and effect of earthquakes, we may be able to reduce damages and losses of lives from the destructive phenomenon.

Among the biggest earthquakes that resulted in heavy loss of human lives and properties are:

- Valdivia, Chile 22 May 1960 [9.5] on Richter scale
  Killed 1655 people
  $550 million USD in damages

- Sumatra, Indonesia 26 December 2004 [9.1] on Richter scale
  Killed 227,900 people

- Sendai, Japan 11 March 2011 [9.0] on Richter scale
  Killed several thousands people

- Ecuador Coast, 31 January 2010 [8.8] on Richter scale
  Killed 1313 people

Taking the preparatory measures to respond timely to the possible earthquakes is the best policy for mitigating the impacts of loss of lives and properties. In this regard, we may take the following measures:

1. Contact your local emergency management office.
2. Be aware of the fact that building with foundation resting on landfill and other unstable soil are at increased risk of damage.
3. Know that doorways are not stronger than any other part of a structure; so don’t rely on them for protection. During an earthquake, get under a strong piece of furniture and hold onto it. It will help shelter you from falling objects that could injure you during an earthquake. Tell your community, your school or your organization to update an emergency plan and supplies in order to be able to prevent damages and injuries. The Union of Myanmar has already laid down a comprehensive plan in the form of a STANDING ORDER ON NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT. Ministries concerned, NGOs both local and foreign and CSOs are all encouraged to make concerted effort to combat the risks of this disaster and to mitigate the losses of lives and properties.

About the author

U Win Sein is a former Assistant Registrar, Companies Registration Office, Ministry of Trade.
Police crack down on gang for gambling, drug trading

FOLLOWING posts on social media, authorities arrested six men suspected on counts of gambling and drug trading in Hlinethaya Township on Wednesday.

To enforce the community peace and the rule of law, the Yangon Region Police Force formed special teams and arrested the four suspects named Win Naing, 44, Leik alias Khin Sein, 47, Aung Soe alias Aung Soe Lay, 41, Shwe Ozi alias Ye Nyunt, 42, of Hlinethaya Township, Win Naing, 50, and Sein Htay, 56, of Shwepyitha Township.

The six suspects are under interrogation at the local police station.— Yangon Police Force

New bridge in Sagaing Region nearly complete

THE construction of a new bridge across Yaywa Creek in Sagaing Region is 80 per cent complete, it is estimated to be finished in March this year, its project manager said.

With the aim of helping people access the benefit of socio-economic development, the 1,440 foot long new bridge has been built since July last year. The Yaywa Creek is located on Kani-Chaungma-Monywa Road in Sagaing Region.

High flow rate of the creek from Mahu mountain range is a major problem of residents who always face a range of transport difficulties in every rainy season because of a large natural flow of water falling down from the mountain, a local said.

“We will fix steel deck along the bridge within two months to finish in time,” an engineer of the project said.— Than Htay Aung (Kani)

Bago residents enjoy full access to electricity

RESIDENTS in Kyaukgyi Township of Taungoo District recently have access to electricity thanks to the establishment of a 33KV power substation in the township, locals say.

“Since 20 January this year, we have started supplying electricity across the township through new substation, which has been installed by the Bago Region Electricity Enterprise,” its officials said.

The main aim of establishing a 33KV transformer in the region is to distribute a high voltage of electricity across the area.

As of 1991, the electricity enterprise has supplied only a low voltage of electricity in the township through 11KV transformer. Not only seven townships but 14 villages including Nathankwin, Yannyoaung, Seikkyi, Maub-in and Aunguomoe villages in Kyaukgyi Township enjoy full access to power.— 045 (Kyemon)

Boozers charged with possession and causing public nuisance

FOUR boozers were charged with possession of lethal weapons in Hlaingthaya township, Yangon Region, on Wednesday, according to local police.

Ye Min Tun, 37, Tun Tun Win, 19, Soe Naing Tun, 19, and Than Naing, 27, were found drunk and belligerent before being searched by police and arrested for each possessing a lethal weapon (blades).

Charges are being filed against them for possession of lethal weapons and causing a public nuisance.— Myanmar News Agency

3rd floor of National Museum in Capital Nay Pyi Taw to be soon opened

THE third floor of the sixth-storrey National Museum (Nay Pyi Taw) will be opened to the public at the beginning of this year, according to an official from the library.

