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Shan State National Level Political Dialogue begins



Representatives from political parties and organizations in Shan State are seen at the Shan State National Level Political Dialogue. PHOTO: IPRD

SHAN State held a state-level political dialogue in Taunggyi yesterday, a meeting described as a milestone and a significant step taken by the people toward peace in the Union.

The three-day Shan State National Level Political Dialogue started with opening remarks by Shan State Chief Minister Dr Lin Htut.

According to the Shan State Chief Minister, representatives from the self-administered regions and zones submitted a total

of 70 papers – 26 political papers, 23 papers on the economy and 21 papers on land issues, natural resources and environmental conservation. Some of these papers were read on the first day of the dialogue.

In his opening address, Dr Lin Htut noted the success of the Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong, which was held in Nay Pyi Taw from 31st August to 3rd September 2016, adding that the success of the conference could build trust among the stakeholders even though

they have diverse opinions.

The Shan State National Level Dialogue Management Committee will combine all the papers according to set frameworks and rules into three draft papers – a political paper, a paper on the economy, and a paper on land issues, natural resources and environmental conservation. The papers will be written with the help of subject experts from various universities and the draft papers will be read on the final day of the dialogue.

Following the Shan State

Chief Minister's opening address, Union Minister for the Office of the State Counsellor U Kyaw Tint Swe expressed his delight for holding the political dialogue, calling the meeting a milestone of the state and a step taken by the people in the State towards peace in the Union.

In addition to U Kyaw Tint Swe, the meeting was attended by the Chairman of the Peace Commission Dr. Tin Myo Win, Shan State Chief Minister Dr. Lin Htut, Peace Commission members, the Shan State Hluttaw Speaker and

Deputy Speaker, Shan State government Ministers, Shan State National Level Political Dialogue Management Committee members, Hluttaw representatives, members of political parties, representatives of ethnic nationals, members of NCA signatory groups Pa-O National Liberation Organization (PNLO) and Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), state level officials, civil society organizations, literature and cultural groups, State Hluttaw affairs committee members, State Hluttaw representatives and members of the public numbering more than 400.

Earlier in the day, an opening ceremony was held in front of the town hall with a ribbon cutting ceremony and a release of peace doves by Union Minister U Kyaw Tint Swe, Chairman of the Peace Commission Dr. Tin Myo Win, Shan State Chief Minister Dr. Lin Htut, Palaung Self-Administered Zone Leading Committee Chairman U Win Kyaw @ U Aik Mann and Pyithu Hluttaw representative Dr. Daw Than Ngwe.

Afterwards, speeches were given by Shan State Chief Minister, Union Minister U Kyaw Tint Swe, Dr. Tin Myo Win, Wa Self-Administered Division Leading Committee Member U Yan Kyaw, Palaung Self-Administered Zone Leading Committee Chairman U Win Kyaw @ U Aik Mann, Kokang Self-Administered Zone Leading Committee Chairman U Kyauk Htel Chan, Pa-O Self-Administered Zone Leading Committee Chairman U Khun San Lwin, Danu Self-Administered Zone Leading Committee Chairman U Arkar Lin. Later, a commemorative group photo was taken.—*Shan State Information and Public Relations Department*



သဒ္ဓါထက်သန် မြန်မာအားမာန် ကမ္ဘောဇဘဏ်



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing visits Austria Army Museum. PHOTO: SENIOR GENERAL MIN AUNG HLAING FACEBOOK

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing visits Austria

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF of the Defence Services, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and party arrived at the Vienna International Airport, Austria at local standard time 6:45 p.m. on 22 April. The Senior General was welcomed at the airport by the Myanmar Ambassador to Austria U San Lwin and wife, Embassy officials and family members.

On 23 April at 10 a.m. local

standard time, the Senior General and party visited the Vienna Museum of Military History.

The museum was built on 15 April 1850 and completed in 1856. The museum exhibits the military historical facts of Austria from about mid-19th century 1867, wars including 1st and 2nd World War in which Austria was involved, in separate halls.

Afterwards, the Senior Gen-

eral and party arrived at the Embassy of Myanmar in Austria at noon local standard time.

The Senior General and wife presented gifts to the Ambassador and wife, Embassy families and trainees attending a medical training course.

After that, the Embassy officials and family members hosted a lunch for the Senior General and party. —MNA



Parents look at exam result. PHOTO: MITV

Exam results released for basic education students

Exam results of the basic education schools were released across the country on Sunday. The announcement includes all levels of grades apart from the matriculation exam.

According to a new reform since 2015-2016 academic years, the grading system has changed into ranking A, B, C

and D, instead of making the ranks like first, second, third and more, depending on the marks student scored.

Examination for Grade-4 and 8 are the government exam system, and it is another prominent reform, aiming to encourage students to learn their lessons at all.

At the Yangon University of Education Practicing High School, cent percent of students for Grade-4 and 8 have passed.

New classes will be opened soon on 1st of June as usual, according to the regular schedule by the basic education department. —MITV

PROMOTE THE CONTRIBUTIONS: YOUTH AGENDA IN URBAN PLANNING

AIMING to promote contributions of youths in urban planning, Youth Agenda in Urban Planning Forum, was held for the first time in Yangon.

Green space per person in Yangon is the lowest among

ASEAN countries, and the organizers suggest the needs to extend more public spaces. Yangon City Development Committee is implementing Yangon 2040 City of Green and Gold- Peaceful and Beloved city, according to the

strategic urban development plan of greater Yangon. The forum discussed the participation of youths in urban planning in line with the policy. 30 youths from various sectors were selected to attend the forum. —MITV

Food poisoning victims treated in Taninthayi Township

TWENTY eight out of 70 persons suffered from diarrhea and nausea after taking meals at a donation ceremony in Thabounglake village, Thaninthayi Township on the morning of 22 April. The next day, a midwife from the village health sub department in the village reported by phone to Tanin-

thayi Township about the incident.

A health team from Taninthayi Township visited the village and gave onsite treatment at the temporary clinic while providing health knowledge to the villagers. The affected patients are learnt to be recovering. —Myanmar News Agecny

Myanmar worker found hanged in Thailand

A Myanmar factory worker was found hanged in his rented room on Saturday in Thailand.

The man, identified only as Shane, 25, from his migrant worker card, was found by Myanmar colleagues at the factory at 6:40am, who then alerted police, according to the commander of the Samphan police station.

The factory is located in the Samphan District of Nakhon Pathom, an area about 56 km west of Bangkok in central Thailand known for its many clothing and apparel factories.

The man apparently hanged himself from a beam in the rented house with a longyi, police said. Police said they found no traces of fighting and he did not leave any note. His friend told police that Shane was working at the Royal factory and had been staying with three siblings at the rented room, according to the Thai newspaper The Nation.

He was regarded as a quiet person and liked to pray. The friend said Shane left the factory at 4am even though his normal shift ended at 8am. —GNLM

Crime NEWS

Stimulant tablets, ice seized in Mandalay, Mabein

A local anti-drug squad from Mandalay seized 0.95 kilos of ice and 1,960 stimulant tablets in a search of Sai Myo Htun and Nay Lin Aung at Ngwe Hlaing Café on the road of 49st, Zee Kone Ward, Patheingyi Township, Mandalay on 22 April.

Likewise, local police from Mabein police station searched the house of Myint Thein Htun at

the Ward (1) (or) Outkhinn Taw of Mabein Township. During the search, police seized 2,253 stimulant tablets from Kyaw Min Tun who was found together with Myint Thein Htun at the house.

The suspects have been charged under the Anti-narcotic drug and psychotropic substances Law. —Myanmar Police Force



Sai Myo Htun and Nay Lin Aung. PHOTO MPF

Minister urges locals to prepare for natural disasters

UNION Minister Dr Win Myat Aye, the Vice Chairman of the National Natural Disaster Management Committee, met residents of Bogale town, Pyapon District and Kyonkan village, Pyapon township yesterday to oversee preparation works and ensure a proper response to natural disasters.

Dr Win Myat Aye, the Union Minister for the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, said that according to experts, Myanmar ranked 42nd in 171 countries of the world that are most at risk to natural disaster and ranked 15th highest in the world for a lack of readiness in responding to natural disasters.

"It is obvious that we need to be ready to resist and respond to natural disasters.

It is found that this depends on the sturdiness of the country's

bridges and buildings, having safe and secure waterway, roadway and airway transports, having secure communications and adequate electrical power," he said.

The union Minister said the new government is working on natural disaster response preparation that includes the strengthening of roads and bridges, improving communication and increasing the usage of electric power.

"The Ministry has been prioritizing for natural disaster preparedness and working on the additional construction of emergency shelters in places where they're needed.

The cooperative effort to be ready and respond effectively, by forming a natural disaster response squad of civil society volunteers, auxiliary fire fighters,



Union Minister Dr Win Myat Aye meets with local people in Bogale, Ayeyawady Region. PHOTO: MNA

Red Cross members, the Myanmar Police Force and the Tatmadaw, is being carried out," he said.

Public participation is vital for natural disaster readiness, the minister said and the ministry has been working to fulfil the public's needs.

The Minister then provided Ks1295.8 lakh for the con-

struction of a cyclone shelter in Nyaungpate village, Bogale township, Ks25 lakh for a tube-well in water scarce Chaungbyegy village, Ks50 lakh for the construction of two drinking water ponds in Maelayo village and Bawathit village in Pyapon township, Ks12 lakh for a concrete road to make it easier for students to go to school in Kyonkan vil-

lage, Ks1295.8 for a school cum shelter in Gawdu village, Ks72 lakh each for Kyonkan village and Nayaungkar village, Dedaye township to dig and construct a pond and fence.

The Minister also donated clothes to 31 elders in the Home for the Aged in Pyapon township during the trip. — Myanmar News Agency

Flymya acquires London-based API start-up SWITCH.CM

Flymya.com, the Myanmar-based one-stop shop for domestic bookings online, has acquired SWITCH.CM, a London-based startup specialising in building reservations platforms for the hotel and airline industry, for US\$ 600,000, according to an announcement released by the website. Flymya.com is the country's largest one stop shop for domestic air tickets, hotel reservations and car rentals supplying travellers with itinerary plans and tour packages.

In addition, local tour operators can list their travel packages online at the Flymya.com platform that has over 100 local operators.

Flymya.com is a subsidiary of BOD Tech and also has outlets in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam.

Flymya's chief executive said the application software

designed by SWITCH.CM CEO Jeff Pan was well-suited for his websites hotel clients.

"We were extremely impressed by Jeff's background as both a hotelier and a software engineer with deep knowledge of hotel API architecture. We look forward to utilising his team's software to provide an added value to our hotel partners", said Mike Than Tun Win, the CEO of Flymya.

"I was blown away by the operational infrastructure that Mike has built, pioneering the digital revolution in Myanmar by combining technology with a massive network of resellers and on-the-ground staff. I'm excited by the acquisition to see him leverage his expertise in Southeast Asia to grow our technology to its fullest potential, said Jeff Pan, CEO of SWITCH.CM.—Ko Khant

Selections for maths olympiad held in Kyimyindine Township

TEAM selection tests for the 58th International Mathematical Olympiad (IMO), which will be held from 13th to 23rd July in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, took place Saturday in Kyimyindine Township, Yangon Region. Region and state level tests were held so that talented

students could enter the IMO, then central level tests were taken, said U Htin Aung from the Myanmar Mathematical Society. The students selected from Upper and Lower Myanmar will leave for Brazil on 12th July with two administrators. — 200

Agricultural development strategy to finalise in July

CONCERTED efforts are being exerted to complete the planning of a Myanmar agricultural development strategy with the assistance of Asia Development Bank (ADB), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT), it is learnt.

The strategy is currently being drawn up on the basis of the Second five-year National Development Plan and will be released to the public through

workshops held in May and June in 17 places in the regions and states in order to receive public opinion.

