State Counsellor returns from ASEAN summit in Australia

STATE Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi arrived back in Nay Pyi Taw at 7.30 pm yesterday after attending the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit held in Sydney.

She was welcomed at the Nay Pyi Taw International Airport by Union Minister U Kyaw Tint Swe, Chairman of the Nay Pyi Taw Council Dr. Myo Aung, Deputy Minister U Min Thu and officials.

The State Counsellor left Canberra, Australia, by special flight yesterday morning and arrived in Sydney at 10.20am.

The delegation led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi left for Singapore and arrived at Changi Airport at 5.05 pm, where they were welcomed by Myanmar Ambassador U Htay Aung and wife, Military Attaché Col. San Nyunt Oo and other officials.

The delegation returned home by a special flight of Myanmar National Airlines.—Myanmar News Agency

Confirmation of more returnees

AFTER reviewing the names, photos and home villages of 8,032 displaced persons sent by Bangladesh, 193 more persons were identified as having lived in Myanmar as of 19 March, officials said.

A Myanmar-Bangladesh ministerial-level meeting was held at the meeting hall of the Ministry of the Office of the State Counsellor on 22 November 2017, and the two countries signed an arrangement for the return of displaced persons from Rakhine State.

The first meeting of the Joint Working Group on the repatriation of displaced Myanmar residents from...
**Pyidaungsu Hluttaw discusses utilisation of loans**

**Aye Aye Thant**  
(MYANMAR NEWS AGENCY)

The 17th-day meeting of the seventh session of the second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw was held at the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw meeting hall in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday morning.  
Dr. Myat Nyana Soe, secretary of the Joint Bill Committee, read the report on the committee’s follow-up findings and comments on the 2018 Union Tax Bill. Apart from the clauses and sub-clauses that need to be amended, the amendments proposed by the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw representatives were discussed by the Joint Bill Committee, Public Accounts Joint Committee and the related departments and organisations. It was agreed that the Hluttaw should agree to the initial comments made by the Joint Bill Committee.

He said the Joint Bill Committee had discussed in depth and agreed on the 2018 Union Tax Bill, with the Hluttaw representatives, providing suggestions to the Public Accounts Joint Committee, Pyidaungsu Hluttaw’s Legal Affairs and Special Cases Assessment Commission, related ministries and organisations. Therefore, the Hluttaw should agree to the initial amendments and the follow-up amendments proposed by the Joint Bill Committee and approve the bill, he said.

The Joint Bill Committee then submitted a motion for the Hluttaw to approve the bill, section by section, and after the Hluttaw approved the bill, the approval was announced to the Hluttaw.

Next, Deputy Minister for Planning and Finance U Maung Maung Win tabled a motion for the Hluttaw to approve the entire bill, and after the Hluttaw approved the entire bill, the approval being announced by Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khairng Than.

Later, 14 Hluttaw representatives discussed the 87.091-billion Japanese yen loan from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to be provided to the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation, Ministry of Construction and Ministry of Transport and Communications.

In his discussion, U Khin Cho of Hainghwe constituency said the aim of the loan was to develop the agricultural sector; improve the transport sector; and develop lives and reduce poverty of the people living in rural areas. He sought details about the current utilisation of dam water; plans to upgrade it with the loan, and thus, the resulting increase in agricultural productivity and the GDP.

The Ministry of Construction is building bridges and roads through a contract system, and plans should be in place so that black-listed companies (and people) are not part of the works.

On the Ministry of Transport and Communications utilising the loan, he suggested the ministry must study the additional services it can provide and the income it can earn through the upgrade of the railways, coaches and locomotives.

U Tun Win of Paungyirin constituency pledged his support, suggesting that the loan utilisation plan of the Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation Ministry for the dam would benefit some 70,000 households. Although he supported the loan for the Ministry of Transport and Communications to upgrade the Yangon-Mandalay rail line, he noted that Myanmar Railways was a state-owned enterprise that was incurring losses every year and, thus, it should ensure the loan is not wasted.

In his discussion, U Tin Tun Naing of Seikkyi Khaanung constituency said he was neither objecting to the projects nor ignoring the benefits that could be accrued from the projects. However, the calculation and estimation of the benefits should be clearly explained. The return on investment, according to the explanation provided by the Deputy Minister for agriculture, livestock and irrigation, is very good, but it was too good to be true, he noted.

There is no objection to purchasing essential machinery with the loan, but the expenses for the machinery and equipment should be explained in detail, he said.

Similarly, Dr. Tin Tin Win of the Bago Region constituency (5), U Aung Thike of Seikpyu constituency, U Kyaw Aung Lwin of Sedoktara constituency, Daw Yin Min Hlaing of Gangaw constituency, Dr. Win Myint of Bago Region constituency (11), U Sein Win of Maubin constituency, Dr. Win Aung of KhinU constituency, U Win Myint Aung of Tabayin constituency, U Tun Win of Kyunhla constituency, U Hla San of Magway Region constituency (1) and U Win Myint of Sagaing Region constituency (3) also discussed the loan.

An announcement will be made later on holding the 18th-day meeting of the seventh session of the second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw.

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**MNHRC issues statement on peaceful assembly law**

**Following is the unofficial translation of the statement released by MNHRC.**

The Myanmar National Human Rights Commission has released a statement concerning the amendment of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law.

The Amyotha Hluttaw, by a majority vote, approved the Bill of Amendment of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law on 7 March 2018, and it will be discussed in the Pyithu Hluttaw soon.

The statement acknowledges that the general public is opposed to the amendments being made, which is said to be in opposition to democracy.

Critics say the amendments would place further restrictions on the right to protest and assemble. Opponents also claim the changes are overly broad and could be exploited to stifle political dissent.

The statement cites the UDHR (Union Declaration of Human Rights) – Article 19, “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”, Article 20, “Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. No one may be compelled to belong to an association”, and Article 29, second paragraph, “In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society”.

It also cites ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) – Article 19, “Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.”

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**Myanmar Investment Commission Meeting 4/2018**

The Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC) meeting 4/2018 was convened in Yangon on 29th March 2018 and reviewed investment proposals consistent with the Myanmar Investment Law.

U Kyaw Win, Chairman of MIC and Union Minister for Planning and Finance and Dr. Than Myint, Vice Chairman of MIC and Union Minister for Commerce and members of MIC attended the meeting.

