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CREATING VALUE

Trading begins in Myanmar's first stock exchange

THE first stock exchange in Myanmar began trading yesterday with shares of First Myanmar Investment (FMI) available for trading.

Shares of FMI, the first listed company on the Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX), rose to their highest value for K31,000 (US$25.83) per share, closing on the first day with total trading volume of 112,845 shares, valued at K3.498 billion (US$2.908 million).

Over 75 per cent of the electronic trading was made through the KBZSC Securities Co.

People gathered early yesterday morning outside KBZSC Securities Co to buy the shares online, which was conducted separately at 11am and 1pm.

The stock exchange is run by the Yangon Stock Exchange Joint-Venture Company, with a 51 per cent stake owned by the Myanma Economic Bank under Myanmar's Finance Ministry and the remainder by Japanese partners.—*GNLM*

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

Rental rates for state-owned property need oversight: MP

Ko Moe

RENTAL rates for state-owned property in Yangon Region need oversight as they are lower than the rates in the market, said MP Daw Aye Aye Mar during a parliamentary discussion on the Budget Bill in the Yangon Region Hluttaw yesterday.

Private companies were allowed to lease public recreation areas and state-owned property at low prices, said the representative for Lanmadaw Constituency.

The Yangon City Development Committee leased land plots in Myakyuntha Park, a state-owned property, to Max Myanmar (6.87 acres), Eden (4.72 acres), Inya Palace Co Ltd (1.83 acres), Magic Land (13.86 acres), Nay La Pwint (2.60 acres), Myanmar Golden Star (4.15 acres), Good Shan Brothers (7.79 acres) and Rya Ji (1.38 acres), according to a report by the Yangon Region Hluttaw finance, planning and economic committee.

Private companies have been allowed to lease state-owned property since the country opened up in 2011. Photo: Moore Zack

The eight companies got 60-year leases for the plots with a monthly payment of K1 million per acre. The leases began on 1 April 2013. **See page 2 >>**

Vietnam's Viettel to become fourth telecom operator under JV system

VIETNAM-based Viettel has been chosen to become the fourth telecom operator in Myanmar under a joint-venture system with a local consortium, announced the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology yesterday.

Viettel owns 49 per cent of the stakes in the joint venture, while the local consortium, comprising 11 firms and Star High Public Co Ltd under the Ministry of Defence, owns 51 per cent.

"To give the public more choices in telecommunications and to increase the funds of the country, we carefully scrutinised and selected the fourth telecom operator of the country," said Dr Saw Oo, an adviser to President Thein Sein and the chairman of the tender selection committee.

With an initial investment of US$300 million, Viettel will begin operating 2G and 3G networks soon, said Deputy Minister U Win Than.—*GNLM*

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Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Roundup

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw is convened in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

THE Second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw's first regular session entered its 13th day, announcing the names of the proposed chairman and members of the Union Election Commission and documenting the process of renaming, forming and re-delineating the boundaries of districts, towns, wards, village tracts and villages around the country. Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than announced the renaming, extended formation, re-delineating of boundaries and abolition of towns and villages in Kayin and Shan states and Sagaing and Ayeyawady regions.

Next, the speaker informed the parliament of the nominees for the five-member Union Election Commission proposed by President-elect Htin Kyaw.

The list of the UEC nominees includes U Hla Thein, who was nominated to the chairmanship, along with U Aung Myint, U Soe Yal, U Tun Khin and U Hla Tint as members.

Then, the speaker invited parliamentarians to sign up to make objections to the nominations not later than 26 March.

The second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw is set to continue for its 14th day on 28 March. —*Myanmar News Agency*

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw announces nominees for Union Election Commission

THE second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw has announced the nominees for the chairmanship and membership of the five-member Union Election Commission proposed by President-elect U Htin Kyaw yesterday.

In his announcement, Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than said U Hla Thein was nominated to chair the commission, which will also include U Aung Myint, U Soe Yal, U Tun Khin and U Hla Tint as members.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Polluted river causing skin diseases

THE polluting of the Mone River, which cuts through Kyaukkyi Township in Bago Region, is causing problems to those who use the river as a source of drinking water, according to local residents.

"I've been living in the Mone area for a long time. The river water has never become this murky and polluted before. The flow of river water has noticeably decreased in the last three years, with the water itself becoming murky. The water is no good to use anymore as a result; it can't be used as a source of drinking water. I've heard it's because of machinery used in golden panning activities further up the river," said U Myint Swe, who lives near the river.

Roughly 10,000 people use the Mone River as a source of water, while insufficient supplies of water in wells located in villages along the river force locals to rely on the Mone River to quench their drinking water needs.

On top of current water shortages in the region, local residents say they have developed skin diseases after bathing in the river.

The stopping of gold panning activities along the river would allow river water to return to its previous purity and bring a reduction in the numbers of skin disease outbreaks, said U Myint Swe.

A woman washing clothes in the Mone River. PHOTO: MYITMAKHA NEWS

"Water shortages are being felt in both urban and rural areas. If these kind of gold panning activities continue, then our Mone River will also experience such water shortages before long. I wish the water in the river would return to its original clarity. The water these days is so dirty, to the point where we can't use it anymore, let alone consume it," said Daw Nyo May, a local resident.

"Only by substituting the river water with clean water for bathing will the frequency of skin disease outbreaks subside, but an insufficient supply of alternative sources means locals have to use the dirty river water regardless. Over 20 residents are currently suffering from skin diseases caused by the polluted river," she added. —*Myitmakha News Agency*

U Myint Soe appointed as Ambassador to Cambodia

THE President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has appointed U Myint Soe, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations, Geneva, Switzerland, as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to the Kingdom of Cambodia.—*Myanmar News Agency*

U Aung Htoo appointed as Ambassador to Indonesia

THE President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has appointed U Aung Htoo, Ambassador of the Embassy of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to the Kingdom of Thailand, as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to the Republic of Indonesia.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Suu Kyi meets new cabinet nominees

DAW Aung San Suu Kyi, chairperson of the National League for Democracy, held a meeting with the proposed members of the new cabinet in Nay Pyi Taw on 24 March.

All but the three lieutenant generals were present at the meeting, said proposed union minister Thura U Aung Ko, adding that the NLD's chairperson instructed them to draw plans of action for their respective ministries' first 100 days from the time the new government takes office.

"The main focus of her instructions at the meeting was on the development of 100-day plans, the practice of thrift and interdepartmental cooperation," he said.

The meeting lasted over three hours and included the speakers and the deputy speakers of the Pyithu Hluttaw and the Amyotha Hluttaw.—*Thein Ko Lwin*

China donates electrical equipment to flood-hit areas

CHINA donated electrical equipment worth 36 million yuans in an effort to restore electricity to flood-hit areas in Myanmar yesterday.

During a donation ceremony in Nay Pyi Taw, Chinese Ambassador to Myanmar Mr Hong Liang handed over documents related to the electrical equipment to Union Minister for Electric Power U Khin Maung Soe.

In his speech at the event, the Union minister thanked the National Development and Reform Commission and the National Energy Administration of the People's Republic of China for their quick response to Myanmar's requests for aid in flood-affected areas.

Work is underway to restore electricity in those areas following the arrival of the Chinese donations on 21 March, added the Union minister.

In his address, the Chinese ambassador elaborated on the ongoing cooperation between the two countries. The Chinese donation includes an 11 KV power line and related parts, a 389-km insulated power line and related parts, a 20 MVA transformer and primary and secondary parts for a Kalay sub-power station and 204 200KVA transformers.

The electrical equipment will be put to use in flood-affected areas in Sagaing and Magway regions and in Rakhine and Chin states.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Rental rates for state-owned ...

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According to the report, other private companies were also granted leases on state-owned property at low prices under long-term contracts.

The report called for rent increases on the state-owned properties and buildings starting next fiscal year, pointing out that the YCDC received just K13.8 billion from leases of state-owned land plots and K56.6 billion from state-owned apartments this fiscal year.

Officials from the Yangon Region government are scheduled to address the report at the Yangon Region Hluttaw session on 28 March.

President U Thein Sein confers honorary titles on 14 Union ministers and Union-level officials, four chief ministers and 55 military officers. PHOTO: MNA

President confers honorary titles on civil, military officials

PRESIDENT U Thein Sein conferred honorary titles on government officials yesterday in recognition of their outstanding achievements.

In his address, the president said that five years of progress in fulfilling two common desires of the people is an undeniable reality.

He gave special thanks to Tatmadaw members for their contributions to ensuring the peace and tranquillity of the country.

During the honorary title presentation ceremony at the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw, the president presented the title of Maha Thayay Sithu to Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing

He presented the title of Thiri Pyan Chi to union ministers U Wunna Maung Lwin, U Ye Htut, U Soe Win, U Win Tun, U Khin Maung Soe, Dr Daw Khin San Yi, Dr Myint Aung, U Win Shein, Dr Kan Zaw, U Kyaw Lwin, Dr Daw Myat Myat Ohn Khin and U Htay Aung, as well as to Union Auditor-General U Myo Myint, Governor of the Central Bank of Myanmar U Kyaw Kyaw Maung and chairman of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission U Win Mra. The wives of Dr Ko Ko Oo and Dr Mya Aye also received the title.

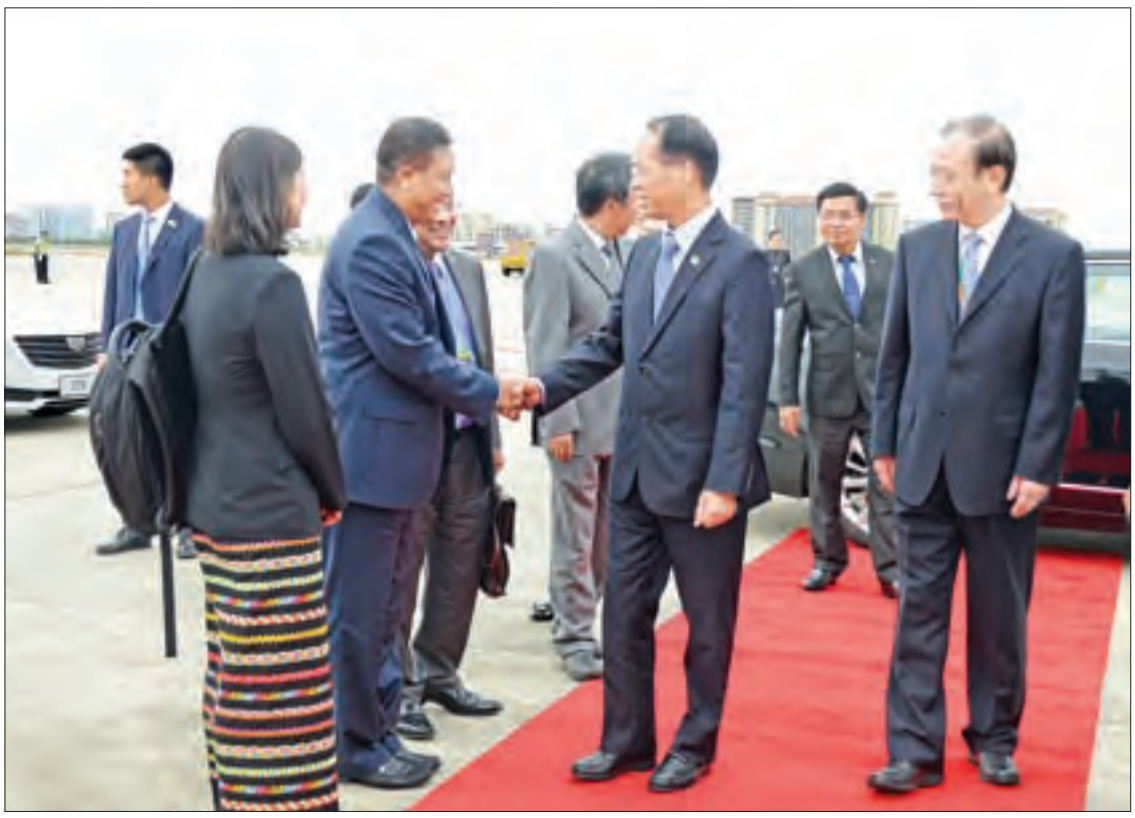
Next, the president presented the title of Zeya Kyaw Htin to 54 recipients through the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.

