Three aircrafts detected to have invaded restricted territory

President inspects Myittha River dredging operations

One tical of Myanmar gold tips over K800,000 mark

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**TAKE US TO THE BRIDGE**

**Winner of Yangon new town project to donate five bridges**

WITH the donation of five river bridges, a new town plan on the western outskirts of Yangon is expected to take at least ten years to complete, said U Kyaw Soe, Yangon Region Minister for Forest and Energy, in an exclusive interview with the Myanmar News Agency.

The chairman of the committee for scrutinising tender forms for the new town project said that the committee is still scrutinising the process in detail in order to select a winner for the project which will be established on 30,000 acres.

Out of 54 companies who bought tender forms, only three competed for the project.

The three developers are Yangon South West Development Public Company, Business Capital City Development Ltd and Shwe Popa International Development Co Ltd.

“The winner of the project will build five bridges for the country in return for the project,” said U Thet Lwin Toe, chair of the Myanmar Tourism Entrepreneurs Association.

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**Myanmar tourism industry could double in the next decade**

FRENCH based online hotel booking agent, Jovago, has made it known that the Myanmar tourism industry could expand by two-fold within the coming decade.

“Myanmar is a top destination within the world tourism industry for its beautiful scenery and friendly people,” says Hugo Schleicher, Myanmar country manager for Jovago.

The Myanmar tourism industry grew by fifty per cent between 2013-15 and is anticipated to grow even further in 2016.

“Myanmar is leapfrogging in growth. Year after year the number of tourists [visiting the country] and tour guide companies operating are increasing. It’s expanded about ten fold in recent years. We will continue to monitor the situation throughout this coming year,” said U Thet Lwin Toe, chair of the Myanmar Tourism Entrepreneurs Association.

See page 3 >>

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**Poor service, high prices blamed for hindrances of tourism development**

THE Myanmar Tourism Entrepreneurs Association has named poor services and high prices as hindrances of tourism development in Myanmar, pointing out that it is expensive to travel to Myanmar compared to other countries.

It costs tourists between 50 and 70 per cent more than other countries while traveling in Myanmar compared to other countries.

U Thet Lwin Toe, chairman of the association, said “Prices are higher than those of other countries but the country does not meet world standards in terms of services yet.”

U Tin Tun Aung, managing director of Thingaha travel & tour company, called on those in the country’s tourism industry to review their performance and seek ways and means for their service improvement, not to be money-oriented.

Tourism industry being a driver of employment growth, it is needed to develop it in which around 100,000 people were employed, added the MD.

According to figures, Myanmar welcomed 4.5 million visitors last year while Thailand receives 20 million visitors, Viet Nam, nine million and Cambodia, seven million a year.

Travel agents and tour operators highlighted the importance of developing infrastructure and improving services for ensuring the sustainability of the tourism sector as tourist arrival in Myanmar is expected to double over the next 10 years.

Statistics show Myanmar has more than 1,400 hotels with 5,000 rooms.

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**INSIDE**

Increased demand seen for hand-woven Chin clothing

Ko Moe

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Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker meets Israeli ambassador, UNHCR resident representative

PYITHU Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint received Israeli ambassador to Myanmar Mr. Dan-iel Zohar Zonshine and UNHCR Resident Representative Mr. Giuseppe de Vincentiis separately in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

During the call with the UNHCR delegation, the Speaker held discussions with the resident representative on the UN agency’s activities and works to be done in the country.

Also present at the calls were Deputy Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U T Khun Myat and officials of the Pyithu Hluttaw Office. — Myanmar News Agency

Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint receives Resident Representative of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Myanmar Mr. Giuseppe de Vincentiis. PHOTO: MYANMA NEWS AGENCY

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker meets UNHCR resident representative

SPEAKER of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Amyotha Hluttaw Mahn Win Khaing Thaan received Mr. Giuseppe de Vincentiis, resident representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Myanmar at a hall of Amyotha Hluttaw Building in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

Also present at the call were Deputy Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Amyotha Hluttaw U Aye Tha Aung as well as officials from the Amyotha Hluttaw Office.—Myanmar News Agency

Government supervision proposed for hasty management of state-owned properties: Pyithu Hluttaw

THE Pyithu Hluttaw yesterday approved an urgent proposal calling for closer supervision of the swift undertaking of the handover of state-owned enterprises and properties during the transitional period.

Daw Khin San Hlaing of the Pale constituency presented her proposal that the central government should supervise what she called post-election developments prior to the transfer of state responsibility.

The pressing proposal pointed out the prompt leasing, handover and privatisation of state-owned land, factories and enterprises; aggressive removal of squats and the hasty management of the country’s natural resources without supervision and transparency. She suggested placing them under the close supervision of the central government in the interest of the people and the country as a whole.

Her suggestion prompted 12 MPs to raise their voices that the issues required greater coordination and negotiation in such a transitional period, which they considered delicate enough for first-timers. Daw Khin San Hlaing’s proposal was accepted by a majority of votes.

Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint sought parliamenta-ry approval for the establishment of three committees with fifteen members each. The Economic and Financial Development Committee, the Public Affairs Management Committee and the Fundamental Rights of Citizens Committee were formed as proposed by the speaker.—Myanmar News Agency

Mandalarians gear up for El Niño-related illness

NECESSARY arrangements have been made for the provision of medical assistance to Mandalari-ans as extremely hot weather that might be caused by the upcoming El Niño can cause heat strokes, ac-cording to an official from Mandalay General Hospital yesterday.

Public awareness of tips for avoiding a heat storke has been disseminated since 2010 when an extreme heat wave hit Mandalay. People will be able to deal with possible severe heat during the El Niño season, said U Min Lwin, communication officer of the hospital. Coordination had been made with ice factories for adequate supply of ice needed for heat stroke treatment and with local social associations for provi-sion of manpower and ambulances as well, he added. According to the communication officer, a heat stroke control committee led by the Mandalay Region Chief Min-ister was formed, including the hospital’s medical superintendent, professors and medical staff. As preparations for heat emergencies, spacious air-conditioned rooms with deployment of medical staff and medical equipment are ready for 24-hour heath care service at the hospital. El Niño may affect people with heat strokes, said Dr Myint Kyaw, medical superinten-dent of Myo Daw private hospital.

Despite the excessive heat expected to hit the people, there will be fewer cases of heat stroke, the medical superintendent of the private hospital predicted.

He said that 24-hour electricity supply is imperative to operate air-conditioners and air-coolers needed to help people suffering from heat emergencies. According to statistics, 22 people died from heat stroke in 2010 when the highest temperature ever recorded in Mandalay, placing heat stress and heat-related illnesses on 1,536 people. There were no heat stroke deaths in 2012 and 2015, but heat stroke killed six of 91 patients in 2014.—Aung Hnatt Thaing

Asia-Pacific, Myanmar scouts hold talks

MISTER Paul D Parkison, chair-person of the Asia-Pacific Scout Committee, held a meeting with Dr Tin Nyo, chief commissioner of the Myanmar Scouts and par-ty, on Myanmar efforts to be a member of the World Scouting Organisation in Yangon yester-day.

During the meeting held at the office of Myanmar Scout Federation, Mr. Paul D Parkison and party gave suggestions on

Scouts of Myanmar and Asia-Pacific Scout Committee are holding talks. PHOTO: THIN MAUNG LATT

Myanmar’s scouting activities and further works following the presentation of officials of the federation.

Next, the Asia-Pacific Scout Committee chairperson and party visited BEHS No (1) in Dagon Township.—Ko Latt (MNA)
President U Thein Sein hears report on widening the Myittha River. **PHOTO: MNA**

**President inspects Myittha River dredging operations**

PRESIDENT U Thein Sein inspected river dredging operations in Myittha river to prevent flooding in Kalay Township, Sagaing Region yesterday.

At a briefing hall near Kyeeegon village in the township, Union Minister U Myint Hlaing, Sagaing Region Chief Minister U Tha Aye and an official reported to the President on progress in the dredging of the Myittha river to allow the proper flow of water, dam construction plans for further supply of water and planning for electricity generation.

Next, the President and party visited Razagyo Dam where they oversaw the main dam, the spillway and water outlets and the hydropower facility.

According to officials concerned, dredging operations that include the removal of scrub from river banks and sandbank excavation in the river have been completed by 70 per cent.

On completion, proper flow of water in Myittha river will help villages along the river to prevent flooding, thereby contributing towards ensuring flood risk mitigation for their farmlands and improving their livelihoods.

Prevention and mitigation of flooding in Kalay plain can be brought about by the emergence of dam projects on the Myittha river and its two tributaries, said the Irrigation Department.

Under the influence of cyclonic storm ‘Komen’, heavydownpours occurred in Kalay Township in June and July last year, causing flooding on the Kalay plain following heavy inflows of water into the Myittha river and its tributaries.—**Myanmar News Agency**

**C-in-C visits Coco Island**

COMMANDER-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing visited Coco Island on February 22nd and March 2nd.—**Myawady**

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing inspects construction of the jetty. **PHOTO: MINA**

During his visit, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing also inspected construction of a jetty. The jetty has seen more than 90 per cent completion, targeting to handle vessels by the rainy season in 2017. Currently, Thanlwin mobile hospital ship is providing medical services to the local people there.—**Myawady**

**Myanmar tourism industry could double in the next decade**

> **From page 1**

It is known that the increase in development of basic building infrastructure is mainly because of the tourism industry.

