

■ NATIONAL

Youths practice meditation during Thingyan

► PAGE 3



■ LOCAL BUSINESS

Exports by government sector dropped by \$1.7 billion from last FY

► PAGE 5



■ NATIONAL

Fire destroys factories in Hlinethaya

► PAGE 6



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Revelers enjoy the water festival with the fine weather on Akya Day. The weather is expected to be cloudy and showers is expected over many areas during the festival. PHOTO: YE HTUT/MNA

Cooler weather for revelers on Akya Day

With the mercury down slightly in Yangon, the second day, or Akya Day, of the Thingyan New Year festival was more crowded than usual with revelers at the numerous pandals in Yangon.

Intermittent showers scattered over Yangon and other areas throughout the day, bringing cooler weather to the festival participants.

Yangon is expected to again

see showers and cloudy weather today, according the Meteorology and Hydrology Department.

Isolated rain or thundershowers are expected over the Yangon region today, with an 80 per cent degree of certainty, said the weather bureau, which also announced yesterday that there was a formation of low pressure over the Bay of Bengal.

“ Low pressure system may result in wet, cloudy weather

The low pressure system over the southeast Bay of Bengal is likely to intensify into a depression that could mean cloudy or wet weather over the next 24 hours, said the

Meteorology and Hydrology Department, according to observations made at 6.30 pm yesterday.

According to the MHD's 9.30 am Friday forecast, the low pressure system is persisting over the southeast Bay of Bengal and is expected to intensify into a low pressure area.

Weather will be partly cloudy in the Upper Sagaing Region and

Chin State. Rain or thundershowers will be scattered in the Mandalay, Bago, Yangon and Aye-yarwady Regions and Shan and Rakhine States and isolated in the remaining areas.

Squalls with moderate to rough seas are likely at times off and along the Myanmar coasts. Surface wind speed in squalls may reach 35 mph.—GNLM

I wish you all physical and mental well being during water festival of 1378 myanmar era and 1379 myanmar new year.



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Walking Thingyan in Mandalay attracts revelers



Walking Thingyan on the 26th Street becomes a popular site in the Thingyan Festival in Mandalay. PHOTO: AUNG THET KHINE

CROWDS flocked to Mandalay City's pandals, pavilions and entertainment stages yesterday, the Akya day of the Myanmar Traditional New Year Water festival.

"Walking Thingyan" on 26th street has attracted revelers this year, making the festival more attractive than previous years.

The Mandalay City Thingyan Pavilion in the southern part of ancient Mandalay moat was one of the popular venues, with the Sein Du Wa Myanmar Orchestra performing Myanmar traditional Thingyan songs together with famous singers.

Those in attendance danced and clapped during the performances and also threw water on each other, a tradition of washing away the previous year's sins and welcoming in a new year with a clean slate. Starting from the morning, famous singers such as Lin Lin, Chit Thu Wai, Sone Thin Par and the popular Myanmar Idol winners performed, to the delight of the water festival lovers.

Many revellers toured the Thingyan pavilions around the Mandalay Ancient moats and enjoyed the performances of traditional Myanmar Thingyan dances performed by the many well-known singers.—Min Htet Aung



PHOTO: MIN HTET AUNG



Crowds of revelers including locals and tourists throng "the Walking Thingyan" of Mandalay enjoying the cooling factor of Thingyan Festival. PHOTO: AUNG THET KHINE



Ethnic Rakhine women wash Buddha statues with scented water.

PHOTO: TIN SOE



Dance troupe performing at a small pavilion in Buthidaung. PHOTO: TIN SOE

Buddha statue washing in Maungtaw draws crowds

PAGODAS and monasteries in Maungtaw Township, Rakhine State were packed with devotees yesterday morning for the Rakhine traditional Buddha statue washing event.

Yesterday morning starting at 7, Maungtaw District Deputy Commissioner U Ye Htut and staff were going around monasteries, including the Min Kan Nikaya Myoma monastery, Paho monastery, and Zawtikaryone monastery to conduct the ceremonial washing of Buddha statues.

Other government departments, social associations, philanthropic groups and local elders were similarly going around town in Buddha statue washing vehicles to assist in the traditional event.—*Yamanya*

Youths practice meditation during Thingyan Festival



Youths learn meditation at Mingun meditation center in Yangon.

PHOTO: ZAW MIN LATT

Nay Pyi Taw residents enjoying Thingyan Akya

ON Thingyan Akya Day, people in Nay Pyi Taw were enthusiastically throwing water at each other yesterday, continuing the Myanmar tradition of washing away the old year's excesses with water.

In the morning, joyful songs

were heard from pandals around Nay Pyi Taw, where people happily threw water at Thingyan revellers who were driving past in motorcycles and cars.

In the same way, Satuditha (free food) was distributed at the

Nay Pyi Taw mayor's Thingyan pandal and other pandals in Pyinmana while people were entertained with Thingyan songs and modern music as well as Thingyan dances by Thingyan dance troupes.—*Myanmar News Agency*



Revelers soak themselves under splash of water enjoying the Thingyan festival in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

WHILE many Yangon youths are participating in the traditional celebration of Thingyan by happily throwing water, many others entered monasteries and meditation centres.

At Mingun monastery in Bahan Township, Yangon, the trustee of the monastery said most of the 806 yogis who enter the meditation retreat during Thingyan were youths.

"There are 117 don-la-ba monks (part-time monks), 116 shin-tha-ma-ne (junior monks), 216 thi-la-shin (female monks), 46 male yogi and 401 female yogi during this Thingyan," said Mingun monastery trustee group member U Soe Min Aung.

Maung Yan Paing from Ahlone Township who is attending the retreat, said it was an annual ritual.

"During Thingyan, all our family enter the meditation retreat. This is the second year. I will try to do this every year."

Maung Myo Min Kyaw, 17, from Tharkayta Township, is from the Mingun monastery meditation retreat for the first time as an adult.

"I have no experience of meditating in a meditation retreat like this during Thingyan even though I did went to a youth meditation retreat earlier. I'm here now to gain experience as well as merit. I plan to do the same next year too."

It is learnt that there are about 2,000 male and female yogis in this year's Thingyan meditation retreat at Mahasi Meditation Centre in Bahan Township.

Mahasi Meditation Centre trustee reserve volunteer member Ko Zaw Myint said arrange-

ments were made to receive about 2,000 this year, including full-time monks, and added that there are many young people this year.

Devotees were seen bringing donations for the welfare of people to the meditation retreats in monasteries and meditation centres.

Ma Nay Min Soe, 19, who came to the Mahasi Meditation Centre from South Dagon Township, was at a retreat for the first time.

"I no longer have my parents, and I'm here for them. I didn't enter a meditation centre before and it is very peaceful here. I'm able to learn about the nobleness of Buddha and his teaching and the value of Dhamma. I'm thinking of coming again next year."

Since the Thingyan period is a new year holiday period, youths from the wards, students as well as middle-aged employees are seen entering meditation centres to practice vipassana meditation.

There are differences in the meditation times among meditation centres and retreats, but meditation is normally practiced in the morning, noon and afternoon interspersed with preaching on meditation methods by the head monks.

In addition to meditating and fasting in the wards and monasteries, Shwedagon Pagoda, Kaba Aye Pagoda, Botahtaung Pagoda, Shwe Bone Pwint Pagoda, Ngar Htat Gyi Pagoda, Chauk Htat Gyi Pagoda, Ko Htat Gyi Pagoda were packed with Thingyan period merit makers and people distributing satuditha (free food).—*Min Thit & Thint Zin Win*

Myanma Railways to have separate rail lines for city and highway circular trains

MYANMA Railways will have separate railroads for Yangon city circular trains and highway ones, said an official from Myanmar Railways.

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) will provide both technical and financial assistance for upgrading the railway system.

In 2016, Japan provided a low-interest loan of 25 billion yen (Ks310.25 billion) for improving the Yangon City circular train. Currently, Myanmar Railways is constructing brick walls and installing signal system at railway crossings.

Myanmar Railways also invited tenders for implementation of 10 projects including upgrading of Yangon circular railway.—200



Two locomotives on railway lines at a rural railway station.

PHOTO: GNLM/PHOE KHWAH

2.5 million ATM users at 3,200 ATM machines

THE number of ATM card users has reached 2.5 million, with MPU credit cards being widely used, according to Myanmar Payment Union (MPU).

There are about 3,200 ATM machines in Myanmar with over 10,000 points of sale (PoS) where people can make payments using MPU cards.

There were about 2,000 ATMs which accepted the MPU cards and about 5,500 PoS in 2016. The number of MPU card

users was only 1.8 million last year.

Increased use of MPU cards creates new problems like having to wait to use ATM machines, busy internet lines and a lack of money in the ATM machines.

ATM machines hold between Ks28 million and Ks60million, depending on the bank. The ATM card users receive mostly Ks5,000 and 10,000 notes from ATM machines. The banks have difficulty keeping the ATMs filled up dur-

ing the water festival, usually filling up the ATMs before and after the water festival.

The shops need to be linked to MPU to receive the payment made with MPU cards. Currently, MPU card holders can settle payments at City Mart, Capital, Ocean and Gamonpwin supermarkets. The authorities are making arrangements to make payment with MPU cards for imported and exported goods.—Min Thu

2,200 farming implements sold in Sagaing Region

THE Agricultural Mechanisation Department has sold 2,289 farm implements to local farmers using an instalment payment plan during the fiscal year 2016-2017 in Sagaing region, it is learnt.

The farming implements sold in instalments are hand push

tractors, Sonalika tractors, China-made hand tractors, Kubota tractors and reconditioned tractors.

"We sold the farming implements in instalments to the local people to use machinery in their farm business. The local farmers bought farm equipment with three

instalments in two years and four instalments in three years. The local farmers can save their time when using the farming implements as well as solve the problem of lower supply in the agricultural labour market," said an official from Regional Agricultural Mechanization Department.

In fiscal 2016-2017, the Agriculture Mechanisation Department sold 52 hand-push tractors with four instalments in three years, 2,167 China made hand tractors with three instalments in two years, 19 Sonalika tractors with three instalments in two years, four Kubota tractors with three instalments in two years and 47 reconditioned tractors, according to Regional Agricultural Mechanization Department.—The Mirror



Farming implements for sale to local farmers in Sagaing Region.

PHOTO: THE MIRROR

Over 1,000 buses to arrive next month

Over 1,000 buses will arrive next month to be added to the YBS public bus line, said an official from Yangon Region Transport Authority (YRTA). The Yangon regional government has already entered into a contract with the Yutong Company from China to buy over 1,000 buses to run on the YBS bus line. The contract sign-

ing ceremony was held in Mingalar hall at Yangon region government office on Thursday.

"Yangon region government will buy new 1,000 buses from a Chinese company to supply buses to the YBS bus line. The buses will arrive in May," said Dr. Maung Aung, the secretary of Yangon Region Transport Authority.

