Lawmakers called for the suspension of the lease of land for the private hospital following their discussions on a proposal submitted by MP Dr San Shwe Win of Yekyi Constituency early this month.

In his discussion, Union Minister for Health Dr Myunt Htway expressed his support for the proposal, vowing that the land lease for the private hospital would be suspended.

The ministry leased the 4.3-acre plot on the corner of Bogyoke Street and Pyay Road in Lanmadaw Township to the Singapore-based Parkway Company for the construction of a private hospital following an agreement signed on 9 January 2016. The Union minister told the Pyithu Hluttaw that no tender was invited to lease the land, and it was leased by the previous government.

According to sources, the company was allowed to rent the land at a rate of US$4.50 per square metre, and $2.58 million was transferred to the account of the ministry, amounting to 30 per cent of the land use premium.

Representatives who took part in discussions on the proposal said the rental process lacked transparency, and the lease price was much lower than the market rate.
Kokang rehabilitation works seek help from President’s special fund

SUGGESTIONS from over 40 civil society organisations (CSOs) regarding the amendment of local ward and village administration legislation will be put forward to both the Pyithu and Amyotha Hluttaw.

CSOs have announced that they will also strive to hold meetings with parliamentarians from both blutaws as well as send their recommendations concerning the legislation.

“We want to amend 11 of the 14 sections of the law, which include articles relating to the right to vote for anyone over the age of 18 years old. They are points that are needed for the democratic selection of candidates and the holding of elections. We’ve requested to meet with parliamentarians during the second week of May. But we haven’t received a reply yet,” said Daw Thinzar Shunlei Yi, advocacy coordinator at the Action Committee for Democracy.

Amendments made by the previous parliament to legislation on local administration were not enough to quell the objections and protests that have prompted further amendments of the legislation during the current parliament.

“It’s the people’s voice that is making the current changes – it’s the public who staged protests and objected during the selection of local administrators. They want articles of law to be amended. They want a transparent selection process. Since the public does not approve of [the current method of] electing local administrators, we will not accept it either,” said Ko Kyaw Htin, programme officer from the New Myanmar Foundation.

In addition to submitting the aforementioned recommendations to the parliaments, efforts will be made to meet with the Ministry of Home Affairs to discuss the amendments.

However, the Union Deputy Minister for Home Affairs told the Lower House in the second week of May that there are no plans to make amendments to the 2012 Ward and Village Administration Law any time soon.

—Myitmakha News Agency

Mandalay Region govt to tackle river erosion in seven villages

THE Water Resources and River Development Department will take emergency measures to prevent river bank erosion in several villages as part of the new government’s 100-day project initiative. The department began preventive measures on 4 May in two villages, and the project will begin in other villages beginning on 12 May.

“We included emergency measures in the schedule of the 100-days project. River banks collapse mostly during high tide. Therefore, we included preventive measures in this project,” said U Toe Aung from the Water Resources and River Development Department.

This April, tides were higher than usual because of El Niño.

Hsinkyiyn and Kyunhsin villages were the first to receive assistance under the project. Other villages that require action include: Sinthal Village and Hthanhar Ma Village in Sintku Township; Konetan Village and Thatasan Village in Mada ya Township; and Chantayi Village in Patheingyi Township.

—Aung Thant Khine

FREE short-term technical and vocational training courses being offered

SHORT courses on skill-based technical and vocational training are free to trainees and accommodation is also provided free of charge, said Union Minister for Education Dr Myo Thein Giyi at the opening of the courses in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

Jointly organised by the Asian Development Bank and the ministry, the bricklaying and bar-bending courses were opened for the first time, intended to nurture skilled workers.

In his address, the Union minister said that the short-term practical courses are aimed at meeting industry demand for skilled workers in respective regions of the country.

The courses are set to run for three months, with no more than 12 trainees per course. Those aged between 18 and 40 who completed primary education are allowed to take part.—Myanmar News Agency

Issuance of CNG books for city buses set for completion during 100-day period

EFFORTS are being made to ensure the speedy issuance of books to BRT city buses for buying CNG from the Ministry of Electricity and Energy, said Daw Khin Khin Aye, assistant secretary of the ministry at a press conference yesterday.

The issuance of CNG books to the city buses of the Yangon Bus Public Company Limited is set for completion during the period of the government’s 100-day plan, added the assistant secretary.

According to the ministry, the present CNG supply of 0.35 million litres for the city buses is not enough to fully operate their service as buses run from 6 am to 10 pm every day. A city bus consumes more than 600 litres a day, said Daw Khin Khin Aye, adding that the ministry is planning to meet the CNG demand of 65 buses.

The Ministry has allowed 30 city buses to get 600 liters of CNG as of 2 May.—Myint Oo (NPT)

Workers lay stones at the bank of Ayeyawady River in Mandalay to prevent erosion. PHOTO: ATK

THE Kokang Self-Administered Zone leading body can seek help from the President for implementation of its rehabilitation works with the use of the President’s special fund in accordance with rules and regulations, said Deputy Minister for Border Affairs Maj-Gen Than Htut during his response to a question by a representative at the session of the Amyotha Hluttaw yesterday.

As provisions that allow the President to use his special funds for certain matters are clearly stated in Union Government Budget Law, the President’s special fund can be used for the rehabilitation of the region under the agreement of the Union government, he added.

According to the deputy minister, regional undertakings are being carried out by ministries concerned to rehabilitate Kokang region following budget allocations to various sectors.

Regarding the construction of a rural road to better socio-economic development opportunities in Falam Township, the deputy minister said that works are underway to upgrade a rural road that passes through 13 villages in the township with the use of Peace and Construction Fund this fiscal year and remaining works are set to continue in accordance with allocation of funds for the next fiscal year.

—Myanmar News Agency

CSOs push to amend Local Administrator Law

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China-Myanmar JV starts building power plant in Myanmar’s Yangon

FAO provides disaster relief to Northern Rakhine State

President forms committee to prevent conscription of minors

Deputy Minister for Transport and Communication appointed

Rumours and confusion abound over 11PM lockout laws

President forms committee to prevent conscription of minors

THE President’s Office has formed a Committee for the Prevention of Recruitment of Minors in Military Service with the release of Notification 17/2016, dated 5 May.

The committee includes 12 members, including the deputy attorney-general as secretary. The committee will be chaired by the Union Minister for Defence.

The committee is set to be tasked with 12 points of action, including discharging minors from military service or basic military training to reunite them with their families and enhancing cooperation with UN agencies, including UNICEF and the UNDP—Myanmar News Agency.

FAO provides disaster relief to Northern Rakhine State

THE UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) is offering food subsidies to impoverished communities in northern Rakhine State. Nearly a year on since Cyclone Komen, communities still rely on food assistance.

FAO has provided 1,700 households with paddy seed, cowpeas and vegetable seeds to help them recover from losses due to the flooding. The FAO provided 1,600 households with goats, pigs and training in animal care and breeding.

“Now we are receiving FAO assistance with goats, and we will be able to generate more income. With the extra income we will use the money to buy food and use the rest for the children to attend school,” said An Bira Hatu, a resident of Warcha Village.

According to a 6 May FAO press release, Rakhine State has one of the highest poverty rates in the country at 78 per cent, based off of World Bank statistics.

Warcha Village is located near Butidaung and Maungtaw Townships, where “the percentage of children consuming the minimum acceptable diet is alarmingly low, at two and three per cent, respectively,” said FAO Myanmar’s Emergency Co-ordinator Mr Andrea Berloff.

“FAO’s project in northern Rakhine State aims to improve income-generating opportunities and diversify livelihoods through the provision of livestock and agricultural inputs.

“At the same time, we are increasing access to and availability of food, particularly high-quality animal proteins, to cover basic needs and improve nutrition. This helps communities to be more resilient to withstand future natural disasters,” Mr Berloff added.

The largely Muslim population of northern Rakhine State faces travel bans that make trade difficult for the communities. Over 10,000 households were Levelled by Cyclone Komen, which also damaged 20 per cent of the state’s paddy fields and more than 13,000 hectares of fishponds and 23,000 hectares of shrimp ponds, according to the FAO—GNLM.

Deputy Minister for Transport and Communication appointed

PRESIDENT U Htin Kyaw appointed U Kyaw Myo as Deputy Minister for Transport and Communications yesterday.