“The Myanmar tourism industry is the most important thing for the country. It must be prioritised whenever government comes to power,” said U Htin Myat, central executive of the Myanmar Tour Guides Association.

The total number of foreign tourists entering Myanmar during 2015 equated to 4.8 million, up by a million on those that entered the country throughout the year prior.

>> **From page 1**

The new town project, approved by the Yangon Region Parliament, will be established on 30,000 acres between the Panhlai River and the Twantay-Yangon Canal and between the Hlaing River and Haing-thaya-Twantay Road in western Yangon.

The seven modern housing projects will be established on more than 100,000 acres of land on the outskirts of Yangon and accommodate more than 10 million people.—**GNLM**

**Winner of Yangon new town project to donate five river crossing bridges to country, people in return**

The seven modern housing projects will be established on more than 100,000 acres of land on the outskirts of Yangon and accommodate more than 10 million people.—**GNLM**

**U EC declares disqualified candidates, representatives**

THE Union Election Commission yesterday announced that 160 candidates and their representatives have been disqualified for failing to submit campaign expenses within the prescribed period.

The disqualified candidates were also barred from standing for elections in the current parliamentary term in accord with section 88 (c) of respective Election Laws, said The UEC.—**Myanmar News Agency**

**Republic of the Union of Myanmar**

**Union Election Commission**

**Notification 7/2016**

**3rd Waning Day of Tabodwe, 1377 ME**

(26 February, 2016)

**Defense Services Personnel representative substituted**

According to a request made in accordance with Section 33 of the Amyotha Hluttaw Election Law to substitute a Defense Services Personnel Amyotha Hluttaw Representative, the Union Election Commission scrutinised and substituted the following representative under Notification 2/2016 of the Commission dated 18-1-2016.

The Defense Services Personnel Amyotha Hluttaw Representative to be substituted was nominated by the Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Services in the second multi-party general elections held on 8 November 2015.

BC 46977 Captain Kyaw Myat Soe

BC 52277 Captain Min Min Thein

Chairman

Union Election Commission
**Energy Ministry has privatised all but 12 fuel stations: Permanent Secretary**

The Ministry of Energy has transferred most of its enterprises, except primary ones, to private companies over the past five years, according to its permanent secretary. U Pe Zin Tun said that the government still remains the sole distributor of natural gas for local demand. No right to distribute natural gas is granted even to regional governments, he added, stressing that his ministry will continue to support private distributors.

He pledged that the ministry will place greater transparency on the production and distribution in line with its existing policies. The ministry has privatised 261 of its 273 fuel stations since 2010, he said.

Up to date, the number of private fuel refilling stations has reached 1,228 and six storage tanks while 12 ship tankers have been granted license for distribution of fuel. The private companies which have been permitted for importing petrol and diesel reached 406 while the Pioneer Services and the National Puma Energy Aviation Service has been granted the license for distributing aviation fuel, the permanent secretary said.

With the aim of reducing the environmental pollution and deforestation, Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise under the ministry reached agreement with Singapore-based Ava Kahysi Investment Pte Co and SAME Sky and Guiding Star companies owned by Myanmar nationals to cooperate in importing, storage and distribution of liquefied petroleum gas.

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**Crime News**

**Yabba seized in Tachileik**

An anti-drug squad in Tachileik seized 415 grams of yabba worth more than K10 million, five guns and a vehicle at a house owned by one Aik Sikyaik in San Phoo village on Wednesday.

When interrogated, Aik Sikyaik said the items were given to him by one Aik Saung from Mae Yan village, who absconded to Laos. The police have filed charges against both of them under the Anti-Narcotic Law.

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**More than six million Yabba bills seized in Tachilek**

On anti-drug squads seized more than six million yabba bills in Meiphone village, Tachileik Township.

Led by Inspector Ye Win Tun and local militia, the police halted the SKAT six-wheel vehicle, heading from Tachileik to Wanpon, being driven by Aik-Kyaung and Aik-Khit for loading sand and stone. During the investigation, the police found 6,300,000 yabba bills weighting 630 kilograms and 5 mobile phones in the secret drawer on the floor at the back side of vehicle.

The Police filed charges against both of them under the Anti Narcotic Law at Wanpon region police station.

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**Car accident kills three, injures four**

A THREE wheel motorbike collided head on with a 12 wheel vehicle on the Yangon-Mandalay road, between mileposts 101/1 and 101/2, Nyaunglebin Township on Tuesday, leaving three dead and four injured.

The motorbike, driven by one Khin Maung Myint, 51, with Kyaw Zin Htet, Win Aung and Myint Zaw on board collided with the 12 wheel vehicle being driven by one Min Zaw with Kyaw Hla Win on board. The reason for the collision is not known yet.

The accident killed Khin Maung Myint while four were injured seriously and are now receiving medical care at Nyaunglebin general hospital. Police are currently investigating.

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**Police seized heroin in prison**

Members of the police seized 0.3 grams of heroin inside coffee sachets in Katha prison on Tuesday.

Police discovered the heroin in coffee sachets belonging to Kyaw Tun who is serving a 12-year sentence in Katha prison. When interrogated, Daw Kyi Tha, who had come to see Kyaw Tun, admitted that she had brought it and said she received the drugs from one Tan Tun alias Hla Tun, the brother of the convict. The police have taken action against all three.

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**Photo: Energy**

Enterprise under the ministry reached agreement with Singapore-based Ava Kahysi Investment Pte Co and SAME Sky and Guiding Star companies owned by Myanmar nationals to cooperate in importing, storage and distribution of liquefied petroleum gas.

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**Photo: District (IPRD)**

The 12-wheel truck being seen overturned.

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**Photo: Aye Mya Tha Htar**

The 12-wheel truck being seen overturned.

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**Photo: Energy**

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**LOCAL Business**

**Bamboo growers may buy saplings at better prices**

GREEN Move Co will sell 70,000 saplings to local bamboo farmers at a reasonable price, said its Chairman U Htain Win, who has established a modern bamboo plantations on 175 acres of farmlands located along Taikkyi-Paunggyi-Bago Road.

The company said it will sell for K1,500 per sapling to those who will buy under 100 saplings, planning to offer discount price at K1,000 for customers who will buy above 100 saplings.

There are 25 species of bamboo in Myanmar. Among them, 18 species have been cultivated by the company in such areas for public observations with the aim of raising awareness about the cultivation of bamboo and its health benefits for both people and environment.

Yangon residents normally purchase bamboo at high prices from rural areas as there are few plantations in Yangon.

Modern farming has been implemented by Green Move Co on the outskirts of Yangon since March last year after gaining the permission of the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry, which leased out the farmlands to the Myanmar Rattan and Bamboo Entrepreneurs Association.

Plans are underway to establish a bamboo industrial zone in future in order to produce bamboo-related products.—Soe Win

**Myanma Timber Enterprise to organise open tender sales in March**

THE Myanma Timber Enterprise will organise the selling of teak and hardwood logs including sawn timbers through an open tender system, planning to conduct the auctions twice in March.

All citizenship scrutiny certificate holders have the right to participate in the tender. Those who participate need to pay a K5 million (US$4,034) deposit for the auction of timber under 2,000 cubic tons and K10 million ($8,069) for timber above 2,000 cubic tons.

Teak and other hardwood including Pyingadoe, Ingyin, Thabyay and Sagawa, Taung-thayet will be displayed for sale during the auction.

The enterprise recently sold timber including illegal logs and sawn timber the forest department seized through the open biddings system in US dollars. It attracted 127 private entrepreneurs nationwide.

Apart from April, the MTE has conducted the open tender sales every month. We normally sell teak and hardwood produced from lower Myanmar—Yangon, Bago and Ayeyawady regions, Nay Pyi Taw council area, Kayah and Rakhine states—in the first week of a month and products from upper Myanmar—Sagaing and Mandalay regions, Shan and Kachin states in the third week of the month.

Despite increase in both local and foreign consumption year by year the Myanma Timber Enterprise will fulfil the future market demand with an annual timber production of no more than 1,160,000 cubic tons, an official said.—Myo Min Thein (Mayangon)

**Increased demand seen for hand-woven Chin clothing**

LOOM employers in Gangaw Township, Magway Divisional Region have seen high income due to heightened demand from both local and foreign markets for hand woven clothing.

“The hand-woven Chin traditional dresses are made for men and women, such as coats, shirts and so on. Likewise, ladies not only wear Chin traditional modern clothes like the shirt and longyi but they also wear old fashion dresses. We are all proud that people are wearing our traditional backstrap loom clothing especially during the time of festivals and special events.” said a local resident.

More than 10,000 Chin people lived in Gangaw Township.

As most Chin people wear traditional dress for various kind, of festivals and ceremonies the demand has increased.

Employers have expanded their business to villages to produce more traditional costumes.—Gyi Myint Naing

**One tical of Myanmar gold tips over K800,000 mark**

GOLD shopkeepers said a slight rise in the price of gold on the world market on 24 February has tipped the value of one tical (0.576 ounces) of Myanmar pure gold over the K800,000 mark.

An ounce of gold on the world market on 24 February increased in value to US$1,230 from the previous day’s value of $1,220, resulting in the price of one tical of Myanmar pure gold rising from K798,000 on 23 February to K802,000 the following day.

“The price of Myanmar gold has risen back up in the last couple of days because of the increase in the value of gold on the world market. It’s difficult to estimate the trajectory of the value of gold for the coming months because of its current fluctuations,” said U Zaw Aung, a member of the Myanmar Gold Entrepreneurs Association (MGEA) and owner of the Taite gold shop.