Before buying these buses, the authorities had discussions with technical experts to ensure they are of good condition and up to the standards for public bus transport.

The purchasing process was delayed by a long process of negotiation on price and quality.—The Mirror

Government aims to earn US\$160 million from telecoms operators

THE government targets to earn US\$160 million for the use of 1800 MHz internet wavelength by four operators, according to the Ministry of Transport and Communications.

Previously, four internet service providers won the tender for use of 2600MHz, for which the government earned Ks2.74 billion from the operators for use of 2600MHz.

The telecom operators are Fortune International, Global Technology, Amara Communications and Yadanarbon telepost. The operators will provide the internet service in the regions.

Fortune International won the tender to use 2600 MHz with US\$6.09 million and Global Technology, with US\$7.03 million in territory 1 — Nay

Pyi Taw, Magway, Bago, Mon, Kayin and Taninthayi; Amara Communications won the tender by US\$95.81 million and Yadanarbon telepost by US\$83.44 million in territory 2 — Yangon, Ayeyawady and Rakhine; and Yadanarbon telepost won by US\$27.24 million and Amara Communications, by US\$24.55 million in territory 3 — Mandalay, Sagaing, Chin, Shan, Kachin and Kayah.

The telecommunications operators said that when they can use the 1800 MHz, 4G service will be widely available across the country. Currently, the four operators are providing 4G service using 900 MHz and 2100 MHz. The telecommunication operators introduced 4G services in 2016.—Emily

Dispute for compensation remains unsettled

OFFICIALS from Mohnyin Township Development Committee met the owners of rubber plantations to discuss payment of compensation for the losses occurring from the burning of garbage near Myoshaungkwin street in the east of Mohnyin on Monday.

An agreement was not reached during the discussion, said U Than Saung, the advocate for the rubber plantation owners, who suffered from

the outbreak of fire.

"We have negotiated with officials for compensation. Rubber plants are six years old. In the next two years, we can tap the rubber. You can think of our losses arising from the outbreak of fire," said U Than Saung.

Rubber growers are planting rubber trees on thousands of acres around Mohnyin Township, said an official from the District Agricultural Department.—Salai Mang Ngai

Licenses issued to makeshift oil refineries

LICENSES are being issued for makeshift oil refineries in Kyaukkamyauk village in Monywa township beginning in April in order to regulate the legal oil refining businesses, it is learnt.

The authorities issued only temporary licenses to 126 private businessmen last year. However, the Ministry of Electric Power and Energy is issuing the permanent licenses to 111 private businessmen beginning in April.

"We don't need to worry about being arrested any more

because the authorities are now issuing one-year licenses. We also don't need to worry about the authorities coming to inspect our businesses. The oil market does not change because of issuing of licenses. Crude oil is mainly supplied by Magway region. Kani, Kalay and Kyunhla Pale also supplied the crude oil, said a local businessman. The oil refined by Kyaukkamyauk village is mainly used for engines, trailers and small businesses. As the private businessmen are now holding licenses, they are making less profit now.—MMAL



Ministry of Electric Power and Energy issued the permanent licenses to private businessmen in April. PHOTO: MMAL

LOCAL Business

Exports by government sector dropped by \$1.7 billion from last FY

MYANMAR government exported US\$3.669 billion worth of products in fiscal year 2016-2017, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

When compared to the last financial year, the export value declined by \$1.713 billion during this FY. In the 2015-2016 financial year, the government sector exported agricultural and forest products, manufacturing goods, minerals, and other products worth \$5.382 billion to foreign trade partners.

During 2016-2017 FY, the sector sent \$386.879 million worth of minerals,

\$4.411 million worth of forestry products, \$0.043 million worth of agricultural products, \$2.98 billion worth of manufacturing goods and others worth of \$297 million to foreign importers.

Imports by the government sector also decreased to nearly \$948 million in FY2016-17 from \$2.544 billion in FY2015-16.

The trade authorities are putting forth continuous efforts to develop the country's economy by encouraging private entrepreneurs in export and import sectors.

Although export by the

government sector decreased last FY, the export value from the private sector rose by over \$2.197 billion than last FY. According to the official figures released by the ministry, the private exporters sold \$7.951 billion worth of goods including animal and marine products within last FY.

Myanmar continues to trade with Asian countries, ASEAN member states, island nations, Middle East countries and some European and African states, and other western countries mainly through by sea.—*Khine Khant*



PHOTO: GNLM/PHOE KHWAR

1,400 metric tonnes of peas exported

A total of 1,424.316 metric tonnes of various peas were exported abroad in fiscal year 2016-2017, fetching US\$1.39 billion, according to pea merchants.

Last year, Myanmar exported 1,214.991 metric tonnes of various peas, earning over US\$1.2 billion.

Eighteen varieties of peas are planted in the

country, with mung beans, green grams, pigeon peas and chick peas the most prevalent.

Peas play a key role in agricultural exports along with rice and paddy. The export of agricultural products this fiscal year hit US\$2.93 billion, which is up by US\$315.625 million compared to that of the previous year, according to the statistics of the Min-

istry of Commerce.

India is the main buyer of Myanmar's peas which also flows into the China market through border trade. India and Myanmar have reached a government to government (G to G) agreement to purchase peas. India will also provide technical assistance to Myanmar's pea growers.—*Mon Mon*

Trade using ITCs at borders reaches Ks18 billion

TRADE value with the Individual Trading Card (ITC) at border gates hit over Ks18 billion at the end of the 2016-2017 fiscal year, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

The Myawady border trade camp is reported to have the largest volume of trade with a value of more than Ks12 billion. According to the ministry's statistics, from 1 April of last year to 31 March of this year, the export value with ITCs was Ks1.187 billion, while the import value with

ITCs was Ks17.784 billion. Border trade values through ITCs were Ks892 million at Tamu trade camp; Ks867m at Muse border gate; Ks779m at Tachilek trade camp; over Ks32m at Lwejel border; over Ks2.211b at Kanpikete border gate; over Ks383m at Kawthoung border town; over Ks741m at Reed border trade camp; over Ks993m at Mawtaung; over Ks24m at Kengtung and over Ks29m at Maese trade camp.

From FY2012-2013

to date, the ministry issued a total of 1,264 ITCs to businesspersons for trade at borders. The Ministry of Commerce permitted 292 ITCs in FY2012-13; 261 cards in FY2013-14; 317 cards in FY2014-15; 146 cards in FY2015-16 and 248 cards in FY2016-17.

According to the ministry, an ITC holder may trade up to Ks15m in five days at border trade camps and import and export offices, with a trade value of Ks3m a day on average.—*Kyaw Swa*

THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

- Market Place by City Mart (6.5 Mile)
- Market Place by City Mart (Damasidi Road)
- City Mart (Aung San Stadium)
- City Mart (47th street)
- City Mart (Yankin)
- City Mart (China Town)
- City Mart (Myay Ni Gone)
- City Mart (FMI)
- City Mart (Junction Square)
- City Mart (Junction Maw Tin)
- City Mart (Sule Square)
- City Mart (Star City - Thanlyin)
- City Mart (Waizayandar)
- City Mart (Hledan)
- City Mart (Myanmar Plaza)
- Ocean North Point (9 mile)
- Ocean Shwegonedine



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ပတ်ဝန်းကျင်ပါရှိပါ

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Firefighters put out the fire at about 6pm in Shwelinban Industrial Zone in Hlinethaya Township.
PHOTO: ZAW GYI (PaNiTa)

Fire destroys buildings in Hlinethaya

A FIRE broke out at a garment factory in the Shwelinban Industrial Zone, Hlinethaya Township yesterday evening, resulting in a loss of two buildings and all the items inside.

"There was a blackout, and when the power came back on the transformer in front of the factory made a loud noise so we contacted the electricity office. An electrician arrived and while he was inspecting the transformer smoke began coming out from inside the building, the fire had started," said security guard U John Bayri.

The fire started at the Harmony Myanmar Garment factory on Banmaw Atwin Win street at about 4pm and spread to a nearby building. Officials, firefighters, and Red Cross members arrived with about 50 fire engines and managed to douse the fire at about 6pm.

Due to the fire in the two buildings, textiles and machinery were lost and some firefighters suffered minor injuries.

"This is a Level-4 incident and we received some cuts and bruises and 10 people were choking from the large volume of

smoke inside. We administered first aid to our firefighters who suffered from smoke inhalation and some had to be sent to hospitals," said Staff Officer (Grade 1) U Thein Win of the Yangon Region Red Cross.

The factory was temporarily closed since 8 April for the Thingyan holidays and only three security guards were present when the fire broke out.

Officials are investigating the cause of the fire. The cost of the damages will be assessed in accordance with the law. —Zaw Gyi (PaNiTa)

Wakema villagers to receive free eye surgery

PEOPLE with vision problems are set to receive free eye surgery at Sattkupa clinic of Wakema Township Association (Yangon Branch) for three days starting from 21 April. This is the 7th free surgery to be sponsored by Wakema Township Association.

A total of 4510 people from Wakema Township with vision

problems have already their eyes tested and 1083 their eyes operated from the 1st to 6th time treatment organized by Wakema Township Association Sattkupa free eye surgery team. And 2141 persons have been provided free of charge with the spectacles.

Wakema Township Associ-

ation will also provide meals to both patients and their attendants during the period of eye test and treatment. Those wishing to donate for eye operations can contact the chairman and secretary of Sakkhupala association and offer cash amounting to K 45,000 for an eye surgery. —Hlwan Thiha (IPRD)

Public safety awareness conducted in Seikphyu Township

MAGWAY Region's authorities has stepped up safety awareness for people during the Thingyan festival in attempts to prevent accidents.

The authorities has conducted public awareness program especially near the Yaw Creek, which is popular destination for the people during the four-day festival, to prevent crimes and accidents.

Members of the Myanmar Police Force have taken the preventive measures, educating the shops and revellers along the beach of the creek during the festival. —Soe Lin Naing (IPRD)



Revellers celebrating Thingyan Water Festival in Yaw Creek, Seikphyu Township. PHOTO: SOE LIN NAING

Armed robbery in Maungtaw

A MASKED man armed with knives and sticks entered the home of Sweyotarlaung, a resident of Tulatulaung village, on Thursday and robbed him of Ks 430,000

from a safe in the living room.

Sweyotarlaung has filed a lawsuit at the Kyainchaung Police Station on Friday. —Myanmar News Agency

Dual selfie camera phone popular

WITH the arrival of several telecommunications operators in the past few years, the smartphone market in Myanmar has grown rapidly, with smartphone users comprising almost half of mobile phone users, according to Forbes magazine.

Between 60 and 80 per cent of mobile phone users are using touch screen phones. With the increase in the number of smartphone users, consumer behaviour has changed, with the majority of the users choosing the high-quality smartphones.

In early days, consumers chose handsets that have better connection capability. But now they are turning to smartphones with high-quality cameras, fingerprint sensors and other features.

