Police arrest six following cargo ship robbery in Mandalay

Aung Thant Khaing

POLICE arrested several suspects who were allegedly involved in robbing a coal cargo ship in the Ayayawady River in Mandalay a day after the crime was committed, according to local police Monday.

The armed robbery took place in the river at around 3pm on Sunday near Latsaungyu Village in Tada U Township.

The police apprehended six suspects yesterday, and two remain at large. The suspects are accused of attacking and robbing property worth more than K3.1 million (US$2,627). Disguising themselves as travellers, the eight robbers approached the ship, named the Loi Samsis, in a motor boat and asked the bosun of the ship to steer it to shallow waters, after which the ship was stranded.

The robbers allegedly broke the ship’s windows and took jewellery, cash and other items.

The robbers also attacked police with knives and homemade petrol bombs while they were being chased on the river.

One suspect was interrogated after being caught on a sandbank where the robbers left their boat, leading to the arrest of five more suspects.

“The robbery happened while our patrol team was at another place in the river. We are in hot pursuit of the remaining robbers,” said a police inspector from the Tada U Township Police Station.

About five robbery cases were reported in April in the township, most of them having taken place on the river. Villages along the river in the township are vulnerable to armed robberies, especially during high tide.

Chevron Puts Myanmar Gas Block Stakes Worth $1.3 Billion Up For Sale: Sources

US oil and gas major Chevron Corp has put all of its Myanmar gas block stakes up for sale, which at a combined likely valuation of $1.3 billion, would be the biggest deal involving Myanmar assets to date, financial sources familiar with the matter said.

The sale, part of Chevron’s efforts to preserve cash and retreat from non-core assets in the wake of sliding oil prices, is seen as setting the tone for future deals in a country that is opening up for business after historic elections last year.

San Ramon, California-based Chevron is working with a US investment bank on the deal, the sources said, declining to be identified as the sale process has not been made public.

Chevron, which has been operating in Myanmar for about two decades, declined to comment.

It owns 28.3 per cent of the Yadana and Sein gas fields operated by France’s Total SA in the Andaman Sea, which mostly supplies Thai power plants and also has a stake in the pipeline company that transports the gas to the Thai border.

Some of the gas is also supplied to Myanmar.

In addition, it has a 99 per cent stake in exploration Block A5 in the promising Rakhine Basin, an area where Woodside Petroleum has recently discovered gas.

Chevron’s net daily natural gas production in Myanmar last year averaged 117 million cubic feet.

Chevron is also seeking buyers for its Asian geothermal energy blocks valued at about $3 billion, sources familiar with matter have said.—Reuters
14 patients die in Mandalay hospital during Thingyan

Among a total of 761 people hospitalised during the Thingyan festival in Mandalay, 14 died while receiving treatment, according to a public relations officer for Mandalay General Hospital.

Almost half of the hospitalised patients were injured in road accidents, while 25 per cent were injured in fights and in other situations, said U Min Lwin, the public relations officer.

Although this year’s festival was celebrated for five days instead of the usual four, the number of people to be hospitalised was lower than in each of the past three years, added the public relations officer. According to some sources, there were 30 deaths during the festival period in Mandalay, including the 14 who died in the hospital.

Figures show that 28 out of 750 patients died in the hospital in 2015, while 22 out of 972 died in 2014 and 13 out of 739 died in 2013.

--- Aung Thant Khaing

Thailand to boost technical capacity in Myanmar gemstones industry

The Myanmar Gems and Jewellery Entrepreneurs Association (MGJEA) has released its plans for neighbouring Thailand to become involved in partnerships within Myanmar’s gemstone industry under the new NLD-led government.

Previously, China has been the only foreign country to have a presence in Myanmar’s gemstone industry, but an inaugural study visit by the Thai Geological Institute of Thalang (GIT) to the Myanmar’s gem-rich Mogok region on 22 March of this year indicates changing times.

"[Myanmar] needs to work together with Thailand, primarily in regard to technology, in order to heighten the quality of Myanmar’s gemstones. There will be cooperation with Thailand within extractive industries for the foreseeable future," explained U Hpone Myint Aung, vice chair of the MGJEA.

GIT comprises members from the Thai Ministry of Commerce as well as academics and gemstone entrepreneurs. The delegation arrived in Myanmar with the aim to invest in technology and machinery that would allow for mutually beneficial joint operations within Myanmar’s gemstone industry.

"We would be able to provide assistance in showcasing Myanmar’s precious stones at gem and jewellery stores in the Thai capital of Bangkok. There can also be collaboration between businessmen [from both countries]. We also want to help in light of the falling market for Myanmar gems in China. When comparing the value of Myanmar gems with those in the world market, the latter is of more interest," said GIT’s chairperson, Myanmar’s Ministry of Mines prohibits foreigners from conducting extraction or commercial activities within Myanmar’s gemstone industry, though it allows them to purchase stones from gems and jewellery sale emporiums, according to the MGJEA. The MGJEA also stated that Myanmar lacks the technological capacity to break into the world market and is currently in a position whereby it can only produce uncut gem stones.

--- Myitmakha News Agency

Sagaing paddy farms inundated with silt

Farmers in Kalay Township, Sagaing Region, have expressed a need for government assistance to be able to re-cultivate their paddy crops in time for the coming rainy season.

Subsiding floods in the region in July 2015 left fields buried under up to eight feet of silt, ruining their land, say local farmers.

"Our crops were flourishing before the onset of the flooding. Now, though, all the dense silt left behind from the floods has completely destroyed our land; fields have become uncultivatable. As such, we want to re-plough our land, but that would only be possible with the aid of machinery. We wish for the government to effectively carry out activities that would allow us to be ready for the coming rainy season," said Ko Aung Thu Win, a farmer from Homa Village in Kalay Township.

Clearing silt from the farms will cost between K200,000 and K800,000 per acre, which is far beyond the financial reach of local farmers.

"The Department of Irrigation has already examined matters related to field irrigation and made submissions [to the government]. The re-digging of irrigation channels has been included in the budget for the 2016-17 fiscal year, but the exact details are still under examination," said U Wai Lwin Phyo, the administrator of Kalay Township.

Efforts to plant winter crops such as peanuts and sunflowers on land that had been covered in flood-induced silt deposits were reported to be unsuccessful.—Myitmakha News Agency

Reminder for mariners

The Department of Fisheries released a reminder for mariners yesterday, offering shelters for watercrafts to stay safe during rough monsoon weather.

Shelters have been set up in Sittwe, Pauktaw, Kyaukphyu, Thandwe, Taungup and Gwak Rotate Townships in Rakhine State; in Ngapadaw and Bogale townships in Ayeyawady Region; Ye Township in Mon State; and Longlon, Myeik, and Kyunsu townships in Tanintharyi Region.—Ministry of Fisheries Department

MWEA delegation to attend BIG+BIH Fair 2016 in Thailand

Four-member delegation from Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association are seen at Yangon International Airport before departure for Bangkok.

Members of Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association are seen at Yangon International Airport by Phyo, the administrator of Kalay Township. The fair is scheduled to be held in Bangkok for five days from 19 to 23 April.

One killed, 24 injured in 80 Thingyan-related cases in Yangon

One person was killed and 24 injured in Yangon in 80 cases reported during this year’s Thingyan Festival, according to the Yangon Region Police Force.

According to figures released by Yangon Region Police Force, the reports of death and injury were fewer in number this year than last year.

During last year’s festival period, three people died and 69 were injured in Yangon in 70 Thingyan-related cases. Among 80 reported cases, including five cases of pickpocketing this year, eight people were injured in three traffic-related cases, and 16 were hurt in 11 fights. One person was killed. There were 241 Thingyan-related cases across the country this year, resulting in 35 deaths and 316 injuries.

The Yangon Region Police Force, deployed more than 8,000 police officers to ensure security and safety for Thingyan revelers this year.—Ko Moi

A four-member delegation from Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association left for Thailand to take part in the Bangkok International Gift and Bangkok International Houseware Fair 2016 on 17 April.

The MWEA delegation comprises Daw Myiint Myint Aye, Daw May Win Kyu, Daw Kyi Kyi Htay and Daw Ohnmar Kyaw.