The submission of proposals and endorsement applications from investors and post-permit activities of MIC-permitted companies were discussed in the meeting. The MIC meeting (4/2018) decided to issue 7 investment permits and 7 endorsements in relation to investment proposals.—MNA.
Vice President U Myint Swe meets Crans Montana Forum honorary chairman, founder

Vice President U Myint Swe, who was in Morocco to attend the Crans Montana Forum on Africa and South-South Cooperation, met Ambassador Jean Paul Carteron, honorary chairman and founder of the Crans Montana Forum, in the meeting hall of the cruise ship Rhapsody on 19 March.

At the meeting, they discussed matters related to cooperation between the developing countries in Africa and Myanmar, as well as investment opportunities. They also exchanged views on the work programmes related to the Crans Montana Forum.

Also present at the meeting were Deputy Minister for Planning and Finance U Set Aung, Ambassador U Myint Lwin and other officials.

U Set Aung, who is a member of Vice President U Myint Swe’s delegation, attended the Crans Montana Forum on Africa and South-South Cooperation maritime transport meeting in Morocco.

Deputy Minister U Set Aung and Ambassador U Myint Lwin attend the Crans Montana Forum on Africa and South-South Cooperation maritime transport meeting in Morocco. PHOTO: MNA

Mayyu Mountain in Rakhine roads upgraded

By Kyaw Thu Htet

SIX miles of dirt roads in the Mayyu Mountains in Rakhine State have been upgraded to a hard surface using rocks, according to an official from the government construction team known as Special Road Group (17).

An earthen road that linked Kyaukpandu, Indin, and Zedipyin villages was built last year, and will soon be accessible to motor traffic because of the hard surfacing, officials said.

“Road axis was already formed and hard surfacing with rocks has been conducted and about six miles had been close to completion. In some places, box culverts will have to be constructed. Of the 46 box culverts that need to be constructed, about 30 were being constructed simultaneously”, said Deputy Director U Aye Tun Maw of Special Road Group (17).

In the plains area, the road is 40 feet wide and on the mountains it is 24 feet wide. It will be constructed to a two-lane macadam road first and it will be upgraded to a concrete one next year.

“There’ll be 14 bridges that are 50 feet and above and 10 feet and above, which was not included in the initial plan. In this year’s budget, 30 feet and above bridges were not included. Funds were also not provided to upgrade the road up to a concrete one”, said U Aye Tun Maw.

The road connects Zedipyin Village in Yathedaung Township with Kyaukpandu Village in Maungtaw Township. It will also be the main road that connects the villages in eastern side of Mayyu Mountain range with villages in the western side.

“The Kyaukpandu-Indin-Zedipyin road and Kyaukpandu-Gopi road will be built. Two more roads, U Daung-Nyaung Chaung Road and That Kine Nya-Padaga Road, are being planned, it is learnt.

“The plan is for four roads. This is the plan. Two more roads are earmarked in the Ministry of Construction budget for fiscal year 2018-2019”, said U Aye Tun Maw.

The construction site of the roads in Mayyu Mountains in Rakhine State. PHOTO: HAN LIN NAING

The road was being constructed to support regional development and stability. Mayyu Mountain range runs parallel to the Bay of Bengal in Maungtaw, Buthidaung and Yathedaung districts of northern Rakhine State. Because of the mountain, it was difficult to travel from villages in the east to villages in the west. It is an obstacle to regional development and administration. That is why this road is being built”, said U Aye Tun Maw.

In the past there was only one road from Buthidaung to Maungtaw that went over the mountain. The present government is planning to build four more roads over the mountain and in fiscal year 2017-2018, Kyaukpandu-Indin-Zedipyin road and Kyaukpandu-Gopi road will be built. Two more roads, U Daung-Nyaung Chaung Road and That Kine Nya-Padaga Road, are being planned, it is learnt.
Plastic-free zone campaign to be launched at Yangon Zoological Garden

A campaign to develop a plastic-free zone will be launched at Yangon Zoological Garden this year, according to a report in the Myawaddy Daily yesterday.

“Currently, we are planning to create a plastic-free zone at Yangon Zoological Garden. Also, we are optimising the land, decorating the garden, and conducting drawing, 3D board art and street art painting sessions,” said U Pyae Sone Myo, director of the Zoological Gardens Division, Forest Department.

The Forest Department has granted permission to Htoo Company to upgrade the Yangon Zoological Garden. The public’s participation is also important to assure that the plastic-free zone campaign is a success. “Most animals living in Yangon Zoological Garden are wild. Therefore, we are feeding the animals according to international norms,” he added.

More travellers are visiting the Yangon Zoological Garden, which is being upgraded to meet international standards.

“We are planning to provide more recreational services to the public,” U Pyae Sone Myo said.—GNLM

Myanmar aims for US$ 700 million from fisheries export

THE Department of Fisheries under the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation set a record for foreign income from fisheries exports over a period of ten years.

Myanmar earned US$ 561.02 million from exports of 351,652.05 tons of marine products in 2007-2008 FY. 386,981.32 tons of exports from Myanmar’s fishery sector amounted to US$ 653.85 million in the 2011-2012 FY, according to the statistics released by the department.

The department set a target to fetch US$ 650 million from the fishery sector and export 523,300.261 tons of marine products, thereby attaining US$662.973 million and exceeding the set goal before the current fiscal year ends, said an official from the department.

Myanmar’s fishery products have been exported to over 30 countries worldwide for the last 10 years. Now Myanmar’s marine products mainly go to more than 40 countries including the European Union due to modern packaging, high quality of the goods and market expansion.

The department is making concerted efforts to earn US$ 700 million in conjunction with respective organizations and entrepreneurs in the current financial year.—MDN

Fewer livestock breeders as cost of feed raw materials goes up

THE number of manageable-scale livestock breeders has reduced owing to the rising cost of feed raw materials.

“Currently, the number of livestock-breeders has decreased. The cost of feed raw materials has risen 16 per cent this year compared with last year. Even pig breeders are not making good profits, because they have to pay Ks800 for a basket of broken rice. For instance, they are selling pigs for Ks200,000, but the cost of pig feed is more than the selling price of the animal. The number of pig breeders has declined considerably,” said U Myat Ko, member of Mandalay Region Pig Farm Group.

The main obstacle in the growth of the livestock feed market is the rising cost of important raw materials. The price of poultry feed has risen to Ks900 per basket compared with Ks700 per basket last year, while the price of pig feed has reached Ks850 per basket from Ks580 last year. Sesame oil-cake prices have also risen to between Ks,500 and Ks4,000 per basket from Ks,2,500 per basket last year.

“Myanmar produces only 10 per cent of the oil needed in the country. Oil mills cannot produce more bean and sesame oil-cakes, which are major raw materials used in the production of animal feed. So, the price of bean and sesame oil-cakes is likely to increase in the future,” said Dr Thet Hmu, chairman of Myanmar Aqua Feed Association.

