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Waso-Dhammacakka Day celebrated at pagodas nationwide

BUDDHISTS observed the Full Moon Day of Waso, also known as Dhammacakka Day, at pagodas across the country yesterday, as they took Precepts from Members of the Sangha, offering robes to Buddha Images and reciting religious verses.

The holy day began in the morning at the Shwedagon Pagoda with a ceremony to donate robes to the Buddha images at the pagoda. Also, the members of the pagoda's Board of Trustees offered a day meal to the members of the Sangha.

The pagoda was crowded with people beginning from early morning.

Buddhist devotees can take Precepts at the pagoda every Sabbath Day during the three-month Waso, or Monsoon Retreat period.

At the Botahtaung Pagoda, Buddhists and religious associations took part in a ceremony to offer Waso robes to the pagoda at the four entrances of the pagoda.

Members of the Sangha also delivered sermons at the ceremony.

The same ceremonies were held at pagodas throughout Yangon yesterday.

On this day, over 2560 years ago, the Buddha preached his first sermon, known as the Dhammacakka which means "Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma".



Buddhist devotees visit the Shwedagon Pagoda on the Full Moon Day of Waso yesterday.

PHOTO: PHOE KHWAH

A Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta recitation was also held at pagodas across the country.

On this auspicious day for Buddhists, pagodas were teeming with worshippers from

morning to night.

The Full Moon Day of Waso is highly significant for

Buddhists because this is the day that the Buddha was conceived. Later in his life, on this day, the Buddha renounced worldly pleasures.

During the three-month period of the Monsoon Retreat for Buddhist monks, pagoda Ovadacariya (patron) Sayadaws will administer sermons to devotees in the Ancient Buddha Images Hall.

The Dhammacakka Festival marks the Buddha's delivery of his First Sermon, known as Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth (Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta), in the Deer Park at Isipatana, near Benares in India.

He delivered this first sermon to the five ascetics with whom he had practiced severe austerities for five years.

Some months before then, when he had concluded that these ascetic practices did not produce the results he was seeking, these ascetics decided to leave him because they felt he had abandoned the holy way of life.

Left alone, the Buddha chose to follow a middle path between indulgence in sensual pleasures and the practice of self-mortification.

This resulted in his attainment of Enlightenment and his discovery of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.—Yi Yi Myint/Ohmar Thant ■

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Cash, food provided to flood victims in Bago

NATIONAL Disaster Management Committee Vice Chairman and Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Dr. Win Myat Aye and Bago Region Chief Minister U Win Thein went to flood relief centres in Bago yesterday morning and provided necessary support and assistance.

The Union Minister first went to flood victims temporarily sheltered in relief centres in Mon Dhammayone (congregation hall), Bago Region indoor stadium, and Kyakhatwaing monastery, and said that, due to climate change, natural disasters are occurring more frequently all over the world.

"Myanmar is experiencing flooding in several states and regions, prompting visits by officials to lend support. In Bago Region, water levels are above the danger level in Bago, Madauk and Shwegyin towns, causing inundation and evacuations.



Dr. Win Myat Aye meeting local people at a flood relief centre in Bago yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

"Flood relief centres had to be opened for the affected people. While staying in the relief centres, food, health care and social assistance are being provided by the Union government, in partnership with the regional government. People are also urged to discuss and suggest their requirements", said the Union Minister.

The Union Minister provided rice, cooking oil, canned fish, and dried noodles to the people and soya milk to the children in the flood relief centres. Cash support was also provided to expecting mothers and children.

Next, the Union Minister and party went to Madauk and encouraged people residing temporarily in the Tagondaing

monastery flood relief centre. Later, the Union Minister accepted rice, cooking oil, canned fish, dried noodles, drinking water and nutrient snacks donated by the Pyuntaza Shwezamyay social welfare group and the public at Shwemyatlay welfare building and then transferred the goods to the flood victims.

From there, the Union

Minister and party went to the Shwekyin flood relief camp to encourage the flood victims, to whom he presented rice, cooking oil, canned fish and dried noodles. For those requiring additional social assistance, cash support was provided.

Yesterday's assistance and support is valued at more than Ks45 million, it was learnt. According to yesterday's news release from the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology, in the coming two days more rain is expected, and water levels will continue to rise above the danger level.