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--- Myitmakha News Agency
Norway to name new public park after Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

A NEW park set to be established in Froland, a municipality in Norway, on 19 June will be named after Nobel Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, State Counsellor of Myanmar, according to sources in Norway.

The new park will be named after Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in honour of her strenuous efforts and commitment to leading democracy building in Myanmar, said Torgeir Overland, the in-charge of International Caffe-Froland, the organising committee working to establish the park.

The naming of the park is also aimed at keeping the name of a person whom Norwegian people value sustainable, added the in-charge of the team.

According to sources, a parcel of land in Froland was chosen as the site of the new park following a meeting by the administrative council of Froland on 16 April, and a statue of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is set to be unveiled in conjunction with the planting of an oak tree, which can live for more than 1,000 years. Other trees, including cherry trees, will be planted on Suu Kyi’s birthday, which falls on 19 June.

Arnfinn Landsverk, a Norwegian activist of Myanmar’s democratisation, said an oak will be planted every year on her birthday, adding that growing of an oak tree represents durability, strength and endurance and is seen as a symbol of Suu Kyi’s strong determination, strength and bravery.

Tatmadaw combing operations continue in Kyauktaw Township

TATMAWD columns clashed twice with two Arakan Army (AA) insurgent groups on 16 April while launching combing operations after receiving a tip-off that a 100-member AA contingent entered an area near Lawymataung in Kyauktaw Township during the first week of April.

Leaving the insurgents dispersed following the clashes, the Tatmadaw columns occupied their temporary bases and seized hand-made mines, equipment, personal items and food. During an ambush by the AA insurgents, who disguised themselves as villagers, some Tatmadawmen, including an officiating battalion commander, were killed, and others were injured.

Tatmadaw columns have continued combing the area in order to eliminate the AA insurgents in Kyauktaw Township.—Myawady

Additional companies to be selected for listing on YSX

MORE companies that fit the criteria of the Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX) will be selected for the selling of stocks on the exchange according to the Myanmar Securities Exchange Supervisory Commission (MSESC).

There are currently six companies permitted to trade stocks on the YSX, while plans are in place for additional companies to be selected to trade stocks once the stocks of the aforementioned companies have all been sold.

“Additional companies allowed to trade stocks on the YSX will be chosen before the permitted time period of those currently trading has come to an end. This year will see roughly 10 companies able to trade stocks on the exchange,” said Dr Maung Maung Thein, chairman of the MSESC.

The YSX opened in the premises of the former Myawady Bank headquarters on 9 December 2015, with First Myanmar Investment (FMI) becoming the first company allowed to trade stocks when it received permission on 25 March this year.

FMI began selling stocks on the exchange at an initial value of K26,000 per share. However, greater buyer demand for shares than those available for purchase shortly after shares went on sale brought the price of a share to K31,000. The market price for a share on 31 March then rose in value to K39,000 before reverting back to K31,000 per share the following day, highlighting the fluctuating nature of the stock exchange.

FMI will shortly be joined by the Myanmar Thilawa SEZ Holdings Co, Myanmar Citizens Bank, First Private Bank Ltd, Myanmar Agribusiness Public Corporation and the Great Hor Kham Public Co.

Shares of the six listed companies will be sold through third-party securities companies, including KBZ Stirling Coleman Securities, the Myanmar Securities Exchange Centre, AYA Trust Securities, CB Securities and KTZRH Securities.

The YSX is jointly owned by the Myanmar Economic Bank, which has a 51 per cent stake in the exchange, and the Japanese Stock Exchange Committee and the Japan Daiwa Company, which share ownership of the remaining 49 per cent.—Myitnakha News Agency

Dee Dote layered waterfall thronged with visitors during Thingyan

THE Dee Dote layered waterfall, with its crystal-clear, blue water in Pyin Oo Lwin, Mandalay Region, was thronged with visitors during the Thingyan holiday.

“The layered waterfall attracted many visitors with its natural, cool water, where people sought refuge from the scorching sun. Some visitors came take a rest, enjoying the scenic beauty in the hottest part of this summer,” said Daw Sein Myint, a vendor who works near the waterfall.

“Many visitors came to the layered waterfall even before Thingyan, so we thought the number of visitors might decline during Thingyan. But it was crowded with many visitors during Thingyan. Both local visitors and the [foreign] tourists visited Dee Dote Waterfall,” she said.

Some visitors choose the waterfall to avoid the intense heat, though they would prefer to visit around the moat around Mandalay. To reach the waterfall, visitors must trek. We enjoy it a lot because we can interact with many visitors,” said Ko Zaw Lin, a visitor from Patheingyi Township.

“We came here with family and relatives, and the waterfall was more crowded than we expected,” said U Min Han from Aungmyethazan Township.—Aung Ye Thwin

Visitors splash at Dee Dote layered waterfall. Photo: Aung Ye Thwin
Crime NEWS

Truck accident near Nay Pyi Taw kills six

A LIGHT TRUCK overturned on the Yangon-Mandalay highway in Dekhamthiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw, yesterday, leaving six dead and five injured.

The deadly accident occurred when the driver lost control of the truck. The truck crashed into the barrier in the middle of the road.

One man and four women died on the spot, and another woman died on the way to hospital. The injured were taken to the Nay Pyi Taw 1000-bed hospital.

A total of 13 people were on board when the accident occurred.

Two pilgrims killed in car crash in Kyaukphyu

A car carrying the pilgrims en route from Simaw village to Rambre Township for paying homage to Naahmewtaw Pagoda in Kyaukphyu Township has overturned near Min Pyin village on 15 April, leaving two dead and 53 injured.

According to the investigation, the pilgrimage vehicle driven by Maung Kyi Aung, 31, with 55 passengers on board, overturned due to loss of control while the children pour the water on it.

Out of the passengers, U Maung Chan Aye, 63, the resident of Chiwete village and Daw Pauk Yaing Ma, 54, the resident of Simaw village are killed at the scene and 35 injured.

A light truck overthrows in Magwe

A LIGHT TRUCK overturns in Magwe Region on 15 April, leaving two dead and 53 injured.

According to the investigation, the pilgrimage vehicle driven by U Kyaw Kyaw, 44, with 14 passengers on board, overturned.

The driver and another woman were not injured.

A man was a heavy drinker and had rented the room at around 8am. Apart from injuries to his neck, no other physical injuries were found on his body.

Police are still investigating the case.—Ye Zarni

Young man commits suicide in Dala Tsp

A YOUNG man from Seikgyi Khanaungto Township, situated on the southwestern bank of Yangon River, committed suicide on Wednesday.

The body of Wathan (aka A Nge Kaung, aka Kalar), 23, was found in the room of a guest house located in Dala Township in the Southern District of Yangon.

Police found him after he tided a 3-foot-long curtain to a wooden beam in the ceiling of the room and wrapped the other end around his neck. According to the police investigation, the man was a heavy drinker and had rented the room at around 8am. Apart from injuries to his neck, no other physical injuries were found on his body.

Police are still investigating the case.—Than Htay

Stimulant tablet and raw opium seized in Tachileik

A combined investigating team involving local authorities and members of anti-drug squad from Tachileik Township searched a house owned by Law Htun in Wan Kyaung ward, and seized 3160 stimulant tablets and raw opium weighing of 126.33 grams in the metal box on 12 April.

Police have filed charges against Law Htun, 49, under the Anti-Narcotic Law.—The Mirror

Three men arrested for motorbike theft in Magwe

THREE men, who are believed to have stolen a motorbike, were arrested by local police on the last day of the Thingyan festival.

Police apprehended the men while they were removing a valuable part from the bike on a hill located on the street near the police post in Insein Township.

Police have filed charges against the driver, Maung Kyi Aung for the lack of control of car.—The Mirror
China launches pollution probe after hundreds of students fall sick

BEIJING — Authorities in China have launched an investigation after a report that hundreds of children attending a language school built near a polluted industrial site developed health problems, including cancer, state news agency Xinhua reported on Monday.

The municipal government of Changzhou, about 100 km (60 miles) northwest of Shanghai, said that since December students and faculty at the Changzhou Foreign Languages School had been complaining about an “unusual smell” emanating from three former chemical plants nearby, Xinhua said.

But a report by state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV) late on Sunday suggested that the problems were much more serious, and the case has raised concerns about environmental risks.