Altogether, 14 Union ministers and Union-level officials, four chief ministers and 55 military officers were conferred Thiri Pyan Chi titles, a Maha Thayay Sithu title and Zeya Kyaw Htin titles during the 2016 honorary titles presentation.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Vice President returns from China

VICE PRESIDENT Dr Sai Mauk Kham returned to Nay Pyi Taw yesterday after attending the first Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Summit and Boao Forum for Asia in the People's Republic of China.

The Vice President and his party were welcomed at Nay Pyi Taw Airport by fellow Vice President U Nyan Tun, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice Senior General Soe Win, union ministers U Aye Myint and U Tint Hsan, deputy ministers and officials.—*Myanmar News Agency*



Vice-President Dr Sai Mauk Kham is being seen off at Sanya Airport in China. PHOTO: MNA

President sends felicitations to Bangladeshi President

U THEIN SEIN, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, has sent a message of felicitations to His Excellency Mr. Md. Abdul Hamid, President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, on the occasion of the Independence Day of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, which falls on 26 March, 2016.— *Myanmar News Agency*

President sends felicitations to Bangladeshi PM

U THEIN SEIN, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, has sent a message of felicitations to Her Excellency Mrs. Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, on the occasion of the Independence Day of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, which falls on 26 March, 2016.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Union Foreign Affairs Minister felicitates Bangladeshi counterpart

ON the occasion of the Independence Day of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, which falls on 26 March, 2016, U Wunna Maung Lwin, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, has sent a message of felicitations to His Excellency Mr. Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.—*Myanmar News Agency*

KBZ foundation brings water to dry villages

Kyaw Thu seen at the tubewell. PHOTO: KBZ

A TUBE WELL with the capacity to produce 1,500 gallons of water per hour was drilled in Set Set Yo Village, Nyaung U Township, last Wednesday, offering a new water source to people in the arid region.

The drilling of the tube well was carried out by the KBZ Brighter Future Myanmar Foundation and the Kyaw Thu Parahita Network.

The KBZ Brighter Future Myanmar Foundation is also digging the Magyi Shweku Lake at a cost of more than K250 million (US$205,592).

The foundation is digging tube wells in seven villages in Thongwa Township, Yangon Region, two villages in Kawa Township, Bago Region, and one village in Myaing Township, Mandalay Region.

So far, the KBZ Brighter Future Myanmar Foundation has spent more than US$4.5 million on 66 tube wells nationwide, including donations of storage tanks.—*GNLM*

Truck accident kills two, injures 10

A SIX-WHEEL vehicle en route to Tatkon from Kyee Inn Village turned over near Ahlai Kyun Village, Tatkon Township, Nay Pyi Taw, on 24 March, killing two people on board.

According to the investigation, the vehicle, driven by Hla Myo Zaw with 12 passengers on board, crashed when the driver lost control. The accident killed Daw Kyi Kyi Mar, 38, and Daw Nu, 50, on the spot, while ten passengers were seriously injured. The injured passengers were rushed to the nearby general hospital. Police are searching for the driver, who fled the scene, and have filed charges against him —*Tin Tun Tar*

A view of the overturned vehicle. PHOTO: TIN TUN TAR

Forest fire destroys Ponlon village in Mong Yang

A FOREST fire has destroyed Ponlon village in Mong Yang township, Shan State. The fire broke out and consumed the village on Tuesday.

According to an investigation, the fire began at around 10:30 pm in the surrounding forest area of Ponlon village before spreading to the home of U Sai Sam Non which was situated on the edge of the village.

The fire services department arrived at Ponlon village at approximately 12:30pm and brought the blaze under control.

The fire has rendered 19 out of a total 87 household families in the village destitute.— *Maung Maung Naing (Kyaikdon)*

Crime NEWS

Police seize counterfeit notes in Myitkyina

Counterfeit K5,000 notes. PHOTO: MIN YAZAR

POLICE have filed charges against a man on suspicion of using counterfeit notes in Myitkyina on 22 March, a police source said yesterday.

According to the investigation, the police searching for Ye Min, 24, who stayed at the Thitsa Guest House, found nine counterfeit K5,000 notes in the suspect's possession. During the interrogation, Ye Min admitted that he had printed counterfeit notes at his house.

Police searched the house and found documents related to printing counterfeit notes. Local police have filed charges against Ye Min.—*Min Yazar*

Bridge collapses due to overloaded truck

AN overloaded truck reportedly caused the complete structural failure and subsequent collapse of a wooden bridge on Taranar-Payagon road in Kyaikmayaw township, Mawlamyine on 20 March. Measures are being taken by a combined team comprising officials and staff from FCGC Company to provide a temporary diversion road for local vehicles to prevent delayed transportation and commercial losses. Local police have taken action against the driver U Sithu Aung and the conductor on board U Aung Win. – *Naing Tun (IPRD)*

Bridge collapses due to an overloaded truck. PHOTO:NAING TUN (IPRD)

LOCAL Business

A worker feeds chicken at a farm in upper Myanmar. PHOTO: AYE MIN SOE

Chicken smuggling drives domestic prices down

IMPORTS of illegal chickens from neighbouring Thailand hurt Myanmar chicken farmers, according to the Myanmar Poultry Business Association.

"Many of the chickens available on the Mawlamyine market are from Thailand. As far as I'm aware, there aren't many chicken farmers in Mawlamyine. That said, at least ten cars of Mawlamyine chickens supply the Yangon market every day," said Dr Kyaw Win, executive member of the MPBA.

The illegally imported Thai chickens make their way into Myanmar through the Thai border town of Mae Sot. They are then stored in Mawlamyine before being transported to markets around the country. Around ten cars of chickens without PC-3 documentation forms enter the Yangon poultry market every day.

"Those without a PC-3 forms aren't allow to enter our Yangon poultry market. If people come and pay the K50,000 to apply for a PC-3, then the rest isn't of concern for us. The form is issued by the Yangon City Development Committee. Birds imported illegally into the country shouldn't be sold [here in the market]. But at the end of the day, whether your birds are legal or illegal, if you've got a PC-3 then you can sell them in the market," said U Khin Maung Lwin, head of the Mingalar Taung Nyunt poultry wholesalers market.

The influx of illegal Thai chickens has put a viss (1.63 kilos) of chicken meat in the Yangon poultry market at K3,500, while a viss of chicken meat purchased directly at the chicken farm fetches just K3,000. By the time the chicken has made its way to the butcher, the price for the same weight of meat can cost between K5,000 and K6,000.

Chicken farmers worry that if illegal chicken imports persist, the price of a viss of chicken meat sold by local chicken farmers could fall to as low as K2,000.—*Myitmakha News Agency*

FDI expected to reach $7 billion in 2015-16 FY

THE Myanmar Investment Commission expects foreign direct investment in Myanmar to reach around US$7 billion this financial year.

Up to the end of February, FDI in Myanamr amounted to $6.01 billion; roughly$2 billion of the investment went into the country's oil and gas sector.

"This financial year, FDI is estimated to reach US$7 billion, mainly into the oil and gas sector, telecommunications and manufacturing," said U Aung Naing Oo, secretary of the MIC.

The MIC estimates that the manufacturing sector is likely to receive more FDI in the coming years because of the development of the country's special economic zone projects.

U Aung Naing Oo said: "We put more effort into enacting two important laws to help develop the country's economic sector. To improve local small and medium enterprises, the country needs to promote its legal framework and economic policies to attract investors."

Myanmar has received over $23 billion in foreign direct investment between the 2011-2012 fiscal year and the 2015-2016 fiscal year.—*PPN/Union Daily*

Local breeders try hand at farming tilapia, giant sea perch

FISH farmers are setting up farms to breed tilapia and giant sea perch, which are in high demand.

"In cooperation with local breeders and experts, we initiated the pilot project in December last year with the aim of promoting production on a commercial scale, planning to distribute larvae of the two species of fish to local farmers," said farmer U Toe Maung.

Tilapia is most highly consumed freshwater fish around the world, and giant sea perch also supports a successful farming industry, particularly in Thailand.

Breeders who want to start farming giant sea perch may join with the Myanmar Fisheries Federation (MFF) to breed the fish on a commercial scale as long as they are located in suitable locations.

MFF is on hand to show breeders how to maintain ponds for the successful farming of giant sea perch and tilapia and to explain the economics of farming these species.

Coffee farmers in Pindaya earn higher incomes

COFFEE farmers in Ywa Ngan village, Pindaya Township, have come to earn more incomes as a result of rising prices in coffee.

The price for coffee seeds have reached K3,000 a viss, up from K1,000 in the past, said local farmer Ko Zaw Oo.

NGOs provide seeds for villagers to grow a variety of crops and vegetables including tea, coffee, carrot, pumpkin, gourd and aubergine. And they purchase agricultural produce from local farmers. Currently, these produce, for instance, coffee, have made inroads into domestic and foreign markets, mainly in Thailand.—*200*

Need for crackdown on illegal Thai chickens: Broiler Association

ACCORDING to the Myanmar Broiler Association Thai chickens are being smuggled into Myanmar at an alarming rate. There is a need to install systematic controls, said Daw Hla Hla Thein, chairman of the MBA (Myanmar Broiler Association).

The MBA claims that chicken, chicks and eggs from Thailand are being illegally smuggled into Myanmar via Maesot every day at an alarming rate. Around ten truckloads of chickens are entering the country according to their investigations into the matter.

We are afraid that local Myanmar poultry farmers will suffer economic hardship and may see foreign diseases transmitted to their chickens because of smuggling operations. We want both the incumbent government and the incoming government to give this issue due attention, she added.

The price of chicken has risen as of late as chick production has fallen. *PTK/ Union Daily*

Plans under way to finalise jewel regulations before Thingyan

THE Myanmar Gems and Jewellery Entrepreneurs Association is planning to finalise the rules and regulations for jewel in cooperation with the Ministry of Mines.

The Jewellery Law came into effect in 1995, but it has been without its rules and regulations for more than two decades.

"We will draw up the rules and regulations of the Jewellery Law before Thingyan festival. We are discussing the prospects of legal permission for the export of gold and diamond," said U Tun Hla Aung, CEO of Myanmar Gems and Jewellery Entrepreneurs Association.

"In addition, we need to find new markets ."

The ministry is planning to reduce taxes by 25 per cent for every export of unrefined jewels. Under the Jewellery Law, a 30% tax is collected for exports of unrefined jewel.

Reduced tax will promote gem trade, U Tun Hla Aung said, adding that the new regulations will allow gem exhibitions to be held in border areas.

Currently, South Korea and China are ranked the biggest buyers of the country's jewels. Myanmar's gems are put on sales at both international and domestic exhibitions.—*MPPS/ Union Daily*

Gems and Jewelleries are seen at Bogyoke Market, Yangon. PHOTO: ALAMY.COM

North Korea threatens South's Blue House as tensions persist

South Korean President Park Geun-Hye observes a moment of silence during a memorial ceremony on the first West Sea (Northern Limited Line) Defence Day at the Daejeon National Cemetery in Daejeon, South Korea, on 25 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

SEOUL — North and South Korea, locked for weeks in exchanges of angry rhetoric and heightened military readiness, traded more threats yesterday, with Pyongyang saying its military had trained to attack Seoul's presidential Blue House.

Isolated North Korea is renowned for its sabre-rattling, and often makes threats of attack and even annihilation against South Korea and the United States.

