BIDS IN FOR SKY VIEWS

RBE Service for travellers on Gokteik Viaduct tendered out

MYANMA Railways (MR) has tendered out rail bus engine (RBE) service on the Gokteik Viaduct in northern Myanmar, inviting tender from local and foreign companies.

According to Myanma Railways, the deadline for submitting the tender to its head office in Nay Pyi Taw is 29 February. Tender forms have been sent out to applicants as of 18 February.

According to the rules of the tender, RGC (Rail Gang Car) with a seating capacity of 20 or RBE with a seating capacity of 50 would be allowed to run along the Nawnghkio-Naungpain Route passing the Gokteik Viaduct.

The period of operating the business would be three years and the winner of the tender shall sign agreement with the MR every year, according to the rules.

“If the service is run by a private company, the market would be expanded with better services,” said U Kyaw Kyaw Myo, Deputy General Manager of the Commercial Department of the Myanma Railways.

Myanma Railways is currently running the RBE service which can carry up to 50 people due to the increasing number of native visitors as well as tourists to Gokteik, running slowly across the Gokteik Viaduct in order for passengers to have the best chance to take in the view and stopping at both ends of the viaduct.

The trip takes around 10 minutes. The trip costs K5,000 per person, according to Myanma Railways.

The Gokteik viaduct is recognised as the “The World’s Largest Trestle” and was built by the Pennsylvania Maryland Bridge & Construction Co. Ltd in 1899 and completed in 1900.

Myanma Railways has prohibited the walking tours along the world famous Gokteik Viaduct to maintain its durability and ensure safety.
Induction programme empowers us and widen our horizons: Fresh representatives

Sai Thiha Kyaw

SOCIAL media was rife with pessimistic criticisms of the recent induction programme the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw organised in Nay Pyi Taw from 15 to 19 February in partnership with international organisations, prompting the parliament to issue a statement on 18 February in a bid to erase the circulating rumours.

The parliament stressed that the event was jointly conducted with the experts from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), under their cooperation and assistance programme.

The parliament explained that the statement was aimed to make the people aware of some social media users spiking with malice towards the recent event. In interviews, participants expressed their views that the induction programme was designed to strengthen local representative institutions.

U Kyaw Soe, director—general at the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, said that the event focused on familiarising local representatives with the functions of other parliaments in the international community. He described the purpose of the programme as sharing of knowledge about passing legislation and conducting an oversight of the checks and balances.

Edin Elgsaether, programme specialist at UNDP’s Parliament Democratic Governance Unit, said that foreign representatives came to the induction programme just to share their knowledge and experience with the country’s newly elected parliamentarians. The programme would benefit Myanmar in its transitional period, but the country had to find its own ways to adapt to its reform processes, the UNDP specialist added.

Sai Thida Kyaw, representative of the Mairali constituency, commented that new representatives were in need of such a capacity building programme, stressing that they needed to know how other parliaments played their legislative roles.

Daw Aye Mya Mya Myo, representative of the Kyauktan constituency, spoke in support of Sai Thiha Kyaw’s view, saying that fresh representatives were ready to receive advice and listen to parliamentary stories from any resource person.

Dr Thet Thet Khaing, representative of the Dagon constituency, expressed her delight at the opportunity to learn how the legislative, executive and judicial sectors interact in checks and balances.

Representatives from Australia, Bhutan, East Timor, Hong Kong, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Korea, United Kingdom and United States shared their experiences in parliament with the country’s fresh representatives.—Nyi Kyaw Min Han, Photos: Htet Thu

Artillery shells explodes in Lashio, wounding three

Two artillery shells fell on Pyidaungsu Road near Hopaik Village, Lashio Township, on Friday, injuring three people.

Two minutes after a military convoy passed between male photos 184-6 and 185-0 on the road around 10.30 pm, two artillery shells exploded near the three civilian vehicles including two passenger buses and one truck. The attack was assumed to have come from a hill nearby.

Kyaw Hla, 31, Min Aung, 33, and Nyi Nyi Naing, 19, sustained injuries. They are receiving medical treatment at Lashio People’s Hospital. The three vehicles were also damaged by the attack.—Han Htay (Lashio)

Blasts reported in Chinshwehaw

Two blasts were reported on Kunlon-Chinshwehaw Road in Laukai Township yesterday, inspection revealed that the road had been damaged.

It was discovered that two mines were planted on the left and right sides of a drainage across the road which exploded at around 12.20 am, leaving a hole 24 ft wide and 6 ft deep.

During an investigation at the site, authorities found that the responsible individual(s) took the site to blast the mines. The blast site is located near the Chinshwehaw Police Station. Police responded by closing the section of road but traffic returned to normal at around 8.30 am.—Han Htay (Lashio)

RBE Service for travellers on Gokteik Viaduct tendered out

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CROWDS of local and foreign visitors continue to flock to the bridge over the Gokteik Viaduct every day, despite the prohibition against tourists crossing the bridge, according to a spokesperson for the Gokteik Railway Station.

The Gokteik Viaduct is the highest bridge in Myanmar and was the longest railway trestle in the world when it was completed. It is situated in Nawngkkio Township in northern Shan State, approximately 100 kilometres northeast of Mandalay.

Generally, the Gokteik Viaduct receives over 200 people per day. The number occasionally rises to 700, especially on weekends and holidays. “Around 300 visitors passed over the viaduct every day before the prohibition was announced. Some visitors behaved unsafely on the bridge and broke the rules set by the authorities,” a local resident said.

The Gokteik Viaduct is situated in the area near Hopaik Village, Lashio Township, on Friday, injuring three people.

Meanwhile, Myanmar Rice Federation has urged the government to buy rice for state reserves following the possible impacts of El Niño. The Federation was also warned of the impact of El Niño on fish farming, calling for necessary measures to be undertaken to avoid possible losses.

The world meteorological organizations have predicted that Myanmar will face the impact of strongest El Nino weather pattern during the first half of 2016. Meteorologists warned that due to the El Nino effect, temperature will be above the average and record breaking temperatures will happen during March, April and May.—GNLM

MHD urges depts to brace up for El Nino

METEOROLOGY and Hydrological Department has warned authorities to brace up for record breaking temperature in this summer.

In the announcement yesterday, the weather bureau’s chief predicted that Myanmar can see drought and high temperature due to El Nino effect in March, April and May. He urged those who are engaging in agriculture, food security, water supply, electricity, health, fishery, water transportation and tourism sectors to take precautionary measures.

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GNLM
Gas and biomass power plant opened in Mawlamyine

MYANMA Alinyaung Co Ltd yesterday opened its gas and biomass power plant in Mawlamyine, Mon State.

President U Thein Sein was present at the opening ceremony together with Union Election Commission Chairman U Tin Aye and Union Ministers Lt-Gen Kyaw Swe, U Nyan Tun Aung, U Khin Maung Soe, U Maung Myint, U Kyaw Lwin, U Aye Myint and U Ye Htut.

The newly-opened power plant has the capacity to generate 230 megawatts of electricity, with Union Minister U Khin Maung Soe saying that the facility is intended to satisfy the country’s growing electricity demand.

The country is experiencing a 15% increase in demand for electric power consumption each year on average.

In 2011, there were ten gas-fueled power plants making up a combined generation of 270 megawatts.

The number of power plants has increased to 20 in 2016, with 1,210 megawatts in total.

After inspecting the control room at the power plant, the president and his entourage watched an entertaining documentary about the plant. —Myanmar News Agency

President opens subpower station in Chaungson

Deal close on fourth social security hospital construction

A HOSPITAL for patients with cancer and heart disease will be built in the new fiscal year, according to the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security.

The 500-bed hospital will be located on the compound of the medical storage facility in Ahlone township, Yangon Region, Deputy Minister U Htin Aung said, adding that the construction will be undertaken in partnership with a pharmaceutical company in Taiwan.

Negotiations are still underway to sign a memorandum of understanding, with the deputy minister saying that the negotiations take time due to the astronomical figure of investment needed for construction.

On completion, the medical centre, the fourth social security hospital in the country, will provide free treatment to any worker who pays social security contributions. —Thein Ko Lwin

Tourist numbers to Mrauk U back up in February

AFTER a scarcity of visitors to the ancient Rakhine city of Mrauk U as a result of armed conflict between the ethnic Arakan Army (AA) and the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Armed Forces), the beginning of February saw the numbers of tourists start to pick back up again.

“Only now has our hotel business started to return to normal. The situation over the last few months was not good at all. We didn’t receive even a single guest when the fighting was going on. An ethnic media conference is currently being held here and the visitors who come here have come to understand that there is nothing to worry about. Our bungalows and hotel rooms are currently at maximum capacity,” said Ma Than Htay, deputy manager of the Nan Myo Taw hotel.

The ancient city of Mrauk U attracts both foreign and local tourists who come to experience the pagodas and ancient heritage that the town has to offer. However, armed conflict which erupted in the region on December 27 of last year heavily dented the local tourism industry, it is known from local hoteliers.

“We’ve been trying to come and visit the famous ancient cultural sites of Mrauk U for some time now. We got to witness a style of pagoda which is quite different from the majority of others found around Myanmar. We also saw a lot of damaged pagodas and stupas. It was a good trip but the price of a hotel room was extremely expensive. On top of that, it was also not so easy to get around,” expressed U Aung Kyaw Moe, a Yangon tourist to Mrauk U.

Tourists that visit Mrauk U, which was once the seat of the royal Rakhine Kingdom for 355 years, mainly come to see the pagodas of 80,000 and 90,000 Buddhas; the Nan Ye Kone, Sandar Muni Elephant Statues and the Five Victory Pagodas, while it is known that there exist over twenty high standard hotels and guest houses within the town of Mrauk U which provide accommodation to guests.—Myitmakha News Agency

Knitting workers go on strike after increment cut

WORKERS have gone on strike at a knitting factory in Industrial Zone-5, Hlaingthaya township, Yangon Region, demanding back their skill-based increments.