Of 641 students from the school who underwent health checks recently 493 were found to have conditions ranging from chronic coughs, headaches and blood abnormalities, to lymphoma and leukaemia, CCTV reported.

Widespread environmental pollution is a dark legacy of the growth-at-all-costs development path that China took since the 1970s, and it is increasingly a source of social unrest.

The ruling Communist Party in recent years has dedicated more resources and attention to cleaning the country’s polluted air, water and soil, but the severity of the problem will be felt for decades to come.

Parents of the students in Changzhou had suspected for months that their children’s ailments were linked to the school, which had opened on the site in September, and called for it to be moved elsewhere, CCTV said in a report online.

Photographs posted on microblogs show what appears to be dozens of people staging protests with banners calling for the school to relocate.

“It replied that ordinary passengers would need to go through safety checks (while) carrying the luggage. So, the chief executive is not an ordinary passenger now,” she asked.

Ng said that under international aviation safety protocols, it is a “must (for all passengers) to accompany your carry-on baggage by yourself at the security desk.”

In what has been dubbed “luggage-gate,” Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying was reported to have pressured a ground crew staff member to help transfer a piece of luggage his daughter left outside the restricted area after she checked herself in for a journey to the United States last month.

Airline staff succumbed to pressure and made an exception, sending someone to carry the unattended luggage into the restricted area to her, so that she did not need to pick it up herself and go through safety checks once again.

The full details of the incident have yet to be confirmed.

Leung has issued a statement denying putting pressure on airline staff, but admitted to talking to the staff over concerns for his daughter.

The girl’s mother, who was accompanying her at the airport that day and helping arrange her luggage delivery, also denied having abused the first family’s privilege, and said the crew staff offered to help willingly.

Both the Civil Aviation Department and Security Bureau, which oversees the territory’s air safety, have said it was not a special case, and that air safety was not compromised “as long as the luggage and the passenger both passed through inspection.”

Ng said they will wait a week for the department chief Norman Lo to meet with them and give a full explanation on the case.

“Hong Kong people will be outraged if the chief executive is really allowed such a privilege,” Monchi-chi Chan, 50, a teacher who used to work at the airport, said. “Hong Kong’s reputation is part of our dissipating core values. We can’t just let it rot.”

Thousands protest at HK airport over aviation security scandal

Up to 2,000 protesters are seen at Hong Kong’s Chek Lap Kok International Airport on 17 April.

The protesters, including members of the territory’s Cabin Crew Federation, were calling for clarity on airport security measures, after Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying became embroiled in a scandal over claims he pressured airline staff to carry luggage through the airport to his daughter, who had already passed through security checks.

Australia parliament debates make-or-break labour reform

SYDNEY — Australia’s parliament returned for a special sitting on Monday to debate crucial labour reform bills which are likely to be blocked in the upper house Senate, leading to the dissolution of both houses and an election on 2 July.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull in March recalled parliament from a seven-week recess, the fourth time in more than 50 years that a special session has been demanded.

The bills are likely to be blocked in the Senate by smaller parties such as the influential Greens and the main centre-left opposition Labour Party. A decision is expected this week.

The government has proposed a regulator for the construction industry, opposed by the main opposition Labour Party and trade unions, many of which believe the watchdog would place undue oversight over their operations.

Greens leader Senator Richard Di Natale reiterated his party’s rejection of the legislation.

“Their number one priority is their own survival.”

Opinion polls showed support for Australia’s ruling Liberal Party-led coalition lingering at its lowest level since Turnbull assumed office last September.

Support for the coalition was 49 per cent, a Newspoll found on Monday, on a two-party preferred basis where votes for minor parties are redistributed to the two main blocs according to preferences. Turnbull retained his lead as preferred prime minister over Labour leader Bill Shorten. But his popularity has waned amid perceived dithering over tax reform, a rejection of calls for an investigation into major banks and planned cuts to spending on hospitals and schools.

Austrian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. PHOTO: REUTERS

“It tells us that the number one priority isn’t innovation, it’s not bringing us into a new economy, it is not tackling climate change and the loss of the Great Barrier Reef, the jobs that are going because we’ve got inaction in managing that transition to a new economy,” he said.

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Chinese military aircraft makes first public landing on disputed island

BEIJING — A Chinese military aircraft has for the first time publically landed at a new airport on an island China has built in the disputed South China Sea, state media said on Monday, raising the prospect that China could base fighter jets there.

The United States has criticised China’s construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea and worries that it plans to use them for military purposes, even though China says it has no hostile intent. The runway on the Fiery Cross Reef is 3,000 metres (10,000 feet) long and is one of three China has been building for more than a year by dredging sand up onto reefs and atolls in the Spratly archipelago.

Civilian flights began test runs there in January. In a front-page story, the official People’s Liberation Army Daily said a military aircraft on patrol over the South China Sea on Sunday received an emergency call to land at Fiery Cross Reef to evacuate three seriously ill workers. They were then taken in the transport aircraft back to Hainan island for treatment, it said, showing a picture of the aircraft on the ground in Hainan.

It was the first time China’s military had publicly admitted landing an aircraft on Fiery Cross Reef, the influential Global Times tabloid said.

It cited a military expert as saying the flight showed the airfield was up to military standards and could see fighter jets based there in the event of war. The runways would be long enough to handle long-range bombers and transport aircraft as well as China’s best jet fighters, giving it a presence deep in the maritime heart of Southeast Asia that it has lacked until now.

More than $3 trillion of world trade is shipped through the South China Sea every year. Besides China’s territorial claims in the area, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines and Taiwan have rival claims.

— Reuters

US pledges ‘strong response’ in event of another North Korean nuclear test

TOKYO — The United States will respond strongly in the case of a further North Korean nuclear test, US Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday, days after the North’s failure to launch what the United States believes was an intermediate-range ballistic missile.

North Korea conducted a fourth nuclear test in January and a long-range rocket launch the next month, both in contravention of UN Security Council resolutions.

Expanded UN sanctions aimed at starving North Korea of funds for its nuclear weapons programme were approved in a unanimous Security Council vote in early March on a resolution drafted by the United States and China.

Blinken, who is meeting senior Japanese government officials in Tokyo, told reporters North Korea would be digging itself deeper into a hole if it pursued further provocations.

“There will be additional strong response in case of another (North Korean) nuclear test,” Blinken said, adding that such actions by North Korea were “unacceptable”.

— Reuters

Singapore offers disaster relief assistance to Japan following earthquakes

SINGAPORE — Singapore’s Minister for Defence Ng Eng Hen conveyed condolences and offered disaster relief assistance to Japan following earthquakes last week, said the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) in a press release on Monday. In a letter to his Japanese counterpart General Nakatani on Monday, Ng noted that the Changi Regional Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Coordination Centre (RHCC) is ready to deploy a team to support the Japan Self-Defence Forces in coordinating military assistance from foreign militaries in the event that it is required. Through a comprehensive assessment of the situation in the affected areas, the RHCC seeks to enhance information-sharing and operational coordination among the militaries, said MINDEF.— Xinhua

Australia state bans underground coal gas drilling

BRISBANE (Queensland) — Australia’s Queensland state on Monday banned underground coal gasification, a controversial process used to convert coal into gas.

Unlike fracking, which involves pumping fluid into coal seams to cause fractures, the method by which unearthed coal, known as underground coal gasification, or UCG, takes place entirely below the surface, raising concerns over water contamination and greenhouse gas emissions.

The ban on UCG was initiated by the state’s mines minister, Anthony Lynham, who said he will introduce legislation by the end of the year to make it law.

Carbon Energy Ltd, a company that said it had spent A$150 million ($115.23 million) over eight years developing UCG technology to use in the state, was considering a response to the ban.

Carbon Energy, whose stock dropped nearly 8 per cent to less than 2 Australian cents on Monday, said it had passed every environmental and scientific test put before it over the past eight years.

Last month, Singapore-listed Linc Energy was charged in Queensland with causing serious environmental harm following an investigation into a gas leak at one of its UCG pilot plants, after four employees fell ill with suspected gas poisoning.

Propponents of UCG say the process is safer as there is no surface disposal of coal ash into the atmosphere, while detractors have raised concerns over contamination of groundwater and increased levels of greenhouse gases beyond those of natural gas.