Under the leadership of the National Disaster Management Committee, the ministry is co-operating and working together with regional governments, civil society organisations and the public on natural disaster preparation work and for a swift response, it is learnt.—Myanmar News Agency ■

Houses destroyed by tornadoes in Bago, Thanatpin

TORNADOES struck Bago Town and Thanatpin Township yesterday, causing damage to houses, schools, monasteries and nunneries.

In Bago, two monasteries, two nunneries, two schools and 92 houses collapsed due to high winds, while 238 houses had their roofs blown off. The damage was estimated to be about Ks 286.7

million, according to officials.

Similarly, in Thanatpin Township, 253 houses in 13 villages collapsed, while 349 buildings, including a school, a hospital, civil servant houses, monasteries and houses had their roofs blown away. Bago Region Chief Minister U Win Thein, (Bago) region government secretary U Toe Win and Hluttaw representa-

tives went to the damaged areas to comfort the people and provide necessary instructions to officials to conduct urgent reconstruction and rehabilitation work. The Tatmadaw, the police force, fire brigade personnel and welfare group members were helping to clear up-rooted trees and debris caused by the collapsed buildings. —Bago District IPRD ■

Death toll from Phakant landslide reaches 19

THE number of fatalities has reached 19, following a landslide which struck an abandoned jade mining block in Phakant, Kachin State, on 24 July, as three more bodies were found in the evening of 26 June.

Local authorities were informed that some 27 migrant miners were missing following the deadly landslide.

The threebodies were found in a lake under a cliff where the landslide occurred.

Meanwhile, authorities and volunteers are continuing their search operation to find the missing migrant miners.

Shortcomings in following safety regulations by both min-

ing companies and migrant squatters pose challenges for local authorities in preventing future landslides near jade mines in Kachin State.

To prevent landslides, local authorities have suggested that migrant miner squatters near at-risk areas relocate to safer areas, and that mining companies dump their waste soil in accordance with technical safety rules.

When miners began using heavy machinery to extract jade from mines in Myanmar in 2005, migrant workers across the country rushed into the area to scavenge small jade stones from discarded soil.—Phakant Township IPRD ■

Landslide kills three in Monghsat

A landslide caused by torrential rains killed three road workers in Mongkhoat, Monghsat District in eastern Shan State yesterday.

The three victims were sleeping inside a tent when the disaster occurred.

U Tin Lin, 35, U Soe Paing, 35, and U Zaw Oo, 40, were buried under stones, earth and mud from the landslide.

Another landslide that occurred on a road in another area on the same day forced the closure of the road. The Myanmar police force, firemen and local volunteers are clearing the blockages. —Than Zaw (IPRD) ■



A landslide which struck an abandoned jade mining block in Monghsat, Shan State. **PHOTO: THAN ZAW (IPRD)**



The number of dead reached 19, at a landslide which struck an abandoned jade mining block in Phakant, Kachin State. **PHOTO: PHAKANT TOWNSHIP IPRD**

Mahamyatmuni, Mandalay pagodas teeming with devotees on Full Moon Day of Waso



Pagoda Board of Trustees offer Waso robe to Mahamyatmuni Pagoda in Mandalay on the Full Moon Day of Waso. **PHOTO: MNA**

YESTERDAY was the Full Moon Day of Waso, also known as Dhammacakka Day, and the Mahamyatmuni Pagoda, along with other pagodas in Mandalay, were teeming with devotees, who flocked to the pagodas beginning at dawn to pay homage on Dhammacakka Day. They brought with them Waso flower donations for the beginning of the three-month monsoon-retreat and novice monk ordination ceremonies.

At 4 am in Mahamyatmuni Pagoda, the morning ritual of washing the face of the Mahamyatmuni Buddha image was conducted, followed by devotees from throughout the country offering golden robes (gold flakes) to the image, robes, food, water, candles and lit oil lamps in all corners of the pagoda.

Similarly, pagodas in Man-

dalay, such as the Mandalay Hill Kyauktawgyi Pagoda, Kuthodaw Sandamuni Pagoda, Atumashi Shwekyawngtawgyi and Buddha Tooth Relic Pagoda were filled with devotees. Those in attendance, led by Mandalay Yunnan Buddhist monastery trustees, also offered dry rations and offertories to 250 sanghas from Masoyein monastery at 80 locations between 31st and 32nd streets. Donor families were led by groups offering rice porridge and drinking water donations from Mandalay west Khinmakan Myakone monastery, who went to Mandalay General Hospital, Women's Hospital, Children's Hospital and the 300-bed Orthopaedic Hospital, where they provided food and drinks to patients warded in the hospitals. Other donor groups were also seen providing food and drinks to

devotees visiting the pagodas.