More than 2,000 workers at Mingtex Myanmar have been deprived of their increments of K20,000, following the approval of a daily minimum wage of K3,600.

Individual workers get paid an increment of K20,000, strike leader Ko Zin Ko said, adding that the protest would go on until their demands were met.

Their demands include the appointment of a local manager and rights to national holidays, casual leave, maternity leave, medical leave and paid leave.

According to a local police officer, a brawl broke out between the protesting workers outside and those in the factory. Slightly more than 100 workers, who live in labour hostels, were reported to remain in the factory.

Daw Si Si May, manager at Human Resources of the factory, said that the owner was not in the country and that the factory would try to meet the demands within the legal framework. —Thein Ko Lwin
Green gram plantations produce a thumping harvest

THONGWA Township in Yangon Region has seen a massive influx of green grams into the market this month, with growers getting K41,000 ($33.09) per viss (a viss is approx. 1.6 kilograms), locals say.

The region mainly grows two kinds of green grams—namely Yayzin and Shwewah. Of them, Yayzin usually gets a good price in the market.

Heroin seized in Myitkyina

AN anti-drug squad seized 336 grams of heroin at the Shari Zinwa restaurant, Ward 6, Wainaw.

Police searched a motorbike being driven by one Ye Lay, 29, with Aikkhan on board. The two were witnessed selling heroin to one Ma Khin Khin Thet who was kept under watch by the police.

The police have charged the suspects under the anti-Narcotic law.—Ko Ye

Stimulants seized in Mongmit and Tamu Townships

AN anti-drug squad in Tamu discovered 360 tablets of stimulant, 0.0002 kilos of heroin, 0.01119 kilos of opium, Myanmar notes K15000 at Pao Min Liang’s restaurant, Ward 6, Waimaw.

Similarly, members of the police searched a motorbike driven by one Ye Lay, 29, on the road near Daunggyi-Theni village, Mongmit Township while the police found 157 tablets of stimulant, 0.0002 kilos of heroin, Myanmar notes 0.574 million.

Three men arrested for robbery

A HOUSE fire broke out in Myo Ma ward-4, Jo Phyu road, Bago region on Thursday. According to an investigation, the fire began when one Than Lwin, 43, became drunk and rowdy, setting fire to a roof. The fire quickly got out of control and consumed his family home. The fire was put out by the local residents. Local police have filed charges against the man.—Nay Min (Nyaunglebin)

Illegal logs seized in Sagaing

AUTHORITIES seized a shipment of illegal logs weighing 1.8 tons in Kalewa township, Sagaing on Monday. Acting on a tip-off, a combined investigation team comprising officers and staff from the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry searched a vehicle near Pau Suwa village, Kalewa township. They discovered eight Tanmalan logs stored on the vessel being driven by one Aung San Win, 23. The man is being charged under section 6(1) of the public property protection law by the police.

Similarly, members of the police searched a motorbike driven by one Nan Ya Aung, 26, and found illegal Tanmalan logs. Nan Ya Aung is being charged under section 6(1) of the public property protection law by the police.—Myanmar Police Force

Overturning 12 wheel vehicle seen at the scene of accident.

A 12 wheel vehicle turned over beside Hpa-an-Thaton Highway near Myaing Kalay village, Hpa-an Township, Kayin State around about 2pm on Tuesday.

The vehicle, driven by one Kyaw Gyi, 24, from Danahyu Township with Aung Myo Oo, 35, from Monywa Township on board turned over when he lost control and plunged into a padd field near Nyaung Pin Thar bend between mile posts 1/6 and 1/7. The collision damaged the vehicle as well as some goods carried on board. No one was reported to be injured. Hpa-an Township Police have filed charges against the driver.—Tun Tun Htway (Hpa-an)

Three men arrested

POlice have filed charges against three men on suspicion of robbery in Pathein on Wednesday.

According to an investigation, three men approached three first year students from Pathein University. While latter were talking near Myothit, Mya Kyun Thar the former threatened with a blade before taking their mobile phones. Police arrested Min Htet Aung, Yan Ko Ko and Htet Myat Aung with five mobile phones, three knives and two motorcycles.

Further investigation led to a robbery of a couple in Kanpat Road that is suspected to have been committed by the suspects. Police are investigating the case. —Pathein—Hla Kyi

Drunkard burns roof, causes house fire

A HOUSE fire broke out in Myo Ma ward-4, Jo Phyu raod, Bago region on Thursday. According to an investigation, the fire began when one Than Lwin, 43, became drunk and rowdy, setting fire to a roof. The fire quickly got out of control and consumed his family home. The fire was put out by the local residents. Local police have filed charges against the man.—Nay Min (Nyaunglebin)

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Similarly, members of the police searched a motorbike driven by one Ye Lay, 29, on the road near Daunggyi-Theni village, Mongmit Township while the police found 157 tablets of stimulant, 0.0002 kilos of heroin, Myanmar notes 0.574 million. Charges have been filed against Tun Tun Win, the driver of the motorbike. The police have filed charges against him under anti-Narcotic law.—Police IPRD

Crime News

Tea distributors from fire-affected Namhsan continue to operate

DESPITE a huge fire in the centre of Namhsan in the Pa-Laung Self-Administered Zone in northern Shan State, it has not affected the production and distribution of tea leaves across the region, local farmers say.

“We regularly operate tea cultivation and distribution on a commercial scale,” said a local tea manufacturer. On 4 February, a fire broke out in the centre of Namhsan destroying nearly 285 houses and leaving about 300 families homeless. People in the area mainly and traditionally operate agricultural businesses, especially the establishing of tea plantations.—Soe Win (Nyaung-bhko)
Real estate in Mandalay goes cold, buyers eyeing political situation

The trading of real estate in Mandalay has come to a halt of late as potential financial investors are holding off from purchasing real estate for want of monitoring the changing political climate.

“The land market has been cold ever since the elections. It’s because of [political] changes. Buyers are closely watching [the political sphere] as to how it will play out,” said U Htun Htun Naing, owner of Kabar Myay Aung real estate brokerage firm.

It is speculated that potential real estate buyers are closely monitoring the political situation of the country as it is likely there will be changes to taxation, real estate and land policies.

“At the moment there is activity in the rental market but few actual sales of real estate being seen. As such, we expect a stable political landscape would be good for our business,” expressed Ko Myo Nyunt, a realtor from the downtown Mandalay township of Aung Mya Thazi.

In Mandalay especially, the majority of buyers and investors in the real estate market are Chinese, while real estate market experts have stated the market could potentially see a variety of changes dependent upon the political changes made by the next government this year.

There is little demand for the purchasing of vacant plots of land within Mandalay at the present time, with an increasing interest of those wishing to purchase real estate in satellite towns located on the outskirts of the city, with real estate firms receiving many inquiries from potential investors about land and property opportunities in such locations.— Myitmakha News Agency

UMFCCI vows to take on trade sanctions

The Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI) will work for the reduction of American imposed economic sanctions on Myanmar to better the development of the trade and financial investment sectors of both countries.

Over thirty Myanmar and fifty American business entrepreneurs met for discussions on Wednesday for the joining of forces between the UMFCCI and the American Chamber of Commerce in Myanmar (AMCHAM) in order to expand trade and investment between the two countries.

“American entrepreneurs are keen to cooperate with their American counterparts [in business]. The same can be said of the Americans. The American government imposed economic sanctions [on Myanmar] for a variety of reasons, but they have caused obstacles to conducting trade and investment. Only if we can overcome these barriers can economic entrepreneurs of both countries work together. As such, we will work for the lifting of these sanctions,” stated Dr. Maung Maung Lay, vice president of the UMFCCI.

“The UMFCCI will travel to the United States capital of Washington in April for a meeting on bringing about development and growth to financial investment for both countries, after which the UMFCCI will host an economic forum within Myanmar in May.

“America will compile a list of economic sanctions imposed on Myanmar. However, if they haven’t managed to make this list in May as we anticipate then we will strive to produce a lot of good results [from the economic forum],” said U Win Aung, president of the UMFCCI.

It is known that the UMFCCI discussed a lot with AMCHAM in regard to the financial sector for the lifting of sanctions upon Myanmar.

The American government imposed economic sanctions upon Myanmar during the time of the military government in response to its failures to meet international human rights obligations. A fair amount of sanctions were lifted during the term of office of president U Thein Sein, it is known.— Myitmakha News Agency

Farmers turn to seasonal crops to fulfil market demand

TO meet the market demand, growers in Yesagyo have grown seasonal crops and flowers instead of growing their regular annual crop. “It costs at least K 200 per plant on market. The growers gain profit of K 150 after investment and thus the growers are able to earn K 7,500,000 for 50,000 plants. Those who want to purchase the beautiful flora have to pay the higher price. Horticultural work is handed over by the old generation and the younger farmers have a strong enthusiasm for horticulture,” said Ko Maung Maung Naing, grower from field No 111 of Yesagyo.

“Previously, winter crops like gram, nut, corn, sunflower and bean were grown. The degrading of arable land was attributed to the planting of the same crops every year. The yield and quality have become lower in those areas. It means that the growers ought to choose other crops for summer instead of growing rice for both seasons if he cultivated rice in the rainy season,” he explained.

The changing of crops can prevent soil degradation and the growers need to choose the right crops or flowers based on the market demand, said an agricultural expert. The commercial growers can gain more profit this way, he added.— Phyu Htun Zaw (Yesagyo)

Falling demand threatens survival of earth ware manufacturers

EARTH wares manufacturers in Dawei, Taninthayi Region are facing production difficulties as people move to using plastic wares rather than traditional earth wares, local manufacturers say.

Normally, earth ware makers sell their products not only in Dawei but Myleik, Kawthaung and Myanmar-Thailand border towns.

