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MAJOR STEP TO PEACE

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi talks with non-signatory armed groups

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi holds talks with United Nationalities Federation Council delegation on peace process. PHOTO: MNA

STATE COUNSELLOR Daw Aung San Suu Kyi held talks with a delegation of the United Nationalities Federation Council, led by its Chairman U N' Ban La, on the country's peace process at the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre in Yangon yesterday.

During the landmark talks, the first of their type between the new government and non-signatory armed groups, they discussed matters of negotiations between both sides of the peace process to ensure inclusiveness for up coming Union Peace Conference — 21st Century Panglong.

During the meeting, the State Counsellor was accompanied by Dr Tin Myo Win, Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Union Peace Conference — 21st Century Panglong, Union Minister for the State Counsellor's Office U Kyaw Tint Swe and U Moe Zaw Oo of the State Counsellor's Office.

Other members of the UNFC's delegation present at the talks were U Naing Htaw Mon, U Khun Able Thut, U Say Htin and Khu U Yae, the leader of the UNFC's Delegation for Political Negotiation.

U N' Ban La is from the KIO, while other key DPN delegation members went to U Say Htin of the Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP) and Khun Abel Thut of the New Mon State Party (NMSP).

At the meeting, the two sides were able to build more trust, said U Hla Maung Shwe, Secretary of the preparatory committee, adding that the talks felt more like "a family-type discussion,"

During the meeting, the UNFC side questioned matters which were unclear to them over their participation in the upcoming Union Peace Conference and exchanged their views with the State Counsellor, he added.

"At the meeting, the UNFC delegation proposed some suggestions which can pave the way for the signing of the new Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement," said U Hla Maung Shwe.

The Preparatory Committee for the Union Peace Conference — 21st Century Panglong will hold talks with UNFC in Chiangmai, Thailand, on 20 July and with the UNFC's Delegation for Political Negotiation-DPN in Yangon in early August, according to U Hla Maung Shwe.—*Ye Khaung Nyunt, Win Win Maw*

Myanmar to receive US$200 million for post-disaster relief

COMMUNITIES hit hard by the floods and landslides that devastated areas of Myanmar in 2015 will receive assistance for resilient road reconstruction, livelihoods support, and recovery of the agriculture sector as part of the Flood and Landslide Emergency Recovery Project (FLERP).

The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors approved US$200 million of financing for the project today.

The FLERP will focus on the worst-hit areas and villages in Ayeyawady, Sagaing, Magwe, Bago, Yangon, Chin and Rakhine states and regions. It will fund repairs to national and rural roads, and help introduce disaster- and climate-resilient approaches in the roads sector. The reconstruction of rural roads will help create work and training opportunities for local communities.

"After floods and landslides, the pressure to rebuild roads is tremendous and the World Bank's support to rehabilitate roads is critical in getting people back to markets and schools,"said Daw Tin Moe Myint, Director of the Department of Rural Development at the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation. "Under the project, we will work on measures that strengthen climate resilience so that roads are not washed away during the next disaster."

The floods and landslides that occurred between July and September 2015 displaced over 1.6 million people and caused 132 fatalities across the country. The total economic losses from the disasters are estimated to equal 3.1 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2014/2015, according to the results of the Government of Myanmar's Post-Flood and Landslide Needs Assessment, carried out with assistance from development partners including the World Bank.

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Defence Services Commander-in-Chief's Office (Army, Navy and Air) holds Waso robes offering ceremony

Families of the Defence Services Commander-in-Chief's Office (Army, Navy and Air) held a ceremony to donate Waso robes to the members of the Sangha at the office in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

At the ceremony, the congregation led by Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and wife Daw Kyu Kyu Hla received the Nine Precepts from the Chairman Sayadaw of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee Abhidhaja Agga Maha Saddhamma Jotika Dr Bhaddanta Kumara Bhivamsa and the members of the Sangha recited parittas.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and wife, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice Senior General Soe Win and wife Daw Than Than Nwe and senior military officers and wives donated Waso robes and offertories to the members of the Sangha.

The congregation shared the merits gained and donated a day-meal to the members of the Sangha following the ceremony.—*Myawady*

Defence Services Connander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and wife offering waso robes.
PHOTO: MYAWADY

Tourists can't stay away from Mandalay

MANDALAY, one of largest cities in Myanmar, has seen increased numbers of international visitors over the past five months, according to the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism.

Between January and May this year, nearly 160,000 tourists entered the city, an increase of 22 per cent over the same period last year, said an official from the region's department of hotels and tourism.

The majority of travelers are from China, followed by Thailand, the U.S and UK, tour operators say.

There are now 11 domestic airlines and 28 international airlines operating in Myanmar.

Taungthaman Lake is one of the tourist attractions in Mandalay.
PHOTO: MIN HTET AUNG

Tada-U airport, located 35km south of Mandalay, is one of only three international airports in the country and is a significant gateway for visitors. An increase in carrier services and demand have seen the number of tourists coming to Myanmar rise year on year.

Mandalay, a city of just over 1.2 million located 716km north of Yangon on the Ayeyawady river, was the last royal capital of Myanmar and boasts a strong cultural heritage.

242,566 international tourists visited Mandalay in 2014. The most popular sites for tourists are Myanansankyaw Golden Palace, Mandalay Hill, Maha Muni Pagoda, U Bein Bridge and the Golden Temple, Ahtumashi Monastery.

It is thought they also enjoy the laid back lifestyle of its residents and the city's traditional handicraft businesses including gold embroidery and gold foil workshops.—*200*

Govt allocates over K10 billion to expand electricity access within Bago Region

A TOTAL of K10.2 billion has been approved from the regional budget for the expansion of electricity lines and sub-stations within Bago Region during the current 2016-17 fiscal in a bid to provide better electricity access to the public.

A tender for the project to distribute electricity throughout the region was called during May of this year, while the successfully bidder of the tender will reportedly be announced by office of regional government.

"The primary agenda of the project is to expand electricity lines and sub-stations within urban centres, replace wooden electricity poles with ones made of concrete, and to install transformers. The project will be carried out in regard to the requirements of the department and promises made by Hluttaw MPs." said U Hla Phone, deputy regional electric engineer for the Electricity Distribution Office of Bago Region.

The main towns within which the majority of electricity line and sub-station expansion will be employed are those of Bago, Taungoo, Pyu and Pyay. The expansion initiative will reportedly include the installation of 11KV and 400V electric lines, together with replacement current transformers to 11/0.4KV models.

The last fiscal year of 2015-16 reportedly saw K8.4 billion allocated for development of regional electricity provision, while 809 of the 2,881 villages which make up the east of Bago Region, and 826 of the 3,613 villages which comprise the west of Bago Region, are allegedly still not connected to the national grid.
—*Myitmakha News Agency*

Ministry of Hotels and Tourism reminds contractors to apply for building permits before, not after, construction

THE Hotels and Tourism Supervising Department, which falls under the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, has made it known that a total of 36 hotels across Myanmar have applied for building permits as of this mid-July.

Of the total number of hotels which made their applications between January and mid-July this year, 16 have been granted permits while applications of the remaining 20 are still scrutinised.

"We've only received license applications from about three of four [hotels] this month, but we receive letters for permission to construct hotels on a daily basis. Licenses are only granted once the ministry has examined the group that desire to construct a hotel and after an EC meeting has been held. Licenses are granted only if deemed appropriate for the environment in which construction has been applied for," answered a director of the Hotels and Tourism Supervising Department, upon being questioned via telephone on Monday.

Hotel contractors have been instructed to submit their applications for building permits to the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, prior to breaking any ground, since 1994, but some contractors disregard this directive, constructing their hotel first with permission from the municipality before later making a submission to the ministry. In light of such behavior, the ministry has reportedly reiterated the need for permit applications to be submitted before building work commences. "Directives, outlining the requirement for hotel construction license applications to be submitted prior to hotel construction, were sent to the offices of Hotels and Tourism Departments around the country in June as there have been cases of construction permits for large-scale hotel projects being applied for in the wake of the hotels being completed." said U Myint Sein, assistant director of the Hotels and Tourism Department for Magway Region. Owners of hotels which have been constructed without prior permission from the ministry will reportedly have to sign a declaration that states they take responsibility for the sturdiness of their building and that guest rooms, kitchens, lobbies, waste and sewage disposal systems are all of a quality standard.

"It's also stated in the law." added the director. "It's more advisable to apply for a permit prior to construction so that hotel rooms, kitchens, waste and sewage systems can be built in accordance with license stipulations. It's impossible to determine how the foundations of a hotel were laid after it's been constructed. Hotel owners are ordered to sign a declaration that states they take full responsibility for their constructed building, as ordering them to tear it down would incur many losses."

As of July this year, Myanmar boasts 1,356 licensed hotels which feature a total of 53,003 rooms, according to the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism.
—*Myitmakha News Agency*

President tours Genghis Khan Statue Complex in Mongolia

President U Htin Kyaw visits a museum in Genghis Khan Statue Complex. PHOTO: MNA

Genghis Khan statue erected on the bank of the Tuul River. PHOTO: MNA

PRESIDENT U Htin Kyaw, who attended the 11th Asia-Europe Meeting Summit in Mongolia, visited the Genghis Khan Statue Complex in Ulaanbaatar yesterday. A gigantic equestrian statue of Genghis Khan was erected on the bank of the Tuul river, 54 kilometres east of the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar, where according to legend, he found a golden whip.

Erected in 2008, the 40-metre-tall statue symbolically points to the east, his birthplace. It has 36 10-metre-tall columns representing the 36 Khans from Genghis to Ligdan Khan.

Visitors can walk up to the head of the horse through the chest and the neck, where they can enjoy a panoramic view of the vast continental tundra below. In the west of the statue complex lies a recreation centre with 200 camps on 520 acres of land. The attached museum has an exhibition that includes archaeological and cultural objects of gold and everyday utensils. Another exhibition has ancient tools and goldsmith objects which hail from the Great Khan period between the 13th and the 14th centuries.

President U Htin Kyaw and his entourage left the Chinggis Khaan International Airport for Yangon via the Incheon International Airport in South Korea. — *Myanmar News Agency*

Myanmar to receive US$200 million ...

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The transport sector was the worst hit by the floods and landslides, accounting for about 50 per cent of the total damages in the public domain. Damages and losses in the agriculture sector have left a major impact on the people. Small businesses, individual families and farmers suffered the worst, with loss of income and livelihoods compounded by loss of assets and reduced access to social services.

The FLERP will support the recovery of the agriculture sector through the purchase of critical machinery and equipment, production inputs, and other goods to address the urgent needs of farmers and fishermen to recover and safeguard against vulnerability from future disasters.

"Repairing and improving roads will help improve access to schools and clinics, and open markets for residents of the flood-hit areas," said Ulrich Zachau, the World Bank Country Director for Southeast Asia. "Road construction and maintenance will also offer local people job and income opportunities so that they don't have to forego health or education spending, which is often the case after disasters." —*GNLM*

Rakhine Coast could be made a conservation area

A MARINE study is planned for the Rakhine Coast by Flora and Fauna International, a non-governmental organization, which is looking to establish a marine conservation area run by local people.

