FOREIGN MINISTER TO CLARIFY FOREIGN POLICY

UNION FOREIGN MINISTER Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will clarify her government’s foreign policy in a meeting with foreign diplomats at her office in Nay Pyi Taw on April 22, according to an official.

Deputy Director-General U Ko Ko Shein of the Political Department said yesterday that invitations have been sent to 93 foreign embassies at home and abroad, including a UN agency. So far 73 embassies have accepted the invitation, with the deputy director general adding that ambassadors or senior diplomats will attend the event.

The government’s foreign policy is oriented to the protection of national interests, security, economic development, justice, stability and environmental sustainability, the official said, adding that the policy also holds in high esteem such virtues as freedom, sovereignty, culture and tradition and national solidarity.

There has been a dramatic shift of emphasis in the country’s foreign policy from ‘bilateral relations’ to ‘regional integration’ and ‘multilateralism’.

According to the constitution, the country practices independent, active and non-aligned foreign policy alongside the five principles of peaceful coexistence. These principles include mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. The new government’s foreign policy is aimed at enabling cooperation with neighbouring countries in an effort to maintain peace, regionally and globally, the official quoted the union foreign minister as saying.

—Myanmar News Agency

FOLLOWING the outbreak of bird flu at a poultry farming zone in upper Myanmar, the Ministry of Health has urged farmers nationwide yesterday to carry out strict bio security measures at poultry farms in order to prevent human infection.

In the announcement, the ministry said that strains H5 and H9 of the bird flu virus broke out at a farming zone in Monywa on April 3.

The sample of the bird flu has been sent to the Australia Animal Health Laboratory—AAHL in order to know the ‘N’ type of the virus, said the statement.

The same farming zone also saw an outbreak of H5N1 in February last year which resulted in the culling of more than 140,000 chickens and 500,000 quails.

THE Ministry of Health confirmed on April 15 that the last outbreak of bird flu occurred in a zone in Monywa and that there has been no humans infected as yet.

The ministry’s announcement said that it had been taking measures to control the avian flu outbreak to the infected zone as of last Friday.

From April 3-5, around 7,000 chickens from 13 farms were culled, according to local report.

The ministry said it is carrying out fever surveillance on the workers, their family members and staff of the ministry that were tasked with culling the infected chickens.

A team from the ministry, comprising local authorities, are combating the outbreak and have implemented a quarantine zone of the infected area and are carrying out surveillance, infection control measures as well as providing medical assistance to those with suspected human infection.

Bio security fears as bird flu hits Monywa

The ministry has established an isolation ward at Monywa General Hospital in order to provide treatment for people suspected of infection. Temporary clinics have been set up at the poultry farming zone.

Mandalay and Sagaing saw outbreaks of bird flu seven times from 2006 to 2015.—GNLM
Inle Lake faces drought

THE WATER levels in waterway near Inle Lake, Nyaung Shwe Township, have rendered 10 villages inaccessible. There has been a steady decline in water levels in Inle Lake which is situated in southern Shan State, with the potential to severely affect more than 300 villages.

“We have no water even for bathing and we buy drinking water for K500 to 1000 per bucket. Farmers also need a mass water supply for their cultivation,” said Ma Than Aye Myint, a local resident.

The local people have suffered from falling water levels as most of the residents rely on the lake water for cooking and other household tasks.

The water levels are so low that they have reached critical condition as indicated by a water level measure post near the Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda, said a source. Water levels in the lake have fallen to roughly four feet and in some parts, only one foot of water remains.

Of the 445 households living in Inle Lake, 80 are considered lake dwellers. —200

Bago villages decimated by riverbank erosion

THIS year’s riverbank erosion has decimated most of the farmland belonging to the villages at the Motama bend of the Sittaung estuary, on the eastern side of Bago Region’s Kawa township.

February of this year saw 239 dwellings and over 2,000 acres of farmland fall victim to land erosion, with surrounding villages also losing swathes of arable land.

“Nearly all arable riverbanks and farmland in the Shwetisout village have been swept away. The adjacent village has seen over a thousand acres of farmland disappear. Everyone is out of work, and an income, as work revolved around these farmlands. People are having to live off whatever work they can get their hands on,” explained U Kyaw Htay, administrator of Shwetisout village.

The erosion has caused a multitude of difficulties for local family’s and their livelihoods, with the local school and monastery also being swallowed up by the river.

“The whole of Shwetisout village has been destroyed. The village of Sarphyu, situated behind Shwetisout village, also lost their farmland to the eroding estuary, forcing them to establish a new village. The very fertile riverbank land was all washed away. People that lived off what crops they grew are now having to feed themselves by purchasing rice. In terms of employment, everyone here is out of work,” said U Moe Thu, a farmer from Sarphyu village whose farmland was lost to land erosion.

The aforementioned villages started suffering from small scale, and annual, riverbank erosion back in 2007-08, but a disastrous bout of riverbank erosion this February had calamitous affects on local farmland.

Despite no reported cases of any missing individuals resulting from the erosion, displaced local villagers have faced difficulties earning their livelihoods since February of this year, cutting timber and tending to remaining livestock in order to survive.—Myitmakha News Agency

Mandalay sees a drop in alcohol fueled brawls during Thingyan

There were 12 reports of alcohol fueled brawls in Mandalay during the Thingyan period with 39 cases being reported in total for the entire Mandalay district, according to Police Lt-Col Sein Tun.

Despite 12 cases being reported, this was actually a decrease in the number of similar cases from last year when Thingyan celebration was observed for four days, he added.

Although the total number of cases during the 2016 festival decreased markedly compared to the 86 reported cases last year, there were also two murder cases this year while no murder cases were reported in 2015.

Locals said that effective security measures taken by the 1,313 police officers in cooperation with other forces which included traffic police, fire brigades and NGOs helped see a reduction in crime in the Mandalay district during Thingyan.—Aung Thant Khaing

Waterway linking Inle Lake to villages are especially drying up. Photo: Aye Min Soe

Multi-stakeholder talks on road legislation coming in June

A ROAD safety meeting is to be held in Nay Pyi Taw this coming June with the objective of amending current legislation in a bid to reduce traffic accidents.

The meeting will be attended by representatives of the Department of Road Transport, the Ministry of Construction, the Ministry of Information, NGOs and INGOs, as well as the APB Alliance Brewery Company.

“Not wearing a seatbelt while driving and driving a motorcycle without a helmet can endanger lives during the event of a traffic accident. Few people obey road and vehicle regulations [here in Myanmar]. Discussions will be held on ways in which the law can curb these types of incidents. We will also cooperate together in the drawing up of legislation amendments,” explained Zita Schellekens, director of corporate relations for the APB Alliance Brewery.

Independent businessmen and civil society organisations will join forces to carry out awareness campaigns for the public in a bid to mitigate traffic and road-related danger. In 2015, the APB Alliance Brewery company successfully carried out road safety educational awareness programmes that reached over 3 million Myanmar citizens.

“General knowledge on vehicle and road regulations is important. It is imperative that close attention be paid to ensure that people follow these [regulations]. There has been a weak foundation in the past for the effective implementation of these regulations in way that ensures they are obeyed,” said Police Colonel Kyaw Htway, head of the Myanmar Traffic Police.

Warning and road information signs, together with cat’s eyes (reflective lane demarcations), will be erected along Myanmar’s major highways in a bid to improve road safety, while animated cartoons, radio programmes and free-of-charge road safety applications will be disseminated via Facebook.—Myitmakha News Agency

Days of wine & roses will soon be with us! Don’t you think so, Abu? Not right away, lad. Mind you, Rome wasn’t built in a day!—Omega
Haka gas explosions injure two, Monywa, kills one

A SERIES of gas explosions occurred at a shop selling gas cylinders used for cooking in Haka, Chin State, destroying a house and wounding two people on Tuesday.

U Saw Yon Man, head of Haka Township Fire-services Department, said that a man was burned when he caught fire in the blasts while a woman sustained injuries from the shockwave caused by the explosions he added.