Annually, some 580,000 commercial-scale breeder pigs and 2.9 million manageable-scale breeder pigs enter the market. Consequently, the pig breeding sector in Myanmar requires 0.76 million metric tonnes of feed raw materials. The dairy farming and the pig breeding sector together required 1.84 million metric tonnes in 2014, 2.12 million metric tonnes in 2015, 2.54 million metric tonnes in 2016 and 3.17 million metric tonnes in 2017 and 2018.—Myat Thu (AMIA)
KBZ Bank, Huawei jointly offer greater financial access to all

KBZ Bank, Myanmar’s largest privately-owned bank is proud to announce a partnership with Huawei to create an inclusive digital financial ecosystem, which will give Myanmar citizens across the country greater access to finance and improve their quality of life through banking.

Mike DeNoma, CEO, KBZ Bank, announced the bank’s partnership at Huawei Global HQ in Shenzhen, China. “In Myanmar only 10% of the population have a bank account, only 30% have access to on-grid electricity but 90% have a smartphone. Our dream, working with all parties, is virtually 100% financial inclusion through the mobile phone in less than 10 years. We are excited about the opportunity to create an inclusive digital financial ecosystem in Myanmar, with Huawei as our technology partner that will benefit everyone in the country.”

The unveiling of this partnership is part of KBZ Bank’s drive towards leading innovation and transformation in Myanmar. U Aung Ko Win, Chairman, KBZ Bank, believes that the partnership will further strengthen Myanmar as a whole, “Our country is going through enormous change and this presents exciting opportunities for all of us. We’re both proud and eager to be driving this change here at KBZ Bank – improving the quality of life for all in Myanmar through easy, convenient and accessible banking. Myanmar deserves an outstanding bank, and we are going to be that bank.”

Mr. Zhang Liman, CEO, Huawei Myanmar, said “Myanmar is one of the fastest growing developing countries, and there is a promising prospect for the development of emerging industries. As the largest commercial bank in Myanmar, KBZ Bank is keen on digital transformation, leading the provision of better financial services to Myanmar people. We believe we can together accelerate Myanmar’s financial inclusion, and improve the living standards of Myanmar people through innovation and new financial technologies, as well as boost the development of a digital economy.”

Through identifying and leveraging Huawei’s strengths in R&D and developing cutting-edge technologies, KBZ Bank looks to create greater value for the people of Myanmar, said the statement released by the KBZ Bank.—GNLM

YSX to increase matching time

By May Thet Hnin

THE Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX) will increase its time trade matching sessions from two to four in the hopes of raising the trade volume and attracting more investors.

The two new hours for time trade matching are 10 am and 12 pm, which will be added to the existing hours of 1 am and 1 pm, once the YSX receives approval from the Securities and Exchange Commission of Myanmar.

U Thet Htun Oo, executive senior manager of YSX, said that increasing the time trade matching to four hours would enable dealers, brokers and other market participants to sell at four different prices. “Customers will be able to make profits,” said U Thet Htun Oo.

“I want to create the kind of environment that will excite customers and encourage more deals,” he added.

The YSX had conducted surveys and discussions with security companies, and held tests with internal operators before increasing the matching time hours. After gathering results through the first wave of surveys, further discussions were held with the Japan Exchange Group (JFX) and the Daiwa Institute of Research (DIR).

Five companies are currently listed on the YSX. They are First Myanmar Investment Company, Myanmar Thilawa SEZ Holdings Public, Myanmar Citizens Bank, First Private Bank and TMH Telecom Company.

The stock market saw more than 20,000 shares being traded daily in the 2016-2017 fiscal year period, at an estimated value of Ks100 million. The stock market in the 2017-2018 FY period has seen only 10,000 shares traded daily, with their estimated value being Ks70 million.

“The attitude of the majority of the general public here is to wait for the annual dividend of a company’s profit, instead of trading for capital gain. A large percentage of these people hold on to their shares, instead of trading, and this is one reason the stock market is slow. This is the opposite of what happens in most other countries. People do not care about the company’s dividends and trade to earn a profit, instead,” said U Thet Htun Oo.

U Thet Htun Oo said there were more than 100,000 shareholders, but only 33,000 were listed. Only 300 to 500 participate in trading each day.

The decline of interest in the stock market and the fall of share prices can be attributed to the poor general economic climate, as well as the low basic income and lack of motivation among the public. Officials from the YSX said they would raise awareness and conduct workshops to remedy this situation.

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VIETNAM

Viet Nam manufacturer to build factory in Myanmar

VIETNAM

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Bangladesh was held on 15 January 2018 in the office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the physical arrangement for the repatriation of displaced Myanmar residents from Bangladesh, under the return of displaced persons from Rakhine State agreement, was signed.

According to the agreement, Myanmar will receive returnees arriving through land routes at the Taung Pyo Letwe Reception Centre, and those who return through the river routes will be received at the Nga Khu Ya Reception Centre. The Hla Pho Khaung Transit Centre has also been opened, and each camp will accept returnees five days a week.

Bangladesh began sending a list of returnees in the prescribed forms on 23 January 2018. Initially, some 508 Hindus and 750 Muslims who were already reviewed, totaling 1,258, were sent to Myanmar through Bangladesh. The 508 Hindus included in this list wished to return and the Myanmar government was informed about this by Hindu religious leaders. The Bangladesh side sent a list of the first group of returnees who wanted to return, totalling 8,032, from 1,637 households.

However, through the particulars provided on the list, it could not be verified if the returnees were coming back of their own will, and the proposed returnees had not signed any agreements to follow the existing laws of Myanmar. The forms did not have a signature or a thumb print to validate the information provided about the person mentioned in the form. Serial numbers, form entry dates, and distinguishing marks or thumb prints of the head of households were absent. It did not mention if these persons held Myanmar cards and identities. There was no mention of the parents of the head of the household or their addresses, so it was not possible to verify who they were.

A photograph of each household members was taken biometrically when they were in Myanmar, so the assessment could be made easily, but the photographs of the returnees provided were not of the quality required. The family list did not include the father’s name. Therefore, Bangladesh was requested to provide a detailed and complete list of the particulars of the 8,032 people wishing to return on 8 March 2018.

The assessment was continued, and as of 19 March, 193 more were found to have lived in Myanmar. Of the 8,032 persons in the list, only 556 were found to have lived in Myanmar. Arrangements were made so that their photographs and thumb prints could be evaluated using computer software. However, the list provided did not have the required particulars, such as the photographs, thumb prints and addresses, and took considerable time to compare the available information.