As the Full Moon Day of Waso preceded the weekend holidays, resulting in a three-day holiday, families and office staff were vacationing, having made their own arrangements or travelling by public transport, and the numbers of travellers during this period was twice the number last year.

In addition to paying homage to pagodas in Mandalay, people were also seen travelling to Pyin Oo Lwin and offering homage at Maha Ant Htoo Kan Thar Pagoda. Additionally, many visited PyinOoLwin National Kandawgyi Botanical Garden, PyinOoLwin Township Wanetchaung elephant camp, the seven mile, six mile and three-mile recreation centres, U Bein Bridge and Yadanabon Zoo.—Tin Maung (Mahn Sub Printing House)

10th Waso robe offering in Uppatasanti Pagoda



Union Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Thura U Aung Ko and Union Attorney General U Tun Tun Oo offer Waso robe to a Buddha Image at the Uppatasanti Pagoda in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

A CEREMONY was held at Uppatasanti Pagoda, Nay Pyi Taw, yesterday morning for the 10th Waso robe offering and the successful conclusion of the 104th non-stop recitation of Pa Htan (Patthana).

Before the ceremony commenced, Union Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Thura U Aung Ko, Union Attorney General U Tun Tun Oo, Nay Pyi Taw Command Commander Maj-Gen. Myint Maw and officials offered Waso robes and food to the jade Buddha images in the Uppatasanti Pagoda cave's four directions.

Next, the ceremony attendees took the nine precepts from Ovadacariya (patron) Sayadaw of the Uppatasanti Pagoda trustee board and listened to the

Sanghas reciting Parittas.

Afterwards, the Union Minister, Union Attorney General, Nay Pyi Taw Command Commander and officials offered offertories to the Sayadaw and Sanghas.

Following this, Union Minister and attendees listened to a sermon by Lewe Township Paukmyaing monastery Sayadaw and shared the merit. The Union Minister and officials then offered "soon", a day meal, to the Sayadaw and Sanghas.

As the day was the Full Moon Day of Waso (Dhammacakka Day), devotees flocked to pagodas in Nay Pyi Taw Council area, while people enjoying the holiday thronged into Nay Pyi Taw Water Fountain Garden and the zoo. —Myanmar News Agency ■

Meals, water bottles delivered to Bago flood victims

THE water level of the Bago River reached the danger level in Bago yesterday, inundating low-lying areas and forcing over 2,450 families to move to shelters.

The Orphans Reduction and Protection Association (Myanmar) delivered about 5,100

water bottles and meal packs to flood victims from three wards sheltering at monasteries yesterday.

The delegation from the association comprised of General Secretary Prof. Dr. Mya Thida and members Daw Kyin Than, Dr. Daw

Shwe Pone and Daw San San Htay.

The water level of the Bagon River reached over two feet above its danger level yesterday and the water level is expected to rise about one foot in the next two days. —Bago District IPRD ■



The Orphans Reduction and Protection Association delivers water bottles and meal packs to flood victims in Bago yesterday. **PHOTO: BAGO DISTRICT IPRD**

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Relief camps opened for flood victims in Bago

FOLLOWING continuous rain, the water level of the Sittoung River in Madauk Town reached 1,214 centimetres, above the danger level of 1,070 centimetres.

As the water level exceeded the danger level, the river water flowed inside houses in Madauk Town. Authorities have opened flood relief camps for people affected by flooding.

On 25 July, authorities urgently moved certain households to the temporary relief camp at Tinetaar monastery after 29 houses from Myoma (1) Ward were flooded. On 26 July, 11 more households were moved there. Also, 30 houses from Myoma (2) Ward were flooded and family members were



The water level of the Sittoung river in Madauk Town, Bago Region, reached 1,214 centimetres, above the danger level of 1,070 centimetres. **PHOTO: YE MYANMAR (NYAUNGLEBIN)**

moved to a temporary relief camp at Tagondaing monastery.

Bago Region chief minister and officials inspected the progress of the relief operation at

the Tinetaar temporary camp. Then, the chief minister gave an encouraging speech and provided Ks2,100 each to the flood victims.