The agriculture development strategy highlights the co-operation between private and public sectors and the farmers to boost production and attain market shares in the highly competitive international market.

The Agriculture Master Plan is being drawn up with the help of local and foreign experts in order to produce pedigree crops,

provide quality fertilizer, practice Good Agriculture Practice (GAP), increase awareness of pesticide use to farmers, provide access to loans, produce quality food and penetrate additional international markets, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation.

The aforementioned department will establish a public-private partnership with a view to reducing cultivation costs and boosting the production rate, it is learnt.—Ko Htet

Tasks carried out after diarrhea outbreak

AN outbreak of diarrhea affected over 100 persons in 5 villages of Gua Son Pyin village tract, An Township, Rakhine State, on 19 April, resulting in one death.

On 20 and 21 April, medical teams from An Township and the Rakhine State health department visited the villages to find the cause of the out-

break and to set up temporary clinics to give medical care to the patients. As of 23 April, all patients are recovering. — Myanmar News Agency

Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 7:00 pm on Sunday 23rd April, 2017)

BAY INFERENCE: Weather is partly cloudy over the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL MORNING OF THE 24th April, 2017: Rain or thundershowers will be fairly widespread in Upper Sagaing Region, Kachin, Shan and Chin States, scattered in Lower Sagaing and Mandalay Regions, Rakhine State, isolated in the remaining Regions and States. Degree of certainty is (80%).

STATE OF THE SEA: Sea will be moderate in Myanmar waters.

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Continuation of rain or thundershowers in Upper Sagaing Region, Kachin, Shan and Chin States.

FORECAST FOR NAYPYITAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 24th April, 2017: Isolated rain or thundershowers. Degree of certainty is (80%).

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 24th April, 2017: Likelihood of isolated rain or thundershowers. Degree of certainty is (60%).

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 24th April, 2017: Isolated rain or thundershowers. Degree of certainty is (80%).

LOCAL Business

PHOTO: PHOE KHWAR



Woodside adds a fifth well in Myanmar drilling programme

WOODSIDE Petroleum has added a fifth well to its Myanmar drilling programme, following successful results from the Thalin deepwater discovery, according to a report in OE Digital on April 20.

The Thalin-1B appraisal well, a re-entry and sidetrack of Thalin-1A, was “spudded” in late February. The sidetrack was successful and Thalin-1B acquired 99m (100% recovery) of core and wireline logs over the objective reservoir interval, Woodside confirmed in its Q1 2017 report.

Block AD-7 is in the Bay of Bengal, some 100km offshore of the west coast of Myanmar. Water depth at Thalin-1A is 836m, which is the northern part of the Rakhine Basin.

The oil and gas company also revealed it has made some progress in narrowing alternative ideas for the development of Browse basin offshore Western Australia, which does not seem to include a floating liquefied natural gas (FLNG) concept, according to the OE Digital report.—Mizzima

Redrafting of Municipal Law underway

YANGON Mayor Maung Maung Soe told Mizzima that they were redrafting the Municipal Law, which has weaknesses, with the assistance of Singaporean legal experts. “It is really shameful. This new Municipal Law is not as good and comprehensive as the law enacted in 1922,” he said, referring to the legislation brought in under British colonial rule.

The Yangon Mayor was speaking after a ceremony for the

third death anniversary of journalist Hantharwady Win Tin which was held at Royal Rose Hall in Yangon.

Yangon Mayor added that under the directive given by State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, this Municipal Law was being jointly redrafted by legal experts from Myanmar and Singapore and this process would take about six months. He said he assumed that the current Rules of Yangon Mu-

nicipal Law, which is currently being used by Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC), were overruling the parent law in many places. “The parent law has rules but these rules cannot overrule the parent law. I mean the rules made some overruling and overriding of the parent law in many provisions. Most of our leaders do not like this. They want the rules to be systematic and the rules cannot override and overrule the parent law,” Maung

Maung Soe said. He added that since this current Municipal Law was incomplete and was not comprehensive, leading to the possibility of vote rigging and malpractice in municipal elections.

The YCDC election under this Municipal Law at different levels was conducted for the first time in December 2014. Candidates in these elections criticized the weaknesses found in procedures and electoral methods.—Mizzima

Mango fetches good price in China

MANGOES placed on the China market in the middle of this month have been offered a good price, said mango growers.

The prevailing price of Sein Ta Lone (Diamond Solitaire) mangoes is around 150 yuan (Ks29,616) per basket in the export market, whereas unwrapped mangoes fetched up to 105 yuan.

During the previous year, a basket of quality Sein Ta Lone fetched only 110 yuan, according to the mango export market.

The price is likely to rise

in May when the mangoes produced from Shan State enter the market.

Growers sent their mangoes to the market early with worries of possibly erratic weather, but those mangoes are found to be weak in quality, stated some growers.

Two mango varieties, Sein Ta Lone (Diamond Solitaire) and Mya Kyauk (Emerald), are mainly exported to Japan, South Korea, Russia and Ukraine. In addition to fresh mango, the country has a plan to export mango paste.—Mon Mon

Number of beachgoers at Chaungtha increases post-Thingyan

A massive number of beachgoers entered Chaungtha Beach after the Water Festival, said U Kyaw Khaing, the chairman of Chaungtha Hotel zone.

With thousands of visitors flocking to the beach, restaurants and souvenir shops enjoyed brisk

sales. Some visitors left Chaungtha because of the heavy rain caused by the Cyclone Maaruttha on the last day of Thingyan, but many travellers reentered the beach after the Cyclone weakened.

Department of Meteorology

and Hydrology and the regional governments issued storm warnings that the storm could approach the country.

Even though there was no storm warning for Chaungtha Beach, many visitors retreated.—200

Commodity price climbs up post-Thingyan

THE low supply to Bayintnaung depot in Yangon after the Thingyan holidays has prompted traders to up the prices, it is reported.

Commodity prices for potatoes, onions, peas, fish and prawn paste have risen during the post-Thingyan period.

In past years, there was a steady flow of commodities into the market up to two days after the Water Festival. But this year, commodity inflows have dramatically declined.

The price of fish paste or prawn paste from Myeik Town-

ship, popular among local consumers, jumped from Ks2,500 to Ks3,500 per viss in the post-Thingyan period.

Fish and prawn paste flows into the Yangon market, from which it is distributed to other regions and states.—200

Moscow scientists propose measuring nanoobjects using ultrasound

MOSCOW — A research team from the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology (MIPT) has developed a technique for measuring the length and diameter of nanotubes and nanofibres suspended in water, MIPT's press office said.

During the research, the scientists passed an ultrasonic wave through a solution of nanotubes which served to define their length and thickness. This method could be potentially applied to measuring any nanoobjects, as noted in the announcement.

"The established technique can be used to define diameter and length of lengthy nanoobjects of an arbitrary composition. In this work, we have chosen carbon nanomaterials as objects because of their high applicability," Viktor Ivanov, chief of the research, corresponding member of RAS and head of Department of Electronics, Photonics, and Molecular Physics at MIPT commented.

Carbon nanotubes and nanofibres represent an especially stable and flexible nanomaterial

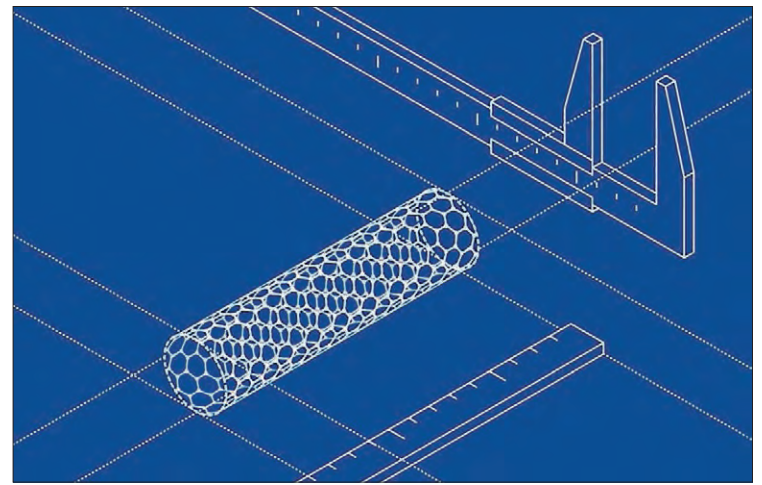
with high electric and thermal conductivity. The application range of nanotubes is constantly expanded. For instance, they are used for creating new materials in form of colloid solutions. Among other numerous cases, the nanotubes can be added to the anode of a lithium-ion battery to increase its power capacity, whereas by adding a few nanotubes to a polymer, one can turn the polymer to a conductive material.

In order to prepare a colloid solution with equally distributed particles which do not coagulate, it is crucial to know their precise size. This information will allow for controlling the composition of the solution. The researchers decided to use ultrasound to measure the diameter of nanotubes. While the ultrasound was passing through the solution, the size of suspended particles could be defined by tracking the attenuation of the sound, as the size of particles directly influences the wave attenuation coefficient. In the recent studies, the ultrasound has been already applied to measure

the diameter of spherical nanoparticles but this method has not been used so far for defining the length of nanotubes.

The researchers decided to conduct its measurement using the customary method, the diameter of nanotubes in the model solution where all the tubes are oriented parallel to each other, and then to study the attenuation in the solution of equal concentration but with tubes oriented chaotically. By comparing the results of measurements for chaotic and assembled solutions, one can calculate the length of nanotubes if the diameter and the diameter/length ratio are known.

In the laboratory of MIPT, an experiment was conducted where the colloid solution was moving through a tight rubber tube with an acceleration in such a way that the nanotubes in the solution were oriented in one direction. The researchers carried out measurements in the rubber tube, compared the results to those of a randomized solution, and deduced the length of nanotubes followed

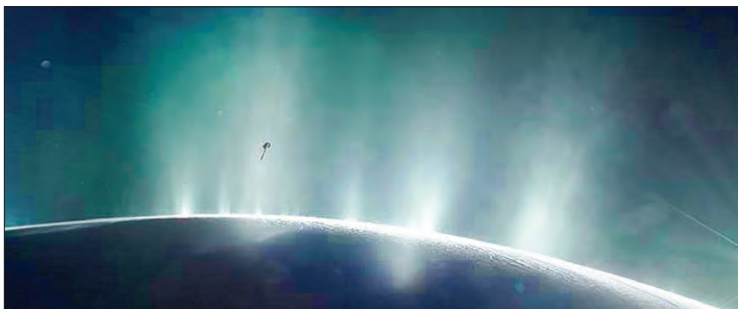


During the research, the scientists passed an ultrasonic wave through a solution of nanotubes which served to define their length and thickness. PHOTO: TASS

by the successful validation of a computed parameter with a microscope. The scientists presume this method is applicable to size measurements of any other nanoobjects.

"We developed a method of measuring sizes of cylindrical nanoobjects, in which the length is greater than the diameter. However, we believe, that a similar

technique might be applied to the opposite case to study nanoobjects having a diameter greater than the length, i.e. for nanodiscs including for instance graphene," Ivanov said. The results of the research presented in the article have been published recently in the journal Colloids and Surfaces A: Physicochemical and Engineering Aspects.—Tass



NASA's Cassini spacecraft is shown diving through the plume of Saturn's moon Enceladus, in 2015, in this photo illustration. PHOTO: REUTERS

US spacecraft to take slingshot dive inside Saturn's rings

CAPE CANAVERAL (Fla.) — NASA's Cassini spacecraft soared past Saturn's biggest moon for the last time on Saturday, tapping its gravity to slingshot into a series of exploratory dives inside the planet's rings, followed by a final fatal plunge into the gas giant.

After nearly 20 years of traveling in space, Cassini used the gravitational tug of Titan, a moon resembling primordial Earth, to hurl itself into a new orbit that will pass through an unexplored region between Saturn's cloud tops and its rings.