Under the programme, the international conservation charity will check the conditions of coral reefs, fish breeding zones, the natural habitats of native birds as well as the state of mangroves, which have been recognized by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN).

Observation teams funded by FFI will soon begin the survey along undamaged coral reefs and the breeding zones of fish and prawns.

Although many coral reefs have been badly destroyed, there are still lot of pristine coral reefs along the Rakhine Coast, said an official from the NGO.

After the two-year survey, FFI will choose some villages to take part in its marine conservation programme.

In cooperation with the local fisheries department, FFI is also developing a marine conservation area in Taninthayi Region. It will cover three villages in Kyunsu Township including Donepaleaw, Lintun and Payortwa villages, Langan Island in Bokepyin Township.

Since 2012, FFI has completed similar surveys throughout the Myeik Archipelago.— *Myitmakha New Agency*

DMH alerts flood warning as Chindwin exceeds danger level

THE Department of Meteorology and Hydrology Department has alerted people in high risk areas of floods as the Chindwin River has exceeded its danger level at Homalin yesterday and expected to rise the danger level at Phaungpyin today.

The weather bureau has urged the people living in the low-lying areas near the river to take precautionary measures.

The water level of the Chindwin River at Phaungpyin is observed as about 1 ½ feet below its danger level yesterday and it may reach its danger level today, said the flood warning issued by the DMH yesterday.

Meanwhile, the water level of the river at Homalin has exceeded by about 3 inches above its danger level and it is expected to continue to rise about 2 feet next two days and remain above its danger level, according to the 12.30 hr observation yesterday.—*GNLM*

State Counsellor visits two museums in Yangon

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi visits Bogyoke Aung San Museum in Bahan Township. PHOTO: MNA

STATE COUNSELLOR Daw Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday inspected the decoration work at the Bogyoke Aung San Museum in Bahan township, Yangon, as part of preparation for the 69th Martyrs' Day.

The state counsellor went round the booths and inspected the preparation for the Martyrs' Day, and the display of the life-size statue of General Aung San and the rare photos of him.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi also went to the National Museum in Dagon township together with Union Minister Thura U Aung Ko, Yangon Region Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein and National League for Democracy's Patron Thura U Tin Oo.

On display at the museum were paintings of different periods by Artist U Mala, who presented a water-colour painting to the state counsellor.

The artist has exhibited 30 of his works at the museum, which will be kept open until 19 July. — *Myanmar News Agency*

U Aung Lynn appointed as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Myanmar to US

The President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has appointed U Aung Lynn, Permanent Secretary / Director-General of the ASEAN Affairs Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to the United States of America.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Nay Pyi Taw
Dated. 18 July 2016

Scouts posing for a group photo after the workshop. PHOTO: KO LATT (MNA)

Myanmar scouts to join the club

BASED on its scout movements, Myanmar is likely to receive a membership of the World Scout Bureau, Mr JR C Pangilinan, regional director of the WSB and Asia-Pacific Scout Region, said at a Workshop on Drafting a National Training System for Myanmar scouts.

The national level workshop was launched on Saturday at No.1 Basic Education High School in Lanmadaw Township, Yangon.

The scouting activities of the Myanmar Scout Federation, providing further support for local scout members including training, the development of a membership registration system and the drafting of a national training system for Myanmar scouts will be discussed during the four-day event.

The Myanmar Scout Federation expects to get global membership certificate from the WSB in November this year, said its chairman Dr Tin Nyo.

Altogether 40 teacher trainees from the MSF, Department of Higher Education and Department of Basic Education are attending the workshop.—*Ko Latt (Myanmar News Agency)*

Land plots to be returned to lepers

THE MANDALAY Region Authority is now scrutinizing land which will be returned to sufferers of leprosy, a chronic infectious disease, in Yenantha Village in Mandalay Township.

An investigation commission comprising Hluttaw representatives was created on July 12 by local authorities to deal with the land issue. The new body is still investigating nearly 900 acres of land confiscated by the Tatmadaw, the Ministry of Cooperative and the former Ministry of Industry-1.

On 9 July, the regional government returned over 200 acres of land to local farmers.

A total of 31,000 land plots from over 35,000 pieces of confiscated land in Mandalay Region have been returned to their original owners.

Since 1991, the Ministry of Health allotted 318 acres of plots of land to persons with leprosy, aiming to use the land for their daily survival. However, the lepers never received the rights to occupy the land. In 2014, Mandalay Region recorded the highest number of leprosy cases with 547, followed by Yangon with 439 and Sagaing with 402.—*Aung Thant Khaing*

One more pedestrian overpass planned to be built this financial year

One more pedestrian overpass has been planned to be built this fiscal year after the completion of the construction of six overpasses during last fiscal year, said an official from the Engineering Department (Roads & Bridges) under Yangon City Development Committee.

This pedestrian overpass is said to be constructed near Sanpya market, Thingangyun Township to protect the outbreak of traffic accident because this junction is daily crowded with pedestrians and the vehicles. The department will make an observation tour of the site where the overpass will be built and will start the construction processes upon approval from Yangon Regional Government.

YCDC has been constructing the pedestrian overpasses at the junctions which are crowded with people to prevent the pedestrians from the outbreak of accidents.

The escalators are installed at the four pedestrian overpasses in Pansodan, Kaba Aye, Morton and Bahan.

Hledan and Morton pedestrian overpasses were left to build in 2014-2015 but they were totally constructed in 2015-2016 fiscal year.

The pedestrian overpasses which have been constructed are at Theingyi market, in Sule, near University of Nursing, near Basic Education High School (Dagon), between Yangon Zoological garden and Kandawgyi, in Pansodan, near Mingaladon (Khayaybin junction), near Bahan (3) Road, in Morton and Hledan.—*200*

Crime NEWS

Head-on-collision kills motorcyclist

A 42-year-old man died after a serious crash between a motorbike and a car on Pathein-Monywa Road on Saturday afternoon.

A locally modified truck carrying iron beams heading from Ngathaingchaung Township collided head-on with a motorcycle en route from Yekyi Township being driven by Than Win Htoo with another one on board.

The collision killed the motorcyclist while the passenger sustained serious injuries. Lin Aung, 42, brother-in-law of the victim, has been taken to the nearest hospital after the crash.

According to investigators, the bike riders involved had a high blood alcohol level. Action is being taken against the truck driver Myo Hlaing who resides in Kyonpyaw, a town in Ayeyawady Region.—*Soe Min Oo (IPRD)*

The passenger bus seen overturned. PHOTO: POLICE

Bus accident kills two, injures 34

TWO women were killed and 34 others were injured when a passenger bus overturned on the Yangon-Mandalay highway on Friday night.

The public bus, driven by Ko Zay, lost control and overturned en route from Yangon to Taungoo between mile post Nos. 97/6 and 97/7 on the road near Kyaukdaga Township at around 10 p.m on 15 July. Two women were pronounced dead at the scene while the injured are receiving medical care at Myochaung station.

Police are still investigating the case and are searching for the driver and bus conductor who fled from the scene after the accident.—*Ko Myo (Shwepaukkan)*

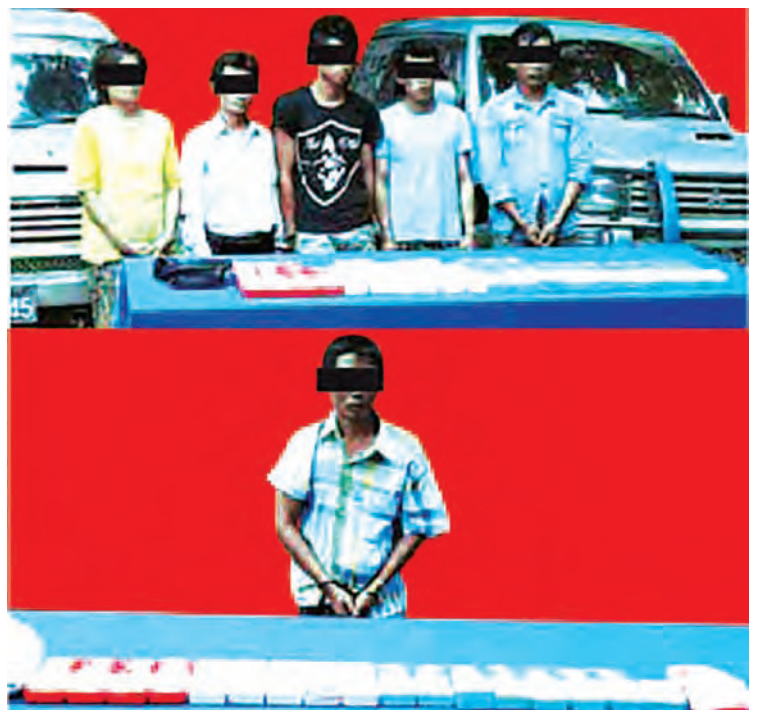
Kilogram of heroin seized in Banmauk

Six drug couriers were arrested and almost a kilogram of heroin was seized by the anti-narcotics suppression squad on Friday in Banmauk Township, Sagaing Region.

After a tip-off to police by a member of public, the combined team searched two Pajero cars stopped near a bridge in Parthet Village in the township. They discovered a cache of heroin weighing 660 grams and over K1 million in a passenger's bag and fuel tank.

According to police investigation, the team searched a house owned by Win Oo and found 330 grams of heroin.

The six people—Than Lwin (aka Moe Lwin), Nila Khaing, Wai Lin (aka Wai Yan), Than Kyaw, Ma Htu Lwan and Win Oo—are facing charges in connection with a drug trafficking ring. —*Kyemon*



The six culprits being seen at police station. PHOTO: POLICE

LOCAL Business

Euromoney names KBZ Myanmar's best bank

KANBAWZA Bank was awarded "The Best Bank in Myanmar-2016" by London-based economics magazine Euromoney, last Thursday at Island Shangri-Lan Hotel in Hong Kong, winning the award for the third year in a row.

KBZ Bank was crowned Myanmar's best bank after it managed to get the highest amount of deposit and make the highest profits from its banking services. The award also recognised the scale of KBZ Banks services with 400 bank branches nationwide and the highest amount of loans distributed to small and medium enterprises which "underpinned the development of the country".

At the award ceremony, Euromoney also acknowledged KBZ's quick and accurate banking services with its Oracle Flexcube Centralized Core Banking System, its overseas banking services which link it with foreign banks, the establishment of the country's first ever Electronic Payment Gateway service and its "modern banking services" which include mobile banking, internet banking, quick pay services, and having the largest numbers of ATMs nationwide.

KBZ is Myanmar's largest income tax payer and makes the largest contribution to social welfare in the country, according to Euromoney. KBZ Bank has been Myanmar's largest tax payer for four consecutive years, from the 2011-12 FY to 2014-2015 FY and since 2007, KBZ's Brighter Future Myanmar foundation has spent more than K103 billion on regional development and disaster preparedness.