Realising this consumer behavior, handset manufacturers such as Samsung, Huawei, OPPO, Xiaomi and Vivo are of-

fering affordable smartphones with special features for high-end users.

Smartphones with a dual camera system have become popular, as the younger generation are increasingly sharing their photos on social website such as Facebook and Instagram.

The photo organising website Mylio.com said that there were 1.1 trillion digital photos taken in 2016. Of these photos, over 900 million photos were shot with mobile phones.

According to Telegraph, the British newspaper, mobile phone users from across the world are taking about one million selfies a day. This has prompted smartphone manufacturers to produce smartphones with dual selfie cameras systems, a feature formerly seen only in the most expensive devices. —The mirror

Over 400 navigation markers to be erected in April

OVER 400 navigation markers will be erected in April because of the changing of river courses in the Ayeyawady River.

Out of 420 navigation markers, there will be 290 in the water and 130 on the river bank, said an official from Mandalay Division 5 of Directorate of Water Resources and Improvement of River Systems.

Cargo vessels and passenger ships ply the Ayeyawady River every day, as this river is the main source of transport for commodities.

The navigation markers are being erected with an aim to en-

sure safe cruising in the river.

The department will erect 50 navigation markers in the water and 25 markers on the river bank on the Katha-Bamaw route, 70 markers in the water and 35 markers on the river bank on the Katha-Malae route, 50 markers in the water and 25 markers on the river bank on the Malae-Mandalay route, 50 markers in the water and 15 markers on the river bank on the Mandalay-Myinmu route, 70 markers in the water and 30 marks on the river bank on the Myinmu-Singu route. —Min Thu

Stimulants seized in Mayangon

A LOCAL anti-drug squad discovered 60 stimulant pills from a young man on Wednesday in Mayangon.

After interrogating Aung Htet, 29, the police searched the apartment of Aung Ko Ko Kyaw in Ward-1, Mayangon Township, and also found 3,022 stimulant pills, 0.00311 kilos of marijuana and 9 kilos of ice. Police also arrested Aung Ko Ko Kyaw, 30, and Thar Htet, 23, and Thet Naing Aung, 23, who were found at the apartment. Actions are being taken against them under the Anti-narcotic and Psychotropic Substance Law. —MPF

Viet Nam's rice exports continue to face challenges

HANOI — Vietnamese rice exports continued to face numerous challenges in the first quarter (Q1) of 2017 when the country has seen its rice exports sharply plunging since 2013, local media reported on Friday.

Official statistics showed that in the 2009-2013 period, Viet Nam was among the world's three biggest rice exporters. In 2012 in particular, Viet Nam surpassed Thailand to become the world's top rice exporter with over 7.7 million tons.

However, since 2013, the country's rice export volume has been on the downward trend, posting the seven-year low in 2016 with nearly 4.9 million tons of rice

sold abroad.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), in Q1, Viet Nam shipped around 1.28 million tons of rice to the world market, earning 566 million US dollars, down 18.1 per cent in volume and 17.3 per cent in value year-on-year.

The Q1 average rice export price hit 426 US dollars per ton, down 1.6 per cent year-on-year.

The decline in Viet Nam's rice exports was blamed on the decrease in its key traditional markets, including China and the Philippines, reported local Vietnam Economic Times (VET) on Friday.

Although China is seen as the "salvage" for Viet Nam's rice ex-

ports, and it continued to top Viet Nam's rice importers, Viet Nam saw negative signals in rice exports to China in Q1 as China lifted its rice standards imported from ASEAN countries, including Viet Nam.

Accordingly, since 1 January 2017, only 22 Vietnamese companies have been qualified to export rice to China.

In addition, Thailand is discharging its rice inventory, which has lowered global rice prices, while the Philippines, one of the key markets of Vietnamese rice, recently announced that it would stop rice imports to protect the domestic production, said the Viet Nam Food Association (VFA) on local CaFeF online newspaper on

Friday.

Addressing the possible inventory of Vietnamese rice amid the sluggish market situation and the current peak harvest time for Winter-Spring crops in the country's southern Mekong Delta, VFA has urged local firms to develop the domestic market by building high-quality rice brands to meet with demands of domestic consumers as well as reduce the export pressure.

To facilitate the rice branding, VFA proposed the Vietnamese government to reduce the value added tax imposed on local firms from five percent to zero percent in the next 5-7 years, reported VET.—Xinhua



Moon Jae-in, a presidential candidate of South Korea's biggest Minjoo Party. PHOTO: XINHUA

South Korean presidential candidates have heated discussions on 1st TV debate

SEOUL — Five major South Korean presidential candidates had heated discussions Thursday in the first TV debate, with less than a month left before an early presidential election.

The presidential by-election is scheduled for 9 May as former President Park Geun-hye was impeached on 10 March and arrested three weeks later over corruption allegations. The three-week election campaign period is to kick off next week.

The first debate was centered on security issues as geopolitical risks escalated following the news reports that the USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier and its accompanying battle-ships re-routed and headed to the Korean Peninsula.

The rare re-routing of the US super carrier boosted worry here about a possible US air-strike on nuclear facilities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

All of the South Korean presidential contenders agreed to the importance of blocking any military conflict on the peninsula, but they showed subtle difference in ways to resolve a possible security crisis.

Moon Jae-in of the biggest Minjoo Party, a frontrunner in recent opinion polls, said he would immediately have a phone call with US President Donald Trump to make sure his firm opposition to any unilateral pre-emptive strike on the DPRK without South Korea's consent.

And then, he would ask the DPRK through various channels to immediately stop any provocation, which can lead to the US attack, while cooperating with China in the meantime.

Ahn Cheol-soo of the centrist People's Party, a runner-up in opinion surveys, said he would first have phone calls with US and Chinese leaders, before announcing a statement to ask the DPRK to stop any provocations.—Xinhua



South Korea policemen stand guard at an entrance of a Samsung Group's building in Seoul, South Korea, on 14 April 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

South Korea police says no explosives found at Samsung Life HQ

SEOUL — South Korean authorities found no explosives at the headquarters of Samsung Life Insurance Co Ltd in Seoul, police said on Friday.

A police official told Reuters that officers dispatched to the Samsung Life building in Seocho, a southern district of Seoul, concluded there were no explosives at 1:38 pm (0438 GMT).

The building had been evacuated earlier in the day following a report that explosives were inside.—Reuters

Foreigners in Shanghai FTZ have easier access to China 'green cards'

SHANGHAI — The latest benefit of the Shanghai Free Trade Zone (FTZ) is to its non-Chinese residents, who can apply for permanent residence in China simply with a letter of recommendation from the FTZ authorities.

According to the social security bureau of Shanghai Pudong New Area, the new policy will take effect in mid-April, and apply to both the applicants and their spouses and minor children.

The move was made following 10 rules related to China's entry and exit policy announced by the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), which authorize Shanghai

Zhangjiang National Innovation Demonstration Zone and Shanghai FTZ to recommend high-level foreign staff for permanent residence permits, Chinese "green cards".

Those with permanent residence will enjoy the same rights as Chinese citizens in areas such as investment, housing purchases and schooling.

The reform is to support Shanghai's ambition of becoming a world sci-tech innovation hub.

Those who qualify for the fast track application include well-known award winners or high-level talent scheme finalists, such as Nobel laureates, the Chinese gov-

ernment "Friendship Award" and other world-class, national and municipal awards; people in charge of Shanghai FTZ-based national laboratories, engineering laboratories, foreign investment R&D institutions, and top-level talent from innovation and start-up enterprises.

A Chinese green card is one of the hardest to obtain with no more than 7,000 issued since 2004, when the policy was introduced. That compares with about 600,000 foreigners currently living in China, and the application procedure is rather complicated.

In 2016, 1,576 foreigners became permanent Chinese residents,

an increase of 163 per cent on the previous year, according to the MPS.

China has made huge progress in easing its residence and entry policies for foreigners since September 2015, which has helped attract more talent from overseas as well as boosting international exchanges and the economy, according to a ministry statement.

Shanghai saw six times more permanent residence applications from foreigners and their families in 2016 from 2015. The number of such applications in Beijing last year increased 426 per cent.—Xinhua

Indian PM Modi committed to inclusive growth

NEW DELHI — Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi Friday said he is committed to building an inclusive India "of Babasaheb Ambedkar's dreams" as he inaugurated thermal power units in western city of Nagpur to pay tributes on the social reformer's 126th birth anniversary.

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, popularly known as Babasaheb, was one of India's tallest lead-

ers — the architect of what is probably the world's longest constitution, a legal scholar, a spiritual leader and, most importantly, the undisputed leader of Dalits — who had campaigned hard against social discrimination against "untouchables."

"None would be prouder of a strong, inclusive and developed India than Babasaheb. Creating an India that he would be proud

of is our aim. Fulfilling the vision of Dr. Ambedkar for developed & inclusive India," Modi posted on Twitter from his personal account.

Later, inaugurating new units of Koradi thermal power station in Nagpur as part of his tributes to Ambedkar, Modi stressed the importance of renewable energy sector, describing it as a great vitality in the 21st century. "One

of the sectors towards which we are devoting significant effort is the renewable energy sector," he said, while addressing a gathering.

On affordable housing, the prime minister said: "Each and every Indian must have his or her own house. And that house must be equipped with electricity, water and other facilities." —Xinhua

Opinion

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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.

Safety needs of the people come first

Aye Min Soe

WHILE many people are celebrating Thingyan, police are on full alert across the country, seizing weapons and bottles in order to prevent crimes, cracking down on reckless driving and tightening security and safety measures at lakes and reservoirs to prevent drowning.

Awareness-raising and educational campaigns were conducted nationwide before the water festival and traffic police have also struggled to curb drunk driving, which surges during the holiday week.

Meanwhile, traffic police have stepped up efforts to check vehicles for safety and roadworthiness around the clock to prevent road accidents. Members of the Myanmar Fire Service Department have also been stationed at lakes with full gear since the beginning of the water festival to prevent drownings.

The nationwide death toll for the water festival last year reached 32, while there were 235 people injured over the five day period of the festival. Thirty-four cases of traffic accidents were reported during the festival, resulting in 14 deaths and 176 injuries.

There were 16 reported deaths as a result of other incidents, mostly drowning, during the festival.

During the five day festival, officials said that more than 50 per cent of patients treated at the hospital were those injured in road accidents and fights while under the influence of alcohol.

Fighting under the influence of alcohol, traffic accidents and drowning are common during the four-day Thingyan festival.

Myanmar Police Force did not allow revelers to use or carry bottles and sent those who were intoxicated back to their homes. The number of cases dropped last year thanks to the cooperation of the people.

Yangon Region Police Force has deployed 60% of its force for 2017 water festival by cooperating with its partner organizations like general administration department, fire service department and red cross society.