The first floor of National Library has been launched on 3 May 2010, and the second floor has also been opened on 22 September 2014.

Located on Kaba-Aye Pagoda Road in Yankin Township in Yangon, the old National Library has been opened for public observation since 1952. It houses nearly 700,000 books with soft copies. The new library in the capital Nay Pyi Taw houses 300,000 books but it has no soft copies.

“Currently, we put more effort to change the traditional library into a digital one,” Dr Kay Thi Htwe, director of Historical Research and National Library (Nay Pyi Taw). “There is no plan to move National Library from Nay Pyi Taw to Yangon.”

Before starting the construction of National Library in Nay Pyi Taw, mass digitization development programme has been carried out by the library technicians with the contribu-
tion of the government.

Currently, the National Library (Nay Pyi Taw) is being kept open for the public observation between 9.30 am and 4.30 p.m. However, the library officials provide extra services for researchers who wish to visit the library beyond 4.30 p.m.— 001 (Kyemon)

Original price of Malaysian work visas restored

Workers who have been issued letters of invitation to work in Malaysia and or who have been permitted to travel for work by the Myanmar Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security will be able to purchase visas at their previous price. This includes a total of 8,107 workers.

Workers who have already received permission to work in Malaysia from the MFEEP and those who have not yet secured visas but have photocopies of the their invitation letters have until 4pm on 21 January add themselves to the list of people eligible to purchase Malaysian work visas for $56 at the office of the Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation.— Myitmyukha News Agency

>> From page 1

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UN envoy says Syria peace talks may be delayed, pressure needed

ZURICH/GENEVA
Internationally brokered talks between Syria’s government and opposition groups due to start on 25 January may be delayed, but major powers must keep up the pressure to bring participants to the table, the United Nations envoy said on Wednesday.

A Syrian opposition council backed by Saudi Arabia said on Wednesday it will not attend the negotiations in Geneva with the government if a third group takes part, a reference to a Russian bid to widen the opposition team.

UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura spoke in an interview with broadcaster CTV almost a day after US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov held talks in Zurich despite no sign of agreement on who should represent the opposition.

“We have no intentions to postpone the talks from January to February. This is both the position of Russia and the United States, and we are confident that in the next days, in January, such talks must start,” Lavrov said.

“This will be just the start, because of course it will take a lot of time, a whole range of arduous tasks are to be resolved,”

Various dates were being mooted, but the final decision was for the UN Secretary General on the advice of de Mistura, he said.

De Mistura, asked if he was able to send the invitations to the talks, told CNN in the Swiss resort of Davos: “I can’t tell you today, I will tell you on the 24th, one day before.” It was important that it be “a serious talk about peace and not talks about talks”, he said. “I believe we can start the talks, perhaps not on the 25th, but we need to maintain the pressure, we need to maintain the momentum.”

Kerry’s spokesman, John Kirby, said Kerry and Lavrov discussed “the importance of maintaining progress toward a diplomatic solution to the crisis in Syria.”

“...This will be just the start, because of course it will take a lot of time, a whole range of arduous tasks are to be resolved.”

“There’s been no change in our desire to see this meeting happen on the 25th,” he said.

A delay of one or two days in the start of the talks not be the end of the world, a US State Department spokesman said later on Wednesday in Washington.

Kerry said Russia also pressed the US to use its influence with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access, especially to Syrians in besieged areas such as Madaya where people are reported to have died from starvation.

De Mistura said he believed Russia, which has been carrying out air strikes on rebels in Syria for months, “has a great vested interest in not getting involved for too long”.

The United States was also “heavily involved politically” in seeking an end to the nearly five-year-old war, while Iran and Saudi Arabia had assured them they would work to end the Syrian conflict, despite their diplomatic row. “They too probably realise that the time has come for at least trying to find a political solution which will be a compromise,” de Mistura said.—Reuters

Western military chiefs to intensify Islamic State fight

PARIS — Defence chiefs from the United States, France, Britain and four other countries pledged on Wednesday to intensify their fight against Islamic State, looking to capitalise on recent battlefield gains against the jihadists.

The jihadist group lost control of the western Iraqi city of Ramadi last month, in a sorely needed victory for US-backed Iraqi forces. But critics, including some in the US Congress, say the US strategy is still far too weak — along with other critics of US war strategy, using another acronym for Islamic State both by wiping out its strongholds in Iraq and Syria and addressing its spread beyond its self-declared caliphate there.