At Euromoney's award ceremony, America's JP Morgan Chase Bank, Germany's Commerz Bank, China Construction Bank from China, Japan's MHFG Bank, DBS Bank from Singapore and Thailand's Bangkok Bank were also awarded "the Best Bank" while BNP Paribas, a French bank, won "Best Global Bank" this year.

Daw Khin Hnin Yu and Daw Win Win Htaik accept "The Best Bank in Myanmar-2016" Award. PHOTO: KBZ

Daw Khin Hnin Yu and Daw Win Win Htaik, general managers of KBZ Bank Ltd, accepted the award. Present at the ceremony were more than 180 senior officials, CEOs, managing directors and chairpersons of 48 banks from 25 Asian countries.

Kanbawza (KBZ) Bank was granted a license by the Monetary Authority of Singapore to open a representative office in Singapore.—*Thura Lwin (Eco)*

Mandalay's milling industries held back by sub-standard machinery

THE Mandalay Brokers, Merchants and Millers Kahtaintaw Association has voiced their desire for more assistance from those concerned in the importation of quality machinery for utilisation within the industrial zones of Mandalay Region.

Those involved in the Mandalay industrial enterprises have reported a requirement for quality and affordable machinery that can manufacture packaged goods for sale. "There are many sub-standard bean milling machines within the country. Difficulty comes in purchasing quality machinery because of the expenses price tags attached. That's why we want assistance from those concerned with the importation of quality, but inexpensive, machinery into Myanmar from abroad." said U Khun, general manager of the aforementioned association.

Tired and sub-standard milling machinery used to mill all varieties of beans and pluses within Myanmar result in a poor quality of bean being milled. The side-effects of such present themselves with produced exported abroad being returned. That, complied with the fact that millers only have the capacity to export raw goods, means that profit margins for local entrepreneurs remain slim.

"We could be in a position to export shelled sesame seeds. Koreans visited Myanmar on a fact finding mission in order to try and make this a reality. All that was left was for the products to be exported. But, the Koreans ended up not buying the sesame as our milling process left behind some chemicals on the seeds. It's because our milling machinery isn't up to scratch, that these pitfalls prevent us from developing our industry." said U Tin U from the Kahtaintaw Association.—*Myitmakha News Agency*

Real estate expo to be held in Mandalay

A real estate expo will be held from 26th to 28th August in Mandalay, according to iMyanmarHouse.com.

Property developers will be displaying their apartments and condominiums at the expo which will run out of the Mandalay Town Hall, with properties to be offered at special reduced prices and by payment in installments.

An official from iMyanmarHouse.com said that those interested are invited to attend free of charge. The expo will be open from 9am to 5pm for its duration and it is hoped it will be a one-stop shop for those interested in Myanmar's property market. There will also be educative talks on the real estate sector.

Apartments and condominiums worth over Ks14billion sold out at the last real-estate expo run by iMyanmarHouse.com held in June this year at Tamadaw Hall, Yangon. Over 50 construction companies offering 1 to 8 year installment payment systems brought thousands of visitors according to iMyanmarHouse.com.—*GNLM*

Retired old buses given a second life

After years of dedicated service, Yangon's old buses will be replaced with new ones and the old buses resold to towns outside of Yangon said Dr Maung Aung, the secretary of Yangon Transport Authority.

Authorities have relaxed restrictions on selling buses with type B licenses in other towns and have granted permission to import new buses. If the old bus owners can't afford the new buses outright, they will be allowed to purchase them in installments.

The Yangon Transport Authority law is being drafted at the moment. The Yangon regional government wants to reduce the number of bus lines and to dissolve the All Private Bus Line Control Committee which has been manage ng and monitoring Yangon's current bus lines.

The Yangon Transport Authority has been formed with the aim to reduce the traffic congestion and control the unsystematic, wraith-like bus lines. With the formation of public bus line companies, the sole ownership of buses will decline gradually.—*200*

Soaring prison population prompts Thailand to re-think 'lost' drug war

BANGKOK — Somsak Sreesomsong was 18 when he was jailed for selling illegal drugs. Now, turning 30, he is not yet half way through his 33-year sentence at Bangkok's high-security Klong Prem prison.

Somsak was "just a kid, not a big-time dealer", his older brother Panit told Reuters after a visit to the jail. "We're also serving time, waiting for him to get out so he can help the family."

More than a decade after Thailand declared a "war on drugs", the country is admitting defeat. As the prison population soars, Justice Minister Paiboon Koomchaya told Reuters he was looking at changes to the country's draconian drug laws.

"I want to de-classify methamphetamine but Thailand is not ready yet," said Paiboon, meaning downgrading the drug, popularly known as "meth", from a Category 1 substance, which would reduce jail time for possession or dealing.

Use of methamphetamine is spiraling across Southeast Asia, and authorities are struggling to respond.

In the Philippines, which has some of the highest rates of "meth" use, police killings of drug suspects have spiked since the swearing-in of President Rodrigo Duterte, elected on a platform of harsh measures to wipe out drug crime.

Myanmar, the source of much of the drugs flooding through the region, is bracing for an explosion in domestic use.

Overall, drugs supply in Southeast Asia, especially of methamphetamine, is at a record level, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

In common with much of the region, Thailand's criminal justice system treats drug offenders harshly.

Producing and trading in Category 1 drugs, which also include heroin, MDMA — the main chemical for ecstasy pills — and LSD, is punishable by death or life imprisonment.

Klong Prem is home to 6,267 inmates serving sentences that range from 15 years to life, with 64 per cent convicted of drug-related crimes. A typical cell measures 1.5 x 3 metres (5 x 10 feet) and sleeps five inmates, side-by-side on dark blue mattress on the floor.

Inmates sit on the floor during an inspection visit in the long term sentence zone inside Klong Prem high-security prison in Bangkok, Thailand, on 12 July 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

"Some of the men, especially the foreign prisoners, are pretty big, so it's a squeeze for them," said one prison guard. Lengthy sentences for drug offences are part of the reason why Thai jails struggle with chronic overcrowding, according to both Justice Minister Paiboon and UN experts.

Thailand has approximately 40 per cent of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' prison population, despite having only 10 per cent of the bloc's total population, the UNODC says.

Paiboon, an army general and senior member of the junta that seized power in a 2014 coup, said in an interview that Thailand would build more prisons, including 17 temporary jails for prisoners who have served at least a third of their sentence.

He added that his priority was to tackle drug trafficking and addiction — an ambitious plan in a country where a record number of people use methamphetamines, known in Thai as "ya ba" or "crazy medicine", according to a 2015 UN report.

A crackdown launched by former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in 2003 aimed at suppressing drug trafficking killed more than 2,800 people, according to an independent inquiry chaired by a former attorney general.

But the country's growing number of drug users and bulging jails have forced policymakers to think again.

"The world has lost the war on drugs, not only Thailand," said Paiboon. "We have clear numbers that drug use has increased over the past three years. Another indicator is there are more prisoners." A 2015 report by the Institute for Criminal Policy Research shows Thailand has the fourth highest number of women imprisoned in the world, after the United States, China and Russia. "We know from meeting and interviewing prisoners, including female prisoners, in Thailand, that the impact is profoundly negative for families," said Jeremy Douglas, the UNODC's Asia-Pacific chief. —*Reuters*

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Malaysia vows to seek truth 2 years after MH17 tragedy

KUALA LUMPUR — Malaysian government reiterated its commitment on Sunday to seek the truth two years after the loss of Malaysian Airlines fight MH17.

Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak said the downing of flight MH17 "was a criminal act that outraged the world and caused the loss of all 298 lives aboard."

"The Malaysian government continues all efforts to find a full and satisfactory explanation of the events that led to this tragedy," he said through his social network account.

On 17 July, 2014, Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 crashed in eastern Ukraine. The plane was en route from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur with 283 passengers and 15 crew members on board.

Malaysian Transport Minister Liow Tiong Lai said his country remains wholly committed and determined in pursuit to bring justice to the criminals responsible for the loss of so many innocent lives.

The criminal investigations by a joint investigation team is expected to come out with preliminary conclusions on the forensic research conducted, including the type of weapon used and other pertinent details, by the later part of this year, Liow said in a statement.

He also called for strengthening international cooperation to improve security standards in civil aviation, including the implementation of real time global tracking of commercial aircraft as well as addressing the risks to civil aviation arising from conflict zones. —*Xinhua*

KOICA New President visits Myanmar as the first visiting of the Southeast Asia

NEW PRESIDENT of Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) Mr. Kim In-shik visited Myanmar from July 14 to 17 to establish the strategy and aid plan for the country.

During the visit, which is also his first visiting of the Southeast Asia, he attended MDI (Myanmar Development Institute) Construction Site, Farmland Consolidation Tegyigon Village and KOICA agriculture compound which are KOICA's landmark rural development projects. He also visited k-town and convention center Site which is located in 8 mile, Yangon.

KOICA President Kim visited Nay Pyi Taw and held three meetings with Union Minister of Planning and Finance U Kyaw Win, Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation Dr Aung Thu and Union Minister of Ministry of Commerce Dr Than Myint to discuss future plan for the project.

It has been constantly promoting that development cooperation between Korea and Myanmar since 1991. Besides, As Myanmar have been selected as the Priority Partner Country last year, KOICA is planning to extend the scale of grant aid to Myanmar. Mr. Kim is expected to strengthen bilateral ties through his visit.—*GNLM*

KOICA delegation led by new president Mr. Kim In-shik poses for photo with Union Minister for Commerce Dr Than Myint and officials. PHOTO: KOICA

Overseas Chinese in Britain protest against South China Sea award

LONDON — Around 1,000 Chinese protesters from across Britain gathered here Saturday to take part in a mass demonstration to protest against the ill-founded award issued recently by an ad hoc tribunal concerning the South China Sea.

People of Chinese origin from all walks of life in Britain and from more than 50 communities came to the Chinatown in central London at around 2 pm(1300 GMT).

They marched through one of the city's busiest streets, Regent Street, to the embassies of the Philippines and the United States, holding banners saying "Arbitration Illegal Illegitimate Invalid," "Say No to Arbitration," "Settle Disputes in Genuine Bilateral Negotiation" and "Defend Our Sea Border, No More US Interference.".

The arbitral tribunal with The Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration as its secretariat issued the award on 12 July, sweepingly sided with the Philippines and denying China's long-standing historic rights in the South China Sea.

Chairman of the London Chinatown Chinese Association (LCCA) Chu Ting Tang noted in his speech that the arbitration case won the tacit support of the United States and Japan.

The government of former Philippine President Benigno S. Aquino III unilaterally initiated the arbitration against China in 2013, despite the agreement his country had reached with China on resolving their disputes in the South China Sea through bilateral negotiations.

Tang said a fair and valid arbitration process should be agreed on by both sides before it proceeds, adding that China was absent in this process.