Police said that the gas explosions in which six gas cylinders exploded one after another is believed to have occurred while water was being boiled on a gas stove in the shop.

According to sources, about 30 cylinders full of gas were kept at the shop which happens to be the only business selling cooking gas in Haka.

In another incident, a gas canister at a restaurant in Monywa blew up yesterday, killing a 35-year-old man and injuring another. —Aung Thant Khaing

Plans underway to relieve water shortages in regions, states

The ministry said that thousands of gallons of water had been transported to villages in Shan and Kayah States and Magwey, Sagaing, Ayeyawady and Yangon Regions yesterday in cooperation with regional and state governments and departments.

Arrangements are being made to supply drinking water to villages in Nay Pyi Taw and Zeyarthiri Township, it added. —GNLM

Villagers collect water supplied by a water bowser in Lashio. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Mandalay to host Mandalar Open Basketball Championship

MANDALAY Region Basketball Sub-committee announced yesterday that the Mandalar Open Basketball Championship and the Men’s U-20 Basketball Championship will be held for the first time at Bahtoo Stadium in Mandalay from April 25 to 30.

The sporting event, jointly organized by Mandalay Region basketball sub-committee and Kaung Su Aung Co., Ltd., will be of an international standard and so will be the first of its kind in Myanmar.

“The tournament aims to support young people who are interested in basketball and turn out a new generation of players,” said U Wai Yan Aung of Kaung Su Aung Co., Ltd who is also a member of the organizing committee.

According to the organizing committee, accommodation is available for teams from rural areas and admission is free for the tournament.

Teams which are interested in participating in the tournament at Bahtoo Stadium must submit application forms by April 23, added U Wai Yan Aung.

Winners of the open championship will receive K2 million for first prize, K1.5 million for second prize and K1 million for third prize.

Likewise, teams which come first, second and third in the men’s U-20 championship will win prizes worth K1 million, K700,000 and K500,000 respectively.

The first basketball championship in Mandalay is open to teams from all regions and states, amateur basketball teams and teams representing universities and colleges across the country. For further information, the following phones can be contacted Ph: 09 2000791 and 09 31242798. —Aung Thant Khaing

President U Htin Kyaw felicitates British Queen over her birthday

U Htin Kyaw, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, has sent a message of felicitations to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on the occasion of the Birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, which falls on 21 April, 2016. —MNA

Union Foreign Affairs Minister felicitates British counterpart

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, has sent a message of felicitations to His Excellency Mr. Philip Hammond, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on the occasion of the Birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, which falls on 21 April, 2016.—MNA

Four regions selected for Industrial Development Center

AUTHORITIES in Myanmar have selected four regions in which the first Industrial Development Center will be established. Yangon, Bago, Mandalay and Sagaing Regions were chosen as they are considered the main gateways to international markets because they have all either seaports or airports.

The four regions were considered to have good potential for rapid development because they possess strong workforces and easy access to public transportation such as buses and trains when compared to other regions. Each of the region’s highways are connected to the major road transport network which links all regions of the country. For investors, the four regions are located within easy access to international markets and have strategic advantages for distribution. —200

‘Made in Myanmar’ to rock international market

MYANMAR is trying to hit the international market with its own country brand ‘Made in Myanmar’ on products from the agriculture, seafood, forest, garment and bean sectors.

Authorities will cooperate with both local export companies and foreign companies with the aim of achieving the ‘Made in Myanmar’ brand global recognition and recommended status in products exported from the country.

Authorities have been appointed with the smearing of the ‘Made in Myanmar’ brand in the international market though the brand is fully endorsed by the products being exported overseas.

Myanmar aims to project its own brand on the international stage in the hopes it will become a money spinner.

Myanmar earned K 29.1 billion in 2015 through international trading while they earned only K 15 billion the year before.—200
A fire has destroyed a house on Bogyoke road, Haka Town, Chin State on April 19. According to the investigation, the fire broke out in a business selling gas cylinders known as GASPA owned by Daw Byat Nam Kyai but the reason for fire is not yet known. The fire damaged a house and four motorbikes worth Ks 1.15 million. No one was injured in the accident. Police have filed charges against the house owner for negligence.— District IPRD

A light truck with ten passengers on board traveling to Dawei from Pathein plunged down a ravine between mileposts 9/5 and 9/6, near 9 mile village, Khawza town, Yay township on April 18. Driver J Pho lost control of the vehicle and was killed at the scene. One passenger was injured in the accident. The police are investigating.— Htut Htut- (Yay)

Six injured in traffic accident on Haingyi to Pathein road

A vehicle accident occurred on the Haingyi to Pathein road, on April 18, leaving six injured. According to the investigation, the vehicle, which had five passengers on board, turned over when driver Ko Thura, 30, lost control after overtaking another vehicle. The diver and the five passengers were all seriously injured in the accident. Four passengers are undergoing medical treatment at Kyauk Chaung Hospital while two passengers were sent to Pathein General Hospital for emergency medical treatment. The police have charged U Thu Ra with reckless driving.— Kyaw Thu Hein (IPRD)

Police search for jewelry thief in Mudon

A man is wanted by police for a robbery in which jewelry was taken from a house in Mudon township, Mon state on Monday. According to the investigation, Daw Kyi Khin found her door broken when she went to cook in the early morning and gold jewelry worth Ks 41.1 million missing from the teak cupboard where she kept it. She informed the Mudon police who are in the process of investigating the case.— 200

Police arrest illegal petrol seller

POLICE arrested a woman selling illegal petrol at a house in Yankin road, ward 7, Lashio, Shan State North on April 18. Acting on a tip-off, police searched the house of Daw Ton Myint who goes by the alias Kyan Ton Myint and discovered two 40 gallon barrels, one 20 gallon barrel and 80 bottles of petrol worth Ks 2.52 million. The police have taken action against her.— 200

Suicide in Falam

A man hanged himself in Talanlo ward, Falam town, Chin State on April 19. According to police, U Lal Nei Thang, 25, allegedly became intoxicated and committed suicide. The Police investigation is ongoing.— District IPRD

A fire destroyed an old Yeiktha near the Shwe Than Dhaung resort, Thaun Daung town, Kayin State on April 18. According to the investigation, the fire was caused when a visitor dropping a lit cigarette onto some dry leaves. The fire quickly got out of control and spread to the resort. The blaze was put out by firemen with the help of local residents within a few minutes of their arrival.— 200

A fire destroyed a servant quarters at Shwe Thuzin Fuji soap factory between Yaw Mingyi and Pho Hla Gyi roads, Pygyidagun township, Mandalay on 17 April. The fire started to break out at 9.30 pm but the reason for fire is not yet known. The fire was brought under control within 15 minutes by the firemen with 30 fire engines and with the help of neighbors. Further investigations are being made to find out the case.— Than Zaw Min (IPRD)

A fire destroyed an old Yeiktha in Than Daung. Photo: 200

A combined investigation team made up of officers and staff from Myanmar police force seized thousands of yabbas pills and six grams of methamphetamine or ice in separate raids in Tamwe on April 18. Police found 60 tablets of yabbas belonging to Nay Min Aung, alias Fizel, on Banyadala road in Tamwe and when interrogated, Nay Min Aung told police he had bought it from Ma Khin Soe Than. Police arrested Ma Khin Soe Than, alias Ma Ni, and Soe Moe Naing, alias Gadon, at a traffic stop and found 1,780 yabbas pills, six grams of ice, two mobile phones and Ks 0.2 million on their motorbike.

In another case, police seized 960 yabbas pills from the house of Sai Thiha Zaw Lat at Aung Myat road, Chan Thar ward, Taunggyi. Myo Ko Ko was found together with the host and the police have filed charges against both of them under the Anti-Narcotic Law.— Myanmar Police Force.