Authorities have also provided some rice to each household from the natural disaster funds of Madauk Town.—Ye Myanmar (Nyaunglebin)

Over 1,400 cases of illegal logging reported in Magway in 15 months

IN THE past 15 months, 1,425 cases of illegal logging have been registered by officials in Magway Region, with forest authorities confiscating over 2,600

tons of illegal timber and 345 trucks, according to data from authorities.

The Magway Region Forestry Department has report-

ed almost 1,150 cases of illegal smuggling of teak and hardwood during the last fiscal year, 2017-2018, confiscating 1,950 tons of illegally-transported timbers and 286 vehicles. From April through June this year, 276 illegal logging cases have been registered in the region, with authorities seizing 656 tons of illegal timber and 59 vehicles.

The forestry authorities said they are making significant efforts to uncover more cases of unlawful smuggling of wood and other forest-based products through projects that focus on community-based reporting systems. U Myint Thein Khine, Director of the regional Forest Department, said that members of

the Forest Department are trying to uncover illegal logging cases on a daily basis, without fear for their safety, although there is a need for more staff members. Public involvement plays a very important role in uncovering illegal logging cases, and thanks to the community, the department has apprehended offenders with illegal timbers.

He went on to say that the department not only combats the illegal trade of forest products, but also carries out tree-planting projects to protect the dry zone from natural disasters. It annually grows 900,000 plants, and over the past 15 months, it developed 17,384 acres of forest plantations.—Zeyatu (Magway)



Officials inspect illegal logging in Magway Region. **PHOTO: ZEYATU (MAGWAY)**

Black opium worth over Ks35 million seized in Pinlebu Township

POLICE on Friday arrested two men after they were found in possession of a cache of black opium on Pinlebu-Bamauk road in Katha District, Sagaing Region, according to a police report.

Acting on a tip-off, township police and members of the anti-drug squad searched the two suspects, Yan Naung and Than Maung, near Nyaunbintha Village, Pinlebu Township, Katha District, Sagaing Region, at around 10.30am on 27 July.

Police found eight pack-

ets of black opium weighing 7.15 viss (a viss equals 3.6 lb), with an estimated value of over Ks35 million. According to officials, the two suspects reside in Leiksaw Village in Bamauk Township.

Police are still investigating in an effort to arrest those connected with drug trafficking.

Both suspects have been charged with smuggling drugs under Sections 19/21 of the existing Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law.—Myo Lwin (Pinlebu)



Suspects Yan Naung and Than Maung. **PHOTO: MYO LWIN (PINLEBU)**

Price of aqua feedstuff hit record high within three years

By May Thet Hnin

PRICE of aqua feedstuff has hit a record high within three years, said Dr. Thet Hmu, chairman of Myanmar Aqua Feed Association.

Currently, the price of bran, broken rice and maize, which are major feed ingredients for fish and prawn, hit a record high. Also, the scarcity of aqua feedstuff in the market and lower quality of the feedstuff are also main challenges for the fish and prawn producers, he added.

The price of bran has risen to Ks 522 from Ks 353 per viss (3.6lb) when compared with the same period last year. The price

of broken rice also increased to Ks640 from Ks517 per viss. The price of maize also went up to Ks650 from Ks420 per viss.

“Currently, there will be many difficulties for the higher transportation charges because of the weather condition. The price of feedstuff will continue to be increased because there are difficulties for the storage of feedstuff. If the price of feedstuff declines, it will be in November and December, I think,” said Dr. Thet Hmu.

Feed costs represent 75 per cent of the total operating costs, based on the farming system. As price of feedstuff increased, some of the fish producers sold

out their fish before reaching the desired weight, said U Zaw Lin, treasurer of Myanmar Fisheries Association.

“Some producers are breeding fish and prawn because they own fishing ponds. The producers are selling all of their products of this month,” he added.

Over 90 per cent of the fish and prawn producers use bran, broken rice and maize as a feed ingredient for fish farming. Some businessmen imported feedstuff from foreign countries.

“As for me, I have imported 35 per cent of feedstuff from other countries for my fish farming since 2013. Recently,

we have imported 60 per cent of feedstuff from other countries because of price rise of and scarcity of local feedstuff,” said U Zaw Lin from Myanmar Fisheries Association.

