NLD seeks to create ‘State Counsellor’ role for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

THE Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) agreed yesterday to discuss a special bill that would create the post of the State Counsellor for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in the new cabinet, with plans to debate the bill today.

U Aung Kyi Nyunt, an NLD lawmaker, tabled the State Counsellor Bill to the Upper House yesterday, saying the bill is in conformity with the constitution and in accordance with the Article 217 of the constitution.

“The move and intention to enact the bill is very simple and is within the rights of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. The bill will guarantee her right to give advice to governmental institutions, organisations and individuals. The bill aims to give [Daw Aung San Suu Kyi] the right to facilitate the building of mutual trust and reconciliation in the country through the executive, legislative and judiciary sectors,” the MP told reporters.

The bill includes five chapters and eight articles. The bill, reviewed by The Global New Light of Myanmar, would guarantee Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s right to contact the government ministries, departments, organisations, associations and individuals for counsel, and she will be accountable to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw.

The term of the office for the State Counsellor is the same as that of the president, who will be in office throughout the duration of the term of current second parliament, according to the bill.

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President U Htin Kyaw and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi enter parliament in Naypyitaw on 30 March. PHOTO: REUTERS
Traffic accident injures 26

A PASSENGER truck heading for Chauk from Ka Tauk Kyauk village carrying 30 passengers overturned between mileposts 399/7 and 400/0, Magwe-Chauk road, Chauk township, Magwe region on Monday leaving 26 people injured.

According to an investigation the vehicle was being driven by one Aung Kyaw alias Phyo Kyaw, 25, who was arrested after the driver lost control. The accident injured 26 out of 30 passengers. The injured passengers are currently receiving medical treatment at Mandalay general hospital. Police have filed charges against Aung Kyaw.—Win Ei Mon (IPRD)

AS El Nino is beginning to make its impact felt nation-wide, Kanbawza’s Brighter Future Myanmar Foundation is currently constructing a drinking water supply facility in Taunggyi to benefit more than 9,000 people facing a scarcity of drinking water in the region.

The tube well, being drilled at the Nagapwet Monastery in Shwetaung Ward in Taunggyi, will be outfitted with a 15,000-gallon concrete tank allowing it to pipe water to three monasteries and the people of three wards through a 7,600 foot long, 2-inch diameter pipe.

The facility is expected to be completed soon according to members of the foundation who are currently supervising the construction project.

Meanwhile, a tube-well in Aungban which was drilled in March of this year is currently producing 2,000 gallons of water per day, benefitting local people around the clock, it has been learned.

The water sourced from the tube well is stored in a 12,000-gallon concrete tank from where it is supplied to local people.—GNLM

A LOCAL anti-drug in Lashio seized 2,925 yaba pills from one Tun Naing Htay who was searched while onboard a passenger vehicle near milepost 80/4 at the Nawngkhio entrance gate on 26 March.

Similarly, police stopped a motorbike being driven by one Aung Myint with a passenger identified as Juliet on Mong Le village road in Hsenwi town on Monday.

Upon conducting a search the police discovered 121 grams of heroin and 1,200 yaba pills on Juliet and 0.3 grams of heroin and 170 yaba pills of heroin from a motorbike driven by one Ko Ko Tun alias Aung Win Ei Mon (IPRD)
Mandalay Region chief minister, Ethnic Affairs Minister sworn in

Mandalay Region Chief Minister Dr Zaw Myint Maung and Ethnic Affairs Minister Sai Kyaw Zaw were sworn in yesterday in the presence of the Speaker of the Mandalay Region Hluttaw and parliamentarians.

In his inaugural speech, the new Mandalay Region Chief Minister called on regional lawmakers to strive for the abolition of laws set up to oppress the people and the enactment of laws ensuring better protection of civil rights.

Next, the chief minister and the speaker visited the Chief Minister’s Office, where they met with staff.

There was no handover ceremony of chief ministerial duties from outgoing Chief Minister U Ye Myint to his successor on Wednesday, according to sources in Mandalay Region.

The outgoing Mandalay Region government did not arrive at the regional office where the new Chief Minister and his party were waiting for the transfer of duties until 6pm on 30 March, said Dr Zaw Myint Maung, the new chief minister for Mandalay Region.

He denied that the handover of chief ministerial duties was not held owing to the absence of the next regional government led by the new Chief Minister.

“We waited for the handover until 6pm on that day. We were informed by the Chief Minister’s Office in the evening that there would not be handover ceremony as the President’s Office did not give any instruction about that,” Dr Zaw Myint Maung told reporters after the swearing-in ceremony at the Mandalay Region parliament yesterday.

Although he did not receive notes or a phone call regarding the transfer of duties, I will begin my duties at the Chief Minister’s Office as we waited until 6pm on that day, he added.

“I think there should be a handshake between the outgoing and incoming chief ministers to mark the transfer of duties,” said U Sai Kyaw Zaw, the new Ethnic Affairs Minister for Mandalay Region.

A representative of the former chief minister wrote a Facebook status saying a computer and furniture purchased by the former chief minister were left for the new chief minister, and the room has been cleaned.

Ethnic Affairs Minister Sai Kyaw Zaw takes the oath at Mandalay Region Parliament. PHOTO: AUNG THANT KHAING

Three representatives take oath before Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker

THE Pyithu Hluttaw put on record yesterday messages of congratulations sent by foreign parliamentary speakers to its speaker.

Speakers from Thailand, Turkey, Singapore, North Korea, India, South Korea, Lebanon, Pakistan and Iran sent congratulatory messages to the new House Speaker U Win Myint.

Dr Sai Mauk Kham of Lashio constituency, U Nyan Tun of the Zegon constituency and U Maung Myint of the Minkin constituency took the oath in the presence of the speaker.

The parliament approved a replacement for Daw Su Su Lwin with U Zaw Thein as chairman of its International Relations Committee.

Daw Su Su Lwin represented Thonkhwa constituency and U Zaw Thein represented Wakema constituency. The parliament will meet on 4 April.

—Myanmar News Agency

US President Obama sends congratulations to President U Htin Kyaw

THE President of the United States of America released a statement yesterday congratulating U Htin Kyaw on his inauguration as president of Myanmar.

In the statement Mr Obama also said that he is looking forward to working with him and the newly elected government.

“U Htin Kyaw’s inauguration represents a historic milestone in the country’s transition to a democratically elected, civilian-led government. This extraordinary moment in Myanmar’s history is a testament to its people, institutions, and leaders who have worked together to ensure a peaceful transfer of power, and it speaking to the significance of the reforms the country has undertaken since 2011,” said Mr Obama in his statement.

The statement said that Myanmar will face significant challenges going forward, including achieving broad-based economic development, advancing national reconciliation, and promoting the rights and freedoms of all its people. The United States looks forward to being a friend and partner of the new government and the people of Myanmar as they make progress toward building a more inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous future, according to the statement. —GNLM

NLD seeks to create ‘State Counsellor’ role for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

>> From page 1

The bill is aimed at helping a multi-party democracy to flourish in Myanmar and to build a peaceful, modern and developed nation with a market-oriented economic system and to establish a democratic, federal Union.

Following the submission of the bill to the parliament, Union Parliament Speaker Mahn Win Kyaw said the debate and voting on the bill will take place on 1 April.

Seven lawmakers—four elected MPs and three military representatives—will debate the bill today.—GNLM

Dredging work to solve erosion problem in Mandalay Region completed

DREDGING works at 26 individual spots have been carried out to help prevent river bank erosion along the Ayeyawady River, Punhaing River and Dodtawady River in Mandalay Region, according to an official from the region’s Water Resources Utilisation Department.

With the use of funds from both the regional government and Union government the department has spent just over K4 million on the Ayeyawady River waterway development project which included dredging works to protect against river bank erosion in the region, said Director U Toe Aung Lin of the department.