The President Office Order No. 40/2016 stated that U Kyaw Myo has been appointed as Deputy Minister for Transport and Communication under provisions of the Union Constitution sections 234 (a) and (c) and the Constitution and section 16 (b) (9) of the Union Government Law.—Myanmar News Agency

MRTV, BBC Media Action look forward to further cooperation

UNION Minister for Information Dr Pe Myint held talks with Mr. Edward Pauker, Country Director for BBC Media Action in Myanmar, on further cooperation between Myanmar Radio and Television and BBC Media Action in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

The two discussed matters related to enhancing human resources development objectives and production works of the MRTV. Also present at the meeting were Permanent Secretary U Tint Swe and officials.—Myanmar News Agency

UCEC Chairman meets DRI expert

CHAIRMAN of the Union Election Commission U Hla Thein received Ms. Charlemagne Sophie Gomez, an expert from Democracy Reporting International (DRI), in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

During the meeting the two held talks on the DRI’s assistance to CSOs to enhance capacity building for their roles in the election process, bringing about more female representation in Union Election Commission and Parliament, further cooperation between the UEC and CSOs in the country’s future elections and revision of the legal frameworks of laws.—Myanmar News Agency

Rumours and confusion abound over 11PM lockout laws

Alec Wilmot

YANGON Region Minister for Security and Border Affairs Col Tin Aung Tun told press on 11 May that the government did not issue “any orders” to ensure that restaurants, KTVs and nightclubs close at 11pm. This comes amongst the NLĐs “100-day plan” to establish rule of law in Myanmar.

The 11pm “lockout” clause is, in fact, a contractual stipulation applied to all liquor licenses issued to venues in Myanmar, the Global New Light confirmed with a number of industry sources.

The Myanmar Times reported yesterday that a number of venues on Tuesday night were forced to close in order to abide by the 11PM lockout rule brought about by police who threatened further action if their instructions were ignored, seemingly as a result of the Region Security Minister further meeting with the government.

The Myanmar Times quoted Police Major Thein Aung as saying that the 11PM lockout rule would be strictly enforced by Yangon Police as a part of the new government’s “100-day plan” to install the rule of law. This has created a public and media storm where it seemingly contradicts the statement made by the Region Minister for Security and Border Affairs.

The Security Minister further stated that rumours came about after meeting with the government.

Social media exploded with angst regarding the news, with many feeling as though the decision was contrary to the regional government’s aims, raising concerns over the potential negative effects on night-time trade.

“I would say that enforcing the early closure rule on the basis of cracking down on crime is about as useful as surgically amputating the foot of a patient with lung cancer,” said Yan Nyein Aung, a Yangon socialite.

Adding, “Crime, gang-related or otherwise, is not an issue at any of the establishments we (col leagues, friends) frequent. I applaud the Regional Government for taking the step to a democratic system and wish our new government all the best but I feel this decision will do great harm to the nighttime and the people of my community.”

Chief Minister of Yangon Region U Phyo Min Thein earlier this week gave his vow that he would avoid over-entrepreneur violence and other crimes in Yangon Region at a meeting focused on the regional government’s 100-day plan, citing a need for increased police presence.

If the 11PM contractual lock-out is enforced there are concerns that the measure will not prove effective and may become counterproductive, considering the manpower and resources required to enforce the rule city-wide. According to UN statistics from 2012 Myanmar overall had 154 police per 100,000 people, a number considered to be alarmingly low. From September 2013-15 the European Union organised community policing and crowd management training courses with the Myanmar Police Force. The programme was cancelled earlier this year.
Intl food and hotels event coming to Yangon

WITH the aim of promoting Myanmar’s hospitality industry, an international exhibition for food and hotels is scheduled to be held in early June in Yangon, said U Nay Linn, chairman of the Myanmar Restaurant Association.

"International Food & Hotels Myanmar 2016" will run between 1 and 3 June at Myanmar Event Park on Shinsawpu Road in Yangon.

A total of 220 exhibitors from 27 countries, including South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Germany will take part in the three-day event by showcasing various products and services.

This is the third time Bangkok Exhibition Services Ltd has organised the recurring event in Myanmar.

Special talks on food safety, a food quiz game and some food and drink-related contests will be held during the event.

"The Myanmar Chefs Association is offering special training to young people with hearing loss from Mary Chapman School for the Deaf to compete in the contest. Myanmar has rapidly emerged as one of Asia’s newest and brightest frontier markets, with economic growth estimated at an annual rate of seven per cent for the next two years. Last year’s tourist arrivals up to the end of November reached more than 4.2 million, according to figures released by the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism. Investments in the country also continue to grow each year."—Myint Maung Soe

EU pledges 100 million Euros in Myanmar’s development sector

IN its efforts to lay emphasis on ensuring stability and prosperity around the world the European Union (EU) has elected to support Myanmar and its people to establish a democratic country, said Mr. Roland Kobia, EU ambassador to Myanmar.

"The EU has allocated one billion Euros to aid Myanmar’s development over the period 2014-2020. The funds are direct at four key issues in Myanmar. The funds will help to develop rural areas and agriculture, ensure food and security improves nutritional value, promote education, improve governance and the rule of law and contribute to peace building. Myanmar will continue to receive support in matters of democratic governance and human rights, the environment and climate change, human development, sustainable energy as well as trade, according to a statement made at the EU establishment ceremony held at the Inya lake hotel yesterday."

EU lends the support of 100 million Euros to Myanmar annually. The EU first started its support in 2013 for the election in Myanmar and is still supporting the country through the STEP Democracy programme. The EU has increased its support for the promotion of livelihoods and development in ethnic areas which have been destroyed by armed conflicts. The EU also attempted to train over 6,500 Myanmar Policemen in regard to human rights.

The EU has enabled over 200,000 local households to access to credit, over 60,000 households to have higher earnings, over 900,000 children to receive books and stationary and over 200,000 people to attend training on environmental conservation. The EU will build on and continue to promote peace, sustainable development and democratic governance for the benefit of all people in Myanmar, it said. —Myint Maung Soe

Yangon to prioritise seizures, arrests during 100-day... >From page 1

have increased livefold,” said Police Lt-Col Kyaw Kyaw Min, adding that most of the seized drugs are believed to have been transported to Bangladesh via Rakhine State.

According to the Yangon Police Force, an anti-narcotic squad of 876 police personnel has been deployed in the region’s four districts, including Yangon Interna-

ional Airport and the jetties. Under ‘Operation Dagon’ from 1 to 11 May, 105 suspects were arrested in 77 drug-related cases, police said.

Minister Col Tin Aung Tun suggested that the Union government allow police to use seized money in anti-narcotic drug activities.

During the 12-year period from 1993 to 2014, police seized movable and immovable assets worth K57.236 billion in connection with drug-related cases, he said.

In his recent pledge to ensure the rule of law in Yangon, Yangon Region Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein said measures will be taken to ensure the effectiveness of police service by increasing police strength and equipping them with modern devices and technology.

Crime NEWS

Locals rob forestry staff of logs

OFFICIALS and staff of the Taikkyi Forestry Department seized illegal logs in a field near Wun Kait village, Taikkyi township on Saturday. The forestry staff found four carts carrying the logs. They also found 66 teak logs hidden inside a straw dump.

Forestry staff put the illegal logs onto a vehicle to move them to a secure location. Over 20 villagers from Wun Kait village arrived to the vehicle with knives and sticks.

They looted the logs from the vehicle and returned to their village. Forestry staff informed local police. The police have filed charges and taken action against the villagers.— Tun Hlaing (Myine)

Local police arrested a man accused of selling narcotics in Kaing Wun village, Kawlin township, Sagaing region on 8 May.

Acting on a tip-off, a combined investigation team comprising officers and staff from the Myanmar Police Force seized heroine weighing 7 grams, 230 Yaba pills and black opium weighing 4.25 grams from one Myint Thaung, 48. Police have filed charges against him under the Anti-Narcotics law.— Ko Ko Nyein (Kawlin)

Yaba, Heroin and black opium seized

A COMBINED team comprising officers and staff from the Myanmar Police Force seized Yaba and ammunition from one Saw Aung Htut near Kyauk Phyu mountain, Hpa-an township, on Monday. The police searched Saw Aung Htut and found 779 yaba pills, four guns and four bullets. He admitted that he had bought the weapons and drugs from one Zai Ni.

Similarly, police searched the home of one Hon Kaye in Kyauk Hmu Lwe ward, Muse town on Tuesday and found 3,000 yaba pills. On that same day a combined team searched the home of one Cho Tu on Htar Nar road, Ahlon township and discovered 2,000 yaba pills.

Log
took by the local robbers. Photo: Tun Hlaing (Myine)
Laydauntkan hatchery set to produce 100,000 fingerlings under 100-day plan

Ko Moe

A FISH hatchery at Laydauntkan in Yangon Region is set to produce over 100,000 fingerlings under its 100-day plan, said U Ye Tun Naing, person in-charge of the hatchery yesterday.

Technology will improve fish hatchery production in order to exceed the fingerling stock of previous years at the hatchery, he added.

That hatchery, which produced more than 38.5 million fingerlings last year, set a target of production of over 40 million fingerlings this year.

It has 49 hatchery ponds in an area of 60 acres.

According to the hatchery, fish farms in Yangon and Ayeyawady Regions are its regular customers. Fingerlings have also been delivered to townships in Sagaing and Taninthayi Regions and Rakhine State.