Myanmar Police Force, which were appreciated last year for its achievement in the last year's festival, has focused on service than arresting since last year, providing full security to all water throwing pandals.

Mine clearance in pandals are carried out twice a day; in the morning and afternoon.

Theoretically, awareness-raising and education can be seen as the key in reducing the number of road accidents and deaths during the festival.

However, without the cooperation of the people, we cannot solve the problem. Public campaigns alone will not eradicate the deaths and injuries. We hope that the country will achieve success this year again in reducing accidents during the New Year festival thanks to the cooperation of the people. Let's celebrate Thingyan "together with the people".

How Myanmar New Year Day of 17th April became a blessed day for the people on the Earth?

U Khin Maung Phone Ko

THERE follow suites with the heading are other questions like where?, why?, when?, and how?

Where: Myanmar New Year celebration and its style commences in the first empire of Bagan in 11th century A.D., as well as in the South-East Asia by King Anawrahta who had exported Theravada Buddhism, after the conquest of Thaton, to the region in the South-East Asia Peninsula, except Viet Nam, attempted even to the Yunnan, the south west of China. The cultural aspects of the basic celebration are still being practised in Myanmar as well as in that region. The spectre of British colonial wedge put in some tribes of Myanmar was obviously found in the past. The colonial rulers encouraged some tribes to celebrate a new year of their own date, avoiding the one by Bamar (means one ethnic race) not Myanmar (all races) and Buddhist way. Some races were encouraged to celebrate a new year in December as majority of them are Christians. But in facts Jesus was not born in December nor on the 25th day of the month. In the Holy Bible, one can find the exact month (September), when Jesus was born by a study in the Old and New testaments scriptures of the Holy Bible.

Why: To make aware the wedge of the colonial ruler, we can analyse the way how Myanmar, not Bamar, it New Year is celebrated. The first month of Myanmar calendar is April, that

is comparable to the Jewish first month in March-April. It is not unusual as both nations are based on a lunar calendar and both are the agricultural countries. But what is common to both culture is that the first month is the sun coming back from the southern hemisphere has crossed past the Equator or the Meridian. In ancient time in Myanmar, New Year days were moving now and then, as it is a practice for the lunar calendar (Ref 16, p348 of The Burman by Schwae Yoe). But it was fixed on the 17th of April (the first month of Myanmar calendar) as Myanmar New Year in the modern time of post British colonial era by our first democratic government for reason unknown to the author.

[Note!!! The story behind the Seventeenth day of the first month of calendar is as follows in the Holy Bible:

In previous sub-section in my book, 1.02 Post Creation of the earth by God, including the Land for Myanmar, we have read that the creator God (Yahweh) destroyed all evil living humans and animals except Noah and family of eight and some created animals that came to the Ark. The ark rested on the seventh month of Nisan (the 7th month of the old international calendar), on the seventeenth day of the 7th month upon the mountains of Ararat (now inside Turkey).]

When: God instituted a calendar, change explained in Exodus12:2 (NIV), and the sev-



There days of splashing water with the in the past, traditionally, make-shift bamboo-poles and coconut leaves tents build around dwelling places almost three to four days there.

enth month Nisan became the first month for Jewish calendar (March-April of earlier existed international calendar). It turns out that the same day the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat (turkey) is the 17th day of Nisan (Genesis 8:4NIV), which just happens to be three days and three nights after the 14th of (the first month of new calendar) or old month of Nisan (Exodus 12:6NIV), (it is recorded as the date for future Passover feast or the independent day of slavery of Jewish people from the Pharos, the king of Egypt). On the Passover day of feast, about two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ was crucified, died on the cross. So, that would mean that in prophetic illustration, God caused the ark to rest from the flood (atonement of His wrath on the evil world) on the same day that after three nights and three days, that Jesus would rise from the dead or

grave, to save mankind from the future wrath upon a Christ-rejecting world. Coincidence? Highly unlikely.)

Let us take this view that any races can celebrate it. It is not only meant for Buddhists or Bamars, it is for all Myanmar races to celebrate new year meaningfully. However, people are free to embrace to be of benefit to their religious practices. Most of the Asian religious new years involve asking for forgiveness, paying respect to seniors and cleansing of sin by washing with (or throwing) water or it is what we called water throwing festival. Nowadays in Myanmar, about ten days are marked as New year holidays in April. There is a traditional belief in Myanmar that king of spirit from the sky came down that time with a golden record book of life to record those who do meritorious deed of now and before. For some, they take

greater care not to do evil things during this time, but to do only good deeds.

How: There days of splashing water with the in the past, traditionally, make-shift bamboo-poles and coconut leaves tents build around dwelling places almost three to four days there. It is like God commanded Jews to remember how they lived as slave in Egypt in the tent. Jewish first month celebration of Passover as commanded by God to Moses in the Bible, after they were taken out from the 430 years of slavery in Egypt, some three and a half thousand years ago, The Passover is to celebrate on the fourteenth day of the first month, the day Jewish people came out of Egypt, and another seven days to eat the bread without yeast or the unleavened bread made without yeast. (Exodus 12:3; & 13:3).

The time of Myanmar New year of lunar calendar in some year falls on or a day before or after the Resurrection Sunday of Jesus Christ when He came out alive from the grave. Notably, this auspicious year 2017, our new year day is on Monday 17th day of the first month after Jesus Christ's resurrection on Sunday 16th April. This Sunday day in the tradition of the Christianity, is recognized as the first Sunday after full moon, when the sun came back to the northern hemisphere or the March equinox. Then eventually counts backward to the Good Friday which is on 14th April. But, on 16th is the resurrection Sunday, during our celebration of our new year the festival from 12 to 16 in 2017.

Unknown to its source, there is a special rice ball eat at the time for Myanmar New Year. It is from

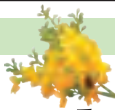
the Chinese origin of food, that a rice paste (or Mont-hunt) rolled with black gula or toddy sweet (or black Htan-nyet from Kyauk Padaung town in Myanmar). What is more interesting is, the way it is cooked. That is interesting that a ball thus make is drop in the boiling water and it dips down below. When it is cooked, this ball will come up on the surface of hot water. - (In Chinese, this food is known as "Tang Yuen"). This food represents the first before it is cooked submerged under water, as sign of death. Then after it is cooked comes up on the hot water, as a sign of alive or depict a likeness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This food is not new to Chinese food culture, but the meaning of it and time of celebrating the Myanmar New Year is a fantastically meaningful. I have learnt that the Chinese and Japanese also eat this food around the New Year time. With this celebration, the British colonial power or its cronies or anyone wants to create the other month of celebration of New Year, for the Christian in different season such as in December, is a wedge push in the crack among Myanmar races.

Myanmar is now celebrating a blessed new year with a resurrected life as Jesus Christ, moving forward to the new dawn of the Democratic Federal Republic of 4th Great nation in the world. My sincere prayer is for all people & races of Myanmar become united Myanmar to build our great nation strong, united and prosperous similar to the first Myanmar Empire of Bagan in the region and the world.

The writer U Khin Maung Phone Ko is formerly assistant lecturer in The Rangoon Institute of Technology now Rangoon technological University, Yangon, Myanmar and lecturer in the Singapore Polytechnic and senior lecturer at the Nanyang Institute of Technology and the Nanyang Technological University.

POEM:



Life is Padauk

I. Happy New Year, Happy Thingyan

Due to the calendar, It is one year older. when Myanmar New Year, Thingyan water festival is coming near, we all Myanmar feel really fresh and excited reminiscing the past golden days. Everybody is happy and joyful to participate in every possible way in the water party. You can see the smiles on everyone's face and joys in their hearts along with the new year mood. Especially we are proud of our National flower "Padauk" which has bright golden yellow color. It has sweet fragrance spread in the air up to the sky. Padauk always grows back and blossoms its flowers every Myanmar New Year although people cut Padauk trees and picked flowers. You can see the padauk in the vase in front of Buddha statue and on top of the hair on everywoman young or old. Padauk can be seen like the golden carpet covering the ground.

II. Padauk is the symbol of love

During the celebration of Myanmar New Year, everybody wants to sing, dance, smile, cry...I can't express in words. It's so amazing. Those are our traditional and memorable celebration, also famous all over the world. As you can feel the sweet fragrance of Padauk, also feel the breeze passing along with the song and lovely music. Everywhere you can feel the cold, clean and clear water pouring with Love and Happiness.

III. Oh! Dear...,

We are never ever older year by year. I would like to say, we feel fresh, younger and stronger enough to face the many more Happy New Years.

Hla Min

POEM:

Thingyan

Thingyan, four days of pouring cool water with goodwill, good wishes, on one another to ease the heat of Myanmar Summer, for body and mind to be symbolically cleaner, to usher in mid April, the Myanmar New Year, a happy traditional festival of water.

The water throwing 'Pandals' whence pretty damsels on stage entertains the revelers with songs and dances drenching them to the musical refrains

Thingyan meritorious deeds are commonplace donors giving 'Saduditha' feeds to the populace 'Shinbyus' of young boys to the religious order washing by young people of hair of the elder setting free fishes in lakes & rivers in the new year.

Padauk trees with the first April showers gloriously laden with their golden flowers wondrous scenes of gold and green the most refreshing sights to be seen. Padauks are said to bloom once a year only even then on one auspicious day supposedly, sought by women folks, young and older to offer to the Buddha on their altar, and a spray to deck their hair.

Thingyan, for Myanmar is a happy occasion for sharing by all goodwill of the season with virtuous deeds and merry making and wising in the new year, peace everlasting.

Lokethar

I Pray to God for Nationwide & Global Peace!

Khin Maung Oo (Tada-U)

MY native place is a small town named "Tada-U", situated in Mandalay Region, Central Myanmar. It is not a well-known area. But most of our people know its name the moment that they hear an ancient poetic line, beginning with "Yellowish Betel Leaf with soft texture from Tada-U"[Tada-U ga Kun Nu War]. In the locality there ceased to exist the age-old practice of growing betel, for long, which was often likened to a kind of ambrosia, and in those days it seemed to have been exclusively planted for the consumption of the royal court circle and the well-to-do. It needs to be irrigated well. The town got its name because it was built at the

head of the bridge, "Maha Zeya Pahta" by Prince Mg Oh. The Tada-U international airport made our small town more noticeable than before. When I was a boy, we always had to pass the airport site-to-be on our way to Kyaukse, our district town, by bus. The location was a barren area, fit for airplanes to land and take off. Far as my town is a few miles away from Mandalay, it was not easily accessible to the city, in the past. There commuted a local train between Mandalay and Tada-U three times a day. We could not rely upon it because it very often failed to enter the railway-station on time. And it sometimes took us three or four hours to reach our destination. Our poor local train

had to wait for its fellows to go past, as most of the trains used to share the same track alternately, giving them priorities. But it was nearly always congested with passengers as there were, with no direct bus lines plying straight between Tada-U and Mandalay. Instead, we had to go first to 'Mee-thway-taik' village [maybe charcoal shed upon literal translation] to cross the river Irrawaddy and 'Oh-htoke-tan' village to cross the river Myitnge. We had to take pony-carts to get there less than an hour. From there we could proceed to Mandalay by No.8 bus line or buses plying between Mandalay and Sagaing. Near these two places are historically renowned buildings; one is the "Maha Atula" monastery [Mai Nu Okkyang] and the oth-

er 'Sin Kyone' Fort. Not far from the former one, or rather on the other side of the Myitnge river is the famous 'Thapayyadan' Fort. Here I want to say that I am not dilating on the outskirts, but just to highlight inconvenience in travelling in a car and concurrently to be able to imagine the grandeur of an old city in the past. By now, it will be obvious that there once used to be public reliance upon rails.

