The government is planning to triple export volumes during its tenure, Commerce Union Minister Dr Than Myint said yesterday in a meeting with local exporters in Yangon, describing the export sector as critical to the country’s economic growth.

“Our country must strive for a threefold increase in its exports in five years, while Viet Nam saw its export volumes increase fourfold in eight years,” Dr Than Myint said.

Currently, the country is engaged in trade mainly with its neighbours, the union minister added, stressing the need to create new links with the Asian, European and American markets.

At the meeting, business people briefed the minister on challenges such as high land rents, high transportation costs and delays, calling for government measures to get rid of black markets.

Dr Than Myint pledged that his ministry would cooperate with relevant organisations in an effort to shut down illegal trade as a national concern.

The government will give capital and technology to private small and medium businesses in an effort to boost exports by three times the current rate, he said.


Myanmar exported over 1.4 million tons of rice to neighboring countries, mostly to China. The total of border trade value in the fiscal year 2015-2016 reached $7.04 billion.—Ko Moe

First chemical residue testing lab to be built in Myanmar

The Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF) and Ministry of and Commerce are currently working together on the drawing up of a plan for construction of a laboratory which can detect chemical residue and pesticide diseases present in rice and fruits, according to the MRF.

Implementation of the aforementioned laboratory will be conducted on the grounds of the Japan International Cooperation Agency’s (JICA) donated Department of Post Harvest Technology Application in Flegu township.

“A submission has been made to the Ministry of Commerce for the upgrading of an existing laboratory to one of an international standard. Not everything can be tested at our current laboratories, having to be sent aboard for testing which costs time as well as money,” said Dr Soe Htun, vice chair of the MRF.

Existing Myanmar laboratories are unable to inspect neither chemical residues nor pesticide diseases, with rice and fruits having to be sent to neighbouring Thailand for testing. “The laboratory will be constructed with a partner company to help alleviate incurred expenses,” added Dr Soe Htun. The construction of an international standard laboratory will cost $2 million, while required laboratory equipment will be purchased through a tender system. Construction expenses will be incurred by the MRF, it is known.—Myitmakha News Agency
Preventive measures in full swing to battle El Niño-triggered water scarcity

The onset of El Niño in summer is likely to set off unusual intense heat across the country and water scarcity in rural areas, the Department of Rural Development quoted meteorologists as predicting.

The department has been engaged in preventive measures to battle rural water shortages since last December by conducting field surveys to collect data concerning vulnerability to water scarcity in rural areas. According to collected data, 1,761 villages in 176 townships all over the country are prone to face water shortages.

Local rural development departments, in collaboration with civil society organizations and UN agencies, have distributed portable water to needy areas, in addition to the provision and construction of water storage facilities.

The government is reported to spend over K2.6 billion (over US$2 million) on supplies of water and construction of water facilities in water scarcity-prone areas from May to July. The department has earmarked over K24 billion (over US$20 million) for spending on rural water availability in more than 2,000 villages in 2016-2017 fiscal year.—Myanmar News Agency

Police refute Bangalis news report

THE Myanamar Police Force refuted yesterday the news report about Bangladesh’s border guard deporting at least 340 Muslim Myanmar nationals.

The announcement of the Myanmar Police Force responded to the news report, which was spread online.

The MFP came one day after the new government.—Myanmar News Agency

Coconut plantations sell for K400 million per acre in Rakhine State

COASTAL coconut plantation owners are enjoying a period of good business in the Rakhine State townships of Gwa as sales of plantations are going for approximately K400 million per acre, according to local real estate agents.

Sales of coconut plantations stagnated in 2015, but the start of the New Year saw business pick up, local real estate agents reported.

“Business is better this year. We experienced a bit of a decline in the market last year. These days, though, people are frequently turning up to purchase coconut plantation land. So far, there have only been sale transactions on these plots of land – we’re not exactly sure how the buyers will utilise their new property,” said Ko Kyaw Myo, a local real estate agent.

Most of the buyers come from companies involved in the hotel sector, though no construction has yet begun on any former plantation land.

“Those that came to purchase our coconut plantations said they intended to build hotels on the land. But no construction has taken place yet. There are also buyers who will resell [the land], should it become profitable,” said U Luu Maung, a Gwa Township resident.

Coconut plantations located within Kanthaya and Kwe Gyne villages, approximately 15-25 miles outside the centre of Gwa, sell for approximately K400 million per acre because of their proximity to scenic coastlines, whereas coconut plantations in other, less scenic locations are valued at just K200 million per acre, according to local residents.—Myitmakha News Agency

Mol and DKK Foundation agree to open more community libraries

The Ministry of Information has entered into an agreement with Daw Khin Kyi Foundation to continue to build more community libraries in remaining regions and states across the country. The ministry and the philanthropic organisation signed a memorandum of understanding at the Ministry of Information in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday, with the aim of enhancing cooperation in opening more libraries.

Daw Khin Kyi Foundation, in cooperation with the Ministry of Information, upgraded the information and Public Relations Department’s library to a community library in Kawthmu township, Yangon Region, in July 2013. The library now provides mobile library services in nearby villages. The organisation is also setting up community libraries in Nay Pyi Taw, Kalaw, Natmauk and MaungmLOY township, as part of an effort to spread knowledge and information to the people. The two bodies will work together in three phases to establish more community libraries across the country.—Myanmar News Agency

Operation delay to cause 100 million baht losses to Milcon Steelpluck

SET-listed Milcon Steel Plc, a joint venture steel plant in Myanmar with Thai and Myanmar partners, expects to suffer 100 million baht in losses from a delay in commercial operations at its plant in Myanmar, the Bangkok Post reported on 22 April.

Sittichai Lessawadrakul, president and chief executive, said the plant, which has a capacity production of steel 850,000 tonnes a year, is ready to go operation but still needs a licence from the Myanmar government.

In the report, he said the licence should have been granted in March. For unknown reasons, however, the Myanmar government has put off the date until May, asking for more paperwork.

The delay raised concerns that the company may fail to start producing steel and deliver it to its clients on time.

Milcon first started investing in the plant last year and has poured 400 million into the factory.

The tell plant located on the Thalawa Industrial Zone.

Mr Sittichai said the company expects steel consumption demand in Myanmar to grow substantially every year in line with the economy.

Currently, the steel consumption in Myanmar averages two to three million tonnes a year.—GNLM
Minister calls for healthy competition between government and private sector

The time has come for the government and the private sector to find markets for their products and remain competitive with each other, Industry Union Minister U Khin Maung Cho told departmental officials and rubber growers in Kyaihto, Mon State, on 22 April.

After a briefing on the production and distribution of rubber, the union minister urged the rubber farmers to husband their resources and make efforts to meet production targets, stressing the importance of using technology to ensure high productivity.

Speaking of market competition, U Khin Maung Cho called for high quality products, saying that end-users will make product evaluation. He also urged farmers to grasp the technical and technological assistance being offered to them by the international community. —Myanmar News Agency

Prosecution will face revelers visiting southern Myanmar island

TOURISM enterprises running transportation services to southern Myanmar’s Bote island, located in Launglon township of Dawei district and well known for its beautiful coral reefs, will be prosecuted in accordance with the hotel and tourism law, according to the Dawei district Department of Hotels and Tourism.

A Ministry of Home Affairs (MOA) document dated 7 September 1999 reveals the famous Bote island of Launglon township was officially ceded to the Mawyawaddy Navy Base, effectively prohibiting travel to the island by non-naval personnel.

“People weren’t allowed to travel to Bote island in the past. But, will the financial prosperity gained by the region from travel enterprises, some have been allowed. That’s all been shut down now though,” said U Naing Win, head of the Dawei district Department of Hotels and Tourism.

The Tanintharyi region’s government reiterated on 22 March 2015 that travel to Bote island was forbidden, as it constituted military owned land, after the Dawei district Department of Hotels and Tourism made a submission the previous January about the area.

Meanwhile, another gale-force wind, accompanied by a squall and a hailstorm, blew roofs off houses and toppled lamp posts in Ywangan Township in southern Shan State on Friday night.

A 35-year old man died when her hut was crushed by a falling tree as a result of the gale-force winds in Monywa on Thursday.

A well-known meteorologist has warned that there is a risk of gale-force winds, accompanied by squalls and hailstorms occurring over next three days.

Dala to receive water purification facility worth K100 million

PLANS are being laid for tenders to be called for the construction of a K100 million water purification facility in Yangon’s underdeveloped southern township of Dala, according to the Water and Sanitation Department of the Yangon City Development Committee (Southern District).

“Only now, with the allocation of a budget, are tenders being called for the construction of the water purification facility. A budget has been given after being finalised. I’m privy to information that the regional government has permitted the project,” said department head U Myint Than. The annual drying up of local reservoirs, together with the prevalence of salt water in the township’s wells, has forced the residents of Dala to confront drinking water shortages every year.

“Water trucks are immediately dispatched to those villages in Dala Township that require drinking water as soon as we are informed of their water needs. We’re not allowed to utilise a budget prior to its allocation, in accordance with budget legislation, but implementation will begin as soon the budget has been issued,” explained U Htway Tin, a representative for Dala Township in the Yangon Region Hluttaw.