The Philippines' unilateral move runs counter to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and runs against the general practice that arbitration shall be premised on state consent.

"We fully supported the action of the Chinese government in refusing to accept the ruling," he added.

He said the demonstration, initiated by his centre on Thursday, had gained speedy and strong support from the Chinese communities and individuals in Britain.

"The South China Sea is part of China, and we cannot accept the arbitration. Thus, we are standing up to tell the people in Britain and the world, the overseas Chinese are also concerned about the South China Sea," said Peter Lam, global managing director of the Royal China Group. —*Xinhua*

Bangladesh police arrest three who rented property to cafe attackers

A man places a sign as others light candles during a vigil in Kolkata, India, to show solidarity with the victims of the attack at Holey Artisan restaurant after Islamist militants attacked the upscale cafe in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on 2 July 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

DHAKA — Police in Dhaka on Saturday arrested three people, including a university professor, for failing to register information about tenants renting a property who later attacked a cafe in the city, killing 20 people.

Gias Uddin Ahsan, a professor at North South University in Dhaka, his nephew, and the manager of Ahsan's apartment were arrested by Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) for failing to comply with rules forcing landlords to register information about their tenants with the police, Mohammad Masudur Rahman, a senior police official told Reuters.

The men will appear in court on Sunday, he said.

Five militants who were killed by police after they stormed the cafe on 1 July had rented the apartment along with another person in a nearby residential area in May and started living there from June, Rahman said.

"From here they attacked the cafe. There were other militants also who fled after the attack," he said.

"We also found evidence that they kept grenades and other explosives in the apartment. If we had been informed they were living there, then that brutal killing would not have been possible and we could also have arrested the other militants who fled." Earlier this year, the DMP issued an order to all apartment owners to provide details of their tenants for a database to help police crack down on criminals and militants using rented accommodation as hideouts.

Bangladesh has suffered a series of attacks on liberal bloggers, university teachers and members of religious minorities over the past year. The government says two domestic militant groups trying to replace secular democracy with Islamic sharia rule are responsible for the violence.

Twenty people including 18 foreigners were killed before police stormed the cafe, rescued 13 hostages and shot five of the attackers dead.

Interior Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said on Saturday that investigators had identified the masterminds of the attack and that the remaining perpetrators would soon be arrested.

Some of the assailants had attended prestigious schools or universities and had been reported missing, according to the police. One was the son of a politician.—*Reuters*

Quake of magnitude 5.0 hits Tokyo and eastern Japan, no major damage

TOKYO — An earthquake with a magnitude of 5.0 struck eastern Japan on Sunday and shook buildings in Tokyo, officials and witnesses said, but there was no danger of a tsunami and no immediate report of injuries or major damage.

The US Geological Survey (USGS) put the epicentre of the quake 44 km (27 miles) northeast of Tokyo at a depth of about 44 km. There were no were immediate reports of damage.

Broadcaster NHK reported that the Tokai No.2 nuclear power station, which has been shut since 2011, was checked for damage after the quake but none was found.

Earthquakes are common in Japan, one of the world's most seismically active areas, which accounts for a fifth of the world's earthquakes of magnitude 6 or larger. Japan's strongest quake on record was one of magnitude 9 that struck the northeast coast on 11 March, 2011, unleashing a massive tsunami and killing nearly 20,000 people, besides setting off the world's worst nuclear crisis since Chernobyl. —*Reuters*

Increased activity detected at North Korea nuclear test site: Yonhap

SEOUL — Increased activity has been detected at a nuclear test site in North Korea, South Korea's Yonhap News Agency reported Sunday, citing South Korean and US intelligence sources.

South Korea and the United States have boosted surveillance of the situation at the Punggye-ri test site in the northeastern part of North Korea due to "a noticeable increase in truck and personnel movement" there, an insider was quoted as saying.

While activity at the site has been increasing since South Korea and the United States announced 8 July that they plan to deploy an advanced US anti-missile defence system in South Korea, South Korean officials reportedly said many observers did not pay great attention at first. Early last week, 38 North, a US-based institute monitoring North Korea, said satellite imagery taken the week before already indicated a "high level of activity" at the site.

Three days after the South Korean and US governments announced their decision to set up the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence system in the South to counter North Korea's nuclear and missile threats, the North issued a strong warning.

The Artillery Bureau of the General Staff of the Korean People's Army warned it will take "physical counter-action to thoroughly control THAAD, aggression means of the US for world domination, from the moment its location and place have been confirmed in South Korea."

The South Korean government said Wednesday that the THAAD system, designed to intercept ballistic missiles flying at high altitudes inside and outside the atmosphere, will be deployed in Seongju County, North Gyeongsang Province.

North Korea has conducted four nuclear tests, most recently in January this year, in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions and despite warnings from the international community. —*Kyodo News*

Opinion

Invest in education and reap the rewards

Kyaw Thura

Many economists have tried to put forward the phenomenon that the development of human capital holds great promise for the future. At a time when all governments of the world regard education as a primary source of economic growth, our government should follow suit by increasing spending on education.

Understanding the importance of human resources means being willing to invest more in education as it benefits the people and the country as a whole. In addition, life will be difficult if we lack knowledge of new technologies simply because technology has become a part of modern life. Without proper education, technology transfer from developed countries will be useless.

In this age, it is absolutely vital for all of us to embrace sweeping globalisation. To swim with this process, our country must augment its educated human capital as a force that can create structural and attitudinal changes in society. There is evidence that increasing education opportunities decreases crime and people's dependence on social welfare. Mostly, educated people uphold human values in their actions by developing a strong sense of community, thereby building social capital through trust and participation among individuals.

The time has come for the government to accept the investment in the development of human capital as a constant source of economic development in order to ensure better social status for individuals.

Write for us

We appreciate your feedback and contributions. If you have any comments or would like to submit editorials, analyses or reports please email ce@globalnewlightofmyanmar.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.

POEM:

Our Guiding Star

Saviours of nations can never be erased by the hands of vicious time,
Nor forgotten with the ebb of memory, nor wrenched away from our hearts,
But their lives are unfurled generation after generation till world's end,
Across decades of tumult and calm, they talk to us, they march with us, they lead the way,
So that no base blades, nor bestial bullets, nor blasting bombs wilt away our fiery will for freedom,
They give us strength to break our shackles when cowed and enslaved,
They remind us of service and sacrifice when we sink in self-pity and selfishness,
They rebuke us when we give way to sloth and torpor,
They plead with us to not waver to attain the nation's goal when weariness and doubts assail us,
They preach us unity, amity and fraternity when storms of discord, distrust and disarray destroy,
Aung San, our beloved Bogyoke, and his colleagues eight, ever the guiding star in our nation-building!

Pho Thit

A new chapter in Myanmar-China relationship?

Thein Aye

It was in 1956 that a famous Chinese composer wrote a poem that portrayed a symbol of the friendly relations between Myanmar and China. History shows that a dance troupe of the Pyu dynasty reached China around 8 AD. Judging from this, the two countries have enjoyed long bilateral relations in the same way that they share a common border of more than 2,000 kilometres. The poet eloquently composed a poem about the ideals of coexistence and fraternity between Myanmar and China as follows: (The following is an unofficial translation of a Chinese poem into English)

Along the upper reaches of the river live we
Along the lower reaches live you
Our mutual relations know no bounds
Both drink the water of the same river
We, the upstream water
You, the downstream water
The river flows endlessly
We both share infinite joy
We both are neighbours

Long live our friendly relations
Like ever-green trees
The water flows on forever
Our countries share common border
At the mountains, by the rivers

We both fought against imperialism
And stood united at mutualism
We are none but fraternal twins
With our languages overlapping
With our unity interdependent

Peace is strength
By the rivers
We both sing hymns of praise
On the mountains
We both compose music in praise of their scenery
The river faces north but flows to the south

This poem was composed in 1956, which was eight years after Myanmar became independent. In 1954, Chinese Premier Chou Enlai visited Myanmar with the intention of further cementing the bilateral relations. Myanmar Prime Minister U Nu paid a friendly visit to the mainland the same year.

Whether or not the two countries set to broaden their relations, a need exists to perform a comparative analysis of the depth of the bilateral relations of 60 years ago and now.

China has maintained a long friendship with Myanmar by upholding the mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, one of the five principles of peaceful coexistence adopted at the Bandung Conference. Frankly speaking, China is inclined to sustain friendly relations with Myanmar, with no interference in the internal affairs of its neighbour, regardless of any government in office. However, the role of politics in world order has changed more dramatically today than it was 60 years ago. This signals the need to thoroughly review the Myanmar-China relations from different angles.

In 2010, columnist Aung Thu Nyein expressed his points of view on RFA's Myanmar programme by presenting an analysis of the book titled "Myanmar-Prospect for Change" published by Yunnan University in 2010. In his criticism, he mentioned Myanmar's reliance on the mighty China in areas of defence, politics and economy, describing the country as a strategic pawn of China. Another point of view of his is that Myanmar should not be a pawn of China, given its wealth of human resources and natural resources.

The installation of the first democratically elected government in 2010 coincided with the rise in border issues, with fightings flaring up in the areas of ethnic armed groups who had entered ceasefire agreement with the government for 14 years. The term 'national reconciliation' came into fashion again.

On 13 November 2010, national icon Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest. She had been placed under house arrest for 15 years. The quasi-democratic government could move forward amid worries of backsliding. The then government vowed repeatedly that there was no possibility of the country's backsliding.

Despite the constitution baring her from becoming president, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi won the hearts of the people. They pinned their hopes on her as a national leader. Her party won a landslide victory in the 2012 by-election. During her visit to the United States on 22 September 2012, she met students of Columbia University in New York and was asked about her points of view on the Myanmar-China relations. In her response, she said that the governmental relations remained unchanged while the people-to-people relations were under strain. She continued that a majority of people in Myanmar felt Chinese business people sought their own interests without taking into consideration the welfare of the people and the country as a whole. She hoped to change the conflicting trends between the two peoples.

Speculation was mounting that the 2015 election would sweep Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to power. It was in June, just five months to the elections, Chinese President Xi Jinping invited her to Beijing in her capacity as the leader of the National League for Democracy. She accepted the invitation and visited China from 10 to 14 June last year. That signalled an abrupt turn in the political landscape of Myanmar. China expected that she would push for better relations between the two countries.

"Along the upper reaches of the river live we Along the lower reaches live you Our mutual relations know no bounds"

The suspension of the Myitsone dam project in 2011 greatly astonished China, with a professor of Beijing University saying that he was taken aback by the recent political reform in Myanmar.

One year after Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's visit to China, I was privileged to participate in a seminar on media cooperation between Myanmar and China from 16 to 29 June. Among officials who gave talks on various topics of news media were high-ranking officials, sociologists and retired departmental officers. When asked how China viewed the new government's commitment to democratic reform, a Chinese official said they welcomed the NLD-led government, recognised Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as a competent leader and hoped for better relations between the two countries.