But US officials have declined to set a timeline for what could be a long-term campaign that will also require political reconciliation to succeed.

Carter announced a meeting next month of defence ministers from all 26 military members of the anti-Islamic State coalition, as well as Iraq, in what he described as the first face-to-face meeting of its kind. “Every nation must come prepared to discuss further contributions to the fight,” he said. “And I will not hesitate to engage and challenge current and prospective members of the coalition as we go forward.”

The US defence official acknowledged that the need for a greater Arab role was a focus of discussions and held out hope that Saudi Arabia would attend next month’s talks in Brussels.—Reuters

Iran diplomat in Saudi Arabia for meeting on Saudi Embassy attack

TEHRAN — Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Wednesday travelled to Saudi Arabia, the first visit by a senior government official to Iran’s regional rival since the two sides severed ties earlier this month, according to an Iranian government official.

Araghchi is to attend an emergency meeting of foreign ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the world body representing Islamic nations yesterday.

The session was called by Saudi Arabia to discuss the recent tensions between the two sides. There is also the chance of the two sides exploring the possibility of re-establishing diplomatic ties, the official told Kyodo News.

In addition, Araghchi is slated to hold bilateral meetings with the director general of the OIC and participant countries.

It is unclear whether Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir, who has taken a hardline stance toward Iran, will be there.

Araghchi left for Saudi Arabia on Tuesday just several hours after Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif’s trip to Tehran for mediation between Tehran and Riyadh. The previous day he held meetings with Saudi leadership in Riyadh.

Iran state news agency quoted Sharif as saying Tuesday that Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia will each appoint special envoy for the mediation.

Also Wednesday, Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei criticised the attacks on the Saudi Embassy in Tehran and its consulate in Mashhad as “very bad and very wrong.”

The latest confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran emerged after Riyadh executed a prominent Shiite cleric and dozens of other people for their alleged involvement in terrorism in opposition to the kingdom’s ruling family.

Following the executions, protesters in Shiite-majority Iran ransacked the Saudi Embassy in Tehran, prompting Riyadh to sever relations with Tehran.—Kyodo News

A girl carrying a baby inspects damage in a site hit by what activists said were airstrikes carried out by the Russian air force in the town of Douma, eastern Ghouta in Damascus, Syria on 10 January. PHOTO: REUTERS

field gains against the militants.

Raqqa.”

The US defence official acknowledged that the need for a greater Arab role was a focus of discussions and held out hope that Saudi Arabia would attend next month’s talks in Brussels.—Reuters

German, Italy, Austria and the Netherlands. A US defence official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the United States was looking for additional contributions of special operations forces from allies. The official also signalled a willingness among core contributors to consider providing additional police and military trainers as needed.

A joint statement by the ministers re-committed their governments to work with the US-led coalition “to accelerate and intensify the campaign.”

The Paris setting for the talks itself sent a message, coming just over two months after the city was struck by deadly shooting and bombing attacks claimed by Islamic State.

French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said Islamic State was in retreat. “Because we have been able to hit its resources, it’s now time to increase our collective effort,” he said.

British Defence Secretary Michael Fallon said the goal was now “to tighten the noose around the head of the snake in Syria in Raqqa.”

But US Senator John McCain, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee — along with other critics of US President Barack Obama’s approach to the war effort — says Islamic State still poses a potent threat.

“ISIL has lost some territory on the margin, but has consolidated power in its core territories in both Iraq and Syria,” McCain said at a Wednesday hearing on US war strategy, using another acronym for Islamic State.

Meanwhile, ISIL continues to metastasise across the region in places like Afghanistan, Libya, Lebanon, Yemen, and Egypt. Its attacks are now global, as we saw in Paris.”

Carter has sought to confront Islamic State both by wiping out its strongholds in Iraq and Syria and addressing its spread beyond its self-declared caliphate there.

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**Prehistoric massacre in Kenya called oldest evidence of warfare**

WASHINGTON — Man’s inhumanity to man, as 18th century Scottish poet Robert Burns put it, is no recent development.

Scientists said on Wednesday they had found the oldest evidence of human warfare, fossils of a band of people massacred by a troop of attackers with weapons including arrows, clubs and stone blades on the shores of a lagoon in Kenya about 10,000 years ago.