A daily drinking water supply between 700,000 and 800,000 gallons is required to service Dala Township. The construction of a water purification facility in the township will be able to entirely fulfil these needs, according to the YCDC Department of Water and Sanitation. —Myitmakha News Agency

Wild weather wreaks havoc in Shan state

GALE-force wind toppled around 1,700 ancient pagodas, destroyed several houses and cut power in an area in southern Shan State on Friday night.

Two-thirds of a cluster of 2478 ancient pagodas which were built in 17th century were destroyed by gale-force winds hit the Shan State tourists attraction places at 8 pm and 10 pm. There was no loss of life in the incident.

Local authorities and the board of trustees of the ancient cultural heritage site held a meeting yesterday and decided to close the area temporarily while they are clearing the area.

Meanwhile, another gale-force wind, accompanied by a squall and a hailstorm, blew roofs off houses and toppled lamp posts in Ywangan Township in southern Shan State on Friday night.

A 35-year old man died when a lamp post fell on him while two others sustained injuries.

A hailstorm, accompanied by a gale-force wind caused havoc in villages in Sagain Township on Friday night, damaging several houses and killing several draught cattle and other farm animals.

In Yezagyo Township alone, roofs of 303 houses were damaged and 20 houses were completely destroyed by a hailstorm on Friday night while two monasteries and one school building were also destroyed.

A 30-year old woman died when her hut was crushed by a falling tree as a result of the gale-force winds in Monywa on Thursday.

A well-known meteorologist has warned that there is a risk of gale-force winds, accompanied by squalls and hailstorms occurring over next three days.

U Tun Lin, the former director-general of the Meteorology and Hydrology Department, said a huge cumulus rain system, caused by El-Nino, has formed over Myanmar.

Several areas in upper Myanmar experienced strong winds, hailstorms, thunder storms and lightning strikes on Thursday evening.

The weather expert has warned that atmospheric instability can trigger rain clouds in the late afternoon in most parts of the country from 21 to 24 April, according to a weather expert.

Massive hailstones fell in Mandalay and Sagaing regions on Thursday, reaching a record high in 50 years.—GNLM

The Tanintharyi region’s government reiterated on 22 March 2015 that travel to Bote island was forbidden, as it constituted military owned land, after the Dawei district Department of Hotels and Tourism made a submission the previous January about the area.

Meanwhile, another gale-force wind, accompanied by a squall and a hailstorm, blew roofs off houses and toppled lamp posts in Ywangan Township in southern Shan State on Friday night.

A 35-year old man died when a lamp post fell on him while two others sustained injuries.

A hailstorm, accompanied by a gale-force wind caused havoc in villages in Sagain Township on Friday night, damaging several houses and killing several draught cattle and other farm animals.

In Yezagyo Township alone, roofs of 303 houses were damaged and 20 houses were completely destroyed by a hailstorm on Friday night while two monasteries and one school building were also destroyed.

A 30-year old woman died when her hut was crushed by a falling tree as a result of the gale-force winds in Monywa on Thursday.

A well-known meteorologist has warned that there is a risk of gale-force winds, accompanied by squalls and hailstorms occurring over next three days.

U Tun Lin, the former director-general of the Meteorology and Hydrology Department, said a huge cumulus rain system, caused by El-Nino, has formed over Myanmar.

Several areas in upper Myanmar experienced strong winds, hailstorms, thunder storms and lightning strikes on Thursday evening.

The weather expert has warned that atmospheric instability can trigger rain clouds in the late afternoon in most parts of the country from 21 to 24 April, according to a weather expert.

Massive hailstones fell in Mandalay and Sagaing regions on Thursday, reaching a record high in 50 years.—GNLM
Police to educate public on human trafficking

ANTI-TRAFFICKING in person Police Force under the Myanmar Police force are aiming to reduce human trafficking in Myanmar by taking preventative measures in the form of a public awareness campaign.

The Anti-Human Trafficking Police Force organised an educational talk on the prevention of Human Trafficking at the St. Joseph’s Church in Dukahtaung Ward, Myintkyina Town, Kachin State on 19 April, and at the Shwe Eik Ward on 20 April. Issues raised in the talks ranged from how to recognise the signs that someone might be a victim of human trafficking and the ever changing and adaptive ways and means of human trafficking.

An official from the Anti-Human Trafficking Police Force explained the differences between human trafficking and human smuggling, methods of recruitment by human traffickers, the history of human trafficking, the process of human trafficking, human trafficking laws and punishments for those involved.

The police force gave out the education pamphlets to the attendees. – Ye Zarni

Head on collision injures nine

A small truck collided head on with a taxi on Thamaing station road, Mayangon township, Yangon region on 22 April, injuring nine passengers.

The vehicle heading for Thamaing from Bayintnaung driven by Ko Saw Tun, 41, crashed into the taxi causing seven passengers on board and one from the taxi to be thrown from their vehicles while the driver of the truck was pinned inside. The driver of the taxi fled the scene before police arrived. All injured are undergoing medical treatment at Insein General Hospital.

Police are conducting investigations to determine the cause of accident. – Myo Min Thein (Mayangon)

Crime

Fire destroys a house in Thamanya village

A fire destroyed a house in Ngwe Taung ward, Thamanya village, Hpa-An township, Kayin state on 21 April. According to the investigation, the fire started around 11:45am when U Maung Kyaw, 56, left the house without putting out a cooking fire. Fifteen firemen with four fire engines and the help of local residents brought the fire under control. No one was injured in the accident. A combined team comprising officers and staff from Relief and Resettlement Department provided a rice bag, five small bottles of oil, eight cans of fish, five bags of noodles, other items and K one lakh to the family who lost their home. — Saw Myo Min Thein (IPRD)

Illegal logs and sawn timber seized in Sagaing

AUTHORITIES seized 1.764 tonnes of timber logs and 6,3390 tonnes of sawn timber in April. Issues raised in the talks ranged from how to recognise the signs that someone might be a victim of human trafficking and the ever changing and adaptive ways and means of human trafficking.

A combined team comprising officers and staff from the township Forestry Department discovered 357 sawn timber planks and six logs believed to have been logged illegally, a six-wheel vehicle, a 32 HP engine and a round saw from timber business owners Pho Pwe, 35, Kyaw Lwin, 42, and Aung Myint Tun, 25. Police from Pinlebu have filed charges against them. — The mirror

Fridge safe-guard fails causing fire

AN overheated refrigerator caused a fire on 21 Street, Shwe Min Ywon ward, Sagaing Town on 22 April. The accident happened in the early morning at the house of U Sein Wan when the fridge’s overheat safe guard short-circuited. The fire was put out by the firemen with the help of neighbors.

The police have taken action against the home owner. — Thura Aung

Tree falls on hut killing woman in Monywa

A woman was killed when strong winds caused a tree to fall on a hut in a construction compound on Kannar road, O Botang ward, Monywa town, Sagaing region on 21 April. According to the investigation, the victim and her husband were in their hut when strong winds caused a large tree to fall, crushing their home.

The police identified the victim was Ma Yin Yin Win, 30, while her husband sustained minor injuries. The police are still investigating the case. — Myanmar Police force

Young man charged with stealing motorbike

POLICE have arrested a young man trying to sell a motorbike which had Ks 170,000 stowed inside it on 60th Street, Chanmyathazi township, Mandalay region on 20 April.

When interrogated, Htet Thu San alias Win Htay Kyaw, 18, failed to prove that the bike belonged to him. The police have filed a lawsuit against him. — The mirror
Japan may draw up disaster relief spending by 1 June

TOKYO — Japan is considering compiling disaster relief spending by 1 June, which killed about 50 people, prompted quick actions on a separate budget, they said. The officials, from the Liberal Democratic Party and the Komeito Party, which form the ruling coalition, asked not to be identified because they are not authorized to speak to the media.

The disaster-related spending will be on top of a fiscal stimulus plan of up to 10 trillion yen ($90-86 billion) in extra spending that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is expected to announce around the time he hosts a Group of Seven summit in late May. The government has already set aside 2.3 billion yen from a 350 billion yen reserve fund for the 2016/17 April-March fiscal year for the disaster-hit region.

The Japan Ground Self-Defense Force said on Saturday. Tokyo may draw up disaster relief spending by 1 June for the disastrous hit region that will be announced at the memorial, asked not to be identified, which form the ruling coalition.

The earthquakes on the island of Kyushu damaged at least 5,000 houses, forcing about 80,000 people out of their homes as of Friday, NHK reported. — Reuters

A year after Nepal quake, some united in grief; others climb again

KATHMANDU — For survivors and relatives of victims of a landslide that struck with the force of half an atom bomb it is a time to grieve. For witnesses to a fatal avalanche at the Mount Everest base camp, it is time to climb again.

A year after the worst earthquake in Nepal’s history struck at four minutes to midday on 25 April last year, the Himalayan nation is remembering the 9,000 victims of the 7.8 magnitude quake and a second tremor 17 days later.

Among those returning to Nepal are adventurers like Australian photographer Athena Zelandonii, who is trekking again to attend a ceremony of remembrance on Monday in Langtang village, obliterated by a huge rockfall that took the lives of 285 locals and foreigners.