However, its tone has been especially belligerent in recent weeks and personally aimed at South Korean President Park Geun-hye following her warnings of regime collapse in Pyongyang after it conducted a nuclear test and rocket launch earlier this year.

North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un guided what state media said yesterday was the North's largest ever exercise of long-range artillery training, with a simulated attack on South Korea's presidential and government offices.

Kim ordered his military to be on high alert "so that it may mercilessly pound the reactionary ruling machines in Seoul, the cesspool of evils, and advance to accomplish the historic cause of national reunification, once it receives an order for attack," the official KCNA news agency said.

Tensions have been high on the Korean peninsula since the North conducted a nuclear test in January and a long-range rocket launch in February, which prompted new sanctions earlier this month by the United Nations Security Council. Annual US-South Korea military exercises, which are ongoing, have added to the jitters.

The tensions also come ahead of a rare congress of the North's ruling Workers' Party in May. Some analysts expects Kim to claim a signature achievement, such as another nuclear test, in the run-up to the congress as he looks to bolster his stature at home.

Park warned the North to end provocative actions and "escape from the illusion" that it will benefit from nuclear armament, ordering her country's military to maintain "maximum combat power."

"Reckless provocation will be the road to destruction for the North's regime," Park said at an anniversary event for the 2010 sinking of a naval ship that killed 46 people. The South blames the sinking on a torpedo attack by the North, which denies any role.

The North conducted its fourth nuclear test in January, saying that it had successfully tested a hydrogen bomb although many experts doubt the claim.

But some US intelligence analysts now believe the North "probably" possesses a miniaturised nuclear warhead, CNN reported yesterday, citing several unnamed US officials, although the assessment is not the consensus view of the US government.

But even those officials say they still do not know if such a device would actually work, CNN said.

Rocket experts have said the North has yet to demonstrate it can launch a ballistic missile mounted with a nuclear warhead that can sustain the stress of atmospheric re-entry and then be guided to hit a target with reliability.—*Reuters*

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Singapore subway tunnel near nature reserve stirs debate

Cars drive along a stretch of highway on the perimeters of the central catchment area in Singapore, on 2 March 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

SINGAPORE — A proposal to build a subway tunnel near Singapore's largest patch of primary rainforest has renewed a debate over the pace of development and its impact on the environment in the Southeast Asian city-state.

Below are key facts and issues surrounding the Cross Island subway line.

Singapore is spending billions of dollars to upgrade its subway system to cope with a rising population in what is one of the world's most densely populated countries, which penalises car ownership through hefty taxes.

The 50-km Cross Island Line would give commuters a shorter option for east-west travel on the island of 5.4 million people. The government is studying two options - one involves building part of the tunnel under Singapore's biggest nature reserve and a second more costly option to skirt around the reserve.

The Central Catchment Nature Reserve (CCNR) is the largest of Singapore's natural reserves with over 2,000 hectares of forest cover. The CCNR includes the MacRitchie Reservoir, the oldest in Singapore and a popular destination for walkers and naturalists. A network of freshwater streams in the reserve supports a rich diversity of flora and fauna, including more than 1,000 species of flowering plants and over 500 species of animals.

The plan to build a 2-km tunnel under the CCNR did not go down well with nature-lovers, who organised guided walks around the reserve, exhibitions and talks, and produced music videos to lobby for the route to be changed.

An online petition asking the government's Land Transport Authority (LTA) to re-route the line away from the nature reserve has received over 11,000 signatures since February.

Organisers of the petition said they are worried about issues like noise pollution and waste water leaking into the soil, which could prove fatal for some animals in the reserve.

The LTA is studying an alternative route that would skirt around the reserve area and build the subway tunnel under private homes and businesses. It would cost an extra S$2 billion ($1.5 billion) and add 6 minutes to commuting time.

Some residents said they are worried about the impact on their homes and the noise and disruption caused by a lengthy construction project. The government has not said when it will make a decision.—*Reuters*

Banks to raise minimum capital

PHNOM PENH — The National Bank of Cambodia (NBC), or central bank, has ordered banks and microfinance institutions in the country to increase their minimum capital requirements by March 2018. According to a Prakas (edict) seen by Xinhua yesterday, commercial bank locally incorporated as local company or foreign subsidiary will be required to have a minimum registered capital of 75 million US dollars, up from the current 37.5 million US dollars. The edict added that commercial bank incorporated as foreign branch, whose parent bank is rated "investment grade," will have a minimum registered capital of 50 million US dollars, up from 12.5 million US dollars now.

Specialised banks will be required to raise a minimum capital of 15 million US dollars from the current 7.5 million US dollars, it said. Deposit-taking microfinance institutions will be required to increase their minimum reserves to 30 million US dollars, up from 2.5 million US dollars now, while microfinance institutions, which do not offer deposit-taking service, will have to increase their reserves to 1.5 million US dollars, up from 62,500 US dollars now.—*Xinhua*

Malaysia nabs 15 suspected IS members

KUALA LUMPUR — Fifteen suspected members of the Islamic State (IS) group, including a police officer, have been arrested across the country, Malaysian authorities said on Thursday.

The move came shortly after deadly bomb attacks on Tuesday in Brussels that killed at least 31 people and injured about 300 others.

The suspects, aged between 22 and 49 years old and including 11 men and 4 women, were arrested in a series of raids earlier this week in Kuala Lumpur and several states in the country, according to a police statement.

Among them were a police officer and an airplane technician, police said.

The suspects were believed to be involved in a series of activities related to the IS, including arranging transit for foreign militants to another Southeast Asian country via Malaysia, collecting fund for a IS-affiliated group in southern Philippines and trying to collect materials to make bombs, police said.

They were also suspected of hacking government websites as well as recruiting members for IS in Malaysia, the statement added. The cell was receiving orders from a Malaysian IS member in Syria to launch attacks in Malaysia. Malaysia has stepped up security following the deadly terrorist attack in Jakarta, Indonesia in January. Its leaders have joined international community in condemning the attacks in Brussels. — *Xinhua*

Philippines releases seized North Korean ship after UN lifts embargo

MANILA — The Philippines has released a North Korean freighter it seized nearly a month ago under tough new UN sanctions, after no contraband was found onboard and the ship was cleared by the United Nations, officials said yesterday.

The M/V Jin Teng, a 6,830 deadweight tonne (dwt) cargo ship with its 21 North Korean crew, left on Thursday afternoon for China after clearing immigration, customs, quarantine and port authorities, said coastguard spokesman Commander Armand Balilo.

"At the policy level, there is no more basis to continue to hold M/V Jin Teng after UN Security Council delisted it from the annex of UNSC Resolution 2270," Charles Jose, a foreign ministry spokesman, said in a text message. No team from the United Nations came to inspect the ship but local authorities did not find any contraband on board except some broken aids to navigation equipment, the coastguard said.

Tough new UN sanctions, passed in March to punish North Korea after its fourth nuclear test in January, blacklisted 31 ships owned by North Korean shipping firm Ocean Maritime Management Company (OMM). The sanctions aim to starve North Korea of money for its nuclear weapons programme.

But the UN Security Council agreed earlier this week to China's request to remove sanctions on four ships blacklisted for ties to Pyongyang's arms trade. China said the ships were not OMM ships and secured a commitment that the ships would no longer use North Korean crews.

The four ships included the Jin Teng, detained by the Philippines days after the sanctions took effect. Jin Teng, flying a Sierra Leone flag, arrived in the Philippines on 27 February and was unloading palm kernels when it was seized. The Jin Teng has called at Palembang, Indonesia, and Kaohsiung, Taiwan, since the beginning of this year, ship tracking data available on the Reuters Eikon Terminal showed.—*Reuters*

Philippines Coast Guard officials inspect North Korean freighter Jin Teng in Subic Bay in this handout photo from the coast guard on 3 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

Pakistani PM to visit US to attend nuclear summit

ISLAMABAD — Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif will visit the United States to attend the fourth Nuclear Security Summit on 31 March, the Foreign Ministry said on Thursday.

US President Barrack Obama invited the prime minister to attend the conference.

"Pakistan's participation in the summit at the level of the prime minister manifests the importance Pakistan attaches to the nuclear security," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nafees Zakaria said at his weekly news briefing in Islamabad.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is likely to explain his vision on nuclear safety issues. He will meet some world leaders on the sides of the summit.

The White House earlier said the summit will continue discussions on the evolving threat and highlight steps that can be taken together to minimize the use of highly-enriched uranium, secure vulnerable materials, counter nuclear smuggling and deter, detect, and disrupt attempts at nuclear terrorism.

The first Nuclear Security Summit was held in Washington DC (April 2010) followed by the Summits in Seoul (March 2012) and in The Hague (March 2014).

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif earlier said he "looks forward to having useful exchange of views on bilateral issues"with President Obama during his visit to attend the summit.

Talking to the US Ambassador to Pakistan David Hale in Islamabad on Thursday he said Pakistan is desirous of bringing greater depth and economic substance to its relationship with the United States.—*Xinhua*

Shikoku Electric to scrap oldest reactor at Ikata plant

Shikoku Electric Power Co.'s Ikata nuclear plant in Ehime Prefecture, western Japan. The company plans to give up restarting the No. 1 reactor of the plant and scrap it because extending the aging unit's lifespan would be hugely expensive, company sources said on 25 March. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

OSAKA — Shikoku Electric Power Co said yesterday it will scrap the oldest of the three reactors at its Ikata nuclear complex in the western Japanese prefecture of Ehime starting on 10 May, as it would be too costly to continue running the nearly 40-year-old unit.

The utility's president Hayato Saeki met with Ehime Gov. Tokihiro Nakamura to convey the company's decision to decommission the No. 1 reactor, which is currently offline.

The power company estimates an investment of more than 100 billion yen ($889 million) would be needed to beef up safety measures for restarting the apparatus which started operation in 1977.

Shikoku Electric concluded that it would not make economic sense to reactivate the aging reactor, as it has a relatively small output capacity of 566,000 kilowatts, while the company aims to reboot the larger and newer No. 3 unit at the same complex in July.

The No. 3 reactor began operating in 1994 and can produce 890,000 kw. The Ikata plant is equipped with the 566,000-kw No. 2 unit, which first went on-stream in 1982.

The utility has decided "comprehensively" to scrap the No. 1 reactor by considering various factors such as the hefty costs and the total capacity it can maintain in the future, Saeki said at the meeting with Nakamura.

The governor responded by saying, "We took (this decision) as a result of the fact that the company has faced" challenges in seeking to extend the reactor's operation.

Shikoku Electric's decision could have an impact on other major utilities regarding whether to seek to keep their aging reactors operable beyond the 40-year time limit, a rule imposed after the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster.

Stricter government regulations set in 2013 following the Fukushima nuclear crisis prohibit the operation of nuclear reactors beyond 40 years in principle. But operation for an additional 20 years is possible if operators make safety upgrades and pass the regulator's screening.

Around the country, five reactors at four other nuclear power plants that are around 40 years old are already set to be scrapped.

The No. 1 reactor at the Ikata power complex reaches the 40-year time limit next year. If the utility wants to continue operating the reactor, it needs to apply for an extension to the Nuclear Regulation Authority in advance.

Some local residents around the nuclear plant welcomed the decision, while others are concerned about the economic impact on the region.

"I hope this will be a step forward for conversion to renewable energy," said a 49-year-old man who runs his own business.

A 67-year-old farmer said he has been worried about the safety of the aging No.1 unit but added that the local economy may be affected if government grants for municipalities hosting power facilities are to be reduced.

The government aims to bring more reactors back online after the Fukushima disaster led to a nationwide halt of nuclear plants, as it looks to make up 20 to 22 per cent of the country's overall electricity with nuclear power in 2030.