Nay Min Aung (a) Fizel, Ma Khin Soe Than (a) Ma Ni and Soe Moe Naing (a) Gadon. Photo: MPF

Yabba, ice and cash seized in Tamwe

A man is wanted by police for a robbery in which jewelry was taken from a house in Mudon township, Mon state on Monday. According to police, U Thu Ra with reckless driving. The diver and the five passengers were all seriously injured in the accident. Four passengers are undergoing medical treatment at Kyauk Chaung Hospital while two passengers were sent to Pathein General Hospital for emergency medical treatment. The police have charged U Thu Ra with reckless driving.— Kyaw Thu Hein (IPRD)
Aquatic feed to be purchased from Viet Nam

AQUATIC feed will be purchased directly from Viet Nam and resold to local fish and shrimp breeders, according to Myanmar Shrimp Association. Fish feed imported from Viet Nam is made of mixed feedstuffs and contains essential nutrients for fish and shrimp. The association will buy both livestock feedstuff and aquatic feedstuff.

A fish farm worker feeds his stock. Photo: The Mirror

First phase of Bago Industrial Park City to be completed by year’s end

The initial phase of the Bago Industrial Park project at Bawnatkyi village-tract, Bago Region, is slated to be complete by the end of this year according to i-Land Myanmar.

The industrial park will be home to textile dyeing and printing enterprises as well as bag manufacturers, electrical companies and garment factories. The initial phase will encompass development of the park’s infrastructure and includes the construction of 4,030 meter-long road sections, water pipes distributing water to each site, a sewage treatment plant and establishing a link between the site and the Bago Electricity transmission lines and a park Wi-fi network. The industrial park will be constructed in accordance with eco-friendly guidelines on 182 acres of land at Field No 1393 of Naungkwan, Bawnatkyi village tract, Bago Region. Once built, it is hoped the park will generate foreign direct investment and create job opportunities for locals.—200

K200 lottery tickets not going anywhere

K200 lottery tickets will remain for some time even after K500 lottery tickets are introduced for sale, according to Aungbarlay Branch under Internal Revenue Department (Head Office).

Currently, tickets worth K200 are being sold, allowing jackpot winners to win up to K150 million while the minimum prize is K50,000. First prize for lottery tickets worth K500 will fetch over ten times that of the current first prize while the lowest prize will remain unchanged at K50,000.

To start the new program, approval is being sought from the head office. Citizens are encouraged to purchase lottery tickets only from the legal shops, and actions will be taken against those who illegally sell the tickets.

The official announcement will be released upon receiving approval.—200

Manufacturing know-how needed for quality gems

MYANMAR needs more emporiums to promote the manufacturing of high quality gem products. Although there are plenty of raw jade and jewelry products available, according to Myanmar Gems and Jewellery Entrepreneurs Association.

Exporters in Myanmar only display upgraded raw gems because of the lack of technological know-how which is needed to produce finished gem products in the country.

The Myanmar International Gems, Jewellery and Watch Expo featured gem manufacturers using foreign technology and is expected to generate a transfer of manufacturing know-how which is needed to produce gem products in Myanmar.

The 5th Myanmar International Gems, Jewellery and Watch Expo was held from April 1 to April 4 at Myanmar Gems Trade Centre on Kaba Aye Road.—200
HANOI — Vietnamese telecommunication company Viettel said on Monday it plans to form a consortium with two Myanmar companies to invest a combined $1.5 billion in Myanmar’s telecommunications sector if it wins the country’s fourth, and last, telecoms license. Viettel is expected to be awarded the licence some time after June, joining three existing licence holders: Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications (MPT), Norway’s Telenor and Qatar’s Ooredoo.

Liberalization of the telecoms sector is widely seen as one of Myanmar’s most successful reforms since the military ended power in 2011. To gain the fourth licence, foreign bidder must set up a joint venture with local firms. Military-run Viettel, one of Viet Nam’s leading telecoms companies, said in a statement that it plans to form a consortium with Myanmar’s National Telecommunications Licensing Limited, consisting of 11 local companies, and state-owned Star High Public Limited.

“This strong foundation ideally positions us to cater to the untapped telecom market potential in Myanmar,” Viettel’s Deputy General Director Le Dung Dung said in the statement. The two Myanmar firms will hold a combined 51 per cent of the joint venture, while Viettel, which operates in 10 countries across Asia, Africa and the Americas, will own the remaining stake.

Viettel also plans to launch 4G services in Myanmar, subject to additional licensing. The Myanmar government said on 25 March that it expects to open the application process for the licence in the middle of June and that Viettel was the only candidate negotiating for a joint venture. Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications, which operates in partnership with Japan’s KDDI Corp and Sumitomo Corp, is the market leader in Myanmar’s telecoms sector with 18 million subscribers as of January, while Telcoron has 12 million subscribers and Ooredoo has 5.8 million. — Reuters

BANGKOK — Thai police on Wednesday appointed Communist Party chief Bounnhang Vorachit as prime minister.

The 149-member assembly completed the process of nomination and voting for both candidates in around an hour.

In his acceptance speech, Bounnhang said he would strive for “peaceful international policies, unity, friendship and cooperation”.

One of the fast-growing economies in East Asia, landlocked Laos has averaged GDP growth of 7 per cent over the past decade, with increased use of natural resources contributing a third of output growth, the World Bank says.

This has boosted inflows into the country and access to electricity, telecoms and healthcare for its mostly rural population of 6.7 million.

Laos has close political ties to communist Vietnam and mirrors its political system. The country’s new president, with more than two-thirds of the votes,” said assembly chairwoman Pan Yathothou. The 149-member assembly completed the process of nomination and voting for both candidates in around an hour.

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Laos has close political ties to communist Vietnam and mirrors its political system. The country’s new president, with more than two-thirds of the votes,” said assembly chairwoman Pan Yathothou. Us and its allies dropped about two million tons of ordnance from 1964 to 1973. More than four decades on, the country grapples with millions of cluster munitions and other unexploded ordnance devices that kill and maim dozens each year. — Reuters

BANGKOK — Thai police cannot find 15 suspects in connection with a bomb at a shrine in Bangkook last year that killed 20 people, an officer said on Wednesday, as two ethnic Uighur Muslims from China accused of involvement appeared in a military court.

No group claimed responsibility for the 17 August blast at a Erawan Shrine, a central tourist spot popular with visitors from China and elsewhere in Asia. Five of the dead were from China and two from Hong Kong. More than 120 people were wounded.

The suspects and even officials suspected the attack was linked to Uighur sympathisers angered by Thailand’s deportation of more than 100 Uighurs to China the previous month.

But police ruled out “terrorism” and said the attack was retaliation for a crackdown on human-smuggling.

The two suspects who were arrested — Yusufu Mieraili and Adem Karadag — are Uighur Muslims, a minority from western China who speak a Turkic language. They have denied all charges.

“We don’t know where they are,” deputy police spokesman Major General Wattanakchai told Reuters. “The perpetrators have done their utmost to escape.”

Shaven-headed and barefoot, Mieraili and Karadag — who is also known as Bilal Mohammed — were led in handcuffs and leg shackles into a cramped court in Bangkok’s old city.

The defendants lawyers said more than 500 witnesses could be called for the prosecution and defense, and that the high-profile trial could last a year or more.

BANGKOK — Thai police say 15 bomb suspects at large as two appear in court.

Suspects of last year’s Bangkok blast Bilal Mohammed (front) (also known as Adem Karadag) and Yusufu Mieraili are escorted by prison officers as they arrive at the military court in Bangkok, Thailand, on 20 April, 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Communist Laos appoints new president, prime minister
China angered by Britain’s comments on South China Sea

THE HAGUE — China expressed anger on Wednesday after a senior British official said attacks on tugboats in Philippine waters could undermine the country’s sovereignty.

Chinese dredging vessels are purportedly seen in the waters around Mischief Reef in the disputed Spratly Islands in the South China Sea in this still image from video taken by a P-8A Poseidon surveillance aircraft provided by the United States Navy on 21 May, 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

Japan offers no comment on Australia submarine bid rejection report

TOKYO — Japan’s top government spokesman on Wednesday refused to confirm or deny a report from an Australian news outlet that the Australian government has eliminated Japan from the bidding process for the construction of a fleet of navy submarines.