The price of Myanmar gold is dependent upon the value of the US dollar and the value of gold on the world market, and while the price of Myanmar gold is currently rising, it has not affected trading.

“The price of world market gold is up, and the dollar is down. Myanmar gold pure has followed the same trend as world market gold, increasing in value. That said, the buying and selling of gold is proceeding as normal.” said U Maw Maw, general manager of the Aung Thamardi gold shop.

The second week of February showcased the extent of current fluctuations in the value of a tical of Myanmar pure gold, peaking at K803,000, with the lowest value recorded that week being K791,000.

On 24 February, a tical of Myanmar pure gold was valued at K802,000; a tical of 15-carat gold cost K792,000; an ounce of gold on the world market fetched $1,230; while $1 bought K1,245, according to gold shopkeepers.—Myitishkha News Agency

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Logs to be tendered are piled in Yangon. PHOTO: MYO MIN THEIN

A Chin woman weaves clothes in Gangaw. PHOTO: Gyi MYINT NAING

Golden jewellery are displayed at a shop in Yangon. PHOTO: AYE MIN SOE
Bangkok shrine bombers first targeted pier for Chinese tourists

BANGKOK — The perpetrators of last year’s deadly explosion at a Bangkok shrine originally chose a pier packed with Chinese tourists as their primary target and had amassed enough chemicals to make 10 equally powerful bombs, the chief of Thailand’s police bomb squad told Reuters.

A bomb planted at the Erawan Shrine on 17 August killed 20 people and turned a popular tourist site into a scene of carnage.

Another device, which was left at a crowded pier on Bangkok’s Chao Phraya river but failed to explode, might have inflicted much greater casualties, said a leading security analyst.

Bomb squad chief Police Colonel Kaveorn Anuchareon’s disclosures to Reuters bolster a theory that the perpetrators of the shrine bombing were trying to kill Chinese tourists.

The Thai police have maintained that the motive for the Erawan bombing was Thailand’s earlier crackdown on human smuggling networks.

But many analysts, diplomats and even Thai officials say the 17 August bombing was likely an act of revenge for Thailand’s deportation to China of more than 100 Uighur Muslims in July.

Acknowledging that Chinese tourists were intentionally targeted could dent one of Thailand’s biggest industries. A record 7.9 million Chinese visited the kingdom in 2015, or more than a quarter of the 28 million tourists that year.

Tourism is one of the few thriving sectors of an economy that has floundered since the military seized power in a May 2014 coup.

When asked about the Bangkok bombers’ possible targeting of Chinese citizens, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told reporters on Thursday that attacks against civilians around the world, including Chinese, were increasing.

“We believe Thai authorities can seriously punish the murderers according to law,” said Hua.

Thai police have uncovered evidence at the shrine bombing that points to a large and well-organised network, according to experts and documents reviewed by Reuters. Dangerous chemicals and other materials discovered in Bangkok apartments connected to two suspects could have made ten more bombs, said bomb squad chief Kamthorn.

Yusufu Mieraili and Adem Karadag, the two suspects arrested last year by Thai police, are Uighur Muslims from China’s restive Xinjiang region. Hundreds of people have died in recent years in unrest in Xinjiang, where most Uighurs live, and in attacks elsewhere in China attributed to Uighurs.

Exiles and human rights groups say those Uighurs engaging in violence are lashing out at oppressive government policies that restrict their culture and religion. Beijing denies this and blames Islamic militants for the rise in violence.

The two suspects appeared in a Bangkok military court on 16 February to hear the ten charges against them, including murder and illegal possession of explosives. Both men say they are innocent.

Police have issued arrest warrants for 15 other suspects, many of whom are thought to be Turkish or in Turkey. Thai police turned down repeated requests by Reuters for information about the investigation.

National police chief Jakdhip Chajinda declined several interview requests.

The military indictment, which Reuters reviewed, accuses the men of planting the first bomb at the Chao Phraya Princess Pier where hundreds of Chinese tourists gather each day to board dinner cruises along the river.

It failed to detonate, and after two or three hours, was taken away by a blue-shirted figure later identified in an arrest warrant as an “Asian man.” — Reuters

Sri Lanka could accept international actors in war crimes probe

WASHINGTON — Sri Lanka’s foreign minister said on Thursday he is willing to consider international participation in investigating possible war crimes during the 26-year Tamil insurgency.

“I think it is only fair that the victims of the war would want some form of guarantee that the new courts will deliver justice and accountability in a fair manner, and for that we are willing to consider the participation of international actors,” Mangala Samaraweera, the minister, said at a Washington think tank.

Sri Lanka President Maithripala Sirisena has previously said that foreign participation was not needed for an impartial inquiry.

The foreign minister’s comments come after the United Nations said earlier this month that it would not force Sri Lanka to accept a role for international judges, but any process must be impartial and independent.

The United Nations says the Sri Lankan military and Tamil Tiger rebels were both likely to have committed war crimes during the war, which ended with a military victory in 2009.

A UN resolution calls for all alleged war crimes to be investigated and tried in special courts by international judges.

“They could be judges, they could be forensic experts, investigators, prosecutors, all these options are being looked at,” Samaraweera said.

Many Sri Lankans oppose foreign involvement, and supporters of former President Maithripala Sirisena believe the UN resolution aims to punish the military unfairly.

Samaraweera said the “contours of the architecture” of the court would be worked on in the next five or six months, after consulting with parties including the Tamil National Alliance.

He said that while the judiciary was on the right track, it had been politicized over the years.

Samaraweera met with US Secretary of State John Kerry on Thursday and is expected to take part in a strategic dialogue between the two countries later this week. — Reuters

Philippine army kills 42 Islamist militants in battles in south

MANILA — Philippine security forces killed as many as 42 Muslim militants claiming links with Islamic State and captured their stronghold during five days of fighting in the mountains of a southern island, an army spokesman said yesterday.

“Our troops were able to seize a stronghold of the terrorists on Thursday night,” the spokesman, Major Filermon Tan, told reporters by telephone from the southern island of Mindanao, estimating that about 42 militants had been killed.

“We are still pursuing the rebels, using armoured assets,” Tan said.

The Philippines signed a peace deal with the MILF in March 2014, ending 45 years of conflict that killed more than 120,000 people, displaced 2 million and stunted growth in the poor but resource-rich south.

Army and police officials believe some Muslim rebel factions, including the small but violent Abu Sayyaf group, have pledged allegiance to Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria, but say they have found no evidence to support this. Elsewhere in Mindanao, the government was chasing the Abu Sayyaf group, which is holding captive several foreigners, including a Japanese, a Dutch national, two Canadians and a Norwegian. — Reuters
China says Taiwan president-elect must respect constitution

BEIJING — Taiwan’s president-elect Tsai Ing-wen must respect the island’s own constitution that states Taiwan and the mainland are both part of one China, China’s foreign minister has said during a visit to Washington.

China considers Taiwan a wayward province, to be brought under its control by force if necessary. Defeated Nationalist forces fled to Taiwan in 1949 after the Chinese civil war.

Beijing has warned against any moves towards independence since January’s landslide win by Tsai and her independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Taiwan’s presidential and parliamentary elections and said it would defend its sovereignty. Tsai has said she would maintain peace with China, and Chinese state-run media have also noted her pledges to maintain the “status quo” with China.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, a former head of China’s Taiwan Affairs Office, said Tsai’s election was a normal political process that did not come as too big a surprise. “We do not care that much who is in power in the Taiwan region of China,” Wang said at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington on Thursday, without directly using Tsai’s name. His comments were carried on the centre’s website.

“What we care about is, once someone has come into power, how he or she handles the cross-strait relationship, whether he or she will maintain the peaceful development of cross-strait relations, whether he or she will re-commit to the political foundation of cross-strait relations, the one China principle,” he said.

Wang said he hoped that, before Tsai assumes power in May, support is more fragile than recent landslide election wins suggest and polls show many voters would opt for a credible rival if they felt one existed.

“We want to respond to the voices of those with anxiety and doubts about the Abe administration,” DFP leader Katsuya Okada told a news conference announcing the merger.

The Democrats surged to power for the first time in 2009 but were ousted by Abe’s LDP-led bloc three years later, after a reign that left a lasting image of incompetence and inighting. Abe, pledging to end decades of economic stagnation and boost Japan’s global profile, has since led his party to two big elections wins.

Many experts, though, attribute his longevity at least partly to voter perception of a lack of a viable alternative. “If there were a unified opposition, the LDP is vulnerable,” said Jeffrey Kingston, director of Asian studies at Temple University’s Japan campus.

In the short-term, the merger, along with proposed election cooperation with the Japanese Communist Party, could also make it harder for the LDP and its allies to win a majority of two-thirds in a July upper house poll needed to tackle Abe’s cherished goal of revising the pacifist constitution.

The LDP and its junior partner, the Komeito party, won a two-thirds “super-majority” in a December 2014 lower house election, but with record low turnout of about 53 per cent.

More recently, Abe’s voter support, shaken by scandals and gloomy economic news, fell seven points to below 50 per cent in a weekend Kyodo news agency poll.

More than 35 per cent of those polled backed no party at all, close to the 38.1 per cent supporting the LDP.

Changing voting patterns by such independents can produce big swings in election outcomes.