“The potential risks to Queensland’s environment and our valuable agricultural industries far outweigh any potential economic benefits,” Lynham said.

Wales in the United Kingdom last month imposed a moratorium on UCG, part of a precautionary approach it said toward the development of unconventional oil and gas resources, which includes a temporary ban on fracking.— Reuters
Israel finds new Hamas tunnel; Hamas says it's 'old, used'

JERUSALEM/GAZA — The Israeli military said on Monday it has uncovered a Hamas tunnel that crosses from Gaza to Israel, the first time such a tunnel was discovered since the 2014 Gaza War.

A military spokesperson said in a statement that the tunnel was built by Hamas, apparently after the 2014 war to "infiltrate Israel" and carry out "terror attacks" against the country's southern community near the Gaza border.

The spokesperson said the tunnel, found about 10 days ago by electronic detections means, has been destroyed.

"The tunnel uncovered in Israel demonstrates once more Hamas' warped priorities and continued commitment and investment in tools of violence," said Lt Col Peter Lerner, a spokesperson for Israel Defence Forces.

"The tunnel exposes Hamas' abhorrent intentions to attack the men, women, and children of southern Israel," he said.

Israel's 51-day-long offensive in Gaza in 2014 claimed the lives of at least 2,251 Palestinians, 65 per cent of them civilians, according to the United Nations. It also saw the death of 72 Israelis, all but six were soldiers.

The violence ended with a fragile cease-fire on 26 August 2014.

However, a Hamas-related website, al-Majd, quoting an unidentified senior Hamas official, said on Monday the tunnel was not new and that it had been used during the 2014 Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip.

"The aim of making the declaration in the Israeli media is to say that discovering the tunnel was a big achievement in order to keep the American financial support to the Israelis project of fighting tunnels," the official was quoted as saying.

Over the past few months, more than 20 Palestinian militants died in tunnels that collapsed across the Gaza Strip. Hamas leaders said digging tunnels was a preparation for any upcoming Israeli wars on Gaza.

However, Hamas leaders said they are not interested in any war with Israel, "but if Israel wages a war on Gaza, Hamas and the armed resistance will have the right to defend themselves and to defend the people in Gaza."— Xinhua

Fate of Obama’s immigration plan in hands of Supreme Court

WASHINGTON — The US Supreme Court takes up a case on Monday probing the limits of presidential powers as the justices weigh whether President Barack Obama’s executive order on immigration in Washington, in November 2015. Many immigrants are hoping that the US Supreme Court revives President Barack Obama’s 2014 executive action on immigration, which was thrown out by a lower court.

WASHINGTON — The US Supreme Court takes up a case on Monday probing the limits of presidential powers as the justices weigh whether President Barack Obama’s executive order on immigration in Washington, in November 2015. Many immigrants are hoping that the US Supreme Court revives President Barack Obama’s 2014 executive action on immigration, which was thrown out by a lower court.

Obama’s programme is called Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA).

Shortly before the plan was to take effect last year, a federal judge in Texas blocked it after the Republican-led states filed suit against the Democratic president’s executive action. The New Orleans-based 5th US Circuit Court of Appeals upheld that decision in November.

The Supreme Court’s ruling is due by the end of June.

Obama’s action arose from frustration within the White House and the immigrant community about a lack of action in politically polarized Washington to address the status of people, mostly Hispanics, living in the United States illegally.—Reuters

‘In’ camp lead maintain lead, but more undecided ahead of EU vote

LONDON — The “In” campaign has retained its seven percentage point lead ahead of Britain’s 23 June referendum on whether Britain should stay in the European Union although more voters were undecided, according to a ComRes poll for the Sun newspaper on Monday.

The telephone survey of 1,002 people carried out last week found support for staying in the bloc was on 45 per cent with 38 per cent of voters backing a Brexit.

That meant the “In” camp’s lead was unchanged from a similar ComRes poll last month although the number of undecided voters had risen significantly to 17 per cent. Last month, 11 per cent said they did not know how they would vote.

“It is clear there is still considerable confusion about the referendum, which suggests a lack of clarity from both campaigns,” Tom Mouldazino from ComRes told the Sun.

Public surveys have generally indicated support for remaining in the EU firmly ahead of the “Out” campaign, while online polls have the two sides running neck and neck.—Reuters

159 passengers from Taiwan bypass Japan airport immigration by mistake

CHIBA — A total of 159 passengers who arrived at Narita airport on a flight from Taiwan on Sunday night entered Japan without going through immigration due to a mishandling by airport staff.

Japanese budget airline Vanilla Air said on Monday that around 110 of the passengers on its Flight 104 from Taipei to Tokyo have since been contacted and processed properly and it is trying to reach the remaining customers by phone or e-mail.

“We have not heard of an incident before in which this many people entered the country (through Narita) without going through immigration,” an official of the airport operator said.

The mistake occurred as buses that transported the passengers from the plane dropped them at an arrival gate for domestic flights. It is possible the flight was mistaken as domestic because before arriving in Narita, it was temporarily diverted to another domestic airport in Aichi Prefecture due to strong winds, according to the airline.

Most of the people Vanilla Air is still trying to reach are Japanese, the carrier said.—Kyodo News

Six corpses found in migrant boat, 108 rescued: Italy coast guard

ROME — Six bodies were recovered and 108 migrants were rescued from a semi-submerged rubber dinghy. Italy’s coast guard said on Monday, as boat arrivals accelerated amid calm seas.

A private rescue ship called Aquarius run by humanitarian group SOS Mediterranee found the bodies on the rubber dinghy on Sunday, a coast guard spokesman said. Five women were among those rescued. The coast guard had no details about the nationality of the migrants.

The migrants and the six corpses are being taken to the Italian island of Lampedusa, the coast guard said.

Separately, Italy’s coast guard rescued 33 migrants from a small island off the eastern coast of Sicily on Sunday.

Almost 6,000 migrants and refugees sailed from Libya to Italy last week in what appears the start of a wave of at least 100,000 and “possibly many, many more” this year, the International Organisation for Migration said on Friday.—Reuters

Aussie police search for owner of lost 2.5 kg gold bar

MELBOURNE — A cleaner with a conscience has handed in a 2.5-kilogram gold bar to Australian police after finding it while at work in the West Australian (WA) capital city of Perth.

The “miracle gold” bar, measuring around 22 centimetres in length by five centimeters wide, was found in the Perth suburb of East Victoria Park last month.

On Monday, police detectives launched a campaign to reunite the misplaced gold bar with its owner.

Depending on its purity, the chunk of gold bullion could be worth in excess of 75,000 US dollars.

While police would usually expect to be flooded with ownership claims for such a valuable piece of lost property, this case may prove tougher to crack.

WA police suspect the crudely set bar, which has no defining marks or features, may be less than 50 per cent pure gold and made from stolen jewellery.—Xinhua

NEWS IN BRIEF

A protester holds a sign as immigrants and community leaders rally in front of the US Supreme Court to mark the one-year anniversary of President Barack Obama's executive orders on immigration in Washington, in November 2015. Many immigrants are hoping that the US Supreme Court revives President Barack Obama's 2014 executive action on immigration, which was thrown out by a lower court. PHOTO: REUTERS

A protester holds a sign as immigrants and community leaders rally in front of the US Supreme Court to mark the one-year anniversary of President Barack Obama’s executive orders on immigration in Washington, in November 2015. Many immigrants are hoping that the US Supreme Court revives President Barack Obama’s 2014 executive action on immigration, which was thrown out by a lower court. PHOTO: REUTERS
Who are the So-called Rohingya?

Khin Maung Myint

The bloody clashes in Rakhine State between the ethnic Rakhines and the migrant Bengalis in Myanmar have dragged on for five decades, yet the problem appears to be no closer to resolution. The new regime is to ensure national reconciliation, to achieve internal peace, to enforce the rule of law, to amend the constitution and to keep the democratic system dynamic and well-ingrained. What matters most, she said, is national reconciliation. This is absolutely correct because a nation cannot develop without unity. Unity is even more important for a nation like ours, which has lagged behind because of racial conflicts that have raged for more than six decades. This is the reason why she said her government would not take the “Rohingya” issue into account when it came to the 2008 constitution. Hence, we can see that the government of the new regime envisions a positive impact upon the peace and stability of the state. The rationale behind amending the constitution can now be seen as the new regime’s effort to put the nation on the correct path toward the establishment of a genuine federal, democratic Union.