As the dredging operation was undertaken along those rivers as of only a few months ago, timely completion of the works has ensured the safe flow of vessel traffic at a time when water levels are falling, the director said.

Preventive measures against erosion of the Ayeyawady River is completed. PHOTO: AUNG THANT KHAING

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>> From page 1

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NEW DELHI: State-run Indian Oil Corp (IOC) has bid for rights to import, store and distribute petroleum products in Myanmar.

“We have put in a bid to enter fuel marketing and retail business in Myanmar,” a senior company official said.

Myanmar Petroleum Products Enterprise (MPPE) last year invited companies to form a joint venture for import, storage, distribution and sale of all petroleum products except liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and liquefied natural gas (LNG).

A separate tender for cooking gas LPG was floated. IOCBP-SE -1.64 % had bid for that tender too, the official said.

MPPE left the fuel distribution business when it was privatised in 2010, but is planning a re-entry into the fast-growing business sector that is marred by widespread dissatisfaction over service standards and fuel quality.

In 2010, MPPE transferred 216 filling stations to private companies across the country, but still runs 12 pumps which supply fuel to state departments.

It also owns four main fuel terminals and 24 sub-fuel terminals. Around 70 private companies run the country’s 1163 petrol stations, but few have storage facilities or an import licence.

MPPE now wants to tie up with foreign companies to expand the business and rehabilitate existing facilities. MPPE will hold 51 per cent of equity while the foreign company will hold the rest.

The joint venture will be for a maximum period of 10 years extendable two 10-year periods.

Pea export prices rise due to high demand

EXPORT prices of various peas dramatically rose following a surge in demand from India, while supply remains low in the domestic market.

The export price of green gram rose from K1,270,000 to K1,470,000, while the price of pigeon peas rose from K150,000 to K200,000, according to pea traders from the Bayinnaung commodity depot.

Pea prices dropped starting from the first week of February as a result of low demand from India and US dollar depreciation. The price bounced back following a period of high demand from India, despite a month of losses.

“There is high demand this month. The price was still on the decline up to third week of March. The price rose again by K50,000 per tonne due to the advanced buyers,” said U Min, a pea trader at the Bayinnaung commodity depot.

India purchased about 10,000 tonnes of various peas during the last week of March.

Expired food vendors to be fined up to K5 lakh

WITH an aim to reduce sales of expired foodstuffs and drugs, the Health Department under the Yangon City Development Committee will conduct surprise checks throughout the coming 2016-2017 fiscal year.

The city’s busiest markets, including Thetegyi, Tharrawanda, Mingala and Bogyoke markets, will be targeted for checks. Officials from the department will check whether any expired or dyed foodstuffs and drugs are being sold.

The authorities will confiscate expired foodstuffs from first-time offenders, and repeat offenders will be fined between K10,000 and K500,000, according to the Health Department of the YCDC.

A combined team comprising township authorities and staff of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will conduct laboratory tests of drugs and cosmetic products.

In previous years, surprise checks have identified food dyes made from insects that can cause gastrointestinal disorders in bamboo shoots and fish paste products.

Agricultural production costs inhibit international sales

HIGH agriculture production costs have hampered our ability to penetrate international markets, said U Chit Khai, chairman of the Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF).

The federation will submit a proposal to the new government in an effort to reduce production costs.

Myanmar exported over 1.84 million tonnes of rice during the 2014-2015 fiscal year.

The country’s export volume is predicted to increase as a result of a decline in domestic consumption, the chairman said, referring to a survey conducted by the MRF.

Urban consumption per head is 4.8 litres per month and 3.8 baskets per year, while consumption levels in rural areas are around 16 litres per month and 4.7 baskets a year, according to a survey by Myanmar rice consumption conducted by the federation.

Dried Mayan fruit businesses under threat in Pau

DRIED Mayan fruit businesses face closure in Pau township, Mon State, due to a poor yield and increased costs of production this year.

“We have had a bad harvest because of the rains. Moreover, labour and production costs are unaffordable,” said Daw San Yuon, local dried mayan fruit supplier.

The price of Mayan fruit stood at K400 per viss but has now jumped up to K500 this year. Workers are normally paid K4,000 a day but are now demanding a raise of K1,000. Dried Mayan fruit are mainly distributed to brokerages in Yangon. The high business season is generally from March to April.

MYANMAR climate is relatively cold in Yangon as most apartments are bought for commercial purpose rather than for personal living. The market is expected to grow again when the condominium law comes into effect, Dr Myo Thant said.

“Although Myanmar produces organic crops, there has been difficulty in establishing a separate organic-only market,” he added.

“We’ve been practising organic agriculture for over 10 years now. We’ve been planting avocados for a long time and still have foreign buyers. Many people are interested in organic methods of agriculture,” said U Hla Myaing, chair of the Myanmar Organic Agriculture Association.

Organic crops are cultivated naturally without the use of chemicals or pesticides,” said Myit-mukha News Agency.

Japanese traders eye organic Myanmar avocados

JAPANESE traders have offered to purchase organic Myanmar avocados, according to the Myanmar Fruits and Vegetables Producers Association (MFVPA). “Japan has extended an offer saying they desire organic avocados. We can’t speak about the details [of the offer] yet. We will be able to export as many avocados as is desired. That said, we are still discussing the sizes and quality of the desired fruit,” said U Soe Than Min, chairperson of the MFVPA.

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THE economy of Myanmar declined around 30 per cent in 2015 due to destructive natural disasters, political transition, China’s economic slowdown and the global economic downturn, Dr Myo Thant, the vice president of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI), said at the general annual meeting of the Myanmar Retailers Association.

The government expected fiscal growth to stand at around 9.2 per cent according to the project and 8.3 per cent according to the expert, while the World Bank predicted the growth at only 6.5 per cent.

The exchange rate of foreign currency depreciated about 25 per cent, with the Kyat falling in value against the American dollar. The political transition and the recent outbreaks of natural disaster caused the commodity prices to go up, resulting in high inflation.

The country’s real estate market saw a record high in 2014. Over 4,000 apartment buildings are expected to be finished in 2016 despite some sluggishness in the construction businesses.

Currently, the real estate market is relatively cold in Yangon as most apartments are bought for commercial purpose rather than for personal living. The market is expected to grow again when the condominium law comes into effect, Dr Myo Thant said.

Local dried mayan fruit supplier. —WPP&MPPS/Union Daily

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North Korea in ‘top-speed dash’ for May congress, Kim’s nuclear policy

SEOUL — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is poised to declare his signature ruling policy during a rare party congress in May and despite tough new UN sanctions, it is likely to be the twin pursuit of nuclear prowess and economic development.

North Korea’s official media have carried almost-daily reports and commentary extolling the “sacred road” to the day Kim’s leadership will be endorsed at the “victorious and glorious 7th party congress.”

“This week marks the half-way point in what state media describes as a 70-day “top-speed dash to glorious victory,” a campaign that calls for ramped-up productivity and a sprucing-up of the capital Pyongyang as it prepares to greet Pyongyang residents have been mobilised before daybreak and after work, as well as during regular work hours, to make preparations, a Western source in Pyongyang told Reuters, requesting anonymity.

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The preparations are a major focus of further run-up to the meeting.

North Korea conducted its fourth nuclear test on 6 January, leading to new United Nations Security Council sanctions early this month, backed by Pyongyang’s sole major ally, Beijing.

Since taking power in late 2011 after the death of his father Kim Jong Il, Kim Jong Un’s ten-year rule has been marked by turmoil and purges within his inner circle, including the 2013 execution of his powerful uncle Jang Song Thaek as well as five replacements of his defence chief. “He’s tried other things such as (Workers’ Party) Political Bureau meetings, dismissals, demotions, etc., and it hasn’t had the effect he wanted,” said Michael Madden, an expert on the North Korean leadership.