An earth wares business owner Daw Zin Mar said, “Currently the earth wares market is cool across the region. It recovers only when the Tatanguang Light festival, an annual traditional religious event, is held. “Plastic products are cheaper and more attractive in design. This is the main reason that residents replace earth wares with plastic ones.”

There were 15 earth wares manufacturers in Dawei.

They have turned to other businesses within the past three years as earth wares are seeing less demand. At this time there are only five manufacturers remaining.— Nay Myo Htut (Ye)

An earth ware manufacturer seen in action. Photo: Nay Myo Htut (Ye)
North Korea artillery shots heard from South Korea island prompts alarm

SEOUL — North Korea fired several artillery rounds into the sea near a disputed maritime border with South Korea yesterday, causing alarm among residents on a nearby island in the South, but the shells did not fly across the border, the South’s military said.

The two Koreas are in a tense political standoff after the North’s nuclear test in January and a long-range rocket launch on February. South Korea and the United States say they were grave violations of UN Security Council resolutions.

The allies are expected to begin large-scale annual military drills in early March, which the North calls preparations for war and routinely vows retaliation over.

The South’s office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff later said there were several rounds of artillery fire, revising a comment by the ministry on 19 February. The South’s defence ministry official said by telephone, asking not to be named.

The South’s office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff later said there were several rounds of artillery fire, revising a comment by the ministry official that there had been a single shot, and there were no other unusual movements by the North’s military.

South Korea suspended the operation of a jointly run factory park in the North, closing what had been the last window of regular interaction born out of a summit meeting in 2000, when leaders pledged to work for peace and reconciliation.

The area is near the scene of the sinking of a South Korean navy ship in 2010 that the South blames on the North, although Pyongyang denies any role.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un attends a photo session with the scientists, technicians, workers of earth observation satellite Kwangmonsong-4 in this undated file photo released by North Korea’s Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on 19 February 2016. Photo: Reuters

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un attends a photo session with the scientists, technicians, workers of earth observation satellite Kwangmonsong-4 in this undated file photo released by North Korea’s Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on 19 February 2016. Photo: Reuters

China’s Xi urges state media to boost global influence

BEIJING — Chinese state media must tell China’s story to the world better and become internationally influential, President Xi Jinping said on Friday, during a visit to three of the country’s main media outlets.

Chinese news outlets spanning television, radio and the Internet have been expanding across the globe with state encouragement, aiming. Chinese leaders have said, to combat the negative images of China they feel are spread by world media.

State news agency Xinhua has opened dozens of news bureaus around the world; China Central Television (CCTV) has launched a 24-hour English-language channel in the United States, and the official China Daily newspaper publishes several regional editions across the globe.

Visiting the People’s Daily, CCTV, and Xinhua, Xi said China must increase its ability to broadcast internationally, increase its voice on the global stage and “tell China’s story well”, state television said. China must also create “flagship media with strong international influence” aimed at foreign audiences, Xi added.

State television broadcast images of Xi visiting CCTV’s control room and making a video call to CCTV’s Washington-based North America branch. China’s efforts to expand its global media footprint have been controversial.

Reuters has found that state-owned China Radio International (CRI) has little-known ownership stakes in a global network of private radio stations from Houston to Finland to Bangkok in partnerships with overseas Chinese.

The US Federal Communications Commission and the Department of Justice have said they are investigating a California firm whose US radio broadcasts are backed by CRI. Xi also signalled that the ruling Communist Party would not be relaxing its tight grip on the media any time soon.

Media must follow the party line, uphold the “correct guidance of public opinion” and promote “positive propaganda as the main theme”, the reports paraphrased Xi as saying.

Critical articles must be “accurate and have objective analysis”, he added.—Reuters

Viet Nam in need of 39.5 bn USD of ODA, preferential loans for 2016-2020

HANOI — Viet Nam has a high demand for official development assistance (ODA) and preferential loans during 2016-2020 period at about 39.5 billion US dollars, according to a recent document signed by Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung said that most of the sum will be spent on transport, urban development, agriculture, rural development, environment, education, training, health care, science and technology, Viet Nam’s state-run news agency VNA reported on Friday.

Meanwhile, disbursed ODA and preferential loans during the period is expected to reach 25-30 billion US dollars, up 14 percent compared to that of the 2011-2015 period. The document outlines policies to ensure the effective mobilisation and use of ODA and preferential loans, helping achieve socio-economic development goals, reported VNA.—Xinhua

Nepalese PM arrives in India for visit

NEW DELHI — Nepalese Prime Minister Sharma Oli arrived here Friday on a six-day visit to India, his first foreign visit after assuming office last October.

He is also the first Nepalese premier to pay a visit to India since former prime minister Baburam Bhattarai did in 2011. In 2014, late prime minister Sushil Koirala attended the swearing-in ceremony of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

“During the visit, we expect discussions on all issues of mutual interest,” Indian external affairs ministry spokesman Vikas Swarup said. “Bilateral cooperation, particularly in the key areas of energy, connectivity and people-to-people linkages will form the main focus of the visit,” he said.

The Nepalese delegation includes Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Kamal Thapa, Finance Minister Bishnu Poudel, Home Minister Shakti Baudhur Basnet, Chief Advisor to the prime Minister Bishnu Prasad Rimai and 13 MPs from various political parties, as well as representatives of Nepal’s business community, according to local media reports.—Xinhua

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Australia resumes talks with six countries to resettle asylum seekers

SYDNEY — Australia is in talks with Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, among six nations, to resettle asylum seekers detained in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific island nation of Nauru, the Sydney Morning Herald said yesterday.

The number of asylum seekers trying to reach Australia is small in comparison with those arriving in Europe, but border security is a hot-button political issue in Australia, which is scheduled to hold a national election later in the year.

Negotiations with the governments of the three Southeast Asian countries focus on potentially settling 1,459 detainees, many of whom arrived during previous administrations, the newspaper said.

Three other countries are also involved in preliminary stages of talks, it added, but did not identify them.

A spokesman for Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull declined to confirm or deny the report.

However, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop cautioned that it was “early days” for the talks, as pressing local issues would influence the discussions.

“Some of them have domestic issues, like elections,” Bishop said in a statement. The Philippines goes to the polls on 9 May to choose a new president and vice president, among other officials.

Australia’s tough immigration policies provide that anyone intercepted while trying to reach the country by boat is sent for processing to camps in Nauru and Papua New Guinea’s Manus Island. They are never eligible to be resettled in Australia.

Past Australian efforts to resettle asylum seekers elsewhere ran into hurdles.

Last October, Philippine President Benigno Aquino said the country had “no capacity” to permanently resettle asylum seekers, adding that his government was “challenged to meet the needs of its own people right now”.

Australia had offered $150 million (£104 million) spread over five years in exchange for permanent relocation of some refugees.

A deal struck with Cambodia was halted after only four asylum seekers were resettled.

In 2011, the Australian high court ruled invalid a deal with Malaysia, as it was not a signatory to the United Nations Convention on Refugees.

Australia has also received criticism from the United Nations and rights groups for its hardline policy.

Since 2012, people on boats trying to reach Australia have been turned back or taken to camps in Nauru, where there have been reports of assaults and systemic child abuse, or Papua New Guinea, where Canberra has set up processing centres.—Reuters

Abe keen to have electoral reform bill passed in current Diet session

TOKYO — Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expressed eagerness yesterday to have electoral reform legislation enacted during the current parliament session to cut the number of seats in the House of Representatives.

“I’d like to push for cutting the number of seats by 10 in the ongoing Diet session to carry out my responsibilities as well as to proceed with the envisaged reform,” Abe said on a radio programme, referring to the envisioned passage of a revised Public Offices Election Law.

A panel-composed reform plan calls for slashing the number of seats in the lower house by 10 to 465. A smaller number of lower house members as well as rezoning of electoral districts are part of the envisaged reform aimed at addressing vote weight disparities among single-seat electoral districts.

The proposed reform is intended to keep such disparities between the most and least populated single-seat constituencies below two-to-one — a threshold that when exceeded is seen by the Supreme Court as problematic from a constitutional point of view.

Japan’s electoral system of a combination of single-seat constituencies and proportional representation blocks for general elections was introduced in 1994.

Abe also reiterated his stance to amend part of the war-renouncing Article 9 of the Constitution, referring to the second paragraph of the article that says, “Land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained.”

“The Self-Defence Forces should be recognised and stipulated in (the) Constitution,” Abe said.

The first paragraph of the article forbids the use of force as means of settling international disputes. The Constitution is interpreted to only allow the minimum force necessary for self-defence.

Amending the Constitution has been a “long-cherished wish of the Liberal Democratic Party since its founding 60 years ago,” said Abe, who heads the LDP, vowing “not to give up and to continue to take on this challenge.”

As for the possibility of holding a so-called “double election,” in which the lower house will be dissolved for a general election to be held simultaneously with a House of Councillors election this summer, Abe once again apparently ruled it out.

“I’m absolutely not considering it,” he said. — Kyodo News

Dear readers,

The GNLM would like to apologise to our readers for the mistaken re-printing of a page on 19 February. The re-print was due to a technical error and steps have been taken to ensure that such misprints do not occur again.— Ed

One killed, 21 injured in violent protest in northern Indian state

NEW DELHI — A protesting crowd was killed and 21 others were injured on Friday in India’s northern state of Haryana after police fired on agitating protesters demanding reservation in government jobs and education.

The protest was killed in Rohtak district of Haryana, about 78 km north of India’s capital city of New Delhi.

According to officials, the protesters belonging to backward Jat community attacked houses of officials including a local minister and set ablaze several vehicles including police jeeps.

Reports said the protesters tried to torch minister’s house.

The protesters turned violent, following which we had to open fire that resulted in death of a youth,” an official said.

Reports said 21 people were injured in police action.

Hundreds of protesters shouting pro-reservation slogans imposed a blockade at several places in the state including the main highway disrupting the vehicular traffic.

They also blocked the railways, following which authorities had to cancel both short and long distance trains.

Haryana’s police chief told media that army has been called in to control the situation in the state.