The remains of 27 people from a Stone Age hunter-gatherer culture were unearthed at a site called Nataruk roughly 20 miles (30 km) west of Lake Turkana in northern Kenya.

One man’s skeleton was found with a sharp blade made of a volcanic glass called obsidian still embedded in his skull. Another man had wounds from two blows to the head apparently with a club, crushing his skull. A woman had wounds from two clubs, one of which struck the head apparently with a club, crushing her skull.

“Higher dietary nitrate intake has been linked to lower blood pressure and may contribute to a lower risk of open-angle glaucoma,” researchers said.
Dubai police say New Year's hotel fire caused by short-circuit

PORT- AU-PRINCE — Haiti could postpone a presidential runoff election if the opposition commits to taking part at a later date, Prime Minister Evans Paul said on Wednesday, adding that the 24 January vote will go ahead if there is no deal to end a political stalemate.

Protesters burned vehicles and barricaded roads this week after opposition candidate Jude Celestin vowed to boycott the vote over alleged fraud in the first round.

The runoff has already been postponed twice during an inquiry into the allegations.

“We are in the middle of a series of negotiations,” Paul told Reuters. “President (Michel) Martelly and I have been talking about the possibility of considering a postponement of Sunday’s election.”

The supporters of Swiss-trained engineer Celestin are demanding that the government first suspend Sunday’s vote to cool tempers, before discussing a new date for the contest with ruling party candidate Jovenel Moise, a banana exporter.

“We insist, they need to withdraw the 24 January date to calm down the population that is protesting,” said Jean Hector Anacics, Celestin’s representative in the talks, adding that the opposition would not seek to “overly delay” the date.

The country of about 10 million people has struggled to build a stable democracy since the overthrow of the 1957 to 1986 dictatorship of the Duvalier family and ensuing military coups and election fraud.

Political instability has hampered Haiti’s efforts to rebuild from a devastating earthquake.

International partners, including the United Nations and the United States, wanted the election held on Sunday to ensure a new president was in place by 7 February, a constitutional deadline.

However, the protests, and Celestin’s refusal to accept the election as legitimate, have led business and church leaders to conclude a vote postponement would be better. The Senate also supported a non-binding motion on Wednesday to postpone.

Martelly’s five-year term ends in May, leaving room for flexibility. A possible March election is under discussion, but the sides differ on whether Martelly should stay in office until a new president is sworn in.

Opposition parties have been pushing for an interim government to be set up. They want Martelly to leave office by the constitutional deadline.

Martelly has repeatedly opposed an interim government, a move he said could plunge the country into political uncertainty.

Paul said any delay would have to be matched with a commitment from Celestin to participate in a runoff later.

“President Martelly and I are open to consider such a possibility,” he added. “But it would not be responsible to postpone the election sine die, vaguely hoping that Mr. Celestin would agree one day to change position.” For now, Paul said, the election was set for Sunday.—Reuters

KASSERINE (Tunisia) — Police clashed with protesters demanding jobs in the Tunisian city of Kasserine on Wednesday, and one policeman was killed as other demonstrations broke out in the capital and towns across the country, residents and officials said.

Large crowds burnt tyres and chanted: “Work, freedom, dignity” during a second day of demonstrations that erupted in the central Tunisian city after an unemployed man killed himself, apparently after he was rejected for a job.

The death and protests evoked memories of Tunisia’s 2011 “Arab Spring” uprising that broke out when a struggling young market vendor committed suicide, unleashing a wave of anger that forced longtime leader Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali to flee and inspired protests across the Arab world.

Police fired clouds of tear gas after protesters tried to storm a police station in Kasserine, a Reuters witness said. Burning tyres blocked streets as police chased down groups of protesters.

“It’s been seven years of no work for me. We’re sick of just promises. We won’t go back to our homes until we get something concrete this time. … We just want to live with dignity,” said Samir, 30.

Protesters had stayed out on the streets overnight, defying a curfew imposed on Tuesday.

Residents said young people also took to the streets in Sefiana, Tahala, Ferrania and Shiba, El Fahs, Kairouan, and Sousse, as well as the capital, Tunis, where several hundred marched on the city’s central Habib Bourguiba Avenue.

At least one policeman was killed in Ferrania after he was attacked by protesters, a spokesman for the Interior Ministry said. Seeking to calm protests, President Beji Caid Essebsi’s government announced on Wednesday it would seek to hire more than 6,000 young unemployed people from Kasserine, and start construction projects in the region.