Facing difficulty in building new reactors amid strong public opposition to atomic power generation, Japan would need a dozen of the aging reactors running beyond the 40-year limit to meet the government goal, industry sources say.—*Kyodo News*

OPINION

The test of power

Kyaw Thura

IN the eyes of ordinary people, the government may seem like an institution that owns the territory it governs. However, no government is vested with the authority or divine right to use public resources for private gain. It is, therefore, important to understand the authority, rights and privileges of the government.

The plain fact is that a government has no responsibility other than act as the guardian of the country's resources and protect public interests. In the days when absolute monarchies were the norm, the administrative system was patrimonial, meaning that the prince would automatically succeed the throne upon the demise of the king. That practice put the rulers under the delusion that they were the real owners of the territories under their sovereign power.

Unfortunately, this practice survives in some parts of the world. The governments in these places might consider themselves to be sovereign rulers with the right to exercise their personal prerogatives to manage their lands as if those public resources were parts of their patrimony by exploiting people's innate fear of authority.

In reality, the authority of the government resides in its ability to protect the rights of individual citizens. In the absence of a proper awareness of this simple fact, any government will find itself, sooner or later, to be a major violator of its subject's rights.

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We appreciate your feedback and contributions. If you have any comments or would like to submit editorials, analyses or reports please email khinmaungaye.hotmail@gmail.com with your name and title.

Due to limitation of space we are only able to publish "Letter to the Editor" that do not exceed 500 words. Should you submit a text longer than 500 words please be aware that your letter will be edited.

Another Dawn of Translation Glory in Sarpay Beikman

Maung Phyo (WYU)

19th of March 2016, the time was about 9:00 am and the place, at the corner of the 37th Street and the Merchant road, downtown Yangon. The day opened up with a silvery grey van turned left into the 37th street and pulled up to a screeching halt right in front of an old building. The building bore the look of an old sage. It towered over the busy traffic down there on the roads, juxtaposing with sophisticated complexes across from the Merchant road. Dismounted from the van was a group of people decently dressed for an occasion. There to greet them at the entrance were three of four gentlemen in Myanmar traditional jacket. They ushered them to a well-lighted and ventilated hall on the third floor. The hall had seating for over 100 guests with its rows of wooden chairs and plastic ones with aisles in-between, creating an impression of a mixture of old and modern ages. The front wall of the hall was pinned with a beautifully designed vinyl reading "Prize-giving Ceremony for Translation Competition, co-organized by Sarpay Beikman, Printing and Publishing Department, Ministry of Information and Shanti Volunteer Association, Japan, funded by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan". Bunches of contestants and invited guests were coming in to capture the moment. For, the day would mark an important event in the history of Myanmar Translation World. And Sarpay Beikman would host it.

In fact, Sarpay Beikman (literally "Abode or Palace of Literature) emerged as Myanmar Translation Society. Its first President was PM U Nu who initiated a Burmese Translation Job at Judson College. It was based at Sorrento Villa at the corner of Pyay road and Hanthawady road. The purpose was to translate world culture, literature, and education for the Myanmar public. The society decided that independent Burma (Myanmar) would need a Burmese Encyclopaedia. Accordingly, it started to launch the project in May, 1948. Initially, Sir John Hamilton's encyclopaedia was selected to be translated into 10 volumes. Shortly afterwards, they changed their minds and stopped direct translation. Instead, they managed to complete the project with articles relating to Myanmar and those on the arts and sciences. Volume1 was printed in 1954; the last volume (15) in 1976. The first five volumes were printed in England. Afterwards, the society started to use its own press in Yangon. Then, yearly volumes of updates were published. In 1951, a pictorial translation of a history between 1900 and 1950 was printed in the Netherlands. Then came Ludu Theikpan in 1957 comprising 30 volumes for science technologies to be initiated for publishing. It also facilitated the publication of textbooks for schools. In addition to its encouragement of translation, the society supported many other forms of Myanmar cultures and literature activities. It also established a free library in Yangon in 1956.

In 1963, the society was absorbed into the Ministry of Information's Printing and Publishing Enterprise as Sarpay Beikman Literature House with its mandate also extended to encourage local writers to print and publish books of all types. Since then, the society presents the annual Sarpay Beikman Manuscript Awards and Myanmar National Literature Awards for excellent, new, unpublished and published writing in various categories. In accordance with its mandate-"To improve and enrich the general knowledge of all Myanmar nationals, the management board decided to compile outstanding works of foreign literature and other branches of knowledge for translation into Myanmar or other indigenous languages. It also tried to print and publish these works at its lowest possible price. Sarpay Beikman, like before, awards prizes for good fiction and research in Myanmar literature and fine arts along with its sponsorship of seminars, courses on writing, book production, journalism and librarianism. Furthermore, it also published English language magazine-"Open Mind", renamed to "Spectrum" after 1962. With declining numbers of English readers, it was later decided to launch a Myanmar version, however with articles geared to the interests of Myanmar readers. Sarpay Beikman started to render the Sarpay Beikman Award (K.1000) in 1949. In 1955, Saya Zawgyi won it under the category of literature with his book "Thakhin Kodaw Hmine tika". The name changed over to the Literary Fine Art Awards in 1962 and the National Literary Awards in 1965. The prizes were awarded annually and the manuscripts published. From 1970, a new system was initiated by which unpublished works were to be submitted in competition for the Sarpay Beikman Manuscript Awards. However, the National Literary Awards, one per category, were selected from the books published in the previous year.

In recent years, Sarpay Beikman co-operated with Shanti Volunteer Association of Japan and decided to hold a translation competition in order to initiate the development of juvenile literature and enhancement of the translation skill of the young translators. As a result, Sarpay Beikman had the book titled "The Sun" translated into Myanmar by its members of Translation Department and published in the year 2015 in compensation for not having been able to hold the translation competition. "The Sun" was themed as the rudiments of ecosystem for the young children.

For the year-2016 competition, the book entitled "The earth" was chosen as prescribed text for translation. It highlighted the importance of preservation of our environment and thus, was considered suitable for bringing into notice the ABC of environmentalism among the youths. In scrutinizing the manuscripts submitted by the candidates, the selection committee adhered to the criteria such as terminology, flow of writing, distinctive writing, translation skill and choice or appropriate or powerful words After three phases of scrutiny, five candidates came out as winners of first, second, third and two consolation prizes, namely, Khin Pyae Pyae Phyo, Sai Wira Lin Khant, Dr Khin Lin Naing, Su Su Myint and Wai Yan Oo.

The ceremony was opened with a welcoming speech made by U Aung Than, Editor-in-Chief of Sarpay Beikman. In his speech, he recalled the background of Sarpay Beikman, pinpointed the importance of consulting the English-Myanmar Dictionary for the contestants especially in their attempts towards translating of an English word for which there already is a fixed term in Myanmar, expressed his concern about the seeming dearth of new-generation translators and at the same time concluded saying he was delighted to see such a horde of young translators who came up for the competition. Then came Ms. Aki Nakahara of Shanti Volunteer Association to make another speech in which she disclosed her heart-felt thanks towards all the contestants and encouraged all of them to keep on participating in the forthcoming competitions. And then, prizes were awarded to the winners by U Tin Hlaing (Ledwinthar Saw Chit), Dr. Khin Aye (Maung Khin Min (Danubyu)), Ms. Aki Nakahara and U Aung Than respectively. After that, presents were given as tokens of thanks to Ms. Aki Nakahara and U Win Tun (Maung Wint Thu), a member of the selection committee. The ceremony was successfully brought to an end with words of thanks given on behalf of all the contestants by first-prize winner, Khin Pyae Pyae Phyo.

In the past, Sarpay Beikman had shined in the Myanmar translation community with its historic publications. Now this translation competition will mark an auspicious start to revive its days of glory as the name "Sarpay Beikman" connotes its grandiose implication. It will also signify the indispensability of the younger generation in bridging the gaps in the world of Myanmar literature especially under the category of translation literature.

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Time running out for restoration of century old Dawei monastery

ABBOTS from the Shwe Kyaung Gyi monastery, located in Taninthayi regional town of Dawei, have expressed the need for timely restoration efforts to be made to a century old building within the monastery compound before it is completely destoryed.

The Shwe Kyaung Gyi monastery was built during the Buddhist calender year of 1126 to service the Shin Oo Aw pagoda. Upon the previous monastery's destruction, a new one which stands on the site today was built and named Shwe Kyaung Gyi.

"The building is over a century old. Nobody can reside within it in its current state of dilapidation. Termites have eaten away the legs of the building to the point whereby the monastery building is folding in on itself. The monks who reside in the monastery tend to the building, carrying out small scale maintenance and restoration work as much as their limited capacity will allow." proclaimed abbot Ariyawuntha of Shwe Kyaung Gyi monastery.

The abbot continued to explain the desire of the monks residing in the monastery for the regional government to conduct field visits and carry out restoration on the extremely rare ancient Dawei building as they themselves are not in a financial position to be able to undertake such an project, nor do they have any donors who would be able to assist.

"Our department has a plan to make an inventory of all ancient buildings in the region. But, just as our Taninthayi Region office hasn't long be open, we have only a small workforce which hasn't yet allowed us to carry out such a task. Should our investigations find them to really be ancient buildings, then we will make a submission to regional government for their restoration." said U Tin Maung Htway, assistant director of the Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library for the Taninthayi Region. Town elders of Dawei have expressed the aforementioned building is a priceless piece of ancient heritage to Dawei people and that the original handiwork of the building should not be lost. Attempts to restore the building need to be carried out in a timely manner though, as elders speculate the building could fall into disrepair within the next three years.— *Myitmakha News Agency*

A century old Dawei monastery. PHOTO: MYITMAKHA NEWS AGENCY

Obstetrics and Gynaecology Special Hospital put into service in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

Obstetrics and Gynaecology Special Hospital put into service in Nay Pyi Taw

OBSTETRICS and Gynaecology Special Hospital was commissioned, with the opening ceremony at the hospital in Ottarathiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

Deputy Minister for Health Dr Win Myint and heads of departments formally opened the special hospital.

Next, Union Minister for Health Dr Than Aung unveiled the inscription of the hospital, and spoke on the occasion.

In his address, the Union minister said that people from central part of the country will have access to maternity and childbirth benefits and gynaecological care thanks to emergence of the OG hospital in Nay Pyi Taw.

He also called on medical staff to strive to ensuring that the hospital will win public trust and reliance.

Then, the Union minister wend round the hospital, and gave necessary instructions.

According to the Health Ministry, 1,190 hospitals have been put into service across the country as of this February. The newly-opened Obstetrics and Gynecology Special Hospital became the fourth facility in Nay Pyi Taw Council Area. — *Myanmar News Agency*

A Certain Public Concern

SU SU MYINT (Paoh Mu)

ONE of the worrisome that may harm the activity or balance of human or animal is noise pollution or noise disturbance. Noise pollution can be categorized by indoor noise and outdoor noise. Large machines, motor vehicles, aircrafts and trains are the source of most outdoor noise whereas small machines, building activities and music performances are indoor noise. The source of most outdoor noise is mostly caused by machines, transportation systems, building activities and motor vehicles, especially in downtown areas; in other words, it can be regarded as environmental noises. The other major cause of noises originates in the blare of loud radio, car horn, the hubbub of market place or mall and the clamour of the dissatisfied mob which is a real city-concern.

In Yangon, when industrializations matters most, material development is growing leaps and bounds. As a consequence, noise pollution is almost a daily affair in this country, occurring in one part or another. In every area, the influx of the construction activities like bridges, roads, building, flyovers, etc take place each day. The construction site is full of diggers, dump trucks and concrete mixer trucks and so forth. The down point is that these construction equipment are too noisy.