The protesters in Haryana were going on for last six days and demonstrators reportedly went berserk following failure of talks with the local government.

Last month a similar group in southern state of Andhra Pradesh resorted to arson and torched a police station and several vehicles.

In India quotas for lower castes and economically weaker sections are guaranteed constitutionally.

Analysts say quotas push people in India to an advantage in government jobs and education.

The re-print was due to a technical error and steps have been taken to ensure that such misprints do not occur again.— Ed

US assistant secretary of state to tour Asia on space security

WASHINGTON — A US assistant secretary of state will visit India, Indonesia, Singapore, Japan and South Korea from next week through early March for discussions on space security, strategic stability and arms control, the State Department said on Friday.

US Assistant Secretary for Arms Control, Verification and Compliance Frank Rose plans to meet in South Korea with officials of defence and foreign ministries and parliament, at-tend the US-India space security dialogue and deliver a keynote speech at a conference from Monday to Wednesday.

In Indonesia, he will exchange views on arms control with Foreign Ministry officials and discuss space security at an institute Friday.

He will hold meetings with officials of foreign and defence ministries in Singapore on 29 February.

From 1 March in Japan, Rose will hold meetings on arms control, the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification framework and space security with ministers and parliament, at-tend the US-Japan space security dialogue, and give a speech at a symposium the following day.

From 4 March he will hold meetings in South Korea with officials of defence and for-eign ministries and the pres-idential office, as well as US forces.

He will also attend a US-South Korea space policy dialogue.—Kyodo News

Activists hold placards and chant slogans as they protest outside the offices of the Australian Immigration Department in Sydney, Australia, on 4 February 2016. Photo: Reuters
Recollection of the tragic days in Rangoon under the Japanese occupation

U Win Sein

(Continued from yesterday)

Once an unusual high-handed manner Japanese soldier, acting high and mighty in the middle of the wooden jetty bridge in Bogalay Township, when doing occasional body search on the passersby crossing the bridge. Suddenly I saw the Japanese soldier giving a big slap to one middle age monk’s face for putting away a not lighted cheroot on his lips, this had making the monk staggering for a few steps forward and fell down in the middle of the bridge, a few minutes later, recovering from his dismay from the impact of the beating and then walked away with blood dripping from the corner of his mouth slowly and abruptly with no body to intervene this inhuman act on a holy man.

There was another incident of mine happening in Rangoon Town, When I was about the age of 10, wishing eagerly to become a competent cyclist just like the other kids in the street with their bicycles riding around every day. So I had borrowed my uncle’s old rickety bicycle for the practice of riding about two weeks. I was feeling freely to be able to ride a distance of 100 yards without falling at all. One night with no prior warning and in Japanese occupation time, with no street light, from a distance of 50 yards away, a Japanese military officer on a bicycle, dashing left and right, most probably after drinking from the Chinese restaurant Kun Lock, was drunk on his way back to his barracks on Anawrath Road. On the spur of the moment, his bicycle was coming head on with full speed toward me, unable to shunt him in time to another direction, dashing head on collision on each other, both of us fell down on the ground. A moment later the Japanese officer stood up and had drawn his sword making a chopping sign meaning to chopping off my head, I just picked up my bicycle. A stride on it, quickly started cracking on the pedals with full speed, even without the nerve to look back at the officer, but heard him shouting loudly with foul Japanese words. This use counter had given me a frightful experience.

Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku perhaps Japan’s greatest strategist and the officer who would contrive the surprise air attack on U.S naval force of Pearl Harbor. He had worked as a Naval Attache for the Japanese Embassy in Washington D.C from 1926 to 1927, had been promoted from Vice-Minister of the Japanese Navy to Commander-in-Chief of Japan’s Combined Fleet in August 1941 But once the Government of Prime Minister Tojo Hideki decided on war with the United States, Yamamoto reluctantly agreed that only a surprise attack aimed at crippling the U.S Naval force in Pearl Harbor had any hope of success. He also predicted that if war with America lasted more than one year Japan would lose at last. This high ranking officer had a far-sighted view of war related affair and a superb military strategic techniques could hardly curb the war oriented prime minister Tojo Hideki.

In August 1943, a new combined commander responsible for South-East Asia under Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten was chosen for the recapture of Rangoon. The training, equipment, health and the morale of the allied troops was very much improving and the extensive use of aircraft to transport and supply troops. Lieutenant General William Slim was to command the Fourteenth Army. The major effort was intended to be by the newly mounted goon plan of Northern Combat Area Command [NCAC] under General Joseph Stilwell. General Orde Wingate with expanded Chindit forces was to contrive the surprise air attack aimed at crippling the Japanese Navy to Commander-in-Chief, the Japanese would defend Rangoon Town.

On May 1944, a Gurkha parachute battalion was dropped near the mouth of Rangoon River and captured the Japanese rear guard. The 26th Indian Infantry Division landed by ship the next day. When they arrived they discovered General Kimura had ordered Rangoon to be evacuated on 22nd April. After the Japanese withdrawal, Rangoon had experienced an orgy of loot and lawlessness. That day was not easy for me to forget. Because I was sent by my father to give 500 kyat [Japanese occupation period notes] to my uncle at 22nd street. After given the money to my uncle, I was on my way back, when on reaching Suie Pagoda Road at the Central Bank of Burma, I saw some looters with their both hands full of notes came out from the Bank, then another looter came out, his hands also were filled with notes, but was being chased by an Indian soldier with a rifle shooting for the looter to stop; as the looter ran past me, and with the soldier near me, suddenly he kneeled down beside me and aimed his rifle at the looter and had fired one shot at him, a tremendous deafening sound holding that making my ears heard a ring noise for a long time. The looter was hit and could even ran a distance of about 5 meters and fell down trembling and shaking his whole body with blood oozing out from a wide opened wound in front of his chest, the bullet piercing in from his back and came out from a wide opened wound. The Indian soldier might not have received the order to evacuate [some Indian army Division had sided with the Japanese Imperial Army].

Another sorrowful sight that I had witnessed was after the liberation of Rangoon, on the day that the Rangoon Jail was to be opened and let out about 680 prisoners of war, they were British; Australians; Americans and Chinese. When the big wooden prison doors were opened for the prisoners to meet the welcoming party of the allied forces, I was among the city folks standing, awaiting for the prisoners of war to come out. About 9 in the morning, when we heard the singing of army songs by the prisoners, from the wide open doors of Rangoon Jail, all were marching out as if they were in an army marching parade, but they were not in steady steps, because all of them were weak physically, their steps were staggering, all of them without shirts, showing their thin bodies of bones only, their lower parts were hardly covered up by their torn and old short pants, some of them not being able to fully cover their buttocks, because they had come from a prison, which had been the way of life in prison all the time. Some older soldiers were stoop marching with head bending down but they kept up their soldierly spirit marching on and on. This pitiful sight of fellow human beings going through this terrible suffering in prison had made my heart aching for their misfortune.

Let’s hope there will be no more disastrous conflicts. Conflicts either big or small shall be resolved on a Round table by the countries concerned.

With sincerity, honesty and compassion.
THE Mawtinson pagoda festival, one of the most famous pagoda festivals in Myanmar, will be held for a month from the full moon of Tabo - dwell to the full moon of Ta-baung, according to a member of the committee working on the festival. Vessels from the Yangon-Mawt in jetty and Phonegyi Street jetty are slated to transport pilgrims during the festival. Roads have already been built at milepost 95/6 to provide access to the hill by car. Two hotels with 50 rooms each are already open for business there. Pilgrims can enjoy the beauty of the beach, MwayTaung Yangho-seik and rest well, he added. — Township (IPRD)

The Zika virus can be contracted by humans through bites from the aedes aegypti mosquito, a carrier of dengue fever. Those who contract the Zika virus are expected to immediately feel feverish; develop red patches and spots on the skin and red swelling of the face; feel cramps and aching joints; and experience nausea and headaches over a period between two days and one week. “Since the Zika virus is not yet treatable, prevention [against contracting the virus] is the main priority,” said Dr. Thein Thein Htay, the Deputy Minister for Health. The Zika virus does usually exhibit severe symptoms; its symptoms are similar to those of the more common influenza virus. Medical experts are currently attempting to show proof of the connection between the effects of the virus on pregnant mothers and birth defects in children, such as microcephaly, where a child is born with an abnormally small head. — Myitmakha News Agency

Survey to boost market access for Mon State farmers

A SURVEY on the future aspirations and agricultural investments of villagers in Mon State will commence in the last week of February in cooperation with the International Food Policy Research Institute at Michigan State University. “Farmers within the agricultural sector are not in a position to access domestic or foreign markets. The government should implement projects that inform farmers of what crops to plant and at what time of year. Since officials at the Ministry of Commerce lack the capacity to provide market-related information, they need to establish a call center,” said Dr. Soe Huan, vice-chairperson of the Myanmar Rice Federation.

Further surveys will be carried out in order to assess the needs of farmers within Yangon and Ayeyawady regions, which will be financially supported by USAID and the LIFT Trust Fund. The Centre for Economic and Social Development previously conducted a pilot project on fresh water fish farming enterprises in Ayeyarwady, Yangon and Bago regions, while a survey was collected last year on livelihoods and household expenses in rural communities in Mon State. — Myitmakha News Agency

Cargo vessel sinks in Hpa-An

A CARGO vessel, 25 feet long and 10feet wide, being maneuvered by one U Aye Lwin, 35, with three crew members sank at an old jetty at Hpa-An town, Kayin State on Tuesday. The accident was caused by over loading of the boat. According to an investigation, the vessel was carrying sand from the river. No one was injured in the sinking.— Tun Tun Htway (Hpa-An)
Cameron hails EU deal to give Britain ‘special status’, battle looms

BRUSSELS — David Cameron hailed a landmark deal on Friday he said gave Britain “special status” in the European Union and pledged to campaign heart and soul to stay in the EU at a deeply uncertain referendum expected in June.