“The Party congress is the most effective way to re-set North Korean political culture,” he said.

The North is probably in the midst of selecting more than 3,000 delegates to the event that revises the ruling party’s charter and adopts new leaders for its ultimate leadership body, officials in South Korea said.

It is a process that will continue until about 20 days before the congress, expected in early May, while the agenda is formalised at the same time, one of the officials said, based on the run-up to the last two meetings, in 1970 and 1980.

“The preparations are no simple feat ... given they have to arrange to find lodging for 3,000 people, for example,” another official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Diminutive ‘Hobbit’ people vanished earlier than previously known

WASHINGTON — The extinct human species dubbed the “Hobbit” vanished from its home on the Indonesian island of Flores far earlier than previously thought, according to scientists who suspect our species may have had a hand in these diminutive people’s demise.

Researchers on Wednesday said they recalculated the age of bones of the species, named Homo floresiensis, found inside a Flores cave, and determined it disappeared about 50,000 years ago rather than 12,000 years ago as previously estimated.

The Hobbit’s discovery in 2003 created a scientific sensation. Homo floresiensis stood 3-1/2 feet tall (106 cm), possessed a small, chimpanzee-sized brain, 3-1/2 feet tall (106 cm), possessed a small, chimpanzee-sized brain, used stone tools and may have hunted pygmy elephants.

The researchers said there is not yet direct evidence the Hobbit people encountered Homo sapiens but noted that our species was already on other islands in the region at around that time and had reached Australia by about 50,000 years ago.

Archaeological excavations of Holocene deposits at Liang Bua on the Indonesian island of Flores are seen in progress in this undated handout picture courtesy of the Liang Bua Team. PHOTO: REUTERS

Homo sapiens first appeared in Africa about 200,000 years ago and later trekked to other parts of the world, encountering other human species like Neanderthals who went extinct not long afterward. The previous assessment that the Hobbits had lived as recently as 12,000 years ago indicated they had survived for perhaps 40,000 years after our species reached the region. The new results show this was not the case. The research appears in the journal Nature. —Reuters

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More remains of Chinese soldiers from Korean War returned

SHENYANG — The remains of 36 Chinese soldiers killed in the 1950-53 Korean War were returned to China on Thursday from the Republic of Korea (ROK), the third batch returned following a handover agreement signed by the two countries in 2013.

Escorted by two Chinese J-11 fighter jets, an Il-76 transportation plane carrying coffins of the soldiers landed at Taoxian International Airport in Shenyang, capital of northeast China’s Liaoning Province, around 11:30am.

“The remains will be buried in a martyrs’ park in Shenyang, with a burial ceremony due to be held on Friday morning.”

“I am honoured to join in the task of receiving the soldiers’ remains. They are heroes,” said Du Yuxin, a soldier who participated in the reception at the airport.

According to an agreement between China and ROK signed in late 2013, the two sides consult every year on the handover of remains of Chinese soldiers found in ROK. Remains of a total number of 505 soldiers were returned to China in 2014 and 2015.

The Chinese People’s Volunteers (CPV) fought with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s army in the Korean War against the ROK army and US-led UN forces. Nearly 200,000 CPV soldiers have been confirmed killed in the war so far, most of whom were buried on the Korean Peninsula.

FLYOVER COLLAPSE KILLS 14 IN KOLKATA, SCORES FEARED TRAPPED

KOLKATA (India) — A flyover under construction in the bustling city of Kolkata collapsed on to moving traffic below, killing at least 14 people with as many as 150 people feared trapped, police said.

Residents were using their bare hands to try to rescue people pinned under a 100-metre (110-yard) length of metal and cement that snapped off at one end and came crashing down in a teeming commercial district near Girish Park.

“Monumental tragedy. Rescue ops on. Many feared dead,” Derek O’Brien, spokesman for the left-wing party that governs the state of West Bengal and which Kolkata is the capital, said in a tweet. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, seeking re-election in a regional poll next month, rushed to the scene.

“The concrete had been laid last night at this part of the bridge,” resident Ramesh Kejriwal told Reuters. “I am lucky as I was planning to go downstairs to have juice. When I was thinking about it, I saw that the bridge had collapsed.”

A senior police officer on the scene said that 15 critically injured people had been rescued.

“Most were bleeding profusely. The problem is that nobody is able to drive an ambulance to the spot,” said Akhilesh Chaturvedi, a senior police officer.

A 140-tonne crane brought to the scene was unable to lift the concrete slab under which many people were feared trapped, including passengers in a minibus.

Home Minister Rajnath Singh tweeted his concern and announced that rescue teams would be rushed to the scene.

Yet there was little sign of a coordinated rescue operation, with access for heavy lifting equipment restricted by the buildings on either side of the flyover and heavy traffic in the area.

The 2-km (1.2-mile) flyover has been under construction since 2009 and has missed several deadlines for completion.

Construction projects in India have long been plagued by lax safety standards and dubious ties between politicians and business. The disaster could play a role in the West Bengal state election, one of five being held from next month that will give a verdict on Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s nearly two years in power. Indian company IVRCL (IVRCLNS) is building the Vivekananda Road flyover, according to its website. Its shares were down 6 per cent after falling as much as 11.8 per cent on news of the disaster.

—Reuters

Viet Nam’s parliament elects first female speaker

HANOI — National Assembly (NA) of Viet Nam yesterday elected Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan as the country’s first female house speaker in capital Hanoi.

Ngan has been elected and sworn in as the NA Chairperson with 472 “yes” votes out of 481 valid ballots, at the ongoing 11th session of the 13th NA.

Meanwhile, she was also elected as the Chairperson of the National Election Council with 467 “yes” votes out of 477 valid ballots.

Prior to the election, Ngan served as Vice Chairperson of the NA from July 2011.

Earlier on Wednesday afternoon, NA Vice Chairwoman Tong Thi Phong delivered a proposal on the nomination of candidates for the position of NA head, of which the 12th Central Committee of the Communist Party of Viet Nam (CPVCC) and CPVCC’s Politburo nominated Ngan as the sole nominee to the post.

On Wednesday, Nguyen Sinh Hung was relieved from duty of the NA Chairman and Chairman of the National Election Council.

In late January, Hung was not elected to be among 200 members of the new CPVCC.

At the second session of the 12th Central Committee of the CPV in early March, Vietnamese party chief Nguyen Phu Trong said the central committee reached high consensus that it is needed to soon replace and re-arrange key leadership positions in order to promptly implement the resolution of the 12th national party congress.

—Xinhua
Nuclear terrorism fears loom over Obama’s final atomic summit

WASHINGTON — Just as fears of nuclear terrorism are rising, US President Barack Obama’s drive to lock down vulnerable atomic materials worldwide seems to have lost momentum and could slow further.

With less than 10 months left in office to follow through on one of his signature foreign policy initiatives, Obama faces a daunting task: convincing leaders from more than 50 countries in Washington this week for his fourth and final Nuclear Security Summit, a high-level diplomatic process that started and will end on his watch.

A boycott by Russian President Vladimir Putin, apparently unwilling to join in a US-dominated gathering at a time of increased tensions between Washington and Moscow, adds to doubts that the meeting will yield major results.

The recent deadly militant attacks in Brussels have fuelled concern that Islamic State could eventually target nuclear plants and develop radioactive “dirty bombs,” a topic that may well be uppermost in leaders’ minds as they meet. Despite significant progress by Obama in persuading dozens of countries to rid themselves of bomb-making materials or reduce and safeguard stockpiles, much of the world’s plutonium and enriched uranium remains vulnerable to theft.