As a daily commuter, I used to take the bus. One day, at 8-mile, no choice, I got on a bus with ear-splitting din of engine to downtown. The same as ever; I was stuck in the traffic jam of junction-8. Yes, Junction-8 is the bone of various noises. Equipment like compressors, generators, giant concrete mixer and gigantic crane in the site of constructing the overhead bridge also were energetically participating in producing the deafening noise. On board, even I had a seat, which was better than other standees that also waited for snatching a seat; the driver played music on full volume which made my condition pretty worse. My patience was wearing out anew due to the long spell of waiting for the green light. Not only me, but also some look nervous and bored. Then the light was on, although, the bus could only drift along inches by inches. Meanwhile, a beggar crawled onto our bus and distributed her papers to beg some money. When she is driven down, she in recalcitrant and gave backchat the bus conductor. That heated debate assaulted the ear. But I dared not breathe a word of my nuisance so as to protect the rudeness from the spare. Unavoidably, loud noises from the road-environs irritated again and made me uncomfortable. As the bus moved along, cars and buses were emulously whizzing past each other by repeatedly horning. Like the "Horn Free Zone", the drivers freely blare out the horn. Thereafter the bus approached downtown and I stepped out of the bus at Sule stop. In a flash, hawkers and vendors came pouring selling things amid the flow of the bus luring out aloud the people attention. Worst, the catcalls of some beggars who cropped up among the crowd along the bus-stop rang my ears. Along both sides of the road lots of loaded trucks, big and small, roared along the noisy motorway. Sometimes, fire engines in private zoomed along the streets. For me, it pollutes the ears which can take in just a certain ranges of sounds. But for others, they seem inured to that condition and even yawned drowsily and dozed at a certain shady place. Sometimes, silence indeed is music to those who is badly upset by the annoyance of the noises.

Although there are still many reasons leading to noise pollution, the country-wide noise that took place are mainly caused by the extremely lax of enforcement by the authorities. As a matter of fact, noises occur due to lack of knowledge about the causes and effects of it. It affects both health and behaviour. Unwanted sound (noise) can damage psychological health. It can cause hypertension; high stress levels, tinnitus, hearing loss, sleep disturbances and other harmful effects. Noise laws and ordinances should exist widely in cities. They may contain a general prohibition against making noise that is a nuisance, or it may set out specific guidelines for daytime and for certain activities. Moreover, the authorities should disseminate information to the public regarding noise pollution and its adverse health effects and inquire the matters related to noise.

To conclude, we can say that the development of our country is made partly ugly by terrible noises and so, it is needed prevent them as much as possible. Steps should also be taken to lessen the sufferings of the people affected by noise disturbance. Better city planning can help create "No-Noise' Zones, where honking and industrial noise are not tolerated. Although there do not exist many solutions to reduce noise pollution, on a personal level, everybody can help reduce the noise. If the public understanding of noise pollution is complete, can the city take steps to eradicate it completely.

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Demonstrators react near burning garbage bins as French high school and university students take part in a demonstration against the labour reform bill proposal in Nantes, France, on 24 March as part of a nationwide labour reform protest. PHOTO: REUTERS

Watered-down French labour bill fails to please business or workers

PARIS — French business leaders urged the government to beef up a revised labour reform bill after pressure from unions and students forced it to scrap plans to limit severance pay.

But the new draft, presented to the cabinet on Thursday, was also criticised by students who said the remaining measures would still deny them the job stability enjoyed by previous generations.

"This version 2 has been totally sanitised," said Pierre Gattaz, the head of employer federation Medef, which is pushing the government to cut the restrictions which make it hard for companies to hire and fire.

"We need to get back to the initial version which was ambitious and could have spurred confidence amongst employers," Gattaz told Radio Classique.

Despite the government backtracking on the most controversial aspect of the bill, thousands of students returned to the streets of Paris and other cities on Thursday.

One car was burned near Medef's central Paris headquarters while 57 secondary schools were barricaded by high school students, although that was fewer than during previous protests.

Student leaders called for an investigation into police handling of the demonstrations after TV showed footage of a student being punched to the ground by a policeman. Speaking after she had unveiled the bill to cabinet, labour minister Myriam El Khomri said the protests showed that the Socialist government still had to convince young people that they would be the main beneficiaries of the reform.

Given the current difficulty companies have to reduce their workforces when they need to, many young people find it hard to get hired on permanent contracts and instead have to settle for highly flexible temporary terms which make it difficult for them to rent housing or secure a mortgage.

Data released on Thursday showed that French unemployment claims rose by 38,400 to a new record of 3,591,000 in February, the biggest increase since September 2013. The amount of time people spent unemployed also rose to a new record of 578 days.

Business leaders say the initial proposal would have encouraged companies to hire more people since the cost of layoffs in a downturn would be more predictable, helping reduce an unemployment rate stuck above 10 per cent. Last week, the story of a struggling lacemaker in the city of Calais pushed to the brink of collapse by the court-ordered reinstatement of five employees served as a reminder of the sometimes counterproductive impact of complex labour rules.

The new draft retains measures giving more flexibility to employers to agree in-house deals with employees on working time and less restrictive conditions for layoffs for economic reasons. Parliament will start discussing the bill on 4 April, with both left-wing rebels and reformists led by Economy Minister Emmanuel Macron seeking to modify it substantially. A final adoption is expected in July.—*Reuters*

Bulgaria says ready to erect fence on border with Greece

SOFIA — Bulgaria is ready to build a fence on its border with Greece to keep out migrants amid fears they could head its way after the Western Balkan route was closed, Prime Minister Boiko Borisov said yesterday.

Parliament last month voted to let its army assist police in guarding the European Union member's borders to avoid a refugee influx that has overwhelmed some of its neighbours. Bulgaria shares a border with Greece to its south that is about 500 kms (310 miles) long.

"The main threat is coming from the Greek border," Borisov told parliament yesterday.

"It is very long and unprotected, and our concern is that the Greek government did not take measures in recent months. We are ready to erect a barrier if necessary."

Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban said that a fence should be erected on the Macedonian and Bulgarian borders with Greece to curb the inflow of migrants into Europe.

Earlier this month, Bulgaria and its neighbour Macedonia to the west held joint air and land operations along their common border to ensure control of it amid an increased flow of migrants.

On Thursday, Defence Minister Nikolay Nenchev requested an additional 1.5 million levs ($860,000) to provide essential equipment to army personnel taking part in border protection and control jointly with police.

In November 2013, Bulgaria started building a barbed wire fence along its border with Turkey. Almost 100 kms of the planned 166 km fence have already been erected.—*Reuters*

NEWS IN BRIEF

Firefight claims four lives including army general in S Afghanistan

KANDAHAR, (Afghanistan) — Four people including an army general were killed in Afghan southern Kandahar Province on Thursday night, provincial government spokesman Samim Khapalwak said yesterday.

"Two armed militants sprayed bullets on General Khan Agha, a senior official with 205 army corps in the southern Kandahar province yesterday night killing him along with one of his bodyguards on the spot and injuring his son," Khapalwak told Xinhua. The general was coming out of a mosque next to his residence in Dand District Thursday night when two armed militants waiting for him opened fire and killing him along with one of his bodyguards on the spot. Khapalwak added that both attackers were killed in the firefight lasted for a while. Meantime, Qari Yusuf Ahmadi who claims to speak for the Taliban outfit, in contact with media claimed responsibility, saying Taliban fighters punished General Khan Agha for serving the government.—*Xinhua*

Radovan Karadzic sentenced to 40 years in prison

THE HAGUE — The first president of Republika Srpska, Radovan Karadzic, was sentenced to 40 years in prison for war crimes committed in Bosnia-Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995, at the Hague Tribunal yesterday.

Karadzic and the Hague Tribunal's prosecution have the right to appeal the judgment. Until the judgment is final, Karadzic will stay at the Hague Tribunal's detention unit.

The Hague Tribunal convicted the first president of Republika Srpska, Radovan Karadzic, of genocide against the Muslim population in the area of Srebrenica in 1995, crimes in Sarajevo, hostage-taking and a large number of war crimes in seven Bosnian municipalities.—*Tanjug*

Three soldiers killed, 24 injured in PKK car bomb attack in SE Turkey

ANKARA — Three Turkish soldiers were killed and 24 others were injured in car bomb attacks by militants in southeastern Turkey yesterday, the state-run Anatolia news agency reported yesterday.

Militants of the outlawed Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) attacked Mermer Gendarme Station with car bombs near the Diyarbakir-Bingol Highway late Thursday evening, according to the report.

It also said that ambulances and reinforcements were dispatched to the area that saw the clashes between the militants and the security forces. The highway in Diyarbakir was closed, said the report, adding that Turkish military had launched an operation to capture the PKK operatives who fled the scene. The wounded were sent to Diyarbakir Military Hospital for treatment, some in critical conditions, added the report. Since a cease-fire between the government and the PKK collapsed last July, Turkish security forces have been conducting a major campaign against the group in the southeast of the country.—*Xinhua*

Twelve killed in minibus crash in France

PARIS — A minibus travelling from Switzerland to Portugal collided with a lorry in central France on Thursday night, killing its 12 passengers and leaving four others injured, local authorities said in a statement.

The accident happened in the French department of Allier just before midnight local time, the authorities said yesterday, adding that the cause of the collision was unclear.

The driver was the only survivor in the minibus. The victims are believed to be Portuguese, the authorities said.—*Reuters*

Thailand delays construction start for rail line to China

BANGKOK — Thailand has pushed back the start date for construction of a multi-billion dollar rail line to link Bangkok to southwest China after a disagreement over the cost of the project, the Thai transport minister said yesterday.

The project is part of China's plan for a network of links across Southeast Asia as its economic and political clout in the region grows. Eventually, rail lines should connect Kunming in southwest China with Singapore. Thailand will begin the first phase of construction, a section that links Bangkok to the northeastern town of Nakhon Ratchasima, in August or September, Thai Transport Minister Arkhom Termpittayapaisith told reporters on Friday. May had been the previously envisaged state date.—*Reuters*

Syrian forces fight their way into Palmyra, as Kerry and Putin hail thaw

GENEVA/MOSCOW/BEIRUT — Syrian troops backed by Russian air support fought their way into the Islamic State-held city of Palmyra on Thursday, their biggest offensive yet against the jihadist caliphate, as Moscow and Washington discussed how to help to end the civil war.

US Secretary of State John Kerry met President Vladimir Putin in Moscow in an atmosphere that was noticeably more amiable than past meetings, reflecting new diplomacy the two Cold War superpowers have championed in recent weeks.

Both men expressed hope for more progress toward ending the fighting.

In Geneva, where the first peace talks involving President Bashar al-Assad's government and his foes began this month, the opposing sides were expected to sign on to a UN document reflecting some initial common ground.

The aim was to move toward discussing the divisive question of a political transition in Syria when the talks resume next month.

Moscow is the main ally of Assad's government, while Washington and other Western countries have backed foes trying to overthrow him during five years of civil war that has killed 250,000 people and led to the world's worst refugee crisis.

Both superpowers share a common enemy in Islamic State, the Sunni Muslim fighters who have declared a caliphate to rule over all Muslims from territory in Syria and Iraq.

After Russia intervened with air strikes to shore up Assad last year, Washington and Moscow have jointly sponsored a peace process that has produced the first sustained ceasefire of the war and the first negotiations involving the warring parties.

"The serious approach that we have been able to cooperate on has made a difference to the life of people in Syria and to the possibilities of making progress on peace," Kerry said at the start of talks with Putin in Moscow.

"The people of Syria and the people of the region have as a result been able to taste and smell the possibilities of what it means to have a huge reduction of violence and receive humanitarian assistance."

Putin, who has announced he is winding down Russia's military involvement in Syria, even offered warm words for US President Barack Obama, with whom his relations have sunk to a Cold War-era level of hostility since Washington imposed sanctions on Russia over its intervention in Ukraine in 2014.

"We understand that what we have been able to achieve on Syria has been possible only thanks to the position of the US top political leadership, President Obama," Putin said at his meeting with Kerry. "I very much hope that your visit will allow us to bring our positions closer on moving forward to solve the Syrian crisis and ... on Ukraine."