Fish are caught to be bred at Laydauntkan farm in Yangon on 11 May. [Photo: Zaw Gyi (Panita)]

Ayeyawady fish paste makers say they use no prohibited substances

FISH paste manufacturers in Noutmeelin Village, Ayeyawady Delta, villagers normally operate fish paste manufacturing businesses, producing between 65 per cent and 70 per cent of the country’s fish paste.

“We local entrepreneurs have not used restricted dyes since we started a special project by the Food and Drug Administration in May 2009,” said U Myat Thu, a fish paste producer in the village.

He went on to say as much as 20 per cent of fish paste products in the local market contain prohibited dyes.

Daw Aye Aye Khin, the owner of the Boma shrimp paste factory, said: “We already know that putting prohibited dyes in fish paste can cause health problems, including cancers in human bodies, and we have never seen fly repellents as we only produce shrimp paste, which has no need for it.”

Fish paste producers in Ayeyawady Region suffered losses after the chairman of the Consumer Protection Association, U Ba Oak Khaing, said 80 per cent of fish paste produced in the delta region contained prohibited dyes.

Noutmeelin Village has 50 fish paste manufacturers, who carry out regular production in cooperation with the FDA.—PTK/Union Daily

Sales of FMI shares fall by over 90 per cent

THE price of First Myanmar Investment (FMI) shares on the nascent Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX) continued to depreciate in value to K27,000 per share, while the buying and selling of shares has fallen by 94 per cent, according to a statement by the YSX.

By 25 May, FMI had sold a total of over 100,000 shares since the beginning of trading on the YSX, while on 12 May, the total shares amounted to over 60,000.

“The price of shares is dependent upon buying and selling demand. As buyers wait for a fall in the market, sellers try and make as many sales as they can. There’s a lot of supply. That’s the nature of the market,” said U Then Htun Oo, chief executive director of the YSX.

The highest price of FMI shares shortly after the company started trading was K31,000 per share, with a total of over 100,000 being sold. However, it is known that by 29 March the company sold 200,000 shares at a cost of K41,000 each.

The current share price has fallen to K27,000 per share, close the primary initial price of K26,000, while a total of 6,483 shares have been bought and sold at this price.

“I haven’t bought any shares yet because I don’t have any expendable income. I think the market will fall with people buying and selling shares in bulk,” said U Kyaw Min Naing, who is involved in the agricultural fertiliser and pesticide business.

The Myanmar Thilawa SEZ Holdings Co was the second company to trade on the YSX as of this May 20. Of the six currently listed companies on the YSX, only two which have been granted official permission to trade shares.—Myitmahta News Agency

Gold supply exceeds demand in Yangon market

THE gold market in Yangon sees an excess in supply these days, said U Ohn Myaing, the owner of a gold shop on 29th Street in downtown Yangon.

He added that gold shops around Lammadaw, Latha and Pabedan townships, as well as Bogyoke Market, have seen low demand for gold wares.

Gold merchants say most middle-income customers sold the bulk of their gold to buy school equipment before the beginning of the school year in June.

The local gold market is likely to cool next month, said U Aye Cho, the coordinator of the Yangon Region Gold Entrepreneurs Association.

“Gold merchants are still trying to export gold to Myanmar gold,” said U Myo Myint, the chairman of the Yangon Region Gold Entrepreneurs Association.—Tin Win Lay

Myanmar and India to conduct G to G or bean export

THE Myanmar Pulses, Beans and Sesame Seeds Merchants Association will be involved as an agency of a G to G (Government to Government) system between Myanmar and India, said U Zin Oo, the Head of the Department of this association.

India proposed to purchase 25,000 metric tonnes of mung beans and pigeon peas a year at the prevailing market price under the G to G system.

According to a draft agreement sent by India, an agency is also required to be set up with the Myanmar Pulses, Beans and Sesame Seeds Merchants Association planning to conduct business as an agency under the guidance of the Ministry of Commerce.

Previously, pea trade between Myanmar and India was carried out under a seller and purchaser relationship system under which merchants from India had to purchase from many different pea companies. Under the new system India will be able to buy Myanmar peas in a streamlined fashion through the agency.—200
Malaysia says two more debris confirmed from missing MH370

KUALA LUMPUR — Two pieces of debris discovered in South Africa and the Mauritian island of Rodrigues were confirmed by expert team as originating from missing Malaysia Airlines MH370, Malaysian Transport Minister Liow Tiong Lai said on Thursday.

Following a thorough examination, the expert team concluded that the two pieces of debris, an engine cowling piece with a partial Rolls-Royce logo and an interior panel piece from an aircraft cabin respectively, are consistent with panels found on a Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777 aircraft, Liow said in a statement.

"As such, the team has confirmed that both pieces of debris from South Africa and Rodrigues Island are almost certainly from MH370," he said.

Malaysian and Australian authorities have confirmed earlier that two pieces of debris found in Mozambique originated from the missing flight.

Liow said the governments of Malaysia, Australia and China continue to be wholly committed to the search for MH370.

More than 105,000 square-km of the 120,000 square-km search area have been completed, he added.

Flight MH370 disappeared on 8 March, 2014 enroute from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing with 239 people on board, most of them being Chinese nationals.

A joint search effort has not yet found the main body of the aircraft in the southern Indian Ocean, where it has presumably ended its journey.

VIET NAM says would welcome US accelerating lifting of arms ban

HANOI — Viet Nam would welcome the United States "accelerating" the lifting of a lethal arms embargo, which would reflect trust between the two countries and recognition of its needs to defend itself, its foreign ministry said on Thursday.

Viet Nam’s comments on a topic that has long been a source of friction with the United States comes just over a week ahead of a visit by President Barack Obama, and amid debate in Washington over whether to remove the ban, which was eased in late 2014.

The arms embargo is one of the last major vestiges of the Viet Nam War era. The United States has not indicated publicly it would remove the embargo and has long said such a move would depend on Viet Nam showing progress on human rights.

“We welcome the United States’ acceleration to fully lift the lethal arms sales ban on Viet Nam,” the ministry said in response to Reuters questions.

“This is consistent with the development trend of the comprehensive partnership ... demonstrating trust between the two countries.”

Lifting the embargo would mark a major step forward in ties 21 years after normalisation began.

The ministry said it welcomed the "many supporting voices in the United States that had called for the removal of the embargo. US engagement with Viet Nam was stepped up rapidly during 2014, in what experts say was a calibrated move by the United States to seize on deteriorating ties between Viet Nam and communist neighbour China over rival territorial claims in the South China Sea.”

China says has wide support for stance on South China Sea case

BEIJING — China has widespread support in the international community for its decision not to have anything to do with a legal case lodged by the Philippines against Chinese claims in the South China Sea, a senior diplomat said on Thursday.

China has been stepping up its rhetoric ahead of a ruling expected in a few weeks by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague on the Philippines case. China says it is fully within its rights not to participate in what it views as forced arbitration, and says the Philippines is using the case to directly undermine Chinese sovereignty.

In February, the United States and the European Union said China should respect the ruling. The court has no powers of enforcement and its rulings have been ignored before.

Xu Hong, head of the Chinese foreign ministry’s Department of Treaties and Law, said the issue was being hyped up by people who lack a proper understanding of international law.

“We can see so many countries coming to the fore hyping this issue up, but it doesn’t matter how loud their voices are, they still represent a minority of countries in the world,” he told a news briefing.

“If you look at who is talking about international law all the time, it is politicians and non-professionals with ulterior motives. It is them who really need to learn something about international law.”

The foreign ministry has in recent weeks been claiming support for its South China Sea position from countries as diverse as Cambodia and Yemen.

Xu said no country would accept compulsory arbitration when core interests were at stake.

“Actually there are a number of voices of reason on this issue from genuine international law experts who have had some serious and objective comments, but all those comments have been neglected or ignored by some people,” he said.

“Some people are trying to change the concept stealthily to confound right and wrong and black and white. They may be able to mislead public opinion for some time but eventually lies are lies and even repeated a thousand times will not become truth,” Xu said.

China had always been a firm defender and practitioner of international law, he said. “We don’t feel isolated at all.” China claims almost all of the energy-rich waters of the South China Sea, through which more than $5 trillion of maritime trade passes each year.

The Philippines, Brunei, Viet Nam, Malaysia and Taiwan have overlapping claims. —Reuters
Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull stands outside Australia’s Parliament House in Canberra on 4 May 2016 following the announcement Australia’s 2016-17 Federal Budget. PHOTO: REUTERS

Australian PM Turnbull named in Panama Papers, denies wrongdoing

CANBERRA — Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull on Thursday denied any wrongdoing after being named in the Panama Papers as a former director of a British Virgin Islands company set up to exploit a Siberean gold prospect. Turnbull and former New South Wales Premier Neville Wran joined the board of Australian-listed Star Mining NL in 1993. The company hoped to develop a $520 million ($14.67 billion)Siberean gold mine called Sukhoi Log, according to the Australian Financial Review, which first reported the story.