At a summit that ran into overtime, EU leaders agreed unanimously on a package of measures aimed at keeping Brit- ain in the 28-nation bloc to avoid a potentially disastrous divorce. Their legally binding deci- sion granted Britain an explicit exemption from the founding goal of “ever closer union”, of- fered concessions on the welfare rights of migrant workers and safeguards for the City of Lon- don financial centre.

The British prime minister said he had achieved all his main negotiating aims and would rec- ommend the agreement to his cabinet yesterday, firing the starting gun on a fierce referen- dum campaign on Britain’s fu- ture membership of the bloc.

“I believe we are stronger, safer and better off inside a re- formed European Union,” he told a news conference. “And that is why I will be campaigning with all my heart and soul to per- suade the British people to re- main in the reformed European union that we have secured to- day.”

The euroscopic “Vote Leave” campaign was quick to dismiss what it called “Camer- on’s hollow deal” as bad for Brit- ain. Cameron acknowledged that one of his closest political allies, Justice Secretary Michael Gove, would campaign to leave the EU, saying he was disappointed but not surprised. He suggested other Conservatives may also join the “out” camp.

He would not officially con- firm the expected polling date of 23 June but said he would make an announcement soon.

After two days of intense wrangling in Brussels, EU lead- ers determined to try to keep Britain in the union resolved out- standing disputes over migrant workers’ welfare rights and rela- tions between London and the euro zone.

“So now the deal is done and its up to the British people to de- cide,” said European Commissi- on President Jean-Claude Juncker — the man Cameron tried furiously to block for the top EU executive job, but who played a key role in crafting the deal.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, one of Britain’s strongest- est allies in Europe, said: “We believe that with this we have given David Cameron a package with which he can campaign in Britain for Britain to stay in the European Union.”

The agreement delivered victory to Cameron on several of the key demands on which he chose to fight for what he called “a new settlement” with Europe. He won a commitment to change the bloc’s governing trea- ties in future to recognise that Britain was not bound to any po- litical union and would have safeguards against financial reg- ulation being imposed on the City of London by the eurozone. Facing an uphill political battle at home, Cameron was concerned to show Britons that he had won concessions that he believes can reduce an influx of EU migrant workers and keep Britain out of any future political integration.

In hours of wrangling with central and east European coun- tries that provide many of Brit- ain’s low-paid immigrant work- ers, he secured the right to curb in-work benefits for up to four years and scale back child benefit for workers whose children re- main abroad. — Reuters

Pressure grows on Hillary Clinton to release Goldman Sachs speeches

NEW YORK — Hillary Clinton continued to resist calls to release her transcripts of paid speeches she gave to Goldman Sachs and other banks, saying she would hold onto them until Bernie Sanders and other rivals for the US presidency released theirs.

Sanders, her populist rival for the Democratic presidential nomination who has surged in polls with his furious rebukes of Wall Street and its role in the 2008 recession, said on Friday he had none to release because he does not give paid speeches to banks. Clinton’s reluctance to re- veal what she privately told banks and other organisations has become an increasingly heat- ed issue ahead of the election this November as she fights sugges- tions by Sanders and others from their party’s more liberal wing that she is too cozy with the US financial industry.

“I am happy to release any- thing I have whenever everybody else does the same, because everybody in this race, including Senator Sanders, has given speeches to private groups,” she said on Thursday night in a tele- vised “town hall” event with vot- ers in Nevada. Nevada is the third state to vote for the Demo- cratic Party’s nominee in caucus- es to be held yesterday.

Clinton has earned more than $20 million for 92 paid speeches since leaving her job as US secretary of state in 2013, according to records disclosed by her campaign, including $675,000 for three closed-door speeches to New York-based investment bank Goldman Sachs. — Reuters

Kurdish militant group TAK claims responsibility for Ankara bombing

ISTANBUL — A Kurdish militant group once linked to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) claimed responsibility for Friday’s bombing in the Turkish capital Ankara that killed 28 people this week, according to a statement on its website.

The Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (TAK) said the bombing was in response to the policies of President Tayyip Erdogan and said it would continue its attacks. It said the bomber was a 26-year-old Turkish nation- al born in the eastern city of Van.

The group most recently claimed responsibility for a mortar attack at Istanbul’s second airport in December that left an aircraft cleaner dead. TAK has in the past said its relationship with PKK militants has been severed. Both groups are regarded as terrorist organisations by Ankara and the United States. — Reuters

Morocco arrests 10 suspected IS militants, including Frenchman

SALE, (Morocco) — Moroccan authorities said on Friday they had arrested 10 suspected militants linked to the Islamic State, including a French citizen, and seized weapons and bomb-making materials in raids on their hideouts.

The cell is the latest in a series of radical groups Morocco says it has uncovered. Thursday’s raids took place at locations the group used in the southern city of Essaouira and the central cities of Meknes and Sidi Kacem, authorities said. At the offices of the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation (BCIJ), reporters were shown armaments, ammu- nition, tasers, swords and bomb materials seized from hideouts. BCIJ is the judicial wing of Morocco’s domestic intelligence service.

“This new cell is too dangerous … I don’t call it a cell but an armed brigade,” bureau head Abdelhak al-Khayyam told reporters.

Al-Khayyam said the group had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group and set up a hideout near the desert city of Tan-Tan in an arid area riddled with caves. The suspects include a French citizen, who converted to Islam and lived in Morocco for at least a year, and a 16-year-old Moroccan. — Reuters

Three Turkish soldiers killed as building collapses in southeast Turkey

ANKARA — Three Turkish soldiers were killed and four others were lightly injured after a building collapsed in the southeast, where security forces have been clashing with Kurdish militants for months.

The building toppled in the Sur district of Diyarbakir Province, where a curfew has been in place for almost three months and more than 300 militants and security personnel have been killed, accord- ing to the Turkish army.

The military did not give a reason for the collapse. — Reuters

Russia hopes Ukrainian truck ban will end on Saturday

MOSCOW — The Russian transport ministry hopes that a Ukrainian ban on Russian trucks will end on Saturday and has made an offer to resolve a dispute over the issue, local agencies quoted the ministry as saying on Friday.

On Sunday, the Russian transport ministry barred Ukrainian trucks in response to Ukrainian activists blocking some Russian trucks from entering Ukraine.

Diplomatic and trade ties between Russia and Ukraine have sharp- ly deteriorated over Russia’s annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and a pro-Russian separatist conflict. — Reuters

Serbia has not closed border with Macedonia

BELGRADE — Serbia did not close the border with Macedonia, the interior ministry told Tanjug.

Head of the ministry’s press office Biljana Popovic Ivtkovic told Tanjug that Serbia had started implementing Thursday’s deal of police raids on the Greece-Macedonia border and their organ- isation transport to Austria.

“As of today, all signatories to the protocol will be profiling migrants on the Greece-Macedonia border, which implies tighter border controls to prevent illegal migration,” Popovic Ivtkovic said.

Under the protocol, the authorities should identify migrants and take their biometric data to make sure they come from countries in which their life has been in jeopardy, such as Syria, Iraq and Afghan- stan. — Tanjug
Afghan troops pull out of strategic Helmand District

LASHKAR GAH — Afghan forces have pulled out of bases in Musa Qala, a strategic district of the southern province of Helmand, after months of heavy fighting with Islamic State insurgents, officials said yesterday.

Helmand, a traditional heartland of the Taliban and one of the world’s biggest centres of opium production, has been threatened for months by the US and the United States recently sent hundreds of soldiers to the province to bolster its defence.

The commander of the Afghan army’s 215th corps, Mohammad Moeen Faqir, said troops had been ordered to pull back from Koshan Tower, their main base in Musa Qala, as well as other checkpoints to reinforce Gereshk, straddling the main Highway One which links Kabul with the south and west.

“Their presence in the area did not mean anything,” he said.

“We will use them in battle with enemies in other parts of Helmand Province.”

Fierce fighting has raged in Musa Qala and other parts of Helmand for months and the Taliban overran the district in August last year before they were driven back by Afghan forces backed by US airstrikes.

Musa Qala itself is a dry and sparsely inhabited district that British and American troops fought hard to control between 2006 and 2008 but its loss could bring further losses elsewhere, including Sangin where government forces have been clinging on.

“Now that the government has withdrawn its forces from this district, we will see Kajaki, Gereshk and Sangin collapsing very soon,” said deputy provincial council member Abdul Majid Akhundzada.

The Taliban said in a statement it had captured armoured personnel carriers, bulldozers and other equipment abandoned in Koshan Tower and nine other checkpoints. The withdrawal prompted speculation among local officials that the government had reached an arrangement with the Taliban but Abdul Jabar Qahraman, presidential envoy for security affairs in Helmand, denied any such pact.

“There wasn’t any deal,” he said.

“We learnt that there was no need to continue the fight in that area.”

No comment was immediately available from the ministry of defence in Kabul.

The outgoing commander of international forces, Gen. John Campbell, recently sent hundreds of American troops to Helmand, where they assist and train Afghan forces but do not fight.

A spokesman for NATO’s Resolute Support mission in Kabul said its aim remained to train, advise and assist and referred questions on Afghan troop movements to the defence ministry.

US officials estimate the Taliban dominates or threatens almost a third of the country and has full control over at least four districts. Although it briefly took the northern city of Kunduz last year, it does not control any provincial capitals.

Although Helmand has been one of the provinces most at risk, the Taliban have been pushing forward across the country, putting severe strain on government troops, fighting alone since international forces ended most combat operations in 2014.—Reuters

Russia pushes UN Security Council on Syria sovereignty

UNITED NATIONS — Russia asked the United Nations Security Council on Friday to call for Syria’s sovereignty to be respected, for cross-border shelling and incursions to be halted and for “attempts or plans for foreign ground intervention” to be abandoned.