In this function, the State Councillor, well aware of deep concerns over constitutional amendment, guaranteed that her administration would choose only the ways and means of amendment that would not adversely affect the people. We hope her guarantee will soothe the hearts of the people. Her amendment of the constitution having a negative impact upon the peace and stability of the state. The rationale behind amending the constitution can now be seen as the new regime’s effort to put the nation on the correct path toward the establishment of a genuine federal, democratic Union.

The State Councillor’s message contained two key concepts related to development. The first concept is unity, without which national development cannot be achieved. The second concept is development of human resources. Without a healthy, educated and capable populace, a nation cannot prosper.

What is worth noting here is that the State Counselor set a higher value upon the human assets than upon Myanmar’s abundant supply of natural resources, which may one day be depleted. The GNLM agrees that what really counts is the strength of the people, not inanimate resources.

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Mandalay authorities pay respect to senior citizens

THE Mandalay Region government organised a respect-paying ceremony on the day of the Myanmar New Year, which fell on 17 April (Sunday) at City Hall. Mandalay Region residents above 80 years old attended the ceremony, where they received cash and gifts presented by the regional government.

Before the ceremony, regional authorities, led by Chief Minister Dr Zaw Myint Maung, released various species of fish into a designated part of the Mandalay Moat on 26th Street between 70th and 71st streets. They also released birds, including pigeons and sparrows, in front of the city hall.

Poetry:

My type-O blood, which can be
to other government hospitals in
of blood donated by members of
We received over 200 bottles

TO MARK the Myanmar New Year, donors across Mandalay donated blood at the region’s General Hospital on Sunday.

Dr Khin Myat Mon said: “We received over 200 bottles of blood donated by members of social organisations and local residents, with plans to keep them at the blood bank to distribute them to other government hospitals in the region.”

One 29-year-old donor said: “I love donating blood because I want to help people’s lives with my type-O blood, which can be given to people with any blood type.”

According to the president of the Myanmar Medical Association Professor Koi Mya, there are no exact figures about the number of patients with blood disorders, but it is estimated that the country has millions of these patients.

“There are many types of blood disorders, of which iron-deficiency anaemia and thalassaemia are the most common in the country.” —Thuya Ko Ko

Literacy talks aim to develop reading habits in rural communities

WITH the aim of promoting reading habits among locals, literacy talks will be held in Nay Pyi Taw this month.

Jointly organised by booklovers and members of the Aungpanmyaing Social Organisation, the talks are scheduled to take place on 24 April (Sunday) at a monastery in Dana Theikdi Ward in Zabuthiri Township.

Well-known writers, including Sayya Laetwintha Saw Chit, Manutha Kyaw Win, Maung Puitha, and Than Oo will speak at the event. “We have already arranged transportation for villagers who wish to attend the educational talks,” a local poet said. —Than Oo

Blood donations rise during Thingyan festival

Strong wind hits in Falan, no injuries reported

Inspection Agencies

After independence and during the political government era, Inspection Agencies such as Electrical, Mining, Oilfields etc. were independent of the entities subject to their inspections, comprising of public and private industries and establishments regarding safety & environmental standards of their operations. However, in the period of the Government of the Socialist Party, most of the agencies were placed under the concerned Ministry and functioned as Departments headed by ‘Director Generals’ enforcing the relevant laws through designated ‘Staff Officers’. The Inspection Agencies are still under the concerned Ministries.

Inspection Agencies, as are in most countries, should indeed be independent, impartial (not come under pressure by anybody) and be in line with international standards as to inspection quality with ‘Chief Inspecting Officer’ & ‘Inspecting Officers’ empowered to perform inspection functions of relevant laws to be enforced. Additionally such bodies also need to be technically equipped, manned by Professionals and Lawyers, competent and qualified conferred with clear legal mandate to perform their functions and the ‘Chief Inspectors’ required to submit their annual reports to the Government, made public through the official gazettes.

Also, as Projects of Construction and Civil Engineering undertaken since the time of the democratic government of twenty eleven will surely increase during the term of the present government with apologies to the authorities, is offered this humble suggestion. A ‘Structures and Buildings Inspection Agency’ that’s independent should perhaps be formed to inspect structures and buildings, existing and those in the process of being built, regarding safety of the workers, the general public and environmental protection, to ensure compliance with laws and rules relating to Construction.

Lokethar

Dear Editor

IT is welcome news to note that Canada has stood by Myanmar to help the newly emergent democracy to establish as nation of hope, promises, prosperity and opportunities for her resilient people in their journey towards self sufficiency (Canada commits CAD 44 million to support Myanmar; GNLM, April 8). Last year I have explicitly written for Canadian support to Myanmar and I am glad it has come true and that the Myanmar-Canada relationship is going to take a new and positive turn. Myanmar with her rich natural resources and strategic location between giant economies (China and India) is a gateway to South East Asia form the vast and thickly populated Indian subcontinent. With new economic corridors being developed connecting China and India through Myanmar to South East Asia and future joining hands of the SAARC and ASEAN economic platforms; Myanmar has a pivotal role to play. As a Canadian, I feel proud to be beside a new and rising Myanmar and would request the Canadian government to establish further economic, strategic, diplomatic as well as strong people to people contact. Once again a warm wish for the long term Myanmar-Canada relationship.

Sincerely yours

Saikat Kumar Basu

Strong winds hit in Falan Township, Chin State, on Saturday, blowing the roofs off houses owned by the Department of Human Settlement and Housing Development.

“The roofs of building Nos 12 and 13 in Phahouk Ward were badly damaged during the disaster. However, there have been no reported injuries to people or animals,” said a member of the department.

The authorities are now working to replace the roofs on the damaged houses.—District IPRD

Thanking you

Sincerely yours

Saikat Kumar Basu

Sincerely yours

Saikat Kumar Basu
Syrian rebels declare new battle against government

BEIRUT — Syrian rebel groups announced a new battle against government forces on Monday, a sign of escalating violence that has undermined a ceasefire deal and threatens to derail UN-led peace talks.

The groups, which included factions fighting under the banner of the Free Syrian Army and powerful Islamist Ahrar al-Sham, said in a statement they would respond "with force" against any government forces that fired on civilians.

The ceasefire deal has been strained to breaking point by escalating fighting, particularly around the divided city of Aleppo, with each side blaming the other for the escalation that has undermined the huge challenge facing the peace talks. Heavy air strikes have also been reported north of Homs.

Senior opposition figures who have asked not to be quoted have said pressure is growing for a speedy decision to leave talks being convened by UN envoy Staffan de Mistura in Geneva, with no sign of progress towards discussion of a political transition sought by President Bashar al-Assad's opponents.

The statement announced the "formation of a joint operations room to begin the battle... in response to violations by the army of Assad." It gave no geographic location for the new battle.

Senior Syrian opposition negotiators on Sunday urged rebels to strike back against the Syrian army, accusing it of using a cessation of hostilities to gain ground, and cast doubt over whether they would continue Geneva peace talks indefinitely.

The cessation of hostilities agreement brokered by the United States and Russia came into effect on 27 February with the aim of allowing peace talks to get underway. The agreement did not include Islamic State or the al Qaeda-linked Nusra Front.— Reuters

Yemen peace talks delayed by ongoing combat

SANAA — Peace talks in Kuwait aimed at ending over a year of civil war and a Saudi-led intervention in Yemen will not begin on Monday as planned, officials from the warring sides said, amid objections over continued fighting despite an announced ceasefire.

Delegations representing Yemen's Houthi group and the party of ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh - Saudi Arabia's main antagonists - have yet to depart the capital Sanaa and have cited heavy combat and Saudi-led air operations.

"There's no point in going to Kuwait if there's no respect for the ceasefire," a senior official in Saleh's General People's Congress party told Reuters on Monday.

Saudi Arabia and some Gulf Arab allies joined the war on 26 March of last year to back Yemen's government after it was pushed into exile by the Houthis and forces loyal to Saleh.