Both Turnbull and Wran were subsequently appointed directors of Star Technology Services, a subsidiary of Star Mining in the British Virgin Islands which had been incorporated by Mossack Fonseca, the Panama-based law firm at the centre of the global scandal.

“There is no suggestion of any impropriety whatsoever. There is nothing new here,” Turnbull told reporters. “The company of which Neville Wran and I were directors was an Australian listed company and had it made any profits — which it did not, regrettably — it certainly would have paid tax in Australia.” The details are included in documents obtained by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists known as the Panama Papers but are not part of the publicly searchable database. Tax havens and transparency have been thrust into the spotlight as governments worldwide launch probes into possible financial wrongdoing after the details of hundreds of thousands of clients’ tax affairs were leaked from Mossack Fonseca. Turnbull, a former investment banker and technology entrepreneur, is campaigning ahead of a general election on 2 July, with his ruling Liberal-National coalition in a virtual tie with the main opposition.

— Reuters

Japan denies alleged bribery in Tokyo’s bid for 2020 Olympics

TOKYO — Japan’s top government spokesman on Thursday denied allegations of bribery in Tokyo’s campaign to host the 2020 Olympics, saying the government understands the organising committee conducted the campaign in a “clean way.”

“We understand the campaign for the 2020 Tokyo Games was conducted in a clean way,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said at a news conference after a British newspaper reported the Tokyo Olympics organising committee paid a 1.3 million euro ($1.48 million) bribe to the account of the son of Lamine Diack, who was an International Olympic Committee member at the time, before Tokyo was awarded the Games.

Suga said he is “not aware of” the Guardian report, which also said French authorities were investigating the allegations. “If we receive a request (for investigation) from French judicial authorities, our country will respond appropriately,” he added.

Suga said the Japanese government has no plan to question the Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games or conduct its own investigation into the allegations.

— Kyodo News

Strong quake strikes northeast Taiwan, shakes buildings in capital

TAIPEI — An earthquake with a magnitude of 5.6 shook northeast Taiwan on Thursday, the US Geological Survey said, with tremors felt in the capital, Taipei.

The quake was centred 14 km (nine miles) northeast of the coastal town of Su-ao, the US Geological Survey said. There were no immediate reports of injuries, collapsed buildings or other damage.

Earthquakes are common in Taiwan. In February, a 6.4 magnitude quake toppled a large apartment complex in southern Taiwan killing more than 100 people. — Reuters

Singapore expert says slower growth ‘brings its own benefits’ as Chinese economy matures

SINGAPORE — Singapore expert said at a forum that the slowdown of China’s economic growth is the “new normal,” which is inevitable and brings its own benefits as its economy matures, local media the Straits Times reported on Thursday.

“It’s a slowdown, but only by Chinese standards. China can’t be expected to grow 6 to 7 per cent forever; no economy can keep growing at such high rates,” Professor John Wong of the East Asian Institute at the National University of Singapore said at the Straits Times Global Outlook series on Wednesday.

China’s economy grew 6.9 per cent year on year in 2015, the country’s most sluggish expansion since 1990, which triggered concerns over whether the world’s second largest economy will face a hard landing.

However, Wong said that the new normal in fact gives China a chance to promote reforms and restructure of the economy. “China’s economy is really being restructured; growth used to be externally driven and labour intensive, now it’s domestically driven and capital intensive,” he said.

China’s service sector contributed 50.5 per cent to the country’s GDP in 2015, up from 48.1 per cent in 2014. It is the first time the sector has exceeded 50 per cent.

— Xinhua

UN statement condemning North Korea missile launches faces opposition

SEOUL — A number of members of the UN Security Council have issued opposition to the missile launches, as the council has been subject to rounds of Security Council resolutions banning the use of ballistic missile technology.

North Korea fired what appeared to be two Musudan missiles, presumed also to be a Musudan, from its east coast, but this too appeared to have failed, having disappeared from radar seconds after being launched.

The Musudan missile has an estimated range of between 2,500 and 4,000 kilometers, which would enable it to reach not only any target in South Korea or Japan, but also potentially US military facilities on the Pacific islands of Guam. — Kyodo News

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Heat stroke awareness be raised

THERE were 87 local accorded as suffering from heat stroke caused by the impact of scorching heat in Mandalay Region from 6 April to 10 May. Eight people were reported to have died of heat stroke according to the figures of the Mandalay Health Department.

“The temperature is still on the moderate scale, but the figures above 110°C can cause fires and fits. If anyone feels any discomfort, they should be taken to hospital to immediately receive medical treatment” said Dr Win Nang, the regional director of the health Department of Mandalay. The temperature of Mandalay started to rise from 6 April, reaching up to 42.3°C (108.1°F) on Monday, according to the Chan-Thar-Mo Meteorological station.

Outbreaks of heat stroke were seen mostly in Kyauktada and other townships, according to the doctors. The figures above 110°C can cause fires and fits. If anyone feels any discomfort, they should be taken to hospital to immediately receive medical treatment.”

The Burma Research Society

The Burma Research Society was founded in 1909 by the then government of Myanmar in its effort to embrace the society’s rich cultural and natural heritage. The society was established to provide a platform for the people of Myanmar to engage in scholarly discussions and to contribute to the development of the nation.

The society’s founders included prominent scholars, academics, and politicians who aimed to promote the study of Myanmar’s history, culture, and geography. The society’s first president was U Khin Zaw, a well-known scholar and politician.

Over the years, the society has played a crucial role in promoting research and education in Myanmar. It has published several journals and books, which have contributed to the nation’s cultural and intellectual heritage.

Today, the society continues to foster a culture of learning and scholarship, engaging in research, publishing, and hosting events to promote the understanding and appreciation of Myanmar’s diverse culture and history.

The Burma Research Society’s accomplishments and contributions have been recognized and celebrated by the Myanmar government and the international community. The society’s work and legacy have left a lasting impact on Myanmar’s intellectual and cultural landscape.

In conclusion, the Burma Research Society’s founding and its continuous efforts to preserve and promote Myanmar’s heritage are commendable. The society’s dedication to research, education, and cultural preservation is a testament to its enduring commitment to the nation’s intellectual growth and advancement.

The Burma Research Society’s work is a remarkable example of how collective efforts can lead to significant achievements in promoting cultural and intellectual heritage. The society’s contributions continue to inspire and guide future generations in Myanmar and beyond.
US activates Romanian missile defence site, angering Russia

DEVESELU, (Romania) — The United States switched on a $800 million missile shield in Romania on Thursday that it sees as vital to defend itself and Europe from so-called rogue states but the Kremlin says is aimed at blunting its own nuclear arsenal.

To the music of military bands at the remote Deveselu air base, senior US and NATO officials declared operational the ballistic missile defence site, which is capable of shooting down rockets from countries such as Iran that Washington says could one day reach major European cities.

“As long as Iran continues to develop and deploy ballistic missiles, the United States will work with its allies to defend NATO,” said US Deputy Defence Secretary Robert Work, standing in front of the shield’s massive gray concrete housing that was adorned with a US flag.

Despite Washington’s plans to continue to develop the capabilities of its system, Work said the shield would not be used against any future Russian missile threat. “There are no plans at all to do that,” he told a news conference before the ceremony. Frank Rose, deputy US assistant secretary of state for arms control, warned that Iran’s ballistic missiles can hit parts of Europe, including Romania.

When complete, the defensive umbrella will stretch from Greenland to the Azores. On Friday, the United States will break ground on a final site in Poland due to be ready by late 2018, completing the defence line first proposed almost a decade ago.

The full shield also includes ships and radars across Europe. It will be handed over to NATO in July, with command and control run from a US air base in Germany. Russia is incensed at such show of force by its Cold War rival in formerly communist-ruled eastern Europe. Moscow says the US-led alliance is trying to encircle it close to the strategically important Black Sea, home to a Russian naval fleet and where NATO is also considering establishing air policing patrols. “It is part of the military and political containment of Russia,” Andrey Kelin, a senior Russian Foreign Ministry official, said on Thursday, the Interfax news agency reported.

“These decisions by NATO can only exacerbate an already difficult situation,” he added, saying the move would hinder efforts to repair ties between Russia and the alliance. Russian President Vladimir Putin’s office said Moscow also doubted NATO’s stated aim of protecting the alliance against Iranian rockets following the historic nuclear deal with Tehran and world powers last year that Russia helped to negotiate. —Reuters

UN rights chief concerned about Austria’s tough asylum law

VIENNA — The United Nations’ Human Rights chief is concerned about Austria’s tough new asylum law, which allows a process under which migrants could be turned away at the border within an hour, he said in an interview published on Thursday.

Austria, a country of 8.5 million, has mostly served as a conduit into Germany for refugees and migrants from the Middle East and Africa but it has also absorbed around 100,000 asylum seekers since last summer.