In response to a query about the attitudinal changes in Myanmar society towards China due to lack of transparency in commercial activities, a Chinese official reiterated the existing friendly relations between the two governments, stressing that China had pushed for the creation of greater intimacy between the two peoples.

Political columnist Aung Thu Nyein pointed out six phases of China's approach to the Myanmar government as of 2011 in his analysis of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's recent visit to China, which was aired on RFA on 15 June.

They are the exchange of visits between senior officials, a variety of extensive training programmes as agreed between the Communist Party of China and the Myanmar government, the enhancement of defence cooperation and arms deals, the civil society relations, the promotion of the Chinese language by the Embassy of China in Myanmar in close partnership with the 88' Open Society and other activists, region-level relations, and the cultural and religious relations. Regarding the region-level relations, China expects Myanmar to allow ethnic self-administration areas as in Yunnan.

According to unconfirmed sources, Chinese investments in the country have undergone a decline, following the Myanmar's transition to democracy in 2011. The suspension of the Myitsone hydropower dam project is a prime example. It is also highly likely that Chinese investors practice a wait-and-see policy until the new government settles.

On the whole, China still keeps calm in the thought that what is important is to sustain good relations with the government, the columnist stated.

A senior official of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained that China experiences an annual rise of food supply by 10 million tons to feed its population of 1.3 billion. The world's most populated mainland possess 300 million acres of cultivable land, with the senior official stressing three things that matter most to his country: peace, stability and development.

Anyway, the people in Myanmar have come to feel that China is gaining the upper hand of Myanmar's economy, that the contracts are not transparent, and that both governments do not accept their responsibility and accountability to local people.

Apart from maintaining good relations between the two governments, China should do something about the enrichment of the social relations between the two peoples so as to dispel the doubts of the people of Myanmar. In addition, it is necessary for the Myanmar people to adopt an attitude of 'Think globally, act locally', when it comes to international relations with China, Japan, the United States and England.

We can no longer neglect the geographical location of our country, since it lies among three world's most populated countries: China, India and Bangladesh. On the one hand, we live next to a giant market, which can turn out to be a huge opportunity if correctly utilised. On the other hand, the opportune geographical location itself will turn to a target of exploitation. While we are finding solutions to traffic congestion which takes two hours to travel 10 miles in Yangon, the people in China travel 100 miles in 30 minutes.

In a sense, Myanmar is in a position to take advantage of China's growing economy, high technology and rising food demands. In addition, India is favourable when it comes to trade and democratic practices. The time has come for the people of Myanmar to keep their eyes open and their ears wide. It is expected that the Myanmar-China relations in the time of the new government is set to boom.

A sport ground in Beijing seen from the China Daily Newspaper Building.

Myanmar delegates pose for a group photo together with Chinese intrepretors.

A panoramic view of the Great Wall seen from a cable car.

Can Pence's vow not to sling mud survive a Trump campaign?

NEW YORK — In 1990, during a close and bitter congressional race, Mike Pence came under attack for using campaign funds to pay for personal expenses, including his mortgage and credit card bills.

The expenditures were not illegal at the time, but proved difficult to explain for a candidate who had railed about the outsized role of money in politics.

Pence in turn blasted his opponent with attack ads, including one featuring a man in traditional Arab clothing who thanked Pence's opponent in thickly accented English for policies that benefited Middle Eastern oil producers. The commercial was attacked by Arab-American groups, and the Indianapolis Star called it one of the two worst campaign commercials that year.

Pence, who is now Indiana's governor and was selected this week to be Donald Trump's presidential running mate, lost his 1990 race, but what he regretted more than losing, he later said, was his decision to sling mud.

In the 25 years since that loss, Pence's political allies and enemies alike say he has steered clear of personal attacks. This could prove challenging when campaigning with Trump, who enthusiastically tears into his rivals.

Pence's style is likely to cast him in a very different role from that of traditional vice presidential candidates, who often throw and take punches to allow presidential contenders to remain above the fray.

In the case of Trump and Pence, said Indianapolis University Professor Laura Merrifield Albright, the roles are likely to be reversed.

"It's a different dynamic. It's tough to imagine anyone out-trumping Trump," she said, noting that he is "willing to do his own dirty work."

Michael Totten, a retired architect who worked on Pence's 1990 campaign, thinks the two candidates will complement one another. He dubbed Pence "the perfect No.2," a running mate who can "temper some of Trump's enthusiasm" and "be the calming voice."

Neither Pence nor the Trump campaign immediately responded to a request for comment.

After losing his 1990 race, Pence apologised to his opponent for the oil advertisement.

He later told his colleague at a conservative think tank, William Styring, that he regretted the tone of the campaign. "I really screwed up on this. It's not me," Styring recalled Pence as saying.

Republican US presidential candidate Donald Trump applauds introducing Indiana Governor Mike Pence (L) as his vice presidential running mate in New York City, US, on 16 July 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

In 1991, Pence wrote an apologetic article for the think tank's policy journal, titled "Confessions of a Negative Campaigner."

After the defeat, Pence did not seek public office again for a decade. He worked at the Indiana Policy Review and hosted his own statewide conservative radio talk show, describing himself as "Rush Limbaugh on decaf." He also hosted a morning TV show in Indianapolis from 1995 to 1999.

In 2000, Pence again ran for a US House of Representatives seat, this time successfully. And he demonstrated that his 1990 mea culpa was more than just political theater, observers of Indiana politics say. His opponents in campaigns after he re-entered politics describe him as extremely disciplined and cordial.

Melina Fox, Pence's Democratic challenger in 2002, said that his statements in the race were "calculated and thought-out." Democrat Barry Welsh, who ran against him in 2006, 2008 and 2010, said Pence was invariably "polite, professional and gentlemanly."

But some question how he will cope with being constantly challenged in a hard-fought presidential race. "He seems uncomfortable with difficult questions and does not take counterpunches very well," said Rebecca Pearcey, who ran the losing campaign of Pence's opponent in the 2012 race for Indiana governor, Democrat John Gregg. "He doesn't engage. He operates as though the opponent is not there."

Before being picked as Trump's running mate, Pence was poised for a tight rematch race against Gregg. In recent months, Pence's approval rating had fallen below 50 per cent, in part because of controversy surrounding the state's Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which held that "a governmental entity may not substantially burden a person's exercise of religion."

Pence first alienated liberals and moderates by signing the bill into law. He then outraged the measure's evangelical supporters by endorsing changes to the law aimed at preventing discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

The 2016 gubernatorial campaign had started to become more negative, with yard signs calling for Pence to be fired. The Republican Governors Association ran an independently produced ad that attacked his opponent's record. But Pence himself had not gone negative.

At a Saturday morning event to formally introduce his running mate, Trump called Pence "a man of honor," contrasting him with Hillary Clinton, whom he described as "the embodiment of corruption."

It remains to be seen how aggressive Pence will be in campaigning for Trump in coming months — and whether he will stick to the principles outlined in his 1991 article on negative campaigning.

"It is wrong, quite simply," he wrote at the time, "to squander a candidate's priceless moment in history ... on partisan bickering." In an interview with CBS correspondent Lesley Stahl that will air on "60 Minutes" on Sunday evening, Trump suggested he may not expect his running mate to go on the attack.

While discussing his Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton, Trump told Stahl, "I call her 'Crooked Hillary' ... but I don't think he should do it, because it's different for him."—*Reuters*

NEWS IN BRIEF

Two arrested in Nice over truck attack: judiciary source

NICE (France) — Police arrested a man and a woman in the French city of Nice on Sunday morning in connection with the truck attack that killed at least 84 people celebrating Bastille Day, a judiciary source said.

Authorities have now detained seven people over the killings, claimed by Islamic State.

The 31 year-old Tunisian killer, Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, drove at the crowd in the Riviera city on Thursday night, zig-zagging along the seafront Promenade des Anglais for two kilometres as a fireworks display marking the French national day ended, until police eventually shot him dead.

French authorities have yet to produce evidence that he had turned to radical Islam.

Nevertheless, Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said Bouhlel may have undergone a rapid change.—*Reuters*

Most Britons oppose second referendum on EU exit — poll

BRUSSELS — The majority of Britons are opposed to a second referendum on membership of the European Union and almost half believe new Prime Minister Theresa May should carry on without calling a general election, according to a poll published on Saturday.

A survey by ComRes for the *Sunday Mirror and Independent* newspapers found that 57 per cent of those asked didn't support a second referendum on Brexit against 29 per cent who did.

A total of 46 per cent thought May should not call an election while 38 per cent thought she should go to the country to get support for her programme to take Britain out of the bloc it joined in 1973.

In June's referendum, 52 per cent of those who took part voted to leave the EU while 48 per cent voted to stay, prompting calls among many shocked "Remain" supporters for a re-run.

Four million people signed a petition to seek a second referendum.

But May, who took over as prime minister after David Cameron resigned in the wake of the result, has ruled out a second vote, saying "Brexit means Brexit".—*Reuters*

EU citizens arriving in UK ahead of Brexit may not be able to stay

LONDON — Britain's new Brexit minister said on Sunday that new European Union citizens arriving in Britain as Brexit nears may not have their right to remain in the country protected.

"We may have to say that the right to indefinite leave to remain protection only applies before a certain date. But you have to make those judgements on reality not speculation," David Davis was quoted as saying by the Mail on Sunday newspaper.—*Reuters*

Armed men seize police station, hostages in Armenia — security service

YEREVAN — A group of armed men seized a police station in Armenia's capital Yerevan along with an unknown number of hostages on Sunday morning, the country's security service said.

Negotiations were underway to resolve the situation peacefully, the security service said, accusing the hostage takers' supporters of spreading false rumours on the internet that an armed uprising against the government was underway.—*Reuters*

Bahrain court dissolves main Shi'ite opposition group Wefaq-Arabiyah

DUBAI — Bahrain's highest court dissolved the country's main Shi'ite Muslim opposition group al-Wefaq, and liquidated the group's funds, Saudi-owned Al Arabiya television reported on Sunday.

The funds would be claimed by the state treasury, the report said. The decision advances a crackdown on the Gulf kingdom's opposition after the authorities closed down Wefaq and revoked the citizenship of a top Shi'ite cleric in June.—*Reuters*

Turkey rounds up plot suspects after thwarting coup against Erdogan

ISTANBUL/ANKARA — Turkish authorities rounded up nearly 3,000 suspected military plotters on Saturday and ordered thousands of judges detained after thwarting a coup by rebels using tanks and attack helicopters to try to topple President Tayyip Erdogan.

For several hours overnight on Friday violence shook Turkey's two main cities, as the armed faction which tried to seize power blocked a bridge in Istanbul and strafed the headquarters of Turkish intelligence and parliament in Ankara.

At least 265 people were killed. An official said 161 of them were mostly civilians and police officers, while the remaining 104 were coup supporters.

But the coup attempt crumbled as Erdogan rushed back to Istanbul from a Mediterranean holiday and urged people to take to the streets to support his government against plotters he accused of trying to kill him.