The price of fish and prawn feed, such as bran, broken rice and maize, are high because neighboring China continuously purchases these raw materials this year. It is very hard to buy groundnut oil cake and sesame in the market, as 90 per cent of local oil mills suspended their operation this year.

“We have already requested to the government to control purchasing amount of maize from China. For broken rice,

the government has permitted to export it legally. For bran, it does not have permission to be exported, according to law, but some export them illegally. It will be a concern for the breeding sector in future, said U Win Kyaing, general secretary of the Myanmar Fish Federation.

Recently, Myanmar Aqua Feed Association attempted to import corn and wheat kernels from other countries in cooperation with Myanmar Livestock Federation. But they have not yet received any approval from the government.

There are over 480,000 acres of fish and prawn breeding farms across the county. ■

Mandalay to start new wheel tax collection system in FY2018-19

BEGINNING in fiscal year 2018-2019, a wheel tax will be levied, based upon the size of engines, on vehicle owners within the municipal area of Mandalay City Development Committee (MCDC).

According to the new rules issued by the Road Transport Administration Department, vehicle owners will be taxed Ks18,250 for a car they own with a 660 cubic centimeter (cc) engine; Ks27,375 for a car with a 660cc-1,300cc; Ks36,500 for a car with a 1,301cc-2,000cc; Ks45,625 for a car with a 2,001cc-4,300cc and Ks54,750 for a car with a

4,300cc engine, or larger.

For business cars, the authorities will collect Ks36,500 for a 660cc car; Ks54,750 for a 660cc-1300cc car; Ks73,000 for a 1,301cc-2,000cc car; Ks91,250 for a 2,001cc-4,300cc car and Ks109,500 for a car with 4,300cc and above.

All registered vehicles which licenses will have expired by 1 October will be required to pay the new wheel tax when they renew the license for their cars. Of note, the new rules call for business vehicles to not pay road user fees at toll gates.

—Thiha Ko Ko ■



Visitors register for wheel tax at Mandalay City Development Committee (MCDC).
PHOTO: THIHA KO KO

Myanmar registers trade deficit of nearly \$1.2 billion in current FY

MYANMAR's overseas trade with international countries exceeded US\$10 billion in the current six-month interim fiscal period, beginning this past April, with a trade deficit of nearly \$1.2 billion, according to the latest trade report from the Ministry of Commerce. When compared with the same period last year, the current trade deficit decreased by \$481 million. At this time last year, the country's external trade totalled \$9.351 billion, registering a trade deficit of \$1.677 billion. Usually, the country's import value is greater than the value of exports. Between 1 April and 20 July this year, the country exported seven groups

of domestic products amounting to \$4.8 billion with its foreign trade partners, and imported \$6 billion worth of capital goods, consumer products and intermediate goods. Also during this period, the current export value rose significantly by \$976 million, compared with the same period last year when the country's exports were valued at \$3.836 billion, in total. The current import value also increased by \$494 million, as against the same time last year. The country suffered a total trade deficit of \$3.97 billion in the last fiscal year of 2017-2018, a decrease by over \$1.4 billion, compared to the 2016-2017 FY.—Shwe Khine ■

Agriculture exports down by \$147 million in current FY

THE export of agricultural products between Myanmar and international buyers during the current financial year declined by US\$147 million, compared to the same period last year, the Ministry of Commerce reported on Friday. Myanmar's agricultural exports have continuously declined since April. Agricultural exports worth \$854 million were sold to overseas traders between 1 April and 20 July this year. At this time during the last FY, the value of the country's exports of agricultural products was \$1.001 billion. Myanmar's

agricultural exports reached a record high of over \$3 billion in the last fiscal year of 2017-2018, increasing \$152 million against the previous 2016-2017 FY. According to the ministry's annual trade report, the country's exports of agro products was worth \$2.372 billion in 2011-2012 FY; \$2.696 billion in 2012-2013 FY; \$2.661 billion in 2013-2014 FY; \$2.919 billion in 2014-2015 FY; \$2.615 billion in 2015-2016 FY and \$2.928 billion in 2016-2017 FY.

As an agricultural country, agro products are important for the country's internation-

al trade, since the agriculture sector is the backbone of the country's economy. It contains a major group of export items which are delivered to overseas partners from border trade camps and maritime routes.