After initially welcoming refugees, the government capped the number of asylum claims it would accept this year at 37,500 and has made family reunification harder for migrants.

“We are concerned that people could possibly be turned away on a questionable basis,” Human Rights High Commissioner Zeid Ra’ad Al-Hussein was quoted as saying by newspaper Die Presse about the law which could be applied as soon as 1 June. Zeid added he was also worried about the law allowing for under-age migrants to be held in detention for up to three days, which he said could represent a breach of children’s rights.

“Austria was a leading European country for the defence of human rights globally for a long time. There must be conformity between what you say to other countries and what is applied domestically,” he said.

Werner Faymann, who had defended the law against critics, stepped down as Chancellor on Monday after his social-democratic party suffered a humiliating electoral defeat to a far right buoyed by Europe’s migration crisis. —Reuters

Papua New Guinea releases asylum seekers during day only

SYDNEY — Papua New Guinea has relaxed restrictions on nearly 900 asylum seekers held on behalf of Australia, allowing them to leave the detention centre during the day, a lawyer said on Thursday, but a rights group dismissed the move as “window-dressing”.

Papua New Guinea’s Supreme Court last month ruled detention of refugees on the country’s Manus Island was illegal, forcing the government of the tiny Pacific Island nation to announce it would close the camp. Papua New Guinea has since allowed the 998 men held on Manus to leave the camp during the day, Ben Lomai, a lawyer acting for many of the detainees, told Reuters. They sign up for one of three buses to a nearby town and return to the camp in the evening.—Reuters

Ukraine, Russia agree some security measures

BERLIN — Ukraine and Russia agreed on Wednesday to create demilitarised zones and implement other security measures in separatist-held areas of eastern Ukraine, but they remained at odds over how to move towards local elections.

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier told reporters after talks in Berlin with the foreign ministers of Russia, Ukraine and France that it would be “a big step forward” if the measures were actually implemented and helped strengthen a fragile ceasefire.

Other steps agreed during the three-hour meeting included greater information-sharing and a halt to military exercises along the dividing line between the separatist territories and Ukraine proper that has led to violence in the past, he said.—Reuters

Flash floods displace nearly 120,000 in Ethiopia: aid agencies

ADDIS ABABA — Flash floods displaced nearly 120,000 people in Ethiopia last month and a total of almost half a million are expected to be affected this year, government and humanitarian agencies said on Wednesday.

The floods are part of the global El Niño weather phenomenon that had previously caused a severe drought in the Horn of Africa nation following successive failed rains.

The drought has left 10.2 million people in need of food aid and aid agencies say that figure could rise to more than 15 million by August. Ethiopia’s total population is 90 million.—Reuters

Fifteen rescued after drifting over one month in Pacific

SYDNEY — Fifteen people believed lost at sea in northeast Papua New Guinea have been rescued in the Solomon Islands after drifting for over one month at sea.

Local Papua New Guinean newspaper the Post Courier on Thursday reported the group were rescued by Solomon Island authorities earlier this week after suffering engine trouble on their transit between New Ireland province and Lihir Island — approximately 50 kilometres away — in the country’s north on 4 April.

Tragically, one of the women has died from dehydration, while two others have been transferred to Honiara General Hospital in the Solomon Islands suffering from serious illness after for one month, six days at sea.—Xinhua

Aust’n parents of 3 children lost aboard MH17 welcome new baby

MELBOURNE — A Western Australian couple whose three children perished in the downing of Malaysian Airline flight MH17 have announced the birth of a new baby girl, almost two years on from the tragedy.

On Thursday, Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) released a statement confirming grief-stricken parents Anthony Maslin and Marite Norris had welcomed their fourth child, Violet May Maslin, into the world Wednesday.

The couple’s first three children, as well as Norris’ father Nick, died when the Boeing 777 airliner, travelling from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, was shot down while flying over Ukraine on 17 July, 2014.—Xinhua

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Kenya drawing up timetable to close refugee camp for Somalis

NAIROBI — Kenya is drawing up a timetable to close Dadaab refugee camp that hosts about 350,000 Somalis because of security concerns, the interior minister said on Wednesday, after the United Nations urged the East African nation to reconsider such a move.

Kenya, which has suffered from a spate of attacks claimed by the Islamist Somali group al Shabaab, has set up a taskforce to handle the closure plan, Interior Minister Joseph Nkaissery said.

“They will present the timetable based on all the resources required,” the minister told a news conference, adding that state funds had been allocated to proceed with the programme.

“The government has commenced the exercise of closing the complex of Dadaab refugee camp,” he said, without specifying what new action had been taken beyond a voluntary repatriation programme already in place.

US Secretary of State John Kerry issued a statement voicing deep concern about the decision and urging Kenya “to maintain its longstanding leadership role in protecting and sheltering victims of violence and trauma... and not forcibly repatriate refugees.”

Kenya’s government has long said Dadaab, which lies near the Somali border, has been used by Islamists to launch attacks, such as the Westgate shopping mall assault in Nairobi in 2013.

Hundreds of Kenyans were killed in that attack and other assaults mainly in Nairobi, the northeast and coast.

The Interior Ministry says it hosts 600,000 refugees, many from neighbouring Somalia and South Sudan. Some refugees have lived in Dadaab for decades and some were born there.

Last year, Kenya said it was setting a three-month deadline to close Dadaab, but backtracked on the plan following UN criticism of any forced return. Last week, the Interior Ministry said it would shut Dadaab in the “shortest time possible”, prompting the UN refugee agency UNHCR to voice “profound concern” and renew its call for Kenya to reconsider.

The UNHCR, Kenya and Somalia signed a tripartite agreement in 2013 to repatriate Somali refugees voluntarily. As Somalia has slowly started recovering from war and chaos, Dadaab has shrunk from more than half a million people to about 350,000.

The UNHCR said in January it aimed to repatriate a further 50,000 in 2016 but also said this would be a difficult target to achieve given the Somali government is still battling an al Shabaab insurgency and there are few schools or public services.

“There has been a very slow process on the implementation of this agreement,” the minister said of the tripartite deal.— Reuters

Western Libyan forces prepare attack on Islamic State stronghold

MISRATA, Libya — Forces in western Libya are preparing to advance on the city of Sirte, seized by Islamic State last year, their spokesman said, pushing ahead with plans for a counter-attack after the Islamists made territorial gains in the last week.

The fighters based in the city of Misrata would like international logistical support to help — what has become Islamic State’s most important base outside Syria and Iraq, but will not wait for it before launching the operation, they said.

“We are ready and we are preparing our security arrangements to attack Sirte,” said Brigadier General Mohamed al-Gasi, spokesman for a newly formed military operations room in Misrata.

The operations room was set up by a UN-backed unity government, which arrived in Tripoli at the end of March.

European powers and the United States hope the unity government will be able to unite Libya’s rival political groups and armed factions to take on Islamic State, though it is unclear how far its authority extends on the ground.

Misrata’s brigades have largely transferred their support to it from a self-declared government formed in Tripoli in 2014.

But the unity government has struggled to win support from another administration based the east and the military forces allied to it. They have also said they would move against Sirte, though past announcements have come to nothing.

Late last month the unity government urged both sides to hold off attacking Sirte before a unified command is created, fearing an uncoordinated offensive could lead to civil war.

“We need logistical support from the international community, and we need weapons and ammunition,” Gasi said.

“Whether they’re going to support us or not, we will be there soon. We will not stand and watch.”

Islamic State took advantage of the political turmoil and security vacuum after the uprising that overthrew Muammar Gaddafi five years ago to build a power base in Libya.

The Misrata brigades were present in Sirte as Islamic State began to establish control, but withdrew last summer.

Though it has struggled to win support and hold territory in parts of Libya, Islamic State controls a strip of more than 250 km (155 miles) of Libya’s central coastline, from which it has launched attacks to the east, west and south.

Over the last week it has made gains, carrying out suicide attacks in the sparsely populated area between Sirte and Misrata, including at a major checkpoint at Abu Grai.— Reuters

Venezuela opposition protests for Maduro recall referendum amid clashes

CARACAS/PUNTO Fijo — Soldiers fired tear gas at stone-throwing protesters on Wednesday as Venezuela’s opposition marched to pressure electoral authorities into allowing a recall referendum against unpopular leftist President Nicolas Maduro.

The Democratic Unity coalition has ramped up its push to hold a referendum against Maduro amid a worsening economic crisis, but says the government-leaving electoral body is intentionally delaying the verification of signatures in favour of the referendum.

Waving flags and blowing whistles, hundreds marched in the capital of Caracas as well as the provinces — where food scarcity and power cuts are worse — but authorities blocked them from reaching election board offices.

Protesters and National Guard squared off on a Caracas highway, where demonstrators chanted “freedom” and waved copies of the constitution.

Some covered their faces and tossed stones.