With 93 members in the more powerful lower house, the merged party, which is to be formally launched under a new name in March, will still be dwarfed by the LDP, which has 290.

“Overcoming public memories of the DPP’s perceived failures will be tough, however. “They have to gain competence or a semblance of competence, rather than just change the name,” said Sophia University professor Koichi Nakano.

Absorbing other small parties will also be vital to success. “It will be meaningful if other parties join in,” said Jiro Yamaguchi, a political science professor at Hosei University.

Japanese opposition parties to merge with eye on July election

TOKYO — Japan’s biggest and third-largest opposition parties yesterday agreed to merge and reach out to smaller rivals, in what they hope will be a first step towards building an alternative to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s behemoth Liberal Democratic Party.

The merger of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) with the smaller Japan Innovation Party poses no immediate threat to Abe’s ruling bloc, but the DPJ’s victory at party headquarters in Taipei, Taiwan on 16 January 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

The merger of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPP) with the smaller Japan Innovation Party poses no immediate threat to Abe’s ruling bloc, but many experts, though, attribute his longevity at least partly to voter perception of a lack of a viable alternative.

“Tsai says it has been known that mineral exports account for almost 40 per cent of DPRK’s total exports.

A draft of new UN Security Council resolutions has been reported as circulating among member countries to punish Pyongyang for its recent rocket launch and nuclear test.

The DPRK launched an alleged Earth observation satellite on 7 February, to test a ballistic missile technology, after detonating what it claimed was its first hydrogen bomb on 6 January.

Asked whether South Korea will announce its unilateral sanctions against the DPRK, Jeong said follow-up measures by the South Korean government will be discussed after the fresh UN resolution is fixed.

Included in Seoul’s unilateral restrictions under discussion is a ban on third-country ships visiting the DPRK from entering South Korean ports.

It has been reported that the pilot is in critical condition whereas the passengers have sustained injuries.

The single engine aircraft had taken off from the Nepalgunj airport at 12:20 local time. Air Kastamandap flies over 11 remote locations in Nepal.

Earlier on Wednesday, an aircraft of Tara Airlines crashed in Myagdi district, killing all 23 people on board including three crew members. — Xinhua

UN ban on DPRK mineral exports to hurt foreign currency income

SEOUL — The expected ban under the new UN Security Council resolution on the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK)’s mineral resources exports will significantly damage Pyongyang’s foreign currency income, South Korea’s unification minister said yesterday.

Unification Ministry spokesman Jeong Joon-hee told a press briefing that if media reports on fresh UN sanctions that include a ban on DPRK’s mineral exports are true, it will cause a “significant” disturbance to the securing of foreign currency by the DPRK.

Jeong said it has been known that mineral exports account for almost 40 per cent of DPRK’s total exports.

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Aircraft crash lands in Nepal, pilot in critical condition

KATHMANDU — An aircraft with nine passengers and two crew members on board crashed landed in Kalokot District in mid-western Nepal yesterday noon, according to local media reports.

Earlier media reports said that nine people were on board the Air Kastamandap plane, which was heading to the remote Jumla district from Nepalgunj. Meanwhile, a foreign media report said the 9N-AIB plane was carrying eight people.

It has been reported that the pilot is in critical condition whereas the passengers have sustained injuries.

The single engine aircraft had taken off from the Nepalgunj airport at 12:20 local time. Air Kastamandap flies over 11 remote locations in Nepal.

Earlier on Wednesday, an aircraft of Tara Airlines crashed in Myagdi district, killing all 23 people on board including three crew members. — Xinhua
Many a true word is spoken in jest

Kyaw Thura

THERE is a traditional belief in our country that things will start to go wrong when amoral customs are endemic. Accordingly, legend has it that floods, fires, storms, thieves and inhuman rulers are deemed the five conventional public enemies. These disasters have a tendency to have a negative impact on people. From the religious point of view, throwing insults at someone superior in virtue or something sacred will undoubtedly set off ill consequences. A glance is enough to convince us that our country is now experiencing disasters which are unheard of before. It is, therefore, imperative that we should all assume our guilty conscience. The time has come for all of us to awaken to the realisation that the prevention of these disasters is a national concern which demands a shared responsibility with a strong sense of community spirit. Nobody can be left behind in this process for the simple reason that warding off these stresses requires the need for a more inclusive public participation.

Nobody in their right minds will dare to get a ride in a car to be driven by a person who does not know how to drive at all. After all, many a true word is spoken in jest. Now is not the time for us to abandon ourselves to despair. It is time for us to take up the courage to come together to abandon what is sending us into the depths of this despair.

Write for us

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

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

Sayar Mya

It is my pleasure and honor in sharing knowledge with the esteemed readers of the esteemed Al New Light of Myanmar on “Nation Building, National Identity and Ethnic Groups” and that my earlier article was “Nation Building and Education”. In this context, some issues on “National Identity” and “Ethnic Groups” are the vital ingredients in the Nation Building, and therefore, I would like to share two themes in a single article with the esteemed readers.

National Identity is one’s identity or sense of belonging to one state or to one nation. The term Nation comprises people, tribe, kin, genus, class, flock, and it is a social concept with no un-controversial definition. However, it is most commonly used to designate larger groups or collectives of people with common characteristics ascribed to them. They include language, traditions, customs, habits, and ethnicity. A nation, by comparison, is more impersonal, abstract, and overtly political than an ethnic group. It is a cultural-political community that has become conscious of its autonomy, unity, and particular interests.

The expression of one’s national identity seen in a positive light is patriotism which is characterized by national pride and positive emotion of love for one’s country. The extreme expression of national identity is chauvinism, which refers to the firm belief in the country’s superiority and extreme loyalty toward one’s country.

Formation of National Identity

National identity is not an inherent trait and it is in essence socially constructed. A person’s national identity results directly from the presence of elements from the “common points” in people’s daily lives such as national symbols, language, colors, nation’s history, blood ties, culture, music, cuisine, radio, television and so on. Under various social influences, people incorporate national identity into their personal identities by adopting beliefs, values, assumptions and expectations as one’s national identity. People with identification of their nation view national beliefs and values as personally meaningful, and translate these beliefs and values into daily practices.

Race and ethnicity in the Unit ed States

The United States has a racially and ethnically diverse population. The census officially recognizes six ethnic and racial categories namely (1) White American, (2) Black or African American, (3) Native American and Alaska Native, (4) Asian American, (5) Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. Interesting point is that people of two or more races is being termed “Not Hispanic or Latino”, which identifies them as a cultural or national experience. Unlike most other social groups, ethnic identity is primarily an inherited status. Membership of an ethnic group tends to be defined by a shared cultural heritage, ancestry, origin myth, history, homeland, language, symbols, systems such as religion, mythology and ritual, cuisine, dressing style, art, and physical appearance.

Ethnic groups, derived from the same ethnic and found popula tion, often continue to speak related languages and share a similar gene pool. By way of language and cultural practices, people are united by a shared emotion of national pride and the feeling of belonging to the U.S. tend to mitigate and tone down ethnic conflicts.

Affect of National Identity

Some progressive Africans argue that tribalism is one of the most disruptive influences confronting newly independent sub-Saharan African states. Tribalism, they argue, is the basis for ethnic divisions among foreign and indigenous ethnic groups. For example, in the U.S, by integrating diverse ethnic groups in an overarching identity of being an American, a group may become separate ethnic groups themselves due to endogamy, the custom of marrying only people from own local community, or physical isolation from the parent group.

Conversely, formerly separate ethnicities can merge to form a pan-ethnicity, and may eventually merge into one single ethnic identity. Whether through division or amalgamation, the formation of a separate ethnic group is referred to as ethno genesis. In simple term, it defines as a process in which a group of people acquire an ethnic, or a group identity that identifies them as a cultural group. This can originate through a process of self-identification as well as come about as the result of outside facilitation.

Conceptualization

Rupert Emerson (20 August 1899 – 9 February 1979) was a professor of political science and international relations. He served on the faculty of Harvard University for forty-three years. Political scientist Rupert Emerson defined national identity as “a body of people who feel that they are a nation”. This definition of national identity was endorsed by cultural psychologist Henri Tajfel, who formulated social identity theory together with John Turner.

Henri Tajfel (formerly Hersz Mordche) (22 June 1919 Włocławek, Poland – 3 May 1982 in Oxford, United Kingdom) was a British social psychologist, best known for his pioneering work on the cognitive aspects of prejudice and social identity theory, as well as being one of the founders of the European Association of Experimental Social Psychology.

John Napier Wyndham Turner, (born 7 June 1929) is an English born Canadian lawyer and politician, who served as the 17th Prime Minister of Canada from 30 June to 17 September 1984.

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Population survey of the Sarus crane to be conducted in Myanmar

A POPULATION survey of the Sarus crane (Grus antigone sharpeyi) will be conducted in the species’ habitats in seven states and regions including the Ayeyawady Delta by the International Crane Foundation in cooperation with the Zoological Department of Yangon University (YU).

“We can observe some limited migrations at an Orchard Farm, a natural fish breeding pond, located in Malet to Village, Maubin District, Ayeyawady Region,” said Dr Myo Sanda Win of YU who is currently visiting the farm for the survey.

The Sarus crane is a native bird of Myanmar, mostly found in the Ayeyawady Region and Indawgyi Lake, the country’s largest natural fresh-water lake.

Thanda, a local observer said, “I saw two Sarus cranes last year within the compound of the Orchard Farm and I started taking notes about them.”