My visit coincided with Myanmar Thingyan Festival. Compared to festivals in cities, festival revelers were sparsely populated. In the town, Thingyan entertainment pandals are full of audience. In daytime, the elders went to monasteries to keep Sabbath. Though they are not living in the backwater of news and informa-

tion, they seem to be free from worries, anxieties and political concerns. They get used to today's social website and face-book, they seldom generally use hate speech. They, especially youths know internal and international affairs through journal, facebook and TV. They are not the ones who lack political knowledge, and they discuss and criticize political affairs in groups. They know rule of law has been breached in the country and they are well convinced of the need of the emergence of reliable constitution. What they mostly talk included performances and activities of parliamentarians in their constituency, bribery and corruption in their town. Remarkably enough, I found young promising literary enthusiasts and historians' emergence in a small town. It is heartening for me to see most youths in the area taking an active part in social activities.

In fact, being able to live under these conditions has been at-

Though they are not living in the backwater of news and information, they seem to be free from worries, anxieties and political concerns.

tributed to peace and stability in the area. They enthusiastically took part in dialogues on various matters, but wonderfully enough, they failed to discuss matters on the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in some warring areas of the country. Old people managed to go to monasteries and eke out their living freely. These are effects of peace and stability. Youths enjoy chatting this and that. This also results from peace and stability. Meanwhile, our people including children and women are being displaced, running for their lives. While we are savoring the taste of freedom, they lost their future, as if groping in the dark. Now, we are performing meritorious deeds and performances during Thingyan Festival. Thanks to these wholesome deeds, we would like to have similar "Boomerang Effect." I pray to God for nationwide & global peace on this auspicious occasion of Myanmar New Year.



The GBU-43/B, also known as the Massive Ordnance Air Blast, detonates during a test at Elgin Air Force Base, Florida, US, November 21, 2003 in this handout photo provided on 13 April 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

US 'mother of all bombs' killed 36 Islamic State militants in Afghanistan

KABUL — As many as 36 suspected Islamic State militants were killed in Afghanistan when the United States dropped "the mother of all bombs," one of the largest non-nuclear devices ever unleashed in combat, the Afghan defence ministry said on Friday.

Thursday's strike came as US President Donald Trump dispatches his first high-level delegation to Kabul, amid uncertainty about his plans for the nearly 9,000 American troops stationed in Afghanistan.

The deaths have not been independently verified, but ministry spokesman Dawlat Waziri said no civilians were harmed in the massive blast that targeted a network of caves and tunnels.

"No civilian has been hurt and only the base, which Daesh used to launch attacks in other parts of the province, was destroyed," Waziri said in a statement.

He was using an Arabic term that refers to Islamic State, which has established a small stronghold in eastern Afghanistan and launched deadly attacks on the capital, Kabul.

The 21,600-pound (9,797-kg) GBU-43 bomb, was dropped from an MC-130 aircraft in the Achin district of the eastern province of Nangarhar bordering Pakistan, Pentagon

spokesman Adam Stump said on Thursday.

The device, also known as the "mother of all bombs," is a GPS-guided munition that had never before been used in combat since its first test in 2003, when it produced a mushroom cloud visible from 20 miles (32 km) away.

The bomb's destructive power, equivalent to 11 tonnes of TNT, pales in comparison with the relatively small atomic bombs dropped on Japan at the end of World War II, which had blasts equivalent to between 15,000 and 20,000 tonnes of TNT.

At a village about 3 miles (5 km) from the remote, mountainous area where the bomb was dropped, witnesses said the ground shook, but homes and shops appeared unaffected.

"Last night's bomb was really huge, when it dropped, everywhere, it was shaking," said a resident, Palstar Khan, adding that he believed no civilians were in the area hit.

Other residents said they saw militants climbing up and down the mountain every day, making occasional visits to the village.

"They were Arabs, Pakistanis, Chinese and local insurgents coming to buy from shops in the bazaar," said resident Raz Mohammad.

On Friday, the village

was swarming with Afghan and international troops, as helicopters and other aircraft flew overhead.

The strike was part of a joint operation by Afghan and international troops, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's office said in a statement.

"Afghan and foreign troops closely coordinated this operation and were extra cautious to avoid any civilian casualties," it said. Former Afghan president Hamid Karzai condemned the use of the weapon on Afghan soil.

"This is not the war on terror, but the inhuman and most brutal misuse of our country as testing ground for new and dangerous weapons," he said on social media network Twitter.

The Taliban condemned the use of the bomb, saying in a statement, "Using this massive bomb cannot be justified and will leave a material and psychological impact on our people."

American officials said the bomb had been positioned for possible use in Afghanistan for "some time" since the administration of former president Barack Obama.

The United States has steadily intensified its air campaign against Islamic State and Taliban militants in Afghanistan, with the Air Force deploying nearly 500 weapons in the first three months of 2017,

up from 300 in the corresponding 2016 period.

Thursday's strike was not the first time Islamic State fighters have been targeted by heavy American bombardment in Nangarhar, where a US special forces soldier was killed battling militants a week ago.

Last year massive B-52 bombers operating out of Qatar flew at least two missions in Afghanistan for the first time since 2006.

Such aircraft can carry as much as 70,000 pounds (32,000 kg) of bombs, missiles, or other weapons on each mission.

In March, US forces conducted 79 "counterterrorism strikes" against Islamic State targets in Nangarhar, killing as many as 200 militants, according to the US military command in Kabul.

American military officials estimate there are around 600 to 800 Islamic State fighters in Afghanistan, mostly in Nangarhar, but also in the neighbouring province of Kunar.

The United Nations has raised concerns that the American air campaign is swelling civilian casualties in Afghanistan.

Last year air strikes by the military coalition caused at least 127 civilian deaths and 108 injuries, up from 103 deaths and 67 injuries in 2015, the UN says.—Reuters

NEWS IN BRIEF

Turkey could suspend EU migrant deal if no progress on visas — Foreign Minister

ANKARA — Turkey could re-evaluate or suspend all agreements under the migrant deal with the European Union if the bloc does not give a positive response on visa-free travel for Turks, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Friday.

In an interview with broadcaster A Haber, Cavusoglu said the migrant deal and visa liberalisation were a package, and added it was Turkey's right to re-evaluate or suspend these if one element was not fulfilled.—Reuters

Kremlin calls for all sides to show restraint over Nord Korea tensions

MOSCOW — The Kremlin said on Friday it favoured diplomatic methods of resolutions of all crises, including on the Korean peninsula, amid mounting tensions between Washington and Pyongyang over North Korea's nuclear programme.

"We call all countries for restraint, we call all the countries to refrain from any actions that could amount to provocative steps", Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told a conference call with reporters.—Reuters

Turkey detains Islamic State suspects over planned attacks — Anadolu

ISTANBUL — Police in Istanbul have detained five Islamic State suspects, some of whom were believed to be planning an attack in Turkey ahead of Sunday's referendum, the state-run Anadolu news agency said on Friday.

Anadolu said three of the detained people were suspected of planning an attack in the name of Islamic State. Two others, including one of Tajik origin, had travelled to "conflict zones" and carried out operations for the jihadist group. Islamic State has been blamed for at least half a dozen attacks on civilian targets in Turkey in recent months, including a New Year's Day attack on Istanbul's Reina nightclub which killed 39 people.—Reuters

New arms race risk increases as US drops largest non-nuclear bomb in Afghanistan: Russian senator

MOSCOW — The US military's recent use of the largest non-nuclear bomb in Afghanistan poses a threat to incite a new round of arms race, a Russian senator said Friday.

"The US test of the new bomb in Afghanistan is an attempt to establish the world dominance with an element of a military threat which may initiate a new round of arms race and increase tension in the world," Igor Morozov, a member of the Federation Council's Foreign Affairs Committee, was quoted by RIA news agency as saying. Russia should initiate a discussion about the incident at the United Nations (UN) Security Council, he said.—Xinhua

China welcomes improved Russia-US ties

BEIJING — China welcomes the continuous improvement of the Russia-US relations, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson said Friday.

"Improved ties between Russia and the United States will be good news to the world," Geng Shuang told a daily news briefing.

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson visited Russia this week, and both sides have remarked on bilateral ties recently. Geng said that a healthy and stable development of bilateral relations between the US and Russia, which are both influential global powers and permanent members of the UN Security Council, will help maintain world peace and stability and respond to global challenges.—Xinhua

Iraqi Christians return to ransacked town with fear and hope

QARAQOSH, (Iraq) — With Islamic State expelled, Iraqi Christians are trickling back to the ransacked town of Qaraqosh, beset by anxiety for their security and yet hopeful they can live in friendship with Muslims of all persuasions.

The town, about 20 km (12 miles) from the battlefield with Islamic State in the northern city of Mosul, shows why Christians have mixed feelings about the future of their ancient community.

In the desecrated churches of Qaraqosh, Christians are busy removing graffiti daubed by the Sunni Muslim militants during two and a half years of control — only for new slogans to have appeared, scrawled by Shi'ite members of the Iraqi forces fighting street to street with the jihadists in Mosul.

But nearby a shopkeeper is doing a brisk trade selling Dutch beer, Greek ouzo and several whisky brands to Christians, Sunnis, Shi'ites and Kurds alike, with this kind of commerce perhaps offering a glimpse of how Iraq's fractured communities could again live together peacefully.

Encouraged by security checkpoints and patrols by a volunteer force, up to 10 Christian families have returned to what used to be the minority's biggest community in Iraq until Islamic State seized it in 2014.

Iraqi forces pushed the group out of Qaraqosh in October, part of a six-month offensive to retake Mosul. But residents are worried that the Shi'ite slogans signal a new kind of sectarian division.

"Oh Hussein" is daubed in red on the wall of a church torched



Empty streets and destroyed buildings are seen in the town of Qaraqosh, south of Mosul, Iraq, on 12 April 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

earlier by Islamic State, praising the hero of Shi'ite Muslims who was martyred 1,300 years ago.

"We are afraid of this, of tensions," said Girgis Youssif, a church worker. "We want to live in peace and demand security," said Youssif, who returned after fleeing to Erbil, about 60 km away in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Shi'ites in the Iraqi government forces and paramilitary groups, mostly from further south in the country, have scribbled such slogans on buildings all over Mosul too.