Previous UN talks in June and December failed to end the war that has killed about 6,200 people, about half of them civilians. The conflict war has allowed al Qaeda fighters to seize territory and opened a path for Islamic State militants to gain a foothold.

Fighting and air strikes persist on several battlefronts throughout the country, especially in the contested southwestern city of Taiz and the Nehm area east of the capital.

Two Yemeni officials from the country's Saudi-backed government said the opposing delegations would likely arrive on Tuesday. "Representatives from Saleh's party and the Houthis are looking for excuses to delay their arrival at a precise time, but it's expected that they will arrive later in Kuwait on Tuesday," one of the officials said.— Reuters

Islamic State's income drops 30 per cent on oil revenue

BEIRUT — Islamic State’s income and the population under its control have both fallen by about a third, a US-based analysis firm said, describing the declining revenue as a threat to its long-term rule over the territory it has self-proclaimed caliphate.

Revenue for the ultra-hard-line Sunni Muslim group, also known as ISIS or ISIL, fell to $56 million a month in March from around $80 million a month in the middle of last year, the analysis company IHS said.

Daily oil output dropped to 21,000 barrels from 33,000 barrels over the same time frame, as production facilities suffered damage from air strikes carried out mainly by a US-led coalition.

"Islamic State is still a force in the region, but this drop in revenue is a significant figure and will increase the challenge for the group to run its territory in the long term," said IHS senior analyst Columb Strack.

Around 50 per cent of the group's revenue comes from taxation and confiscation, 43 per cent from oil and the rest from drug smuggling, sale of electricity and donations, the report said.

The territory under its control has declined by about 22 per cent since mid-2014, while the population of that territory has fallen to around 6 million from 9 million.

"There are fewer people and business activities to tax; the same applies to properties and land to confiscate," said IHS senior analyst Columb Strack.

Erdogan accuses Gulen of setting up a ‘parallel state’ and conspiring to unseat the government with a network of supporters in the judiciary, police and media. Gulen, whose adherents run schools and are active in the media sector, denies the charges.

The probe is centred on financial support raised for Gulen’s group amounting to some 50 million lira (£12 million), Anadolu added.

Gulen, who has lived in self-imposed exile in the United States since 1999, accused him of heading a criminal group.— Reuters

Smoke rises after an airstrike on the rebel-held Old Aleppo, Syria on 16 April. Photo: Reuters

Tribesmen loyal to the Houthi movement attend a gathering in Yemen's capital Sanaa, on 17 April. Photo: Reuters

Photo: Reuter
Chinese scientists develop mammal embryos in space for first time

BEIJING — Chinese scientists on Sunday said they have successfully developed early-stage mouse embryos in space for the first time on a retrievable microgravity satellite set to return to Earth sometime next week.

The SJ-10 research probe, launched on 6 April, carried over 6,000 mouse embryos in a self-sufficient chamber the size of a microwave oven, according to Duan Enkui, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS).

Among them, 600 embryos were put under a high-resolution camera, which took pictures every four hours for four days and sent them back to Earth. The pictures showed that the embryos developed from the 2-cell stage, an early-on embryonic cleavage stage to blastocyst, the stage where noticeable cell differentiation occurs, around 72 hours after SJ-10’s launch, Duan said. The timing was largely in line with embryonic development on Earth, he added.

The rest of the embryos loaded on the satellite were injected with fixatives at 72 hours after the launch for studies on the effects of space environment on embryonic development, according to Duan.

This is the first reported successful development in mammalian embryos in space in human history.

Scientists will compare the retrieved embryos with samples on Earth and perform further analyses on the profiles of early embryo development in space, once SJ-10 returns home.

SJ-10 is expected to land in a designated spot in Siziwang Banner in Inner Mongolia sometime next week. Earlier reports said the probe as a whole had a designed life of just 15 days.

The bullet-shaped probe is said to be housing a total of 19 experiments involving microgravity fluid physics, microgravity combustion, space material, space radiation effects, microgravity biological effects and space biotechnology.

These include one studying how space radiation affects the genetic stability of fruit flies and rat cells, and a combustion experiment which will test how materials used in spacecraft burn in space to find ways of making safer capsules for future manned missions. An experiment being run in partnership between the National Space Science Center under the CAS and the European Space Agency will investigate the behavior of crude oil under high pressure, and also on board is equipment to test coal combustion and pollutant formation under microgravity.

The former experiment is aimed at improving scientists’ understanding of oil reservoirs under microgravity. The latter is expected to see a large number of people affected.

Despite spotlight, proving Flint lead damages no slam dunk

FLINT (Michigan) — Luke Waid drives 20 miles each day to show er at a relative’s place, hads bottled water back to his Flint, Michigan, home and worries about his 2-year-old daughter’s irritability.

“I don’t know if that is a product of her being exposed to high lead levels, or her just being a child,” he said. “I’m not sure.”

That uncertainty also presents a challenge to the lawyers who have enlisted as many as 1,800 residents, including Waid, as plaintiffs in lawsuits over contamination in the Flint’s water supply.

The problem began in April 2014 when the city, then under the control of a state-appointed emergency manager, switched its water source to the Flint River from Lake Huron as a cost-saving measure, and corrosive river water caused lead to leach into the water supply. Flint switched back in October after tests showing elevated lead levels in the blood of some children became public.

In spite of the international outcry and the well-known toxic effects of lead, proving Flint’s contaminated water actually caused any particular injury will be far from straightforward, lawyers with expertise in lead litigation said.

The difficulty in showing a causal link adds to other legal hurdles. State and city officials are challenging the cases, arguing they are protected by sovereign immunity, a legal doctrine that shields most government officials and agencies from liability for their official actions. That powerful defense already has kept many major plaintiffs firms away from Flint, since the water supply is government-run.

In an effort to overcome these potential obstacles, plaintiffs’ lawyers are pursuing several strategic approaches to seek redress for victims: individual lawsuits, class actions, and victims’ compensation fund.

Plaintiffs’ lawyers claim that the alleged government misconduct rose to the level of gross negligence or violated residents’ constitutional rights, two exceptions to immunity. Some lawsuits also target private companies that performed work or tests on Flint’s water system. The companies have denied responsibility.

It should be relatively easy to show in court that residents were exposed to lead, in part because government officials have publicly acknowledged the water is tainted, said Delaware Law School Professor Jean Eggen.

But exposure is not enough to prove damages, Eggen said. Lead injuries may not be apparent for years. In addition, injuries associated with lead poisoning — such as impaired brain development, reduced attention span and lower IQ — all have many causes.

New York law firm Napoli & Shkolnik said it has hired a Washington lobbyist to persuade Congress to create a compensation fund for Flint. Such funds may be set up to allow injured parties to receive compensation with a lower burden of proof than applicants would face in court. Napoli partner Hunter Shkolnik envisions such a fund paying for medical monitoring immediately, and possibly leaving the question of damages for later, putting money into people’s pockets relatively quickly.

But Ken Feinberg, who oversaw victim compensation funds for victims of the 11 September 2001 attacks and the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill, is skeptical such an approach would work with Flint residents.

“How long do you monitor them?” asked Feinberg. “If they are deemed injured, are they in- jured by the water or by other means, other sources?”

The Napoli firm also is pursuing a class action in Michigan federal court. It said it has signed up some 800 clients and represents Waid in an individual lawsuit.

Local Zika outbreaks in United States ‘likely’: US official

WASHINGTON — The United States is likely to see outbreaks of the Zika virus, with perhaps dozens or scores of people affected, said Dr Anthony Fauci, director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, on Sunday.

The United States has seen more than 350 cases of people who were infected abroad and then returned to the country but has yet to confirm a case where someone was infected within its borders. That is likely to change, said Fauci.

“It is likely we will have what is called a local outbreak,” he said on Fox News Sunday with Chris Wallace.

The Zika outbreak was first detected in Brazil last year and is spreading through the Americas. It has been linked to thousands of cases of microcephaly, a typically rare birth defect marked by unusually small head size, which often indicates poor brain development.

The World Health Organisation declared a global health emergency in February.

Zika, which is spread by mosquitoes and through sexual contact, can give adults the para- lyzing Guillain-Barre syndrome. That involves an attack on nerve cells, which primarily transmits disease, is present in about 30 US states.