Sarus cranes, the endangered species, are native to Myanmar. PHOTO: THANDAR

The Sarus Crane is the tallest crane species and of all flying birds, with a height of about 176 cm. They feed on wide range of wetland plant materials, seeds and grains. They tend to breed inland but always in wet areas.

The species lives mostly on wetlands such as canals, ponds, marshes, even near humans. They can be found in cultivated areas too, and also in high-altitude wetlands.

During the dry season the Sarus Crane is found in shallow wetlands, rice fields or wet grasslands.

For now, Sarus crane is included on the list of endangered bird species as the population has notably declined. The rare bird can be found in Myanmar, Cambodia, Viet Nam and India in Southeast Asia.

The number of Myanmar’s total bird species will reach 1,114, including new species found within the last five years. Forty-nine are in danger of extinction, a bird observation agency said at a conference last year.

The Orchard Farm has received greater interest from both local and international bird observers. According to the 2013 survey, more than 140 species covered painted stork, pelican and other winter birds reside in the natural fish breeding pond.—Thi Thi Min

A TOTAL of 671,431 students were registered to sit the country’s matriculation examination for the 2015-2016 academic year, according to the Myanmar Board of Examination.

The examination is scheduled to begin on 9 March this year and will finish on 18 March. The Myanmar Board will organize the examination through 1,453 local exam centres and 17 foreign centres.

Students across the country will answer the same questions issued by the Myanmar Board of Examination.—Tin Win Lay (Kyimyindaing)

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Europe’s free travel will end unless Turkey halts migrant flow, officials say

BRUSSELS — Europe’s cherished free-travel zone will shut down unless Turkey acts to cut the number of migrants heading north through Greece by 7 March, European Union officials said on Thursday.

Their declaration came as confrontations grow increasingly rancorous among European countries trying to cope with the influx of refugees. Those recriminations culminated in Greece’s recalling its ambassador to Austria on Thursday.

“In the next ten days, we need tangible and clear results on the ground,” the top EU migration official, Dimitris Avramopoulos, said after EU justice and home affairs ministers met in Brussels on Thursday. “Otherwise there is a danger, there is a risk that the whole system will completely break down.”

EU leaders are now pinning their hopes on talks with Turkey on 7 March and their own migration summit on 18-19 March. The two meetings look like their final chance to revive a flailing joint response to the crisis before warmer weather encourages more arrivals across the Mediterranean.

Seven European states have already restored border controls within the creating Schengen passport-free zone. More said they would unilaterally tighten border controls unless a deal with Turkey is reached before the two March summits.

That deal promises Turkey 3 billion euros ($3.3 billion) in aid to help it shelter refugees from the Syrian war, in return for preventing their travelling on to Europe.

“By 7 March, we want a significant reduction in the number of refugees at the border between Turkey and Greece,” German Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere said. “Otherwise there will have to be other joint, coordinated European measures.”

Germany has been pushing the Turkey plan hard. Many other EU states are increasingly frustrated and sceptical, though. Another 110,000 people have arrived on the continent so far this year, mostly from Turkey, via Greece, after more than a million arrived last year.—Reuters

US test-fires ICBM amid tensions with Russia, North Korea

VANDENBERG AIR FORCE BASE, (Calif) — The US military test fired its second intercontinental ballistic missile in a week late on Thursday to demonstrate the reliability of American nuclear arms at a time of rising strategic tensions with countries like Russia and North Korea.

The unarmed Minuteman III missile blasted off from a silo at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California shortly before midnight, a Reuters reporter witnessed, headed toward a target area near Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands of the South Pacific.

Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work said the US tests, conducted at least 15 times since January 2011, send a message to strategic competitors like Russia, China and North Korea that Washington has an effective nuclear arsenal.

“That’s exactly why we do this,” Work told reporters prior to the launch.

“We and the Russians and the Chinese routinely do test shots to prove that the operational missiles that we have are reliable. And that is a signal … that we are prepared to use nuclear weapons in defense of our country if necessary.”

Demonstrating the reliability of the nuclear force has taken on additional importance recently because the US arsenal is near the end of its useful life and a spate of scandals in the nuclear force two years ago raised readiness questions.

The Defence Department has poured millions of dollars into improving conditions for troops responsible for staffing and maintaining the nuclear systems. The administration also is putting more focus on upgrading the weapons.

President Barack Obama’s final defence budget unveiled this month calls for a $1.8 billion hike in nuclear arms spending to overhaul the country’s aging nuclear bombers, missiles, and other systems.

The president’s $19 billion request would allow the Pentagon and Energy Department to move toward a multi-year overhaul of the atomic arms infrastructure that is expected to cost $320 billion over a decade and up to 1 trillion dollars over 30 years.

The nuclear spending boost is an ironic turn for a president who made reducing US dependence on atomic weapons a centerpiece of his agenda during his first years in office. Obama called for a world eventually free of nuclear arms in a speech in Prague and later reached a new strategic weapons treaty with Russia. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in part based on his stance on reducing atomic arms.—Reuters

Two suicide bombers kill 15 in Baghdad

BAGHDAD — Two suicide bombers blew themselves up at a Shi’ite mosque in Baghdad on Thursday, killing at least 15 people in an attack claimed by Islamic State militants.

Fifty other people were wounded in the blast in the predominantly Shi’ite Shulaa neighbourhood of the Iraqi capital, police and medical sources said. The first bomber detonated his vest inside the mosque and the second blew himself up when security forces gathered at the site of the initial blast.

Four of the victims were members of the security forces, the sources said. Islamic State, which controls swathes of Iraq’s north and west, said the attacks targeted “apostates” — a term the ultra-hardline Sunni group uses to describe Shi’ite Muslims.—Reuters

Two miners found dead, 28 still trapped after accident at Russian mine

MOSCOW — Two miners were found dead on Thursday evening and the search for 28 more miners was continuing after an accident in a coal mine owned by a subsidiary of Severstal in Russia’s northern Komi Republic.

At the moment when the accident happened in coal-mining town Vorkuta, 110 people were in the mine and 80 of them were taken to the surface as of 1635 GMT. Severstal’s subsidiary Vorkutagol said in a statement. “We all hope now that there will be no other casualties. We are doing everything possible for quick evacuation of miners who remain in the mine,” Vadim Shabulakov, the subsidiary chief executive, said.—Reuters

Israeli stabbed, seriously injured, in overnight stabbing attack

HURSHEIM — An Israeli security guard was seriously wounded in a West Bank mall overnight in an apparent stabbing attack, the Israeli police said.

Israeli forces were called to a mall in Ma’aale Adumim, a Jewish settlement east of Jerusalem, at 1:00am Friday, where they found a 47-year-old security guard stabbed in his upper body, police spokeswoman Luba Samri said.

An initial investigation by the Israeli police and the Shin Bet security services determined that the attacker was Palestinian who managed to flee the scene. Security forces are still in the middle of a manhunt for the perpetrator.—Xinhua
Iranians vote in contest likely to shape post-sanctions era

TEHRAN — Iranians voted in two crucial elections yesterday, with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei urging a big turnout in order to frustrate Tehran’s foes, a remark reflecting the Islamic Republic’s traditionally anti-Western policies.

The vote, Iran’s first since last year’s nuclear deal with world powers, could determine whether the Islamic Republic continues to emerge from diplomatic and economic isolation after years of sanctions.

“It is important for us to vote,” Khamenei told the nation yesterday, warning of the dangers of regime change. “Iranians should come out and vote.”

The contest is for parliament and the Assembly of Experts, a body that employs the power to appoint and dismiss the supreme leader, Iran’s most powerful figure. Both are currently in the hands of hardliners.

Supporters of pragmatist President Hassan Rouhani, who championed the nuclear deal and is likely to seek a second presidential term next year, are pitted against conservatives deeply opposed to detente with Western powers.

Influential former president Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a veteran pragmatist politician allied to Rouhani, told Reuters that Iran would lose if reformists were defeated in Friday’s vote.

Asked what would happen if reformists did not win, he said: “It will be a major loss for the Iranian nation.”

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who led nuclear talks with world powers, said: “The message to the international community from this election is the Iranians are solidly behind their government.”

“People should be observant and vote with open eyes and should vote wisely,” Khamenei said after casting his vote.

At stake is control of the 290-seat parliament and the 88-member Assembly of Experts. During its eight-year term it could name the successor to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who is 76 and has been in power since 1989.

If the Assembly of Experts is called upon to choose a successor to Khamenei, its decision could set the Islamic Republic’s course for years or even decades to come.

Mistrust of the West runs deep, and hardliners have sought to undermine Rouhani’s allies by accusing them of links to Western powers.

A more supportive parliament would allow Rouhani to continue his economic reforms at home and diplomatic engagement abroad.

Whatever the outcome, Iran’s political system remains split in the conservative establishment including the Guardian Council, the judiciary and the Supreme Leader.

The 12-member Guardian Council must approve all new laws and vet all electoral candidates. It has already played a role in excluding thousands of candidates, including many moderates and almost all reformists. Nevertheless, prominent reformists and moderates have scrambled together a joint list of candidates in Tehran for 30 parliament, and 16 for the Assembly of Experts — and hope this can propel them to an overall majority in both bodies. — Reuters

Hamas not seeking a war with Israel, says top official

GAZA — A senior leader of the Islamist group Hamas said the Palestinian movement was not seeking a new war with Israel and insisted a network of tunnels it is digging, some of which have reached into Israel, is primarily for defense.