The spacecraft is expected to make the first of 22 dives between the planet and its rings on Wednesday. During the last dive on 15 September, Cassini is slated to destroy itself by flying directly into Saturn's crushing atmosphere.

Cassini's final run was set into motion early on Saturday by its 127th and final pass by Titan, the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration said.

At its closest approach, NASA projections had Cassini flying 608 miles (979 km) above Titan, zipping by at a relative speed of 13,000 miles per hour (21,000 km per hour),

"Titan's gravity will bend Cassini's orbit around Saturn, shrinking it slightly, so that instead of passing just outside the rings, the spacecraft will begin its finale dives which pass just inside the rings," NASA said in a statement on Wednesday.

During the dives, Cassini will measure how much ice and other materials are in the rings and determine their chemical composition. That information will help scientists learn how the rings formed.

Cassini also will study Saturn's atmosphere and take measurements to determine the size of the planet's rocky core.

Cassini has been probing Saturn, the sixth planet from the sun, and its entourage of 62 known moons since July 2004, but is running low on fuel. NASA plans to crash the spacecraft into Saturn to avoid any chance Cassini could someday collide with Titan, the ocean-bearing moon Enceladus or any other moon that has the potential to support indigenous microbial life. By destroying the spacecraft, NASA will ensure that any hitchhiking Earth microbes still alive on Cassini will not contaminate the moons for future study.—Reuters

Valeant prices psoriasis treatment at \$3,500 per month

LAVAL, Quebec — Canadian drugmaker Valeant Pharmaceuticals International Inc said it had priced its recently approved plaque psoriasis treatment at \$3,500 per month, ahead of an expected US launch in the second half of 2017.

Siliq is the lowest priced injectable biologic psoriasis treatment currently on the market, Valeant said on Friday.

The treatment, which blocks a cell receptor known as interleukin-17 to tamp down inflammation, will compete with a host of existing IL-17 inhibitors including Cosentyx from Novartis AG and Taltz from Eli Lilly & Co.

Looks like Valeant has sought to price this reasonably relative to Taltz and Cosentyx,

Stifel analyst Annabel Samimy told Reuters.

Taltz is priced at about \$6,000 per month, while Cosentyx at \$5,400 per month as per the recommended dosing schedules, she said.

"But this is only list price — it's neither here nor there unless you know the rebates provided to payers. But optically, looks like Siliq is the better value based on the price and relative efficacy."

Siliq will also compete with other classes of drugs used to treat psoriasis such as Amgen Inc's Enbrel, Johnson & Johnson's Remicade and AbbVie Inc's Humira.

Valeant is trying to regain investor confidence following a tumultuous year in which its pricing strategy and ties to a spe-

cialty pharmacy led to a wider political and regulatory scrutiny.

The Canadian drugmaker's US-listed shares were up about 1 per cent at \$8.98 in early trading on Friday.

Siliq secured US approval in February, but the Food and Drug Administration slapped on its label a black box warning — the most severe given by the agency — calling attention to the risk of suicidal thoughts and behavior.

About 7.5 million in the United States suffer from psoriasis, according to the American Academy of Dermatology.

The disorder, characterized by raised, scaly skin patches, can be associated with other conditions, including diabetes and heart disease.—Reuters



The company logo of Valeant Pharmaceuticals International Inc is seen at its headquarters in Laval, Quebec on 19 May, 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia to buoy rubber price

BANGKOK — Thailand, the world's largest rubber producer, is working together with Malaysia and Indonesia to reduce rubber supply so as to stabilize prices, the Rubber Authority of Thailand said on Sunday.

The three countries held a meeting recently to find ways to ensure the price stability of rubber since the current prices remain volatile, according to Titus Suksaard, governor of the Rubber Authority of Thailand.

Titus said the three countries, which account for around 70 per cent of the world's natural rubber supply, will also increase domestic demand for natural rubber as much as possible.

"Prices keep swinging. We should buoy the price since the deadly flood in south Thailand last year has lowered the rubber supply and rubber farmers in India and Indonesia reduced rubber tapping," said Titus.

He added that rubber

prices should be at least 20 per cent more than production costs and the rubber price in Thailand is only 63 baht (1.8 US dollars) per kilogram with a production cost of 50 baht (1.4 dollars) per kilogram.

Titus said the growth of automobile industry is a major factor to boost rubber prices. He mentioned that the world's big economies are on the rising trend with a growth in automobile industry of 7.37 per cent year on year.

Thailand has approved

to extend a rubber price subsidy scheme worth 20 billion baht and loan packages totaling 10 billion baht to private rubber processing operators to help them continue production.

Malaysia, Indonesia and India have also implemented policies to reduce rubber plantation to bolster market prices.

The rubber bodies among the three countries will disseminate information of rubber markers to avoid rubber speculation.—Xinhua

Chinese navy fleet begins half-year friendship visits

SHANGHAI — A fleet of three Chinese naval ships left Shanghai Sunday morning for public relations visits to more than 20 countries.

The fleet, composed of missile destroyer Changchun, missile frigate Jingzhou and supply ship Chaohu, will tour Asia, Europe, Africa and Oceania for nearly 180 days.

The visits will convey friendship, deepen military communication and cooperation and show a good image of the Chinese navy,

according to Miao Hua, Political Commissar of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy, who saw the fleet off.

All the three ships were domestically made. It is the maiden voyage of the Jingzhou, commissioned in 2016. The other two ships have conducted many escort, drill and patrol missions.

Sunday marks the 68th anniversary of the establishment of the PLA Navy.—Xinhua

Thai king's coronation likely by the end of 2017 — deputy PM

BANGKOK — The coronation of Thailand's new King Maha Vajiralongkorn is likely to take place at the end of the year, a deputy prime minister said on Friday.

King Maha Vajiralongkorn ascended the throne in December, following the

death in October of his father, the revered King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who had reigned for seven decades.

The king's coronation is widely expected to signal the resumption of politics following a year-long mourning period for King

Bhumibol and a general election should follow soon after. "Around the end of the year there might be a coronation," Deputy Prime Minister Wissanu Krea-ngam told reporters on Friday, without specifying a month.

The king's coronation

will take place after his father's cremation, set for 26 October. King Maha Vajiralongkorn endorsed Thailand's new military-backed constitution this month, an essential step towards democracy after the military seized power in a 2014 coup.

But restrictions on political activities will remain in place until after King Bhumibol's cremation and the new king's coronation, Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha has said.

The new constitution is Thailand's 20th since the

end of absolute monarchy in 1932 and critics say it will give the generals a powerful political say for years, if not decades. A date has not yet been fixed for a general election, which had initially been promised by the junta for 2016.—Reuters

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Abe vows to resolve abduction issue amid North Korea tension

TOKYO — Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Sunday reiterated his determination to resolve the issue of North Korea's past abductions of Japanese nationals, with concerns lingering over the safety of the abductees amid tension on the Korean Peninsula.

"My mission will not end until the day comes when the abductees and their families can hold each other. There is no change at all in my idea that the abduction issue should be resolved under the Abe Cabinet," the prime minister said at a gathering in Tokyo.

The event was organized by members of a group representing abductees' families and others. Shigeo Iizuka, the 78-year-old head of the group, said, "It is important to think about how to ensure the return of the victims no matter what the situation surrounding North Korea will be."

The group is growing impatient over the lack of progress on the abduction issue. In November, 40 years will pass since iconic abduction victim Megumi Yokota was taken away to North Korea in



Prime Minister Shinzo Abe speaks in a gathering in Tokyo on 23 April, 2017, organized by members of a group representing the families and supporters of Japanese nationals abducted by North Korean agents in the 1970s and 1980s. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

1977 at age 13.

Abe separately met Iizuka and other members of the group and told them that while the Japanese government should take the initiative in dealing with the issue, it will also seek US cooperation for rescuing the abductees from North Korea.

"Many people are left (in North Korea). It is extremely heartbreaking, as I have worked on the abduction issue from the begin-

ning," Abe said.

Abe has been deeply involved in the abduction issue even before becoming prime minister. In 2002, as deputy chief Cabinet secretary, Abe accompanied then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in his first trip to North Korea and gained the spotlight with his tough stance toward North Korea during negotiations on the abduction issue.

Japan officially lists

17 nationals as having been abducted by North Korean agents in the 1970s and 1980s but alleges their involvement in many more disappearances.

While five of the 17 were repatriated in 2002, Japan continues to seek the return of the remaining 12 people. Of the 12, Pyongyang claims that eight, including Megumi Yokota, have died and four others never entered the country.—Kyodo News

North Korea says ready to strike US aircraft carrier

SEOUL — North Korea said on Sunday it was ready to sink a US aircraft carrier to demonstrate its military might, as two Japanese navy ships joined a US carrier group for exercises in the western Pacific.

US President Donald Trump ordered the USS Carl Vinson carrier strike group to sail to waters off the Korean peninsula in response to rising tension over the North's nuclear and missile tests, and its threats to attack the United States and its Asian allies.

The United States has not specified where the carrier strike group is as it approaches the area. US Vice President Mike Pence said on Saturday it would arrive "within days" but gave no other details.

"Our revolutionary forces are combat-ready to sink a US nuclear powered aircraft carrier with a single strike," the Rodong Sinmun, the newspaper of the North's ruling Workers' Party, said in a commentary.

The paper likened the aircraft carrier to a "gross animal" and said a strike on it would be "an actual example to show our military's force".

The commentary was carried on page three of the newspaper, after a two-page feature about leader Kim Jong Un inspecting a pig farm.

North Korea will mark the 85th anniversary of the foundation of its Korean People's Army



The aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) transits the Sunda Strait on 15 April, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

on Tuesday.

It has in the past marked important anniversaries with tests of its weapons.

North Korea has conducted five nuclear tests, two of them last year, and is working to develop nuclear-tipped missiles that can reach the United States.

It has also carried out a series of ballistic missile tests in defiance of United Nations sanctions.

North Korea's growing nuclear and missile threat is perhaps the most serious security challenge confronting Trump.

He has vowed to prevent the North from being able to hit the

United States with a nuclear missile and has said all options are on the table, including a military strike.

North Korea says its nuclear program is for self-defense and has warned the United States of a nuclear attack in response to any aggression. It has also threatened to lay waste to South Korea and Japan.

US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis said on Friday North Korea's recent statements were provocative but had proven to be hollow in the past and should not be trusted.

"We've all come to hear their words repeatedly, their

word has not proven honest," Mattis told a news conference in Tel Aviv, before the latest threat to the aircraft carrier.

Japan's show of naval force reflects growing concern that North Korea could strike it with nuclear or chemical warheads.

Some Japanese ruling party lawmakers are urging Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to acquire strike weapons that could hit North Korean missile forces before any imminent attack.

Japan's navy, which is mostly a destroyer fleet, is the second largest in Asia after China's.

The two Japanese warships, the Samidare and Ashigara, left

western Japan on Friday to join the Carl Vinson and will "practice a variety of tactics" with the US strike group, the Japan Maritime Self Defence Force said in a statement.

The Japanese force did not specify where the exercises were taking place but by Sunday the destroyers could have reached an area 2,500 km (1,500 miles) south of Japan, which would be waters east of the Philippines.

From there, it could take three days to reach waters off the Korean peninsula. Japan's ships would accompany the Carl Vinson north at least into the East China Sea, a source with knowledge of the plan said.

US and South Korean officials have been saying for weeks that the North could soon stage another nuclear test, something the United States, China and others have warned against.

South Korea has put its forces on heightened alert.

China, North Korea's sole major ally which nevertheless opposes Pyongyang's weapons programs and belligerence, has appealed for calm. The United States has called on China to do more to help defuse the tension.