The Myanmar government is putting forth concerted efforts to boost agricultural production by using modern farming techniques, in a bid to raise the country's economy and improve small-and-medium-scaled agribusinesses and revenues for landless growers. —Khine Khant ■

Oil prices kept rising amid supply concerns

NEW YORK — Oil prices continued to rally on Thursday as Saudi Arabia suspended oil shipments through a key Red Sea strait.

Saudi Arabia said on Thursday that it was “temporarily halting” all oil shipments through the strategic Red Sea shipping lane of Bab al-Mandeb after an attack on two big oil tankers by the Houthi movement, according to CNBC.

Analysts worried that the suspension may reduce global oil supplies as Saudi Arabia is the world’s biggest oil exporter.

Meanwhile, investor sentiment was still buoyed by last week’s much-bigger-than-ex-

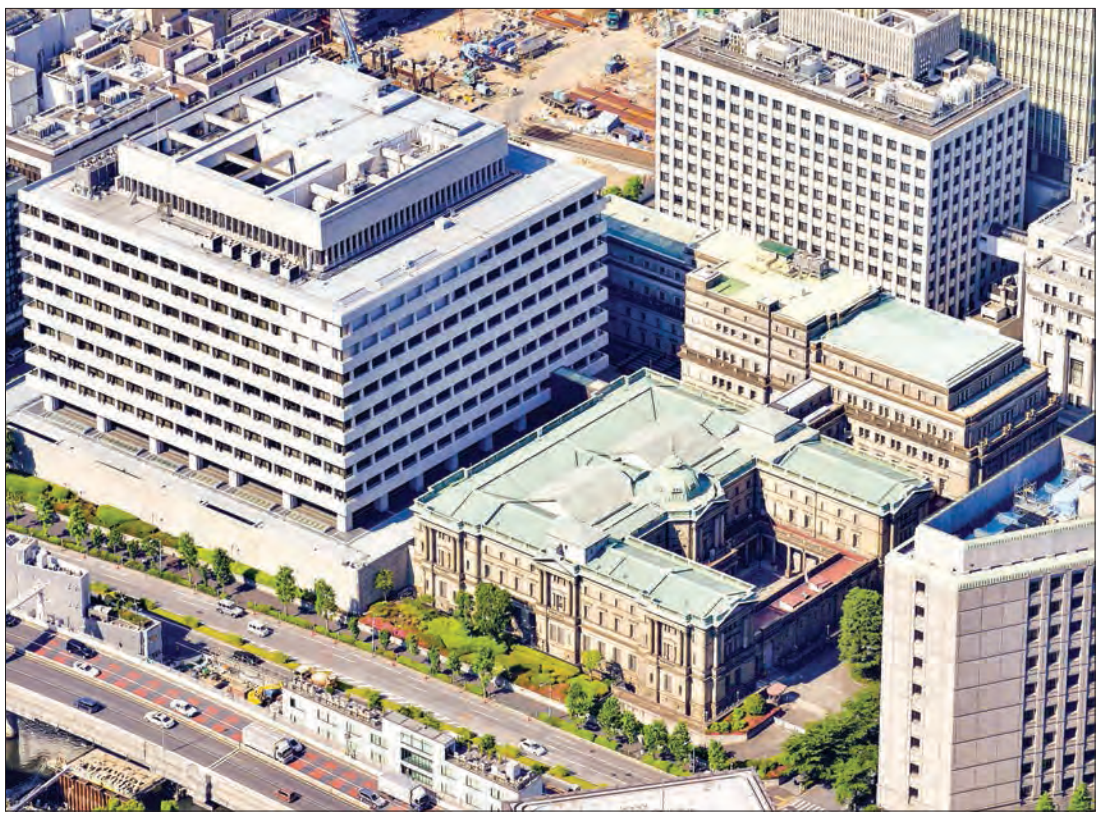
pected drop in US crude stockpiles.

The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said in a weekly report on Wednesday that the country’s crude stocks fell by 6.1 million barrels to 404.9 million barrels last week, marking the lowest level since February 2015.

The West Texas Intermediate for September delivery rose 0.31 US dollar to settle at 69.61 dollars a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange, while Brent crude for September delivery added 0.61 dollar to 74.54 dollars a barrel on the London ICE Futures Exchange. — Xinhua ■



Oil prices continue to rally on Thursday as Saudi Arabia suspended oil shipments through a key Red Sea strait. **PHOTO: XINHUA**



The Bank of Japan's head office in Tokyo. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

Surging yield forces BOJ to offer rare market operation again

TOKYO — The Bank of Japan on Friday offered a rare bond purchase operation for the second time in a week as the central bank struggles to quell a surge in long-term interest rates amid speculation that it will tweak monetary stimulus next week.