They will be remembered at the memorial event where, starting at 11:56am, the name of each victim will be read out. “There was no question of not coming back,” Zelandonii, 26, told Reuters in the capital Kathmandu.

Part of a group of people who searched for loved ones or themselves lived through the disaster, Zelandonii survived an avalanche on the mountain slopes above Langtang, but was stranded for days by the rockfall.

Still missing in the Langtang area is American Dawn Habash, a 57-year-old yoga instructor from Augusta, Maine, who was trekking in Nepal for the fourth time.

Son Khaleed and daughter Yasmine worked shifts to try and find out about their mother after the earthquake — all they could find out was that she was last seen walking downhill toward Langtang just before the earthquake.

Both of them and Dawn’s brother Randy are in Nepal for the anniversary, and hope that at least her body can be found.

“We need that closure,” said Khaleed. “Sometimes I still get these lightning-bolt thoughts — what if? And that’s not healthy.”

Of 181 foreigners who died in the earthquake or are still missing, 63 were in Langtang.

Villager Kartok Lama, 30, said locals had already ordered the anniversary of the quake by the Tibetan calendar that they follow. They said prayers in a hut because Langtang’s two gompas, or Buddhist temples, had been destroyed.

“Almost everyone from the village is back; people are rebuilding homes and hotels, and there is work going on in the fields,” she told Reuters.

“We want the tourists to come back.”

Monday’s Langtang memorial will be preceded by national commemorations on Sunday — the quake anniversary by the Nepali calendar — at the site of Kathmandu’s historic Dharahara Tower that collapsed. There will be a candlelit vigil that night and three days of national mourning.— Reuters
PHNOM PENH — An elephant died on Friday in a section of the Angkor Temple complex in Cambodia, the Khmer Times and the Phnom Penh Post reported.

The elephant was found dead in the archaeological area near Siem Reap, where the Angkor Wat temple complex is located.

Khmer Times said the elephant was the second one to die in the area in the past week.

A Cambodian government official told the newspaper that the cause of death is unknown, but investigations are underway.

Tourist elephant dies near Angkor Wat after dropping off tourists

PHNOM PENH — An elephant was killed near the temple complex.

PHONOM PENH — An elephant died on Friday near the Cambodia’s Angkor Wat temple complex.

The elephant was found dead in the archaeological area near Siem Reap, where the Angkor Wat temple complex is located.

KHUNING — Six people are missing after a landslide buried a work shed in southwest China’s Yunnan Province Friday, local authorities said.

A strong earthquake with a magnitude of 5.5 occurred on April 14, leaving an out-of-service train derailed on tracks south of Kumamoto Station and damaging railway facilities elsewhere.

The service resumption coincided with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s visit to the area.

Kumamoto Station and Shin-Minamata Station to the south in the section yet to be brought back to service.

The entire bullet-train line was halted when a 6.5 magnitude quake occurred in Kumamoto on April 14, leaving an out-of-service train derailed on tracks south of Kumamoto Station and damaging railway facilities elsewhere.

Kumamoto Railway Co., the bullet-train operator, is in the process of removing the cars from the tracks and could finish the work as early as Saturday, but it remains unclear when service on the section linking Kumamoto and Shin-Minamata can be resumed.

Service on the remaining section of the link, linking Shin-Minamata and Kagoshima-Chuo Stations, was brought back on Wednesday. Earlier Saturday, Abe flew to Kumamoto from Tokyo on an air defense force jet and surveyed quake damage from the air and on the ground before meeting with quake victims at a temporary shelter in Minamiaso, a village hard-hit by the temblors.

At a base for personnel engaged in search efforts in the village, Abe said, “Although your work entails risks, I expect you to complete your mission while watching out for secondary disasters.” Abe met with evacuees at a shelter in Minamiaso and pledged that his government will “provide a strong support” for the people affected by the quake.

Kumamoto, Abe also met with Gov. Ikao Kabashima at the prefectural government building in Kumamoto City and was briefed on the support being provided to quake victims and rebuilding plans. Abe said the government will do its utmost to secure housing for those disaster-stricken people, while Kabashima asked for government support for the revival of Kumamoto as well as early restoration of Kumamoto Castle, whose stone walls had partly collapsed following the quakes.

PHNOM PENH — Cambodia formally agreed to host SEA Games in 2023.

Cambodia's Ministry of Culture said the country has reached an agreement with the ASEAN Secretariat to host the 27th SEA Games in 2023.

The decision was made during a meeting of the Cambodian Olympic Committee and the Ministry of Culture.

Cambodia will host the 27th SEA Games from December 15 to January 1.

The games will feature 31 sports and have a total of 2,097 athletes from 30 participating countries.

Cambodia's government has made it a priority to develop sports and promote physical activity in the country.

The country has already hosted the SEA Games twice, in 1976 and 2013.

Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen said the country is ready to host the games and is confident it can deliver a successful event.

The SEA Games are a major regional sporting event that brings together athletes from South East Asian countries.

Last year, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen announced that the country would host the 27th SEA Games in 2023.

The games will feature a range of sports, including football, basketball, swimming, and table tennis.

Cambodia has been working on infrastructure development and upgrades to meet the requirements of hosting the games.

The country has invested in new stadiums and training facilities in preparation for the event.

Cambodia's government has also been working on improving living conditions for athletes and officials participating in the games.

Cambodia's Olympic Committee has been working closely with the Cambodian government to ensure the success of the games.

The 27th SEA Games will be held from December 15 to January 1, 2023, in Phnom Penh.

Cambodia has a strong tradition in sports, particularly in football and badminton.

The country has been preparing for the games for several years, with a focus on improving facilities and training athletes.

Cambodia is looking to use the games as a platform to showcase its culture and heritage to the world.

The SEA Games are a major event in the region and are highly anticipated by athletes and spectators alike.

Cambodia's preparation for the games is seen as a testament to the country's commitment to promoting sports and physical activity.

The government has been working on infrastructure development and upgrades to meet the requirements of hosting the games.

The country has invested in new stadiums and training facilities in preparation for the event.

Cambodia has a strong tradition in sports, particularly in football and badminton.

The government has been working on infrastructure development and upgrades to meet the requirements of hosting the games.

The country has invested in new stadiums and training facilities in preparation for the event.

Cambodia has a strong tradition in sports, particularly in football and badminton.

The country has been preparing for the games for several years, with a focus on improving facilities and training athletes.

Cambodia is looking to use the games as a platform to showcase its culture and heritage to the world.

The 27th SEA Games will be held from December 15 to January 1, 2023, in Phnom Penh.

Cambodia has a strong tradition in sports, particularly in football and badminton.

The country has been preparing for the games for several years, with a focus on improving facilities and training athletes.

Cambodia is looking to use the games as a platform to showcase its culture and heritage to the world.

The 27th SEA Games will be held from December 15 to January 1, 2023, in Phnom Penh.

Cambodia has a strong tradition in sports, particularly in football and badminton.

The country has been preparing for the games for several years, with a focus on improving facilities and training athletes.

Cambodia is looking to use the games as a platform to showcase its culture and heritage to the world.
WASHINGTN — The United States will buy heavy water from Iran’s nuclear programme and expects it to be delivered within weeks, US officials said on Friday, a move that Republican lawmakers quickly criticised.

The US Department of Energy, or DOE, will buy 32 metric tonnes of heavy water from Iran worth $8.6 million, a department spokesman said. Heavy water is a component of making nuclear weapons and nuclear energy, that is not radioactive.

Under last year’s landmark nuclear deal between Iran, the United States and five other world powers, Tehran is responsible for reducing its stock of heavy water, which it can sell, dilute or dispose of, under conditions.

Iran is permitted to keep up to 130 tonnes of heavy water at present and up to 90 tonnes once its redesigned and rebuilt Arak nuclear research reactor is commissioned.

“The United States will not be Iran’s customer forever,” the DOE spokeswoman said. US officials hope the purchase will pave the way for other countries to buy the heavy water, which can be used in the development of some reactors and near magnetic resonance imaging.

Iran’s top nuclear negotiator, Abbas Araghchi, who discussed the sale with US officials in Vienna on Friday, told reporters that the 32 tonnes have been sold to an American company.

Aragchi estimated Iran has about 70 tonnes in excess of what it needs and said further sales are being negotiated with another company that is not based in the United States.

Iran, which is still under US sanctions, has long had to go through third-country financial institutions for authorised transactions for items including medicine and food.

A US Treasury Department official would not discuss details of the payment for the heavy water until after the purchase is complete, but said it would be completed under the same method.

“Regardless of whether or not this is in US dollars, this licenced transaction is limited in scope,” the Treasury official said on condition of anonymity.

Iran’s compliance with the nuclear deal means that the heavy water was already removed from Iran, ensuring that it would not be used to support the development of a nuclear weapon. State Department spokesman John Kirby said.

“Our purchase of the heavy water means that it will instead be used for critically important research and non-nuclear industrial requirements,” Kirby added.

The purchase, first reported by the Wall Street Journal, was slammed by Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, a Republican. Ryan said in a statement it appeared to be part of the Democratic administration’s efforts to strengthen the nuclear deal with Iran and would “directly subsidise Iran’s nuclear programme.”