Russian President Vladimir Putin speaks with US Secretary of State John Kerry during a meeting at the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia, on 24 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

The US and Russian-sponsored ceasefire between Assad's government and his enemies does not cover Islamic State, allowing Damascus to ramp up its fight against the jihadists.

After months in which the West accused Moscow of helping Assad fight mainly against other foes, Damascus has launched a major offensive this month to take back Palmyra, which the fighters seized in their biggest Syrian offensive of last year.

The state-run news channel Ikhbariya broadcast images from just outside Palmyra on Thursday and said government fighters had taken over a hotel district in the west.

The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the army had advanced into the hotel district just to the southwest of the city and reached a residential area, after a rapid advance the day before brought the army and its allies right up to its outskirts.

Palmyra has some of the most extensive ruins of the ancient Roman empire, some of which were dynamited by Islamic State in what the United Nations calls a war crime.—*Reuters*

Human rights on trial in Egypt as NGO funding case revived

CAIRO — Egypt has launched a new crackdown on human rights groups, questioning staff and ordering asset freezes over accusations they took foreign funding to destabilise the country after the 2011 uprising that ended Hosni Mubarak's 30-year rule.

Egyptian rights activists say they are facing the worst assault in their history in a wider campaign to erase the freedoms won in the 18-day revolt that began on 25 January 2011.

Some say they are working from home in anticipation of arrests as the noose tightens on non-governmental organisations that have faced growing pressure since the burst of activism that accompanied the Arab Spring uprisings that toppled autocrats from Tunisia to Yemen.

Prominent Egyptian journalist and human rights advocate Hossam Bahgat (C) is seen at a court in Cairo, on 24 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

It is not clear how many groups will be investigated in the case that has so far affected staff or management from at least six of Egypt's best-known rights groups.

They include Hossam Bahgat, founder of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), and Gamal Eid, founder of the Arab Network for Human Rights Information.

An investigating magistrate has banned both men from travelling abroad and ordered their assets frozen pending an April 20 court decision. EIPR associate director Heba Morayef expects that freeze to be extended to the group as a whole, potentially forcing its office to close.

"I think some in the security agencies see human rights organisations as part of this global conspiracy to sow chaos, and that is actually in the asset freeze order," Morayef told Reuters.

"This would be the biggest blow to human rights organisations in 30 years."

Egypt's Social Solidarity Minister Ghada Waly, who oversees the NGO sector in Egypt, did not respond to a written request for comment this week. There was also no comment from Egypt's prosecutors, who have banned reporting of the legal details of the case.

Since toppling elected president Mohamed Mursi of the Muslim Brotherhood in mid-2013, general-turned-president Abdel Fattah Sisi has overseen a crackdown on opposition in which hundreds of Brotherhood supporters were killed and thousands jailed.

The net has widened to include liberal and secular activists at the forefront of the 2011 revolt. Many are behind bars, charged with violating a 2013 law which prevents a repeat of the protests that helped unseat two presidents in three years.

Sisi portrays himself as a bulwark of stability in a region that has slipped into chaos since the 2011 revolts, prioritising security over civil rights.—*Reuters*

Lebanese newspaper to close, blames country's political problems

BEIRUT — Lebanese daily *As-Safir* is to cease its print and online operations after over 40 years, editor-in-chief and publisher Talal Salman said on Thursday, blaming falling revenues and Lebanon's political and sectarian problems.

As-Safir, founded by Salman in 1974 with the slogan "a voice for those who have no voice", will end publication on 31 March. It is close to the Lebanese Shi'ite group Hezbollah.

In a situation faced by print media around the world, Lebanese dailies *al-Nahar and al-Liwa'* have also indicated they are facing financial difficulties because of falling circulation and advertising income.

But Salman has said the country's political environment also contributed to the problems of the Lebanese press.

Lebanon has a paralysed political system and sectarian tensions left over from a civil war that ended around 15 years ago. These have increased with Syria's civil war next door.

The government has not passed a budget since 2005 and has been without a president for almost two years.

Lebanon's economy grew 8 percent a year between 2007 and 2010, but growth has been relatively sluggish since the collapse of a unity government and the start of Syria's uprising in 2011. Gross domestic product (GDP) grew at only 2 per cent in 2014.

"We tried and tried and tried and in the end the great sectarian divide took its first victim — the media, which is supposed to be the one guiding a unified national public," Salman told Reuters.

"The press is connected with political life. In Lebanon there is no politics and no political life whatsoever," he said. "This is a country without a state, with no institutions and no president."

In an editorial in his paper this week, Salman said the demise of his and other papers in Lebanon — a country famed across the Arab world for its press freedom — threatens the nation's claim to be the "country of freedom".

The decision to close *As-Safir* ("The Ambassador" in Arabic)will be formally announced on 30 March at a press conference. "We have announced the death, but we await the funeral," said Salman.—*Reuters*

As tensions escalate, Cruz calls Trump a 'snivelling coward'

WASHINGTON — The feud between Republican presidential contenders Donald Trump and Ted Cruz over their spouses heated up on Thursday, with Cruz calling the party front-runner "a snivelling coward" for threatening his wife on Twitter.

The US senator from Texas also sharpened his attacks on Trump's conservative credentials, linking the brash billionaire to disgraced New York politicians Eliot Spitzer and Anthony Weiner.

Cruz continued bashing Trump for making Cruz's wife, Heidi, a target of social-media barbs.

"I have to say, seeing him go deeper and deeper into the gutter, it's not easy to tick me off," Cruz said at a news conference while campaigning in Dane, Wisconsin. "But you mess with my wife, you mess with my kids, it'll do it every time.

"Donald, you're a snivelling coward," Cruz said. "Leave Heidi the hell alone."

Cruz's remarks were the latest burst of hostility between the two camps, which earlier this week erupted into full view when Trump accused Cruz of posting a nude photo of Melania Trump on Twitter. Trump responded by threatening to "spill the beans" on Cruz's wife, Heidi.

Cruz denied having anything to do with the image, which was part of an attack by an anti-Trump Super PAC, Make America Awesome.

"Donald, real men don't attack women. Your wife is lovely, and Heidi is the love of my life," Cruz said in a post on Twitter earlier on Thursday.

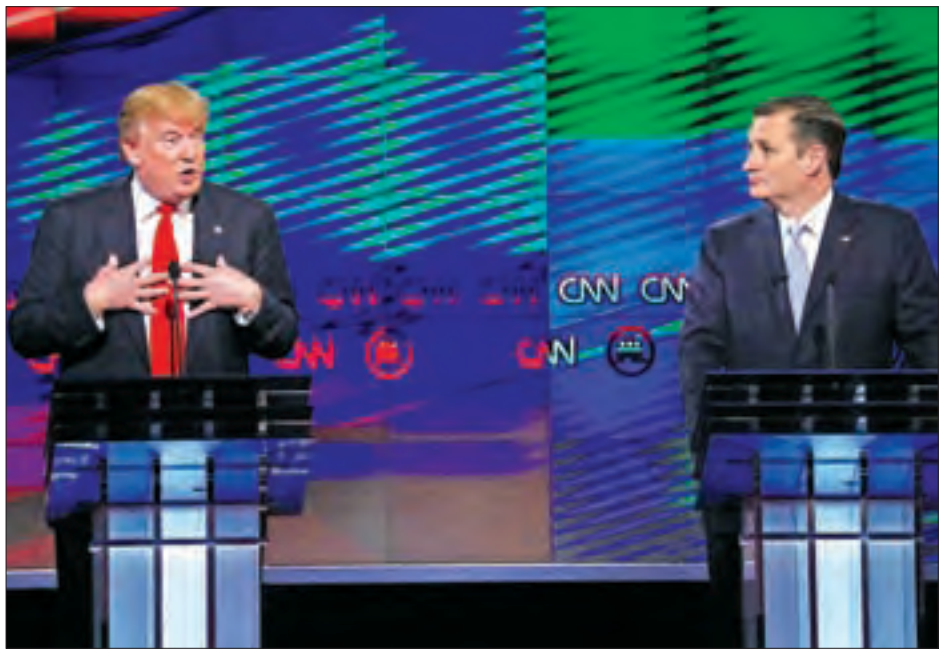
Cruz's tweet followed one moments earlier by Trump in which he retweeted an image featuring a less-than-flattering picture of Heidi Cruz juxtaposed with a glamorous photo of Melania.

The back-and-forth was too much for US Senator Lindsey Graham, a former presidential candidate, who blasted both men in an interview on NBC's "Today" show on Thursday.

"Talk about things that people really care about, and knock this crap off because these are serious times, and you're not behaving like you want to be president of the United States," he said.

For Trump, attacking another candidate's wife may carry some political risk.

Half of US women say they have a "very unfavourable" view of the billionaire businessman, according to Reuters/Ipsos polling in March.



Republican US presidential candidate Donald Trump (L) speaks as rival Ted Cruz listens at the Republican US presidential candidates debate sponsored by CNN at the University of Miami in Miami, Florida, on 10 March 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Cruz fared better, with 24 per cent of the 5,000 women surveyed saying they had a "very unfavourable" view of him.

The Democratic front-runner, Hillary Clinton, did worse than Cruz but better than Trump, with 36 per cent of women polled saying they had a "very unfavourable" view of her.

The poll had a credibility interval of 2 percentage points.

Also on Thursday, Cruz began to press Trump on his history of supporting Democratic politicians in New York, which holds its Republican primary on 19 April. And while Manhattan is home to Trump's business empire, Cruz spent time there this week campaigning.

In media releases and social-media postings, Cruz highlighted Trump's history of donating not only to Spitzer, New York's former governor who resigned amid a prostitution scandal, and Weiner, the former US congressman who quit after tweeting lewd images of himself, but also to other New York liberals such as US Representative Charles Rangel, Senator Chuck Schumer, and New York's current governor, Andrew Cuomo.

The Trump campaign did not respond to a request for comment, but Trump posted an Instagram video that showed former Republican presidential candidates Carly Fiorina and Graham expressing doubts about Cruz earlier in the campaign. Both have since endorsed Cruz, saying he is in the best position to halt Trump's march toward the nomination.

Both Trump and Cruz are trying to garner enough delegates to win the Republican nomination ahead of the party's convention this summer.

After Tuesday's contests in Arizona and Utah, Trump had 739 of the 1,237 delegates needed to win the nomination, according to The Associated Press. Cruz had 465.

Polls show Trump leading in New York ahead of its primary.

And there were also indications on Thursday of Trump's strength in California, where many observers believe he could clinch the nomination by winning its primary on 7 June.

A new survey by the Public Policy Institute of California found that among likely Republican primary voters, Trump led with 38 per cent to 27 per cent for Cruz and 14 per cent for Ohio Governor John Kasich.

The next Republican contests will be on 5 April in Wisconsin and on 9 April in Wyoming.—*Reuters*

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Belgian police hold seven in bombing inquiry, Germany arrests two

BRUSSELS — Belgian police arrested seven people and Germany arrested two in investigations into Islamic State suicide bombings in Brussels, while authorities in France said they thwarted a militant plot there "that was at an advanced stage".

Islamic State suicide bombers hit Brussels airport and a metro train on Tuesday, killing at least 31 people and wounding some 270 in the worst such attack in Belgian history.

Investigators believe the attacks were carried out by the same Islamic State cell responsible for gun and bomb attacks that killed 130 people in Paris in November.

The Belgian federal prosecutor's office said six people were held during searches in the Brussels neighbourhoods of Schaerbeek in the north and Jette in the west, as well as in the centre of the Belgian capital. Public broadcaster RTBF said a seventh man was arrested in the Forest borough of Brussels early yesterday.