The yield on the benchmark 10-year government bond, which the BOJ has pledged to

guide close to zero per cent as part of monetary easing, had risen as high as 0.105 per cent.

The BOJ offered to buy an unlimited amount of bonds with five to 10 years left until maturity from financial institutions next Monday at a yield of 0.100 per cent.

This was the sixth such operation since the tactic was introduced in September 2016.

The BOJ had announced the fifth on Monday but there were no sellers.

The 10-year yield has been volatile this week, with some market participants anticipating a policy change at the BOJ's two-day policy meeting through next Tuesday in an effort to alleviate the side effects of the current easing measures on the banking sector.—Kyodo News ■

US dry natural gas output to hit record high this year

HOUSTON — US dry natural gas production this year is forecast to surpass the previous record set in 2015, according to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) on Thursday.

Dry natural gas production allows for less processing due to lower to nonexistent level of water and no additional hydrocarbons.

EIA forecast that US natural gas production, consumption, and exports will grow through 2019. US dry natural gas production is forecast to increase by 11 per cent in 2018 and average 81.3 billion cubic feet (about 2.30 billion cubic meters) per day for the year, surpassing the previous record set in 2015. Natural gas production is expected to continue increasing in 2019, averaging 84.5 billion cubic feet (about 2.39 billion cubic meters) per day.

Natural gas consumption is forecast in EIA's Short-Term En-

ergy Outlook (STEO) to increase by 7 per cent in 2018, averaging 79.7 billion cubic feet (about 2.26

billion cubic meters) per day for the year, then decrease slightly in 2019.

EIA expected higher annual natural gas consumption in 2018 mainly because relatively

cold weather earlier this year led to strong residential and commercial heating demand, and because warmer forecast temperatures are projected to lead to greater use of natural gas in the electric power sector this summer.

The United States became a net exporter of natural gas in 2017 on an annual basis for the first time in 60 years, averaging 0.3 billion cubic feet (about 8.50 million cubic meters) per day. EIA expected exports of both pipeline and liquefied natural gas to continue to increase while imports—almost all of which are pipeline imports from Canada—remain steady.

As a result, net natural gas exports are forecast to average 2.0 billion cubic feet (about 56.63 million cubic meters) per day in 2018 and 5.5 billion cubic feet (about 155.74 million cubic meters) per day in 2019.—Xinhua ■



US dry natural gas production this year is forecast to surpass the previous record set in 2015. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

In LA, fresh produce bound for trash helps feed the poor

LOS ANGELES — Delighted to take home food that others would discard, Herlinda Mendoza looks excitedly over the bounty of fresh produce spread out before her.

"I like all of it, all of it. The grapes, the onions," Mendoza says in a soft grandmotherly voice as she and her daughter Laura man shopping carts, waiting to fill them up.

"You have to be grateful for everything you are given."

The women are in a warehouse in a poor neighborhood of Los Angeles, one of many venues where a non-governmental organization called Food Forward is working to salvage some of the mountains of food that Americans throw away every year and give it to the needy.

On this particular day, the NGO and a community center distributed 15,000 pounds (6,800 kilos) of fruit and vegetables that wholesalers would otherwise have thrown out.

There was nothing wrong with all that food. It was doomed only because more fresh deliveries were on the way and room had to be made, or because the

produce had some slight bruise or other minor defect.

Every week, Food Forward collects some 353,000 pounds of surplus produce from people's fruit trees, farmers' markets and LA's Wholesale Produce Market.

It then donates the food to hundreds of organizations that help the needy throughout southern California.

"With a program like this, where people can actually understand the two-sided connection of food waste and hunger, you start to see some change," said Rick Nahmias, the NGO's founder.

'No restrictions'

This particular twice-monthly handout is held in a warehouse in Watts, one of the poorest and roughest neighborhoods of Los Angeles, where most residents are black or Latino.

"They can have two or more bags, and they fill up, and there is no restrictions," said Sheila Thomas, who works for the community center allied with Food Forward at this warehouse.

The center also helps people find work, and offers assistance to



Americans throw out an extraordinary amount of food — as much as 400 pounds (180 kilos) per person per year, according to one study. **PHOTO: AFP**

young people applying to college. It even helps them with paying their tuition.