Speaking to members of the Foreign Press Association in Gaza, Mahmoud al-Zahar, a medical doctor seen by many as a hardliner, suggested the prospect of reconciliation with the rival Fatah party of President Mahmoud Abbas are slim, despite years of international efforts to forge unity.

“I think nobody here in the region is looking for a war,” said Zahar, 71, who has survived two Israeli assassination attempts, one of which, in 2003, killed his son.

“We are not looking for any confrontation with Israel, but if they are going to launch an aggression we have to defend ourselves,” he told reporters late on Wednesday.

Hamas seized control of Gaza in 2007 after a brief civil war with Abbas’s forces. It maintains strict security over the coastal territory, where more than 1.9 million people live. Zahar is one of Hamas’s founders and one of its most senior figures in Gaza, regarded as close to the military wing of the movement.

The movement has, since its founding in 1987, advocated the destruction of Israel, seeing all of historic Palestine, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean, as its land.

However, some of its leaders have indicated in recent years that they would accept a Palestinian state in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, captured by Israel in a 1967 war, in return for a long-term truce with their neighbour.

Israel regards the truce idea as a ploy and will not negotiate with Hamas, which the EU and United States list as a terrorist group.

Asked why Hamas was building tunnels, Zahar said they were defensive and suggested they were nothing against the might of the US-supplied Israeli military.

“You are speaking about tunnels? You are not speaking about F-35 (fighter planes)? You are not speaking about the nuclear bomb in Israel... The tunnels are a matter of self-defence,” he said.

Hamas’s armed wing has lost 10 fighters this year in tunnel collapses. In strongly worded speeches, the group’s leaders have called for the pursuit of the building tunnel, prompting alarm in Israel, which has stepped up efforts to find the tunnels and stop them reaching its territory.

The heightened tension on both sides has fueled fears of another war, which would be the fifth since Hamas won Palestinian elections in 2006.

The last war, in July-August 2014, left more than 2,100 Palestinians dead, most of them civilians, while 73 Israelis, nearly all soldiers, were killed. — Reuters

Syria war rages hours before deal to halt fighting

BEIRUT — Heavy air strikes were reported to have hit rebel-held areas as the east of Damascus as fighting continued across much of western Syria yesterday, hours before a US-Russian plan aimed at halting the fighting is due to take effect.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring organisation reported at least 10 air raids and artillery shelling targeting the town of Douma in rebel-held Eastern Ghouta near Damascus.

Rescue workers in the opposition-held area, reporting on their Twitter feed, said there were confirmed civilian casualties but did not say how many. Syrian military officials could not immediately be reached for comment.

The “cessation of hostilities” agreement is due to take effect at midnight (5pm ET on Friday).

The government has agreed to the plan. The main opposition alliance, which has deep reservations about the terms, has said it is ready for a two-week truce to test the intentions of the government and its Russian and Iranian backers.

Damascus has made clear it will continue to target Islamic State and the al Qaeda-linked Nusra Front which are not included in the agreement. The opposition fears the government will continue targeting rebel groups on the pretext they are jihadists.

The government says the agreement could fail if foreign states supply rebels with weapons or insurgents use the truce to regroup.

Eastern Ghouta is regularly targeted by the Syrian army and its allies. It is a stronghold of the Jaish al-Islam rebel group, which is represented in the main opposition alliance, and has been used as a launchpad for rocket and mortar attacks on Damascus.

The Observatory also reported artillery bombardment by government forces and air strikes overnight in Hama Province, and artillery bombardment by government forces in Homs Province.

Fighting also resumed at dawn between rebels and government forces in the northwestern province of Latakia, where the Syrian army and its allies are trying to take back more territory from insurgents at the border with Turkey.

US President Barack Obama said on Thursday the United States was resolved to try to make the deal work but that “there are plenty of reasons for scepticism.” — Reuters
PARIS — Thirty-five-year-old Didi saved scores of lives on 13 November when Islamic State militants attacked the Bataclan concert hall where he was in charge of security. Now those he saved say they turn to him for solace.

They meet, mostly in cafes, just to be together, to chat and support each other.

“It was just surreal to see him show such composure, and be methodical and efficient, and also so human... we lapped up everything he said, he was our point of reference,” says Myriam, a survivor who regularly meets up with him.

And while Didi, an Algerian who later dropped his name to give his full name, says he is no hero, Myriam said meeting him is helping her move on.

Like other survivors of the attacks, in which 90 were killed, she sought him out for weeks to say “Thank you.”

“It was very important, it was key for me to feel better and move on with life. Being able to say thank you to someone about that night was something really good. To be able to hold someone in my arms and just tell him ‘you saved my life,’” said the single mother of a 10-month-old baby.

Didi, who has not been back to work since the attacks, is constantly on the phone with survivors.

“Without him, I would not be here. He was the one who told me ‘go there, get out this way, be careful’,”

Franck Auffret
Survivor

“You saved my life,” Didi explained that like everyone else, he laid down on the floor, turned off his walkie-talkie and then took advantage of a moment when the attackers were re-loading their weapons to tell people to head for the emergency exits. While shots rang out, dozens of people packed into the emergency exit, which led to a small alleyway behind the venue.

Didi opened the doors and guided concert-goers to a student residence down the street. “Helping others and seeing them make progress in their healing process is the thing that’s going to help me get better and heal,” he told Reuters.—Reuters

‘You saved my life’: Paris attack survivors seek solace with Bataclan security man

UK’s Osborne pushes G20 to warn against Brexit

SHANGHAI — British finance minister George Osborne is pushing the Group of 20 leading economies to warn about the dangers of Britain leaving the European Union, the Financial Times reported on Thursday.

Osborne said he hoped G20 support for Britain staying in the EU would be an important outcome of a meeting on Friday and Saturday in Shanghai of finance ministers, the FT said, citing people close to the finance minister.

Osborne pressed concerns about a so-called “Brexit” in bilateral meet

ings with his British counterparts in Beijing on Wednesday, the FT said.

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Minister spokes-

man Hong Lei said he had “noted” Osborne’s com-

ments. China supported the European integration pro-

cess, he added, and would like to see Europe play an even greater role in the world.

“We hope that Britain and the EU can appropri-

ately handle the relevant issue,” Hong told a daily news

source. A G20 official, who spoke to Reuters on condi-

tion of anonymity, said the prospect of Britain voting to leave the EU was such a horizon that it had not been announced, with Osborne by of-

ficials from other countries on the sidelines of the G20 meetings.

“We understand some countries are raising the is-

sue with the Chancellor in bilateral meetings. If they are concerned, then it could end up in the communique, though this would be un-

usual and the British have not put it on the agenda,” the offi-

cial said.

The possibility that Britain might leave the EU has led to a sharp fall in ster-

ling in recent weeks. Some economists say an ‘out’ vote could deliver a shock to the global economy, which is already struggling to grow quickly, because it would raise questions about the fu-

ture of the bloc as a whole.

Prime Minister David Cameron is campaigning to keep Britain in the EU and has the support of London’s financial district, major companies, much of the La-

bour Party, major trade un-

ions, international allies and Scottish nationalists.

International Monetary Fund Managing Director Christine Lagarde, in an interview with CNN Mon-

ey on Wednesday, warned Britain against Brexit. She said trade and financial ties, and migration between the UK and Europe have boost-

ed growth.—Reuters

Finland to provide $88m investment aid to renewables projects

OSLO — Finland will provide 80 million euros ($88 million) in aid to bio-

fuel and new energy tech-

nology projects to meet its climate goals by 2030, the government said on Thurs-

day.

In a statement. The Nordic country wants more than half of its energy needs from renewables by the 2020s.

The government also confirmed its plans to phase out coal and reduce its use of imported oil. “Finland will stop using coal in energy production and halve the use of imported oil for domestic needs during the 2020s,” the Ministry of Employment and the Economy said in a statement.

Consumption of hard coal, which is mainly im-

ported from Russia, fell in 2015 by 26 per cent year-on-

year to 2.6 million tonnes, the lowest level since ear-

ly 1980s, preliminary data from the Finland’s statistics office showed.

Finnish utilities have already mothballed or per-

manently closed a number of coal power plants as Nordic power prices plunged to 15-

year lows last year, reducing profitability.

Finnish utility Lahin Energi said on Thursday it planned to mothball its 170 megawatt (MW) Kymja-

vi coal and gas power plant from June 2019.

Last year, another Finn-

ish utility, PVO, decided to permanently close its 240 MW Tahkoilovo and 240 Kristiina coal power plants.

In total, up to 1,800 MW of electricity production capac-

ity, equivalent to two nuclear reactors, was expected to be decommissioned in Finland during 2013-2016, PVO has said.—Reuters

Eleven killed in mass Papua New Guinea jail break

SYDNEY — Police in Papua New Guinea shot and killed 11 prisoners and wounded 17 after a mass prison breakout in the Pa-

cific nation’s second larg-

est city, PNG media outlet EMTV reported yesterday.

More than 30 prisoners ar-

ned attackers two guards at the Buimo prison in

Lae, nearly 320 km (200 miles) north of the Papua New Guinea capital, Port Moresby, before escaping, EMTV said.

“It is confirmed that 11 prisoners have been shot and killed and 17 wounded and recaptured,” EMTV quoted Metropoli-

tan Superintendent Anths

ny Wagambie as saying.

It was not clear how many prisoners were un-

accounted for, the station said.