"They will pay a heavy price for this," said Erdogan, launching a purge of the armed forces, which last used force to stage a successful coup more than 30 years ago. "This uprising is a gift from God to us because this will be a reason to cleanse our army."

Among those detained were top military commanders, including the head of the Second Army which protects the country's borders with Syria, Iraq and Iran, state-run Anadolu news agency said.

Hundreds of soldiers were held in Ankara for alleged involvement in the coup, leaving police stations overflowing.

Some had to be taken under armed police escort in buses to a sports stadium. Reuters footage showed some of the detainees, handcuffed and stripped from the waist up, sitting on the floor of one of the buses.

Supporters of Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan shout slogans on the back of a truck during a pro-government demonstration on Taksim square in Istanbul, Turkey, on 16 July, 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

The government declared the situation under control, saying 2,839 people had been rounded up, from foot soldiers to senior officers, including those who formed "the backbone" of the rebellion.

Authorities also began a major crackdown in the judiciary over suspected links to US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen, removing from their posts and ordering the detention of nearly 3,000 prosecutors and judges, including from top courts.

Erdogan has blamed the coup on supporters of Gulen, who he has frequently accused of trying to foment uprising in the military, media and judiciary.

Ten members of the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors and two members of the Constitutional Court have already been detained, officials said.

A successful overthrow of Erdogan, who has ruled the country of about 80 million people since 2003, would have marked another seismic shift in the Middle East, five years after the Arab uprisings erupted and plunged Turkey's southern neighbour Syria into civil war.

However, a failed coup attempt could still destabilise the NATO member and major US ally that lies between the European Union and the chaos of Syria, with Islamic State bombers targeting Turkish cities and the government also at war with Kurdish separatists.

US President Barack Obama expressed support for Turkey's government and urged parties on all sides of the crisis to avoid destabilizing the country and follow the rule of law. But his secretary of state, John Kerry, warned Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu that public suggestions of a US role in the plot were "utterly false" and harmful to relations.

Erdogan, who had been holidaying on the southwest coast when the coup was launched, flew into Istanbul before dawn on Saturday and told thousands of flag-waving supporters at the airport that the government remained at the helm.

A polarizing figure whose Islamist-rooted ideology lies at odds with supporters of modern Turkey's secular principles, Erdogan said the plotters had tried to attack him in the resort town of Marmaris. "They bombed places I had departed from right after I was gone," he said. "They probably thought we were still there."

Erdogan's AK Party has long had strained relations with the military, which has a history of mounting coups to defend secularism although it has not seized power directly since 1980. —*Reuters*

UN-backed Yemen peace talks resume in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY — United Nations-sponsored talks to end nearly 16 months of war in Yemen resumed in Kuwait on Saturday, delegates said, despite threats by representatives of the Saudi-backed Yemeni government not to attend.

A shaky ceasefire that began when the talks started in April has helped slow down the fighting but clashes continue in various parts of the country where Islamist militants have taken advantage of a security vacuum to launch a string of bombings.

The talks bring together the Iranian-allied Shi'ite Muslim Houthi movement and Yemen's internationally-recognised government, but have achieved little concrete progress in over two months.

Two delegates said only a ceremonial meeting was scheduled for Saturday night in the presence of the UN special envoy, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed. Both sides would get down to bargaining on Sunday.

The talks have given Yemen its best chance for peace after 16 months of war that have killed more than 6,500 people and created a humanitarian crisis. They were suspended at the end of June ahead of the Muslim Eid al-Fitr holiday.

Hadi's government is demanding the Houthis withdraw from areas they have seized since 2014 and hand over weapons they have captured from the army.

The Houthis want to be part of a new government that would prepare for elections.—*Reuters*

Obama urges rule of law in Turkey, US warns of damage to relations

WASHINGTON — The United States urged Turkey on Saturday to exercise restraint after a failed military coup sparked a government crackdown, and warned its NATO ally that public suggestions of a US role in the plot were "utterly false" and harmful to relations.

President Barack Obama urged parties on all sides of the crisis to avoid destabilising Turkey and follow the rule of law after the coup attempt against President Tayyip Erdogan.

The coup attempt complicated US-led efforts to combat Islamic State. Turkey closed its airspace to military aircraft and power was cut off to Incirlik air base, which US forces use to launch air attacks against the militant group.

US officials were working with Turkish officials to resume air operations quickly, the Pentagon said.

Secretary of State John Kerry told Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu that authorities should respect the rule of law during their probe of the coup.

He also said "public insinuations or claims about any role by the United States in the failed coup attempt are utterly false and harmful to our bilateral relations," the State Department said.

Turkey has long been a key US ally but relations have been strained in recent years and Erdogan's government has accused US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen of being behind the coup attempt.

US President Barack Obama speaks about the Bastille Day truck attack in Nice at the Diplomatic Corps Reception at the White House in Washington, US, on 15 July 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said any country that stands by Gulen will be considered at war with Turkey, and Erdogan urged Washington to deport the cleric.

Kerry said the United States was willing to help Turkey as it tries to identify those involved in the coup attempt, but made clear it would only act if there was evidence against Gulen.

"We fully anticipate that there will be questions raised about Mr Gulen, and obviously we invite the government of Turkey ... to present us with any legitimate evidence that withstands scrutiny and the United States will accept that and look at it and make judgements appropriately," he said.

Gulen has condemned the coup attempt and denied any involvement in it.

Obama conferred with his national security and foreign policy advisers on Saturday morning and reiterated his support for the "democratically-elected, civilian" government of Turkey.

"While we have no indications as of yet that Americans were killed or injured in the violence, the president and his team lamented the loss of life and registered the vital need for all parties in Turkey to act within the rule of law and to avoid actions that would lead to further violence or instability," the White House said.

Obama noted the United States needed continued cooperation from Turkey in the fight against terrorism.

Forces loyal to Erdogan largely crushed the last remnants of the coup on Saturday as he launched a purge of the armed forces to tighten his grip on power.

Turkey scrambled jets throughout Friday night to resist the coup launched by a faction within Turkey's military that saw rebels piloting military aircraft.

The Incirlik air base near Adana in the southeast of the country was running on internal power sources after a loss of commercial power to the base, the Pentagon said.

"US officials are working with the Turks to resume air operations there as soon as possible," said Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook. "In the meantime, US Central Command is adjusting flight operations in the counter-ISIL campaign to minimize any effects on the campaign."—*Reuters*

French PM says clear that Nice truck driver was radicalised quickly

PARIS — The man behind the truck attack that killed at least 84 people celebrating Bastille Day in the French city of Nice had recently been radicalised, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls said in remarks published on Sunday.

Thursday night's attack in the Riviera city of Nice plunged France into new grief and fear just eight months after gunmen killed 130 people in Paris. Those attacks, and one in Brussels four months ago, shocked Western Europe, already anxious over security challenges from mass immigration, open borders and pockets of Islamist radicalism.

Authorities have yet to produce evidence that the 31 year-old Tunisian Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, shot dead by police, had any links to Islamic State, which claimed the attack, but Valls said there was no doubt on the assailant's motives.

"The investigation will establish the facts, but we know now that the killer was radicalised very quickly, " Valls said in an interview with Sunday newspaper *Le Journal du Dimanche.*

"The claim on Saturday morning by Islamic State and the fast radicalisation of the killer confirms the Islamist nature of this attack."

French President Francois Hollande. PHOTO: REUTERS

Officials said on Saturday that people questioned by police had indicated that he had undergone a rapid transformation from someone with no apparent interest in religion.

The Amaq news agency affiliated with the militant Islamist group said that Bouhlel "was one of the soldiers of Islamic State."

Valls, who said security services had prevented 16 attacks over three years, indicated that at play on Thursday was the group's modus operandi of cajoling unstable individuals into carrying out attacks with whatever means possible.

"Daesh gives unstable individuals an ideological kit that allows them to make sense of their acts ... this is probably what happened in Nice's case," Valls said, referring to the Arabic acronym for Islamic State.

The group, which is under military pressure from forces opposed to it, considers France its main target given its military operations in the Middle East, and also because it is easier to strike than the United States, which is leading a coalition against it.—*Reuters*

Le Corbusier-designed Tokyo museum to be on World Heritage list

ISTANBUL — The UNESCO World Heritage Committee decided Sunday to add to the World Heritage list an art museum in Tokyo and 16 other buildings designed by Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier.

The committee of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation recognised the structures in seven countries, including the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo's Ueno Park, as innovative and laying the foundation for modern architecture. The buildings include the Villa Savoye in France and the Capitol Complex in Chandigarh, India. Discussions on the listing at a meeting in Istanbul were delayed due to a failed coup attempt in Turkey. Sources had said the committee may cut short the session and postpone the listing possibly to the fall.

The Tokyo museum, the only structure in Japan designed by the renowned architect, was completed in 1959 as a symbol of resumed diplomatic ties between Japan and France after World War II.

It will be the 20th World Heritage site in Japan and the first in central Tokyo. The 17 buildings will be officially added to the World Heritage list at the end of the committee meeting through Wednesday. The Tokyo museum's three-story building features the architect's signature style of raising the bulk of a structure off the ground and supporting it by pilotis, or columns. Japan recommended the Le Corbusier-designed structures together with six other countries — Argentina, Belgium, France, Germany, India and Switzerland.

With the addition of the National Museum of Western Art, Japan will now have 16 cultural sites, including Mt. Fuji, and four nature sites, including the Ogasawara island chain in the Pacific, on the World Heritage list.

Le Corbusier was born in Switzerland in 1887 and later became a French citizen. He became known as one of the 20th century's leading architects and a pioneer of modern architecture. He died in 1965. —*Kyodo News*

Two boats made of bulrush prepare to leave Yonaguni Island for Iriomote Island, both in Okinawa Prefecture, on 17 July, 2016, on a journey to replicate part of a hypothetical migration by a group of ancient settlers from what is now Taiwan about 30,000 years ago.
PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

Boats set out on journey to replicate migration 30,000 years ago

YONAGUNI (Japan) — Two boats made of bulrush set out on a journey on Sunday to replicate part of a hypothetical migration by a group of ancient Japanese settlers from what is now Taiwan about 30,000 years ago.

A research team from Tokyo's National Museum of Nature and Science left Yonaguni Island for Iriomote Island, both in Okinawa Prefecture, aboard the 6-metre-long vessels made of a local plant called himegama, which is similar to narrow leaf cattail.

Fourteen people, including marine adventurers, plan to row more than 30 hours to get through the 75-kilometre journey between the two Japanese islands near Taiwan, according to the team. "Through the sea journey, we will be able to visualize our ancestors' lives, which are hard to imagine merely through relic surveys," project leader Yosuke Kaifu said.

Researchers hypothesize some ancient Japanese settlers travelled to Japan from Taiwan through the Nansei Islands, where many relics dating back to more than 30,000 years ago have been discovered.