Last Thursday, Trump praised Chinese efforts to rein in "the menace of North Korea", after North Korean state media warned the United States of a "super-mighty preemptive strike".—Reuters

Japanese ships join US carrier for drills as it nears Korean waters

TOKYO — Two Japanese destroyers on Sunday began an exercise with the US Carl Vinson carrier strike group in the Western Pacific as it approaches waters around the Korean peninsula, Japan's navy said.

The two Japanese warships, the Samidare and Ashigara, left western Japan on Friday to join the Carl Vinson in a show of solidarity as the United States confronts North Korea over its ballistic missile programme and nuclear tests.

The destroyers will "practice a variety of tactics" with the US strike group, the Japan Maritime Self Defence Force (MSDF) said in a statement.

US President Donald Trump ordered the Carl Vinson carrier strike group to sail to the waters off the Korean peninsula in response

to rising tension over North Korea.

Japan's military ordered the warships to accompany the Carl Vinson north at least into the East China Sea, a source with knowledge of the plan said. He asked not to be identified because he is not authorised to talk to the media.

The MSDF did not say how long the Japanese destroyers would stay with the US carrier.

North Korea will mark the 85th anniversary of the foundation of its Korean People's Army on Tuesday. It has in the past marked important anniversaries with tests of its weapons.

North Korea has conducted five nuclear weapons tests, two of them last year, and has carried out a stream of ballistic missile tests, in defiance of UN sanctions.

Trump has vowed to prevent

North Korea from being able to hit the United States with a nuclear missile and has said all options are on the table, including a military strike.

North Korea has warned the United States of a nuclear attack in response to any sign of aggression. It has also threatened to attack US allies South Korea and Japan.

Japan's show of naval force reflects growing concern that North Korea could strike Japan with nuclear or chemical warheads.

Some ruling party lawmakers are urging Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to acquire strike weapons that could hit North Korean missile forces before any imminent attack. Japan's navy, which is mostly a destroyer fleet, is the second largest in Asia after China's.—Reuters

Philippine troops kill 3 more militants on tourist island

MANILA — Philippine soldiers have killed three more Islamic State-linked militants on a resort island where they were hiding after a failed attempt to kidnap tourists, a military spokesman said on Sunday.

The Islamist militants from the Abu Sayyaf group were killed in a clash on Saturday on Bohol island, a considerable distance to the north of their strongholds in the far south of the predominantly Christian country.

Two or three of them were still at large, said Colonel Edgard Arevalo, chief of the military's public affairs office.

"We have reports indicating that they were also wounded and running out of supplies," Arevalo said.

A group of about 10 mil-

itants infiltrated Bohol this month. Western countries have issued travel warnings about visiting the island.

Six of them were killed in a clash on 11 April and one last week.

Among those killed was their leader, who had been involved in the kidnap and execution of Canadian and German nationals in recent months, the Philippine military has said.

The military has been struggling to wipe out Abu Sayyaf, which originally had Muslim separatist aims but now engages mostly in banditry and piracy.

The group has been holding more than two dozen captives, most of them Vietnamese sailors, who are easy prey for militants equipped with small, fast boats.—Reuters

China's first gallery for disabled people opens in Beijing

BEIJING — China's first gallery for the disabled opened in Beijing on Sunday, offering a place for them to showcase calligraphic work and paintings.

The gallery was established

by the China Disabled Persons' Federation (CDPF) and China Braille Library and will be used for fine art exhibition and training for people with disabilities.

More than 150 paintings

have been on display since Sunday in the gallery's debut exhibition. Entry is free to the public throughout the year.

The country is paying more attention to the disabled's emo-

tional and cultural needs while improve their living standards, said CDPF chair Zhang Haidi. The move will offer a stimulus for disabled groups to show their talent and make their life

more colorful and dignified, she said.

Zhang asked disabled federations to help in creating art and better protect disabled people's rights.—Xinhua

Opinion

Write for us

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

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

Peace does not come from a meeting room, but from your heart and mind

Aye Min Soe

The Shan State reached a milestone for peace in Myanmar, holding a national level political dialogue on 23rd April for the state.

The representatives of the people in the Shan State, where the historic Panglong Agreement was signed in 1947, are participating in the three-day dialogue. To be read, discussed and debated are a total of 70 papers – 26 political papers, 23 papers on the economy and 21 papers on land issues, natural resources and environmental conservation.

Some of these papers were read on

the first day of the dialogue.

This is all being done to achieve peace in Myanmar, which has been plagued by armed conflicts for centuries.

The Shan State experienced armed conflicts throughout its history. With the Panglong Agreement signed by General Aung San and ethnic leaders, there was peace, albeit temporary.

The Union was established by sacrificing many lives, but no progress was made until the next step was taken after the fighting.

Political dialogue is the first step towards ending of armed conflicts, solving the political dilemma through political

means with peace and building a union which can guarantee physical and mental peace for our future generations.

The Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong was held in Nay Pyi Taw from 31st August to 3rd September 2016, and the success of the conference could build trust among the stakeholders, even though they have diverse opinions.

Differing views and visions exist not only between armed organizations and the government, but also in different forms among different groups across the nation. Differences depend on political outlooks, race, religion, social attitudes

and visions. If we really want democracy, we need to believe that different visions can be solved in a peaceful way.

It is important for all participants in the peace process to strive for unity and for the emergence of the Federal Democratic Union.

Peace does not come from a meeting room, but from the hearts and minds of all concerned.

All participants in the peace process should strive for unity and for the emergence of the Federal Democratic Union. Our main strength, and the common quality that should bring us together, should be our sense of duty.

Myanmar Green Peacock to last forever

Dr. Myint Thein (B.V.S)

One day, in the early morning I saw a man embracing a peacock with one hand and grabbing two legs of the peacock tightly with another hand in a busy road of Yangon, precisely speaking in Upper Pansodan road of Mingalataung Nyunt township. It seemed he is waiting a taxi. Normally a man waiting taxi is by no means interesting for everyone. Nevertheless, the peacock in his hand made me vigilant and inquisitive. When I got near him, I was so shocked and upset to see the peacock in his hand because it absolutely lacked the physical characteristics of the species of Myanmar Green Peacock. In my mind I despairingly dubbed that creature as "genetically obliterated and degraded peacock". It had no features to be recognized as Myanmar Green Peacock.

In this case, I would like to explain about green peacock, blue peacock and white peacock which has been found in the world, especially about Myanmar species of Green peacock.

Though non-biologists or lay men cannot clearly identify the authenticity of Myanmar Green Peacock (Green Peafowl), scientific name of which is "Pavo muticus", they are familiar with Blue Peacock (Indian Peafowl or Blue Peafowl), scientific name of which is "Pavo cristatus". Many people have seen blue peacock from the photos or business advertisements. However, many people still are mistakenly recognized Blue Peacock as Green Peacock.

It was noted when people tried to keep the peacock as pet animal, the India Blue Peacock and the White Peacock only are in their knowledge.

Myanmar Green Peacock then was not widely known. So, it is very important to be able to differentiate between Myanmar Green Peacock and Indian Blue Peacock. Otherwise Myanmar Green peacock will vanish from existence as an outstanding species of peacock.

Even in the Green Peacock species (Pavo muticus), three different types can be classified depending on their geographical occurrence such as Indochina Green Peacock, Myanmar Green Peacock and Java Green Peacock.

Another noteworthy fact regarding green peacock and blue peacock is that they never occur in the same region and they are living in the different habitat having no way to meet each other in the natural habitat. According to the report of peacock specialist there are no different types or subspecies in Blue Peacock like Green Peacock. Male and female green peacock have similar characteristics in colour, shape and features.

To have the knowledge on the essential characteristics of a green peacock is important because without that knowledge one cannot correctly identify which is green peacock or which is blue peacock. Generally speaking both male and female green peacocks have more beautiful and attractive colour than Indian blue peacock. Head ornamenta-



“Now the green peacocks are included in the list of the most endangered species in South East Asia.

tions and head features of green peacock is quite different from those of blue peacock. Therefore, green peacock can be easily distinguished from blue peacock by body colour, shade, tinge and color and features of the head. The lock of feather at the very top of the head of green peacock grow altogether straight upward in an organized way while it is upward fan-shaped in blue peacock. The colour of the cheek of green peacock is yellow and the feather of neck and breast is totally green while in blue peacock the feather in the part of neck and breast is blue. This is also an obvious feature to distinguish between green peacock and blue peacock. The feather all over the whole body is bright green and produces shining scaly appearance in green peacock. Female blue peahen is very similar in breast and

neck feather to green peahen by having the same green colour. But the feather on other parts of body of blue peahen is brownish in colour. Green peacock and blue peacock are the same genus and male and female can mate to reproduce the offspring. The offspring reproduced have the yellowish colour on the face. The lock of feather or ornamentation on the head is also changed in style. It has fan-shaped lock of feather but a little bit less sideward extension. That means fan becomes narrower in spreading angle than that of blue peacock. Sometimes the breed of green and blue peacock has the leg longer than its parents. Scale-like appearance of the feather disappears, but it retains on the wings. The worst feature that has deviated from the parents is the ugly white patches on the whole length

of the neck. Second or later generation of mixed blood between green peacock and blue peacock will certainly exhibit the colour and features quite different from the pedigree. It is a big problem in conserving the true pedigree of Myanmar Green Peacock.

Some bird enthusiasts are trying to produce a new breed which has different features and combination of colour by crossbreeding between green peacock and blue peacock. Some people appreciate the strange and unconventional combination of colour and features of the crossbred peacock. However, those new breeds showing no pedigree features, if viewed from the aspect of conservation value, will absolutely score zero. In other word they are scums.

Actually nature has placed those different species of peacock geographically apart not to be able to mate between them. However, man betrayed the nature and places the different species together to mate and produce a new product. The nature being blighted responds by a barrage of severe impacts on the crossbred product. Those impacts are rendering white patches on the neck, lock of head feathers not straight upward and arranged in disarray, green feather on body like green peacock, but with fan-shaped lock hair on the head like in blue peacock, and the colour of the cheek also corrupted to unattractive one. The most important disgrace is the loss of shining scale-like features on the body which is unique to the

Myanmar Green Peacock. To put in a nutshell human has committed the grave mistake that result in the loss of the most valuable properties and genetic conservation of Myanmar Green Peacock.

Now it is time to turn to White Peacock. The white peacocks are not of the different species from green peacock (Pavo muticus) and blue peacock (Pavo cristatus). According to the research record, it is the result of colour mutation on blue peacock. Scholars studying on the peacock said that white peacock has no relation with green peacock. According to the staffs of Zoological Garden of Myanmar, some white peacocks are seen in the group of blue peacocks in the garden, but they have never seen white peacock offspring though the group of green peacocks are breeding many generations in many years. Now the green peacocks are included in the list of the most endangered species in South East Asia.

Excessive hunting and seriously spoilt habitat has increased the endangered level of the green peacocks in 2009. So, it is strongly suggested to breed the pedigree and genetically strong green peacocks to prevent the green peacocks from extinction. To sum up the articles, it is strongly urged to the lovers of natural resources and biodiversity of Myanmar to make concerted effort to try to keep 100% pedigree breed of green peacocks and to protect genetic variation of green peacocks. — (Translated by Khin Maung Win)

US Homeland Security probes possible abuse in Twitter summons case

SAN FRANCISCO — The US Homeland Security Department's inspector general said on Friday he was investigating possible abuse of authority in a case that triggered a lawsuit against the department by Twitter Inc (TWTR N).

Inspector General John Roth described the probe in a letter to Senator Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat who had asked for an investigation due to concerns about free speech protections.

In a lawsuit on 6 April, Twitter disclosed that it received a summons in March from the US Bureau of Customs and Border Protection, an agency within Homeland Security, demanding records about an account on the social media platform identified by the handle @ALT_uscis.

The account has featured posts critical of President Donald Trump's immigration policies, leading Twitter to complain in its lawsuit that the summons was an unlawful attempt to suppress dissent.