In 2009, 73 prisoners cut through two fences to escape from the same facil-

ity, the Australian Broad-

casting Corp reported.

Papua New Guinea, formerly administered by its near-neighbour Australian, struggles with endemic violence and poverty.

The Australian govern-

ment warns of “high levels of serious crime” on its travel advice website and refers to a “general atmosphere of lawless-

ness.”—Reuters
Morocco suspends contacts with EU over court ruling on farm trade

RABAT — Morocco said on Thursday it had suspended contact with European Union institutions over a court ruling invalidating their farm trade accord with Rabat and saying it should exclude the disputed territory of Western Sahara.

“The EU lodged an appeal last week against a European Court decision announced on 10 December to void the trade deal with Morocco in response to a suit filed by the Polisario Front, which wants independence for the Moroccan-controlled territory.”

The complaint, brought to the court in 2012, involves trade of agricultural products, processed agricultural products and fisheries. Reuters reported last month the government had decided to suspend contacts with the EU delegation in Rabat.

Thursday’s statement, issued after the weekly cabinet meeting, said Morocco rejects the court ruling as against international law and UN Security Council resolutions.

“Morocco cannot accept to be treated as a subject of a judicial process and to be buffeted between European institutions,” it said. “Continuing in that position would deeply threaten the mutual trust and even the continuation of the partnership between the two sides.”

There was no immediate comment from the EU.

Moroccan farm trade in 2015 amounted to 43 billion dirhams ($4.59 billion) and most of it was done with EU countries.

An EU source said the December court decision would have no direct impact on trade pending a ruling on the EU appeal. But Moroccan’s formal suspension of contacts could disrupt some 1.03 billion euros ($1.12 billion) of EU grants to the North African kingdom.

The EU and Morocco have struck agreements allowing duty-free quotas for agricultural products such as tomatoes and granting access for European vessels to fish in Moroccan waters in return for financial assistance. The two sides also began negotiations in 2013 to form a deeper and broader free trade agreement.

Morocco has controlled most of Western Sahara since 1975 and claims sovereignty over the sparsely populated stretch of desert to its south, which has offshore fishing, phosphate reserves and oilfield potential.

Morocco’s annexation of Western Sahara prompted a rebellion by the Polisario Front backed by Morocco’s neighbour Algeria. The United Nations brokered a ceasefire in 1991, but talks have since failed to find a lasting settlement in Africa’s longest-running territorial dispute. Rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch accuse Morocco of continuing to use excessive force against activists and repressing political freedom in Western Sahara. Rabat invests heavily there, hoping to calm social unrest and independence claims.

Earlier this month, Morocco’s King Mohammed launched an 18 billion dirham ($1.85 billion) investment plan in Laayoune, Western Sahara’s biggest city, driven by state-run phosphate company OCP.—Reuters.
Kylie Minogue celebrates 10 years of being cancer-free

LONDON — Singer Kylie Minogue celebrated the 10-year anniversary of being ‘all-clear’ from cancer with an adorable childhood picture.

The 47-year-old “I Was Gonna Cancel” songstress shared the picture on Instagram.

“Today marks my official 10 year ‘all clear’ from breast cancer. Naturally, my nearest and dearest were at the forefront of my mind. Behind the tears were relief and thanks and thoughts.

‘Thoughts of all those who are making their way towards this landmark, those who are past the landmark and of those who we sadly miss. Thank you just doesn’t say enough...’ she wrote in the caption.

Minogue was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2005, at the age 36.—PTI

Michael Jackson’s Neverland ranch up for sale

LONDON— King of pop Michael Jackson’s former Neverland Ranch is on the market for USD 100 million.

Coloncy Capital is offloading Sycamore Valley Ranch in Los Olivos, California and to help attract interest for the property the company has created a five-minute promotional video of the property, reported Female First. A source said that Colony didn’t have permission to use the late pop superstar’s music in the video.

The clip features the song “Man in the Mirror” in the background of a virtual tour of the plush property and its surrounding grounds. In November 2008, Jackson transferred the title of the ranch, which was named after him and a Colony affiliate. The “Beat It” hitmaker purchased the ranch, which was named after the fantasy island which features in “Peter Pan”, a book series by novelist J M Barrie — for USD 19.5 million in 1987.

Last year, Michael’s daughter Paris Jackson, 17, built a Zen garden at the ranch.—PTI

It is a man’s world (again) in the Oscars best picture race

LOS ANGELES — From abandoned astronauts to testosterone-fueled Wall Street traders, dogged reporters and frontiersmen bent on revenge, it is a man’s world in the best picture race at Sunday’s Oscars with women again taking supporting roles.

The Oscars have not seen a female-led film win best picture in a decade, since “Million Dollar Baby” starring Hilary Swank won the top accolade in 2005. The #OscarsSoWhite backlash that took place this year after no actors of color were nominated has overshadowed much of the coverage of Hollywood’s awards season.

Yet the male-dominated race is indicative of the larger gender gap in Hollywood, observers say.


Brooklynn and “Room,” both female-driven films and whose leads are both nominated for best actress, are included in the pack, but neither film is predicted by awards pundits to win the best picture contest.

“A woman’s film is always harder to get made at a studio,” veteran film producer Lynda Obst told Reuters. “They (studios) have never been convinced that a female market 100 per cent exists.”

That is despite the box office success of big budget films with female leads, including Jennifer Lawrence in “The Hunger Games” franchise, Shailene Woodley in the “Divergent” series, Scarlett Johansson’s “Lucy” and newcomer Daisy Ridley in “Star Wars: The Force Awakens.” But studio executives attribute the success of those films to the popularity of the star actress rather than the strength of the female movie-going audience, said Obst, who has produced films such as “Sleepless in Seattle” and “Intolerable Cruelty.”

According to a study published this week, women made up only one-third of speaking characters in 414 Hollywood movies and TV shows in 2014.

“Award shows can only be a reflection of the material out there,” said Katherine Phillips, professor of leadership and ethics at Columbia Business School.

Much of the problem, Phillips said, lies in movie studios sticking to business models that have worked in the past, leading to “history repeating itself over and over again.” Films with popular male leads tend to do well on average at the box office, so the formula is replicated. —Reuters

Meryl Streep clarifies ‘We’re all Africans’ remark

LOS ANGELES — Oscar-winning actress Meryl Streep on Thursday said her “We’re all Africans” comment was taken out of context, writing in the Huffington Post about the controversy she sparked up amid Hollywood’s ongoing diversity debate.

Streep, who earlier this month headed up her first international film jury at the Berlin Film Festival, said her comments to an Egyptian reporter during a press conference about whether she was familiar with cinema from Africa and the Middle East, were “distorted.”

“I was not minimizing difference, but emphasizing the invisible connection empathy enables, a thing so central to the fact of being human, and what art can do: convey another person’s experience,” Streep wrote.

The furor over her comments came amid an uproar in Hollywood over this year’s all-white Oscar acting nominees for a second consecutive year, sparking the #OscarsSoWhite discussion.

The actress also added in the piece entitled “Setting The Record Straight From Berlin” that she was not asked at the press conference about the all-white jury at this year’s festival.

“I did not ‘defend’ the all-white jury,” nor would I, if I had been asked to do so. Inclusion — of races, genders, ethnicities and religions — is important to me, as I stated at the outset of the press conference,” she said.

The comments from the three-time Oscar winner, one of the most admired actresses of her generation, quickly went viral and made headlines around the world as some critics expressed disappointment. Others at the time said her remarks were taken out of context.

Streep said she hoped the attention drawn by her “misconstrued remarks” would be directed toward celebrating this year’s Berlin film festival award winners, which included Gianfranco Rosi’s “Fire At Sea” about African immigrants.—Reuters
Flying Scotsman steam train puffs again, thrilling enthusiasts

YORK, (England) — Legendary British steam train The Flying Scotsman returned to the tracks on Thursday after a 10-year, $5.9-million-pound (4.2-million-pound) refit, bellowing smoke over train enthusiasts as it thundered from London to the northern city of York.

Built in 1923 and now the sole survivor of its class, the train is considered a national treasure because of its longevity and popularity. It became too costly to run in 2004 but an appeal to save it attracted donations from thousands of people.

“I’ve always loved steam trains, my dad worked on the railways, but I wasn’t quite old enough to see them. So to be here today, the smell of the steam and the noise of the engine, it’s just been unfor- gettable,” said Michael Cooper, 48, who works for the Post Office in London.

With its distinctive green livery and round clock face, it was named the Flying Scotsman after the London to Edinburgh service it covered, and made famous at a British Empire Exhibition in 1924.

The Scotsman took just under five hours to puff the 200 miles to York, a journey which now takes around two hours on a modern train.

Back in 1934, however, The Scotsman was the first train in Britain to reach a speed of 100 miles per hour (160 km per hour).

Steam trains hold a particular place in the British imagination due to the country’s pioneering role in developing the railway industry in the 19th century, and to the enduring popularity of children’s fiction character Thomas the Tank Engine. The train is now headed to the National Railway Museum in York.—Reuters

Zoo animals starve in Yemen city shattered by war

DUBAI — Fighting, bombing and a blockade by mi-
litary elites of food and water that have killed hundreds of people in the southwestern Yemeni city of Taiz have not spared the animals of the local zoo.

But thanks in part to the work of an animal-lov-
er an area away in Sweden, the beasts now have a better chance of surviving.