The 556 who were already reviewed and checked will be accepted when Bangladesh sends them over.—Myanmar News Agency

FROM PAGE 1

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Defence Services Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing greeting with Tatmadaw members and families from Putao cantonment on 19 March. PHOTO: MNA

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing met with officers, soldiers and families from Putao cantonment

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing met with officers, soldiers and families from Putao cantonment at Bandoala Hall, Putao cantonment, Kachin State, on 19 March.

At the meeting, the Senior General said that soldiers who had joined the Tatmadaw out of their own free will serve the nation.

The duty of safeguarding the country have led to actions against ethnic armed conflicts. At the meeting, the Senior General said that there must be respect for the rights or reputations of others.

Similarly, the Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief met with Putao town folks, ethnic nationals, departmental personnel, veterans and people’s militia members.

During the meeting, the Senior General said that transport was not difficult in Putao region during peacetime, but when peace and stability deteriorate, ways and means must be developed to ensure regional food sufficiency. In emergency situations, when road links are disrupted, the Tatmadaw will prioritize assistance. The agricultural land area in the region must be increased, and the yield should also be increased for regional food sufficiency. Emphasis should be placed on making the area free of drugs.

In the afternoon, the Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief visited the northern command agriculture and livestock breeding station and inspected the Novogen Brown egg-laying chickens, dairy cows and the preparation and usage of natural fertilizers (super bokashi).

— Myanmar News Agency

Joint patrols along Myanmar-Bangladesh border

FOLLOWING coordination between the two countries, the Myanmar Border Police and Bangladesh Border Police forces conducted a joint patrol along the Myanmar-Bangladesh border fence, from border post 34 to 38, on the morning of 15 March and 18 March.

The security forces conducted a coordinated patrol 14 times from 4 to 26 February 2018, between border posts 42 to 55. Patrols were conducted on 11 March, 15 March and 18 March from border posts 31 to 34, 34 to 36 and 36 to 38. A total of 17 coordinated patrols were held along the land border, along with a coordinated naval patrol along the Naf River on 5 March. The countries will continue to hold coordinated patrols in the future. —Myanmar News Agency

Union Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Thura U Aung Ko attends 19th ASCC meeting in Singapore

Union Minister Thura U Aung Ko left for Singapore yesterday to attend the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Council (ASCC) meeting in Singapore. The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) is committed to lifting the quality of life of its peoples through cooperative activities that are people-oriented, people-centred, environmentally friendly, and geared towards the promotion of sustainable development to face new and emerging challenges in the ASEAN region. The meeting will be held in Singapore from 18-22 March, 2018. —Myanmar News Agency

MNHRC issues statement on peaceful assembly law

The statement also cites ICCPR-Article 20 subsection 2, “Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.”

The statement urged anyone discussing the Bill of Amendment of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law to consider the aforementioned references to the UDHR and ICCPR. —Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (Unofficial Translation)

Three Myanmar migrants die in road accident

THREE Myanmar migrant workers were killed, including two women, and nine others injured in a road accident in Sing Buri province, Thailand, on 17 March, according to the Bangkok Post.

The three workers were killed when the van they were travelling in crashed into an 18-wheel truck and caught fire on Asia Highway between kilometre markers No. 32 and No. 77, in Tambon Ban Paoaung, Promburi district. The two women were trapped in the front seats. Nine others from Myanmar and the van driver were injured. Eight of the injured were rushed to Sing Buri Hospital, while two were taken to Promburi Hospital. According to Thai police, the Myanmar migrant workers were headed to Chiang Rai from Bangkok after renewing their visas. Others were returning home after working in Bangkok. The Thai police are investigating the cause of the accident. —Kyaw Soe (Kawthoung)
A cooperation from INGOs, NGOs, local and community organizations in Myanmar has been the key element in the long-term sustainable management of Myanmar's ecosystem, as it not only fulfills the need for coordinated action to address the challenges, but also for the welfare of the global community.

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Information Ministry to hold ethnic literature and cultural festival

The Ministry of Information has speeded up efforts for holding a festival of literature and culture of ethnic people in the country from the 21st to the 25th of March.

Union Minister for Information Dr. Pe Myint held a meeting with relevant at the Shan State Information and Public Relations Department in Taunggyi yesterday over preparations for holding the festival.

Dr. Pe Myint expressed his hope that members of the country’s ethnic groups would have opportunities to exchange literature and culture through the festival, and that the unity of the indigenous peoples would be strengthened.

The festival is aimed at playing a part in making the peace process a success, and for emergence of a democratic federal republic, said the Union Minister.

At the meeting, Shan State Minister for Bamar Ethnic Affairs Dr. Aung Than Maung, in his capacity as chairman of the committee for holding a festival of literature and culture of ethnic peoples, reported to the Union Minister on arrangements for holding the festival, as did secretaries of the work committees on preparations for the festival.

Also present at the meeting were Director-General of the Information and Public Relations Department U Ye Naing, Managing-Director of the News and Periodicals Enterprise U Kyaw Soe and other officials.

Following the meeting, Union Minister Dr. Pe Myint and his entourage visited the Awaityar Konnyintaung grounds where the festival will be held.—Shan State IPRD

Onion prices drop due to bulk supply

Onion prices have plunged in the market following a glut in supplies.

The prevailing prices of onions range from Ks550 to Ks1,350 per viss (1.6 kg), according to Bayintnaung market. Onion prices started soaring in July 2017. The prices, however, declined slightly in February this year. But with the fresh supply of summer onions, prices dropped by half.

Onion prices hit a nine-month low of some Ks550 per viss this month. Earlier, the lowest registered price was Ks650 in July last year.

Onions are primarily cultivated in Pakokku, Myittha, Myingyan and Taungdwingyi townships.—Ko Khant

Netherlands experts to train SME enterpreneurs

HANMSAHUB Company has invited experts from the Netherlands to conduct a training course for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), in cooperation with the Directorate of Industrial Supervision and Inspection. Recently, the Yangon region government issued smart cards to the SMEs.

“By registering for an SME member card, they can access technology, awareness programmes and training from us. In our country, most of the SMEs are not registered. Some do not get loans, as they do not have government recognition,” said Daw Aye Aye Win, Director General of the Directorate of Industrial Supervision and Inspection.