Fauci said he expected to see someone bitten by a mosquito here contract Zika but did not expect a large number of people to fall ill.

—Reuters

Mari Copeny, 8, of Flint, Michigan, waits in line to enter a hearing room where Michigan Governor Rick Snyder (R) and EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy will testify before a House Oversight and government Reform hearing on “Examining Federal Administration of the Safe Drinking Water Act in Flint, Michigan, Part III” on Capitol Hill in Washington on 17 March. PHOTO: Reuters

Duan Enkui, researcher of the Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, and also the leader of the project, introduces the development of the mammal embryos in space in Ulanqab City, north China’s Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, on 17 April. PHOTO: XinHua
Shaken Ecuador hunts for survivors amid 7.8 quake debris

KUMAMOTO — Food shortages worsened at shelters in Kumamoto Prefecture on Monday as tens of thousands of people evacuated from their homes after powerful earthquakes jolted southwestern Japan last weekend, leaving some without food, water and shelter.

As earthquakes and ensuing mudslides severed roads, many supplies have not made it to local shops and shelters. There were many reports of shelters being unable to serve breakfast to some evacuees Monday, according to the city of Kumamoto.

With Monday being the first business day since the M7.3 quake, the cities of Uo and Yatsushiro in Kumamoto, whose administrative buildings were damaged by the quakes, were only partially operating.

“Evacuees from a series of earthquakes receive food in the southwestern Japan town of Mashiki, Kumamoto Prefecture, on 18 April. Photo: Kyodo News”

KABUL—Up to 30 people including women and children lost their lives in downpour and flash floods that showered the northern Baghlan, Samangan and Takhar provinces on Sunday night, officials said on Monday.

“Rainstorms and flash flood killed 12 people and washed away several houses in Burka District of Baghlan Province Sunday night,” director of Natural Disaster Management Authority in Baghlan Province, Naisr Kohraz, told Xinhua.

Flood kills 30 people in North Afghanistan

SANTIAGO — Chilean President Michelle Bachelet said Sunday that flooding in the central part of the country has left at least two people dead and eight others missing.

“Bachelet confirmed the toll in a speech from the presidential palace in Santiago. He said that at least 324 people have been displaced and over 300 homes damaged.”

Chilean president confirms two dead, eight missing due to floods

Food in short supply, offices crippled in quake-hit southwestern Japan

Evacuees from a series of earthquakes receive food in the southwestern Japan town of Mashiki, Kumamoto Prefecture, on 18 April. Photo: Kyodo News
Afghan schools, hospitals under threat, UN says in grim report

KABUL - Schools and health facilities have come under increasing threat as violence spreads in Afghanistan, making it harder for children especially to get access to education and medical care, the United Nations reported on Monday.

Western-backed Afghan government forces are locked in a protracted battle with Taliban insurgents who are at their strongest since they were ousted by US-backed Afghan forces in late 2001.

International donors have poured billions of dollars into reconstruction in Afghanistan, including education and health programs, but the conflict threatens to undermine services provided to millions of Afghans, the new UN report said.

Although direct attacks on schools and health facilities dropped sharply from previous years, UN monitors counted 257 conflict-related incidents in 2015, up from 130 in 2014.

"It is simply unacceptable for teachers, doctors and nurses to be subjected to violence or threats, and for schools and medical facilities to be misled or attacked," Nicholas Haysom, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, said in a statement.

"All parties must take measures to protect education and health services in Afghanistan," he said.

Sixty-three medical personnel were killed or wounded in 2015, most of them in a single, mistaken attack by a US warplane on a Medecins Sans Frontieres hospital in the northern city of Kunduz in October.

In 2014, 25 health workers were killed or wounded. A further 66 medical personnel were abducted in 2015, compared with 31 the year before. Deaths and injuries among teachers and other education workers were down, to 26 in 2015 from 37 the year before, but abductions spiked to 49 from 14 in the same period.—Reuters

Children drink water from a public water pump on the outskirts of Kabul, Afghanistan on 4 March.

Photo: Reuters

In crushing defeat, Brazil’s Rousseff moves close to impeachment

BRASILIA — Brazil’s leftist President Dilma Rousseff suffered a humiliating loss in a crucial impeachment vote in the lower house of Congress on Sunday and is almost certain to be forced from office months before the nation hosts the Olympics.

Fireworks lit up the night sky in Brazil’s megacities of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro after the opposition comfortably surpassed the two-thirds majority needed to send Rousseff for trial in the Senate on charges of manipulating budget accounts.

The floor of the lower house was a sea of Brazilian flags and pumping fists as dozens of lawmakers carried in their arms the deputy who cast the decisive 342nd vote, after three days of a marathon debate.

The final tally was 367 votes cast in favor of impeachment, versus 137 against, and seven abstentions. Two lawmakers did not show up to vote.

Brazilian financial markets were expected to open higher on Monday after the vote - a major step toward ending 13 years of the left-leaning Workers’ Party rule in the world’s ninth largest economy.

If the Senate now votes by a simple majority in early May to proceed with the impeachment, as expected, Rousseff would be suspended from her post and replaced by the deputy who cast the historic 342nd vote.

The impeachment battle, waged during Brazil’s worst recession since the 1930s, has divided the country of 200 million people more deeply than at any time since the end of its military dictatorship in 1985.

It has also sparked a bitter battle between the 68-year-old Rousseff and Temer, 75, that could destabilise any future government and plunge Brazil into months of uncertainty.

Despite anger at rising unemployment, Rousseff’s Workers’ Party can still rely on support among millions of working-class Brazilians, who credit its welfare programs with pulling their families out of poverty during the past decade.

"The fight is going to continue now in the streets and in the federal Senate," said Jose Guinaciares, the leader of the Workers’ Party in the lower house. “We are hereby notified that the vessel MV MAENAM 1 VOY NO (546N) Consignees of cargo carried on MV MAENAM 1 VOY NO (546N) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 19.4.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of A.W.T where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY AGENT FOR: M/S WAN HAI LINES PTE LTD Phone No: 2301185

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV MAENAM 1 VOY NO (546N)

MV HYUNDAI ADVANCE VOY NO (005)

METHI BHUM VOY NO ( ) Consignees of cargo carried on MV METHI BHUM VOY NO ( ) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 15.4.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY AGENT FOR: M/S FAR SHIPPING LINES Phone No: 2301185

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV HYUNDAI ADVANCE VOY NO (005)

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY AGENT FOR: M/S REGIONAL CONTAINER LINES Phone No: 2301185

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE
Box Office: ‘Jungle Book’ opens to smashing $103.6 million

LOS ANGELES — “The Jungle Book” dominated the weekend box office, grossing a massive $103.6 million, and extending the Walt Disney Company’s success in making live-action versions of its classic animated features.

That ranks as the second biggest April opening in history, behind only “Furious 7’s” $147.2 million launch. With “Cinderella,” “Alice in Wonderland,” “Maleficent,” and now “The Jungle Book,” this strategy of revitalizing fairy tales has become a virtual brand onto itself.

One that nearly rivals Disney’s marvels Marvel, Pixar, and LucasFilm projects. The studio will continue to mine its library; “Beauty and the Beast” with Emma Watson hits theaters on 17 March, 2017, and new versions of “Cruella De Ville” and “Peter Pan” are in the works.

Critics loved “The Jungle Book,” handing it a 95% “fresh” rating on Rot-

ten Tomatoes. Word-of-mouth for the film also looks strong. The picture received an A CinemaScore, which could set it up for a healthy run in the days and weeks ahead. Families made up 49% if the opening weekend audience. The film performed well in Imax, earning $10.4 million, and 43% of its domestic opening weekend gross came on 3D screens.

Jon Favreau (“Iron Man”) directed the $175 million, which used digital wizardry to conjure Rudyard Kipling’s jungle setting. Bill Murray, Ben Kingsley, Idris Elba, and Scarlett Johansson head up the vocal cast with Neel Sethi making his feature film debut as Mowgli, the feral child at the heart of the story. Despite the shadow cast by “The Jungle Book,” Line and MGM scored with “Barbershop: The Next Cut.” The third film in the “Barbershop” series racked up a sterling $20.2 million from 2,661 locations. Women comprised 54% of ticket buyers, and 66% of consumers were over the age of 21.