“We don’t have a magic wand to fix the situation in Kasserine straight away, but we are working on public investments that will start soon there,” government spokesman Khaled Chaouketa said.

Despite a shift to democracy since the toppling of Ben Ali, many Tunisians worry more about unemployment, high living costs and the marginalisation of rural towns — all factors that helped fuel the 2011 uprising.

Unemployment in the North African country rose to 15.3 per cent by the end of 2015, compared with 12 per cent in 2010, driven by weak economic growth and a decline in investment in both the public and private sectors coupled with a rise in the number of university graduates, who now comprise one-third of jobless Tunisians.

Three major Islamist militant assaults last year — shootings at a touristic hotel and a Tunis museum as well as a suicide bombing on troops in the capital — have hurt the economy, particularly the tourism industry.—Reuters
Experts blast Japan’s whaling programme as ‘unscientific’ in journal

TOKYO — A group of experts from around the world have criticised Japan’s ongoing Antarctic Ocean whaling programme as having no scientific basis in a letter published in British science journal Nature’s latest edition dated yesterday.

The 32 signatories to the letter include 31 members of the International Whaling Commission’s Scientific Committee and an independent expert witness who testified at an International Court of Justice hearing that resulted in a March 2014 ruling ordering Japan to suspend whaling in the Antarctic.

“In our view, the science behind Japan’s whaling activity has not passed a reasonable standard of peer review,” the letter states.

Japan’s latest whaling plan, submitted to the IWC in December, provides for an annual catch of 333 minke whales, a reduction of about two-thirds from previous quotas, under the auspices of sampling the whale population.

The experts called for Japan to consider methods of sampling that do not require the whales to be killed. They also urged reform in the IWC “to develop a process of scientific review that results in clear decisions that can be respected by all,” calling the current process “a waste of time.”

According to the letter, a review of Japan’s latest proposal by an independent expert panel found a lack of justification for lethal sampling.—Kyodo News

OSLO — For British climate expert Chris Hope, new data showing that 2015 was the hottest year ever recorded is not just confirmation he’s been right all along that the planet is getting warmer.

It also won the Cambridge University researcher a 2,000 pound sterling ($2,830) wager made five years ago against a pair of scientists who reject man-made global warming and bet Hope that the Earth would be cooling by now.

NASA, the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the British Met Office said on Wednesday that 2015 was the warmest year recorded since 1880, boosted by a long-term build-up of greenhouse gases and a natural El Niño event warming the Pacific Ocean.

That puts last year ahead of 2014, the previous warmest, as well as 2010, 2005 and 1998, when a strong El Niño marked, for a time, a peak in temperature rises.

A slowdown in temperature increases after 1998 — described by most climate experts as a hiatus in a long-term rise — has been invoked by a small band of sceptics who say mainstream science has exaggerated the risks.

Hope agreed wagers of 1,000 pounds each with two of them: British engineer Alan Rudge and Australian geologist Ian Plimer.

Hope bet average global temperatures in 2015 would be no more than 0.1 degree Celsius (0.18 Fahrenheit) cooler than 2008.

He said it was good to test theories with cash. “Of course, one side ends up happier than the other,” he said. Neither Rudge nor Plimer were immediately available to comment.

“Win you some, lose some,” said Benny Peiser, director of the Global Warming Policy Foundation, for which Rudge is an adviser.

Peiser said the pace of warming “is not something that people ... need to be greatly concerned about”.

Among other wagers, in 2005 British climate modeller James Annan bet $10,000 against two Russian solar physicists that average global temperatures from 2013-17 would be warmer than 2003-07.

“Things are looking good for my bet,” Annan said, noting the UN’s weather agency has said 2016 could be as warm as 2015. If so, Annan reckons that his bet is safe unless 2017 is the coldest year since about 1929.

His Russian opponents are not conceding yet.

Galina Mashnich, an expert at the Institute of Solar-Terrestrial Physics in Irkutsk, Russia, who made the bet with her colleague Vladimir Bashkirtsev, said the new temperature data is not definitive.

“2015 is not the warmest year, according to some sources,” she wrote in an e-mail to Reuters. In recent years, she said, it was “most likely temperature increases are caused by El Niño”.

The Russian solar experts predicted a decade ago that a decline in energy output from the sun, linked to the Earth’s changing orbit, will depress temperatures.