The agency dropped its demand of Twitter the day after the suit was filed.

Customs bureau spokesman Mike Friel said on Friday that the bureau requested the inspector general's review and will fully support it.

The people behind the Twitter account have not disclosed their identities, but the use of "ALT" with a government agency acronym has led many to assume government employees were behind the tweets critical of Trump.

The lawsuit said the account



People holding mobile phones are silhouetted against a backdrop projected with the Twitter logo. PHOTO: REUTERS

"claims to be" the work of at least one federal immigration employee. USCIS is the acronym of United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, a component of Homeland Security.

Roth's office is charged with investigating waste, fraud and

abuse within Homeland Security. He wrote in his letter that he was looking at whether the summons to Twitter "was improper in any way, including whether CBP abused its authority."

"DHS OIG is also reviewing potential broader misuse of

summons authority at the department," he added.

Wyden's office posted the letter online. A representative for Roth could not immediately be reached for comment. A Twitter spokeswoman declined to comment.—Reuters

Singapore bets on robot vehicles to drive future of public transport

SINGAPORE — Self-driving vehicles may sound futuristic, but Singapore is already betting on them to drive the future of transportation in the wealthy city-state.

The idea is to deploy driverless taxis, buses, trucks — and even utility vehicles that can clean streets and water plants along the city's motorways.

The government has invited foreign and local firms and research institutions to conduct trials here of self-driving vehicles, with the aim of eventually deploying them for public transport and a stream of other uses.

Unlike other countries where private-sector tech giants or automakers are the ones driving research and development of autonomous vehicle technology, in Singapore it is the government — enthralled by the technology's potential in public transportation — that is taking the lead to turn the dream into reality.

The Singapore government has identified deployment of autonomous vehicles as one pillar of its "Smart Nation."

The technology for autonomous vehicles is about 80 per cent developed, leaving 20 per cent yet to be accomplished, said Pang Kin Keong, permanent secretary at the Ministry of Transport, adding solving the problems that remain "is going to be harder than the first 80 per cent."

The remaining problems include how autonomous vehicles deal with the unpredictability of human behavior and human drivers, as well as bad weather conditions such as heavy rain.

Still the hope is autonomous vehicles "encourage people to ditch their cars and move to public transport," freeing up space in the tiny city-state for other urban uses such as parks instead of carparks.

According to a 2011 study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, car sharing based on an automated system could potentially reduce the number of passenger vehicles in the city-state by two-thirds.

The majority of Singaporeans already use public transport in a country where government policy to curb car ownership has made the price of cars in the city-state one of the highest in the world.

"People have been saying (our) public transport system is not bad," Pang said. "But if I wanted to shift the last one third to public transport, I have to provide them with an even more valuable proposition in taking public transport." This includes improving "the first and last mile" journey from home to train station and vice versa.

The government aims to begin limited deployments of autonomous vehicles for consumer use in four to five years, starting with a few buses in newer areas so that Singaporeans get a feel for what it will be like down the road, said Pang.



A driverless vehicle moves along a public road in the One-North business district in Singapore on 20 January, 2017, as a pedestrian looks on. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

A US and Singapore start-up, nuTonomy, and British firm Delphi Automotive are among four companies and research institutions currently conducting trials of autonomous cars on public roads within the leafy "One-North" business enclave, the first public road network in Singapore designated for testing driverless vehicles.

nuTonomy is currently testing six vehicles here and aiming for the commercial launch of its on-demand robo-taxi service in Singapore next year.

Kyodo News reporters recently took a ride in an autonomous car that is being tested by SMART at One-North. The small white Mitsubishi i-MiEV, a hatchback electric car, which had been converted into an autonomous car with the installation of some devices, glided at a cautious pace of about 20 kilometers per hour, much less than the 40 km speed limit in the area.

"We normally do 20-30 km" during test drives, said Eng You Hong, post-doctoral researcher in the SMART project who was one of two engineers in the car during

the demo ride. As a safety precaution, there must always be an engineer behind the wheel and another engineer monitoring the software at this stage of the trials on public roads.

The car had been retrofitted with LIDARS, which act as sensors by emitting laser lights that are bounced back when they hit objects, enabling the car to make sense of its surroundings.

The car has a "270-degree field of view, much more than our human eyes can detect," Eng said.

The vehicle has also been fitted with a camera and a computer which is linked to a motor that controls the steering wheel and brake. It is able to slow down to avoid hitting unexpected obstacles such as jay walkers who might suddenly appear in its path.

Still, there was a button near the driver's seat to push to switch between automatic and manual driving mode. During the demo ride, the driver often placed his hands there as a safety precaution so that he could immediately take control in case of an emergency.

The ride, although generally smooth, was somewhat jerky at times. And to overtake another car, the driver needed to take control manual as the car is not yet able to perform that function. "We are still developing the algorithm," Eng said.

Traffic junctions and crossings also still post major problems.

MIT Professor Daniela Rus, a principal investigator in the SMART project, said it is a big challenge for autonomous vehicles to cope in a real-life environment where "some of the cars are driven by people and some of the cars are driven automatically."

Singapore's Land Transport Authority has partnered with local firm ST Kinetics and state-run

Nanyang Technological University to try to develop Singapore's own autonomous buses.

And this past January, it roped in Japan's Toyota Tsusho Corp. and Sweden's Scania to help develop a truck platooning system to transport containers between port terminals. The first phase of trials will be conducted for about a year by Scania and Toyota at their own research centers in Sweden and Japan before one is selected for the second phase of trials in Singapore.

Pang said the government also plans to launch trials later this year for the development of self-driving utility vehicles for cleaning streets and watering plants.

Singapore is playing an active role to help set up an international standard for the testing of autonomous vehicles. It has set up a Centre of Excellence for Testing & Research of Autonomous Vehicles NTU. It has a 1.8 hectare test circuit that can provide trials in a controlled environment with simulated conditions.

Yet aside from the remaining technological hurdles to overcome, there are also legal issues that need to be sorted out, such as liability for accidents involving self-driving vehicles operating on public roads, before such cars can be fully deployed.

There are also concerns about the impact driverless technology will have on the employment of thousands of taxi and bus drivers. Pang is hopeful autonomous vehicle technology will enable Singaporeans to "take on higher value added jobs that automation brings about."

"The progress of technology is inexorable. It will come whether you like it or not, and you can choose to stay wedded to the past or you can prepare for the future," Pang said.—Kyodo News

May's Conservatives on course for sweeping British election victory

LONDON — Britain's Theresa May appeared on course to win a crushing election victory in June after opinion polls put support for her ruling Conservative party at around 50 per cent, double that of the opposition Labour party.

May's decision to call a 8 June election stunned her political rivals this week and a string of polls released late on Saturday suggested the gamble had paid off, with one from ComRes showing the party of Margaret Thatcher enjoying levels of support not seen since 1991.

May, appointed prime minister in the turmoil that followed Britain's vote to leave the European Union last June, said she needed the election to secure her own mandate and strengthen her hand for the Brexit negotiations ahead.

She is also looking to capitalise on the disarray swirling around the Labour party, which has been riven with internal division over its leader Jeremy Corbyn. Voters also appear to be switching from the anti-EU UKIP party, which helped campaign for Brexit, to May's Conservatives, which will likely deliver it.

"The announcement of a snap election has clearly focused the minds of the electorate," said James Crouch at pollster Opinion.

In two other polls, May's Conservatives also gained ground in Scotland at the expense of the Scottish National Party, potentially weakening the nationalists' demand for another independence referendum.



Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May delivers a stump speech at Netherton Conservative Club during the Conservative Party's election campaign, in Dudley on 22 April, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

erendum.

May has already warned her party not to take victory for granted, a message that was echoed by pollsters on Saturday.

"While no political party could ever object to breaching the 50 per cent barrier for the first time this century, this spectacular headline result masks a real danger for the Tories," said ComRes Chairman Andrew Hawkins.

"The fact that six in ten voters believe Labour cannot win under Corbyn's leadership bring with it the threat of complacency among Tory (Conservative) voters who may be tempted to sit at home on June 8th and let others deliver the result they expect."

According to polls by Opinion, ComRes and

YouGov, May's Conservatives held a lead of between 19 and 25 percentage points, with the party's support ranging from 45 per cent to 50 per cent.

Having repeatedly denied that she would call an election, May is now also poised to announce a raft of policy proposals more commonly associated with the left-leaning Labour party, according to the Sunday Times.

The newspaper said the Conservatives would pledge to protect workers' rights and cap more household energy prices in a bid to help those hit by rising inflation and muted wage growth.

If the polls are correct, the Conservatives could secure a once-in-a-generation victory that will realign the British political

landscape. According to the polls, Labour has lost its reputation as the party that would best protect the National Health Service — once its strongest claim. The improved Conservative fortunes across the country have also spread to Scotland, where First Minister Nicola Sturgeon's Scottish National Party, or SNP, has stepped up calls for a second independence referendum.

According to an analysis for the Times, the Conservatives are on course to win 12 seats in Scotland while Labour will be wiped out from its former political stronghold.

Currently, the Conservatives hold only one of Scotland's 59 seats in the British parliament. The SNP holds 54. —Reuters

Labour leader Corbyn says could suspend Syria air strikes if elected

LONDON — The leader of Britain's main opposition Labour Party Jeremy Corbyn said on Sunday he could suspend British involvement in air strikes against Syria if he was elected prime minister at a June 8 election.

The veteran peace campaigner, whose Labour Party is around 20 points behind the ruling Conservatives in opinion polls, set out his position on a range of security and

foreign policies, saying he would look again at Britain's nuclear deterrent and was against using nuclear weapons.

His comments were pounced upon by the Conservatives, who said that Corbyn posed a threat to British security and was the best reason "for sticking with the strong leadership of (Prime Minister) Theresa May".

Corbyn told the BBC's Andrew Marr

Show that he believed that "the only solution in Syria is going to be a political one".

"I want us to say 'Listen, let's get people around the table quickly' and a way of achieving that — suspending the strikes, possibly."

The leftist leader, whose views on foreign policy have often been at odds with those held by other lawmakers in his party, also said he would

have to consider whether he would authorise a drone strike against the leader of Islamic State to limit civilian casualties.

May, who said she had called the early election to shore up support for her divorce plan with the European Union and heal divisions in the country, looks set to win a large majority, with some polls putting support for her party at 50 per cent. —Reuters

NEWS IN BRIEF

North Korea detains third US citizen — Yonhap

SEOUL — North Korea detained a US citizen on Friday, South Korea's Yonhap news agency has reported, bringing the total number of Americans held by the isolated country to three.

The man, a Korean-American in his fifties identified only by his surname Kim, had been in North Korea for a month to discuss relief activities, Yonhap said on Sunday. He was arrested at Pyongyang International Airport on his way out of the country. North Korea, which has been criticised for its human rights record, has in the past used detained Americans to extract high-profile visits from the United States, with which it has no formal diplomatic relations. —Reuters

Britain's ruling Conservatives to focus on Brexit, energy in poll — minister

LONDON — Britain's ruling Conservative Party's election manifesto will focus on Brexit and domestic concerns, such as strengthening the economy and putting a cap on energy prices, Work and Pensions minister Damian Green said on Sunday.

"The manifesto will deal with two big issues facing the country — one obviously is the Brexit negotiations ... but the other half, which is equally important, is indeed the domestic agenda," he told ITV's Peston on Sunday programme. "There will be a lot about energy policy in the manifesto ... I think that people feel that some of the big energy companies have taken advantage of them with the tariffs." —Reuters

Polling station evacuated in eastern France due to suspicious vehicle

PARIS — A polling station in the town of Besançon in eastern France was evacuated on Sunday after a stolen vehicle was abandoned with the engine running while voting was taking place, French Interior Ministry said.