Soldiers have also hoisted the flag of Ali in the city and on their on military vehicles. Shi'ites regard Ali, the son-in-

law of the Prophet Mohammed, and the prophet's grandson Hussein as his true successors.

Two Shi'ite flags also fly over Qaraqosh.

Most Sunnis, who are the dominant community in Mosul, have shrugged off the Shi'ite slogans as the work of a handful of religious zealots but Christians take them as a signal that their future remains uncertain.

"Of course we are afraid of such signs," said Matti Yashou Hatti, a photographer who still lives in Erbil with his family. "We need international protection."

Those families who have returned to Qaraqosh — once home

to 50,000 people — are trying to revive Christian life dating back two millennia. However, most stay only two or three days at a time to refurbish their looted and burnt homes.

"We want to come back but there is no water and power," said Mazam Nesin, a Christian who works for a volunteer force based in Qaraqosh but has left his family behind in Erbil.

By contrast, displaced Muslims have been flocking back to markets in eastern Mosul since Islamic State's ejection from that part of the city, despite the battle raging in the Old City across the Tigris river which is the militants' last stronghold.—Reuters

Evacuation of Syrian rebels, Shi'ite villagers begins under swap deal

BEIRUT — Buses began evacuating hundreds of people from two rebel-besieged Shi'ite villages in northwest Syria on Friday and rebels began to leave two towns near Damascus with their families, under a deal between the government and insurgents.

Similar agreements have been reached in recent months, with Syrian rebels leaving areas long-besieged by President Bashar al-Assad's forces, sometimes in exchange for Shi'ite residents moving from towns surrounded by the mostly Sunni insurgents.

After six years of fighting a civil war, with help from Russia and Shi'ite allies Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah, Damascus has negotiated the deals from a position of strength.

The opposition says the deals amount to forced demographic change and deliberate displacement of Assad's enemies away from the main cities of western Syria. Early on Friday, residents of the mostly Shi'ite villages of al-Foua and Kefraya, besieged by rebel forces in the insurgents' northwestern Idlib province stronghold, left on dozens of buses, the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said.

The buses headed for government-held areas of Aleppo, the Observatory said. Meanwhile, buses carrying rebel fighters and their families left the government-besieged town of Madaya near Damascus and close to the Lebanese border, the Observatory and a pro-Damascus military media unit reported.—Reuters

In historic referendum, Turkey's Erdogan faces his biggest test

ISTANBUL — Much like the vast mosque he has commissioned atop one of Istanbul's highest hills, President Tayyip Erdogan's supporters hope a referendum on Sunday will be a crowning achievement in his drive to reshape Turkey.

The vote, in which millions of Turks will decide whether to replace their parliamentary democracy with an all-powerful presidency, may bring the biggest change in their system of governance since the modern Turkish republic was founded on the ashes of the Ottoman Empire almost a century ago.

The outcome will have repercussions beyond Turkish shores.

Never in recent times has Turkey, one of only two Muslim members of the NATO military alliance, been so central to world affairs, from the fight against Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, to

Europe's migrant crisis and Ankara's shifting allegiances with Moscow and Washington.

The campaign has split the country of 80 million down the middle, its divisions spilling over to the large Turkish diaspora in Europe. Erdogan has accused European leaders of acting like Nazis for banning rallies on security grounds, while his opponents overseas say they have been spied on.

Erdogan's fervent supporters see his drive for greater powers as the just reward for a leader who has put Islamist values back at the core of public life, championed the pious working classes and delivered airports, hospitals and schools.

Opponents fear a lurch towards authoritarianism under a president they see as addicted to power and intolerant of dissent, chipping away at the secular



A billboard carrying a picture of Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and a slogan that reads: 'Yes. It is for the people to speak and to decide' is seen on a building ahead of the constitutional referendum in Istanbul, Turkey, on 13 April 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

foundations laid by modern Turkey's founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, and taking it ever further from Western values on democracy and free speech.

"Within the past 15 years

he has achieved everything once considered impossible, unthinkable for Turks, be it bridges, undersea tunnels, roads, airports," said Ergin Kulunk, 65, a civil engineer who heads an Istanbul

mosque association that is financing the new mosque on the city's Camlica Hill.

"The biggest quality of the Chief is that he touches people. I saw him at a recent gathering literally shaking almost 1,000 hands. He's not doing that for politics. It comes from the heart," he said, as Erdogan's voice boomed from a television in the corner, broadcasting one of his daily campaign rallies.

In Kulunk's office on Camlica Hill, once a hunting ground for the Ottoman well-to-do and now a popular viewing point, a signed picture of Erdogan hung on the wall next to portraits of Ataturk and Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid.

But for Erdogan's opponents — including secularist liberals, left-leaning Kurds and even some nationalists — his tightening grip poses an almost existential threat.—Reuters

CIA chief calls WikiLeaks a 'hostile intelligence service'

WASHINGTON — CIA Director Mike Pompeo on Thursday called WikiLeaks a "hostile intelligence service," using his first public speech as spy agency chief to denounce leakers who have plagued US intelligence.

Pompeo, in an address at the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank, called WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange "a fraud" and "a coward."

"It is time to call out WikiLeaks for what it really is, a non-state hostile intelligence service often abetted by state actors like Russia," Pompeo said.

He said Russia's GRU military intelligence service used Wikileaks to distribute material hacked from Democratic National Committee computers during the 2016 US presidential election.

US intelligence agencies have concluded that Russia stole the emails and took other actions to tilt the election in favour of eventual winner Donald Trump, a Republican, against Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton.

Pompeo and President Donald Trump, who chose him to head the CIA, have



Central Intelligence Agency Director Mike Pompeo speaks at The Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, US, on 13 April. PHOTO: REUTERS

not always been so critical of WikiLeaks. During a campaign rally last October, Trump praised the group for releasing hacked emails from the DNC by saying, "I love Wikileaks."

In July, Pompeo, then a Republican member of the House of Representatives, mentioned it in a Twitter post referring to claims that the DNC had slanted the candidate-selection process to favour Clinton. "Need further proof that the fix was in

from Pres. Obama on down? BUSTED: 19,252 Emails from DNC Leaked by Wikileaks."

WikiLeaks has published secret documents from the US government and others and says its mission is to fight government secrecy and promote transparency. Pompeo said it has "encouraged its followers to find jobs at CIA in order to obtain intelligence."

Assange has been holed up in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London since 2012, after taking refuge

there to avoid extradition to Sweden over allegations of rape, which he denies.

Two of Assange's lawyers and a Wikileaks spokesman did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Pompeo's remarks.

Pompeo's speech on Thursday follows a series of damaging leaks of highly sensitive CIA and National Security Agency material.

In March, WikiLeaks published thousands of pages of internal CIA discussions that revealed hacking techniques the agency had used against iPhones, Android devices and other targets.

Pompeo also had harsh words for Edward Snowden, the former National Security Administration contractor who downloaded thousands of documents revealing some of the electronic eavesdropping agency's most sensitive programs and shared them with journalists. "More than a thousand foreign targets, people, groups, organizations, more than a thousand of them changed or tried to change how they communicated as a result of the Snowden disclosures," Pompeo said. "That number is staggering."—Reuters

United passenger dragged from plane has concussion, broken nose — lawyer

CHICAGO — The United Airlines (UAL.N) passenger dragged from a plane in Chicago in an incident that sparked international outrage and turned into a corporate public relations nightmare suffered a concussion and broken nose and will likely sue, his attorney said on Thursday.

"For a long time airlines, United in particular, have bullied us," Thomas Demetrio told a news conference in Chicago, outlining the potential causes of action they may pursue against United and the city of Chicago.

"Will there be a lawsuit? Yeah, probably."

David Dao, a 69-year-old Vietnamese-American doctor, was hospitalized after Chicago aviation police dragged him from the plane to make space for four crew members on the flight from the city's O'Hare International Airport to Louisville, Kentucky.

Demetrio said the law stated that passengers could not be ejected from planes with unreasonable force.



A video screengrab shows passenger David Dao being dragged off a United Airlines flight at Chicago O'Hare International Airport in this video filmed by @JayseDavid on 9 April 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Chicago runs the airport and the city's department of aviation employs the three officers who dragged Dao off the plane.

Dao, who was discharged from the hospital on Wednesday night, suffered a significant concussion, a broken nose and lost two front teeth in the incident, and he will need to undergo reconstructive surgery, Demetrio said.

Video of Sunday's incident taken by other passengers and showing Dao being dragged up the plane aisle and with a bloodied mouth circulated rapidly, causing public outrage that was not calmed by the airline's initial response.

Dao's daughter, Crystal Dao Pepper, told the news conference that the family was "horried, shocked and sickened" by what happened to her father. One of Dao's five children, Pepper, 33, called him a "wonderful father" and "loving grandfather" who had been returning from vacation in California.

"What happened to my dad should have never happened to any human being," she said. Demetrio said Dao had told him that being dragged down the plane aisle was more terrifying than his experience fleeing Viet Nam in 1975. Demetrio and a second attorney, Stephen Golan, said neither they nor the family had heard from United yet.

United, in a statement, said Munoz and the company "called Dr. Dao on numerous occasions to express our heartfelt and deepest apologies." The company did not say how it would respond to any litigation, or whether the airline would try to settle.—Reuters

Beijing park goes high tech to save toilet paper

BEIJING — A park in the Chinese capital, Beijing, has found a high-tech solution to stop people from using excessive amounts of toilet paper.

The Temple of Heaven Park has equipped public washrooms with a paper dispenser that uses

facial recognition technology to record each user and then roll out a strip of about 70 cm of paper for one trip to the bathroom.

The same user will have to wait for nine minutes before they can get another strip of toilet paper.

"This machine was actually designed in order to stop people from wasting toilet paper," said Lei Zhenshan, a designer and sales executive for dispenser maker Shoulian Technology.

"If the paper was put in an uncontrolled device,

then people will waste it endlessly," he told Reuters Television.

This month, Chinese media reported that visitors to the park's washrooms were taking unnecessarily large amounts of toilet paper from dispensers.—Reuters

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

MV MCC S'PORE VOY. NO ()

Consignees of cargo carried on MV MCC S'PORE VOY. NO () are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 16.4.2017 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T.T/M.I.P where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

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AGENT FOR: M/S MCC TRANSPORT(S'PORE)
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No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

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Panasonic eyes top electronics brand in Asia by 2020

JAKARTA — Japanese electronics giant Panasonic Corp. is seeking to double its sales in Asia by 2020 and become the top premium brand in the region by that year, according to company executives.

Despite tough times in the Asian electronics market last year, Panasonic was able to achieve a sales gain of more than 15 per cent in the home appliance sector, the company said in a press release issued at a Panasonic Business Strategy 2017 event in Jakarta on Wednesday.