“The weekend’s other new entry, Lionsgate’s action thriller “Criminal,” debuted to $5.8 million from 2,683 locations for a sixth place finish. The story of a convict who is implanted with the memories of a dead CIA agent in order to finish a mission stars Kevin Costner, Tommy Lee Jones, and Gary Oldman. It cost just north of $30 million to produce.

Last week’s champion, the Melissa McCarthy comedy “The Boss,” dropped 57%, taking third place with $10.2 million. The story of a business icon whose career is derailing by insider trading has earned $10.2 million in two weeks of release.

“Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice” captured fourth place, adding $9 million to its $311.3 million domestic haul.

In limited release, the Weinstein Company opened the musical-dramedy “Sing Street” in five locations, where it grossed $68,979 for a per-theater average of $13,796. A24 debuted the horror-thriller “Green Room” in three locations, earning $91,000, for a leading per-theater average of over $30,000. It will expand nationally on 29 April.—Reuters

Tracy Morgan performs for medical staff who treated him: People

LOS ANGELES — Actor-comedian Tracy Morgan performed a show near the site of a New Jersey car crash two years ago in which he was nearly killed for an audience that included medical staff who treated him, People magazine said on Sunday.

The Saturday performance at the State Theater in New Brunswick was attended by doctors, first responders and nurses who took care of Morgan at the Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital after his accident in June 2014. “These people are heroes and I love them all from the bottom of my heart,” he told People. “To be standing on stage with the people that saved my life in the audience was an overwhelming experience.”

“I will never fully be able to thank the doctors, nurses, first responders and everyone else that got me back on that stage enough,” added Morgan, 47, who donated proceeds from the sold-out show to the hospital.

After the show, Morgan invited the hospital employees in an experience to come to his dressing room for pictures and hugs, People reported.

The former “Saturday Night Live” and “30 Rock” cast member suffered a serious brain injury and broken bones in the 2014 collision that killed a fellow comedian. Their mimus limousine was in a crash with a truck.—Reuters

Pulitzer Prizes mark 100th year with Monday’s awards

NEW YORK — The Pulitzer Prizes, established in 1917 with a bequest from trail-blazing publisher Joseph Pulitzer, are marking their 100th year on Monday with the announcement of the winners of what are regarded as the most prestigious awards in American journalism.

The Pulitzer recognises excellence in categories that range from breaking news reporting to public service articles to feature photography. In addition to the journalism awards, there are prizes in fiction, history, drama, music and other literary forms.

All told, there are 21 prizes in play every year. Winners are selected by an independent board after judges make nominations from a total of 2,400 entries across the range of categories. The board has the option of naming no winner in any category.—Reuters
Afghan teenager braves threats, family pressure to lead women’s orchestra

KABUL — Like many teenagers, 19-year-old Negin Khlpulwak from Kunar in eastern Afghanistan loves music, but few people of her age have battled as fiercely to pursue their passion in the face of family hostility and threats.

Playing instruments was banned outright during the period of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, and even today, many conservative Muslim women frown on most forms of music.

Negin took her first steps learning music in secret, before eventually revealing her activity to her father. He encouraged her, but the reaction from the rest of her conservative Pashtun family was hostile.

“Apart from my father, everybody in the family is against it,” she said. “They say, ‘How can a Pashtun girl play music?’”

Especially in our tribe, where even a man doesn’t have the right to do it.”

Now living in an orphanage in the Afghan capital of Kabul, Negin leads the Zohra orchestra, an ensemble of 35 women at the Afghanistan National Institute for Music that plays both Western and Afghan musical instruments.

When she went home on a recent visit, her uncles and brothers threatened to beat her for a performing appearance on television, and she had to return to Kabul the next day.

“Compared to women outside Afghanistan, we feel we are in a cage,” she said.

In a country notorious internationally for harsh restrictions on women in most areas of life, Negin’s story highlights a double challenge.

“The formation of the orchestra is an achievement in itself,” said Ahmad Naser Sarmast, a musicologist who returned home from Australia after the fall of the Taliban to help found the National Institute for Music in 2010.

While children at the school have the support of their parents, they often face pressure from their wider family as well as from religious authorities, he said.

“The bravery of the girls sitting in the orchestra and the leadership of a young female conductor is an achievement for Afghanistan,” he said.

Some of the women say their relatives are proud of their achievements, but they face suspicion from others, as well as intimidation.

“When I have my musical instruments with me, people talk a lot behind my back,” said Mina, a trumpeter in the orchestra, whose mother is a policewoman in the eastern city of Jalalabad.

“There are a lot of security problems, and if we go from one place to another with our instruments, then we have to go by car,” she added.

The dangers awaiting performers in Afghanistan were brutally highlighted in 2014, when Sarmast was nearly killed by a suicide bomber who blew himself up during a show at a French-run school in Kabul. — Reuters

Actress Heard given good behavior bond for smuggling dogs to Australia

SYDNEY — An Australian court on Monday sentenced American actress Amber Heard to a one-month good behavior bond for smuggling dogs to Australia without déclaration.

American actress Amber Heard was in a cage, she said.

The offense of providing false immigration documents carries a maximum penalty of 12 months in jail and a fine of $A10,200 ($US7,800).

In April last year, Heard brought the couple’s Yorkshire terriers to Australia without declaring them when she visited her husband who was filming the latest installment of the Pirates of the Caribbean series on the Gold Coast.

Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce, who was agriculture minister at the time, had threatened to have the dogs euthanized if they were not taken out of Australia within a set timeframe, and the couple obliged.

Australia’s biosecurity laws are among the toughest in the world due to the large number of species endemic to its environment. — Kyodo News

People cornered by wild boars on tiny Japanese island

KARATSU (Japan) — An increase in wild boars is threatening residents on a small island in southwestern Japan, with the population of the animals now triple that of the islanders.

300 boars inhabit 2.8-square-kilometer Kakara Island in the Genkai Sea between Fukuoka and Saga prefectures. While there have been no injuries so far, “People will be forced off the island if the current situation continues,” said a resident, which has a population of 100. The boars are believed to have swum around the three kilometers from the main island of Kyushu about 15 years ago.

Even today, boars are occasionally seen swimming off the island,麻将. Teruki Kawasaki, 27, a local Japan Coast Guard official, saw a pair of boars swimming while he was aboard a patrol boat. They were “good swimmers,” he said.

Boars have thrived on Kakara due to the absence of natural predators and an abundance of agricultural crops such as pumpkins and sweet potatoes, said a Karatsu city official. The island is part of the Saga Prefecture city.

Islanders plan to produce cosmetics from camellias growing in clusters on the island to generate revenue and promote tourism, but the boars have inflicted widespread damage. The island has steep cliffs, making it difficult to hunt the boars with dogs. So islanders set up traps in bushes and capture around 50 boars a year, but they are unable to keep up with the growing population. A sow can give birth to five or six piglets each year. At night, islanders are forced to use cars when they go out because the boars roam close to their homes.

The two children on the island are driven to and from the local elementary school by their parents. An increasing number of villagers in Japan sell boar meat as a specialty, but most households on Kakara rely on fishing. “We cannot become hunters... We have our hands tied,” said Toshiyuki Tokumura, a 66-year-old squid fisherman. — Kyodo News
Barca lose again, Leicester grab late equaliser

LONDON — Barcelona completed a disastrous week by losing 2-1 at home to Valencia, their third straight La Liga defeat — while Atletico Madrid moved level on points with the league leaders after a 3-0 home win over Granada.

Barca have 76 points along with Atletico, who knocked the holders out of the Champions League in midweek, and remain top only due to a superior head-to-head record.

Real Madrid, whose coach Zinedine Zidane said in February that the title race was over, thrashed Getafe 5-1 away and stand just one point behind the leading pair. An own goal by Barca midfielder Ivan Rakitic put Valencia ahead at the Nou Camp and Santi Mina added a second before Lionel Messi pulled one back with his 500th career goal.

Barça’s title bid suffered another setback when they lost 2-1 at home to Valencia — their third straight La Liga defeat — while Atletico Madrid moved level on points with the league leaders after a 3-0 home win over Granada.

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