The suspicious car was flagged as stolen and had fake number plates, a ministry official told Reuters, adding that a decision was made to evacuate the polling station, while bomb disposal experts were called to examine the vehicle.

France is voting in the first round of a presidential election on Sunday amid heightened security. Security officials have said there is a risk during the elections of a militant attack like the ones that have killed more than 230 people in the past two years in France. —Reuters

Scottish Conservatives open up lead over Scottish Labour — poll

LONDON — The Scottish Conservative Party has opened up a 10 percentage point lead over the Scottish Labour Party in an opinion poll, reaching 28 per cent, while the Scottish National Party remains in front on 43 per cent, pollster Survation said on Sunday.

"Suration's latest poll in Scotland on behalf of the Sunday Post shows the Scottish Conservatives at their highest level in either a Survation Westminster or a Holyrood (the devolved parliament) voting intention ever," Suration said in a statement.

The pollster said it had interviewed 1,018 Scots between 18-21 April for the survey. —Reuters

White House official: deal to avoid government shutdown could come today

WASHINGTON — White House budget director Mick Mulvaney said talks between Republicans and Democrats in Congress could reach an agreement to avoid a government shutdown as early as Sunday.

"The negotiations are ongoing and there's no reason we can't have an agreement there as early as today," Mulvaney said in an interview on Fox News Sunday. —Reuters

Syrian army, allies gain ground against rebels north of Hama

BEIRUT — The Syrian army and allied forces advanced against rebels in western Syria near Hama city on Sunday, building on recent strategic gains in the area, a military source and a monitoring group said.

Government forces captured the town of Halfaya and nearby villages, they said, taking back territory that rebels seized last year from forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad.

“We gained control of Halfaya and several hills in the area,” the Syrian military source said. “The army will of course continue its fight.” Boosted by Russian air strikes and Iranian-backed militias, the Syrian army has pushed into rebel areas north of Hama, expanding its control this week along the western highway that links Damascus and Aleppo.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitoring group, said the army began advancing into areas near Halfaya when rebels with-

drew on Sunday, following intense battles and air strikes.

Sources on the rebel side could not immediately be reached for comment. Warplanes have pounded Halfaya and swathes of territory near the highway in a region vitally important to Assad’s government, which has shored up its rule in the populated west of the country. Rebel factions, spearheaded by jihadists from the former al-Qaeda affiliate and also including Free Syrian Army groups, have been fighting fiercely to defend the towns in recent days.

The army’s earlier capture of Soran, its northern gateway to Hama city, meant it had reversed most of the territorial gains rebels made in their major offensive last month. With the help of its allies, the government has gained the military upper hand in the six-year war against the wide array of rebels, including some groups supported by Turkey, the United States and Gulf monarchies. —Reuters



PHOTO: REUTERS



Smoke rises above the old city as Iraqi forces fight Islamic State militants in western Mosul, Iraq on 22 April, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Three Iraqi policemen killed in suicide attack south of Mosul

MOSUL, (Iraq), — Three policemen were killed on Sunday in a suicide attack south of Mosul, the northern Iraqi city where Islamic State is fighting off a US-backed offensive, security sources said.

A group of about 10 assailants, including four suicide bombers, had tried to infiltrate a Federal Police helicopter base in

Al-Areej, a police captain told Reuters.

Three policemen and three of the assailants were killed in the attack, he said. Police gave chase but the assailants managed to escape, he said.

Al-Areej is located just south of Mosul where some districts remain under control of the hardline

Sunni group.

Islamic State is now besieged in the northwestern part of Mosul, an area that includes the Old City. Its Grand al-Nuri Mosque is where the group’s leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, declared a “caliphate” over parts of Iraq and Syria in mid-2014. —Reuters

Saudi Arabia restores civil service and military allowances

RIYADH — Saudi Arabia’s King Salman issued a royal decree on Saturday restoring financial allowances for civil servants and military personnel that had been cut under austerity measures.

“The royal order returns all allowances, financial benefits, and bonuses to civil servants and military staff,” said the decree, broadcast on state-run Ekhbariya TV.

In September Saudi Arabia cut ministers’ salaries by 20 per cent and scaled back financial perks for public sector employees in one of the energy-rich kingdom’s most drastic measures to save money at a time of

low oil prices.

The measures were the first pay cuts for government employees, who make up about two-thirds of working Saudis.

The decree cancelled those orders, saying they had come as a response to the sharp drop in the price of oil, the main source of state revenues.

Oil prices sank to a low of around \$28 last January amid a two-year price slump. Since late 2016, however, prices have partially rebounded, with Brent crude now trading around \$52 a barrel compared to last year’s average of \$45.

Minister Of State Mohammed Alsheikh said Deputy

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who serves as chairman of the Council for Economic and Development affairs, recommended the reinstatement of allowances after an official review and better-than-expected budgetary performance in the first quarter of 2017.

“The government has conducted a review of the measures initiated in the fall in relation to the public-sector employees’ allowances.

A number of fiscal adjustment measures were taken over the last two years which led to a strong improvement in the government’s fiscal position,” said Alsheikh.

He joined other key officials in highlighting figures pointing to economic recovery.

The central bank governor said the trade deficit was expected to drop in 2017, possibly moving into a surplus, while the deputy economy minister said the kingdom had reduced its deficit in the first quarter of the year by more than half, in part because of prudent management of government spending.

“We believe this move will boost positive sentiment as domestic demand recovers on the back of enhanced government employees’ disposable income,” said Alsheikh. —Reuters

Israeli fire kills three in Syria at pro-government military base — militia, monitor

BEIRUT — An Israeli attack against a military base for the Syrian pro-government National Defence Forces in southern Syria killed three NDF members on Sunday, the NDF militia and a monitoring group said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitoring group, said it remained unclear if the source of the bombardment in Quneitra province was an air strike or shelling. Israel has carried out air strikes or fired mortar rounds during the six-year war in Syria, often in response to the occasional spillover, including stray shells from fighting among Syrian factions.

The Israeli military declined to comment on the reports. The Syrian army could not immediately be reached for comment. The NDF said the attack struck its military camp in the countryside of Quneitra, which sits near the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, territory that Israel captured from Syria in a 1967 war. Rebel groups fighting President Bashar al-Assad’s government in the Syrian conflict hold swathes of Quneitra, while the army and pro-government forces control another part of the province. —Reuters

Gunmen shoot, injure conservationist Gallmann in Kenya

NAIROBI — Gunmen shot and wounded Italian-born conservationist Kuki Gallmann at her conservation park in northern Kenya on Sunday, a source close to her family said.

The 73-year-old author of the memoir “I Dreamed of Africa” was shot in the stomach after the vehicle she was driving in was ambushed by a group of gunmen, the source said.

Gallmann was first flown by

helicopter to Nanyuki Hospital where she received treatment but was later transferred to another hospital in Kenya’s capital, Nairobi.

A wave of violence has hit Kenya’s drought-stricken Laikipia region in recent months as armed cattle-herders searching for scarce grazing land have driven tens of thousands of cattle onto private farms and ranches from poor quality

communal land.

At least 14 people have been killed.

Some local Kenyan farmers have also been attacked and had their livestock stolen.

The source also told Reuters a local Kenyan, Duncan Murimi, was shot in the stomach by militias from the local Pokot tribe and died three days ago in the same area.

The militias stole nothing

from him and had no cattle looking for grass when they attacked him.

Last month, Tristan Voorspuys, a British military veteran who ran a safari company in Kenya, was shot dead at a private ranch in Laikipia.

He had gone to the ranch to inspect the remains of a friend’s home that had been burnt down by herders days earlier —Reuters



Tactical drills are also conducted on the Arctic Island archipelagoes. PHOTO: TASS

Russian submariners perfecting under-ice navigation skills in Arctic

MOSCOW — The crews of Russian strategic submarines are sharpening their skills of under-ice navigation in Arctic conditions, Defence Minister Army General Sergei Shoigu told the ministry's board meeting on Friday.

"Arctic practices continue. The crews of strategic missile submarines are perfecting the skills of under-ice sailing. Northern Fleet naval groups annually

make voyages across the Northern Sea Route," the defence minister said.

Also, tactical drills are conducted on Arctic Island archipelagoes, he added.

"Servicemen of the Arctic motor rifle brigade continue learning to operate new types of military hardware adapted to low temperatures," the Russian defence minister said. —TASS

French presidential poll a bellwether for Europe

PARIS — France voted on Sunday in the first round of a bitterly fought presidential election that is crucial to the future of Europe and a closely-watched test of voters' anger with the political establishment.

Over 50,000 police backed by elite units of the French security services were on high alert, patrolling the streets less than three days after a gunman shot dead a policeman and wounded two others on the central Champs Elysees avenue.

Nearly 47 million voters will decide whether to back a pro-EU centrist newcomer, a scandal-ridden veteran conservative who wants to slash public spending, a far-left eurosceptic admirer of Fidel Castro or to appoint France's first woman president who would shut borders and ditch the euro.

The outcome will be anxiously monitored around the world as a sign of whether the populist tide that saw Britain vote to leave the EU and Donald Trump's election in the United States is still rising, or starting to ebb.

Emmanuel Macron, 39, a centrist ex-banker who set up his party just a year ago, is the opinion polls' favourite to win the first round and beat far-right National Front chief Marine Le Pen in the two-person

run-off on 7 May.

For them to win the top two qualifying positions on Sunday would represent a huge change in the political landscape, as the second round would feature neither of the mainstream parties that have governed France for decades.

"It wouldn't be the classic left versus right divide but two views of the world clashing," said Ifop pollsters' Jerome Fourquet. "Macron bills himself as the progressist versus conservatives, Le Pen as the patriot versus the globalists."

But conservative Francois Fillon is making something of a comeback after being plagued for months by a fake jobs scandal, and leftist Jean-Luc Melenchon's ratings have surged in recent weeks. Any two of the four is seen as having a chance to qualify for the run-off.

The seven other candidates, including the ruling Socialist party's Benoit Hamon, two Trotskyists, three fringe nationalists and a former shepherd-turned-centrist lawmaker are lagging far behind in opinion polls.

"I have no idea who I'm going to vote for. It's a disaster. I am going to go and vote but only because I have to," said 60-year-old Pierrette Prevot in Paris.

Security has played an important part in national debate since Thursday's killing of a policeman by a suspected Islamist in Paris, with some arguing it could increase Le Pen's chances.

But previous militant attacks, such as the November 2015 killing of 130 people in Paris ahead of regional polls, did not appear to boost the votes of those espousing tougher national security policies.

Adding uncertainty to France's most unpredictable election in decades, pollsters say they might not be able to give precise estimates of the outcome at 8 pm (1800 GMT) as usual, because small and medium-sized polling stations will be open one hour longer than in past elections.

The possibility of a Le Pen-Melenchon run-off is not the most likely scenario but is one which alarms bankers and investors.

While Macron wants to further beef up the euro zone, Le Pen has told supporters "the EU will die". She wants to return to the Franc, re-denominate the country's debt stock, tax imports and reject international treaties.

Melenchon also wants to radically overhaul the European Union and hold a referendum on whether



Marine Le Pen (L), French National Front (FN) political party leader and candidate for French 2017 presidential election, casts her ballot in the first round of 2017 French presidential election at a polling station in Henin-Beaumont, northern France on 23 April, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

to leave the bloc.

Le Pen or Melenchon would struggle, in parliamentary elections in June, to win a majority to carry out such radical moves, but their growing popularity worries both investors and France's EU partners.

"It is no secret that we will not be cheering madly should Sunday's result produce a second round between Le Pen and Melenchon," German Finance Minister

Wolfgang Schaeuble said, adding that the election posed a risk to the global economy. If either Macron or Fillon were victorious, each would face challenges.