Russia circulated a short draft resolution to the 15-member council over concerns about an escalation in hostilities after Turkey this week said it and other countries could commit ground troops to Syria.

The Security Council met on Friday afternoon to discuss the draft, but veto-powers the United States, France and Britain all said it had no future.

“Rather than trying to distract the world with the resolution they just laid down, it would be really great if Russia implement the resolution that’s already agreed to,” US Ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, told reporters after the meeting.

She was referring to a resolution unanimously agreed by the Security Council in December that endorsed an international road map for a Syria peace process.

The Russian draft, seen by Reuters, would have the council express “its grave alarm at the reports of military buildup and preparatory activities aimed at launching foreign ground intervention into the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic.”

It also demands that states “refrain from provocative rhetoric and inflammatory statements inciting further violence and interference into internal affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic.”

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told Reuters this week that his country, Saudi Arabia and some European powers wanted ground troops in Syria, though no serious plan had been debated.

Russian air strikes have helped to bring the Syrian army to within 25 km (15 miles) of Turkey’s borders, while Kurdish militia fighters, regarded by Ankara as hostile insurgents, have also gained ground, heightening the sense of urgency.

Turkey has been shelling positions of the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia in response to what it says is hostile fire coming across the border into Turkey.

Russia’s relations with Turkey hit a low in November when Turkish warplanes downed a Russian bomber near the Syrian-Turkish border, a move described by Russian President Vladimir Putin as a “dastardly stab in the back.”

Syria’s civil war was sparked by a Syrian government crackdown on a pro-democracy movement in early 2011. Islamic State militants have used the chaos to seize territory in Syria and Iraq, and some 4.3 million Syrians have fled the country. The UN says at least 250,000 people have been killed. A US-led coalition has been bombing Islamic State targets since September 2014.

Russia began air strikes in Syria in September 2015.—Reuters

US-backed fighters capture Islamic State-held town in northeast Syria

BEIRUT — A US-backed alliance of Syrian fighters including the Kurdish YPG militia captured an Islamic State-held town in Syria’s northeast on Friday, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said.

The capture of al-Shadadi in Hasaka province came three days after the beginning of an offensive against Islamic State in the area by the Syria Democratic Forces backed by US-led air strikes, and would help isolate Raqqa, the jihadists’ de-facto capital in Syria.

There was no immediate comment from the Syria Democratic Forces. The Britain-based Observer’s director Rami Abdulrahman said al-Shadadi’s capture was a “psychological blow” to the Islamic State group. He said it still controlled dozens of villages in the area, but that the SDF had taken many more villages and farmland in the past few days. On Thursday the SDF announced it had launched an operation earlier in the week to seize al-Shadadi from Islamic State. The US-backed alliance, formed in October, includes the powerful YPG, which has proved the most effective partner against Islamic State on the ground in Syria for a Washington-led air campaign against the group there and in neighbouring Iraq.

The SDF, which also includes Arab fighting groups such as Jaysh al-Thawar, captured areas of Hasaka from Islamic State late last year. The YPG took swathes of territory from the group last year. Most of Hasaka province is under Kurdish control.—Reuters
Republican White House hopefuls Rubio, Bush battle it out in South Carolina

CHARLESTON — Republican presidential candidates Marco Rubio and Jeb Bush are locked in a bare-knuckled fight for third place in a South Carolina primary vote yesterday, amid fears that anything less could blunt their White House hopes.

With front-runner Donald Trump fighting to hold off US Senator Ted Cruz of Texas and win his second straight early nominating contest, Rubio and Bush are battling to become the main anti-Trump alternative from among establishment Republicans seeking the party’s nomination for the 8 November election.

An NBC News-Wall Street Journal/Marist poll released on Friday showed Trump in the lead with support from 28 per cent of likely Republican primary voters, followed by Cruz at 23 per cent. Rubio led Bush narrowly, 15 per cent to 13 per cent.

The Bush-Rubio competition is layered with home-state drama: Bush, 63, is the elder statesman, of Florida politics having served as governor. Rubio, 44, is the upstart understudy, a first-term US senator who served in Florida’s legislature.

Rubio supporters were offended by the millions of dollars in attack ads spent by Bush’s Super PAC. Right to Rise, believing that the money would have better spent attacking Trump rather than trying to undermine a like-minded Republican.

“People are going to whatever they think they need to do to win. But it’s notable they spent far more money attacking Marco than they have the front-runner Donald Trump,” said Rubio spokesman Alex Conant. The Bush team dismissed the complaints.

“I don’t think there’s anything personal about it from Jeb’s side,” said Jim Dyke, Bush’s campaign chief in South Carolina. “Jeb for good reason feels there’s very little common ground.”

Bush has a key backer in South Carolina’s Republican US senator, Lindsey Graham, but Rubio upped the ante by winning the support of popular Governor Nikki Haley.

Her endorsement gave Rubio momentum at just the right time and the two have campaigned together around the state. Rubio is treading carefully around whether Bush should exit the race if he performs poorly in South Carolina, saying Bush has worked hard and “has a right to be in this race as long as he wants to be.”

“I mean, he’s spent $50 million attacking me. If there are differences in policy we’ll talk about it. What I’ve said about Governor Bush is he doesn’t have any foreign policy experience, which is true. But I don’t view that as an attack. I view that as a fact.” Rubio told reporters on Wednesday.

Bush has bristled at the charge, telling supporters he has visited 89 countries and seen his brother and father develop foreign policy as US presidents.

His team has made much of Rubio’s having missed many hearings and votes as a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

“It’s hard for me to be lectured to by a gifted young guy who thinks going to committee hearings means you know something about the world,” Bush said. Rubio forces had wanted to knock Bush out of the race in New Hampshire, the last nominating contest held on 9 February, but a bad Rubio debate performance and a strong campaign trail performance by Bush thwarted those hopes with Bush edging his rival for a fourth-place finish.—Reuters

Vatican to Trump: It’s not ‘personal’, it’s religion

MYRTLE BEACH, (South Carolina) — The Vatican on Friday tried to tamp down a firestorm ignited by Pope Francis’ comments assailing Donald Trump’s views on US immigration as “not Christian”, assuring the Republican presidential front-runner that it was not a personal attack or attempt to influence the US campaign.

Francis told reporters during a conversation on his flight home from Mexico on Thursday, “A person who thinks only about building walls, whether they come by, and not building bridges, is not Christian.”

Trump has said if elected president, he would build a wall along the US-Mexican border to keep immigrants from illegally entering the United States.

Vatican spokesman Father Federico Lombardi told Vatican Radio the pope’s comments, in response to a reporter’s question on Trump, were an affirmation of his longstanding belief that migrants should be helped and not shut out. He said the pope believed people “should build bridges, not walls”.

“In no way was this a personal attack, nor an indication of how to vote,” Lombardi said.

Trump, who leads Republican candidates in opinion polls, lashed out on Thursday, dismissing the pope’s remarks as “disgraceful” for questioning his faith.

“If and when the Vatican is attacked by ISIS (Islamic State), which as everyone knows is ISIS’ ultimate trophy, I can promise you the pope would have only wished and prayed that Donald Trump would have been president,” Trump said.

Later, during a television appearance, he rowed back, calling Francis “a wonderful guy.”

The extraordinary exchange between the billionaire real estate developer and leader of the world’s 1.25 billion Roman Catholics, which occurred days before Saturday’s Republican nominating contest in South Carolina, was headline news around the world.

On Friday, New York’s Daily News gave it the front page against a backdrop of an image of Trump, a headline blared: Anti Christ? The New York Post ran a front page photo of Trump and the pope wearing boxing gloves with the headline: Trump & pope: Bible bakers.

It was unclear what, if any, effect the tussle might have on the vote in South Carolina, a conservative state that is home to many evangelical Protestant Christians.

Patrick Hornbeck, chairman of the department of theology at Fordham University in New York, said on Thursday that Francis’ words were not surprising given the poverty he had just seen in Mexico.

“There is very little common ground between Pope Francis and Donald Trump,” Hornbeck said. He predicted the pope’s words on electoral politics would have little effect on any US Catholics who liked Trump as a candidate. At a CNN town hall in Columbia, South Carolina, on Thursday night, Trump said he had “a lot of respect” for Francis but that the pope had been influenced by hearing only Mexico’s side of the border issue. The pope’s statement also had been exaggerated by the media, he said.

“Think he said something much softer than it was originally reported by the media,” Trump said.

Earlier on Thursday, Thom as Gromee, director of the Boston College Center on the Church in the 21st Century, said Francis’ comments were entirely in keeping with his focus on mercy.

“The pope is commissioned to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That’s his job,” Gromee said. “So when he was asked a direct question, he gave Trump the benefit of the doubt, he said we have to be sure he said this, but if he said this, it is not Christian.”—Reuters

UN’s climate chief to quit, praises Paris agreement

Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

PARIS — The UN’s climate chief said on Friday she will step down in July, at the end of a six-year term, and praised governments for reaching a historic Paris deal in December to shift the world economy from fossil fuels to renewable energy such as wind or solar power.

“The journey that lies ahead will require continued determination, ingenuity and, above all, our collective sense of humanity and purpose,” she wrote in the letter, dated 12 February and made public on Friday.

Figueres, a 59-year-old Costa Rican, said she would not accept any extension of her term as head of the Bonn-based UN Climate Change Secretariat after what she called the historic Paris Agreement.

“We now move into a phase of urgent implementation,” she wrote in a letter to governments, which agreed a goal in Paris to cut greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2100 by shifting from fossil fuels to renewable energy such as wind or solar power.

“Today is the day the world took a historic step, from fossil fuels to a bright future. In 2016, we can take the next big step, as we gear up to implement the agreement,” she wrote.

“While we have a long road ahead, we must act now, with the help of all our partners,” she said.

Figueres will be succeeded by former Costa Rican climate negotiator, who took over the UN job at a low point in 2010 after a summit in Copenhagen the year before collapsed in acrimony between rich and poor.