“They don’t let us march. They don’t let us eat. They don’t let us live peacefully. What else can we do? We have to fight however we can against this tyranny,” said Juan, declining to give his surname as he donned a bandana.

At one point, an officer appeared to squirt pepper spray on two-time presidential candidate Henrique Capriles, a video showed. Capriles later tweeted he was fine.

A new election would be held if the opposition succeeds this year in recalling Maduro, whose term ends in 2019.

But if a successful recall referendum is held in 2017, the presidency would fall to the vice president, a post currently held by Socialist Party loyalist Aristobulo Isturiz.

The opposition says Maduro, elected in 2013, is pushing the OPEC country towards economic catastrophe. One recent poll showed almost 70 percent of Venezuelans want Maduro, 53, gone this year.

“We have to suffer a queue of nine to 10 hours for corn flour, we walk from pharmacy to pharmacy looking for medicine,” said Irma Rojas, who was protesting in northwestern Falcon state. “For that and so much more, we want this man out.”

In the western opposition hotbed of Tachira, protesters branded signs reading “we don’t want to die of hunger” while some masked youths blocked streets with trash and prepared Molotov cocktails. The Socialist Party blasts protesters as dangerous coup-plotters and held a separate march on Wednesday. Officials have said a referendum is unlikely this year and have cast doubt over the legitimacy of the signatures.— Reuters
Trump draws even with Clinton in national White House poll

WASHINGTON — Republican Donald Trump pulled even with Democratic rival Hillary Clinton in a Reuters/Ipsos opinion poll released on Wednesday, in a dramatic early sign that the 8 November presidential election might be more hotly contested than first thought.

While much can change in the six months until the election, the results of the online survey are a red flag for the Clinton campaign that the billionaire’s unorthodox bid for the White House cannot be brushed aside. Trump’s numbers surged after he effectively won the Republican nomination last week by knocking out his two remaining rivals, according to the poll. The national survey found 41 per cent of likely voters supporting Clinton and 40 per cent backing Trump, with 19 per cent undecided.

The survey of 1,289 people was conducted over five days and has a credibility interval of 3 percentage points.

“Very happy to see these numbers. Trump gets my vote over Trump comment to Reuters. “Good direction.” A spokesman for Clinton’s campaign did not respond to requests for comment on the poll. A Reuters/Ipsos survey conducted in the five days to 4 May had the former secretary of state at 48 per cent and the New York magnate at 35 per cent. Republican strategist Dave Carney said the Reuters/Ipsos poll showed the vulnerability of Clinton, who is still battling US Senator from Vermont Bernie Sanders for the Democratic nomination.

“She has been in the public eye for decades, served in high office, and now she’s in a dead heat with Trump, in a race that everyone thought she would win easily,” said Carney, who has been critical of Trump. “Everyone thought it would be a romp.”

Trump has his own problem, though. He is struggling to bring some senior Republicans behind his campaign after primary election battles in which his fiery rhetoric rankled party elites.

Several Republican leaders — including House of Representatives Speaker Paul Ryan — are withholding their support.

“After a tough primary, that’s going to take some effort,” Ryan said about unifying the party. “We are committed to putting that effort in.” The former reality TV star will face pressure to tone down his rhetoric and clarify his policy positions when he visits Republican lawmakers, including Ryan, on Thursday.

A former presidential season winding down, the two likely nominees have turned their attention to attacking each other, both on policy and personality. Clinton took aim at Trump’s tax plan at a rally in New Jersey on Wednesday. With a typical American family earning $54,000 per year, Clinton said, “It would take that family 24 years of work to earn what Donald Trump’s tax plan will hand out to people like him in just one year. That is no way to create good job with rising incomes for the vast majority of Americans, is it?” — Reuters

Brazil Senate puts Rousseff on trial, ending 13 years of leftist rule

BRASILIA — Brazil’s Senate voted on Thursday to put leftist President Dilma Rousseff on trial in a historic decision brought on by a deep recession and a corruption scandal that will now confront her successor, Vice President Michel Temer.

With Rousseff to be suspended during the Senate trial for allegedly breaking budget rules, the centrist Temer will take the helm of a country that again finds itself mired in political and economic volatility after a recent decade of prosperity.

The 55-22 vote ends more than 13 years of rule by the left-wing Workers Party, which rose from Brazil’s labour movement and helped pull millions of people out of poverty but before seeing many of its leaders tainted by corruption investigations.

Fireworks rang out in cities across Brazil after the vote at the end of a 20-hour session in the Senate. “It is not a coup,” said during the debate. “But having the Rousseff government continue would be a bigger tragedy. Brazil’s situation would be unbearable.”

The impeachment process began in the lower house of Congress in December. Rousseff has denied any wrongdoing and called her impeachment a “coup”.

The 71-year-old centrist and constitutional scholar who spent decades in Brazil’s Congress, now faces the challenge of restoring economic growth and calm at a time when Brazilians, increasingly polarized, are questioning whether their institutions can deliver on his promise of stability. In addition to a towering budget deficit, equal to more than 10 per cent of its annual economic output, Brazil is suffering from rising unemployment, plummeting investment and a projected economic contraction of more than 3 per cent this year.

Only major reforms can keep Brazil from moving from crisis to crisis, says Eduardo Giannetti da Fonseca, an economist and author in Sao Paulo, who has written extensively about the country’s socioeconomic problems. But those changes, including an overhaul of pension, tax and labour laws and a political reform to streamline fragmented parties in a mercenary Congress, could remain elusive at a time of turmoil. While opposition supporters celebrated in the central Paulista Avenue of Brazil’s largest city, Sao Paulo, many Brazilians are concerned that the end of Workers Party rule could bring back bad times for the poor, who have made great strides in the last decade. “Has Dilma made mistakes? Of course. But the Workers Party has done so much for us, for the people,” said Benedi to Polongo, a 63-year-old janitor outside a shiny Brasilia business centre, who said he had no job or bank account before the party came to power. “I fear that those who come after her will erase all that has been done for the poor.” — Reuters

Tired of waiting, Greece’s migrants turn to business to survive

IDOMENI (Greece) — Within sight of a razor wire fence guarded by Macedonian police, 35-year-old Iraqi migrant Saima Hodip rolls dough with an old steel grinder outside her tent, in preparation for customers for her unleavened bread.

Saima is one of a small but growing number of migrants ek ing out a living on the Greek side of the Macedonian border, where about 10,000 people have set up Europe’s biggest refugee camp and are waiting for months of settling in for the long term.

She sells about 100 pieces of bread a day at the Idomeni camp, which has no running water but at least eight barbers.

“My parents didn’t have any choice when we ran out of money a few weeks ago. They had to do something to make money,” said Saima’s 17-year-old daughter Savan.

The makeshift camp, home mostly to Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans, sprang up four months ago. At the time, huge numbers were making their way to northern Europe in the hope of gaining asylum in countries such as Germany, but border shutdowns in the Balkans stranded thousands in Greece.

They refuse to move, despite being tear-gassed by Macedon ian police, and appeals by Greek authorities to move to organised camps deeper inside the country. Today, the Idomeni camp has three improvised mosques, a kindergarten and a school, as well as at least four makers of falafel — the ground potato and chickpea patty of the Middle East — who supplement food provided by non-governmental organisations.

Migrants are haphazardly placed, jostling for space in the meadow outside Idomeni village. Basic facilities are scarce; there are chemical toilets, but they are often and often overflowing.

Yannis Mouzalas, Greece’s migration minister, said last week that conditions at the camp were an “affront which should stop”. Yet Greece, unlike France which tore down part of an unofficial camp known as “The Jungle” at Calais, goes for the softly softened approach with the Idomeni migrants. “We will step up the dialogue,” Mouzalas told the semi-official Athens News Agency. Raised Ambra, a 44-year-old from Aleppo, has been stranded in Idomeni for three months, separated from his family who had already reached Germany. — Reuters
Libya’s ancient sites not exposed to same risk as in Syria, Iraq

TUNIS — Libya has not faced the same risk to its antiquities as Syria and Iraq, though there is evidence Islamic State is involved in the smuggling of antiquities, Libyan and international experts said on Wednesday.

The most famous classical sites have remained largely undamaged, though some illegally excavated artefacts are being smuggled out of the country and Islamist fighters have targeted mosques and Sufi shrines, the experts said on the sidelines of a conference on how to protect Libya’s cultural heritage.

Libya is rich in ancient sites, including some of North Africa’s finest Roman and Greek ruins as well as prehistoric rock art in the desert region of Fezzan. But their preservation has been threatened by the political chaos and security vacuum that followed the toppling of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

Islamic State took control of the coastal city of Sirte last year and established a presence in several other parts of the country, leading to fears that it would attack and damage key ancient sites as it has done in Syria and Iraq.

Though Islamic State may still try to attack classical sites as they “search for visibility”, a bigger risk is from illegal excavations and looting, and illicit commercialization by locals, said Stefano De Caro, the director-general of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property.