The absence of Russia, one of the biggest nuclear powers, could detract from decisions reached in Washington this week.

Obama, in an opinion piece in The Washington Post, said, “Our massive Cold War nuclear arsenal is poorly suited to today’s threats. The United States and Russia — which together hold more than 90 per cent of the world’s nuclear weapons — should negotiate to reduce our stockpiles further.”

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Wednesday Russia was skipping the summit because of a “shortage of mutual cooperation” in working out the agenda.

While noting that Moscow had continued joint work on nuclear security, White House spokesman Josh Earnest said Russia was going to “miss out on an opportunity” and that its no-show illustrated the “degree to which Russia is isolated.” Russia has chafed over US-led sanctions over the Ukraine conflict.

Efforts to make the world safer have also been complicated by a boycott by North Korea’s nuclear weapons, which Washington fears may further destabilise an already volatile region.

All of this weighs on Obama’s agenda as he prepares to host world leaders on Thursday and Friday. He inaugurated the event nearly six years ago, after using a landmark speech in Prague in 2009 to lay out the goal of ridding the world of nuclear weapons as a central theme of his presidency. There is no guarantee that once Obama, the driving force behind the initiative, leaves office in January his successor will keep the issue a high priority.

Serbian firebrand Seselj faces verdict in UN war crimes trial

THE HAGUE — UN judges ruled yesterday in the war crimes trial of Vojislav Seselj, a Serbian nationalist politician accused of stoking murderous ethnic hatred during the 1990s wars prompted by the break-up of federal Yugoslavia.

The verdict may prove as difficult for the UN Criminal Tribu- nal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) to manage as the decade-long trial, which suffered multiple delays as Seselj represented himself, and challenged the court at every turn.

Seselj, 61, was granted provisional release in 2014 after being diagnosed with terminal cancer. However, he is still alive and has re-immersed himself in Serbian politics, addressing rallies in defiance of ICTY orders.

He refused to return for Thursday’s court session, due to begin at 0800 GMT, and did not intend to even watch it by satellite. Judges averted a showdown over his attendance by excusing him from attending for health reasons at the last minute.

A close ally of late Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, Seselj faces three counts of crimes against humanity and six of war crimes for inciting ethnic cleansing in Croatia, Bosnia and the Serbian province of Vojvodina. Prosecutors say in addition to his rhetoric about creating an ethnically pure “Greater Serbia,” he helped set up paramilitary units to carry out the plan. Serb paramili- taries drove tens of thousands of Muslims and Croats from their homes. A prolific author, Seselj is known for passionate speeches, a short temper and crude threats such as telling Serb enemies that he would “gouge out their eyes with rusty spoons”.

He says he is innocent of wrongdoing. If convicted, he could face life imprisonment, which would require his transfer to the ICTY. That would pose a dilemma for Serbia’s government.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Britain to ship record amount of nuclear waste to US: ‘UK government source’

LONDON — Britain will ship 700 kilograms of nuclear waste to the United States under a deal to be announced by Prime Minister David Cameron at a nuclear security summit in Washington yesterday, a British government source said.

In return for the shipment, the largest ever movement of highly enriched uranium, the United States will send Europe a different type of nuclear waste that can be used to produce medical isotopes for the treatment of some cancers. “The prime minister will be announc- ing a landmark deal that we have agreed with the US and with (European Atomic Energy Community) Euratom,” the British govern- ment source said, on condition of anonymity.

“It is a win-win. We get rid of waste and we get something that will help us to fight cancer.”

At the two-day summit, being attended by more than 50 world leaders, Britain and the US will also announce plans to host a joint exercise later this year to test the ability of their governments and nuclear industries to deal with a cyber attack in the civil nuclear sector. The source said this was not in response to intelligence about a specific threat, but “prudent planning.”—Reuters

Hungarian Nobel laureate Kertesz dies aged 86 — state news agency MTI

BUDAPEST — Hungarian novelist and Auschwitz survivor Imre Kertesz, winner of the 2002 Nobel Literature Prize, died yesterday at the age of 86 after a long illness, state news agency MTI reported, citing his publisher.

Kertesz won the Nobel Prize for works that portrayed the Nazi death camps as “the ultimate truth” about how low human beings could fall.—Reuters

El Salvador plans ‘extraordinary’ moves to fight violence

SAN SALVADOR — El Salvador plans to boost prison security and deploy more troops in the streets to battle a rising wave of gang violence that has pushed murder rates to record levels, President Salvador Sanchez Ceren said on Wednesday.

The government has declared a state of emergency in seven prisons, limiting gang leaders’ movements inside and prohibiting visitors and outside communication for 15 days.

Officials also plan to contract a thousand reserve soldiers to reinforce existing troops in controlling chunks of territory taken over by gangs, known as maras.

The small, impoverished Central American state ranks among the world’s most violent. Murders jumped almost 120 per cent in the first two months of this year compared to 2015. “Faced with this irrational violence, we are forced to take urgent measures, of an extraordinary character, in order to guarantee security (and) peace for all Salvador- ans,” Sanchez Ceren said in a national broadcast. The government also plans to ask Congress to approve 14 measures to increase prison controls, as incarcerated leaders are still able to order killings and extor- tions.—Reuters

Mainland, HK police nab nearly 3,000 illegal immigrants in joint operation

BEIJING — Mainland and Hong Kong police have arrested 2,943 illegal immigrants in a joint operation to crack down on growing human smuggling, the Ministry of Public Security said on Wednesday.

Among the detained immigrants, 2,860 are from Southeast Asia and 83 from South Asia, said the ministry at a press conference held in Shenzhen of Guangdong. Most illegal immigrants were trying to sneak into Hong Kong from the mainland to seek employment, it added.

Since the 17-month campaign started on 20 February, police in Guangdong, Guangxi and Yunnan have dismantled three cross-border smuggling syndicates with the help of Hong Kong police, the ministry announced the results of the first phase of the crackdown.

A total of 142 suspects from the three syndicates were apprehended by police, including 29 from countries in Southeast Asia and South Asia. The cross-border smuggling rings are well organised with clear division of labour, said the ministry.

Smugglers in Southeast Asia and South Asia recruit immigrants, smugglers in the mainland transfer them to Guangdong from the border and ports and then sneak them into Hong Kong, and smugglers in Hong Kong take control of the whole process,” it added. Illegal immi- grants have also commit crimes such as thefts, robberies and drug smuggling, which in result seriously harmed public security in both Hong Kong and Guangdong, the ministry said.—Xinhua
BETEL CHEWING is a steep-rooted tradition in Myanmar that is traceable to the thirteenth century in Indonesia, where it is known as kum. Betel chewing is believed to have been introduced to Myanmar by the Burmese traders who went to Southeast Asia in search of ivory and spices. The practice of betel chewing is closely associated with the Buddhist monastic tradition and is considered a symbol of hospitality and respect. The chewing of betel nut and areca palm leaves is a common practice among Myanmar citizens, particularly in rural areas, and is often carried out by distributing betel to the monks who are entitled to this private offering. In the life account of King Kyanzaw Kyaung Pyai (1502 AD), betel chewing is said to have been a tradition in the royal court since the times of the ancient Burmese kings. Today, betel nut and areca palm leaves are used in various religious ceremonies and offerings to monks and other religious figures.

BETEL CHEWING has been regulated by the Myanmar government since the 1980s, with the aim of controlling its use and production. The government has implemented various measures to control the sale and consumption of betel, including the imposition of taxes on betel and the banning of its sale in public places. However, despite these efforts, betel chewing continues to be a popular tradition in Myanmar, and the government has been working to find alternative ways to control its use.

The practice of betel chewing is also closely associated with the Myanmar currency, with the betel nut and areca palm leaves being used as a form of currency in some areas. The betel nut is often used as a currency in rural areas, where it is considered a symbol of respect and hospitality. In some areas, the betel nut is used as a form of payment, and the government has been working to control its use as a currency.