The DOE expects to resell the 32 tonnes as heavy water to domestic commercial and research buyers, including a national lab.—Reuters

US to buy heavy water from Iran’s nuclear programme

Merkel’s Turkey visit aims to soothe tensions on EU migrant deal

ANKARA/BERLIN — German Chancellor Angela Merkel will try to soothe tensions over a deal meant to stem the flow of migrants to Europe when she visits Turkey this weekend.

The pact, which came into force three weeks ago, aims to help end the chaotic arrival of migrants and refugees on the Greek islands, many fleeing war and poverty in the Middle East and Africa. More than one million reached Europe last year.

The deal initially slowed the number of arrivals to Greece sharply, but boats have been coming again with about 150 people a day, the International Organisation for Migration said.

Merkel and European Council President Donald Tusk will go to Gaziantep near the Syrian border on Saturday, where they are due to visit a refugee camp and meet Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu.

There is much at stake for both sides. Merkel lobbied sceptical European partners to back the deal, under which Turkey agreed to take back migrants who crossed the Aegean Sea illegally, and is under political pressure at home to show progress.

Davutoglu sold the deal to the Turkish public partly on the basis that Turks would win quicker visa-free travel to Europe in return, a pledge that now could go unfilled, at least by the June deadline he had wanted.

“Turkey wants support in easing the refugee burden — both financial support and in terms of numbers. And they want visa liberalisation. We have other interests,” a Merkel aide said.

“Ultimately it will depend on both sides fulfilling the criteria they need to. If that doesn’t happen the deal won’t work.”

Rights groups have questioned the legality of the deal, which hinges on Turkey being a safe country of asylum. Amnesty International says Turkey has illegally returned Syrians to their war-torn homeland, a charge Ankara denies.

Under the deal, Ankara gets more EU funding for refugees living on its soil and the revival of long-stalled EU accession talks, as well as the quicker visa liberalisation, the main prize in the eyes of many Turks.

But EU officials propose waiving visas for Turks for 4 May but that is strongly opposed by some EU member states. Ankara now meets just under half of the 72 conditions for visa-free access.

“This is clearly shaping up to become a problem. We are talking about some criteria, while they seem to think they in fact already got visa-free travel,” said one Brussels diplomat. —Reuters

Obama says no plans to deploy ground troops in Libya

LONDON — US President Barack Obama said on Friday there were no plans to deploy ground troops in Libya, but that the United States would not wait to see if Islamic State starts to gain a foothold there.

Speaking in London, Obama said it would be a challenge to support Libya’s nascent government.—Reuters

US, allies report 29 strikes against Islamic State in Iraq, Syria

WASHINGTON — The US-led coalition fighting Islamic State staged 29 strikes against militants in Iraq and Syria on Thursday, the US military said on Friday.

Drones and bomber and fighter aircraft carried out 22 strikes in Iraq, including 13 near Falluja and Mosul, two of the cities held by Islamic State, it said in a statement. Seven strikes in Syria hit various militant targets, it added.—Reuters

G-7 farm ministers start talks on ensuring stable food supply

NIIGATA, (Japan) — Farm ministers from the Group of Seven countries started two-day talks on Saturday in Japan to discuss strategies for securing a stable food supply for the world’s growing population.

The Japanese farm minister Hiroshi Moriyama will chair the meeting of ministers from Canada, Germany, Italy and the United States as well as representatives from Britain and France.

The outcome of the gathering in the Sea of Japan coastal city of Niigata, which has the largest rice paddie acreage in the country, will be reflected in discussions at the G-7 summit to be held on 26 and 27 May in Mie Prefecture, central Japan.—Kyodo News

Suspected Islamist militants kill Bangladesh teacher

DHAKA — Suspected Islamist militants brutally murdered a univeristy professor on Saturday in northwestern Bangladesh, a police official told reporters, the latest in a spate of attacks on liberal activists.

Two or three assailants rode up on a motorcycle and attacked Rezaul Karim Siddiquie, an English professor at Rajshahi University, slitting his throat and hacking him to death, said police official Golam Saklline. “We are investigating the killing,” Saklline said. The pattern of the murder was similar to other recent attacks by Islamist militants, he said.—Reuters

Two thirds of unimmunised children live in conflict-affected countries

UNITED NATIONS — The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) on Friday said that almost two thirds of children, who have not been immunised with basic vaccines, live in countries that are either partially or entirely affected by conflict.

Of countries in conflict, South Sudan has the highest percentage of unimmunised children, with 61 per cent not receiving the most basic childhood vaccines, followed by Somalia (58 per cent) and Syria (57 per cent). UNICEF said in a press release ahead of World Immunisation Week, World Immunisation Week is marked annually at the end of April to promote the use of life-saving vaccines for all children, particularly those who are consistently excluded. The event is observed by UNICEF, immunisation partners, governments and civil society organisations around the world. World Immunisation Week 2016 runs from 24 to 30 April.—Xinhua

Merkel’s Turkey visit aims to soothe tensions on EU migrant deal

ANKARA/BERLIN — German Chancellor Angela Merkel will try to soothe tensions over a deal meant to stem the flow of migrants to Europe when she visits Turkey this weekend.

The pact, which came into force three weeks ago, aims to help end the chaotic arrival of migrants and refugees on the Greek islands, many fleeing war and poverty in the Middle East and Africa. More than one million reached Europe last year.

The deal initially slowed the number of arrivals to Greece sharply, but boats have been coming again with about 150 people a day, the International Organisation for Migration said.

Merkel and European Council President Donald Tusk will go to Gaziantep near the Syrian border on Saturday, where they are due to visit a refugee camp and meet Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu.
Harm principle and law making

Khin Maung Aye

The concept of freedom has been one of the most controversial topics concerning societies throughout history. There have been endless debates on the different aspects of freedom and the limits of legitimate state and social action. The basic definition of freedom is the ability to think or act as one wishes. In other words, freedom is a condition under which people have the opportunity to speak, act and pursue happiness without unnecessary external restrictions.

In this regard, Locke viewed that government should ensure the prevalence of individual right to life, liberty and property whilst Rousseau stated that people can be forced to be free. According to the Isaiah Berlin, there are two types of freedom: the positive freedom and the negative freedom. The negative freedom is defined as being free from external restraints or limits on what one person can do whereas the positive freedom is described as being empowered to be free. Thus, the government will provide certain services such as education, job opportunities, healthcare benefits, and poverty alleviation in order to ensure it achieves its goals. At the same time, laws and regulations should also be enacted to ensure the prevalence of peace, stability and order as well as liberty for establishing a peaceful, secure and prosperous community.

In contrast, concerning liberty, John Stuart Mill stated that the individual is sovereign who has complete power over his own body and soul. According to his harm principle, a person can do whatever he wants to do as long as his actions do not harm others.

In this regard, it is important to consider both physical harm and psychological harm to the people in a society. Physical harm is defined as the deliberate pain inflicted on someone by another through kicking, punching, slapping or any other type of aggressive physical contact.

The psychological harm is defined as emotional or cognitive disturbances resulting from one’s actions.

However, the harm principle does not specify what qualifies as harm. So, there still is a problem when a self-regarding action becomes another-regarding action. There is no clear line of demarcation to distinguish between actions. A case of euthanasia, mercy killing, coup de grace or assisted suicide can be taken as a good example. In such a case, one has a right to end one’s own life as one is in persistent suffering from severe pain caused by a terminal illness. They have the right to die if they don’t want to continue their own life. However, it is against the law for a physician to assist suicide.

This being so, although the harm principle could be applied to cases that do not harm other people, it is not applicable to the law making process to achieve a better society.

Leopard, a majestic predator: some interesting facts

Leopard (Panthera pardus) is a majestic big cat distributed across the continents of Africa and Asia and is severely impacted by deforestation, habitat loss, habitat fragmentation and unrestricted hunting as well as poaching. The dominant predator has been reduced to small sub populations across various habitats and ecosystems in Africa and Asia. There are one subspecies of leopard recognized currently, namely, the African, Sinai, Arabian, Persian, Amur, Indochinese, Indian, Sri Lankan and Javan sub species. Although the Asiatic branch of leopards are clearly distinguishable into seven sub species; but, the African sub species of leopard (Panthera pardus pardus) which is distributed over a very large geographical area is recognized as only one, uniform sub species. It is quite surprising that in spite of such a wide distribution and visible geographical isolations in different parts of its huge range in the continent of Africa, this could be designated as only one sub species.

Several other mammalian species belonging to different orders across several continents show a wide range of variation resulting them being classified into different sub species. Has there been any detailed molecular or genetic studies been ever conducted on comparable isolated, sub populations of African leopards with appreciable sample size? If not this grouping of African leopards into one sub species may be a superficial one. A list of species representing different orders with a wide array of sub species has been included; and the numbers in the parenthesis suggest the current identified sub species for that individual species. If all these species with distinct geographical separation are demonstrating sub species level variations, why not the African leopards distributed over a large geographical area and even demonstrating geographical isolations. A comprehensive genetic studies involving advanced molecular tools and techniques need to be employed for finding if the African sub species of leopards could be further split into other sub species or groups.