The report from ABC News stated that a decision on the contract is due to be announced next Wednesday, and added that while it is not clear if the winner has already been chosen, the Australian Cabinet’s National Security Committee “has all but eliminated the Japanese bid to build.”

Asked by a reporter whether he could confirm ABC’s statement, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said he could not comment on the matter.

Japanese officials, citing the principle of neutrality, said they have refused to confirm or deny a report by Australian media of talks between Japanese defense officials and their Australian counterparts on the submarine deal.

Suga declined to comment on the matter.

Japanese Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera on Wednesday brushed off ABC’s report and said the government on Wednesday brushed aside a UN rights expert’s concerns about its influence over the media, saying the country has always upheld freedom of expression.

“We are extremely dissatisfied.”

Suga also denied reports that China had pressed Japan to build a submarine fleet.

Chinese dredging vessels are purportedly seen in the waters around Mischief Reef in the disputed Spratly Islands in the South China Sea in this still image from video taken by a P-8A Poseidon surveillance aircraft provided by the United States Navy on 21 May, 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

Japan denies UN expert’s accusation gov’t exerted pressure on media

TOKYO — The Japanese government on Wednesday brushed aside a UN rights expert’s concerns about its influence over the media, saying the country has always upheld freedom of expression.

“It is regrettable that the Japanese government’s explanation was not sufficiently reflected” in the report and opinions of David Kaye, UN special rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Foreign Press Secretary Yaeuhisa Kawamura told a press conference.

Kaye aired his concerns on Tuesday as he concluded a weeklong research on the situation regarding freedom of expression in Japan that included meetings with government officials, civic groups, journalists and lawyers.

“The government has never exerted pressure on the media,” Kawamura said, in response to Kaye’s comments Tuesday in which he said “the independence of the press is facing serious threats” from the Japanese government, citing the broadcast law and the contentious expression in Japan that included meetings with government officials, civic groups, journalists and lawyers.

“This is a serious concern,” he said.}

Philippine army urges no payments to free foreign captives

MANILA — The Philippines has urged no payments to be made to free foreign captives held by Muslim rebels.

A Philippine military spokesman was responding to media reports on Tuesday that quoted an Indonesian minister as saying a Taiwan firm would pay to release 10 Indonesian hostages held by Abu Sayyaf rebels.

A combined 18 crew from Indonesia and Malaysia have been taken captive in three separate incidents in the South China Sea.

Indonesia’s coordination minister for political, legal and security affairs, Lastru Pandjaitan, was quoted as saying a Taiwan firm was prepared to pay 50 million pesos ($1.08 million) to free the crew held since late March.

The Philippines rarely publicises ransom payments and officials sometimes refer to them euphemistically as “board and lodgings”.

Padilla said there were ongoing military operations to rescue the captives. “The safety of the kidnap victims is our primordial concern,” he added.

Five other foreign nationals, including two Canadians, are also held on the remote southern island of Jolo, a stronghold of the small but violent al Qaeda-linked group, known for beheading, bombings and extortion.

Militants of the small but violent al Qaeda-linked group, known for beheading, bombings and extortion.

Nei Reeder, Canada’s ambassador to the Philippines, expressed serious concern over an Abu Sayyaf threat to behead two of its citizens on 25 April if their families and government failed to pay 300 million pesos for each of them. “We are very, very concerned about the situation of our nationals,” Reeder told reporters in Manila.

“We are doing our best for their recovery and we hope that they’ll be safe and sound and released very soon.”

Security is precarious in the south of the largely Christian Philippines, despite a 2014 peace pact between the government and the largest Muslim rebel group that ended 45 years of conflict.

—Reuters
Myanmar’s Yangon Stock Exchange draws interest from local investors

YANGON Myanmar’s Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX) has drawn interest from local investors as its weekly sale stood at over 20 billion kyats (about 20.641 million U.S. dollars) by the first week of this month before the water festival.

Trading on YSX has closed for the long water festival holidays until next week.

Even on the first trading day, March 25, the first listed company, First Myanmar Investment (FMI) received more market order volume than its sale offer. The market order reached over 37,000 while sales offer stood at over 22,000 with the value of 26,000 kyats (21.5 U.S. dollars) at the opening stage.

After the first trading period of the day, the company’s trading volume reached 42,610 shares. The highest volume of shares were traded on March 29 with 210,752 shares worth 8.641 billion kyats (about 7.3 million U.S. dollars). The per share value on that day hit as highest as that of the previous days with 41,000 kyats.

The YSX will reopen on Thursday.

Government officials and business people pose for documentary photos at the opening of the Yangon Stock Exchange in Yangon. PHOTO: GNLM

Aung Thura told Xinhua that it was a normal status for a capital market. The highest trading in early days were due to people’s interests as a new market.

The YSX officially began trading on March 25 with only one listed company, First Myanmar Investment (FMI), being available for transactions. YSX was launched last December with six listed companies, two securities companies and one fund settlement bank although it was not ready for trading by then.

If Myanmar’s new Company Act, which allows foreign investors to join YSX, is submitted to the new parliament, YSX’s presence will be at a larger stage, according to Aung Thura.

Aung Thura said that it was of utmost importance to safeguarding our sovereignty and national integrity, but a strong army itself is really nothing without public support.

Simply put, if the strength of a nation is related to the might of its army, then the strength of the army depends on its soldiers. In addition, the strength of the soldiers lies in the support of their families and the people in general.

The people and the armed forces must come together to ward off future alien invasions. All things considered, now is the time for the armed forces and the people to be aware that their inseparable bond is a thing that matters most in the defence of the country.

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Trading on YSX has closed for the long water festival holidays until next week.

Even on the first trading day, March 25, the first listed company, First Myanmar Investment (FMI) received more market order volume than its sale offer. The market order reached over 37,000 while sales offer stood at over 22,000 with the value of 26,000 kyats (21.5 U.S. dollars) at the opening stage.

After the first trading period of the day, the company’s trading volume reached 42,610 shares. The highest volume of shares were traded on March 29 with 210,752 shares worth 8.641 billion kyats (about 7.3 million U.S. dollars). The per share value on that day hit as highest as that of the previous days with 41,000 kyats.

The YSX will reopen on Thursday.

Government officials and business people pose for documentary photos at the opening of the Yangon Stock Exchange in Yangon. PHOTO: GNLM

Aung Thura told Xinhua that it was a normal status for a capital market. The highest trading in early days were due to people’s interests as a new market.

The YSX officially began trading on March 25 with only one listed company, First Myanmar Investment (FMI), being available for transactions. YSX was launched last December with six listed companies, two securities companies and one fund settlement bank although it was not ready for trading by then.

If Myanmar’s new Company Act, which allows foreign investors to join YSX, is submitted to the new parliament, YSX’s presence will be at a larger stage, according to Aung Thura.

Aung Thura said that it was of utmost importance to safeguarding our sovereignty and national integrity, but a strong army itself is really nothing without public support.

Simply put, if the strength of a nation is related to the might of its army, then the strength of the army depends on its soldiers. In addition, the strength of the soldiers lies in the support of their families and the people in general.

The people and the armed forces must come together to ward off future alien invasions. All things considered, now is the time for the armed forces and the people to be aware that their inseparable bond is a thing that matters most in the defence of the country.
ASEAN puppetry exchange programme to begin in May

THE ASEAN puppetry exchange programme is scheduled to be held in Yangon in May with the aim of sharing traditional such folk arts among the 10 member countries, one of organisers said.

With the assistance of the Japanese embassy in Yangon, the programme will mainly cover a discussion on how to control a puppet using various methods and on different forms of performance in each country, said U Khin Maung Htwe, the art director of Htwe Oo Myanmar Traditional Puppet Theatre.

In addition, a collective marionette show will also be performed during the event by all the teams involved in the programme.