Germany's *Der Spiegel* magazine said German police had arrested two people. One had received phone messages with the name of the metro station bomber and the word "fin" — French for "end" — three minutes before the metro blast, it said. The German interior ministry declined immediate comment. The Belgian daily *De Standaard* said on Friday police had arrested a man who was filmed by security cameras in the airport terminal next to two bombers who blew themselves up there. Prosecutors did not confirm the arrest and it was not known if the man was among the seven detained overnight. —*Reuters*

Masked Belgian police secure the entrance to a building in Schaerbeek during police operations following Tuesday's bomb attacks in Brussels, Belgium, on 25 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

Much-needed rain forecast for South Africa, but too late for summer maize

Lake St Lucia is almost completely dry due to drought conditions in the iSimangaliso Wetland Park, northeast of Durban, South Africa, on 25 February. PHOTO: REUTERS

JOHANNESBURG —Most parts of South Africa are forecast to receive above average rainfall in the autumn season from April, the national weather service said on Thursday, too late to benefit the drought-seared summer maize crop.

South Africa experienced its driest year on record in 2015 and record temperatures in January this year as an El Niño weather pattern triggered drought and heatwaves, threatening the staple maize crop among others.

In its rolling monthly forecast, which looks five months ahead, the South African Weather Service said that most models are confidently showing a gradual decay of El Niño.

"The forecasting system favours a tendency of above-normal rainfall for the late autumn over most parts of South Africa," it said.

The weather service said that there are "enhanced chances" for above-normal rainfall for the southern hemisphere winter months of June through August in most of the country apart from the central region.

It also noted that the forecast showed "a huge disparity in the rainfall and temperature forecast for the coming seasons", so some regions are likely to be much wetter than others.

Higher than normal rainfall could bring much-needed relief to parched pasture lands and dam levels, which the water minister has said could take more than three years to recover to pre-drought levels.

But analysts said it was too little, too late for the summer maize crop and said prospects for winter wheat remain uncertain.

"For the summer maize crop we need the rain immediately as it is now in the pollination stages. April is too late for the summer crops," said Wandile Sihlobo, economist at Grain SA, South Africa's largest grain producer group.

"And for the winter crop, the forecast is not clear," he added.

The Crop Estimates Committee (CEC), which will provide its third production forecast for the 2016 crop next Wednesday, is expected to peg the harvest at 6.77 million tonnes, a Reuters poll of analysts and traders showed.

That would be down almost 7 per cent from last month's estimate of 7.255 million tonnes and 32 per cent less than last year's harvest. Maize is South Africa's staple food and the price of the white variety, used for human consumption, doubled last year, stoking inflation that accelerated to 7 per cent in February, its highest in seven years, from 6.2 per cent in January.—*Reuters*

China leads as green energy investment plans hit record high

Workers walk past solar panels and wind turbines (rear) at a newly-built power plant in Hami, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, China, on 17 September 2015.
PHOTO: REUTERS

FRANKFURT — China helped push global green energy investment plans to record heights in 2015, offsetting a sharp fall in Germany, authors of a UN-backed report said on Thursday, predicting further growth.

Solar and wind power, especially in developing countries, are driving spending higher and last year for the first time renewables made up more than 50 per cent of new electricity capacity plans, the Frankfurt School of Finance report said. "The term 'niche product' no longer applies to renewables," said Ulf Moslener, professor for sustainable energy finance at the school and one of the report's authors. "Investments are becoming less expensive, due to falling equipment costs, which will also enable further growth, especially in light of the new momentum from the Paris climate summit goals," he told reporters.

Firmly committed renewable investment plans totaled $286 billion last year, up 5 per cent from $273 billion in 2014, according to the study, which is prepared annually by the Frankfurt School-United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Collaborating Centre and Bloomberg New Energy Finance. Solar power accounted for $148 billion, up 12 per cent partly driven by an ongoing solar boom in Japan. Wind accounted for $107 billion, up 9 per cent helped by offshore projects.

Biomass accounted for just $5 billion of investment pledges, down 46 per cent. The study excludes large hydrological power projects because of environmental concerns. Other studies which include such data therefore may arrive at larger sums. China accounted for $103 billion of the total, up 17 per cent, ahead of Europe with $49 billion, the United States with $44.1 billion and Asia, excluding China and India, at $48 billion.

China expects its greenhouse gas emissions to peak by "around 2030" as part of its commitments to a global pact to combat global warming signed in Paris last year.—*Reuters*

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV BLUE PHOENIXI VOY NO (VI 16008)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV BLUE PHOENIXI VOY NO (VI 16008) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 27.3.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of B.S.W-3 where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

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CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV YOUSEF S VOY NO (V.2)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV YOUSEF S VOY NO (V.2) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 27.3.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of B.S.W-3 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: M/S RK SHIPPING & TRADING PTE LTD.

Phone No: 2301928

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV YOSSA BHUM VOY NO ( )

Consignees of cargo carried on MV YOSSA BHUM VOY NO ( ) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 26.3.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.P where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

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Cate Blanchett debuts pink hairdo

LOS ANGELES — Actress Cate Blanchett has gone for major hair makeover by colouring her tresses pink.

The 46-year-old Oscar-winning actress enlisted London-based colorist Nicola Clarke for the light rinse, reported E! online.

"We've been talking about doing it for a while but wanted to get all the award seasons out of the way to have a play and a bit of fun. It will last a couple of weeks, depending on how many washes it has," Clarke told *The Telegraph.*

Blanchett paired her new hairstyle with matching tinted aviator glasses, while out and about in London.

The "Carol" star joins a growing list of actresses who have sported pink hair, which includes the likes of Kaley Cuoco, Katy Perry, Rihanna and Helen Mirren.

Blanchett had debuted a short bob just before the 2016 Oscars, where she walked the red carpet in a teal, romantic, flower-adorned V-neck Armani gown.—*PTI*

Wonder Woman leads the fierce females of 'Batman v Superman'

LOS ANGELES — "Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice" is centered on the clash of two of the most recognisable caped heroes of the comic book world but it is the women of the DC Comics universe who defy expectations.

The movie has "four really great female characters ... but not a single one of them is an archetype," said Amy Adams, who reprises her role as intrepid Daily Planet journalist Lois Lane.

The film, which opens around the world this week, introduces Israeli actress Gal Gadot as Wonder Woman and sees Holly Hunter as a senator determined to hold Superman accountable for the destruction caused by his actions. Diane Lane plays Superman's mother, Martha Kent.

Wonder Woman, also known as Diana Prince, is an elusive force in "Batman v Superman," immaculately dressed, coyly intelligent and drawing the attention of Ben Affleck's Bruce Wayne — the playboy billionaire alter-ego of Batman.

"She's been around, she's very experienced, she's darker, she's sassy, she understands a lot about mankind," Gadot said of her character.

Gadot, a former model who served two years in Israel's army, will reprise her role in 2017's "Wonder Woman," the first standalone female superhero movie in a decade.

"She's as elegant as a supermodel and she kicks it with the boys," Adams said of Gadot's Wonder Woman.

The superhero genre has long been skewed to male characters but female characters have slowly become a larger presence in recent years. That potentially broadens a film's appeal for female audiences and its commercial success.

Wonder Woman is not the only one to get feisty in "Batman v Superman." When Lois Lane is referred to by an interview subject as a lady, she snaps "I'm not a lady, I'm a journalist."

Hunter's Senator Finch holds her own against the psychotic villain Lex Luthor as he tries to coerce her to do his bidding, while Martha Kent fiercely tells Superman that he does not owe anyone anything as he faces growing dissent from the public.

Warner Bros' "Batman v Superman" is projected by analysts to take some $300 million worldwide on its opening weekend.

The film lays the groundwork for "Wonder Woman," which will explore the origin story of the Amazonian heroine with powers of super strength.

"The story deals with Diana becoming Wonder Woman so she starts very pure, very naive, this young idealist who doesn't really understand the complexities of life," Gadot said.— *Reuters*

Gal Gadot arrives for the European Premiere of "Batman V Superman: Dawn of Justice" in London on 22 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

Cuba's journey from rock labour brigades to the Rolling Stones

HAVANA — When Carlos Carnero's rock band Los Kent plugged in guitars and drums to play Rolling Stones covers on Cuba's Island of Pines in the 1960s, soldiers stopped the gig at gunpoint in minutes and marched the musicians onto a boat heading back to the mainland.

Now some 50 years later, Carnero is preparing to see the Stones play to a crowd of 400,000 people in Havana on Friday in the latest sign of Cuba's thaw with the West.

It is the first time the British band has performed in Cuba and caps a week in which US President Barack Obama made a historic visit.

The Stones arrived in Cuba on Thursday.

"Time changes everything," Mick Jagger said at Havana airport, when asked about a former ban on his music in Cuba.

Despite the stern treatment Los Kent received in the 1960s, Carnero's instruments were not confiscated that day and his band survived to play in secret house parties. Others suffered more for their love of rock and roll, including being sent to farms in labor brigades meant to correct "ideological deviation."

"They called it the music of the enemy," Carnero said, clutching dog-eared black and white photos of Los Kent as young men on stage in 1963.

(L-R) Mick Jagger, Charlie Watts, Keith Richards and Ronnie Wood of the Rolling Stones stand together after landing in Havana, on 24 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

Hippies and rock fans faced repression in Europe and the United States too in the 1960s, but Cuba went further, banning music from artists such as the Stones, the Beatles and Elvis Presley on the radio and television after the 1959 revolution that brought Fidel Castro to power.

Rock was frowned on for decades and it was only in 2000 that Los Kent were given a license to work professionally, as people of Carnero's generation reached senior positions in government.

Los Kent, who got their name from a guitar brand, will play on Thursday night in a bar at the Havana Melia hotel, where the Stones are expected to stay.

To get his musical fix, Carnero, now 66, secretly listened to short-wave radio stations from Florida and shared pirated copies of vinyl records brought in by diplomats' children and sailors and passed around the scene.

He was excluded from college for two years because he refused to cut his long hair, despite pointing out to the authorities that heroes of the revolution like Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos sported unkempt locks.

His brother was among those sent to the countryside — given the choice of farm work and abandoning his tight pants and musical taste or leaving the technical college he attended.

"After two months in the countryside he decided he'd rather not continue at school and came home," said Carnero, chuckling.

"It was a moral punishment, you were doing something you weren't allowed to do because somebody didn't like it," Carnero said, in a home studio where an electronic drum kit and keyboard vie for space with an acoustic guitar.

Some of Cuba's leading personalities were sent to similar camps, including composer Pablo Milanes and Cardinal Jaime Ortega. Many rock musicians later left the country.

Fidel Castro later regretted the censorship of music and attended the unveiling of a statue of John Lennon, one of the four Beatles, in a Havana park on the 20th anniversary of his death on 8 December 2000.

Carnero said Castro told him that his revolutionary government was facing huge international challenges in the 1960s as he tried to consolidate the revolution and that many in his government did not understand what the young rockers were up to.—*Reuters*

Christmas song ranks in top 100 for 30 yrs, recognised by Guinness

TOKYO — A Christmas song written and performed by Japanese veteran pop singer Tatsuro Yamashita has been recognised by Guinness World Records as it has remained in the top 100 in Japan's weekly sales ranking for the 30th consecutive year, his agent said on Thursday.

"Christmas Eve," released as a single in 1983, set the record when it ranked 39th in a ranking released by Japanese music information company Oricon Inc. dated last 28 December, according to Warner Music Japan Inc.

The song has become widely known and commonly used as a Christmas song in the country after being used in TV commercials for Central Japan Railway Co.