The registration fee for small enterprises is Ks5,000 and Ks10,000 for medium enterprises. SMEs need to renew their member cards every two years.—GNLM

Correction

An article on Page 3 in the 19 March edition of The Global New Light of Myanmar contained some errors. In the story headlined “Dr Shwe Hlwan attends Myanmar-Japan scouts fund raising bazaar”, the headline should read, “Dr Shwe Hlwan attends Osaka scout and Myanmar Girl Guides fund raising bazaar.” Also in the article please read “Myanmar Scouts” as “Myanmar Girl Guides,” and Dr. Tin Hla Kyi’s title should be “Chief Commissioner of Myanmar Girl Guide Association.”—Ed
Syria forces battle to secure Damascus

DAMASCUS — Syrian regime and allied forces battled to suppress the last pockets of resistance in and around Damascus on Tuesday while the beleaguered Kurds in the north braced for further Turkish advances.

The simultaneous assaults have sparked one of the worst humanitarian emergencies since the start of the Syrian conflict seven years ago, with aid groups struggling to gain access to the masses of displaced civilians.

Washington has voiced concern that the chaos in Syria could allow a revival of the Islamic State group, whose “caliphate” collapsed late last year after three years of international military operations.

The jihadists launched a surprise nighttime attack in a southern neighbourhood of Damascus, moving into the vacuum left by a deal that saw another armed group pull out exactly a week ago.

“IS took full control of Qadam, and 36 government troops and loyalist fighters have been killed,” the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported.

There was no immediate comment from the regime, nor could the Britain-based monitoring group provide casualty figures for the jihadists.

Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said the regime was sending reinforcements to retake Qadam, which was attacked from the adjacent IS-controlled neighbourhood of Hajar al-Aswad.

The jihadists also have a presence in the nearby Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk.

Douma under attack

Assad has in recent months brought swathes of territory back under his control thanks to heavy Russian involvement, as well as support from other forces such as the Iran-backed Lebanese Hezbollah militia.

He has recently focused his efforts on flushing out the last pockets that escape government control in and around the capital, the largest of them being Eastern Ghouta.

A month-long air and ground assault on the area, which was home to around 400,000 residents, has left more than 1,400 dead.

Regime and allied forces have retaken more 80 percent of the enclave and splintered its rump into three pockets, each controlled by a different armed group.

Tens of thousands of civilians have fled both the intense bombardment and the deprivations of a siege that lasted five years.

Eastern Ghouta’s main town of Douma remains under rebel control but even as a trickle of emergency medical evacuations was scheduled to continue Tuesday, the regime continued to pound the enclave.

An AFP correspondent reported heavy bombardment through the night, adding that ambulances were struggling to reach the wounded so intense was the shelling.

At the town’s main hospital, exhausted staff worked on extracting a palm-sized shard of wood from the head of a 10-year-old girl.

The local civil defence group known as the “White Helmets” said they were able to retrieve only two bodies and that several others remained trapped under the rubble.

Clashes broke out between the Jaish al-Islam rebel group and the regime on the outskirts of Douma, the correspondent said.

The Observatory said 16 children were among 20 civilians killed overnight when an air strike on the town of Arbin levelled the school above the basement they were sheltering in.

Another humanitarian catastrophe was unfolding hundreds of kilometres (miles) to the north near Syria’s border with Turkey, whose forces have pressed a devastating offensive.

Bodies of 39 Indians, abducted by ISIS in Iraq, found: Swaraj

NEW DELHI — All the 39 Indians, who were abducted by ISIS in Iraq nearly three years back, were killed and their bodies have been recovered, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said on Tuesday.

As many as 40 Indians were originally abducted by terrorist organization ISIS in June 2015 from Mosul in Iraq but one of them escaped by posing as a Muslim from Bangladesh, Swaraj said in a suo motu statement in Rajya Sabha.

The remaining 39 Indians were taken to Badoosh where locals said some bodies were buried by the ISIS. Deep penetration radars were used to establish that the mound indeed was a mass grave, she said, adding the Indian authorities requested their Iraqi counterpart to exhume the bodies.

Swaraj said the mass grave had exactly 39 bodies, with distinctive features like long hair, non-Iraqi shoes and IDs.

The bodies were then sent to Baghdad for DNA testing.

DNA testing by Martyrs Foundation has established identity of 38 Indians while there has been 70 per cent matching of the DNA for the 39th person, she said.

Minister of State for External Affairs V K Singh will be flying to Iraq to bring back the bodies on a special flight. —PTI
PARIS — French ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy was taken into police custody on Tuesday and questioned over allegations that late Libyan dictator Moammar Kadhafi financed his 2007 election campaign via suitcases stuffed with cash, a source close to the inquiry told AFP.

Sarkozy was detained early on Tuesday morning and was being questioned by prosecutors specialising in corruption, money laundering and tax evasion at their office in the Parisian suburb of Nanterre.

The 63-year-old had until now refused to respond to a summons for questioning in the case, one of several legal probes that have dogged the right-winger since he left office after one term in 2012.

Sarkozy’s detention was first reported by the Mediapart investigative news site and French daily Le Monde.

AFP’s source said that Brice Hortefeuex, a top government minister during Sarkozy’s presidency, was also questioned on Tuesday as part of the inquiry.

Sarkozy has been a focus of the inquiry opened in 2013 by magistrates investigating earlier claims by late Libyan ruler Moammar Kadhafi and his son Seif al-Islam that they provided funds for Sarkozy’s election effort.

Sarkozy has dismissed the allegations as the claims of vindictive Libyan regime members furious over his participation in the US-led military intervention that ended Kadhafi’s 41-year rule and led to his death.

But the case drew heightened scrutiny in November 2016 when a Franco-Lebanese businessman admitted delivering cash-stuffed suitcases from the Libyan leader as contributions towards Sarkozy’s first presidential run.

In an interview with the investigative website Mediapart, Ziad Takieddine said he had made three trips from Tripoli to Paris in late 2006 and early 2007 with cash for Sarkozy’s campaign.

Each time he carried a suitcase containing 1.5-2 million euros (1.8-2.5 million dollars) in 200-euro and 500-euro notes, Takieddine claimed, saying he was given the money by Kadhafi’s military intelligence chief Abdallah Senussi.

Legal woes

Sarkozy, the son of a Hungarian immigrant father who takes a hard line on Islam and French identity, was nicknamed the “bling-bling” president during his time in office and was nicknamed the “bling-bling” president during his time in office for his flashy displays of wealth.

He was taken into custody after a former associate, Alexandre Djouhri, was arrested in London in January.

Djouhri was released temporarily on bail but returned to pre-trial detention in February after France issued a second warrant for his arrest, ahead of a hearing scheduled for 28 March.

Djouhri, a 59-year-old Swiss businessman, was well known among France’s rightwing political establishment, and had also refused to respond to a summons for questioning in Paris.