In conclusion, betel chewing is a deeply rooted tradition in Myanmar that has been practiced for centuries. The government has implemented various measures to control its use and production, but betel chewing continues to be a popular tradition in Myanmar. The practice of betel chewing is also closely associated with the Myanmar currency, with the betel nut and areca palm leaves being used as a form of currency in some areas. The betel nut is often used as a currency in rural areas, where it is considered a symbol of respect and hospitality. In some areas, the betel nut is used as a form of payment, and the government has been working to control its use as a currency.
**World**

**10 April 2016**

**GLOBAL NEWS LIGHT OF MYANMAR**

**Assad says he can form new Syria government with opposition**

**TRIPOLI** — Members of Libya’s UN-backed Presidential Council reached Tripoli by ship on Wednesday, defying attempts to keep them out of the city and prevent them from installing a unity government.

Seven members of the Council, including Fayez Seraj, its head and the new government’s prime minister, arrived from Tunisia at Tripoli’s Abusita naval base amid tight security.

The situation in Tripoli remains volatile, and hours after their arrival clashes erupted between supporters and opponents of the Council. A key TV channel that backs a separate, self-declared government in Tripoli was taken off air. A self-declared government and armed groups that back it had warned the Council and the unity government not to travel to the capital. Tripoli’s airspace was closed for several hours on Sunday and Monday, a move the Council said was designed to prevent it from reaching Libya.

Seraj told Reuters that the council members had travelled in a Libyan navy vessel from the Tunisian port of Sfax, a 12-hour journey.

“There are challenges ahead of us, including uniting Libyans and healing divisions,” he said after arriving. He later made a brief statement saying the government would release a programme in the coming days.

“We will work for a ceasefire across Libya, for national reconciliation and the return of displaced people, and we will seek to confront Islamic State,” he said. The government of national accord (GNA) emerged from a UN-mediated deal signed in December aimed at ending the country’s political impasse, resolving its armed conflict and tackling a growing threat from Islamic State jihadists.

Western powers have recognised it as Libya’s sole legitimate government, but it has faced opposition in both eastern and western Libya.

Since 2014 Libya has had two competing pairs of parliaments and governments, both backed by loose alliances of armed brigades. The government in Tripoli was brought to power by armed factions that won a battle for control of the capital in 2014.—Reuters

**Air strikes target al Qaeda in Yemen, troops control Aden district**

**ADEN** — At least four suspected al Qaeda militants in southern Yemen were killed in what was believed to be a drone strike on Wednesday as unidentified warplanes bombed outposts held by the Islamist militant group further east, witnesses and local residents said.

The four suspected militants were killed when what was thought to be a US drone fired on a checkpoint at the entrance of the city of Azan in southern Yemen.

It was not immediately possible to confirm the accounts by the residents, who said the militants had seized the city two months ago. The United States has acknowledged using drones but declines to comment on specific attacks.

The stepped-up air strikes came as forces loyal to President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi conducted a security operation against militants in al-Mansoura district of Aden, trying to end a stalemate of clashes that had gripped the port city where the Yemeni government is temporarily based.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Islamic State have exploited the year-old Yemen war between Hadi supporters, who are backed by a Saudi-led alliance, and Iran-allied Houthis to seize parts of the country, including the Holmament provincial capital in southeastern Yemen.

Residents said unidentified warplanes launched three strikes on a former Yemeni army camp east of Mukalla controlled by al Qaeda late on Wednesday night.

They said the air strikes ignited a fire at the old al-Rayan air base that could be seen from several miles away. Residents said they believed the attacks have caused casualties, but provided no figures.

The militants seized Mukalla in April last year, a month after a Saudi-led alliance began military operations trying to restore Hadi to power after he was forced to flee his temporary headquarters in Aden by the advancing Houthis.

Last week, US warplanes struck a training camp run by al Qaeda, killing at least 50 people and wounding more than 30. A local al Qaeda commander said in an audio recording posted on the Internet on Wednesday that the camp was being used to train tribal volunteers to fight the Houthis.—Reuters
China-led AIIB eyes first loans to India

NEW DELHI — India hopes to receive one of the first loans issued by the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) later this year, as it looks to raise $500 million for solar power projects from the newly created lender, Indian officials said.

Funding for clean energy projects would allay fears of environmental lobbyists that the bank’s relaxed lending criteria could promote dirty fuels like coal in developing economies, like India, that are in a hurry to ramp up energy output.

The multilateral investment bank, which has authorised capital of $100 billion, plans to join global clean-energy initiatives, and could fund eco-friendly investment projects to avoid allegations of promoting pollution.

India, the bank’s second biggest shareholder after China, is looking to borrow from the AIIB, a senior official said, to back Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s plan of expanding installed solar capacity to 100 gigawatts by 2022.

“In about six months, funds could start flowing from AIIB,” Tarun Kapur, joint secretary at the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, told Reuters.

Interest on the loan is likely to be 2-2.5 per cent and would be linked to LIBOR — a floating benchmark based on the rate at which commercial banks lend to each other — for a term of over 15 years. The AIIB, which is headquartered in Beijing and was launched in January, did not comment directly on borrowing by India but said it was developing a project pipeline in a number of countries.

“It is expected that the first loan decisions will be taken later this year,” it said in written answers to questions submitted by Reuters. — Reuters

With Galaxy S7, Samsung seen rediscoversing its mobile mojo

SEOUL — Early indications of stronger-than-expected sales of new Galaxy S7 smartphones suggest technology giant Samsung Electronics Co Ltd is emerging from a two-year decline at its flagship mobile business.

Squeezed by Apple Inc in premium products and undercut by Chinese rivals like Huawei (HWT.U) in cheaper devices, Samsung’s smartphone sales and global market share have fallen and sagged momentum at South Korea’s most valuable company.

But several brokerages on Wednesday upgraded first-quarter forecasts for what is still the world’s top smartphone maker, citing a strong start for the Galaxy S7 and S7 edge premium phones that were launched earlier this month.

“S7 sales about a month earlier were much as 2.4 per cent on Wednesday through the middle of January following a 22 per cent slide over the previous three months,” noted HDC Asset Management fund manager Park Jung-hoon.

Samsung shares gained as much as 2.4 per cent on Wednesday

Microsoft’s Windows 10 reaches 270 million users, no mobile numbers

SAN FRANCISCO — The latest version of Microsoft Corp’s Windows operating system has 270 million active users eight months after launch, the world’s largest software company said on Wednesday.

The number, announced by executive Terry Myerson at Microsoft’s annual gathering for developers in San Francisco, represents a solid start for Windows 10 after the tepid reaction to its predecessor, Windows 8.

Getting its Windows strategy right is a key part of Microsoft’s plans to stay relevant in a mobile-centric world where rivals like Amazon.com Inc, Apple Inc and Alphabet Inc’s Google carry more clout with many consumers and developers.

One reason for the rapid take-up is that Windows 10, released in July, is free for individual consumers who download it during its first year. Enterprise customers must pay for Windows 10.

An anniversary upgrade to be released this summer will also be free for users already running Windows 10, Myerson said on Wednesday.

The giveaway is effectively an admission by Microsoft that few individuals are willing to pay for software, and represents a shift to a strategy embraced by most tech startups of attracting as many users as possible and nailing down how to make money later.

Microsoft laid out its business case last year: the more consumers run on Windows, the more potential targets it gains for advertising sales and for its own paid-for applications and services.

Myerson said before launch he was aiming for 1 billion devices running Windows 10 within a few years. — Reuters

Asian stocks edge up to four-month high, dollar sags on Fed caution

TOKYO — Asian shares edged up to a four-month high yesterday as receding worries of near-term US interest rate hikes continued to buoy investors’ appetite for riskier assets.