Annan did lose one bet, of 100 pounds in 2011, linked to the pace of global warming.

Hope said he made his wager partly to show a potential for a financial market in temperatures, allowing investors to hedge long-term climate risks, for instance of rising sea levels or damage to crops linked to differing rates of warming.

After the spur of El Niño fades, global temperatures are likely to be slightly cooler in 2017, said Myles Allen, a climate expert at Oxford University.

He predicts any drop will revive doubters’ claims of an end to warming.

“I bet you in a few years’ time they will say global warming stopped in 2015 or 2016,” Allen, who is not a sceptic and is senior author of UN climate reports, said.—Reuters

In global warming bets, record 2015 heat buoys mainstream science

A dry bank of the river Elbe is seen after the water level dropped due to hot temperatures in Dresden, Germany in 2015.

Photo: Reuters

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV EVER APEX VOY NO (471N)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV EVER APEX VOY NO (471N) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 22.1.2016 and cargo will be discharged into 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 Claim’s 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 MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY AGENT FOR: MS EVERGREEN SHIPPING LINE Phone No: 2301185

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV BC SANFRANCISCO VOY NO (023W)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV BC SANFRANCISCO VOY NO (023W) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 22.1.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.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 Claim’s 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.

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Actor Leonardo DiCaprio honoured in Davos

DAVOS — Hollywood star Leonardo DiCaprio received an award “for his leadership in tackling the climate crisis” at the Annual Crystal Awards held at the World Economic Forum.

At the ceremony in Davos, Switzerland, the actor, whose Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation supports conservation projects, criticised what he called “the corporate greed” of “the energy industry. “We simply cannot afford to allow the corporate greed of the coal, oil, and gas industries to determine the future of humanity. Those entities with a financial interest in preserving this destructive system have denied and even covered up the evidence of our changing climate,” he said.

“Enough is enough. You know better, the world knows better. History will place the blame for this devastation squarely at their feet.”— Reuters

Disney pushes next ‘Star Wars’ movie release to December 2017

LOS ANGELES — Fans of the blockbuster “Star Wars: The Force Awakens” will have to wait two more years for the next installment as Walt Disney Co. on Wednesday pushed back the release of “Star Wars: Episode VIII” by seven months.

“Episode VIII” written and directed by Rian Johnson, will now be released on 15 December 2017, rather than the previously scheduled 26 May 2017 date.

Hollywood blockbusters released during the summer months have drawn in the biggest audiences in recent years but Disney noted the success of “The Force Awakens,” which was released worldwide last month.

“The Force Awakens” already has become the highest-grossing release in North America with $861 million and the third-biggest global release in history, taking in $1.88 billion at the box office to date.

“Episode VIII” will start filming in London in February and is expected to continue the tale of new characters Rey (Daisy Ridley), Finn (John Boyega), Poe Dameron (Oscar Isaac) and the villainous Kylo Ren (Adam Driver).

Franchise veterans Carrie Fisher (General Leia) and Mark Hamill (Luke Skywalker) also are expected to return, although Disney did not comment on casting.

“Star Wars: Rogue One,” a stand-alone story set in the world of “Star Wars” with new characters, will be released this December.

Disney said it will put the fifth installment of its popular “Pirates of the Caribbean” franchise, starring Johnny Depp, in the May 2017 slot previously occupied by “Episode VIII.” The franchise has grossed $3.7 billion worldwide to date.— Reuters

Rita Wilson’s self-titled album to release in March

LOS ANGELES — Actress-singer Rita Wilson will release her self-titled album on 11 March.

The record will mark the 59-year-old “Sleepless in Seattle” star had released a cover album of some of her favourite songs from the ‘60s and ‘70s.

For the project, Wilson has collaborated with Kara DioGuardi, Dan Wilson, Nathan Chapman, and Babyface.

Post the release of the album, she will also tour across the US, with her first show in Salona Beach, California on 29 March and last in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on 4 May.

Prior to the release she will give performances at the Cafe Carlyle in New York City from 23 February to 5 March.— PTI

Tom Hooper to receive Goteborg’s Honourary Dragon Award

LOS ANGELES — Director Tom Hooper, whose latest film “The Danish Girl” has been nominated for four Oscars, will receive the Honourary Dragon Award at Goteborg Film Festival.