For Macron, a big question would be whether he could win a majority in parliament in June. Fillon, though likely to struggle less to get a majority, would likely be dogged by an embezzlement scandal, in which he denies wrongdoing.—Reuters

Thousands take part in March for Science in Berlin

BERLIN — Thousands of people in Berlin turned out for the first March for Science being held in more than 600 cities worldwide on Saturday due to growing concern about US President Donald Trump's climate change skepticism and cuts to research funding.

Demonstrators carried signs reading "We love experts - those with evidence" and "Science not Silence" for the march from Humboldt University toward the Brandenburg Gate, led by mayor Michael Mueller and the leaders of the city's universities.

"There are no alternatives to facts," read one large banner, referencing a term used by White House

official Kellyanne Conway during a dispute with the media over the size of the crowd at Trump's inauguration.

The marchers also stopped briefly at the Hungarian embassy to protest a new Hungarian law that has threatened to close a university funded by financier George Soros.

Organisers said 11,000 people took part in the event, which they said aimed to highlight the importance of science and evidence-based knowledge in democracies. "We Berliners know from our own history what the repression of freedom means. That is why we have a particular responsibility to mobilise for free science

and an open and tolerant society," Mueller told marchers.

The march, timed to coincide with Earth Day, comes after moves by Trump to cut funding to the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Institutes of Health.

"Science is necessary. In my opinion empirical science is the key to progress by the culture and civilisation we have developed," marcher Hagen Esterberg told Reuters TV. Maria Pohle said she joined the march to show support "for the science which is not only threatened in America, but also in Europe and everywhere in the world."—Reuters

Six bodies found buried in ditch outside Mexico's Acapulco

ACAPULCO — The remains of at least six bodies were found in a ditch on Saturday just outside the seaside resort of Acapulco in Guerrero, Mexico's bloodiest state, an official said.

The bodies had been buried between 5 and 20 days ago in a ditch that fed rain water into one of Acapulco's main bays, according to Acapulco prosecutor Ricardo Quevedo. Sparsely populated Guerrero has led the nation in firearm killings for most of the past six years as heroin production for the US market has spiked in an area that is being fought over by

a growing number of drug gangs.

Violence has also been fed by turf wars over the distribution of drugs like cocaine and methamphetamine in cities like Acapulco. There were nearly 1,500 recorded firearms murders in Guerrero last year, according to government data, and hundreds more people have disappeared, with many found in mass graves.

Violence in Mexico has spiked during the past year to the highest rates since 2011 and the worst during the presidency of Enrique Pena Nieto, who took office in late 2012.—Reuters

US defence secretary arrives in Djibouti to visit key military base

DJIBOUTI — US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis arrived in Djibouti on Sunday to visit an important military base at the southern entrance to the Red Sea used as a launch pad for operations in Yemen and Somalia.

The visit, part of Mattis' week-long trip to the Middle East and Africa, comes as the United States has been increasing pressure on militant groups such as al Shabaab in the region.

The US base, which has about 4,000 personnel, is located just miles from a Chinese one, still under construction, which has caused concern to some US officials.

Djibouti, which is about the size of Wales, is on the route to the Suez Canal. The tiny, barren nation, sandwiched between Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia, and also hosts Japanese and French bases.

The White House recently granted the US military broader authority to strike al Qaeda-linked al Shabaab militants in Somalia.

Al Shabaab has been able to carry out deadly bombings despite losing most of its territory to African Union peacekeepers supporting the Somali government.

The group's insurgency aims



US Defence Secretary James Mattis is greeted by Djibouti's Minister of Defense Ali Hasan Bahdon as he arrives at Djibouti-Ambouli International Airport in Ambouli, Djibouti on 23 April 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

to drive out the peacekeepers, topple Somalia's western-backed government and impose its strict version of Islam on the Horn of Africa state. The United States recently sent a few dozen troops to Somalia to help train members of the Somali National Army.

The United States is also

carrying out strikes in Yemen against al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

AQAP boasts one of the world's most feared bomb makers, Ibrahim Hassan al-Asiri, and it has been a persistent concern to the US government ever since a 2009 attempt to blow up a De-

troit-bound airliner on Christmas Day.

The militant group has also taken advantage of a civil war pitting the Iran-aligned Houthis against the Saudi-backed government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, to try to widen its control and influence in the

impoverished Arabian Peninsula country, one of the poorest in the Middle East.

Mattis' trip also comes amid a recent surge in piracy off the coast of Somalia.

The sudden string of attacks by Somali pirates comes after years without a reported incident. Attacks peaked with 237 in 2011 but then declined steeply after ship owners improved security measures and international naval forces stepped up patrols.

This month has seen a new rash of attacks, with two ships captured and a third rescued by Indian and Chinese forces after the crew radioed for help and locked themselves in a safe room.

A US defence official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the recent incidents were concerning but not surprising.

The official said international shipping companies had started to become complacent about their security. At the same time poverty and limited economic opportunities meant that piracy was bound to increase.

The recent incidents, the official said, are likely to mean that countries patrolling the waters are going to think twice before they reduce their presence.—Reuters

US pursues 3 pct growth via tax reforms, regulatory relief: Treasury Secretary

WASHINGTON — US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin reiterated on Saturday that the Trump administration is pursuing over 3percent economic growth with the support of tax reforms and regulatory relief.

"The US economy is well positioned," Mnuchin said during a conversation with Christine Lagarde, managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

He called the IMF's forecast for US growth "a little conserva-

tive," saying that the US economy could grow by 3 per cent or higher with the support of tax reforms and regulatory relief.

The IMF forecast the US economy to grow by 2.3 per cent this year and 2.5 per cent next year.

Mnuchin reiterated that the Trump administration is planning to bring the high corporate tax rates down and simplify tax codes for individuals.

US President Donald Trump said on Friday that the adminis-

tration is going to release its tax plan next week.

Mnuchin suggested that the tax plan would not be revenue-neutral. "We're looking for reforms that will pay for themselves with growth," Mnuchin said.

He skipped questions about whether regulatory relief could affect financial stability, saying that the administration is trying to reduce conflicting regulations that hurt economic growth.—Xinhua

Member of security watchdog OSCE killed in Ukraine

MOSCOW — One member of European security watchdog OSCE's monitoring mission in eastern Ukraine was killed and another injured after their vehicle drove over a mine near Luhansk.

An American man was killed and a German woman was injured on Sunday morning, a spokesman for Austria's foreign ministry said. Austria holds the rotating presidency of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Three years after Moscow annexed the Crimean region, tensions between Ukraine and separatists in the Russian-held eastern part of the country remain high and a 2015 ceasefire agreement is violated regularly.

The Ukrainian military said the incident took place at 10:17 local time (0717 GMT) near the small village of Pryshyb, which is controlled by pro-Russian separatists.

The unarmed, civilian OSCE mission with more than 700 international observers was deployed in 2014.

The role of the monitors includes verifying the withdrawal of heavy weapons as agreed under the 2015 ceasefire agreement.

Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz called for an investigation of the incident and, in a tweet, said he had spoken to the mission's ambassador, Ertugrul Apakan.

"Need thorough investigation; those responsible will be held accountable," he said on Twitter.

A spokesman for the OSCE said further information would be released as it became available.

The 57 member states of the OSCE, which include Ukraine, Russia and the United States, in March extended its monitoring in Ukraine by a year.—Reuters

11 killed in rain-triggered accidents in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD — At least 11 people were killed and several others injured in separate rain-related accidents in Pakistan over the past 24 hours, local media and officials said Sunday.

Geo TV reported that the country's east Punjab province was the worst hit where torrential rains claimed seven lives.

The deceased included four of a family including two women and two kids whose house col-

lapsed due to heavy downpour in Kamonki district.

In a separate incident in Sheikhpura district, a power transmission cable fell on an under-construction house, injuring six laborers working inside.

They were shifted to a nearby hospital where three of them were pronounced dead and the others are said to be in critical condition.

In the country's northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, four people were killed in separate rain-caused accidents, the provincial disaster management authority said.

Pakistan Meteorological Department said that rains and dust storms, associated with gusty winds and hailstorms, are likely to hit scattered places in both the provinces over the next 24 hours.—Xinhua

Home where Marilyn Monroe died for sale for USD 6.9 million



Hollywood icon Marilyn Monroe . PHOTO: PTI

LOS ANGELES — The home where Hollywood icon Marilyn Monroe died in Los Angeles is on sale for USD 6.9 million.

Marilyn bought the palatial pad in Brentwood, California in 1962 after her divorce from third husband Arthur Miller but was

found dead in the property just months later, following an apparent drug overdose at the age of 36, reported Variety.

Speaking about the property in an interview just weeks before her death, Marilyn called it “a place for any friends of mine who are in some

kind of trouble, you know, and maybe theyll want to live here where they wont be bothered till things are OK for them.”

The house has four bedrooms and four bathrooms and real estate agent Lisa Optican says that although it has been sold a number of times since Marilyn owned it, it still has the overall “aesthetic and vibe” from when she lived there. “There have been owners in the past who have made changes to the property but the overall feeling and aesthetic and vibe of what attracted Marilyn to it is still there and you can feel it. The same courtyard, entry, and backyard with the pool and the expansive grassy yard and garden are all there,” Lisa said. “You feel it and get why she was attracted to it - she wanted a home rather than just a big house in Beverly Hills.”

The 2,624-square-foot home sits on an estate which boasts a swimming pool and citrus grove. —PTI

Nicole Scherzinger in talks to star in ‘Wicked’ film

LONDON — Singer Nicole Scherzinger is in talks to star in the film adaptation of the musical, “Wicked”.

If things work out, the 38-year-old songstress will play Elphaba in the big screen version of the stage play, reported FemaleFirst.

“Nicole has held early dis-

cussions with film bosses who think she’s perfect for the role of Elphaba. “She’s been eyeing a career in acting for some time now, so playing the lead role in a such a popular musical would be a major coup. There’s still some way to go before a final decision but she’s very much in the frame for the job,” a source said.—PTI



Nicole Scherzinger. PHOTO: REUTERS

I’m not afraid to speak my mind: Frieda Pinto

LOS ANGELES — Actress Frieda Pinto says that speaking her mind can get her “into trouble” but she will still not shy away from sharing her views. “I’m not afraid to speak my mind, and that can get me into trouble. For me (social and political activism) is the only thing that matters,” Pinto says.

The 32-year-old, who stars in the Showtime miniseries “Guerilla”, says she jumped at the opportunity to play the role of Jas, reported People magazine. “As a female actor it is a lot harder to come across roles that explore every aspect of the character, not just her beauty. But Jas and I are similar in our passion,” she says. Pinto considers herself “really blessed” to have a career in Hollywood but is also aware of the fickleness of it all and how fleeting stardom can be. And despite



Actress Frieda Pinto. PHOTO: REUTERS

any ups and downs she has had through her career, the actress says she would not go back and do anything differently.

“I’m just glad that I did everything I had to do in my

20s and got everything out of my system between 18 and 25. Now I know what I don’t want. I wouldn’t change anything. If you dont make mistakes, you never learn,” she says. —PTI

Amy Schumer buys mattress for a store employee

LOS ANGELES — Chance the Rapper donating USD one million to Chicago schools Common dismisses Trumps controversial threat against Chicago Cynthia Erivo cast in ‘Widows’ Sister Sledge approached to create musical Uproar over United video imperils Chicago airport police

Comedian and actress Amy Schumer bought a USD 2,000 mattress for a store employee, who let her use the bathroom.

The 35-year-old “Snatched” star was jogging around Chicago recently when she stopped into the local Six Corners Mattress Firm hoping for an emergency bathroom, reported People magazine.

Sagine Lazarre, the store employee, happily pointed her towards the restroom, not realizing



Amy Schumer. PHOTO: REUTERS

the desperate jogger was Schumer.