The next host country for the exchange programme is Laos, which will host a puppetry exchange event in September 2016.

Puppetry is one of the most popular traditional arts in Myanmar. It is usually performed at pagoda festivals. Researchers say traditional Myanmar marionettes were first designed in the 1780s.

According to U Khin Maung Htwe, there are at most 20 professional puppeteers across the country and a few puppet-makers, mainly in Yangon and Mandalay.

“Unity among puppeteers is so crucial for the existence of puppetry world,” he said—200

Fire department to spend K 27 billion on new facilities

THE Yangon Region Fire Services Department plans to use K 23 billion (US$22,881,356) to purchase fire facilities the department needs within the 2016-2017 fiscal year, a department spokesman said.

The budget will cover the purchase of fire engines and four water tanks, as well as the construction of 15 service centres.

Moreover, the department will hire an additional 250 members as the existing 986 staff members are insufficient.—200

Learning to Learn


There’s a lot of truth in the above quotation, after all, formal learning in Institutions of Education will take most people up to an age just past youth with their life span probably twice those years to boot. The prime time of life will be spent in an occupation to earn a living and enter the marriage institution, adding more qualifications may hardly be an intention.

Meanwhile, failing to learn and acquire new knowledge due to the exponential rate at which it increases may leave many floundering through life as ‘illiterates’. Not being aware of the need to learn, unlearn and relearn, will not enable one to keep up with changes of concern. Institutions of Continuing Education may be of help but the burden of learning will be upon one’s own self. The best way to learning nowadays, as many would agree is through the Internet which requires computer literacy. The internet opens windows to the world of knowledge and with the recent proliferation of all kinds of IT devices who want to broaden his/her horizon, the internet may access.

The Institutions of Continuing Education could include functions of recognizing self-learning and awarding qualifications, providing opportunities for higher learning to the population which can be an asset for one’s occupational progression.

Learning may also be applicable to experiential learning some of which may quite require unlearning and relearning for changing the attitudes and mindsets of individuals to be more attuned to the Rule of Law in the practice of democracy.

Lokethar

Letter to the editor

Dear Editor,

I agree with the opinion of Khin Maung Aye in his comments on “Two development concepts from the State Counsellor’s message” in OPINION column of 19 April issue of GNLM.

But I am not satisfied with his usage of the word “Regime” for NLD government. Oxford Dictionary define “regime” as – a method or system of government, especially one that has not been elected in a fair way: a fascist/ totalitarian/ military regime.

NLD government was elected by landslide majority of voters in the whole country in both Hluttaws in general election held on 8 Nov. last year. The election was recognized as free and fair by international communities such as UN, EU, Carter Center and countries around the world. The election result was duly accepted by incumbent USDP and the Tatmadaw.

NLD government, emerged from such a widely-respected ways and means should not be called “regime”. I don’t think KMA intentionally use the word “regime”. But if he really did so, it is unfair and not correct.

Mgko Gyi.

Mawlamyine to host multimedia art exhibition

A COLLECTIVE art event titled the Mawlamyine Art Exhibition is being held in the capital of Mon State starting on 21 April, showcasing a wide variety of works in a single place.

The event runs until 25 April at the market on Kanna Road in Setse Ward, Mawlamyine, featuring works by local painters, poets, sculptors, photographers, designers, cartoonists and musicians.

This is the second time the event has been held in Mawlamyine. The organisers expect to attract more visitors than last year’s event.—200
After big New York wins, Trump and Clinton cast themselves as inevitable

NEW YORK — Republican Donald Trump and Democrat Hillary Clinton focused their campaign efforts on winning over voters in New York after their respective wins in the state's primary. Trump, 69, predicted some "amazing weeks" ahead for his campaign.

Still, he has a long way to go to seal the nomination and begin trying to heal the wounds in his bitterly divided party. Some fence-mending may happen when he sends campaign advisers to the RNC meeting starting in Hollywood, Florida, on Wednesday. Trump will be vying for 55 of New York's 95 delegates, which could move him closer to the 1,237 needed to win the nomination outright. Anything short of that will lead to a contested convention when Republicans hold their national convention in Cleveland.

"There's only two issues left for Republicans: Will Trump get 50 per cent of the delegates prior to Cleveland, and if not, how close will he be? New York gives him a nice boost, but it will take weeks before we know the answer," said Ari Fleischer, who was White House press secretary under President George W. Bush.

Cruz, a 45-year-old US senator from Texas, came in third in New York and gave his primary night speech in Philadelphia, where he was already focused on running in Pennsylvania. He called on Republicans to unite around his candidacy.

Ohio Governor John Kasich, 63, a long-shot candidate, is seeking to use his second-place showing in New York as proof he is emerging as Trump's central challenger in the states that come up next on the calendar.

Trump wins New York: "We don't have much of a race anymore."

Clinton, a former US senator from New York, former secretary of state and former first lady, got nowhere near the knockout punch she needed to finally put Sanders away.

Trump has adopted a more focused performance, casting themselves as inevitable after big New York wins, Trump and Clinton cast themselves as inevitable.
US says North Korean remittances at risk if it conducts nuclear test

WASHINGTON — A fifth North Korean nuclear test could trigger new sanctions including an effort to choke off hard currency earnings by its workers abroad, the top US diplomat for the Asia-Pacific region has said.

"Like a regimen of medicine, the dosage can be upped when the effects fall short of what’s required," Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Danny Russel told Reuters on Tuesday.

Russel made clear he was speaking about the possibility of fresh sanctions by the UN Security Council, the United States on its own, or by a group of like-minded states from the European Union and Southeast Asia, along with the United States.

North Korea conducted a fourth nuclear test in January and a long-range rocket launch the following month, triggering expanded UN sanctions aimed at choking off its funds for its atomic weapons programme.

Some experts expect North Korea to conduct a fifth nuclear test in the near future, possibly before a ruling party congress in early May, following an embarrassing failure of an intercontinental-range rocket last week.

Estimates of North Korean workers abroad vary widely but a study by the South’s state-run Central Intelligence Agency put the number as high as 150,000, primarily in China and Russia, sending back as much as $900 million annually. North Koreans are known to work abroad in restaurants and on construction sites, and also as doctors.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un looks at a rocket warhead tip after a simulated test of atmospheric re-entry of a ballistic missile. Photo: Reuters

The effectiveness of current, or any new, sanctions depends heavily on them being fully implemented by China, North Korea’s neighbour, the closest thing it has to an ally and by far its largest trading partner, US officials and analysts say.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hua Chunying said all sides should refrain from doing or saying anything to worsen tensions, and remain calm and exercise restraint to get the talks process back on track.

"I don’t want to answer a hypothetical question," she told a news briefing on Wednesday, when asked if China would support new, tougher sanctions in the event of another nuclear test. If the North were to test a fifth nuclear device, the United States and its allies South Korea and Japan could also take unspecified "defence-related measures," Russel said. "As the threat grows, then our defensive capabilities need to adjust as well," he said, stressing that there was also a diplomatic route that the North could take by reviving long-dormant negotiations on curbing its nuclear programme.

South Korean Unification Ministry spokesman Jeong Joon-hee downplayed the prospect that an upcoming visit to New York by North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Su Yong to attend a UN climate conference would create an opening for engagement.

"At a time when the North is talking of more provocation, I think it’s time to put more weight on sanctions rather than dialogue," Jeong told a briefing in Seoul on Wednesday.

Russel laid out what he called the possible "universe" of how the US government and others might respond to a fifth test and he acknowledged that sanctions have failed to deter North Korea, which tested its first nuclear device in October 2006. He stressed that no decisions had yet been made and said he could not preview a response to an event that has yet to occur.

US General Vincent Brooks, whom President Barack Obama has nominated to lead American forces in South Korea, said on Tuesday that China was frustrated over North Korea’s behaviour, including its nuclear advancements, but was unwilling to apply pressure that could threaten the viability of Kim Jong Un’s government.