Order-Carnivora; Family-Felidae: Leopard (1 African and 8 Asiatic sub species), Lion (1 Asiatic & 7 African sub species with one African subspecies extinct in the wild), Cheetah (1 Asiatic and 4 African sub species), Tiger (9 but 3 extinct), Puma (1 North American and 6 Latin American sub species), Jaguar (1 North and 2 South American sub species), Clouded leopard (3), Sandclouded leopard (2), Snow leopard (2-3), Fishing cat (many), Leopard cat (many), Junge cat (many), Wild cat (many), Sandcat (many), Serval (many), Pallas cat (3), Asian golden cat (3), Marshled cat (2), Ocelot (10), Canadian lynx (2), Eurasian lynx (many), Bobcat (many), Jaguaundari (many), Rusty spotted cat (2), Caracal (7), Pantanal cat (2), Colocolo (2), Pampas cat (5) & Oncilla (4)

Order-Carnivora; Family-Hyaenidae: Striped hyena (2 African and 3 Asiatic sub species) Order-Carnivora; Family-Hyaenidae: Striped hyena (2 African and 3 Asiatic sub species)

Order-Carnivora; Family-Canidae: African wild dog (5), Asiatic wild dog (3), Wolf (several species & subspecies), Side striped jackal (7), Golden jackal (2) & Black headed jackal (2) & Coyote (many)

Order-Carnivora; Family-Ursidae: Bears (many species & subspecies) including Sloth bear (2), Sun bear (2), Asiatic black bear (7), American black bear (16), Brown bear (16)

Order-Perissodactyla; Family-Hippidae: Hippopotamus, Rhinoceridae: White rhinoceros (2), Black rhinoceros (3), Javan rhinoceros (3 but 2 extinct) & Sumatran rhinoceros (3)

Order-Primates: Yellow baboon (3), Chacma baboon (3), Mountain gorilla (many), Common chimpanzee (4-5), Gibbons (many species & subspecies) & Bornean orangutan (3)

The Arabian leopards once roamed across both the Sinai and the Arabian population suggesting historic range overlap in the past. However, unrestricted hunting has reduced their population so devastatingly, that less than 200 are probably surviving in the wild. Extremely small sub populations have been reported form the Negev desert in Israel. Similar is the state of the Sinai leopard and no leopard sightings are reported from the Sinai in the recent times; hence chances of detecting wild natural hybrids (Arabian leopard X Sinai leopard) now are almost zero. Current status of the Sinai leopard in the wild is quite doubtful and data deficient. The Far Eastern or the Amur leopard (Panthera pardus orientalis) is currently known to be surviving in the form of small population in the Russian Far East. Extensive hunting pressure has almost wiped this predator form their natural habitats.

Another supportive example for the need to investigate if African leopards could be split into further sub species based on modern genetic analysis, is the case of the Sunda Clouded leopard (Neofelis diardi). The Sundaclouded leopard was believed for a long time as a sub species of Clouded leopard (Neofelis nebulosa) and used to
New report looks at budget policies of U Thein Sein government

THE Ministry of Planning and Finance and the World Bank Group will hold a discussion on the key findings and recommendations of Myanmar’s first ever Public Expenditure Review (PER) in Nay Pyi Taw on Wednesday, 27 April.

The Ministry of Planning and Finance and the World Bank Group looked at Union Budget policies between 2009 and 2013, a period which saw rapid economic liberalisation in Myanmar, and compiled a comprehensive report which is hoped will contribute to deepening policy dialogue on Union Budget issues and provide reform options to improve the efficiency and quality of public spending.

The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Planning and Finance U Maung Maung Win and World Bank Myanmar Country Manager Abdoulaye Seck, will discuss with members of the media, government departments, and development partners on the key findings and recommendations of the PER which, among others, covers: (i) rebalancing the composition of the Union Budget; (ii) improving coverage, quality and equity of education services; and (iii) moving from higher to better government spending on health.

The discussion will take place at the Tharaphi room of the Hilton Hotel, from 9:00 am to 11:00 am on Wednesday 27 April. Those who are interested must contact Kyaw Soe Lynn at klynn@worldbank.org (tel: + 99 2031159) or Shin Thandar at sthandar@worldbank.org (tel: 09 780 239 827) to confirm attendance COB on Monday 25 April and must register by 8:30 am on 27th April. —GNLM

Heavy rain, hailstones and power failure in Mandalay

BECAUSE of the strong wind swirling from the southwest, the rising temperature of heat and the instability of wind occurred with heavy rain and hailstones falling, the strong wind blowing, thunder striking Mandalay District yesterday evening.

After formation of the rain clouds, hailstones fell and heavy rain registering 0.59 inches. Strong wind blowing with 20 miles per hour struck in Mandalay District and damaged some houses in Pyaygyitagan township and those on the bank of Ayeyawady river with branches from trees falling.

In the evening, temperature went down from 43 degree centigrade to 34 degree centigrade in Mandalay.—Thika Ko Ko (Mandalay)

Developing ‘Rural Areas’ of Yangon Region

POEM:

POEM:

Developing ‘Rural Areas’ of Yangon Region

For rural migrants from all over, Yangon is a prime destination. With seemingly weak management of their permanent migration, has increased the number of ‘Kyu-kyaw’ settlements particularly in the townships and villages bordering Yangon City Municipality, settling sans permission or consideration of legality of such action or for that matter availability of water and proper sanitation.

Many who in the past migrated, are now living permanently in the settlements and villages in the rural outskirts of the City. Many who cannot find jobs in the formal economy are commuting daily to the business areas of the City in the hope of earning a living, often contributing haphazardly to the informal economy and posing a constant challenge to the Yangon Municipality.

According to the newspapers, building of flyovers in the City which from past experience has been of doubtful utility will be cancelled and the budget instead used fruitfully for rural development of villages outside Yangon Municipality to provide the inhabitants, to improve their living conditions, with sources of clean water, sanitation, electrification, and building roads and bridges for better communication.

Perhaps also, helping the habitants to pursue agricultural occupation of growing more vegetables and fruits for Yangon’s growing population will enhance their contribution in no small way to the City’s economy and also create employment for themselves in their own community.

What Education Means

Ko Myat

EDUCATION is the core part of our life. We have come into the world uneducated. We first started learning inside the womb. The unborn babies learnt new skills inside the tummy to be able to survive when they entered the new world outside. When born, babies have to struggle learning new skills outside. Remember, education and learning do go hand in hand.

Living things including plants have to learn for their survival and growth. Finding some ways or another to overcome obstacles begets some experiences. Some stages of education come into existence: learning, experience, mistakes and teaching. You know, learning never ends, from the cradle to the graveyard.

Education itself is a quality of life. It doesn’t mean a degree or a certificate. It is more than just a sheet of paper or silverware. It means an ability to stand on one’s own feet and to lead a better life without jeopardizing others’ lives. It paves the way for all beings to happiness.

We must first educate ourselves and then impart our garnered knowledge to others. That is called teaching. Learning through teaching is one of the best forms of education, I think.

We must learn everywhere and everywhere. We must try to find out what is yet unknown. Remember the saying: Only when there is a will there is a way. Learning and teaching mean helical growth for everyone. Will education never die when there is learning. We must never stop learning and teaching. For a better place to live in this world we need education for all indeed.

Leopard, a majestic predator: some interesting facts

be called Borneo clouded leopard; until latest molecular studies found it to be an altogether different species. Furthermore, two sub species of Sunda clouded leopard is now also recognized. It will be also interesting to investigate if there are range overlaps among different sub species of Asiatic leopards particularly those that are in closer geographical proximity such as the Indochinese leopard of China and SE Asia and the Indian leopard of the Indian subcontinent and the leopard of the Indian subcontinent around southern fringes of China, western Myanmar and NE India along the remote Indo-China and Indo-Myanmar border regions. It will be also interesting to note if any wild natural leopard hybrids (Indoceanic leopard X Indian leopard) are available in these geographic region. Possible range overlaps with other Asiatic leopard sub species seem to be unlikely due to vast natural barriers and geographical separation in the form of large deserts, river valleys and high mountain ranges. The species is in dire need for conservation in all the habitats across Africa and Asia. Some of the sub species such as the Sinai, Arabian, Amur, Javan are showing sharp decline in populations or are rarely sighted in their wild habitats; and hence need active conservation for their long term survival. It is sad to mention that the majestic predator is showing a sharp decline in their global population.

POEM:

POEM:

POEM:

POEM:

POEM:

POEM:

POEM:

POEM:

POEM:

POEM:

POEM:

POEM:

POEM:
Syrian peace talks limp on to next week with opposition absent

BEIRUT / GENEVA — The UN special envoy for Syria has vowed to take fragile peace talks into next week despite a walkout by the main armed opposition, a breakdown in a truce and signs that both sides are gearing up to escalate the five-year-old civil war.

The opposition declared a “pause” in the talks this week because of a surge in fighting and too little movement from the government side on freeing detainees or allowing in aid. Nearly all of its delegation left Geneva.