Sarkozy failed with a bid to run again for president in November 2016 and has stepped back from front line politics, although he remains a powerful figure behind the scenes at the rightwing Republicans party.

His failed attempt to clinch the presidential nomination for the Republicans in 2016 was partly down to the several legal cases against him.

When asked about the allegations by Takieddine during a televised debate, Sarkozy called the question “disgraceful” and said the businessman was a “liar” who had been convicted “countless times for defamation”.

Investigating magistrates have recommended that Sarkozy face trial on separate charges of illegal campaign financing over his failed 2012 re-election bid.

The prosecution claims Sarkozy spent nearly double the legal limit of 22.3 million euros ($24 million) on his lavish campaign, using false billing from a public relations firm called Bygmalion.

He faces up to a year in prison and a fine of 3,750 euros if convicted, but he is appealing the decision to send him to trial, claiming he knew nothing about the fraudulent practices that Bygmalion executives have admitted.

After a long investigation, Sarkozy was cleared in October 2013 of accepting campaign donations in 2007 from France’s richest woman, L’Oreal heirress Liliane Bettencourt, when she was too frail to know what she was doing.

Only one other French president — Jacques Chirac — has been tried in France’s Fifth Republic, which was founded in 1958. He was given a two-year suspended jail term in 2011 over a fake jobs scandal. — AFP

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**CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE**

**MV SINAR BANDA VOY. NO. (083 N/S)**

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V SINAR BANDA VOY. NO. (083 N/S) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 21-3-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of A.W.P.T where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

**SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT**

**MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY**

**AGENT FOR: MS SAMUDEERA SHIPPING LINE**

Phone No: 2301185

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**CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE**

**MV MAX CRUSADER VOY. NO. ( )**

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V MAX CRUSADER VOY. NO. ( ) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 21-3-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of H.P.T where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

**SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT**

**MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY**

**AGENT FOR: MS INTER ASIA LINES**

Phone No: 2301185

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**CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE**

**MV MAERSK WELLINGTON VOY. NO. (1809-1810)**

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V MAERSK WELLINGTON VOY. NO. (1809-1810) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 21-3-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

**SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT**

**MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY**

**AGENT FOR: MS MCC TRANSPORT (SP'ORE) PTE LTD**

Phone No: 2301185

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China’s national legislature concludes annual session

BEIJING — The first session of the 13th National People’s Congress (NPC) concluded on Tuesday morning.

President Xi Jinping and NPC Standing Committee Chairman Li Zhanshu addressed the closing meeting. Other Chinese leaders including Li Keqiang, Wang Yang, Wang Huning, Zhao Leji, Han Zheng and Wang Qishan attended the meeting. Zhang Dejiang, Yu Zhengsheng and Zhang Gaoli were also present.

Lawmakers adopted the supervision law and resolutions on the government work report, and the work reports of the 12th NPC Standing Committee, the Supreme People’s Court and the Supreme People’s Procuratorate.

They also passed resolutions on the reports of the national economic and social development plan as well as the central and local budgets.

President Xi signed a presidential decree to promulgate the supervision law and continue to pursue a path of peaceful development, and common prosperity.

Deputies to the 13th National People’s Congress (NPC) sing the national anthem at the closing meeting of the first session of the 13th NPC at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, capital of China on 20 March, 2018. PHOTO: XINHUA

China’s development poses no threat to others

Chinese President Xi Jinping said China’s development does not pose a threat to any other country.

“China will never seek hegemony or engage in expansion,” he said at the closing meeting of the first session of the 13th National People’s Congress. “Only those who are accustomed to threatening others see everyone as a threat.”

“The Chinese people’s sincere wish and practical action to contribute to the peace and development of humanity should not be misinterpreted, nor should they be distorted,” Xi said. “Justice will prevail!” Xi said China will stay on the path of peaceful development, and continue to pursue a mutually beneficial strategy of opening up.

Xi said China endeavors to uphold international fairness and justice. China advocates that all issues in the world should be settled through consultations with people around the world. China will not impose its will on others, Xi added.

He said China will contribute more Chinese wisdom, Chinese solutions and Chinese strength to the world, to push for building an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity.

“Let the sunshine of a community with a shared future for humanity illuminate the world!” Xi said. — Xinhua

World

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All in respect of “Pharmaceutical, veterinary and sanitary preparations; dietetic substances adapted for medical use, food for babies; plasters, materials for dressing; materials for stopping teeth, dental wax; disinfectants; preparation for destroying vermin; fungicides, herbicides” in Class 5.

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C/o Kelvin Chia Yangon Ltd.,
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Dated 21 March 2018

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Ong Min U (Advocate)
For: WOORIM FMG CO., LTD.
Myanmar Global Law Firm Ph: 09443220023 Dated:21st March 2018

Last male northern white rhino dies in Kenya: keepers

NAIROBI — The last male northern white rhino has died in Kenya at the age of 45, his keepers announced on Tuesday, leaving only two females of his subspecies alive.

The rhino, named Sudan, “was being treated for age-related complications that led to degenerative changes in muscles and bones combined with extensive skin wounds,” according to a statement from the Ol Pejeta Conservancy where he lived under armed guard to prevent poaching.

“His condition worsened significantly in the last 24 hours; he was unable to stand up and was suffering a great deal. The veterinary team... made the decision to euthanize him.”

Theoretically, the death of Sudan assures the extinction of this subspecies of rhino.

However scientists have gathered his genetic material and are working on developing in-vitro fertilization (IVF) techniques to preserve the subspecies.

The northern white rhino population in Uganda, Central African Republic, Sudan and Chad was largely wiped out during the poaching crisis of the 1970s and 80s, fueled by demand for rhino horn in traditional Chinese medicine in Asia and dagger handles in Yemen.

A final remaining wild population of about 20-30 rhinos in the Democratic Republic of Congo was killed in fighting in the late nineties and early 2000s, and by 2008 the northern white rhino was considered extinct in the wild.

Four fertile rhinos, two males and females, were moved from the Dvur Kralove Zoo in the Czech Republic to Ol Pejeta in Kenya, with high hopes that conditions similar to their native habitat would encourage breeding.

However, despite the fact that they were seen mating, there were no successful pregnancies.—AFP

PHOTO: XINHUA
British designer Kim Jones takes over at Dior Homme

LONDON — British designer Kim Jones said on Monday that he was taking the reins at Dior Homme two months after quitting Louis Vuitton.

The 38-year-old wunderkind—who insists that he wants to retire by the time he is 45—brought a buzz and a galaxy of star fans to the Vuitton catwalk in his seven years at the label.