The feathered and furry denizens of the city zoo are slowly dying from starvation and untreated wounds before the eyes of helpless keepers, in another sign of suffering the impoverished country has endured in nearly a year of war. King of the jungle no longer, one man has a better chance of surviving.

The critically endan-
erg er Arabian leopards that every bump in his spine pok-es up and sores cover much of his body.

The critically endan-
erg ered Arabian leopards which once stalked the ver-
dant highlands are dropping dead from hunger.

Zoo staff allow them to feast on their expired brethren — anything to keep them alive.

“When I first arrived, the scene was terrifying. Animals would be fed one day and not eat again for another five. They were bleeding, angry and would fight each other over any scraps to eat,” said one volunteer working at the zoo.

“It was a picture of hell on earth,” he added.

The man, who declined to give his name for security reasons, said the number of staff was down to just 17 — none of them had been paid in months and were working for love of the animals.

“They’re doing the best they can give the short-
eges,” he told Reuters.

Taiz is contested between local militias and the armed Houthi group which many residents say has killed hundreds of people.

Residents say the Hou-
this have repeatedly shelled hospitals and civilian are-
as, while their network of checkpoints around the city mean locals must struggle in cooking gas and bread through rugged mountain passes. A Saudi-led military coalition that backs the pro-government fighters bombes Houthi positions multiple times a day and residents live in constant fear of death.

Medics in the city say at least 1,600 people have been killed in the city since the start of the war. At least 6,000 people have been killed in Yemen, accord-
ing to the United Nations, around half of them civil-
ians.—Reuters

Prada offers ‘see now, buy now’ bags straight off the Milan catwalk

MILAN — Italy’s Prada blended military, nautical and 1940s looks for women next fall at Milan Fashion Week and joined in on the “see now, buy now” retail model by offering two new styles of bag at selected out-
lets from Friday.

Miuccia Prada, regarded as a trailblazer by fashionistas, mixed prints with luxurious fabrics to create glamorous, colour-
ful, layered outfits, for her collection.

The designer, 66, put fur on sleeves and linings of check or leather jackets and cloaks, embroidery on slinky velvet dresses and played with an array of prints — cactus plants, flowers and fruit — on tops, skirts and dresses.

Brocade also featured heavily in the collection — namely in gold on jackets and suits.

Dark coats reminiscent of an elegant military style were teamed with white nautical hats and thick
tight dresses and slinky jackets had big shoulders, a nod to 1940s silhouettes, and some were worn with chunky, elbow-length gloves.

Nearly all looks were teamed with wide cor-
set-like belts, tie-up boots, buckled sandals or peep-toe shoes and handbags, some with charms, others so small they were worn around the neck.

The brand, known for its luxury leather goods with handbags costing as much as 6,000 euros ($6,600), presented its latest addition to the catwalk and accessories range at the show: the new Pion-
nière and Cahier bags.

The small, shoul-
der-strap bags retail for about 1,750 euros and 2,400 euros respectively, with the round-shaped Pionniière in-
spired by hunting, uniforms and travel and the more ex-
.pensive Cahier reminiscent of old book bindings and notebooks.—Reuters

10:46 Am Elegant and Exquisite Myanmar Cotton Fabrics
(11:00 Am – 03:00 Pm) - Friday Repeat (07:00 Am – 11:00 Am)
(03:00 Pm – 07:00 Pm) - Today Repeat (07:00 Am – 11:00 Am)

Prime Time
07:03 Pm News
07:26 Pm To The Land Of Countless Temples - Bagan Trip (EP-1)
07:52 Pm Today Myanmar: Low Cost Rental Housing Project
08:03 Pm News
08:26 Pm Hamhawaddy U Win Tin “A Fearless Man” (Episode-1)
08:49 Pm Myanmar Masterclass: Artist Tin Win (Beikthano)
(09:00 Pm – 11:00 Pm)–Today Repeat (09:00 Am – 11:00 Am)
(11:00 Am – 03:00 Am) - Friday Repeat (07:00 Am – 11:00 Am)
(03:00 Am – 07:00 Am)–Today Repeat (07:00 Am – 11:00 Am)
(For Detailed Schedule – www.myanmaritv.com/schedule)
LONDON — Manchester United flirted with calamity before coasting into the Europa League last 16 as debutant Marcus Rashford helped them overcome an early blow with two goals in a 3-1 home victory over Midtjylland on Thursday.

United, who secured a 6-3 aggregate win, looked on their way out when Pione Sisto gave the Danes the lead but an own goal by Nikolay Bodurov, Rashford’s double, an ander Herrera penalty and a late goal from Memphis Depay saw them safely through.

They will be joined in Friday’s draw by one of the most appealing last-16 lineups in recent seasons with Liverpool, Tottenham Hotspur, Borussia Dortmund, Valencia, Villarreal and holders Sevilla among those marching on.

Athletic Bilbao, Lazio and Bayer Leverkusen also progressed.

Louis van Gaal’s United side looked set to endure another frustrating night when they fell behind to Sisto’s opener, a superb jinking run and sharp finish from the edge of the area after 28 minutes putting the visitors in control.

After last week’s surprise 2-1 first leg success, the Danes seemed to be heading for a famous upset but four minutes later a Memphis cross was turned into his own net by Midtjylland’s Bodurov and the muted fans inside Old Trafford came to life.

Juan Mata had a penalty saved but United kept coming forward and Rashford’s first goal arrived in the 63rd when he lashed Mata’s pull-back into the net before he gave United the lead on aggregate with a sharp first-time finish 12 minutes later.

Herrera slammed home from the spot with two minutes remaining and Depay drove in a fifth in stoppage time.

“It was a great performance. The fans will have enjoyed our attacking football,” said under-pressure Dutchman Van Gaal, whose struggling side have been accused by pundits and former United players of dishing up boring football this season.

The Europa League is almost certainly Liverpool’s best hope of competing with the continent’s elite next term but the five times European Cup winners, who have fallen off the pace in the Premier League, were made to sweat in a 1-0 win over Augsburg.

Having played out a goalless draw in the first leg, Juergen Klopp’s side spurned several chances after James Milner’s early spot kick and survived a nervy finale at Anfield.

There was no such tension for Tottenham who eased past Fiorentina 3-0 with strikes from Ryan Mason and Erik Lamela plus a Gonzalo Rodriguez own goal wrapping up a 4-1 aggregate win.

It was an unsurprisingly easy stroll for Valencia, who took a 6-0 first-leg advantage into the return against Rapid Vienna and continued their recent upturn in form with a 4-0 win that secured a 10-0 aggregate thrashing.

Valencia boss Gary Neville endured little but misery in his first months in Spain but his team have now won four games in a row and inflicted Rapid Vienna’s joint-worst home loss in Europe.

As for Borussia Dortmund, reinvented as the clear bookmakers’ favourites to win the trophy with a 1-0 victory at Porto to complete a 3-0 success over the two legs.—Reuters

ZURICH — Longtime FIFA President Sepp Blatter is disappointed the global soccer body’s appeal committee upheld his ban from the sport, he told a Swiss newspaper in an interview published yesterday.

“I am deeply disappointed,” Blatter told the Aargauer Zeitung when asked about the decision to uphold the ban.

“That of all things the independent appeal committee, on which there are many old comrades, bans me, is really hard on me. But for what? For a financial procedure that has nothing to do with ethics.”

Blatter and European soccer head Michel Platini had their bans for ethics violations upheld on Wednesday, although they were reduced from eight years to six. The pair were banned over a payment of 2 million Swiss francs ($2 million) made to Platini in 2011 by FIFA with Blatter’s approval for work done a decade earlier.

He called the decision to reduce the ban by two years “a bad joke.”

The comments from Blatter, head of soccer’s scandal-plagued governing body since 1998, come the same day that Zurich-based FIFA will elect his permanent successor.

Asian Football Confederation (AFC) president Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa is the bookmaker’s favourite with UEFA’s Swiss general secretary Gianni Infantino a close second.

His ban means Blatter is not allowed to attend Friday’s FIFA congress but he said had many associations and groups had still asked him for advice on who to vote for.

“I only answered: vote for who you want,” Blatter is quoted as saying.

He also said he had contact with all of the candidates except Jordanian Prince Ali Bin Al Hussein.

“At Christmas in Visp I drank mulled wine with one of the candidates,” Blatter said, then confirming this had been with Infantino.

FIFA is currently caught in the worst crisis in its 112-year history. More than 40 individuals and entities, including many former FIFA officials, have been charged with corruption-related offences in the United States. It also faces a parallel Swiss investigation.

Blatter, who is the subject of a criminal investigation in his native Switzerland over the Platini payment, said he had not received an offer to be a whistle-blower in the United States.

Blatter told the newspaper: “And I would not accept such an offer because I am not a referee.”

—Reuters

DUBAI — Novak Djokovic pulled out of his Dubai Championships quarter-final on Thursday after suffering an eye problem.

The world number one had lost the first set against Spain’s Feliciano Lopez when he decided to retire, the day after achieving his 700th career win.

Djokovic had earlier been treated by his trainer during the first set, after having dropped his serve.

After losing his serve again to concede the set 6-3, making 18 unforced errors, he decided not to continue, denying him the chance of reaching an 18th successive ATP Tour final.

The Serb was not immediately available to explain his decision, but Lopez told the media that his opponent had suffered an eye infection.

Lopez now meets Marcos Baghdatis in the semi-finals on Friday for the right to meet Nick Kyrgios or Stan Wawrinka in the final.—Reuters