“Danish Girl” will have its Swedish premiere at the festival.

The London-born helmer, who won an Oscar for “The King’s Speech” in 2010, will be present in Goteborg to receive the honorary prize.

As previously announced, Tobias Lindholm’s “A War”, Mads Matthiesen’s “The Model” and Runar Runarsson’s “Sparrows” are among the eight Nordic films set to compete for a Dragon Award.— PTI

Adele to perform at 2016 Grammys

LOS ANGELES — Adele, whose album “25” swiftly became the biggest seller of 2015, is to perform at the 2016 Grammy Awards in February, organisers said on Wednesday.

The British singer has not been nominated this year because her comeback album “25” was released in November, outside the eligibility period for Grammy consideration. But she will be among performers taking the stage at the awards ceremony in Los Angeles on 15 February, the Recording Academy said in a statement.

Adele, who won six Grammy for her 2011 hit album “21,” broke opening week sales records in the United States when she returned to recording after a four-year absence with “25.” The album has sold more than 7.4 million copies in the US alone, according to data from Nielsen Music.

US rapper Kendrick Lamar, who leads the 2016 Grammy field with 11 nominations including album of the year for “To Pimp A Butterfly”, will also perform at the February award ceremony, along with Canada’s The Weeknd.— Reuters
**Want to go to college in US? Show compassion not test scores: proposal**

BOSTON — US educators on Wednesday endorsed a Harvard University-developed proposal to reform college admissions by reducing reliance on high-stakes tests, and more on teens demonstrating a passion for learning and long-term volunteer projects.

The proposal aims to reduce the pressure on teenagers to pack their resumes with extracurricular activities and spend months preparing for the SAT and ACT tests, encouraging them instead to focus on academic subjects and social causes they find meaningful.

"Too often, today’s culture sends young people messages that emphasize personal success rather than concern for others and the common good," said Richard Weissbourd, a senior lecturer at Harvard’s Graduate School of Education, and a co-director of the Making Caring Common group that developed the proposal.

The proposal titled "Turning the Tide" has been endorsed by about 80 educators, including top admissions officials at major US universities ranging from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Columbia University to the University of North Carolina and Purdue University.

The initiative, which has backing from some US high schools and education associations, is intended to make the college admissions process less daunting for low-income families.

It encourages colleges to revise their applications to ask students about two or three extracurricular activities, rather than requiring them to submit long lists of sports and clubs they participate in and to consider making standardized tests optional or discouraging students from taking them more than twice.

Some 1.7 million students took the SAT in 2014, the most recent year for which data is available, and 1.8 million took the ACT.

"Escalating achievement pressure is not healthy for our youth. Young people are suffering from higher rates of depression, anxiety than ever before," said Ed Hughey, a vice president for applicants who show long-term commitment to service projects in their own communities.

"Too often, current forms of service are patronizing to recipients and don’t spark in those providing service a deeper understanding of social structures and inequalities," the report said. "Rather than students ‘doing for’ students from different backgrounds, for example, we encourage students to ‘do with,’ to work in diverse groups for sustained periods of time.” — Reuters

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**Sakai city launches English website to boost specialty knife exports**

OSAKA — Sakai city’s Industrial Promotion Centre has launched an English-language website selling nearly 200 types of specialty steel cooking knives and specialty "tobacco knives" from seven makers in Sakai, western Japan. The site has been launched by the city, which has seen increased exports of its signature product over recent years.

The site includes videos of the traditional forging and grinding processes by which the blades are crafted, along with care instructions and detailed images and descriptions of products ranging from a small $50 carving knife to a drag-on-engraved sashimi knife with ebony handle that comes in at just over $900.

In 2014, approximately $1 billion yen ($8.53 million) in total knife exports went through Osaka customs — a threefold increase since 2009, with knife exports to the US jumping by a factor of 15 over the same period. Sakai’s IPC sees the growth as an indication that the proposal recommended that colleges continue to rely on standardized tests make clear how much influence they have over admission decisions. It also recommends that colleges look for applicants who show long-term commitment to service projects in their own communities.

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**Three songs selected for Tokyo subway’s departure melodies**

TOKYO — Hit tunes by the all-girl pop group AKB48 and its rival group Nogizaka46, and a 1960s duet song still popular in karaoke, have been selected for departure melodies at three subway stations in central Tokyo.