They believe the boats were made of grass as no woodworking tools have been found.—*Kyodo News*

Leaders call for more support to African women in agriculture

KIGALI — African women in agriculture have been marginalized in most programmes geared towards agricultural transformation in Africa which puts gender on the periphery of the continent's growth, says Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia.

Sirleaf, who is also the chair of Empowerment of Women in Agriculture (EWA) initiative, made the remarks on Saturday during a meeting on women empowerment in agriculture on the sidelines of the ongoing 27th African Union (AU) summit in the Rwandan capital, Kigali.

Rwanda hosts the summit from 10 to 18 July dubbed "2016: African Year of Human Rights, with particular focus on the Rights of Women."

"Women play a major role in agricultural growth in Africa, yet they face persistent obstacles and economic constraints. It's time for us to create ways for women to contribute their skills and talents to national development," said President Sirleaf.

She noted that when African heads of state launched their continental development plan, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), in 2001, women's organisations banded together to protest the initiative's seeming lack of sensitivity to gender issues.

"Women's organisations including Empowerment of Women in Agriculture (EWA) initiative, and the Gender is my Agenda Campaign Network (GIMAC), the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) demanded that NEPAD's proponents ensure that women were not left out of the social and economic benefits promised by the initiative," Sirleaf added.

According to Macky Sall, President of Senegal, if women are given equal access to land, seeds, as their male counterparts, Africa can reduce hunger and poverty on the continent and the whole world.

"This situation must change as Africa spearheads efforts to transform Africa's agricultural landscape," he added.

The African Development Bank (AfDB) report indicates that women make up almost 50 per cent of the agricultural labour force in Sub-Saharan Africa and a total of 62 per cent of economically active women in Africa work in agriculture, making it the largest employer of women.

In some countries, such as Rwanda, Malawi and Burkina Faso, more than 90 per cent of economically active women are involved in agriculture.

Akinwumi Adesina, president of AfDB said that agriculture in Africa is poised to remain one of the most important economic sectors, accounting for around 25 per cent of the continent's GDP and empowering women in agriculture will enable the continent address hunger and poverty among Africans.

"While African women farmers are essentially feeding the continent, they have remained largely in the background, calling little attention to themselves and receiving little help. The African Development Bank has embarked on a campaign to support women in agriculture through funding and agricultural trainings," he added.

Rhoda Peace Tumusiime, AU commissioner for rural economy and agriculture, stated that African leaders have committed to help African women farmers under the 2003 Maputo Declaration (the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme), which is intended to increase support for smallholder farmers. —*Xinhua*

UNESCO may postpone heritage listing of Le Corbusier works

ISTANBUL — The UNESCO World Heritage Committee may cut short its ongoing meeting in Istanbul due to Turkey's failed coup attempt and postpone some anticipated World Heritage listing including that of Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier's works, sources from the meeting said Sunday. The Le Corbusier works subject to the anticipated listing are 17 buildings in seven countries, including the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo's Ueno Park, the Villa Savoye in France and the Capitol Complex in Chandigarh, India.

The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation on Saturday proposed shortening of the meeting, which was scheduled to be held through next Wednesday, and holding an extra meeting in September and October in Paris instead to discuss the listing, the sources said.

The Istanbul meeting has decided on the listing of nine items including heritage sites in China, Greece and Turkey but it was not held Saturday following the uprising erupted Friday.

Items left without being listed also include an expanded area of religious sites and pilgrimage trails in the Kii mountains straddling central and western Japan.

The Tokyo museum was completed in 1959 as a symbol of resumed diplomatic ties between Japan and France after World War II.—*Kyodo News*

China's urban air quality improves in first half

BEIJING — Air quality in China's largest cities continued to improve during the first six months of 2016, the country's environment ministry said on Sunday.

China's largest 338 cities enjoyed more clean air days in the first half compared with the same period of 2015, the ministry said on its website. It said 76.7 per cent of January-June days had clean air, an increase of four percentage points from a year earlier.

In the capital Beijing, levels of PM 2.5 — dangerous tiny pollutants — fell 17.9 per cent from a year earlier, the ministry said.

In Beijing, concentrations of PM 2.5 averaged 64 micrograms per cubic metre in the first half, significantly higher than the official state standard of 35 micrograms, and the World Health Organisation's guideline of an annual average of no more than 10 micrograms.

The ministry did not provide reasons for the improvement in air quality, but it follows increased measures to crack down on polluters and coal use, as well as efforts to tackle overcapacity in the heavily polluting steel sector. A slowdown in economic growth has also likely contributed.— *Reuters*

I have lowered expectations in love: Nicholas Hoult

Nicholas Hoult. PHOTO: REUTERS

LONDON — Actor Nicholas Hoult says he's been forced to lower his expectations of women.

The 26-year-old actor, who dated Jennifer Lawrence on and off for three years until 2014, said as people grow in life they become more realistic and lower their expectation of others, reported Female First.

"Maybe my expectations have lowered a little bit ... The first time you fall in love you're so mental that it's difficult to recall anything. I think you just grow up and become more aware of yourself and other people and that changes it," he said.

Hoult, however, does believe there's someone out there for everyone and his "soulmate" is waiting for him.

"I believe completely. I don't think anyone can change the way they feel or should have to, depending on what they feel."—*PTI*

Mariah Carey wants children to have 'normal' life

LONDON — Pop star Mariah Carey says she has never forced her children to live in the spotlight.

The "We Belong Together" hitmaker's demanding career regularly takes her around the world but she doesn't want her five-year-old twins Moroccan and Monroe to feel they have to follow her around on tour and live in the spotlight, reported Female First.

"I want them to still feel normal. So, if they don't like travelling around at some point, they won't have to travel around. But they love travelling. They love flying."

"If I keep them home for like five days, they're like, 'When are we going on an airplane?' They really love it. They love doing all these things and seeing places — they love the Eiffel Tower. It's amazing, you know what I mean? I just have the best time with them," the 46-year-old singer said.—*PTI*

I believe in ghosts: Chris Hemsworth

LONDON — "The Avengers" star Chris Hemsworth says although he is yet to experience the spirit of a dead person around him or any paranormal activities, he still feels that ghosts are for real.

"I think that most of us ask all sorts of questions about what else is out there. I'd like to think there was an afterlife or reincarnation or something to continue on. If it was 'game over' after this life, that would be upsetting." he said.

The 32-year-old actor is seen the new "Ghostbusters" film, in which he is playing a geeky character named Kevin Beckman who is possessed by a ghost.

Hemsworth said that he have had faced problems to let loose with his dialect during filming, reported Female First.

"It [doing an Australian accent] was [weird] at first. It's funny because [your voice] becomes like another prop. When it's you speaking, and having not done it in a long time, you're very much aware of it. It's in your head more," he said.

Chris Hemsworth. PHOTO: REUTERS

The female-lead film, which hit cinema screens last week, sees Chris showcase his natural Australian accent. However, the heartthrob — who was born and raised in Melbourne, Victoria — has admitted he struggled to let loose with his dialect during filming because he's been so limited when it comes to his vocals in previous international blockbusters.—*PTI*

Pop star Justin Bieber. PHOTO: REUTERS

Justin Bieber lashes out at fan?

NEW YORK — Pop star Justin Bieber reportedly lashed out at a fan at his gig in New Jersey after she threw hat on stage.

The 22-year-old "Sorry' hitmaker allegedly swore at the innocent concertgoer after she spun her cap, which she was giving as a gift, at him while he was performing in Atlantic City, reported New York Daily News.

Bieber said mid-way through his performance, "Whatever it is you're trying to throw at me on stage, your hat or whatever, I don't want that," before kicking the present off the stage.

The singer apparently quickly realised he'd been a bit hasty with his temper and apologised for his "mean" remark but admitted the incident had "ruined the vibe" of the song.—*PTI*

'Rogue One' unveils gritty, grounded new 'Star Wars' story

LONDON — A "Star Wars" world with a host of new characters and a new feisty female lead was unveiled at a special fan event on Friday, as the cast of the upcoming film "Rogue One" discussed the latest chapter of the much-loved franchise.

British actress Felicity Jones, who follows in the heels of newcomer Daisy Ridley leading last year's "Star Wars: The Force Awakens," said her character Jyn Erso is "incredibly independent" in "Rogue One," out in theaters 16 December.

"She can be tough when she needs to be but she has, I hope, great humanity as well at the same time, and someone who throughout the film finds a cause and finds those leadership qualities inside of her," the actress told Reuters.

Jones joined "Rogue One" cast members to kick off this year's "Star Wars Celebration" in London, which features three days of panels and events for fans.

Mexican actor Diego Luna, who plays Captain Cassian Andor, said "Rogue One" was the "most grounded film" in the franchise and centered on a group of rebels fighting for freedom and to "change their reality."

Forest Whitaker, who plays Saw Gerrera, said "Rogue One" director Gareth Edwards shot a "very gritty" film with handheld camera work that made it more "personal and intimate." The characters, Whitaker said, struggled with "light and darkness."

Disney released a three-minute reel online on Friday of behind-the-scene "Rogue One" footage that featured action, explosions, green screen sets, new creatures and Stormtroopers wading through calm blue waters on a tropical beach.

Attendees at the event were given an exclusive look at a new trailer for "Rogue One," not yet released to the public, that featured a glimpse of franchise villain Darth Vader, seen in a fan video from the event uploaded by The Daily Beast.

"Star Wars" producer Kathleen Kennedy had previously said that Darth Vader would return in "Rogue One" and veteran actor James Earl Jones will reprise voicing the character.

"Rogue One" is the first of three new standalone "Star Wars" films that will explore new realms and stories outside of the trilogies first set up in George Lucas' 1977 "Star Wars: Episode IV — A New Hope."

Walt Disney Co resurrected "Star Wars" with a new generation of characters in December's box office hit "The Force Awakens."

The saga will be continued in "Episode VIII," which wrapped filming this week and will be out in theaters December 2017.—*Reuters*

Kobe Bryant slimed after winning Kids Choice prize

LOS ANGELES — Retired Los Angeles Lakers guard Kobe Bryant was given the traditional golden sliming at the Kids Choice Sport awards on Thursday after picking up the "Legend" prize.

The 37-year-old was presented with the award, an orange blimp with a bushy mohawk, by American actress and singer Zendaya in Los Angeles before four jets emerged from the stage to douse the 18-time All Star in slime.

Bryant brought down the curtain on his standout 20-year career with a 60-point showing in his final game against the Utah Jazz in April.

He won five NBA Championships with the Lakers, two NBA Finals MVP awards and two Olympic gold medals for the United States.

Former England soccer captain David Beckham and ex New York Yankee shortstop Derek Jeter are previous winners of the Kids Choice 'Legend' prize that comes with a gold sliming. —*Reuters*

Retired NBA basketball player Kobe Bryant reacts after he was "slimed" after accepting the "Legend" award at the Kids Choice Sport 2016 awards in Los Angeles, California US, on 14 July 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Wildfires rage across Southwest, forcing home evacuations

NEW MEXICO — Several destructive wildfires were raging across the Southwestern United States on Saturday, after consuming dozens of homes and forcing evacuations.