Grateful for the hospitality, Schumer walked up to Lazarre on her way out and asked which mattress was her favorite. She then bought the USD 2,000 mattress on the spot as a gesture of her appreciation 5.—PTI

It was tough: Harry Styles on Dunkirk role

LONDON — Former One Direction star Harry Styles says he found shooting “Dunkirk” physically tough.

The 23-year-old singer makes his acting debut in director Christopher Nolans upcoming wartime saga and loved working on the ambitious film, reported Rolling-Stone.

“The movie is so ambitious. Some of the stuff theyre doing in this movie is insane. And it



Former One Direction star Harry Styles. PHOTO: REUTERS

was hard, man, physically really tough, but I love acting.

“I love playing someone

else. Id sleep really well at night, then get up and continue drowning,” Styles says. —PTI

Insidious 4 release date pushed to 2018

LOS ANGELES — “Insidious Chapter 4”, which was initially scheduled to be released on October 20 this year, has been pushed to 5 January, 2018.

“Insidious 4” original slot, meanwhile, has now been occupied by “Half to Death”, reported Ace Showbiz.

The horror comedy film centers on a college student who investigates her own murder in order she can find her killer.

Both “Insidious 4” and “Half

to Death” come from Jason Blums Blumhouse production company, which previously nailed it with “The Purge” and “Get Out”.

“Insidious 4” will see the return of Lin Shaye as Dr Elise Rainier. Leigh Whannel is set to pen the script, with Blum, Oren Peli and James Wan producing.

The movie will be directed by Adam Robitel, who previously directed “The Taking of Deborah Logan”. —PTI

Flying car costing more than \$1 million goes on show in Monaco

MONACO — A Slovakia-based company unveiled the commercial design for a flying car priced at more than \$1 million on Thursday, saying it was ready for pre-orders with first deliveries expected by 2020.

AeroMobil said its teardrop-like shaped AeroMobil Flying Car, displayed at the Top Marques Monaco, could switch to flight mode in less than three minutes. The wings fold away for driving on roads and swing out for flying.

The company, one of



People look at the AeroMobil flying car during its unveiling at the Top Marques Monaco supercar show in Monaco on 20 April, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

several developing such flying vehicles, aims to make up to 500 units of its first commercially available edition, priced at 1.2 million to 1.5 million euros (\$1.29 million to \$1.61 million).

To fly, the car would need an airfield or another approved place to take off, while owners would require driving and pilot licenses, AeroMobil Chief Communications Officer Stefan Vadocz said.

AeroMobil said deliveries to customers of the flying car, which Vadocz

said would comply with air and road regulations, was expected to start by 2020.

Before so-called flying cars become mainstream, they must overcome a host of flight safety issues to allay public fears.

Governments are already studying how to regulate drones and driverless cars, while the auto and aviation industries are working on advances in software and city planning to ensure the vehicles are restricted to travel within safe corridors.—Reuters

California’s ‘weed nuns’ on a mission to heal with cannabis

MERCED (Calif) — The Sisters of the Valley, California’s self-ordained “weed nuns,” are on a mission to heal and empower

women with their cannabis products.

Based near the town of Merced in the Central Valley, which produces over half of the fruit, vegetables and nuts grown in the United States, the Sisters of the Valley grow and harvest their own cannabis



California ‘weed nun’ Christine Meeusen, 57, who goes by the name Sister Kate (L), and India Delgado, who goes by the name Sister Eevee, trim hemp in the kitchen at Sisters of the Valley near Merced, California, US on 18 April, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

plants.

The sisterhood stresses that its seven members, despite the moniker, do not belong to any order of the Catholic Church.

“We’re against religion, so we’re not a religion. We consider ourselves Beguine revivalists, and we reach back to pre-Christian practices,” said 58-year-old Sister Kate, who founded the sisterhood in 2014.

The group says its Holy Trinity is the marijuana plant, specifically hemp, a strain of marijuana that has very low levels of Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the psychoactive compound in the plant.

Members turn the hemp into cannabis-based balms and ointments, which they say have the power to improve health and wellbeing.

More than two dozen

US states have legalized some form of marijuana for medical or recreational use, but the drug remains illegal at the federal level. California legalized recreational use of marijuana in November 2016.

“A sister becomes a sister through a commercial relationship and earning a wage or a commission and we want to grow this way because we want to free the women, we don’t want to make them more dependent,” said Kate, whose real name is Christine Meeusen.

She said the group had roughly \$750,000 in sales last year, the most since it started selling products in January 2015.

President Donald Trump’s administration and his Attorney General Jeff Sessions, a longtime critic of marijuana legalization, have worried some

in the country’s nascent legalized marijuana industry.

But the “weed nuns” say the new administration has strengthened their resolve.

“The thing Trump has done for us is put a fire under our butts to get launched in another country,” said Kate. “Our response to Trump is Canada.” The group makes online sales to Canada, and hopes to launch an operation there in two months.

Sister Kate adopted the nun persona after she took part in an Occupy Wall Street protest in 2011 dressed as a Catholic nun, a look that led her to be known by protesters as “Sister Occupy.”

“We’ve gotten a few hate calls but, by and far, the Catholics understand what we’re doing,” she said.—Reuters



Myanmar International

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(24-4-2017 07:00am ~ 25-4-2017 07:00am) MST

07:03	Am	News
07:27	Am	Myanmar Delicate Artistic Creations - Gem Stone Painting
07:46	Am	MONASTERY (Bargayar Kyaung)
08:03	Am	News
08:26	Am	Hanthawaddy U Win Tin: A Fearless Man (Ep-2)
08:44	Am	The Iron Rider
09:03	Am	News
09:26	Am	A Trip To The City of Rakkhita, Rakhine
09:46	Am	Colourful Threads
09:54	Am	Parents’ Day
10:03	Am	News
10:26	Am	Product of Myanmar - Stone of The Heavens
10:53	Am	Writer

(11:00Am~03:00 Pm)-Sunday Repeat(07:00Am~11:00Am)
(03:00 Pm ~ 07:00 Pm)-Today Repeat(07:00Am~1:00 Am)

Prime Time

07:03	Pm	News
07:27	Pm	Food Trip (EP-4)(Part-1)
07:45	Pm	Food Trip (EP-4)(Part-2)
07:56	Pm	Myanmar Street Foods
08:03	Pm	News
08:26	Pm	Taste of Myanmar (Shan - Flat-Rice-Noodle Soup)
08:41	Pm	Kid’s Home
08:47	Pm	Entrepreneur: Nan Ei Ei Zar

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

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

For love of horses, Czech rider turns equine therapist

HROBICE (Czech Republic) — After a career in show jumping, Czech rider Adela Liskova has managed to spin her new career in horse dentistry into equine full-care therapy.

Her clinic — central Europe’s first, founded in 2014 — now offering a range of therapies from infrared saunas and water massage to hoof recovery and laser therapy.

“I fulfilled my dream as I see this work with horses has meaning.... I see the animal feels better after and it also makes the people around the horse better — the rider or the owner of the horse are happy when

we improve (the horse’s) performance,” she says.

Liskova, 40, started as a dentist for horses in her post-riding days. After seeing similar horse rehabilitation centres in the United States, Britain, Denmark and Germany, she wanted to bring the same experience to her less-well off country.

The most popular therapy at the clinic, which is 110 km (68 miles) east of Prague, is water box training, simulating walking in a river, Liskova said.

As for the teeth, Liskova is still sought after, performing the scarcely available treatment. —Reuters



Tottenham's Dele Alli scores their second goal during the match of FA Cup Semi Final between Tottenham Hotspur and Chelsea at Wembley Stadium on 22 April, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Chelsea edge Tottenham in thrilling Cup semi-final

LONDON — Late goals from Eden Hazard and Nemanja Matić sealed a 4-2 victory for Chelsea over London rivals Tottenham Hotspur in a rip-roaring FA Cup semi-final at Wembley on Saturday.

It was only the fourth time in the competition that a semi-final had featured the current top

two in the top flight and it did not disappoint as the title rivals produced a sizzling contest.

Brazilian Willian, surprisingly selected ahead of Hazard in the starting line-up, twice put Chelsea ahead, first after four minutes with a free kick and then close to halftime from the penalty spot.

Twice Tottenham roared

back with Harry Kane heading them level after 18 minutes and Dele Alli making it 2-2 with a superb finish seven minutes after the break. Tottenham, who are four points behind Chelsea in the league after a brilliant run of form, dominated at times but their hopes of a first FA Cup final since 1991 were sunk late on.

First Hazard, who replaced Willian with half an hour remaining, buried a low shot past Hugo Lloris after 75 minutes, then Matić's 30-metre piledriver sank Spurs who have won only one of their last nine matches at Wembley and have now lost in seven successive FA Cup semi-finals. —Reuters

Athletics-Kenya's Keitany breaks women's only world record at London Marathon

LONDON — Kenya's Mary Keitany broke the women's only world record en route to her third London Marathon gold medal on Sunday, finishing in a time of 2 hours 17 minutes 01 seconds to beat Paula Radcliffe previous best by 41 seconds.

Radcliffe still holds the overall record of 2:15.25, which she set in a mixed gender race at the London Marathon in 2003 when she used male runners to help set the pace. The IAAF recognises two marathon world records for women, one for "mixed gender" and the other for "women only".

Tirunesh Dibaba of Ethiopia finished Sunday's race 56 seconds adrift in second place, while Aselefech Mergia of Ethiopia was third. —Reuters



Kenya's Mary Jepkosgei Keitany wins the Women's Elite race at London Marathon on London on 23 April, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Lacklustre Bayern dig deep to rescue 2-2 draw against Mainz

MUNICH — Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich twice came from a goal down to struggle to a 2-2 draw against visitors Mainz 05 on Saturday but stayed nine points clear at the top with four matches remaining. The Bavarians, chasing a fifth straight Bundesliga title, lacked any spark for much of the game, with Tuesday's Champions League quarter-final extra-time loss to Real Madrid having taken its toll on the players.

They are on 70 points, with second-placed RB Leipzig on 61, ahead of their match at Schalke 04 on Sunday. "It was difficult for us but we expected more," said Bayern coach Carlo Ancelotti. "We were not as compact in the first half. We should have done it better. "We were better after the break and luckily managed to get the equaliser." Bayern, who next face Borussia Dortmund in the German

Cup semi-final next week, made an error-ridden start and Bojan Krkic sneaked in to fire the visitors ahead after three minutes.

Levin Oztunali could have doubled the lead from close range a little later as Bayern looked disorganised. Arjen Robben levelled after a fine break from the Bavarians but they were again on the back foot when Mainz were awarded a 40th-minute penalty and Daniel Brosinski beat goalkeeper Sven Ulreich. Thiago Alcantara's low drive from the edge of the box drew Bayern level for the second time but despite late efforts and more than 70 per cent of possession they could not find a winner. They have now gone three matches in all competitions without a victory. Raphael Guerreiro's 87th-minute glancing header gave Borussia Dortmund a 3-2 victory at Borussia Moenchengladbach to take



Mainz's Jannik Huth in action with Bayern Munich's Thomas Muller during the match of Bundesliga at Allianz Arena in Munich, Germany on 22 April, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

over third place and the last spot leading to automatic Champions League group-stage qualification. Dortmund, eliminated by Monaco from the Champions League this week, are on 56, a point ahead of Hoffenheim, who drew 1-1 at Cologne on Friday.

Vedad Ibisevic's 12th goal of the season gave Hertha Berlin a 1-0 win over VfL Wolfsburg to stay on course for a Europa League spot in fifth place on 46. Max Kruse scored four times in 46 minutes as Werder Bremen crushed Ingolstadt 4-2 to extend their unbeaten run to 10 matches and climb to sixth on 42 points as they continue their remarkable revival since the winter break. Last-placed Darmstadt 98 earned themselves a mathematical lifeline with a 2-1 win at Hamburg SV but they are still 11 points off the relegation playoff spot with four games left. —Reuters