“The big difference from Syria is that here they are attacking the Islamic heritage sites more than the classical heritage,” he said.

Ahmed Abdelkarim, head of Libya’s department of antiquities, said extremist violence was the top risk one year ago, but that since Islamic State recently lost ground in and around the eastern cities of Benghazi and Derna, preventing illegal building around ancient sites was now the primary concern.

Looting is also a problem, he said, with international mafia-style groups smuggling artefacts through Libya, and security forces have found antiquities last week in the recaptured house of an Islamic State commander in Benghazi.

“They found prehistoric objects, maybe from Fezzan, and Roman and Byzantine objects. This was a collection from different parts of Libya, for trade.”

Authorities had recovered artefacts on two other occasions in Benghazi and Derna, Abdelkarim said. “All these incidents together give us the impression that they are involved in the smuggling of antiquities,” he said.

Ramadan Alshebani, a senior official from the department of antiquities in Tripoli, said Roman ruins at Leptis Magna and at Sabratha, where local brigades forced out Islamic State fighters after a US air strike in February, had not been damaged.

He said the director of the archaeological site of Medinat Sultan, about 30 km east of Sirte, had told him by telephone about two months ago that it was also intact.

But Alshebani said there was a “major problem” with attacks on mosques and Sufi shrines that the militants consider un-Islamic, with more than 20 such sites attacked in the capital alone.—Reuters

Iranian, Indian cities ranked worst for air pollution

NEW DELHI — India is home to four of the five cities in the world with the worst air pollution, the World Health Organisation said on Thursday.

But while WHO experts acknowledge India faces a “huge challenge”, many countries are so bad that they have no monitoring system and cannot be included in its ranking.

The dirtiest air was recorded at Zabol in Iran, which suffers from months of dust storms in the summer, and which clocked a so-called PM2.5 measure of 217. The next four were all Indian: Gwalior, Allahabad, Patna and Raipur.

India’s capital New Delhi was the survey’s ninth worst city, measured by the amount of particulate matter under 2.5 micrometres found in every cubic metre of air, with an annual average PM2.5 measurement of 122. Tiny particulate matter can cause lung cancer, strokes and heart disease over the long term, as well as triggering symptoms such as heart attacks that kill more rapidly. The WHO says more than 7 million premature deaths occur every year due to air pollution, 3 million of them due to outdoor air quality.

New Delhi was ranked worst in 2014 with a PM2.5 reading of 153. It has since tried to tackle its toxic air by limiting the use of private cars on the road for short periods.

Maria Neira, head of public health, environmental and social determinants of health at the WHO, praised India’s government for developing a national plan to deal with the problem when others have been unable to.

“Probably some of the worst cities that are the most polluted ones in the world are not included in our list, just because they are so bad that they do not even have a good system of monitoring of air quality, so it’s unfair to compare or give a rank,” she said.

Common causes of air pollution include too many cars, especially diesel-fueled vehicles, the heating and cooling of big buildings, waste management, agriculture and the use of coal or diesel generators for power.

On average, pollution levels worsened by 8 per cent between 2008 and 2013, although most cities in rich countries improved the state of their air over the same period. The WHO data, a survey of 3,000 urban areas, shows only 2 per cent of cities in poorer countries have air quality that meets WHO standards, while 44 per cent of richer cities do.—Reuters
Depp back as Mad Hatter in ‘Alice Through the Looking Glass’

LONDON — Hollywood star Johnny Depp returns as the flamboyant Mad Hatter in “Alice Through the Looking Glass,” for more big screen fantasy adventures inspired by the much loved stories by Lewis Carroll.

The movie follows on from the 2010 box office hit “Alice in Wonderland,” which starred Depp alongside Australian actress Mia Wasikowska as the titular heroine and Oscar nominee Helena Bonham Carter as the Red Queen.

“It’s a lot of fun to revisit the Mad Hatter,” Depp told reporters at the movie’s London premiere on Tuesday night.

“It was a gas to get back together with the cast of before, and then the addition of Sacha Baron Cohen certainly upped the stakes quite a lot ... It was great because this particular film ... has a bit more of the Hatter — there are a lot more layers of things going on.” Cohen, known for his satirical characters Ali G, Kazakh reporter Borat and Austrian fashionista Bruno, joins the cast as new villain, Time, in the sequel, which looks at the Mad Hatter’s traumatic childhood.

The plot follows Alice as she rushes to reunite the Mad Hatter and his family while battling Time and the Red Queen. — Reuters

Taylor Swift accepts Taylor Swift award at BMI Pop Awards

LOS ANGELES — Pop icon Taylor Swift has been presented with the inaugural trophy named after her at the BMI Pop Awards in Los Angeles.

The Taylor Swift Award represents only the second time that the BMI (Broadcast Music, Inc, which tracks airplay and collects royalties for artists) has created an award in a specific artist’s name, having done so way back in 1990 for Michael Jackson.

The eponymous award recognises Swift’s “artistic talent and influence” reported Billboard magazine.

Accepting the award at the ceremony, the 26-year-old singer said: “If they had chosen someone else to give the Taylor Swift Award to, I’d be kind of bummed about it.”

She also said that becoming a globe-conquering star with her fifth album 1989, which made her famous worldwide after a number of nationally successful albums, had not dulled her appetite for creating more music, confessing that she often feels compelled to write songs at any time of day.

“My favourite part is when I’m in the middle of a conversation with my friends and my eyes glaze over and I awkwardly run over to a corner,” she continued in another speech as she accepted another award — Pop Songwriter of the Year.

“I have to explain to them that I have this issue called: ‘I love song-writing so much that it interrupts my daily life’.” — PTI

Justin Bieber is ‘done taking pictures’ with fans

LOS ANGELES — Pop star Justin Bieber has decided that he will not take any pictures with fans in future.

In an Instagram post, Bieber, 22, said he feels like a “zoo animal” because of fans constantly seeking photos from him.

“If you happen to see me out somewhere know that I’m not gonna take a picture I’m done taking pictures,” he wrote. “It has gotten to the point that people won’t even say hi to me or recognise me as a human. I feel like a zoo animal, and I wanna be able to keep my sanity. The singer accepted the fact that “people will be disappoint-ed,” but went on to say that he doesn’t “owe anybody a picture.”

“And people who say ‘but I bought ur album’ know that you got my album and you got what you paid for AN ALBUM!” he continued. “It doesn’t say in fine print whenever you see me you also get a photo.” — PTI

Jodie Foster mines human impact of financial risk in ‘Money Monster’

LOS ANGELES — When Jodie Foster wanted to explore the human relationship with technology and virtual intimacy in her latest directorial effort “Money Monster,” she opted to use Wall Street as her setting and raise the dramatic stakes by holding George Clooney hostage.

“I wanted to see how those things affected these two human beings, in this small little room, who are confined with each other,” she said.

Sony Pictures’ “Money Monster,” premiering at the Cannes Film Festival this week and opening in US theaters on Friday, sees Clooney play Lee Gates, a suave, showrooming host of a money news TV programme, held hostage live on air.

Gates and his producer Patty (Julia Roberts) are forced by the captor, who lost his life savings investing in stock that Gates had vouched for, to dig deeper into the technical glitch that wiped away millions of dollars of people’s savings.

“George’s disaffected old school journalist has to learn some new tricks, he has to become more of an activist journalist,” Foster said.

The film taps into millennial disillusionment through the captor Kyle (Jack O’Con-nell), a young man unable to provide for his family, which Foster said “did tap into something, there’s a certain rage of a generation of people.”

“That’s the smack in the face, it’s almost classist in a way, in that we told (millennials) that you could achieve something and actually you’re not going to be able to get a job. That’s enraging,” she said.

While the American story, the larger social and financial themes of “Money Monster” will resonate around the world, Foster said.

“Europe is going through massive financial crisis ... so this isn’t foreign to them. I feel like this feels pretty international, for a way I don’t feel like it’s purely an American film,” Foster said.

“Money Monster” is the fourth feature film directed by Foster, 53, who started acting as a child and has won two best actress Oscars for 1989’s “The Accused” and 1992’s “The Silence of the Lambs.”

Amid the hot button topic over the lack of gender diversity in Hollywood, Foster said things haven’t improved much for female directors over her career, and have been made worse by studios not wanting to take risks in the current economy.

“I don’t know why women are seen as a risk, that’s really the question,” Foster said.

“Forty, fifty years I’ve been working in the film business, why would I be a risk? But it’s gender psychology.” — Reuters

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Britons, Mexican first foreigners atop Everest since disasters

KATHMANDU — Two Britons and a Mexican have become the first foreigners to climb Mount Everest from the Nepali side, climbing officials said on Thursday, after disasters in 2014 and 2015 killed dozens and forced mountain climbers off the world’s tallest peak.