She patiently worked to build trust among governments with radically different interests, ranging from the United States and China to small island states worried by rising seas or OPEC nations fearing a loss of export revenues.

Nicholas Stern, of the London School of Economics who wrote a 2007 study about the economics of climate change, said Figueres had an “outstanding ability to see where we need to go as a world and to bring people together”.

Her successor is likely to come from a developed nation — Figueres succeeded Yvo de Boer, of the Netherlands. Separately, Hela Cheikhrouhou, head of the UN’s Green Climate Fund set up to channel money to developing nations to help them cope with climate change, also said on Friday she would stand down in September after a three-year term.

—Reuters
Zimbabwe’s main hydro power dam running out of water after drought

KARIBA — Zimbabwe’s main hydro power dam could stop producing electricity in six months if water levels keep falling after the nation’s worst drought in more than two decades, an official said on Friday.

Zimbabwe and neighbouring Zambia both rely heavily on the Kariba dam for electricity, and falling dam levels at the plant raises the threat of deeper power cuts in the two countries which are already facing frequent power shortages.

Kenneth Maswera, Kariba Power Station’s general manager told reporters that dam levels were at 12 per cent of capacity, a level last recorded in 1992 during a severe drought.

“We’ve not received any significant inflows, basically the level is going to continue going down if we don’t get any flows into the lake,” said Maswera in Kariba town, 390 km (242 miles) northwest of the capital Harare.

Without any new inflows, the dam would only generate power for the next 165 days, Maswera said.

Supplies from Kariba, which has an installed generating capacity of 750 megawatts (MW), were at 285 MW now, he said.

Zimbabwe is importing 300 MW of electricity from South Africa’s power utility Eskom (ESCI:UL) and another 40 MW from Mozambique, which has eased the power cuts, officials say.

The drought has left 3 million people in need of food aid in Zimbabwe, and farmers in Zimbabwe have lost cattle and crops to drought but fear the worst is yet to come.—Reuters

State of natural disaster declared in Fiji over tropical cyclone Winston

SUVA — Fiji declared a state of natural disaster yesterday as severe tropical cyclone Winston lashed the South Pacific island country, the government-owned Fiji Broadcasting Corporation (FBC) said.

The declaration is effective for a period of 30 days starting from Saturday, said Meleti Bainimarama, permanent secretary for rural and maritime development and national disaster management. “As your national disaster and controller who will be responsible for this operation and together with the Disaster Management Committee (DISMAC) machinery and resources of the government, we will do our best to maintain and uphold your interest and the interest of Fiji,” Bainimarama said, according to the FBC.

Meanwhile, a nationwide curfew was imposed from 6 pm local time until further notice. Although no immediate casualties or damage were reported, local police kept monitoring the situation closely. Power supplies to parts of Fiji including the capital of Suva had been cut as Winston, now a category 5 tropical cyclone — the highest possible level — swept through the Pacific island country.—Xinhua

Three Palestinians killed in flaring day of Mideast violence: medics

RAMALLAH/GAZA — Three Palestinians were killed in a flaring day of Mideast violence: medics reported.

The radio said a third Palestinian was killed by Israeli soldiers’ gunfire when dozens of young men threw stones at the soldiers near the village of Beit Fajar, close to Bethlehem in the West Bank. The Palestinian Health Ministry said two more Palestinians were also shot and wounded during the clashes. In Gaza, a health ministry spokesman said seven Palestinians were injured during clashes with Israeli soldiers stationed on the border between northern Gaza Strip and Israel.

Friday has been in a flaring day of violence that saw another two Palestinian tolls. Earlier a Palestinian man was shot dead after allegedly trying to run over Israeli soldiers in Silwad, a Palestinian village northeast of Ramallah in the West Bank. Before that, two Israelis were shot and lightly injured in an apparent attack at the Damascus Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem. The assailant, identified as a 20-year-old resident of an east Jerusalem Arab neighbourhood, was killed at the scene.—Xinhua

Chicago buffeted as strong winds prompt highrise evacuations

CHICAGO — Gusts of up to 70 mph (113 kph) in the Windy City on Friday caused the closure of the second-tallest US building’s observation deck, power outages, flight cancellations and highrise evacuations.

The Willis Tower Skydeck, a popular tourist attraction at the 1,451-foot (442-m-tall) Willis Tower, said it closed due to the weather.

The Chicago Fire Department said it was evacuating tenants from three downtown highrises due to blowing debris such as broken glass from nearby buildings caused by the high winds.

The third-largest US city’s aviation department reported delays at O’Hare International Airport of up to 60 minutes and 160 canceled flights. The National Weather Service issued a high wind advisory for the area in effect until 6 pm CST. The agency reported fallen trees and power lines, road accidents and the collapse of a building under construction.

On city streets, pedestrians struggled to stay upright and retrieve lost hats and papers. Flying debris stopped service on one branch of the Chicago “L”, rapid transit rail and caused major delays on another, according to the Chicago Transit Authority website. A suburban commuter train line was delayed when a large box containing salt used to clear ice from the platform fell onto the tracks, said Metra spokeswoman Meg Reile. About 92,000 customers were without power in Northern Illinois on Friday afternoon, while another 91,700 who had lost power had service restored, said ComEd spokesman Alejandro Bodipo-Memb. —Reuters

Welthungerhilfe Myanmar

Call for Consultancy Applications

Reference: Mid-Term Evaluation- MMR 1089

Welthungerhilfe is currently seeking an independent midterm evaluation of its BMZ funded project “Capacity development of networks for food security and social safety nets at the community level in Htan Tabin Township”. Specifically, the project focuses on building the capacities of local CBOs for food and nutrition security through:

- A Village Development Committee (VDC) Federation and its member VDCs, which provide village led development, micro-finance for pro-poor small business development and social safety nets.
- Savings groups, organized in three Self-Help Group Federations which provide savings and loan services to members
- Farmers groups, which jointly store harvest and rent machinery for members.

The main Objectives of the MidTerm Evaluation are to assess the project on:
1. Progress towards project planned activities and outcomes.
2. Stability and sustainability of the current structure of CBOs and federations of CBOs.
3. Role and effectiveness of the CBOs in improving the food and nutrition security of its members.

Expected Outputs
- Evaluation report, at the latest four weeks after the field mission, 30-40 pages maximum, plus annexes. (in English)
- A summary of findings and recommendations for presentation to CBOs using a visualization and annexes. (in English)

Reference:
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World Bank

Global New Light of Myanmar

WORLD 13

Photo: Reuters

An official of the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA) inspect water levels on the Kariba dam in Kariba, Zimbabwe, on 19 February 2016.
‘Commune’ director in Berlin wants Danes to share with refugees

BERLIN — Danish director Thomas Vinterberg says he hopes his film “Kollektivet” (The Commune) will help his countrymen recognize the importance of sharing — especially with refugees — despite curbs enacted in Denmark.

Vinterberg, who grew up in a commune, said it disturbs him when Denmark puts ads in newspapers in the Middle East warning would-be refugees that benefits had been cut for new arrivals.

Last month, the Danish parliament passed measures aimed at deterring refugees from seeking asylum, including confiscating valuables to pay for their stay, despite protests from international human rights organizations.

The so-called “jewellery bill” was the latest attempt by Denmark’s minority center-right government to curb immigration to a country that took in a record 20,000 refugees last year.

Vinterberg, who had his breakthrough with his 1998 film “Festen” (The Celebration), said the commune had taught him the value of generosity and sharing can re-awaken at some point.

Danish actress Trine Dyrholm, who plays a woman who talks her husband into turning their home into a commune, said it was more important than ever to talk about togetherness.

“Right now in Denmark it’s really complicated. I think we are too afraid of everything actually and we have a huge Danish Folkparti (right-wing Danish People’s Party) and I think that’s very dangerous if they get too much power.”

“The Commune” is among 19 films competing for the Berlin festival’s top Golden Bear prize.

Taylor Swift’s next single titled ‘New Romantics’

LOS ANGELES — Singer Taylor Swift is releasing “New Romantics” as her seventh single from her Grammy-winning album 1989.

“I’m very happy to say the next single from 1989 will be ‘New Romantics,’ the pop singer tweeted. “New Romantics” was a bonus track on the deluxe edition of 1989.

The song is thematically similar to Swift’s hit “Shake It Off,” with triumphant lyrics like, “Cause, baby, I could build a castle/ Out of all the bricks they threw at me” and “We are too busy dancing/ To get knocked off our feet.”

This has been a big month for Swift, 26, who won three Grammy Awards in the album of the year, pop vocal album, and music video categories.—PTI

Dave Grohl to perform at Oscars

LOS ANGELES — Foo Fighters frontman Dave Grohl is to give a special performance at the 2016 Academy Awards.

The rock icon joins an extensive list of stars from music and movies who will appear at the Oscars ceremony in Los Angeles on 28 February, reported Rolling Stone magazine.

The full list of stars presenting awards or performing includes actors Russell Crowe, Sacha Baron Cohen, Ryan Gosling, Charlize Theron, Eddie Redmayne, and Reese Witherspoon, and the musicians who will take to the stage at the city’s Dolby Theatre include Lady Gaga, The Weeknd, Quincy Jones, and John Legend.

Grohl, 47, who made his directorial debut in 2013 with the documentary “Sound City”, has been billed as giving a “special performance.”

“We’re thrilled to be joined by a movie icon, a filmmaking dynamo, a larger than life hero, a master of satire and two world renowned music power-hitters,” Oscar producers David Hill and Reginald Hudlin said.

“This year’s show reflects a commitment to showcase cinematic contributions from a variety of genres and this latest list of presenters reflects just that.—PTI

Film on Fukushima nuclear disaster wins Berlin film festival award

BERLIN — A film set in northeastern Japan’s Fukushima Prefecture in the wake of the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear power plant disaster was awarded the Heiner Carow Prize at the 66th Berlin International Film Festival Friday.