But UN envoy Staffan de Mistura said he had no plans to call off the negotiations, the first in five years of conflict to include some rebel factions. He said a ministerial meeting of world powers was urgently needed to get the talks back on track. “Bottom line, I plan to continue the proximity talks, but at the formal level and at the technical level until next week, probably Wednesday as originally planned,” he said. A fragile ceasefire in place since February was still in effect because none of the sides had renounced it, he said, but it was “in great trouble if we don’t act quickly.”

The talks at UN headquarters in Geneva aim to halt a conflict that has allowed for the rise of the Islamic State group, sucked in regional and major powers and created the world’s worst refugee crisis.

De Mistura now says 400,000 people have been killed in the war, far higher than the previous UN toll, usually given as 250,000.

He said he had no proof of the higher figure but the estimate of 250,000 was two years old and no longer valid. The war was tilted in President Bashar al-Assad’s favor late last year by Russia’s intervention. — Reuters

UN says Yemen peace talks atmosphere shows progress

KUWAIT CITY — Yemen’s warring factions held their first direct talks in a UN-backed peace process on Friday and will meet again despite failing to agree on an agenda, participants said.

The United Nations envoy, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, said the meetings in Kuwait had been constructive and the positive atmosphere was a step forward in efforts to end the conflict.

They discussed a more permanent ceasefire in Yemen and how it would be implemented, he said.

The talks, which opened late on Thursday, seek a solution to a war which has killed more than 6,200 people, triggered a humanitarian crisis and enabled al Qaeda and Islamic State militants to consolidate their presence in the country.

They bring together the Iran-allied Houthis, who control the capital Sanaa, and its General People’s Congress (GPC) allies with the Saudi-backed government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, based in the southern port city of Aden.

“The meetings held today were constructive and the atmosphere is an important advancement,” Ould Cheikh Ahmed told a news conference. “We will intensify our efforts.”

But sources present at the talks, delayed since Monday due to the late arrival of the Houthi delegation and its allies, said the two sides continue to be divided on the priorities.

The government delegation wants Houthis and fighters loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh to withdraw from cities and hand over weapons before discussing a political solution, the sources said.

De Mistura now says 400,000

People’s Congress Party, and Mohammed Abdul-Salam (2nd L), head of the Houthi delegation to scheduled peace talks in Kuwait, gesture after they finish a news conference at Sanaa Airport, Yemen, on 20 April. Photo: Reuters

Syrian warplane crashes near Damascus, Islamic State says pilot captured

BEIRUT / MOSCOW — Islamic State fighters have captured the pilot of a Syrian warplane which crashed southeast of Damascus on Friday, a news agency affiliated to the militant group said.

“The pilot, called Azam Eid, from Hama was captured after he fell by parachute near the site where his plane crashed east of Damascus,” the news agency Amaq said.

Citing a Syrian military source, Russian news agency Interfax said the plane belonged to the Syrian Air Force and crashed because of a technical fault.

“The plane had recently undergone repairs... there was no attack from the ground. It crashed because of a technical fault. The pilot ejected,” Interfax quoted the source as saying.

Interfax said the plane was a Mig-23.

A video shared online by Amaq shows the plane was shot down by the jihadist group on Friday.

Stepping up their operations, Russian-backed Islamic State fighters around burning plane wreckage, part of which had a Syrian flag painted on it. Russian TV could not independently verify the video.

Earlier on Friday Islamic State said a Syrian warplane had been shot down, but did not specifically claim responsibility.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said the plane crashed in the southeast Damascus countryside after flying over territory controlled by Islamic State. It said the fate of the pilot was not known.

The Observatory said earlier it was not clear if it had been brought down by gunfire or suffered a technical fault. — Reuters

NATO’s new deterrent may include bigger Black Sea presence

SOFIA — Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania may expand the NATO alliance’s maritime presence in the Black Sea as part of a broader strategy to deter Russia, NATO’s deputy chief said on Friday.

NATO is looking to counter Russia’s military build-up in Crimea, which Moscow annexed from Ukraine in 2014, and in the Black Sea, which is strategically important for both East and West given its energy reserves and closeness to the Middle East.

“There are some very valuable discussions under way among the allies who live on the Black Sea ... of more closely integrating their naval forces and operations,” NATO’s Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow said in a visit to Sofia, mentioning the three NATO allies by name.

The US-led alliance is concerned by what it sees as a Russian strategy to try to block NATO from moving about by air, land and sea by positioning surface-to-air missile batteries and anti-ship missiles in Kaliningrad, the Black Sea and in Syria.

NATO already patrols the Black Sea, but Vershbow said that by the time Western leaders meet for a NATO summit in July, allies could have “an enhanced presence” in the area as part of plans to move troops on rotation into the Baltics and Poland.

“We need to consider a more persistent NATO military presence in the particular region, with a particular focus on our maritime capabilities,” he said.

Backed by a big increase in US military spending, NATO is setting up smaller external outposts, forces on rotation, regular war games and warehoused equipment ready for a rapid response force to deter Russia.

That force includes air, maritime and special operations units of up to 40,000 personnel.

Worried since the seizure of Crimea and pro-Russian rebel operations in eastern Ukraine that Moscow could exert pressure on Poland or destabilise the Baltic states — perhaps by fomenting unrest in their Russian minority populations — the West wants to bolster defences on its eastern flank without provoking the Kremlin by stationing large numbers permanently.

NATO says it respects a 1997 agreement with Moscow to avoid deploying substantial combat forces on Russia’s borders.

However, the Kremlin’s envoy to NATO sees the alliance’s plans as a threat to its security and has warned there will be no improvement in the worst East-West tensions since the Cold War until NATO withdraws its forces. — Reuters
Mini-brains reveal how Zika causes damage in fetuses

WASHINGTON — US researchers said Friday they successfully created inexpensive mini-brains in lab to reveal how the Zika virus causes microcephaly and other damage in fetuses.

The study, led by Guang-Ming and Hongjun Song at the Johns Hopkins University and published in the US journal Cell, supported that the mosquito-borne virus prefers to infect neural stem cells but the extent of damage differs depending on time of infection.

The results confirmed what almost the same team suspected in earlier experiments done in two-dimensional tissue cultures. Mini-brains, or brain-region-specific organoids, have been actively used in research for years, but they are limited by their high cost, lack of access for most labs, and tricky protocols that prevent clear control experiments.

The Hopkins group solved these problems by 3D printing so-called mini-brains from human stem cells, which can mimic the front, middle and back of a human brain.

These mini-brains can survive and grow for up to six months, thereby allowing the researchers to induce Zika infection during development stages equivalent to very early and mid-pregnancy.

The 3D experiments replicating the team’s previous work finding that the virus prefers to infect neural stem cells and supported clinical findings that the developing brain is most at risk during the first trimester, or first three months, of pregnancy.

“If infection occurred very early in development, the virus mostly infected the mini-brains’ neural progenitor cells, and the effects were very severe,” said Ming. “After a while, the mini-brains would stop growing and disintegrate.”

“At a later stage, mimicking the second trimester, Zika still preferentially infected neural progenitor cells, but it also affected some neurons. Growth was slowed, and the cortex was thinner than in noninfected conditions.”

These different effects correspond to what clinicians have seen in infants born to women who contracted Zika during pregnancy, as well as miscarriages, she noted, namely that the earlier in pregnancy Zika infection occurs, the more severe its effects.

The research group’s next step will be to test drugs using the mini-brains to see whether one might provide some protection against Zika.

The sky is not the limit: China’s Mars plan

BEIJING — Like many space-faring nations, China has seen Mars as the next destination ever since it landed on the moon. China plans to orbit Mars, land and deploy a rover, all in one mission around 2021.

No country has tried such a complex mission before, said Sun Zezhou, the chief designer of Mars probe. The United States, which has done most to explore the planet, required two separate missions before landing.

The probe will include an orbiter, a lander and a rover. After an interplanetary journey of 6 to 12 months, the probe will be positioned in orbit. The lander will then be separated, land on the surface and the rover begin its tour, while the orbiter surveys from above.

“All in one mission — that’s quite a bold attempt,” Sun said after explaining the process.

The greatest challenge lies in the landing process, given that the weather on Mars is hard to predict, Sun said. “If we encounter a dust storm, the worst possible scenario, the rover can’t touch down.”

“Besides, the environment on Mars is so special that it is difficult for us to imitate on Earth, which makes it hard to practice,” Sun said.

Mars is at least 55 million kilometres from Earth, which makes communicating with the probe another great challenge. One-way transmissions between Mars and the Earth could take as long as 20 minutes, so most of the time the rover will have to deal with things on its own. It must be smart enough to react to whatever it meets, Sun said.

“We have less than five years till the launch, but we are confident. The probe is being developed by the team that completed the Chang’e-3 lunar probe,” said Ye Peijian, of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

“The successful lunar landing laid the foundation for Mars exploration,” said Sun, the chief designer of Chang’e-3 that went to the moon at the end of 2013. “It’s on the moon’s shoulder that we set our mission objectives at such high level.”

Reaching Mars is so complicated that few countries have attempted it, and even fewer have made it. Among more than 40 missions since the 1960s, about half failed.

China made one unsuccessful attempt in 2011 when a probe carried by a Russian rocket failed to complete the mission. Calls for speeding up China’s own mission mounted after failure.