Briton Kenton Cool, 42, and David Liano Gonzalez, 36, of Mexico, reached the 8,850 metre (29,035 feet) summit at 8.24am (0239 GMT), said Ang Tshering Sherpa, chief of the Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA).

“They reached the top with three Nepali sherpa guides,” he told Reuters in Kathmandu after contacting the team on the mountain.

Robert Richard Lucas, a 47-year-old Briton, also climbed with the group, said Ishwari Paudel of the Himalayan Guides hiking group, his local organiser.

“All climbers are on their way down,” Paudel said without giving details.

A nine-man sherpa team reached the summit on Wednesday after setting ropes on the final stretch in time for the first clear weather window of this year’s campaign to open.

Around 100 climbers are readying to make their final assault in the coming days out of a total of 289 who have received Everest permits.—Reuters

Chinese visitors drive boom in New Zealand accommodation sector

WELLINGTON — A rising number of Chinese visitors helped drive a surge in New Zealand’s accommodation sector in March, according to figures from the government statistics agency Wednesday.

Guest nights at commercial accommodation in March were up 12.3 per cent year on year, said Statistics New Zealand.

“Guest nights for March were boosted by an early Easter and increased visitor arrivals, and are the highest recorded for any March month,” business indicators senior manager Neil Kelly said in a statement.

“The Easter this year was in March, whereas last year it was in April. Guest nights have been rising for the last two years.”

Domestic guest nights were up 11.5 per cent and international guest nights were up 13.2 per cent.

Figures from Statistics New Zealand last month showed holiday-makers from China helped drive a record number of overseas visitor arrivals in March.

Total visitor arrivals reach a new March record of 344,400, up 18 per cent from March last year, with arrivals from China up by 9,600 to 40,400, making it the second largest source country after Australia, from where 133,300 visitors arrived.—Xinhua

Rembrandt painting found in New Jersey basement now in museum

NEW YORK — A painting languishing in a New Jersey basement that turned out to be one of Dutch master Rembrandt’s earliest works goes on display on Wednesday at the J. Paul Getty Museum in California as a key part of an exhibit on the 17th-century artist.

“The Unconscious Patient (An Allegory of the Sense of Smell)” depicts two men wafting a rag under the nose of a third man who is swooning and is dated 1624, the museum said in a press release.

The 8-1/2-by-7-inch (22-by-18-cm) work is among a series of five paintings on the senses that Rembrandt created as a teenager, and will be displayed with two others — hearing and touch — from Wednesday until 28 August, when the exhibit will travel internationally.

The painting’s slop from a New Jersey basement to the upper echelons of the art world began in July when adult children cleaning out their family home in Essex County after their parents died contacted John Nye, owner of Nye and Co auction house in Bloomfield, New Jersey.

“The picture was remarkably unremarkable,” Nye said, recalling the oil painting was flaking. “It looked like a dark, discolored portrait of three people, one of whom is passed out.”

When the painting went up for auction in September, Nye estimated it would fetch up to $800, having spent two weeks on display on the auction house wall and in its online catalog. That is where sharp-eyed art aficionados from three different European countries spotted it, ultimately leading to a Paris art dealer’s winning bid of $870,000, or about $1.1 million including the typical added sale premium, Nye said.

“I was stunned,” Nye said in a phone interview. “Soon the Paris dealer was in contact with New York financier Thomas Kaplan, who heads the investment firm Electrum Group, and is founder of the Leiden Collection, one of the world’s largest private collections of Dutch Golden Age art. Restoration of the piece confirmed suspicions — it revealed the initials RHF, for Rembrandt Harmenszo on van Rijn fecit.

“Basically, he put his name down and ‘fecit’ means ‘made this,’” said Nye.

Rembrandt’s painting of the fourth sense — sight — is in a museum in the Netherlands but the whereabouts of the fifth sense — taste — remains unknown.

“If someone sees an allegorical painting of three fancifully dressed people eating, call me and I’ll come check it out,” Nye said.—Reuters
Sunderland joy as Newcastle and Norwich go down

LONDON — Sunderland secured their Premier League survival on Wednesday with a 3-0 victory over Everton that condemned bitter local rivals Newcastle United and Norwich City to relegation and sparked wild scenes of celebration at the Stadium of Light.

It was the fourth season in a row that Sunderland’s fans had to endure a gruelling relegation battle before popping the champagne corks, and their victory was a crushing blow for Newcastle and Norwich, whose 4-2 win over Watford on Wednesday proved in vain.

Sunderland’s win, which came courtesy of two goals from surprise hero Lamine Kone, moved them up to 38 points with one match remaining, four clear of Norwich and Newcastle.

Sunderland manager Sam Allardyce, a master of steering teams clear of danger, led the Sunderland fans in celebration, pulling off his jacket and flexing his muscles to the crowd after the final whistle.

“There were a few long months winter months,” he said. “We became a team that was difficult to beat, who did not like losing and continued the run constantly for the last few months.”

Everton’s John Stones heads at goal during Barclays Premier League at the Stadium of Light on 11 May 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Sunderland came into the game knowing victory would secure their survival regardless of other results and they dominated a lacklustre Everton from the start.

They took the lead six minutes before halftime when Patrick van Aanholt’s free kick was completely misjudged by Everton keeper Joel Robles before nestling in the net. It was 2-0 three minutes later as Kone lashed home a lofted ball into the box before the Ivorian started the celebrations in earnest 10 minutes after the interval when he converted from a corner which Robles palmed straight to him.

It was a painful end for Norwich, who had lost their previous four league matches without scoring, but found goals easy to come by in a comfortable win over Watford that came too late.

They fell behind to an early strike from Troy Deeney but goals from Nathan Redmond and Dieumerci Mbokani and a Craig Cathcart own goal put them in command.

Odion Ighalo pulled one back for Watford before Mbokani dinked in Norwich’s fourth.

The win, however, counted for nothing and left boss Alex Neil cursing an end-of-season collapse that condemned his team to the second tier.

“It is severe disappointment,” he said. “In recent matches we have known it was going to be a difficult match. We had it in our hands five matches ago but we came up short.

“The story for us is that as a club, we have dropped short for a variety of reasons. We have made vital errors in games at crucial times and the recruitment has not been as good to strengthen the squad.”

In a very different atmosphere to the intensity of the relegation battle, Liverpool’s Christian Bentke headed a stoppage-time equaliser in a 1-1 draw against last season’s champions Chelsea at Anfield.

Belgian Eden Hazard had earlier lit up a mid-table clash between the division’s eighth and ninth-placed sides with a superb individual goal.—Reuters

Real Madrid top Forbes’ most valuable teams list

MADRID — Spanish football giants Real Madrid retained top spot on a list of the world’s most valuable football teams for a fourth consecutive year, according to a Forbes poll released on Wednesday.

The value of the 10-time European champions rose 12 per cent to $3.6 billion (2.5 billion pounds), making them the world’s second most valuable sports team, surpassed only by the National Football League’s Dallas Cowboys ($4 billion), Forbes said in a statement.

Barcelona were second on the list with a value of $3.5 billion, also up 12 per cent from last year. Manchester United ($3.3 billion), Bayern Munich ($2.7 billion) and Arsenal ($2 billion) rounded out the top five.

According to Forbes, the 20 most valuable football teams are worth an average of $1.44 billion, a 24 per cent jump from last year that was driven by new lucrative television deals.—Reuters

Chelsea’s Hazard back to his best: Hiddink

LONDON — Chelsea interim boss Guus Hiddink said Eden Hazard was back to his best after the midfielder scored a stunning goal in the 1-1 draw against Liverpool at Anfield on Wednesday night.

The Belgium international, who was named PFA Player of the Year last season, has struggled for much of the current campaign, scoring his first league goal against Bournemouth last month.

Since that strike, Hazard has racked up four goals in his last four league games, including the sumptuous curler that secured a 2-2 draw with Tottenham Hotspur on 2 May and ensured that Leicester City won their first top-flight title.

“Hazard was terrific and has been growing in fitness for some weeks,” Hiddink told British media. “It’s good to see. He had to suffer a lot with injuries this year but I’m very happy he’s back.”—Reuters

Contest aims to turn out junior lethwei fighters

THE 13th traditional boxing event will be held in mid-May in Yangon with the aim of turning out talented junior athletes.

The free event will take place on 15 May at the Thim Phyu Boxing Gymnasium in Yangon.

Myanmar Media Group has organised the recurring event since early 2015, aiming to produce talented fighters. Since then, the group has selected at least 10 talented junior boxers from past events.

The event is part of a programme to promote Myanmar’s traditional martial arts, said U Wunna, an event organiser. Nearly 15 athletes, including Sithu Aung, Ko Ko Aung, Salai, Aung Myo Thant and Sanda Aung, will participate in the contest.—Maung Sein Lwin

Young lethwei fighters try to hurt each other. PHOTO: MAUNG SEIN LWIN