“Our target is to con-

tinue the growth and double its sales by 2020, compared to 2015,” said Yuji Majima, managing director of Panasonic Appliance Marketing Asia Pacific. “The key categories to our growth are air conditioners, refrigerators, washing machines and televisions.” Asian markets expected to lead the growth of Panasonic business are the “VIP” countries of Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines as well as Thailand, Majima said. In Indonesia, Panasonic is targeting a threefold rise in 2020 sales compared with 2015, he added.—Kyodo News

Armyworms ravage crops in southern Ethiopia

ADDIS ABABA — Crop-eating caterpillars known as fall armyworms have damaged crops across southern Ethiopia, the latest country to be struck by the pests in a region already struggling with widespread drought and hunger, authorities said on Thursday.

In March, Uganda confirmed that the caterpillars had attacked crops on farms in about 20 districts in the country, while neighboring Kenya has dispatched a team of scientists and other experts to investigate reports of their appearance.

In a statement, Ethiopia's farming ministry said the pests have so far damaged crops in nearly 10,700 hectares of land in the country's Oromiya area and a region known as SNNP, short for Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People.

“Thirty-five thousand

liters of chemicals have been purchased and distributed to spray affected areas with insecticide,” said Zebdios Selato, the body's director for plant healthcare. The attacks could further affect agricultural output in a country where a drought has left 5.6 million people needing food aid. Drought and conflict have put four countries in the region at risk of mass starvation — northeast Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen — according to the UN refugee agency. The caterpillar is native to North and South America, though it has already spread to other parts of Africa including Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique and Democratic Republic of Congo.

The United Nations fears it could reach Asia and the Mediterranean in the next few years.—Reuters



A woman consumes an 'Ooho' plastic-less water container in London, Britain, on 12 April 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

UK-based start-up hopes to cut plastic waste with innovative water balls

LONDON — Small transparent spheres filled with natural or flavoured water could help provide a solution to London's plastic waste problem, according to the start-up company based in the British capital that manufactures them.

With many cities around the world struggling to dispose of vast numbers of used plastic water bottles, the biodegradable 'Ooho balls' have begun quenching the thirst of consumers at special events in San Francisco and London.

The balls, which resemble large bubbles, have a jelly-like membrane made of plant and seaweed extracts. The company, Skipping Rocks

Lab, says the membranes decompose after four to six weeks if not consumed.

A report published by the London municipal authorities on Thursday said more than 4,000 plastic bottles had been removed from the River Thames in a one month period last year, demonstrating the scale of the waste problem.

“We think Ooho, may not be the solution for all the applications that plastic bottles have, but definitely for short term consumption it could be a solution,” Rodrigo Garcia Gonzalez, the founder of Skipping Rocks Lab, told Reuters.

In a trial near London Bridge on Wednes-

day, the innovative balls drew a mixture of surprise, amusement and delight among those who sampled them.

London's city assembly said Ooho was a step forward.

“It could be part of the solution but not the only solution. You also need to be able to refill bottles at railway stations for example,” said Leonie Cooper, the Chair of the assembly's environment committee.

Skipping Rocks, who spent three years developing Ooho, said they produce up to 2,000 balls a day but hope to increase that figure, extend the shelf-life of the product and improve the resistance

of the membranes.

The company aims to target, among other consumers, marathon runners, who will be able to dispose of the Oohos mid-race without concerns about the environment. It is also considering encapsulating alcohol for a whole new market.

“People see these small round bubbles and they just think ‘shots’. So that's definitely something we're looking at,” said Skipping Rocks Lab Chief Operating Officer Lise Honsinger.

“We have encapsulated alcohol, we want to perfect it, and then hopefully this will be the Jaegerbomb of the future.” —Reuters

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CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

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

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‘Star Wars’ embraces girl power with new heroine stories, toys

LOS ANGELES — “Star Wars” is beefing up its girl power through a new series of animated short movies featuring the sci-fi saga’s heroines including Princess Leia, Rey and Jyn Erso.

Walt Disney Co and Lucasfilm announced on Thursday that “Star Wars Forces of Destiny” will focus on the “untold stories of everyday heroism that shape the destinies” of the main female characters in the franchise.



Some of Mattel’s Star Wars merchandise is seen at the 114th North American International Toy Fair in New York City, US. PHOTO: REUTERS

The move is the latest by Disney to broaden the male-dominated audience for the “Star Wars” series, which is celebrating the 40th anniversary of the original 1977 film starring Carrie Fisher, Harrison Ford and Mark Hamill.

The 2-3 minute shorts will be launched on Disney YouTube in July and followed by more shorts on Disney Channel television in the autumn. A range of new action figures and dolls, as well as other merchandise, will also be released.

“‘Star Wars Forces of Destiny’ is for anyone who has been inspired by Leia’s heroism, Rey’s courage, or Ahsoka’s tenacity,” Kathleen Kennedy, president of Lucasfilm, said in a statement.

Actors Daisy Ridley (Rey), Felicity Jones (Jyn) and Lupita Nyong’o (Maz Kanata) will voice their characters. The voice for Princess Leia, played in the movies by Carrie Fisher, will be supplied by Shelby Young following Fisher’s sudden death of a heart attack in December.

Fans launched a social media campaign #WheresRey in 2016 when Ridley’s fearless Rey in “Star Wars: The Force Awakens” was missing from some of the film’s toys and merchandising.

The new range will include a doll in which Rey swings her lightsaber, her extendable staff and an electronic Jedi power lightsaber toy. John Frascotti, president of toymaker Hasbro Inc, said in a statement the “Star Wars” fan base has broadened over the last 40 years, and the “Forces of Destiny” toy line would “help connect with new audiences as well as appeal to existing fans.”—Reuters

‘The Promise’ brings tragedy of 1915 Armenian massacre to big screen

LOS ANGELES — Celebrities of Armenian descent including Cher and the Kardashians lent their support this week to “The Promise,” a period drama centered around the massacre of Christian Armenians during World War I in what is now Turkey. “The Promise,” out in US theaters on 21 April, stars Oscar Isaac as an Armenian medical student and Christian Bale as an American foreign correspondent, both of whom fall in love with the same woman.

Their love triangle unfolds as the Ottoman Empire’s entry into the war is followed by the 1915 massacre of Christian Armenians.

“So many people, when confronted with a period film, they tend to ask that question ‘why is this still relevant?’” Bale told Reuters at Wednesday’s red carpet premiere in Los Angeles.

“You only have to look at the news to see sadly how relevant this story still is,” he added.

Terry George, who directed 2004 Oscar-nominated historical drama “Hotel Rwanda,” said shooting “The Promise” coincided with news of Yazidi refugees besieged by Islamic militants in northern Iraq and the mass exodus of Syrians attempting to flee the war-torn country for Europe.

“As we were shooting, we were watching the same events in the same location - people under siege in the mountains and drowning in the Mediterranean,”



Singer Cher (R) poses with television personalities Kim Kardashian (C) and Kourtney Kardashian at the premiere of ‘The Promise’ in Los Angeles, California, US, on 12 April 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

George said.

The nature and scale of the massacre of Christian Armenians remains a contentious issue.

Turkey accepts that many Armenians died in partisan fighting beginning in 1915, but denies that up to 1.5 million were killed and that this constituted an act of genocide, a term used by many Western historians and foreign parliaments.

Singer Cher, whose father was Armenian-American, joined reality TV stars Kim and Kourtney Kardashian at the premiere.

“There is something about people when they don’t see other people as human beings, then they objectify and then they can do anything to them,” Cher said about the massacre.

“Westworld” actress Angela Sarafyan, who plays Isaac’s wife

in the film and is of Armenian descent, described the role as very personal.

“My great-great-grandparents fled to Syria, Aleppo to survive and to start a family and today, people from Syria, Aleppo leave to other places so they can live,” she said.

“One hundred years have gone by and that is still happening,” she added.—Reuters

‘No regrets’ says Mexican actress del Castillo of El Chapo interview

NEW YORK — When Mexican actress Kate del Castillo helped orchestrate a secret meeting between actor Sean Penn and drug lord Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman in what became an explosive Rolling Stone article, little did she know she’d be drawing from the experience for her new Netflix series.

In “Ingobernable,” which debuted on Netflix last month, del Castillo, 44, plays a fictional first lady of the run after she is framed for her husband’s murder.

“This is a woman who’s tried to prove her innocence. This is a woman who’s been persecuted by the government. This is a woman who’s been criticized or under scrutiny for something that she didn’t do wrong. She’s not a criminal, you know?” del Castillo told Reuters on Friday.

“I was treated like one in Mexico, in my country. All those things, she risked her life, she’s in danger, all of those things, I live them in mine.”

Del Castillo brokered an interview between Guzman, the boss of the Sinaloa drug cartel,



Pinatas depicting Mexican actress Kate del Castillo (L) and the drug lord Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman are displayed outside a workshop in Reynosa, in Tamaulipas state, Mexico, on 13 January 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

and Penn in 2015, after the drug lord became interested in making a movie of his life. The interview was published in Rolling Stone in early 2016 and

helped lead to the drug lord’s arrest.

Penn and del Castillo were not investigated directly by Mexican authorities, but the

actress did say in a statement to Univision at the time that she believed the Mexican government “wants to destroy me.”

“I can tell you that I have no regrets at all,” del Castillo said, adding that she didn’t “see there is anything wrong” in trying to secure the rights to Guzman’s life story.

“It was risky of course, but at the end I’m an actress, a Latina woman living in another country, struggling still. And I’m going to go and reach out to the good stories when they’re there,” she added.

Yet, del Castillo said she did feel guilty for her family in Mexico having to deal with the news of her involvement with Guzman.

Details of flirtatious phone messaging chats between Guzman and del Castillo gripped Mexico, and an official said the drug lord’s “obsession” with her led him to lower his guard and be caught.

“It’s not been a good year, it was very stressful to say it in one word. But I’m getting better, pulling myself together,” del Castillo said.—Reuters

To visit Titanic, New York banker dives deep into her savings

NEW YORK — Renata Rojas has longed to visit the wreck of the Titanic since she was a girl, years before the ill-fated passenger liner was discovered on the seabed three decades ago.

Next year, the 49-year-old New York banker and diving enthusiast should finally realize her dream, and she is shelling out more than \$105,000 for the privilege.

"I don't own an apartment. I don't own a car. I haven't gone to Everest yet. All of my savings have been going towards my dream, which is going to the Titanic," said Rojas, who last tried to visit the wreck in a 2012 centennial expedition that was canceled.

"I've made a lot of sacrifices over time."

Beginning May 2018, OceanGate Expeditions will launch a series of deep dives aboard a submersible for people like Rojas who want to see the infamous shipwreck.

The company has the only privately-owned



Stockton Rush, CEO of OceanGate exhibitions, stand with Renata Rojas at Times Square in New York, US, on 12 April 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

manned research submarine in the world capable of diving to the Titanic's depth, with the other four such vessels in the hands of governments, according to chief executive Stockton Rush.