Firefighters have gained the upper hand on a blaze burning in the sparsely populated and wooded community of Timberon, New Mexico.

That wildfire, which officials said was in the "mop-up stage" and had charred roughly 270 acres, destroyed 44 homes and damaged or demolished an additional two dozen structures since it was sparked on Wednesday, according to fire information website InciWeb.

Investigators have not yet determined what caused the blaze, according to InciWeb.

Firefighters to the north in Colorado were facing a so-called red flag warning of low humidity and wind gusts of up to 30 miles per hour (48 kph) as they struggled to contain the 16,200 acre Hayden Pass Fire.

Fire team spokesman Jose Acosta said residents of about 140 homes were forced to flee the flames in Fremont County, which is about 65 miles (105 km) southwest of Colorado Springs. As of Saturday, fire personnel had carved out containment lines around only 5 per cent of the inferno, and Acosta said it could take until 1 October for the wildfire to be fully contained.

To the southwest, in Arizona, firefighters aimed to keep the 3,700-acre Fuller Fire from reaching a highway that serves as a crucial artery in and out of the Grand Canyon National Park's North Rim.

Low humidity and strong winds also plagued the 430 fire personnel battling that blaze, which broke out after a lightning strike on 29 June, according to InciWeb. Firefighters on Saturday focused on keeping the flames to the east of State Route Highway 67, InciWeb said.—*Reuters*

Finland auctions vintage Soviet cars dumped by migrants at Arctic border

SALLA — Finland on Friday auctioned off scores of vintage albeit ramshackle Soviet-era cars abandoned by asylum-seekers who used them to cross the country's desolate Arctic border from Russia.

Last year Finland's 1,340 km-long (833-mile) frontier with Russia — marking one of the external limits of the European Union's passport-free Schengen travel zone — became the northernmost crossing point to the EU for migrants keen to avoid the perilous Mediterranean sea route to the continent.

At first, most of the migrants entered Finland from Russia on bicycles. But after Finland banned bicycle crossings in December, and the subzero winter freeze set in, asylum seekers bought old Soviet cars in Russia and drove them to the border.

On Friday, Soviet-era Volgas and a rusty 1970s Lada station wagon were the main attractions at a vintage car auction held in Salla, a northern town 20 km (12 miles) from the Russian border.

Finnish customs put more than 100 Soviet-era cars on the auction block after they were left behind by asylum seekers.

The Volgas fetched prices up to 640 euros ($713.02) and the Lada estate car, with now-rare circular headlights, was picked up by a Finnish collector for 280 euros ($311.95).

"There's rust and few dents on them, but mechanically they'll last forever."

"And it's very easy to find spare parts," Rauno Halttunen, a retired mechanic and a Soviet car enthusiast, told Reuters by phone from Salla.

"Most of the cars were registered 30-40 years ago in Finland, and then sold to Russia in the 1990s. Now they've made their way back," said auction organiser Asko Viitanen.

Prices for classic Soviet models began at 120 euros ($133.69) while "newer" Russian models from the 1990s, after the Soviet Union's break-up, and a few German cars of the same vintage were snatched up for a few euros each.

Early this year Finland criticized its giant eastern neighbour and tsarist-era ruler for allowing increasing numbers of asylum seekers with no Finnish visas to cross their Arctic border, and held high-level meetings with Moscow.

Helsinki worried it could become an ever more popular route into the EU for migrants as the summer approached and the main Balkan route via Turkey and Greece became harder to access.

A further 1,000 asylum seekers entered Finland from Russia in the first two months of 2016 before the flow dried up as the countries agreed on tighter border zone security.—*Reuters*

Sale items are showcased as asylum seekers' abandoned cars are auctioned in Salla, northern Finland on 15 July 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

MRTV Entertainment Channel

(18-7-2016, Monday)

06 : 00 pm
- Weather Report
- Pyi Thu Ni Ti

06 : 20 pm
- Cartoon Programme "ALVIN and The Chipmunks — The Road Chip" (Part-1)

07 : 10 pm
- International Drama Series

07 : 50 pm
- International Drama Series

08 : 30 pm
- The Martyr's Day

08 : 50 pm
- MRTV Entertainment Music

09 : 00 pm
- National Literary Icon and Guiding Light of Myanmar Literature "National Literary Icon In His Old Age" (Episode-3)

09 : 30 pm
- International Movie Songs

09 : 40 pm
- Traditional Customs of Holy Waso

9 : 50 pm
- Music Programme

10 : 00 pm
- Exclusive Interview with Thura U Tin Oo

10 : 20 pm
- Myanmar Video

Midnight

From 18-7-2016 (Monday) 6:00 pm
To 19-7-2016 (Tuesday) 6:00 pm

mitv Myanmar International

(18-7-2016 07:00am ~ 19-7-2016 07:00am) MST

Today Fresh

07:03	Am	News
07:26	Am	Myanmar Delicate Artistic Handy Creations- The Making Procedure of Goldsmith
07:43	Am	Talking Shwe Thway (Children Journal)
07:54	Am	A Tribute to Myanma National Hero General Aung San
08:03	Am	News
08:26	Am	Traditional Customs of Holy Waso
08:39	Am	Myanmar Betels
08:54	Am	Scented Buddha Images
09:03	Am	News
09:26	Am	The Martyr's Day
09:43	Am	Egg Shell
09:52	Am	General Aung San Museum
10:03	Am	News
10:27	Am	Rakhine The Land of Sublime Pagodas

(11:00 Am ~ 03:00 Pm) - Sunday 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
07:27	Pm	Food Trip (Ep-3) (Part-1)
07:50	Pm	Pyin Oo Lwin Sweater
08:03	Pm	News
08:26	Pm	Taste of Myanmar (Rice Salad with Vegetables)
08:45	Pm	Chef Life "Thanakrit Chamnongbutr"

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

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Berdych pulls out of Olympics tennis event

LONDON — Czech Tomas Berdych has become the third high-profile tennis player to withdraw from the Olympics in two days, saying his concerns over the Zika virus prompted his decision.

The world number eight's announcement follows the decision by Wimbledon runner-up Milos Raonic and Simona Halep to withdraw from next month's Rio tournament.

"It was a hard decision for me to take after a long and painstaking discussion with my dearest," Berdych, 30, said on his Twitter page on Saturday.

"It is because of the Zika virus spread in the country of the Olympics. As I have founded a family recently, to limit health risks towards my nearest is the utmost priority."

Several top golfers have opted to skip the Olympics because of concerns about the mosquito-borne disease which is linked to birth defects in newborn babies.

"I apologise to all of you who are disappointed by my decision. I do believe that if you take a deeper account of my reasons you will understand that I have done it out of the responsibility for my family," Berdych added.

The Czechs still have Jiri Vesely and Lukas Rosol on their Olympic team.

Raonic and women's world number five Halep withdrew on Friday. They, along with twice Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka, who is pregnant, will not be making the trip to Rio even though they were included in the final list of participants issued by the International Tennis Federation (ITF) on Friday.—*Reuters*

Czech Republic's Tomas Berdych during his match against Great Britain's Andy Murray at All England Lawn Tennis & Croquet Club, Wimbledon, England on 8 July 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Hewitt pulls out of Rio coaching role

MELBOURNE — Two-times grand slam champion Lleyton Hewitt has opted out of his role as coach of the Australian men's tennis team at the Rio de Janeiro Olympics for "personal reasons", local media reported on Sunday.

Hewitt's withdrawal is another blow for Australia's prospects at Rio after top-ranked players Nick Kyrgios and Bernard Tomic withdrew themselves from consideration. Tennis Australia had applied to the Australian Olympic Committee to replace Hewitt with former professional Mark Draper, an Associated Press Australia said. Hewitt's agent and Tennis Australia were unable to be reached for comment. Thanasi Kokkinakis and John Millman are representing Australia in the men's singles at Rio, with John Peers and Chris Guccione in the doubles.—*Reuters*

Chelsea sign France midfielder Kante from Leicester City

LONDON — Chelsea have signed France midfielder N'Golo Kante from Premier League champions Leicester City on a five-year contract, the Londoners said Saturday.

Kante, 25, is new manager Antonio Conte's second acquisition, following Olympique Marseille's Belgium striker Michy Batshuayi, and arrives after playing at Euro 2016.

"I am so happy to have signed for one of the biggest clubs in Europe. It's a dream come true for me," Kante told www.chelseafc.com.

"The opportunity to work with Antonio Conte, a brilliant coach, and some of the best players in the world was simply too good to turn down."

The clubs did not disclose financial details but British media put the fee at 32 million pounds ($42.20 million).

Kante was Claudio Ranieri's first signing at Leicester, joining for six million pounds after two seasons at Caen.

He had a successful season last term, helping the 5,000-1 outsiders win the title for the first time before joining up with France.

Kante played in the opening match but was banned for the quarter-final, came on in the semi and was an unused substitute in the final which the hosts lost 1-0 to Portugal after extra time.—*Reuters*

Australian veteran Gerrans ruled out of Rio

Simon Gerrans
PHOTO: REUTERS

MELBOURNE — Australia's Olympic road cycling medal hopes have suffered a blow with world silver medallist Simon Gerrans forced out of the Rio de Janeiro Games after breaking a collarbone at the Tour de France. The 36-year-old Orica-BikeExchange rider underwent surgery in Barcelona over the weekend after being ruled out of the Tour following a crash.

He was set to be replaced by another rider in the Australian team at Rio, a Cycling Australia spokeswoman confirmed on Sunday.

Two-time Olympian Gerrans had been selected in the road race at Rio with BMC Racing rider Rohan Dennis and Richie Porte, a twice world champion in the team time trial.—*Reuters*

Argentina will be competitive without Messi

CHENNAI — Argentina will fight for major honours despite Lionel Messi retiring from international soccer after the disappointment of last month's Copa America final shootout loss to Chile, the country's former forward Hernan Crespo has said. The 29-year-old Messi, a five-times World Player of the Year, is Argentina's top scorer with 55 goals and although he has played in three Copa America finals in 2007, 2015 and 2016, plus the 2014 World Cup final, Argentina have lost them all.

Despite media reports suggesting the Barcelona forward is reconsidering his decision, Crespo, 41, said the focus should now be on ensuring Argentina remain a force and take the next step to end the country's 23-year wait for a major trophy. "The Argentina national team is very competitive. If you watch the last three tournaments — two Copa America finals and one World Cup final — you are competitive, you arrive in the final of great events," he told reporters on Saturday. "I hope to see our national team win but I don't want to say that Messi was at fault, it's not good. Messi played very well. He is the top scorer of the national team. He is the best player in the world. It's unlucky."

"But it's not about Messi. It's about the last 23 years the national team never won (a major trophy). Yes they won the Olympic games (in 2004 and 2008) but, at the same time, we have lost a lot of finals. However, we are still competitive."—*Reuters*

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