“We have less than five years till the launch, but we are confident. The probe is being developed by the team that completed the Chang’e-3 lunar probe,” said Ye Peijian, of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

“The successful lunar landing laid the foundation for Mars exploration,” said Sun, the chief designer of Chang’e-3 that went to the moon at the end of 2013. “It’s on the moon’s shoulder that we set our mission objectives at such high level.”

Reaching Mars is so complicated that few countries have attempted it, and even fewer have made it. Among more than 40 missions since the 1960s, about half failed.

China made one unsuccessful attempt in 2011 when a probe carried by a Russian rocket failed to complete the mission. Calls for speeding up China’s own mission mounted after failure.

Mini-brains, or brain-representative 2D tissue cultures, were used in earlier experiments done in two-dimensional tissue cultures. But using the 3D experiments replicating the team’s previous work finding that the virus prefers to infect neural stem cells and supported clinical findings that the developing brain is most at risk during the first trimester, or first three months, of pregnancy.

Mini-brains reveal how Zika causes damage in fetuses

China’s top astronaut goes to ‘space camp’

BEIJING — Liu Wang, one of China’s leading astronauts, visited a high school in Beijing Friday and shared his experiences ahead of 24 April celebrations of the launch of the country’s first satellite 46 years ago.

“Being an astronaut and exploring the space certainly made me feel powerful, but before that, you must go through all the tough training and tests, and some unfortunately will sacrifice their lives,” said Liu when recalling how he was selected.

Liu was one of the crew of Shenzhou-9 which conducted China’s first manned space docking in June, 2012. He was speaking to over 200 students at the Capital Normal University High School. Liu encouraged students to study science and technology well, to prepare for future aerospace studies.

“Space technology is based on practical technology in areas such as materials and energy. The advancement of space technology can promote the development of practical technology, that is why China has been allocating so many resources to space technology,” said Liu.

Liu showed pictures of how astronauts eat, drink, sleep and conduct experiments under microgravity conditions.

What impressed the students most was the landscape of the earth that astronauts see over 300 km high in the sky. Liu said the oceans, continents, islands, rivers, lakes and the nightscape of cities on the earth can be clearly seen from the spacecraft.

“Only when you leave the earth can you feel the beauty of the earth as the home for humans,” said Liu, who advised students to conserve resources and protect the environment.

“I think I learned a lot and gained intuitive understanding of what we learned about space in class,” said Shen Shuyi, an eighth grader from the high school.

“With the development of manned space flight, more people will have the change to go into the space. So get ready. The future of China’s space research is in your hands,” said Liu.
Thai court rules on SCMP Hack

WATSON - The Thai court ruled on Wednesday that the South China Morning Post (SCMP) should be held responsible for hacking and breaching the personal information of Thai politicians. The court's decision comes after months of investigation and the prosecution of the SCMP for alleged hacking activities.

The SCMP has been accused of hacking the personal information of several Thai politicians, including the Prime Minister. The court's ruling is a significant step in the case and is expected to have a significant impact on the media landscape in Thailand.

The case has been ongoing for several months, with the SCMP denying any involvement in the hacking activities. The court's decision is a clear signal to other media outlets that they cannot engage in such activities without facing legal consequences.

The case is expected to set a significant precedent for media law in Thailand, and it is likely to have a significant impact on the future of media reporting in the country. The SCMP has already announced its intention to appeal the decision, but the court's ruling is final and cannot be appealed.

The ruling comes at a time when the media landscape in Thailand is undergoing significant changes. The government has been increasingly crackdown on independent media outlets and has been accused of using legal means to silence critical journalists.

The ruling is a significant victory for the SCMP and its journalists, who have been under attack for their reporting on government corruption and abuse of power. The case is expected to have a significant impact on the future of independent journalism in Thailand.
ASIA WORLD PORT MANAGEMENT WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND OUR THANKS AND APPRECIATION TO OUR PARTNERS AND CUSTOMERS FOR YOUR UNWAVERING SUPPORT

20th Anniversary
Making a difference

WE LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR CONTINUOUS SUPPORT

AT ASIA WORLD PORT TERMINAL
WE STRIVE TO PROVIDE BETTER PROFESSIONAL PORT SERVICES
De Niro, Foster, Keitel, reunite for ‘Taxi Driver’ anniversary

NEW YORK — Robert De Niro, Martin Scorsese, Jodie Foster and Cybill Shepherd turned out in New York to celebrate the 40th anniversary of “Taxi Driver,” the 1976 movie that made De Niro a superstar and that spawned the iconic catchphrase “You talkin’ to me?”

Although it won none of the four Oscars it was nominated for at the time, the film about an obsessed, lonely Viet Nam veteran with insomnia who drives his taxi through the streets has since been hailed by critics as one of the best movies of all time.

Foster, who was just 12 years old when she was cast as a young prostitute, said she had watched the movie again a few days ago. “It’s funny seeing yourself so young and yet you have the same gestures and the same voice, and the same physical patterns,” Foster told Reuters. While many around her were concerned about the young actress taking on the role of a prostitute, Foster said she took on an “instinctual” approach. “I didn’t think about it too much. I read the script. I loved the script and I played the character and that was that.”

The 40th anniversary was marked with a screening on Thursday at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York which De Niro founded in 2002. — Reuters

Rihanna dedicates tour performance to Prince

LONDON — R&B star Rihanna honoured music icon Prince, who died on Thursday, with a performance of her hit track “Diamonds” during the Canada leg of her Anti World Tour.

The 28-year-old singer stopped her concert in Calgary to pay tribute to the late “Purple Rain” hitmaker, reported Female First. “Today is a very sad day in music. A sad day to music lovers, musicians, fans all over the world who lost one of the greatest legends, Prince. We will miss you.”

“A lot of us have started making music and listening to music because of Prince, so right now I just wanna honour him, me and my crew, and you guys. Let’s shine some light to heaven for Prince right now,” Rihanna said.

Prince was found dead at his home on Thursday, 21 April. He was 57. The cause of death is not known yet.—PTI

‘Captain America’ team pay tribute to Prince

SINGAPORE — The cast and co-director from superhero action flick “Captain America: Civil War” paid tribute to late pop superstar Prince on Friday, while promoting the movie in Singapore.

The 57-year-old singer-songwriter, known for hits like “Kiss” and “Purple Rain”, died at his Paisley Park Studios compound on Thursday in the Minneapolis suburb of Chanhassen.

“It’s tough, it’s heartbreak-ing, he really was a special guy, someone else told me recently that... between him and David Bowie... they really were able to kind of redefine what it is to be a man... what it is to be an artist,” the film’s star Chris Evans said.

“It’s really a tragedy that the music world, the world just lost a couple of great legends this year.”

The film’s co-director Joe Russo echoed those comments. “It’s very tragic, it’s heart-breaking,” he said. “Prince was such an influence in my life musically... my eyes teared up when I read about it.” —Reuters

Hamlet, Lear line the Thames in London Shakespeare celebrations

LONDON — Some of Shakespeare’s best known characters — Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet and King Lear — will be featuring along a stretch of the River Thames this weekend, as part of celebrations to mark the 400th anniversary of the death of England’s greatest playwright.

Short films of the Bard’s plays will be screened along the south bank of the river, while in the middle of the 2.5 mile (km) route, the Globe theatre will stage a production of Hamlet which returns to London after touring 189 countries in two years.

Dominic Dromgoole, the artistic director of Shakespeare’s Globe theatre, said the Hamlet tour, which this month alone has performed in Kabul, Afghanistan, and Elsinore, Denmark, where Shakespeare set the play, demonstrated Shakespeare’s enduring relevance.

“He gives you life, and anything that gives you life rather than takes it away is always going to be popular,” Dromgoole said in an interview on Friday.

Hamlet, the story of melancholy Danish prince and his doubting quest to avenge a murdered father, captured audiences across the world, said Dromgoole.

“In some places it provokes, in some places it challenges, in some places it consoles, in others it inspires,” he said.

Non-English speaking audiences were provided with synopses and translators, with memorable performances taking place in Somalia, Dromgoole said, remembering the cast being followed by trucks full of “boys with AK47s”.

They also performed for Syrian refugees at the Zaatre camp in Jordan, where the play was interrupted by a sandstorm, and at the migrant shanty town nicknamed the “Jungle” outside France’s northern port of Calais.

The final performances of the Hamlet world tour will be staged on Sunday in the open-air core of the timbered, curved-walled Globe, a 1990s replica of the famous theatre which was burned to the ground in 1613.

Those without a ticket will still be able to celebrate Shakespeare through the film project, named “The Complete Walk”. It will screen 37 short films, one for each of Shakespeare’s plays, shot in locations from Athens to Vienna where the playwright had set his stories but never visited.

Highlighting Shakespeare’s international appeal, the Complete Walk is also being exported to cities beyond Britain including Madrid, Gdansk and Taipei.

Shakespeare’s birth place Stratford-upon-Avon will also host celebrations and a parade on Saturday and Sunday.—Reuters

Daffodils are in bloom at Mount Stuart where a Shakespeare First Folio has been discovered nearly 400 years after his death on the Isle of Bute, Scotland, Britain on 7 April 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS
Robot monk blends science and Buddhism at Chinese temple

Longquan temple says it has developed a robot monk that can chant Buddhist mantras, move via voice command, and hold a simple conversation.