"I am deeply honoured to join the house of Dior, a symbol of the ultimate elegance," he said in a statement.

"I am committed to create a modern and innovative male silhouette built upon the unique legacy of the house." He will replace Kris Van Assche, who said he was leaving Dior Homme after 11 years at the head of the French menswear label.

Jones made headlines with a series of eye-catching hook-ups with his New York streetwear brand Supreme and the iconoclastic British artists Jake and Dinos Chapman during his time at Vuitton.

The fashion label had poached him from British heritage house Dunhill in 2011, which he had dusted down and given a new lease of life.

At Vuitton he brought his passion for wildlife and for exotic travel to his ultra luxurious collections, mixing a lingering nostalgia for British colonial chic with a streetwise edge.

The creator, who had a globetrotting childhood that took in Africa and the Amazon, said in November that he planned to retire in five years, or at least by the time he was 45.

Van Assche’s departure comes only weeks after the arrival of new Christian Dior Couture chairman Pietro Beccari, who had worked with Jones at Louis Vuitton. Dior said in a statement that the 41-year-old Belgian, who added a punkish street style influence to Dior’s fine tailoring, would be staying on with the luxury giant LVMH, which owns the label.

Women’s Wear Daily, the fashion industry bible, had reported that Jones was in talks with Versace in September.

Kris Van Assche brought a punkish street style influence to Dior’s fine tailoring. PHOTO: AFP

Steven Spielberg to start filming ‘Indiana Jones 5’ next year

LOS ANGELES — Veteran filmmaker Steven Spielberg is planning to start shooting the untitled fifth “Indiana Jones” movie some time around next year.

He made the revelation at the Rakuten TV Empire Awards, where he was on stage to receive a Legend of Our Lifetime award and spoke about his collaborators from the British film industry. The event was held at the Roundhouse in London, reported Variety.

“It’s always worth the trip when I get to work with this deep bench of talent coming out of the UK. The actors, and the crew, the chippies, the sparks, the drivers everybody who has helped me make my movies here, and will continue helping me make my movies here when I come back in April 2019 to make the fifth Indiana Jones movie right here,” Spielberg said.

During his speech, Spielberg also praised the Time’s Up initiative.

“Thank you Time’s Up. We were very much on board from the very beginning, my wife Kate and I. This is more important than any of us can ever really realise. I think in 10 years we’ll look back and realise what a watershed moment we are all experiencing together, 2017 to 2018.

“It’s extraordinary what’s happening right now. The fact that women who have had no representation and have not been able to find the support or the courage to step forward, now they will have representation and they will have the support. Time’s Up means it’s time up. This is it. This is the end of the way things were, it will never be that way again hopefully,” he said.

Disney announced in 2016 that Spielberg would be returning to direct the next installment with Harrison Ford on board to reprise his role of the adventure-seeking archaeologist.

The film has been scheduled to release on 10 July, 2020.—PTI

‘Sex and the City’ star joins New York governor race

NEW YORK — Cynthia Nixon, the US actress who shot to fame as workaholic lawyer Miranda on “Sex and the City,” jumped into the race for New York governor on Monday, unveiling a progressive platform championing economic equality and eschewing big business.

The 51-year-old declared her candidacy with a two-minute campaign video posted on Twitter that showed her at home with her wife and children, riding the subway, taking one of her children to school and speaking at liberal political causes.

The move confirmed speculation that Nixon would challenge incumbent Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo. If elected, Nixon—who is a vocal opponent of President Donald Trump—would be New York state’s first woman and first openly gay governor.

The actress and liberal activist, who has campaigned for gay marriage, public schools and access to women’s health care, announced that she was “sick of politicians who care more about headlines and power than they do about us.”

“Our leaders are letting us down. We are now the most unequal state in the entire country with both incredible wealth and extreme poverty. Half the kids in our upstate cities live below the poverty line. How did we let this happen?” she said in the video.

“Something has to change. We want our government to work again — on health care, ending mass incarceration, fixing our broken subway.

“Together we can win this fight,” finished the New York-born and raised Nixon, who said she grew up with her mother in what she called “a one-bedroom, fifth-floor walkup.”

The Trump presidency has seen a surge in women — particularly Democratic women — running for office. Only eight of the current 50 US state governors are women. In 2004, Nixon accepted an Emmy award — the highest accolade in US television — for her role as Miranda Hobbes from Trump, the fellow celebrity-turned-politician whose current presidency she publicly opposes.—AFP

Actress Cynthia Nixon — shown here at rally outside Trump Tower in 2017 — is running for the New York governorship. PHOTO: AFP

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Tokyo hotel teams up with Airbnb-style private lodging operator

PARIS — Baguette lovers may be horrified to learn that in 2017, for the first time ever, hamburger sales were higher in France than the classic jambon-beurre sandwich.

American-style burgers were on the menu at 85 per cent of restaurants in France last year, with a whopping 1.5 billion units sold, according to Paris-based restaurant consultants Gira Conseil.

The silver lining for foodies was the gradual demise of junk food, with good-quality, fresh alternatives on the rise.

Interestingly, fast food joints sold just 30 per cent of burgers in France, with the majority sold at restaurants with full table service. This is in big news for a country that takes great pride in its national culinary culture, and which for years resisted the global burger onslaught.

“We’ve been talking about a burger frenzy for three years. This year, we don’t know how to describe the phenomenon. It’s just crazy,” Gira Conseil director Bernard Boutboul told AFP.

There was a nine percent jump in burger sales last year. “That’s phenomenal growth,” Boutboul said.

In 2016, hamburger sales were on a par with the jambon-beurre, or ham-and-butter baguette — which is still the most popular sandwich in France.

“But in 2017, for the first time, (burgers) overtook (the French classic) by a long way,” Boutboul said, with jambon-beurre sales at 1.2 billion units.

“One wonders whether the burger might even overtake our famous steak frites in France,” he said.—AFP

Photo taken in Tokyo in February 2018 shows Hotel Suehiro President Mitsuharu Nishizawa (I). The hotel has agreed to work with the operators of budding Airbnb-style Japanese home-share accommodation called “minpaku.” PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

Missing giant yellow duck found in Australia

PERTH — A giant yellow inflatable duck named Daphne that made a break from its moorings in Australia has been located after a week on the lam, its swimming club owners said Monday.

Daphne — the oversized mascot of the Cockburn Masters Swimming Club in Perth — made a bid for freedom on 11 March, drifting out into the Indian Ocean and sparking an appeal for help along Australia’s west coast.

Reports of sightings flooded in, including one from 440 kilometres (270 miles) away.