But spreadbets forecast a slightly lower open for Britain’s FTSE, Germany’s DAX and France’s CAC, with sliding crude oil prices expected to prevent European stocks from extending the previous day’s rally.

The dollar hovered near seven-week lows versus the euro, still gripped by cautious comments from Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen earlier in the week on monetary tightening.

MSCI’s broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan was up 0.1 per cent, briefly reaching its highest since early December. The index was poised to eke out a gain of 1 per cent this quarter, which saw equities rocked earlier by global growth worries, and particularly for the Chinese economy.

Japan’s Nikkei rose 0.2 per cent, on track for an 11 per cent loss on the quarter as the yen firmed against the flagging dollar, while Australian stocks added 1.5 per cent.

Shanghai shares climbed 0.5 per cent, en route to a quarterly drop of about 15 per cent.

Risk appetite has increased since Fed Chair Yellen said on Tuesday that the US central bank should proceed cautiously as it looks to hike rates, pushing back against some colleagues who have suggested another move may be just around the corner.

“Fed Chair Janet Yellen’s speech earlier this week is still dragging the dollar down, sparking risk appetite globally,” said Kim Moon-il, a foreign exchange analyst at Eugene Futures in Seoul.

Yellen’s views were echoed by Chicago Fed President Charles Evans, who said on Wednesday there was a hard hedge to raising rates in April, given low inflation. Following such cautious views from top Fed officials, the Dow climbed 0.5 per cent and the S&P 500 rose 0.4 per cent overnight.

The CBOE Market Volatility Index, Wall Street’s “fear gauge”, ended down 1.9 per cent at its lowest level since August. — Reuters

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella delivers the keynote address during the Microsoft Build 2016 Developer Conference in San Francisco, California, on 30 March. Photo: Philpre钅
Dozens feared missing after migrant boat sinks off Libya

TRIPOLI/ROME — Dozens of migrants were feared missing after their boat sank off Libya on Wednesday, a spokesman for the country’s naval forces said, amid signs of a sharp increase in the number of people attempting the dangerous crossing from North Africa to Europe.

Earlier Italian officials said their coast guard rescued 1,361 migrants on Wednesday from boats and rubber dinghies in the southern Mediterranean. The Libyan spokesman, Ayoub Qasem, said naval guards had intercepted one boat carrying 120 migrants off the coast near Sabratha and had also managed to rescue 32 from the boat which sank. It was not known exactly how many people were missing.

More than 16,000 people have made the crossing from North Africa to Italy in the first three months of 2016, some 6,000 more than in the same period last year. The number of new arrivals is expected to climb further in coming months as warmer, more stable weather kicks in, making it easier for people traffickers to put the boats to sea.

The Italian coast guard said that among some 3,680 people over the past three days a further 350 migrants, most believed to be minors, had been spotted on a boat off Sicily and an operation was under way to bring them ashore. Italian officials have also warned that a deal to limit the number of migrants travelling via Turkey to Greece could increase the flows through Libya to Italy. However, up until now, the vast majority of migrants using the Mediterranean route have continued to come from sub-Saharan Africa, with no significant increase in the number of Syrians, Afghans or Iraqis, who have mostly been using the Greek route. Hundreds of thousands of migrants, most believed to have reached Italy in recent years, looking for a better life in the West.

Most are believed to have moved swiftly to wealthier northern Europe, taking advantage of the European Union’s passport-free travel zone, but moves to suspend the border pact could make it much more difficult for them to leave. — Reuters

Suspected suicide bomber not one of Nigeria’s missing Chibok girls

ABUJA — A suspected suicide bomber intercepted in northern Cameroon last week before she could blow herself up is not one of 219 schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram in the Nigerian town of Chibok in 2014, an African public advocacy group said on Wednesday.

The abduction of about 270 school girls by the Islamic extremists sparked international outrage and a campaign for their safe return. Some 50 of the girls managed to escape but 219 are still missing. The Murtala Mohammed Foundation (MMF), a non-government organisation, partnered with Nigeria’s government to help parents from Chibok verify the girl’s identity after she claimed to be among the missing students.

Nigeria’s government had said it was keen to ascertain the girl’s identity so that she could possibly assist the government in investigations regarding the fate and whereabouts of the missing Chibok girls.

MMF’s chief Aisha Mohammed-Oyebode said three representatives of parents of the missing students looked at photographs of the girl and a woman she was arrested with and said they “do not fit the description of any of the missing daughters from Chibok”. She said the Nigerian government told her group on Tuesday that the girl identified herself as a 12-year-old originally from Maiduguri, northeast Nigeria, who was abducted from Bama about 60 km (40 miles) away, when the town was overrun by Boko Haram a year ago.

The woman was said to have identified herself as a 25-year-old Nigerian. Mohammed-Oyebode said the pair had been handed over to the Nigerian military and were returning to Nigeria. Former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan was criticised for his slow reaction to the Chibok kidnappings, which was seen by some as indicative of his response to Boko Haram, which at its strongest held large swathes of northeastern Nigeria.

President Muhammadu Buhari, who defeated Jonathan in an election last year, ordered a new investigation into the abductions in January. Joint operations between Nigeria and neighbouring countries drove Boko Haram from many of its strongholds last year but the group has stepped up cross-border attacks and suicide bombings, many of which have been carried out by young girls. — Reuters

Trump sounds off on abortion; criticism comes from all sides

WASHINGTON — Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump said on Wednesday that women who end pregnancies should face punishment if the United States bans abortion, triggering atorrent of criticism from both sides of the abortion debate, including from his White House rivals.

After MSNBC broadcast a clip of an interview with Trump, the billionaire businessman rowed back his remarks, first saying that the abortion issue should be handled by states and later that doctors who performed abortions should be the ones held responsible.

“The doctor or any other person performing this illegal act upon a woman would be held legally responsible, not the woman,” Trump said in his latest statement. “The woman is a victim in this case as is the life in her womb.”

Trump’s earlier statements drew heavy fire from abortion rights supporters and opponents alike.

Abortion has long been a divisive issue in American politics, even though the procedure was legalized in a Supreme Court ruling more than 40 years ago. Opposition to abortion has become a central plank in the platform of most conservative politicians.

Trump has won support from Republican voters for selling himself as a Washington outsider. But the New York real estate tycoon, who once supported abortion access, has come under pressure from conservative organizations to prove he is truly one of them. At the same time, he has drawn criticism for comments that offended women and minority groups.

“Of course, women shouldn’t be punished,” rival Republican candidate John Kasich said on Wednesday, saying he opposed abortion except in specific cases such as rape.

US Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, the third candidate for the Republican nomination for the 8 November election, said Trump had not thought through the issue. “What’s far too often neglected is that being pro-life is not simply about the unborn child, it’s also about the mother,” he said in a statement.

Abortion rights supporters were equally incensed.

“What Donald Trump said was outrageous and dangerous. I’m constantly taken aback at the kinds of things that he advocates for,” Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton told MSNBC. “Once again, he has showed us who he is.”

Dawn Laguens of the Planned Parenthood Action Fund, the political arm of the women’s health group, called Trump “flat-out dangerous” in a statement.

Abortion was legalized in the United States in 1973, when the Supreme Court declared that a woman’s constitutional right to privacy protected her decision to end a pregnancy.

In the decades since, there have been no enough votes on the Supreme Court to reverse the ruling, but numerous states have passed laws aimed at restricting abortion. — Reuters

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV WEST SCENT VOY NO (109N)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV WEST SCENT VOY NO (109N) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 1.4.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of A.W.P.T. where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

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Huge seawall at Hamaoka plant completed to protect against tsunami

CHIBUOKA (Japan) — Chubu Electric Power Co said yesterday it has finished building a huge seawall at its Hamaoka nuclear power plant in Shizuoka Prefecture to protect the facility from a tsunami triggered by a massive earthquake predicted by scientists.