Master Xianfan, Xian’er’s creator, said the robot monk was the perfect vessel for spreading the wisdom of Buddhism in China, through the fusion of science and Buddhism.

Science and Buddhism are not opposing nor contradicting, and can be combined and mutually compatible,” said Xianfan.

Under the careful watch of China’s officially atheist Communist Party, religion has slowly crept back into daily life since the end of the Cultural Revolution.

Xian’er’s creator, said the robot monk was not only a way of reaching out to the public, but also a symbol of the coastal city’s reconstruction and draw tourists from around the country.

The aquarium opened in 1994 as the nation’s first underwater park, utilizing a tunnel of the national oil storage in the area. It was completely gutted in the tsunami, but has been rebuilt and opened again.

About 1000 high school students sang ‘Purple Rain’ to honour the late singer Prince at Walt Disney Concert Hall which is illuminated purple on Thursday night, to honour the late musician.—Reuters

Iwate aquarium destroyed in 2011 tsunami reopens after 5 years

Los Angeles City Hall, New York’s Empire State building and Minneapolis’ Interstate 35 bridge were among the numerous monuments around the United States lit up in purple on Thursday night, to honour the late musician.—Reuters

LA children’s choir pays homage to Prince with musical tribute

MORIOKA, Japan — An aquarium destroyed by the earthquake-triggered tsunami of March 2011 reopened on Saturday for the first time since the disaster in Kujū, Iwate Prefecture, in northeastern Japan.

The city government hopes the aquarium, housed in a rebuilt five-story building, will serve as a symbol of the coastal city’s reconstruction and draw tourists from around the country.

The aquarium opened in 1994 as the nation’s first underwater park, utilizing a tunnel of the national oil storage in the area. It was completely gutted in the tsunami that inundated the city on 11 March 2011. At the reopened aquarium on Saturday, about 200 people attended a celebration and a diver showed off a traditional diving technique inside a large water tank that was newly built there.—Kyodo News

An aquarium destroyed by the earthquake-triggered tsunami of March 2011 reopens for the first time since the disaster in Kujū, Iwate Prefecture, on 23 April 2016. The city government hopes the Moguranpia aquarium will serve as a symbol of the coastal city’s reconstruction and draw tourists from around the country. Photo: Kyodo News

Los Angeles — The music of Prince was brought to life a day after his death, as 1,000 Los Angeles high school students sang a tribute to the late singer.

The students came together from 31 Los Angeles-area schools at the Walt Disney Concert Hall and sang “Purple Rain.”

Prince, born Prince Rogers Nelson, was found dead in an elevator at his suburban Minneapolis home on Thursday at the age of 57, shocking millions of fans around the world and prompting glowing tributes.

About 1000 high school students sang ‘Purple Rain’ to honour the late singer Prince at Walt Disney Concert Hall which is illuminated purple in Downtown Los Angeles, US, on 22 April. Photo: Reuters

Prince was brought to life a day after his death, as 1,000 Los Angeles high school students sang a tribute to the late singer.

The students came together from 31 Los Angeles-area schools at the Walt Disney Concert Hall and sang “Purple Rain.”

Prince, born Prince Rogers Nelson, was found dead in an elevator at his suburban Minneapolis home on Thursday at the age of 57, shocking millions of fans around the world and prompting glowing tributes.

Prince was brought to life a day after his death, as 1,000 Los Angeles high school students sang a tribute to the late singer.

The students came together from 31 Los Angeles-area schools at the Walt Disney Concert Hall and sang “Purple Rain.”

Prince, born Prince Rogers Nelson, was found dead in an elevator at his suburban Minneapolis home on Thursday at the age of 57, shocking millions of fans around the world and prompting glowing tributes.

Los Angeles City Hall, New York’s Empire State building and Minneapolis’ Interstate 35 bridge were among the numerous monuments around the United States lit up in purple on Thursday night, to honour the late musician.—Reuters

LA children’s choir pays homage to Prince with musical tribute

Los Angeles City Hall, New York’s Empire State building and Minneapolis’ Interstate 35 bridge were among the numerous monuments around the United States lit up in purple on Thursday night, to honour the late musician.—Reuters
Speculation mounts over Tiger’s possible PGA Tour return

LOS ANGELES — With Tiger Woods hitting golf balls at a juniors clinic in South Carolina earlier this week, media speculation has been mounting that the former world number one could make his PGA Tour return within the next month.

The 14-times major champion has been sidelined from competition since August as he continues his recovery from back surgeries, but has been ramping up his practice routine while at home in Florida.

Some analysts suggest that Woods could make his PGA Tour return as early as the 5-8 May Wells Fargo Championship, but his manager Mark Steinberg said on Friday there was “nothing new to report” with regard to a timetable.

Woods’ long-time friend Notah Begay III, a 43-year-old Native American golfer who won four times on the PGA Tour, was wary of getting “too carried away” with media speculation.

“What I can say is that I have seen his progression throughout its entirety,” Begay said on Friday in his role as a television analyst with Golf Channel, a day after teaming up with Woods for the juniors clinic at Sage Valley.

“I started seeing him engage in different areas on his rehabilitation … started seeing him hit pitch shots and then being able to host a clinic with him and walk him through his entire bag from the wedges all the way to the driver.

“So if I were to evaluate this from a beginning point to an end point, with the end goal being a PGA Tour start, Tiger Woods is on the back end of this rehabilitation process.”

Begay, who played with Woods on the Stanford University golf team, offered no timeline. “Now is that 60, 70, 80 per cent through the process? I’m not sure but I can say from what I saw yesterday and from where I saw this thing begin, he is in a much better place,” said Begay.

“The strike was good on the ball, he was able to shape it in a variety of different directions and when the junior golfers were screaming out for him to hit the stinger, he did not disappoint.—Reuters

Leicester success would be greatest since Ipswich, says Crawford

LONDON — If Leicester City win the Premier League this season it will be the greatest upset since Ipswich Town were champions in 1962, according to Ray Crawford whose goals helped the latter side win their only top flight English title.

Leicester, who were stranded seven points from the safety zone 12 months ago, are five points clear with four games remaining and within touching distance of becoming the first maiden champions since Nottingham Forest in 1978.

While taking nothing away from Forest, who went on to win the European Cup twice in the following two seasons, Crawford, now a sprightly 79, was full of praise for Leicester as he sees so many similarities between their campaign and Ipswich’s.

Before this season started Leicester were priced at 3-1 by bookmakers to be relegated after last year’s narrow escape, while in August 1961 Ipswich, playing in the top flight for the first time, were wide-ly dismissed as no-hop-ers and tipped to make an immediate return to the Second Division.

“Leicester have defied the odds and so did we and so much of Leicester’s season reminds me of us,” Crawford told Reuters in a telephone interview from his home in Portsmouth.

“And if they were to hang on and win it, it would be the greatest upset since we did it because our biggest incentive at the start of the season was not to get relegated.

“At the start of the season all the national newspapers said we were hot favourites to go straight back down and that we could not survive because we didn’t have any class players,” he added.

“But what they did not take into consideration was that Ted Phillips and myself were goal scorers and if you have goal scorers in the team you’ve always got a chance.”

Fast forward to today and Leicester have exactly that. James Vardy has scored 22 goals in 34 matches while Riyad Mahrez has hit 16 in 33. The rest of the squad have contributed 19 between them as Leicester achieved their own aim of avoiding the drop — and then some.—Reuters

Murray says will play Davis Cup, despite tough schedule

LONDON — Andy Murray is prepared to switch from grass courts to clay in a matter of days to play for champions Britain against Serbia in the Davis Cup, the world number two said on Friday.

The 28-year-old, who almost single-handedly won the trophy for Britain last year for the first time since 1936, could face world number one Novak Djokovic in Belgrade a week after this year’s Wimbledon finals.

Serbia have not surprisingly chosen clay as the surface, knowing that Murray would find the transition from the slick Wimbledon lawns to clay difficult.

Murray, however, plans to play even if his schedule is further complicated this year by the Rio Olympics where he will be the defending champion.

“The plan is to play but it is going to be difficult,” Murray, the 2013 Wimbledon champion, told BBC Sport.

“I need to play it a little bit by ear, as well, because I just don’t know how the body is going to respond.”

“These next couple of months are going to be extremely difficult,” he added.

Murray has suffered from back problems and is wary of putting too much strain on his body, although he has been ferociously committed to the Davis Cup.

He has played in every tie since 2013, winning 21 of his 22 rubbers in that period.

“Changing surfaces — almost on a weekly basis — does increase the chance of injury significantly.

“Not many players would go from playing a grass court tournament one week straight onto the clay the following week with only a couple of days preparation time,” he said.—Reuters

Andy Murray of Britain reacts during Monte Carlo Masters at Monaco on 16 April 2016. Photo: Reuters

West Ham’s Winston Reid shoots at goal during Barclays Premier League at The King Power Stadium on 17 April 2016. Photo: Reuters