Brooks also said Kim appeared more "risk-tolerant, arrogant and impulsive" than his father, Kim Jong II. He was more aggressive in ignoring international concerns while advancing the North’s nuclear programme, the general said.

Russel said it would take time to judge how well the latest sanctions were being enforced, but Beijing had "exhausted traditional options of encouraging and cajoling and persuading the North Koreans and they have clearly shifted to the application of pressure."

"There is an argument to be made that serious and sustained pressure on North Korea has never before been undertaken," he said. "The degree to which the Chinese economy depends on China and access to China is such that this stated resolve on the part of China, I think, constitutes something of a new ball game."

Death toll from blast in Afghan capital Kabul rises to 64

KABUL — The casualty total from Tuesday’s major attack in Kabul has risen to 64 killed, more than double the total previously estimated by police, and 347 wounded, Afghan Interior Ministry spokesman Sediq Sedidqi said.

He said on Wednesday most of those killed in the attack, which hit a security services office in the heart of the government and diplomatic area of the Afghan capital, were civilians.

The attack, which was quickly claimed by the Taliban, was the deadliest single incident of its kind in Kabul since 2011 and came only days after the Islamist insurgent movement announced the start of its annual spring offensive.

It began at around 9:00 am (0530GMT), in the middle of the morning rush hour, when a suicide bomber in a vehicle packed with explosives blew himself up in front of an office of a department of the National Security Directorate.

In a pattern similar to major attacks in Kabul and other Afghan cities, the bombing was followed by one or more gunmen who engaged in an extended shootout with security forces.

The attack underlined concerns raised in a United Nations report this week, which said an increase in urban warfare had caused a spike in civilian casualties during the first three months of the year.

Turkish police detain 20 people over links to cleric Gulen: Anadolu

ISTANBUL — Turkish police on Wednesday detained 20 people over their alleged links to a movement led by US-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, the state-run Anadolu Agency said.

It said the arrests were made in an operation carried out in the southern provinces of Osmaniye, Adana, Mersin and Isparta, and that teachers and businessmen were among those detained.

President Tayyip 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 some schools and are active in the media industry, denies the charges.

The two men were allies until police and prosecutors seen as sympathetic to Gulen opened a corruption inquiry into Erdogan’s inner circle in 2013. Thousands of police officers, prosecutors and judges were sacked or reassigned for alleged links to Gulen.

Earlier in the week, the police detained 100 people including executives of a prominent Turkish construction company over allegations of funding Gulen’s movement. — Reuters

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Global HIV drive hampered without drugs for ‘neglected’ West and Central Africa

DAKAR — A global drive to help curb the HIV epidemic by 2020 will fail unless millions of people with the virus in West and Central Africa receive life-saving drugs, Médecins Sans Frontiéres (MSF) said on Wednesday.

The United Nations AIDS programme (UNAIDS) launched a five-year treatment programme in 2014 to ensure that by 2020 almost all people with HIV worldwide know their status and receive treatment.

The drugs used to treat HIV also help to curb the spread of the virus.

Only one in four adults and one in 10 children living with HIV in West and Central Africa have access to antiretroviral (ARV) drugs, compared to almost half of HIV sufferers in Eastern and Southern Africa, MSF said.

HIV treatment is not considered a priority in West and Central Africa by donors or governments, as the region has a smaller percentage of people infected with HIV than Eastern and Southern Africa, said Mit Philips, health policy advisor at MSF.

“Donors focus mostly on high prevalence countries, like in Southern Africa, where everyone knows someone affected by HIV,” Philips told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone from Brussels.

Parts of Southern Africa have the world’s highest HIV rates, including Swaziland where 27 per cent of people aged 15 to 49 have HIV, and South Africa which has a prevalence rate of nearly 20 per cent.

“People with HIV in West and Central Africa are neglected ... the low prevalence rate is misleading but means there is a lack of interest and that the disease is less visible in society,” Philips added.

Two per cent of people in West and Central Africa have HIV, yet the region accounts for one in five new infections annually worldwide, one in four AIDS-related deaths and almost half of all children born with HIV, according to MSF.

While conflict across the region and epidemics of other diseases like Ebola have hindered HIV treatment, stigma, weak health systems and lack of political will have worsened the situation, MSF said in a report published on Wednesday.

“Many people face an obstacle course to obtain ARV drugs — they face stigma within society and even prejudice from health workers, struggle to pay transport or consultation fees, and often find there are low stocks of the drugs,” Philips said. Some 36.9 million people worldwide are living with HIV, which is spread through blood, semen and breast milk and causes AIDS, and more than half of them do not have access to treatment. Many do not know they have the virus.

UNAIDS said in November that its treatment programme, called 90-90-90, was starting to show results as the nearly 16 million people being treated by June 2015 was double the number in 2010.—Reuters

US chief justice uses sign language as deaf lawyers sworn in

WASHINGTON — In an historic first, US Chief Justice John Roberts used sign language from the Supreme Court bench on Tuesday as he welcomed a dozen deaf and hard-of-hearing lawyers who took part in a ceremony authorizing them to argue cases before the court.

The 12 members of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Bar Association were sworn in as members of the Supreme Court bar.

After they were presented to the court for admission, Roberts signed in American Sign Language: “Your motion is granted.”

Membership in the Supreme Court bar allows a lawyer to argue cases before the justices but most of its members never actually do so.

Roberts, appointed by Republican President George W. Bush in 2005, is believed to be the first US chief justice to use sign language from the bench. It was also the first time members of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Bar Association took part in a ceremony at the court.

The lawyers then stayed for oral arguments in two cases in the ornate courtroom, assisted by an interpreter standing in front of the mahogany bench where the eight justices sit.

The lawyers were permitted to use an instant transcription service that was transmitted to electronic devices.

Normally, no electronic devices are allowed in the courtroom. One of the attorneys, Teresa Curtis of the Weitz & Luxenberg law firm, said in a statement the event was aimed at encouraging more people with disabilities to embark on legal careers.

When she began her law career in the late 1980s, there was only a handful of deaf lawyers in the United States, while now there are around 250, Curtis said.

In 1982, a deaf lawyer, Michael Chatoff, argued a case before the Supreme Court, assisted by a real-time transcription system.

That case concerned whether a school board was required to provide a deaf student with a sign-language interpreter. Chatoff lost the case in a 6-3 ruling.—Reuters

Hopes of finding Ecuador quake survivors fade as death toll nears 500

PEDERNALES, (Ecuador) — Rescuers in Ecuador were losing hope on Tuesday of finding more survivors from an earthquake that killed nearly 500 people and dealt a shattering blow to the South American OPEC country’s already fragile economy.

“Praying for miracles, disheartened family members beseeched rescue teams to find missing loved ones as they used dogs, bare hands and excavators to hunt through debris of flattened homes, hotels and stores in the hardest-hit Pacific coastal region.”

The death toll stood at 480 on Tuesday afternoon but was expected to rise.

The 7.8 magnitude quake, Ecuador’s worst in decades, destroyed or damaged about 1,500 buildings, triggered mudslides and left some 20,500 people sleeping in shelters, according to the government.—Reuters
Djuric: Deals on ID cards, trucks, elections

BRUSSELS — Director of the Serbian Government Office for Kosovo-Metohija Marko Djuric said early on Wednesday that, after more than 18 hours of talks with representatives of Pristina, an agreement had been reached on ID cards, the crossing of trucks, visits by Serbian officials to Kosovo-Metohija (KIM) and elections.

Underlining the importance of the deals in the "four fundamental fields" for Serbs in KIM, Djuric told Tanjug that IDs issued by the Serbian authorities could be used in Kosovo-Metohija freely as had been the case so far, adding that the talks on ID cards would continue.

As for the transport of dangerous goods, the truck blockade will end on 25 April, he said. When it comes to the 24 April elections, they will be held as in 2014, with OSCE observers, Djuric said, adding there would be 90 polling stations in KIM. Serbian officials will not be banned from entering KIM, Djuric said, adding he would visit the province on Thursday.