“This is quite a strange story, being in love with a priest, but this wasn’t our main goal,” she said. “I think we more focused to find a presence on screen for that character, for the lady who (for a long time) nobody touched because they didn’t let them touch.”—Reuters

Berlin film shows women emotionally trapped in post-communist provincial Poland

BERLIN — Director Tomasz Wasilewski says he was inspired to make a film about the emotional desperation of women trapped in provincial 1990s Poland after the fall of communism because he remembers that time through female eyes.

The 35-year-old director’s “Zjednoczone Stanowy Milosci” (United States of Love), showing in the main competition at the Berlin International Film Festival, depicts several women who live fairly routine lives in the concrete cinderblock housing typical of the era, but dream of annulment.

One of the women is married but has fallen in love with a handsome priest, another loves a recently widowed doctor and a third has fallen in love with the young female aerobics teacher who lives across the hall.

Wasilewski said on Friday after a press screening that while the politics of that time were turbulent and exciting, people’s personal lives and society were changing in different ways.

“I remember some portraits of people and sensations and emotions from that time, and I experienced actually that time through the eyes of women, the whole transformation and all the changes that happened in Poland,” Wasilewski said.

That was in part because like many Polish men, his father went abroad to work when the Iron Curtain came down, leaving the young boy with his mother and older sister. “So the whole period of transformation I saw through their eyes,” he said.

The parts of the main characters are played by Polish theater actresses, which helps in a movie that is divided into vignettes — each of which could be seen as a short stage play.

Julia Kijowska plays Agata, whose love for the young priest is so all-consuming that she spies on him in a shower and tells her husband after making love that his hands are sweaty and he shouldn’t touch her.

Kijowska said she saw her character as emblematic of people who under communism had been unable to express themselves — emotionally as well as politically.

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The award is named after renowned German director Heiner Carow.—Kyodo News
Thousands marry in mass ceremony in South Korea

GAPYEONG, (South Korea) — About 3,000 couples from 62 countries tied the knot in South Korea yesterday, in a mass wedding ceremony conducted by the Unification Church founded by the late Reverend Sun Myung Moon.

A further 12,000 couples worldwide participated in the ceremony via the Internet, said Ryu Kyung-seuk, president of the South Korean headquarters of the church. Moon, who died in 2012 at the age of 92, had presided over mass weddings since the early 1960s.

His widow, Hak Ja Han Moon, officiated at Saturday’s ceremony, which was witnessed by about 22,000 church followers and guests gathered at the church’s CheongShim Peace World Centre in Gapyeong, about 75 km (50 miles) northeast of Seoul. The couples included 1,000 who were newly wed and about 2,000 who were already married and seeking to re-dedicating their marriages and families to God as they had married before joining the church.

“We’ve been engaged for over one year now, mostly been separated, so of course it’s extremely good to be together again,” said Hye-joo Song, from Britain, who married his Japanese wife on Saturday. “And yes, we’re happy to be married and also share that experience with many other people.”

Moon was a lightning rod for controversy and was once jailed in the United States for tax evasion. He also declared in 1992 that he and his wife were messiahs. Critics over the years have called the organisation a cult, questioning its finances and how it indoctrinates followers, who are sometimes derogatorily known as “Moonies.” — Reuters

Newlywed couples attend a mass wedding ceremony of the Unification Church at Cheongshim Peace World Centre in Gapyeong, South Korea, on 20 February. PHOTO: REUTERS

Aston Martin made for Bond ‘Spectre’ film sells for $3.5 million

LONDON — An Aston Martin DB10 car designed for the latest James Bond film “Spectre” has sold for some $3.5 million at auction, far exceeding its reserve price.

The Aston Martin, a make long linked to the Bond franchise, was one of 10 made for the movie that saw Daniel Craig reprise the famous role for the fourth time. Most were modified for filming, with two, including the one sold, kept as show cars.

Bidding for the “Spectre Silver” DB10, on offer as part of the “James Bond Spectre: The Auction” sale, lasted just under five minutes, according to auction house Christie’s.

With a reserve price of $1,000,000 to $1,500,000 pounds, it was sold for $2,434,500 pounds ($3.48 million).

Other “Spectre” memorabilia up for grabs at Thursday’s auction included a “Day of the Dead” costume worn by Craig in the film’s opening scene, which sold for 98,500 pounds.

Singer Sam Smith’s signed “Writing’s On the Wall” music sheet and vinyl single — the movie’s chart-topping theme tune — sold for 9,375 pounds.

In total, 10 lots were sold on Thursday, raising around 2.8 million pounds, with proceeds going to charity. An online auction for another 14 lots remains open for bidding until 23 February.

“Spectre”, the 24th James Bond film in 53 years, has grossed some $879 million at the box office worldwide since its release in late October. — Reuters

An employee poses as an Aston Martin DB10, one of the series of DB10s designed and engineered by Aston Martin for the James Bond film “Spectre”, is displayed during a media preview of “Spectre — the Auction”, at Christie’s auction house in London, on 15 February. PHOTO: REUTERS
United States, Canada book Rio Olympic berths

USA forward Alex Morgan (13) dribbles against Trinidad & Tobago defender Arin King (5) in the first half during the semifinals of the 2016 CONCACAF women’s Olympic soccer tournament at BBVA Compass Stadium in Houston, TX, USA, on 19 February. Photo: Reuters

Farah wants ban for countries that break doping rules

LONDON — Athletics must make “an example” of countries that do not follow doping rules, said the IAAF could ban Kenya’s track and field team from this year’s Rio Olympics if the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) finds the country non-compliant.

Kenya, which topped the medals table at the 2015 world championships, has had more than 40 athletes banned for doping in the past three years, putting it in the crosshairs of the drive to eliminate systematic cheating and corruption.

The African country missed last week’s WADA deadline to implement new regulations and then it makes it easier for me which is great,” he replied. “But at the same time you don’t want to be anyone who has not done anything wrong. “As a country they just have to follow the rules and if they can’t follow the rules then tough on them...we have to set an example.”

The Somalia-born Farah, due to run over 3,000 metres at the Glasgow Indoor Grand Prix on Saturday, won the 5,000-10,000 double at the 2012 London Olympics and at the 2013 and 2015 world championships.

He also said he would not allow the threat of the Zika virus, which is widespread in Brazil and linked to birth defects, to stop him enjoying the Olympics with his family.

At London 2012 his wife Tania and step-daughter Rihanna joined him on the track to celebrate his 10,000 triumph. “If we didn’t have Kenya Duty Free Tennis Champion its sports minister said on Friday the nation wanted two more months to show it had cleaned up its act, hoping to avoid the risk of an Olympic ban.

Farah, who competes with his distance runners, was asked at a news conference if the absence of Kenya would devalue the Games. “We have dominated Olympic women’s soccer, winning four of the five gold medals since the event was added to the programme in 1996. Their only loss came in the final against Norway in 2000.

The Americans were barely tested on Friday by a completely outclassed Trinidad and Tobago team grappling with a porous defence. In the early game, Sinclair was the star of the show for Canada, opening the scoring in the 18th minute before adding a stunning second in the 52nd minute.

Costa Rica pulled one back from the penalty spot before 16-year-old Deanne Rose put the game out of reach of the Costa Ricans with a late goal to put Canada, bronze medallists at the 2012 London Games, into the final. — Reuters

Errani, Strycova reach Dubai women’s tennis final

DUBAI — Italian elite player Sara Errani and Barbora Strycova from Ukraine won Friday their semifinals of the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships 2016 against Elina Svitolina and Caroline Garcia, respectively.

Errani ended the winning streak of the 21-year-old Svitolina from Ukraine, scoring in 6-4, 6-4.

Errani, 28, who ranks 22nd in the WTA, told Xinhua after the quarterfinals that she does not think too much of the game or the set, “but I always fight for the next point and fight for every ball.”

France’s Garcia, ranked 15th, and Strycova, ranked 48th, delivered a breathtaking semifinal on the center court of the not very crowded Dubai Duty Free Tennis stadium at the Aviation Club which the Ukrainian decided for herself by scoring 6-2, 3-6, 6-3.

Strycova, aged 29 and 10 centimetres smaller than her 1.74 meter tall French opponent, fell to the ground in the third set at 1-1 for a net fight, but managed to keep her spirit and playing speed high throughout the match. The final will take place on Saturday at 7pm local time.— Xinhua

Wie wishes women’s major staged in Asia

SINGAPORE — American golfer Michelle Wie said she would like to see one of the five women’s major championships staged in Asia.

The region’s heavy interest in the women’s game, buoied by the number of local players at the top of the world rankings, is reflected with seven events on the LPGA schedule in Asia, including the HSBC Women’s Championship in Singapore from 3-6 March.

But the 26-year-old Korean-American said she would like Asia to get in on the major scene, which was boosted to five in 2013 when the French-based Evian Championship joined the British Open and three American hosted elite championships.

“I think the HSBC tournament is always a really strong field. The players always love to come to Singapore,” she told local-based reporters in a call on Saturday when asked if the tournament featuring all of the top 10 mented major billing.

“I think whether or not it should be a major tournament is really not in our hands. The LPGA takes in to consideration a lot of guidelines regarding that. “It would be nice to see Asia have a major championship. Some things need to happen for that, you never know in it would be really nice to see.”

Wie won a breakthrough major at the 2014 US Open but said she has struggled for fitness since and now sits 33rd in the world rankings.

She said she had spent the off-season working to improve her health and was targeting a drive back up the rankings and spot on the US team for the Rio de Janeiro Olympics in August.

“I’m really excited about 2016. 2015 was tough with injuries so my number one goal is to stay healthy and have a season where everything is great and I feel healthy and injury free,” said the former teen prodigy who turned professional at 15 to much fanfare.

“I took a big chunk of the off-season off to try and get my body right so I could swing to where it doesn’t really hurt me.”

“My number two goal is to win majors and make big teams. Those are the goals I have.” — Reuters