The construction of the seawall, which stands 22 metres above sea level and 1.6 kilometres in length, began in November 2011 after a huge earthquake and tsunami triggered triple meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant of Tokyo Electric Power Co in March 2011.

Located on the Pacific coast in central Japan, the Hamaoka complex is believed to be situated at the epicenter of a potential massive earthquake in the Nankai Trough running south of Japan's mainland.

In the case of a magnitude 9.0 earthquake originating off the Suruga Bay or the Sea of Enshu — which stretches along the Shizuoka Prefecture coast — the maximum on the Japanese seismic intensity scale, the Shizuoka prefectural government said.

Tsunami waves as high as 19 metres would be expected to hit the coast 20 minutes after the quake, it said.

“With this (wall), we have completed efforts to build anti-quake measures for now,” he added. The Hamaoka plant suspended operation in May 2011 due to safety concerns at the request of then-prime minister Naoto Kan.

“We have strived to enhance safety in accordance with our belief that there is no option to abandon nuclear power,” Tatsuma Muramatsu, chief of Chubu Electric’s Hamaoka regional office, said after confirming the completion of construction. “With this (wall), we have completed efforts to build anti-quake measures for now,” he added.

Chubu Electric’s Hamaoka nuclear power plant suspended operation in May 2011 due to safety concerns at the request of then-prime minister Naoto Kan.

Enlarged image of the document.
Beyoncé gets surprise visit from Hillary Clinton

LOS ANGELES — Pop star Beyoncé received a visit from US presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton while filming a music video.

The “Drunk In Love” star, who is currently working on a new album, was recently in Los Angeles shooting a promo for the record when a special guest joined her in the studio, according to Us magazine.

“I definitely went through a crisis at 25, 26, 27. I don’t know, it was like a 3-year crisis. Then I had honour at 28, and I felt like everything just kind of fell into place and made sense. I feel really good now, and I’m excited about turning 35.”

Talking about her birthday plans, Alba dished, “I’m trying to figure out a fun birthday. I’m thinking maybe a girls’ thing with some of my friends. Then, I was thinking maybe something at my house.” — Reuters

Harrison Ford uses the force for good

NEW YORK — The battered leather jacket worn by Harrison Ford in the latest “Star Wars” movie has been put up for auction in New York to help a cause dear to the actor’s heart.

Ford, 73, signed and donated Han Solo’s “Star Wars: The Force Awakens” jacket to help raise money for research into epilepsy — a condition he recently revealed that his adult daughter Georgia Ford suffers from.

Harrison said he was impressed with the work done by the FACES (Finding a Cure for Epilepsy and Seizures) unit at New York University’s Langone Medical Center. “I hope this jacket will provide some means to further that exploration. This is a cause that is near and dear to me and unlike the cynical Han Solo, I’ve got a good feeling about this,” he said.

Harrison told reporters earlier in March that his daughter Georgia, 26, had suffered seizures since she was a child and that doctors at the Langone Medical center had finally diagnosed epilepsy as the cause some eight years ago.

Bidding for the leather jacket stood at $33,000 on Wednesday (March 30) and the online auction continues until 11 April at the website. — Reuters

Actress Fujiwara, Kabuki actor Kataoka tie the knot

TOKYO — Actress Norika Fujiwara and Kabuki actor Kataoka Ainosuke tied the knot on Wednesday, their management agencies said, after they announced being in a relationship in August.

Fujiwara and Kataoka, both 42, held a press conference in Tokyo yesterday to talk about their nuptials.

It is the first marriage for Kataoka, a native of Sakai, Osaka Prefecture. In addition to being an actor of the traditional Japanese performing art, Kataoka also acts in modern dramas with his performance as a Financial Services Agency inspector in the mega-hit 2013 TV drama series “Hanzawa Naoki” seeing his popularity rise.

Fujiwara, hailing from Nishinomiya, Hyogo Prefecture, divorced comedian Tomonori Jinnai, 42, in March 2009, about two years after marrying him.

Kataoka, also a model, is a popular television and theater actor. — Kyodo News

World’s largest film screen poised to impress Chinese audience

HEFEI — A Chinese company has developed an extra-large film screen, measuring 100 by 25 meters.

The manufacturer, Star Screen Co., Ltd. in east China’s Anhui Province, spent two years developing the 1.6-tonne screen, which has been recognised as the world’s largest by the science and technology committee of the state film administration.

The company overcame several technical difficulties in screen evenness, spraying and transportation.

Some technical specifications of the final product are even better than the national standard, said Yang Xuepei, deputy director of the committee.

“Take polarization ratio for example: a higher ratio means a better 3D effect, while a substandard screen brings viewers sore eyes and dizziness,” said Yang.

Eight orders from cinemas and movie theme parks have been placed for the screen, and the company is expecting more orders after the official launch.

Over 3,300 new cinemas opened across the country over the past five years, with the number of screens soaring to 31,000, said Lin Minjie, general manager of China Film Equipment Company.

The new screen will be made to fit the China Film Giant Screen (CGS), a large format film system jointly developed by the China Film Company and China Research Institute of Film Science and Technology.

Launched in 2011, the CGS has become one of the fastest-growing high-end digital movie exhibition systems in the world, according to Lin. Of the 350 giant screens available in China, 133 have adopted the CGS system.

“CGS has been exported to the United States, India, Indonesia, Thailand and will soon enter the European market including France and Russia,” Lin said.

China’s box office sales in 2015 hit 44 billion yuan (6.75 billion US dollars), up 48.7 percent from 2014 and a whopping 235.9 percent from 2011.

Monthly ticket sales in February reached 6.87 billion yuan, overtaking that of North America for the first time, official data showed.

Last year alone, 8,000 new screens were installed nationwide, with 6,700, or 80 percent of them, produced by Star Screen.

“Alongside the breathtaking growth of box office sales, China’s own film equipment industry is also booming,” Lin said. “More film projectors, servers, screens and sound equipment with independent proprietary intellectual property rights are made in China.” — Xinhua
Child labour rises in Gaza amid soaring unemployment

GAZA — Child labour has risen sharply in Gaza, where youngsters toiling in garages and on construction sites have become breadwinners for families feeling the brunt of the Palestinian enclave’s 43 per cent unemployment rate.

In the past five years, the number of working children between the ages of 10 and 17 has doubled to 9,700 in the territory, according to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics.

The bureau said 2,900 of those children are below the legal employment age of 15. Economists in the narrow coastal strip, home to 1.9 million Palestinians, estimate the real number of underage workers could be twice as high.

The increase in Gaza goes against trends. The International Labour Organisation says the worldwide number of children in labour has fallen by a third since 2000, from 246 million to 168 million, with more than a fifth in sub-Saharan Africa.

At one garage in downtown Gaza, 16-year-old Mahmoud Yazji and another boy, aged 12, work nine hours a day, Mahmoud said he earns the equivalent of $13 a week; the younger boy takes home half of that.

“My father makes 1,000 shekels ($258) a month. It disappears in a few days and we struggle for the rest of the month,” Mahmoud said.

Haitham Khza’iq, 16, quit school six months ago to sell candy apples to visitors at Gaza’s newly developed seaport, a major picnic venue. He works a half-day, seven days a week, and said he earns a total of 20 shekels ($5).

“We are five brothers and eight sisters. I am the oldest son and I had to work because my father is unemployed,” he said. “I don’t earn enough but it is better than nothing and it is better than begging people for money.”