The director of the Office for Kosovo-Metohija described the negotiations as "lengthy and very difficult", noting that the deals were a result of the diplomatic efforts invested over several weeks, in which Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic had also taken part.

"I think we have achieved a good result for our country and our people in KIM," Djuric concluded.—Tanjug

UK airport sniffer dogs good at finding sausages, but not drugs

LONDON — A team of sniffer dogs set up at a British airport at a cost of 1.25 million pounds ($1.7 million) have proved adept at discovering small amounts of cheese and sausages but not so good at finding smuggled drugs, a report said on Thursday.

An inspection of border security at Manchester Airport in northern England found that during a seven-month period, the six dogs had failed to find any illegal class A drugs, those considered the most dangerous such as heroin or cocaine.

"The deterrent effect of the detection dogs was difficult to measure, but seizures alone represented a low return on investment, given 1.25 million spent on new kennels and the costs of operating the unit," said the report by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration.

Each dog has its own speciality in detecting goods such as drugs, tobacco, cash and meat being illegally brought into the airport by the 22 million passengers who use it annually. However the report found that although the sniffs had helped customs seize 46 kg of cigarettes and 181 kg of meat, they had uncovered no class A drugs between November 2014 and June 2015 even though this was a "very high" priority.

It said one dog trained to find smuggled animal products had made "multiple accurate detections, but most were of small amounts of cheese or sausages, wrongly brought back by returning British holiday-makers and posing minimal risk to UK public health".

Managers are now examining how better to deploy the dogs, the report said.—Reuters

French baker fires his savior instead of giving him his business

PARIS — A French baker who promised to give his business to the homeless man that saved his life has fired him instead.

Michel Flamant was close to dying of carbon monoxide poisoning when Jerome Aucant, the homeless man, raised the alarm. Flamant caused a minor media sensation by pledging to sell his business to Aucant for one euro ($1.13). The 62-year-old said the abrupt change came after he went to his bakery shortly before midnight and found his would-be successor had invited a bunch of friends to drink on the premises in his absence.

"Last week, I returned to the bakery at 0330, 11 at night as usual and discovered that Jerome had set up a bar of sorts with wine and beer, and all his homeless friends in the oven room. I told him this was not part of the deal," Flamant told the French state radio channel France Bleu.

"Jerome had sent me notices telling me not to come back but I came after he went to his room. I told him this was not part of the deal," Flamant told the French state radio channel France Bleu.

"I told him to pack his bags and go," said the baker, who promised to give his business to the homeless man who had saved his life.

French chef Jerome Aucant has gone viral on French social media, having been invited by a baker to work for free, in return for saving his life, in the event that the baker was to die of carbon monoxide poisoning.

The 62-year-old man was found unconscious and连接ing to his bakery at 1030, 11 at night and found his would-be successor had invited a bunch of friends to drink on the premises in his absence.

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U.S. Airways Q1 revenue 1 pct lower than $1.4 bln target

BANGKOK — Thai Airways Q1 revenue came in 1 per cent below its 49 billion baht ($1.4 billion) target, the company’s President Charamporn Juengsri said on Wednesday. Thailand’s national carrier is among a number of state-controlled companies undergoing reform since the military seized power in May 2014.

It posted a smaller annual loss in 2015, mainly due to decline in operating expenses and fuel oil costs.—Reuters

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French bakery owner has fired his former savior after he promised to give him the business

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A police dog handler talks with a colleague as his sniffer dog waits outside the GMEX (Greater Manchester Exhibition centre) in Manchester, northern England, on 21 September 2006. Photo: Reuters
AC/DC frontman says ‘crushed’ over hearing loss, but not retired

LONDON — Brian Johnson, lead singer of veteran Australian rock group AC/DC, said on Tuesday he was “personally crushed” to give up touring due to his hearing loss, but vowed that he was not retiring and will continue to record with the band in the studio.

Johnson, 68, said in a statement that he wanted to explain why the band was forced in March to postpone 10 of its US shows for its “Rock or Bust” tour this year. The British singer was replaced by Guns N’ Roses frontman Axl Rose for the rest of AC/DC’s European and US shows.

Johnson said he had partial hearing loss, which affects his performance onstage, and he was advised by doctors in March that he risked “total deafness” if he continued to tour in large venues. Johnson called it “the darkest day of my professional life.”

“I am personally crushed by this development more than anything one could ever imagine,” he said.

“Being part of AC/DC, making records and performing for the millions of devoted fans this past 36 years has been my life’s work. I cannot imagine going forward without being part of that, but for now I have no choice.”

AC/DC, known for its blazing guitars and full-throated vocals on songs such as “Back in Black” and “Highway to Hell,” was supposed to perform in US cities in March and April. The shows have yet to be rescheduled, but are expected to take place later this year.

Johnson said he was not retiring and that he is able to continue recording in studios with the band.

“I am hoping that in time my hearing will improve and allow me to return to live concert performances. While the outcome is uncertain, my attitude is optimistic,” he said.—Reuters

May the royal force be with you: British princes get ‘Star Wars’ peek

LONDON — Battling with light sabers and sitting in an A-wing fighter, Britain’s royal princes got a taste of the “Star Wars” universe on Tuesday when they visited the set of latest episode in the sci-fi saga.

Accompanied by Daisy Ridley and John Boyega, the young stars of “The Force Awakens,” and Luke Skywalker actor Mark Hamill, Prince William and Prince Harry toured Pinewood studios outside London, where “Star Wars: Episode VIII” is being made. In a tweet, Kensington Palace said the visit was to “recognise the wealth of fantastic British creative talent involved” in making “Star Wars” films.

Prince William, Duke of Cambridge and Prince Harry were touring Pinewood to visit the production workshops and meet the creative teams working behind the scenes on the Star Wars films. The princes met the creative teams working behind the scenes, checked out props and posed with characters such as Chewbacca and droid BB-8.

“Star Wars: Episode VIII” is due for release in December 2017.—Reuters

Vin Diesel shares ‘Fast & Furious 8’ movie poster

LOS ANGELES — Action star Vin Diesel shared the poster of upcoming “Fast & Furious 8.”

“New Roads Ahead,” the poster reads above a photo of Diesel looking somber into the distance.

The text continues with, “‘Furious 8.’ 14 April. In Theaters and IMAX.”

This is the first film sans the “Fast & Furious” star Paul Walkers, who passed away in November 2013.

Diesel, 48, recently announced on Instagram that there would be an entire trilogy, rounding out the franchise to an even 10.

“Fast 8” is set for release 14 April 2017, while “Fast 9” and “Fast 10” will hit the theaters on 19 April 2019, and 2 April 2021, respectively.

F. Gary Gray is helming the project with Charlize Theron and Scott Eastwood set to join the franchise, while Michelle Rodriguez, Jason Statham and Dwanye Johnson are signed on to reprise their roles.—PTI

Amitabh Bachchan pays tribute to Lalita Pawar

MUMBAI — Megastar Amitabh Bachchan has paid tribute to character actor Lalita Pawar on her 100th birth anniversary.


Born in Nasik, Pawar started her acting career at age nine with 1928 film “Raja Harishchandra”.

Known particularly for playing scheming mother-in-law in the movies, she was honoured with Sangeet Natak Akademi award in 1961.—PTI

Adele’s songs reworked into lullabies

LONDON — Oscar-winning singer Adele’s biggest hits have been converted into lullabies.

The Rockabye Baby brand has reworked 27-year-old British singer’s songs like “Chasing Pavements,” “Someone Like You,” “Make You Feel My Love” and “Skyfall,” reported Digital Spy.

In the past the company has converted the music of more than 70 artists to infant-friendly nighttime tunes, from the likes of U2, Coldplay, Foo Fighters, Maroon 5, Rihanna and Taylor Swift.

“Lullaby Renditions of Adele” will be out on 29 April.—PTI

‘Everybody Loves Raymond’ actress Doris Roberts dies

LOS ANGELES — The Hollywood community is mourning the loss of veteran actress Doris Roberts, who died on overnight on Sunday at the age of 90.