A lack of private subs, plus the hefty price tag for commercial trips, are key

reasons the site has not been explored by dive teams in 12 years. Fewer than 200 people are estimated to have ever visited the wreck.

All told, more than 50 passengers, or "mission specialists" as OceanGate calls them, will set off from the Canadian island of New-

foundland in six scheduled eight-day trips.

The Everett, Washington-based company will take nine at a time on a ship to the site, with each of them given an assignment such as photographing artifacts from the debris field. From there, they will take turns diving in

the small submarine to get a close-up of the hulk.

The object of their fascination is RMS Titanic, which sank in the early hours of 15 April, 1912 after ramming into an iceberg on its maiden voyage from England to New York, killing more than 1,500 people.

The wreckage, located in 1985, lies on the floor of the North Atlantic 370 miles (600 km) south-southeast of Newfoundland at a depth of more than 2 miles.

One of the worst maritime disasters ever, the sinking of the state-of-the-art liner sparked outrage and grief, and still stirs deep emotions for many.

Rojas said this is because it was "a tragedy that wasn't supposed to happen."

"It disappeared for years, it was mystical, and that attracts a lot of people," she said. "That's what attracted me to it."

It was the inspiration for James Cameron's 1997 film "Titanic," a tragic love story that became one of the

most nominated movies in Academy Award history.

But it was an earlier telling of the disaster that caught the eye of Rojas, who recalls watching the 1958 movie "A Night to Remember" when she was a young girl.

"I actually wanted to find the wreck but somebody beat me to it," said Rojas, whose father taught her to dive at the age of 12 in her home country of Mexico.

When not working for Banco Sabadell in Manhattan, she spends much of her free time exploring shipwrecks in the waters off New York and New Jersey.

Rojas, who will help monitor and operate the sonar system while aboard the submersible, said she was making the expedition to the Titanic because of her tight connection to the story.

"I don't want any distractions," she said. "It's such an emotional experience for me, and I think I want to take it all in by myself."—Reuters

As people age, the factors that drive depression may shift

AMSTERDAM — Different types of problems are most likely to afflict people at different times of life, so common risk factors for depression change over the years, too, Dutch researchers say.

But when a risk factor is uncommon among peers — like widowhood or poor health in youth — it can have an outsized effect on depression risk, the study team reports in The American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry.

"A wide range of risk factors for depression is relevant across the entire life span," said lead author

Roxanne Schaakxs of VU University Medical Center in Amsterdam.

"However, some risk factors expected to be strongly related to depression in certain ages, may actually affect other age groups to a larger extent," Schaakxs added by email.

Depression is a complex condition and many experts believe that in addition to innate genetic and personality factors, risks like stressful life events, health issues and money problems can contribute to its development, the study team notes.

To see which depres-

sion risk factors affect people at various stages of life, and how much of an effect each factor has, the study team analyzed data on more than 2,000 adults participating in two long-term studies of depression and anxiety. Subjects in one study were aged 18 to 65 when they began participating, while participants in the other study were aged 60 to 93 when it started.

At baseline, a total of 1,431 people had major depressive disorder and 784 people had no symptoms or history of the condition.

The research team

assessed 19 different risk factors for depression in different age groups, comparing people who had never been depressed with people who were currently depressed.

Most of the risk factors did increase people's likelihood of being depressed at any age, including low education, recent negative life events, personality traits, reduced social functioning, an unhealthy lifestyle and poor health.

However, five of the risk factors were more strongly related to depression in certain age groups.—Reuters

Belgian company takes 3D printing to chocolate

GEMBLOUX, (Belgium) — Layer by layer, 0.2 millimetres at a time, a specialized printing machine at Belgian chocolate shop Miam Factory applies melted chocolate to shape a three-dimensional object.

Miam Factory — French for "Yum" — was spun off three months ago from nearby University of Liege's Smart Gastronomy Lab, which researches technology in the food and beverages sector, and operates four specialized 3D printers.

The company produces 3D-printed chocolate objects and also engraves chocolates and macaroons with messages or logos for clients, such as nearby brewery Bertinbamps.

The brewery wanted a unique prize for the winners of an Easter egg hunt and ordered chocolate beer bottles.

The chocolate is ready to eat straight after printing, which can take from 10 minutes to three hours. The bottles for the Bertinbamps Brewery took just under three hours and used up 24.6 metres of chocolate.

The company gets orders from hotels, businesses and individual customers. Prices range greatly depending on what kind of size, shape and chocolate is required.

While dark chocolate is most popular, milk and white chocolate are also available.—Reuters



Gaetan Richard, founder of the Miam Factory 3D printing chocolate company, displays a three-dimensional shape object after being printed at Belgian chocolate company Miam Factory in Gembloux, Belgium, on 10 April 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

mitv Myanmar International Programme Schedule

(15-4-2017 07:00am ~ 16-4-2017 07:00am) MST

07:03	Am	News
07:25	Am	Great Shwedagon-The Sacred Hair Relics Hailing Pogodas
07:52	Am	Talented Musicians
08:03	Am	News
08:25	Am	Auspicious and Traditional Thingyan (New Version)
08:34	Am	The Beauty In The North Of Myanmar
08:50	Am	Thingyan Songs & Dances
09:03	Am	News
09:26	Am	Myanmar Game Changers (Ep-I)
09:52	Am	A Nun's Creation in Fruit Carving
10:03	Am	News
10:25	Am	Bago: A City Of Famous Historic Pagoda
10:46	Am	Thingyan Songs & Dances

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

Prime Time

07:03	Pm	News
07:26	Pm	Interesting Features of Rakhine
07:47	Pm	Today Myanmar: By Election - 2017
08:03	Pm	News
08:25	Pm	An Aficionado Of Alluring Antiques
08:56	Pm	Myanmar Masterclass: Fantastic Art

Remark:

07:00 Am to 11:30 Am	- Live: Mandalay Thingyan Festival
03:00 Pm to 06:00 Pm	- Live: Mandalay Thingyan Festival
07:00 Pm to 11:30 Pm	- Live: Mandalay Thingyan Festival

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

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

Ajax win, United held, trouble delays match at Lyon

EUROPEAN football was given good and bad reminders of its past on Thursday with an impressive 2-0 win for once-mighty Ajax Amsterdam over Schalke 04 in one Europa League game but ugly scenes in the crowd at Lyon delaying another.

Anderlecht, like Ajax once a major force in continental competitions, snatched a late 1-1 draw at home to Manchester United in another of the quarter-final first-leg ties while Celta Vigo beat visitors Genk 3-2 in a goalfest. There was an untimely reminder that the hooliganism which once plagued European football has still not been completely eradicated when crowd trouble delayed the start of Olympique Lyonnais' match at home to Turkish side Besiktas by 45 minutes.

Dozens of fans spilled onto the pitch, with the French club saying the supporters were seeking refuge after being pelted with objects and fireworks thrown from high up in the stands. Four-times European champions Ajax, now effectively reduced to the role of a springboard for young players



Manchester United's Henrikh Mkhitaryan scores their first goal. PHOTO: REUTERS

hoping to move to the bigger leagues, enjoyed a reminder of what continental success was like as they outclassed Bundesliga side Schalke.

Ajax played plenty of the flowing football for which their predecessors were

re-nowned and went ahead when Davy Klaassen converted a penalty after Amin Younes went down under a tackle from Alessandro Schoepf. Klaassen struck again early in the second half, firing home from 12 metres after he was picked out by Justin Kluivert, the son of former Dutch international Patrick.

Henrikh Mkhitaryan gave Manchester United a 37th minute lead in Belgium after snapping up a rebound, and the visitors seemed on the way to a comfortable win as they dominated the game. Leander Dendoncker had other ideas as he outjumped Matteo Darmian to head in Ivan Obradovic's cross with four minutes left.

Jean-Paul Boetius headed Genk into a 10th minute lead in Spain but Celta hit back quickly as Pione Sisto, Iago Aspas and John Guidetti made it 3-1 before halftime. Thomas Buffel pulled a goal back midway through the second period to revive Genk's hopes and leave the tie on a knife-edge.—Reuters

FIFPro wants clear guidelines after attack on Dortmund soccer team

BERNE — The world players' union FIFPro said that Borussia Dortmund should not have played so soon after Tuesday's attack on their bus and wants clear guidelines on dealing with similar incidents should they happen in the future.

Dortmund's Champions League quarter-final first leg at home to AS Monaco was postponed by 24 hours after three explosions went off near the bus as it made its way to the stadium, injuring Spanish defender Marc Bartra.

The game was immediately rescheduled for Wednesday where Monaco ran out 3-2 winners.

FIFPro said that the game could have been delayed for longer, regardless of any knock-on effect to the fixture list.

"Players are people first and their emotional state must be taken into account. This comes before any other consideration," the Dutch-based union told Reuters.

"We believe the incident was



Borussia Dortmund players line up before the game at Signal Iduna Park, Dortmund, Germany, on 12 April 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

serious enough to warrant a longer delay than 24 hours, irrespective of the challenges it would have posed for travelling fans and to adjust the match calendar."

European soccer body UEFA took the decision to reschedule the game on Tuesday night, saying it had consulted both clubs and police authorities.

"A revision of this incident

needs to be carried out together with FIFPro and other key stakeholders to create clear guidelines on how to act in such extreme circumstances," FIFPro said.

Dortmund coach Thomas Tuchel said after the game on Wednesday that his team had not been ready to play and had found out about the rescheduling after receiving a text message from Swit-

zerland, where UEFA is based.

Following Tuchel's comments, UEFA reaffirmed in a statement that the decision was made at the stadium on Tuesday night "in cooperation and complete agreement with clubs and authorities."

"UEFA was in touch with all parties on Wednesday and never received any information which suggested that any of the teams did not want to play," it said.

Dortmund chief executive Hans-Joachim Watzke said on Tuesday night that there was no alternative to playing on Wednesday.

"We have a very tight fixture list," he said on the club's website. "The second leg is next week. There is no possibility to wait for Thursday. The Monaco team cannot stay here, they also have a game at the weekend."

On Wednesday, he said he had "appealed to the team to show society that we do not bend before terror."—Reuters

Contract talks can wait, says Arsenal's Ozil

LONDON — Arsenal's Mesut Ozil does not want contract talks to distract the club in the crucial run-in to the end of the season and will wait until the Premier League campaign is over before discussing his future, the German midfielder has said.

Ozil's place at the club has been the subject of much speculation in British media, with reports suggesting the 28-year-old, whose contract runs out in less than 15 months, is refusing to sign a new deal of around 250,000 pounds per week.

Arsenal are sixth in the league, seven points behind fourth-placed Manchester City, who have played a game more.

"At this stage I'm not important, what's important is the club," Ozil told British media. "We've still got a lot to aim for this season, to try and finish in the top four."—Reuters