Tokyo Metro Co, the operator of nine subway lines in the metropolis, said Wednesday that Akihabara station on Hibiya Line will feature “Kissouri Fortune Cookie” by AKB48. AKB stands for Akihabara, the group’s electronics district and a hub of subculture, and is also the group’s birthplace.

“Kiminona wa Kobo” (Your Name is Hope) by Nogizaka46 will be played on the platform of the group’s namesake station, Nogizaka, on Chiyoda Line.

An old hit song, “Ginzano Koino Monogatari” (A love story in Ginza), sung by the late actor Yojiro Ishihara and singer Junko Makimura, will naturally be played at Ginza station on Hibiya Line. The three songs will replace departure beeps currently in use at the stations in the spring.

Tokyo Metro said it received many suggestions for the three tunes when it solicited song ideas for the stations’ departure melodies on its website last year. The songs also matched the image of the stations and the nearby areas, the company said.

The subway operator is gradually replacing the beeps with melodies at its stations, totaling 179 on the nine lines. Melodies have been already introduced at 114 of the stations to inform passengers of a train’s departure.—Kyodo News

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**Kyodo News**

**Miyawaki Graduate School of Education, a co-director of the Making Caring Common group that developed the proposal.**

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Ivanovitch shaken but not stirred after spectator fall

FORMER French Open champion Ana Ivanovitch was shaken up when a spectator was injured by a stray ball at the Australian Open yesterday. She won the third round of the tournament after a first set in which she was 6-2 ahead was abandoned when the ball hit her, and retired with a 6-2, 6-0 victory.

Ivanovitch started her campaign with a 6-0, 6-4 victory over British world number 41 Johanna Konta. She took the first set in just 29 minutes and won the second set in 65 minutes.

The Australian Open is the first Grand Slam tournament of the year and is being held from January 15 to January 28. The tournament is considered one of the four most prestigious events in tennis and attracts top players from around the world. Rounds of 16, quarter-finals, semi-finals and finals will be held over two weeks, with a break of one day between rounds.

Despite the injury, Ivanovitch was focused on the match, saying: “I was really shaking, because I heard the lady falling, but I was not actually thinking about the game. I was trying to help her, but I didn’t know if she was fine or not.”

She continued: “I felt very bad. I was really shaking, because I heard the lady falling, but I was not actually thinking about the game. I was trying to help her, but I didn’t know if she was fine or not.”

The Australian Open is one of the most prestigious tournaments in tennis and attracts some of the best players in the world. The tournament is held annually in January and is one of the four Grand Slam events, along with the French Open, Wimbledon and the US Open. The tournament is being held at Melbourne Park from January 15 to January 28.

Murray negates Groth’s attack to advance in Melbourne

MELBOURNE — Andy Murray has advanced to the quarter-finals of the Australian Open after defeating unseeded James Duckworth in straight sets. Murray won 6-2, 6-4, 6-1 in an hour and twelve minutes.

The world number two said after the first round that he knew exactly what to expect from Groth — a big serve and a large frame to chip or pass at the net — and that he was confident he could come through the early roadblocks. The 25-year-old Scot has yet to drop a set at the tournament and will now face fellow Briton Kyle Edmund in the quarter-finals.

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Arsenal and Cech seek symbolic Chelsea win

LONDON — Arsenal can take another step towards the Premier League title with a symbolic victory over neighbours Chelsea when they host their London rivals at the Emirates on Sunday.

Victory would also take Arsenal goalkeeper Petr Cech closer to becoming the second player in English League soccer history to win the title with different clubs. The Czech goalkeeper has won the title with Manchester United and Chelsea.

Cech made his Arsenal debut when they beat Chelsea 1-0 in the Community Shield in 2008, will face the 2016 champions this weekend.

Arsenal lead the standings and Chelsea are 19 points adrift in 14th place with their interim coach Guus Hiddink saying last week they were not yet free of relegation worries.

Arsenal, who have several top players out injured, lead the table on goal difference from Leicester City, but they could be boosted by the return of playmaker Mesut Ozil and striker Alexis Sanchez who missed the 0-0 draw at Stoke City on Sunday.

The Gunners, though, have little margin for error if they are to win their first title since 2004. Leicester have confounded everyone by remaining doggedly in the title race with manager Claudio Ranieri now aiming for 79 points by the end of the season, rather than his original target of 40 which is usually needed to avoid relegation.