The five time Emmy award winning actress reportedly passed away from natural causes.

Roberts, whose long career stretched decades through television, stage and film, is best known for her role as Marie, the over-involved mother of Ray Romano in the long running hit television series, “Everybody Loves Raymond.”—Reuters
**Shirley Temple’s rare blue diamond ring fails to sell at auction**

Fancy Deep Blue diamond ring, once owned by child star Shirley Temple, is displayed at Sotheby’s in New York on 18 March 2016. Photo: Reuters

NEW YORK — Sotheby’s highlight at its Magnificent Jewels auction in New York this week was a bouncy, curly-haired young actress in 1930s movies such as “Bright Eyes,” “Heidi” and “Curly Top.” Under her married name, Shirley Temple Black, she forged a career as an ambassador and died at age 85 in 2014.

“The Shirley Temple Blue Diamond is an exceptional stone in quality, rarity and provenance. It has been an honour to have its story with collectors, connoisseurs and Temple’s loyal fans over the past few months,” Sotheby’s said in a statement.

“Unfortunately, tonight wasn’t its night in the salesroom, but we remain fully confident that it will find a buyer.”

The ring was the highlight at Sotheby’s Magnificent Jewels sale, which fetched nearly $30 million across more than 300 lots.

Other top items at the auction included a platinum and fancy purple-pink diamond ring that sold for $4.5 million, a platinum and diamond ring weighing 19.25 carats that fetched $1.9 million and a fancy light blue diamond ring weighing 5.06 carats that sold for $1.2 million.

Temple won legions of fans as a bouncy, curly-haired young actress in 1930s movies such as “Bright Eyes,” “Heidi” and “Curly Top.” Under her married name, Shirley Temple Black, she forged a career as an ambassador and died at age 85 in 2014.

**India says it still wants back British queen’s crown jewel**

NEW DELHI — India will make all possible efforts to get back the Koh-i-Noor Diamond from Britain despite comments by New Delhi’s solicitor general that the priceless jewel should stay with the former colonial ruler, the government said on Tuesday.

India has repeatedly demanded that Britain return the 105-carat diamond, which was presented to Queen Victoria in 1850 and today sits on display as part of the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London.

India’s solicitor general surprised many on Monday when he told the Supreme Court that his country should forget its claims to the jewel because it was given to Britain as a gift by an Indian king in 1851, rather than stolen as many Indians today believe.

The government said on Tuesday its view did not represent its own and that it was yet to give its opinion to the court, which is hearing a case demanding the diamond be returned.

“The Government of India further reiterates its resolve to make all possible efforts to bring back the Koh-i-Noor Diamond in an amicable manner,” the ministry of culture said.

The ministry said the stone was a “valued piece of art with strong roots in our nation’s history” and that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was determined to get it back.

“A lawyer in India’s neighbour Pakistan last year filed a court petition calling for the stone’s return. India and Pakistan became two different countries with partition in 1947, when they became independent from Britain.

“The Koh-i-Noor is set in the crown worn by Queen Elizabeth, the mother of the reigning monarch, at the coronation of her husband George VI in 1937, and was placed on her coffin at her funeral in 2002. The Duchess of Cambridge, who last week visited India with her husband, Prince William, will wear the crown on official occasions when she becomes queen consort. William is second in line to the British throne.”— Reuters

**Visa changes promise easier travel for Chinese to New Zealand**

WELLINGTON — Chinese visitors to New Zealand will soon find travel easier with a raft of new visa initiatives, Immigration Minister Michael Woodhouse said Tuesday.

The introduction of “e-visas” enabled Chinese nationals to now apply online, and a Chinese logon service, allowing a complete online Chinese language application process, from registration to approval, said Woodhouse.

Later this year applicants would also be able to pay for online visa applications using China UnionPay debit and credit cards.

“China is New Zealand’s second-largest and fastest growing tourist market,” Woodhouse said in a statement.

“Last year, over 355,000 Chinese citizens visited New Zealand and contributed over 1.6 billion NZ dollars (1.12 billion US dollars) to our economy,” said Woodhouse.

“The government has been looking at ways to make it easier for Chinese travellers to visit New Zealand and ensure they have a positive experience when they come to our country,” he said.

“These measures deliver on our commitment to make all possible efforts to bring back the Koh-i-Noor Diamond in an amicable manner,” the ministry of culture said.

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Manchester City stifled by battling Newcastle

LONDON — Manchester City gave renewed hope to the chasing pack in the battle for a Champions League spot as they were held to a battling 1-1 draw at relegation strugglers Newcastle United on Tuesday.

City, who took the lead when Sergio Aguero headed home from an offside position for his 100th Premier League goal after 14 minutes, were largely stifled by a Newcastle side who levelled through Vurnon Anita after 31 minutes.

City stayed third in the Premier League on 61 points, but the result opened the door in the battle for a top-four finish to their rivals Manchester United who are fifth, five points adrift with a game in hand. Arsenal are fourth on 60 points.

Rafa Benitez’s side, who were denied a late winner when Joe Hart saved brilliantly from Georgio Wijnaldum, stay second-from-bottom on 29 points, but maintain some precious momentum after their weekend victory over Swansea City.

With four games of their season remaining, they are a point adrift of local rivals Sunderland and two behind Norwich City, who are outside the relegation zone in 17th.

City had enjoyed an iron grip on this fixture having won 12 straight Premier League games against Newcastle, while Aguero had plundered 10 goals in his eight appearances against the Magpies.

It was little surprise, therefore, when the visitors took the lead after 15 minutes, with City’s Argentine striker heading them in front from Aleksandar Kolarov’s free kick, even if the goal should not have stood.

Replays showed that Aguero was clearly offside when Kolarov’s set-piece was whipped

Bolt eyes triple ‘three-peat’ and sub-19 200m

NEW YORK — Sprint king Usain Bolt aims to crown his legacy with an unprecedented Olympic three-peat at the Rio Games, and to top that off by running the first ever sub-19 seconds over 200 metres. The long-striding Jamaican suggested he might not stop there, leaving open the chance he could extend his career beyond the 2017 season he has said would be his last. Bolt has already swept the 100 and 200m sprints at the last two Olympics and added gold in the 4x100 relays in both Beijing (2008) and London (2012) with his Jamaican team mates. “Just to defend my titles, to do the three-peat. That’s my main goal. That’s my main focus,” Bolt said on Tuesday after helping sponsors Hublot open their biggest US fine watch store with a grand opening on Fifth Avenue.

“My secondary goal is to try and lower the world record,” added Bolt, who set the mark of 19.3 sec in 2009. “That’s something I really want and I’m really looking forward to it. That would be a big step for me,” he added.

Bolt said he has been gradually rounding into shape after dealing with ankle problems. “I’m feeling OK,” he said. “My coach says my fitness is not exactly where he wants it to be. ‘Starting out this season I had a problem with my ankles and it was a setback but not that bad. We’re getting back on track and he’s happy with the progress I’m making.’

Bolt said he would ramp up his preparations carefully so he can end his Olympic career with a flourish. “I really want to be at my best leading up to the championships. I have two months before the (2017) world championships (in London),” said the six-time Olympic gold medalist.

“And if I still feel like I want to retire, I should. But he says to give it a chance, because I think my coach is pushing me for to go a few more years. We’ll see what happens,” he added.

“Personally, I don’t really want to continue for years and years because it’s getting hard. I have to sacrifice more and more. It takes so much of your time.”

In any event, Bolt said he would not treat 2017 like a farewell tour. “I’m never going to come out and joke or be a joke in a season. I’m a winner, I believe in winning. I hate to lose. I will never come out and say it is a farewell tour. I will want to compete at my best, go to championships and win again.”

As for the legacy he hoped to leave the sport he has dominated for eight years, Bolt spoke about another Hublot spokesman,, Bolt said he would run his time Olympic gold medalist.

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