But on Monday a local fisherman revealed that he had spotted the escaping bath toy on the day of its disappearance — just 30 kilometres off shore.

“No-one knew about a missing duck at that point, we didn’t know where it did come from,” Tony Gibbs told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

“It looked perfect. It was fully inflated, there was no damage to (it) whatsoever.”

The fisherman towed Daphne back to shore, and said he would return the inflatable soon.

Swimming club president Peter Marr, who made a daring — but ultimately fruitless — dash to catch the duck after it blew away, quipped that he was in “delicate negotiations, and we want Daphne back.”

Giant inflatable rubber ducks drew international attention in 2007 when Dutchman Florentijn Hofman created one as an artwork.

Hofman’s 18-metre-tall (59-feet) bath toy travelled to different cities around the world, ranging from Brazil to Australia, and spawned many replicas.

—AFP
Ronaldo seeks to avoid prison for tax fraud

MADRID — Real Madrid striker Cristiano Ronaldo is not willing to admit he has committed any criminal offense, but will pay the quantity of money the Spanish Treasury demands if the Treasury withdraws its request for him to be given a prison sentence for an alleged tax fraud of 14.7 million euros, according to reports in the Spanish media on Monday.

The same sources report the Treasury’s petition last week for an eight year prison sentence for another former Real Madrid player, Xabi Alonso, for three cases of alleged fraud, totaling eight million euros, provoked Ronaldo and his advisors to attempt to find a negotiated solution to the charges against him, rather than continuing to fight the case through the courts.

Until now Ronaldo, like Alonso, has strongly denied he committed fraud to avoid paying tax on earnings from image rights, but his idea now is to offer the Treasury a “blank cheque” to avoid a prison term.

Meanwhile he continues to insist that despite earnings from image rights being paid to societies in various tax havens, such as the Virgin Islands, he never intended to avoid paying taxes in Spain and that he always gave orders to his advisors to pay what corresponded to him, for which reason he refuses to accept any criminal responsibility. The media informs that Ronaldo hopes the case can be resolved administratively, adding that after Madrid President, spoke in his defense on a public radio station, he is more confident this will be the case.—Xinhua

Dutch great Koeman prepared for ‘big and difficult’ challenge

LONDON — Ronald Koeman says he is over the disappointment of being sacked by Everton and anticipating a “great game” against England on Friday in what will be his first match as Netherlands coach.

The 54-year-old European Championship winner and former Dutch great Koeman — who lost his job in October after his £140 million (159 million euros, $186 million) spending spree backfired spectacularly — accepts returning the Dutch to their status as one of world football’s heavyweights is going to take time.

Koeman replaced the veteran Dick Advocaat, who had been one in a raft of unsuccessful appointments for the Oranje since Louis van Gaal stepped down after finishing third in the 2014 World Cup, in February.

The size of the task facing Koeman is a massive one as the Dutch — who were World Cup finalists in 2010 — have failed to reach either Euro 2016 or this year’s World Cup.

“We are here,” Koeman told the Daily Mail.

“It is a new challenge. It is one I couldn’t say no to.

“It is an honour to be the Holland coach and I am looking forward with all I have to trying to get the country moving forward again.

“I want to take us to the next big tournament in 2020. That is the aim. “It is a big and difficult challenge. Everybody knows this. We have not qualified for the last two big tournaments and, OK, it is going to take time.”

Koeman — who failed to persuade Bayern Munich striker Arjen Robben to revoice his decision to retire from international football — faces an England side that will be going to the World Cup.

The English are also a team Koeman will forever be associated with because of his professional feud on David Platt in the 1994 World Cup qualifier which he escaped with just a booking.

He scored a few minutes later to rub salt into the wounds and the Dutch went on to win 2-0, which was to prove decisive in them going to the finals as group runners-up instead of the Dutch — who were World Cup finalists in 2010 — have failed to reach either Euro 2016 or this year’s World Cup.

“It is going to be a great game,” said Koeman of Friday’s friendly.

Koeman, who was capped 78 times between 1982-94, scoring 14 goals, said he had had enough time to rediscover his managerial vim since the shattering disappointment of losing the Everton job.

“Anderstrom, where everyone knew it was really difficult towards the end, I needed time to focus again,” said Koeman.

“I needed to recover. I have had a good time to relax. I work because I want to work.

“Even after that decision (his sacking), I was still crazy about football. “I wanted to be involved as a coach, I wanted to be with the national team and this was the right time to try the challenge — for me and the national team.”—AFP

Things have to change if trophies are to come, says Benitez

LONDON — Rafael Benitez says things have to change at English giants Newcastle United if they are to reward their devoted fans with trophies after decades without silverware.

The 57-year-old Champions League-winning coach has stuck with his new blood has constantly been ignored by controversial owner Mike Ashley.

Newcastle’s mid-table position is not as comfortable as it appears as they are only four points above the relegation zone with their next match a six-pointer against fellow strugglers Huddersfield on 31 March.

“We have to change things,” Benitez told The Times in Alicante where his squad are on a training camp during the international break.

“I came here with the idea to compete and to create a strong team and a strong club, to compete every year.

“What we have to do if we stay up is improve.

“The way Newcastle were doing things before I arrived doesn’t mean they were right, because they were going down.

“But we have had the chance to go up and we cannot make the same mistakes again.”

Despite hovering near the relegation zone, Newcastle attract the seventh highest average crowd in the Premier League with attendances of over 51,000. Benitez, who has twice been named UEPAs coach of the year, said he had stayed in his post despite misgivings because of the club’s enormous potential even if they have not won a trophy since 1969.

“When I said I wanted to stay I could see the potential for this club to be in the top 10 or even higher, but it depends on consistency,” said Benitez.

“You have to have a structure. Everybody has to be organised. “Can we win trophies? We would need time, but you never know in the cups.

“To compete and be capable of winning something, you need to have the plan and the process. Everything has to be... not settled down, that’s not the right phrase, but more clear.”

Benitez, who was bemoaned by the timing of an offer to extend his contract in January when he wanted Ashley to spend money on players instead, says this season has been a trial rather than a pleasure ride.

“Have I enjoyed being Newcastle manager? I enjoy it when we are winning,” said Benitez, whose family have remained in Liverpool. “I like to do things well and when you see something is right, I’m really proud.

“But it’s difficult to enjoy it when you are suffering all the time because you have to win and then you lose. “Have I enjoyed this season? No, but maybe the word ‘enjoyment’ is different in English. “I’m really pleased with my job. I like it. But enjoyment is when you score eight goals in the Champions League against Besiktas.”

—AFP