"This is all because of the many listeners who pick up this song at some point, somewhere over the past 30 years. I'm really glad to have continued to play music," the 63-year-old Yamashita said in a statement.—*Kyodo News*

Cherry blossoms in US capital in full bloom

WASHINGTON — Cherry blossoms are seen around the Tidal Basin in Washington, capital of the United States, on 24 March 2016. The cherry blossoms in the US capital are in full bloom. PHOTO: XINHUA

MRTV News Channel in Brief

(26-3-2016, Saturday)

6:00 am
- Paritta by Hilly Region Missionary Sayadaw

7:35 am
- Hyper Sports

8:35 am
- The Farmer

9:35 am
- MRTV's Youth Programme

11:15 am
- Documentary

11:35 am
- Game For Children

12:50 pm
- Round up of The Week's Local TV News

1:20 pm
- Round up of The Week's Hluttaw

1:50 pm
- TV Drama Series

3:35 pm
- Hyper Sports

4:35 pm
- MRTV Job Opportunity Programme

5:35 pm
- Poem For Children

6:15 pm
- Graphic Info (Stock Exchange) (5)

8:00 pm
- News / International News/ Weather Report

8:35 pm
- Documentary

9:00 pm
- News
- Gitadagale Phwintbaohn
- Documentary

Note / Hourly News Bulletins (Local + International)

China to provide adult education for 1.5m migrant workers

BEIJING — The Chinese government will provide free adult education for 1.5 million migrant workers in the next five years to improve literacy and work skills, the Ministry of Education said on Thursday.

Starting in 2016, the government will help 300,000 migrant workers receive post-secondary education at universities or community colleges each year, according to the ministry.

The programme will strengthen training employees of companies with overcapacity, who are likely to be made redundant as the nation pushes forward economic restructuring, in new skills.—*Xinhua*

Famous tree in Hokkaido cut down by owner fed up with rude tourists

ASAHIKAWA (Japan) — A poplar tree which became a famous tourist attraction on farmland in Biei, Hokkaido, was cut down in late February by its exasperated owner, who had grown sick of unwelcome visitors trampling his fields.

The 30-metre-tall tree on a picturesque hill was felled on the morning of 24 February 2016, by the owner who had maintained the scenery in good faith. Many tourists walked across his fields to photograph the tree, ignoring warning signs.

Some years ago, the central Hokkaido town deleted information about the tree, which was nicknamed the "Philosophy Tree," from its tourist map at the owner's request, but the effort failed to prevent tourists from flocking to the already-too-poplar attraction. The 68-year-old owner said, "I was always with this tree all these years and I will miss it." The poplar tree was planted during the 1960s.

But he also said, "I don't have to be bothered any longer," explaining that he had feared that the old tree may fall by itself and cause damage to crops in the surrounding fields or injure tourists who trespassed on the fields to see the tree.

Toshiki Nakanishi, a 44-year-old local photographer, said, "When I told one tourist not to go into the field, he yelled at me."

Nakanishi said that although foreign tourists were often scapegoats, "Japanese tourists were almost always the ones who got easily mad when they were warned."

Trespassing on private farmland is against the law. Farmers also voiced concerns that germs on shoe soles could contaminate soil. Biei is famous for potatoes, but one kind of potato pest, a species not native to Japan, was found in Abashiri, a Hokkaido city some 200 kilometres east of Biei, last August for the first time.

It is yet unknown how the pest was brought into the area, but the finding appalled potato farmers in Biei who found their livelihoods under threat.

Town officials said that the number of tourists to Biei will be unlikely to drop soon following the felling of the tree, but they worry that other poplar trees may face the same destiny if tourists' manners are unchanged, leading to a substantial drop in the number of tourists.

To deal with the situation and protect tourism resources, the town government has decided to designate those poplar trees and buildings as visually significant properties and provide subsidies to the owners, starting in April. Still, the decision may not help prevent bad manners. "We cannot call the police each time a tourist steps into the fields," said a town official in charge. —*Kyodo News*

A poplar tree, nicknamed the "Philosophy Tree," in Biei, Hokkaido was cut down in late February 2016. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

mitv Myanmar International

(26-3-2016 07:00am ~ 27-3-2016 7:00am) MST

Today Fresh

07:03	Am	News
07:26	Am	Great Shwedagon- Charitable Associations
08:03	Am	News
08:26	Am	Myanmar HR Conference 2015 (Part- VII)
08:48	Am	Toddy Palm Product Shop
09:03	Am	News
09:26	Am	Myanmar Game Changers (Episode - IV)
09:54	Am	The Storytellers
10:03	Am	News
10:26	Am	Caves of Myanmar
10:51	Am	Cultural Show: Theatrical Make Up

(11:00 Am ~ 03:00 Pm) - Friday Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(03:00 Pm ~ 07:00 Pm) - Today Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)

Prime Time

07:03	Pm	News
07:26	Pm	A Famous Pagoda in the Sea
07:55	Pm	Today Myanmar "Community based Tourism Development"
08:03	Pm	News
08:26	Pm	Bogalay Tint Aung: A Man of Versatility (Part- 2)
08:53	Pm	Myanmar Masterclass: Conceptual Art

(09:00 Pm ~ 11:00 Pm)- Today Repeat (09:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(11:00 Pm ~ 03:00 Am) - Friday Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(03:00 Am ~ 07:00 Am) -Today Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)

(For Detailed Schedule – www.myanmaritv.com/schedule)

MRTV Entertainment Channel

(26-3-2016, Saturday)

6:00 pm
- Weather Report

6:10 pm
- Music Programme

6:40 pm
- Cassette Recording

7:50 pm
- Special Movie "Lord of War"

9:50 pm
- Myanmar Video

Midnight
- Close Down.

From 26-3-2016 (Saturday) 6:00 Pm
To 27-3-2016(Sunday) 6:00 Pm
This schedule will be repeated four times in 24 hours.

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Saturday, 26 March, 2016

Argentina fight back for 2-1 win on Messi return

BUENOS AIRES — Lionel Messi's return sparked Argentina to a 2-1 win over Chile in Santiago on Thursday, breathing new life into their South American qualifying campaign for the 2018 World Cup.

Messi, who had missed the first four games last year with a knee injury, laid on the 24th-minute winner for defender Gabriel Mercado after Angel Di Maria had cancelled out Felipe Gutierrez's opener for Chile.

Argentina, beaten finalists at the last World Cup in Brazil, moved up to fourth in the 10-team group on eight points from five games. The top four qualify automatically for Russia with the fifth-ranked team going into an intercontinental playoff.

"We had to win in whatever way we could," Messi told broadcasters TyC Sports. "I was glad to be back to help this group of players who fight for every point to the death."

Chile, who had beaten Argentina in the Copa America final in Santiago last July, took the lead after 10 minutes when Gutierrez took advantage of poor defending at a corner to head past goalkeeper Sergio Romero.

The home side dominated the opening quarter of an hour as Argentina struggled to find their feet but the tide turned when Di Maria curled a right-footed shot past Claudio Bravo for the equaliser 10 minutes later.

Lionel Messi (10) of Argentina and Gonzalo Jara (18) of Chile in action during World Cup 2018 Qualifier, at Nacional Stadium, Santiago, Chile, on 24 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

Argentina then pulled ahead when Messi won a tussle for the ball inside the box and lifted it over to right back Gabriel Mercado, who hooked the ball home past Bravo.

Chile drove forward in the second half searching for the equaliser, keeping Messi in check and Argentina on the back foot.

Fabian Orellana forced a diving save from Romero, substitute Mauricio Pinilla hit the side netting and Alexis Sanchez hit a 90th-minute free kick over the bar but the home side were unable to break through.

The defeat leaves Chile in sixth place on seven points, six behind leaders Ecuador, who needed a stoppage-time goal by Angel Mena to rescue a 2-2 draw at home to Paraguay.

The draw ended a run of four straight wins for Ecuador but they remain the only unbeaten team in the group.

Joining Chile on seven points are Colombia, who got an injury-time winner from Edwin Cardona to beat Bolivia 3-2.

Peru moved above Bolivia into eighth after Raul Ruidiaz struck a 94th minute equaliser as the hosts fought back from 2-0 down to snatch a 2-2 draw against winless Venezuela in Lima.

Second-placed Uruguay play Brazil, who are fifth, in Recife on Friday.—*Reuters*

Serena Williams edges McHale in three, Halep wins

Serena Williams celebrates after winning match point against Christina McHale (not pictured) on day three of the Miami Open at Crandon Park Tennis Centre at Key Biscayne, FL, USA on 24 March 2016. Williams won 6-3, 5-7, 6-2. PHOTO: REUTERS

MIAMI — Top seed Serena Williams dropped the second set before bouncing back to beat compatriot Christina McHale 6-3, 5-7, 6-2 in second-round action at the Miami Open in Florida on Thursday.

The eight-times winner of the event took more than two hours to dispose of the world 56 and notch her 14th consecutive victory against an American opponent.

The last countrywoman to beat her was big sister Venus in Montreal in 2014.

Playing on what almost amounts to her home court, Williams was not in top form, making more than 40 unforced errors, but she finally wore down McHale in the third set.

"She's clearly capable of playing great tennis. She showed it today," a relieved Williams, speaking of her opponent, told Tennis Channel in an on-court interview.

"Miami is such a special place to me. I live so close to here," continued the 21-times grand slam singles champion, who resides in nearby Palm Beach Gardens.

The hard-fought victory came only days after Williams was beaten by Victoria Azarenka in the Indian Wells final in California on Sunday.

In her only other tournament appearance this year, Williams lost the Australian Open final to Angelique Kerber in January.

In other women's second-round Miami matches, third seed Agnieszka Radwanska advanced with a 6-0, 6-1 cakewalk over Frenchwoman Alize Cornet.

"I'm just very happy with that win, maybe the score was not showing everything that was happening on the court," the Pole said.

"But I think it was a great start and a couple of tight games at the beginning of both sets was the key."

Fifth seed Simona Halep also moved into the third round by beating Daria Kasatkina 6-3, 7-5.

The biggest casualty was 11th-seeded Lucie Safarova of the Czech Republic, who fell to Yanina Wickmayer of Belgium 6-2, 6-3.—*Reuters*

Aduriz's first Spain goal secures draw with Italy

UDINE (Italy) — Aritz Aduriz scored his first goal for Spain at the age of 35 to give the European champions a fortuitous 1-1 draw away to Italy in a Euro 2016 warm-up for both teams on Thursday.

Lorenzo Insigne, playing his first international for two years, ended Spain's run of six successive clean sheets when he finished off a counter-attack to give the hosts a deserved lead midway through the second half at the Stadio Friuli.

But Aduriz, who made his only previous appearance for Spain six years ago and was recalled thanks to his prolific form with Athletic Bilbao, replied three minutes later from Spain's first shot on target.

The result ended Spain's run of seven successive wins and they would have lost if had it not been for an inspired performance by their goalkeeper David de Gea.

"It's a shame we conceded a goal from a set piece and especially one that was offside, but apart from that it was a good performance," Italy coach Antonio Conte, who announced this month that he would step down after the Euros, told RAI.

"I can assure all Italians that this is a great group of guys and we are a squad who love this shirt," he added.

Italy were missing midfielders Claudio Marchisio and Marco Verratti and defenders Andrea Barzagli and Giorgio Chiellini, while Spain were without forward Diego Costa.

The hosts fielded a 3-4-3 formation and were far livelier than the pedestrian visitors, in particular Antonio Candreva.

The Lazio midfielder produced a wicked cross which defender Sergio Ramos turned against his own post in the sixth minute and nearly scored with a long-range shot which De Gea turned around the post.

De Gea made further saves from Insigne and Alessandro Florenzi before Italy finally went ahead in the 67th minute.

Debutant Federico Bernardeschi set Emanuele Giaccherini free and his low cross was diverted past de Gea by Insigne.

They led for only three minutes before Cesc Fabregas floated a free kick into the area, Gianluigi Buffon failed to hold Alvaro Morata's header and Aduriz fired the rebound into the roof of the net.

Insigne thought he had won the game for Italy with a delightful chip over De Gea but the Spain goalkeeper managed to tip the ball over the bar.—*Reuters*

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