A devastating 2014 war between Palestinian militants and Israeli, border restrictions imposed by Israel and Egypt and the destruction of cross-border smuggling tunnels by an Egyptian government at odds with Gaza’s Hamas rulers have contributed to economic hardship in the territory.

The United Nations estimates that 80 per cent of the population is dependent, with unemployment rising to its current level from around 35 per cent five years ago.

“Some people are living like kings and many others like us are hardly finding anything to eat,” said 10-year-old Mohammed, who sells potato chips on the street and began working after his father, a construction labourer, lost his job.

A gap is evident on the Gaza beachfront, where child vendors haggling trays of tea, coffee and snacks mingle with other children using expensive cellphones to record their family puzzles. Several smart hotels overlook the port and beachfront.

A Dutch-funded organisation, El-Wedad Society for Community Rehabilitation, has been running a project for three years aimed at convincing families in Gaza of the importance of returning working children to the classroom.

“We are very worried. We feel children’s rights are being trampled on,” said Naeem al-Ghalban, who heads the society.

Its representatives visit the homes of working children they meet on the street and invite them to guidance sessions at the organisation’s headquarters.

Palestinian boy Mahmoud al-Sindawi, 15, sells balloons and footballs at the Seaport of Gaza City on 17 March. Photo: Reuters

Children are taken for visits to Gaza’s colleges to show them what could lie ahead if they go back to school.

Ghalban said that over the past three years, some 50 working children have taken up their studies again as a result of the organisation’s efforts.

“We have managed to persuade some families that educating their children is far better and more valuable than the little money they make,” he said.—Reuters

OSAKA An art museum established by a textile firm in Izumi, Osaka, houses a collection that once belonged to the founding family of the now-defunct company inside a complex renowned for its sophisticated design.

The Kuboso Memorial Museum of Arts holds some 11,000 objects such as bronze and earthen wares from China, western paintings, and Japanese calligraphic works and prints including about 6,000 “ukiyo-e” woodblock prints.

The museum’s air of luxury is created by spacious buildings constructed in the style of a “sukiya” or tea-ceremony house, a beautiful garden and other facilities.

Named after the cotton textile industry in Osaka, Kuboso was established in 1886 and contributed to the rise of the textile industry in Osaka.

It went out of business in 1977 amid an industry slump.

Kuboso and the founding Kubo family, when they pulled the plug on the business, built a museum and donated it, together with its land and some 500 artworks, to the city. With the company and family donating more artworks, the museum has increased its collection and facilities since its opening in 1982.

Kuboso Memorial is a “top-level public museum having two national treasures and 29 important cultural properties,” curator Rieko Uemi said.

Visitors enter the front gate in the new building completed in 1997 and walk through an outdoor garden, with a beautiful collection of well-maintained trees and plants that seasonally bloom, to the main building.

A tea-ceremony house, built before the Pacific War, stands near the main building. The museum also has a music hall that accommodates more than 100 people.

While concerts are held at the hall mainly on weekends, there are many frequent visitors because separate fees are not required on top of door charges paid at the front gate.

For the museum’s 35th anniversary next year, “we are preparing various events that will enable visitors to enjoy wonderful artworks whenever they come here,” Uemi said.—Kyodo News
England team mates set to resume title rivalry

LONDON — Having combined seamlessly for England, the players of Leicester City and Tottenham Hotspur will resume battle in the Premier League title race this weekend with the two main protagonists facing testing fixtures.

Hostilities were put to one side as the likes of Leicester striker Jamie Vardy and Spurs counterpart Harry Kane both impressed as England won in Germany and lost at home to the Netherlands.

Yet with the international break over, Kane, one of five Spurs players in the England squad, and Vardy, who played alongside England debutant and club mate Danny Drinkwater, are back in opposing camps.

Kane, who scored against Germany, will be hoping that his team win at Liverpool on Saturday and narrow the gap to leaders Leicester, who play Southampton at home on Sunday.

Vardy, who scored his first two goals for England in Saturday’s game in Berlin and Tuesday’s match at Wembley, is hoping to get back on the scoresheet after five league games without a goal.

“The (England) goals can only be good for my confidence and I will hopefully be scoring again at the weekend,” he said.

With only seven matches remaining, Leicester, seeking a fourth straight win when they face Southampton, are top with 66 points, five ahead of Spurs on 61.

Arsenal are a further six behind with a game in hand and on Saturday have a quick opportunity for revenge against Watford, who ended the Gunners’ bid for a third successive FA Cup triumph when they beat them 2-1 at the Emirates three weeks ago.

Fourth-placed Manchester City, whose title hopes virtually evaporated when they lost 1-0 at home to Manchester United, travel to Bournemouth, while fifth-placed West Ham United will be looking to continue their top-four push at home to Crystal Palace.

Palace have tumbled from fifth on New Year’s Day to 16th and will be desperate to end a run of 13 league matches without a win that has dropped them far too close to the relegation zone for comfort.

Bottom-placed Aston Villa, who sacked French manager Remi Garde on Tuesday, look to have very little chance of escaping and have caretaker Eric Black in charge for the visit of out-going champions Chelsea on Saturday.

Unless Palace’s nosedive continues, two from Norwich City, Sunderland and Newcastle United look set to go down with Villa.

Norwich are at home to Newcastle, who now have 11 players sidelined with injuries after goalkeeper Rob Elliot was ruled out for the season after damaging knee ligaments in Ireland’s 2-2 draw with Slovakia.— Reuters

Azarenka beats Konta to reach Miami semis

MIAMI — Victoria Azarenka withstood some early pressure from Britain’s Johanna Konta to continue her quest for a third Miami Open title with a 6-4, 6-2 quarter-final victory on Wednesday.

Azarenka, who 10 days ago beat Serena Williams to win the Indian Wells title in California, was too consistent for the 24th-seeded Konta in a first set played in blustery conditions.

Azarenka, however, rose to the occasion to fend off five break points, while Konta double-faulted twice to drop serve as the Belarusian took charge in just over 90 minutes.

“She’s such a great player,” eighth-ranked Azarenka, the 2009 and 2011 champion, told ESPN. “I see a lot of potential.”

“I couldn’t actually get a read on her serve in the beginning — it was tough for me to adjust — but then I got a bit lower and tried to get more returns in, be a bit more aggressive.”

The British number one, who was ranked 151st in the world this time last year, took some satisfaction from the match.

“I’m happy with the level I was able to bring to the court,” Konta, now ranked 23rd, told the BBC. “Obviously I’m disappointed that I couldn’t have done a little bit better but I’m taking the positives from it.”

Kerber, who won the Australian Open, lost the opening match of her two previous tournaments but was helped by 39 unforced errors by Keys, the last American remaining in either draw, who was not able to put much pressure on her German opponent.

The 28-year-old left hander upset Azarenka in the quarter-final at Melbourne Park then beat Konta in the last four and Serena in the final to claim her first grand slam title.— Reuters

I learned valuable lessons from last season, says Bale

BARCELONA — Gareth Bale learned valuable lessons from his disappointing Real Madrid campaign last season, he said on Wednesday.

The Wales forward enjoyed a dream first season at the Bernabeu after a world record 85.3 million pounds ($122.67 million) move from Tottenham in 2013, scoring in the finals of the Champions League and King’s Cup as Real won the double.

Bale struggled to kick on during a difficult second term, attracting boos from some supporters and criticism from the media as his club failed to win a major trophy and speculation grew that he was seeking a return to the Premier League.

“Maybe last season I didn’t play to anywhere near my potential,” he told a news conference ahead of Saturday’s ‘Clasico’ at runaway La Liga leaders Barcelona.

“This season I wanted to improve. It was important for me to keep working hard, to keep fighting, it’s difficult playing in a foreign country.”

“I feel like I am playing well, growing and improving all the time,” he said. “I’m in good form at the moment.—Reuters