As they all wait in line, Herlinda and Laura chat and joke around with other Latinos. All told, some 500 people are expected to come by on this particular day and take home some fresh produce. The spread at the center looks like any other market, with everything neatly organized.

When it comes time for the customers to choose, their neediness becomes more apparent.

They nervously use both hands as they try to stuff as much as they can in bags, as if they were participating in a TV game show race against the clock.

"This is really good for the heart," Herlinda says, with a cucumber in her hand.

Later, she holds an ear of corn. "Do you know what I make with this? Atol," she says, referring to a hot beverage made from corn flour.

"This food is so good. I don't understand why they were going

to throw it away," said 61-year-old Salvadoran woman Paula Ramirez.

She saves a lot of money thanks to this charity, and she needs to: her husband uses a wheelchair and they get by on a small pension.

"He doesn't work and neither do I," she said.

'A lot to share'

A study by the National Resources Defense Council has estimated that each American chucks out an average of more than 400 pounds of food per year.

Multiply that by America's population of 327 million. It is an astronomical amount of waste.

An orange tree in somebody's backyard might yield 200-300 pounds of fruit per year, according to Nahmias, who adds that he has heard of grapefruit trees yielding as many as 1,400 pounds in a year.

"That's a lot of fruit for one family or one person to use. So in every which way, there is a lot to share," he said as a team working with him picked oranges in the courtyard of a school.—AFP ■

No day at the beach as toxic algae hit Baltic coast

WARSAW — Polish health authorities said Wednesday they had closed scores of beaches along the country's Baltic Sea coast due to a massive toxic algae bloom triggered by a heat wave.

"Swimming is prohibited on eight beaches along the open sea and about twenty beaches in Gdansk Bay because of the appearance... of cyanobacteria," Tomasz Augustyniak, health inspector for the northing Gdansk province, told AFP referring to blue-green algae.

"The algae is toxic and poses a health risk," he said, adding that the week-old bloom was "particularly intense" due to a long stretch of hot weather.

Polish television this week broadcast aerial footage showing a green carpet of algae covering the sea.

Run-off containing nitrates and phosphates from farm fertilisers and sewage have seeped

into the Baltic, triggering large algal blooms in recent years, Augustyniak said.

Dying algae also triggers complex organic processes that suck the oxygen out Baltic waters leading to "dead zones" where no marine life can exist.

Scientists termed oxygen loss in the Baltic "unprecedentedly severe" in a study published this month in the European Geosciences Union journal *Biogeosciences*.

They note that as a relatively small, shallow and enclosed sea, the Baltic has a very limited ability to flush out pollutants into the waters of the North Sea, making it an extremely vulnerable ecosystem.

Encircled by nine countries — Estonia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden — the Baltic has an estimated 16 million people living along its shores.—AFP ■

Untouched ocean habitats rapidly shrinking

SYDNEY — Shipping, pollution and overfishing have reduced areas of "wilderness" to just 13 percent of the world's oceans, a study showed Friday, warning untouched marine habitats could completely vanish within half a century.

International researchers analysing the impact of human activity, from fertiliser runoff to increased sea transport, on underwater ecosystems have mapped the dwindling zones considered pristine.

The bulk of remaining ocean wilderness, classed as "mostly free of human disturbance", was found in the Arctic and Antarctic, and around remote Pacific islands.

"Improvements in shipping technology mean that even the most remote wilderness areas may come under threat in the future, including once ice-covered places that are now accessible because of climate change," said lead researcher Kendall Jones, from the University of Queensland.

Just five percent of the wilderness areas are in protected zones, leaving the rest vulnera-



Untouched marine habitats could completely vanish within half a century, researchers have warned. **PHOTO: AFP**

ble, according to the study published in the journal *Current Biology*.

It called for greater international coordination to regulate the world's oceans, clamp down on overfishing, limit destructive ocean-mining and reduce sediment runoff.

"Marine wilderness areas are home to unparalleled levels of life, holding massive abundances of species and high genetic diversity, giving them resilience to threats like climate change," said James Watson of

the Wildlife Conservation Society.

"These areas are declining catastrophically, and protecting them must become a focus of multilateral environmental agreements. If not, they will likely disappear within 50 years."

Last year, the United Nations began negotiating its first conservation treaty for the high seas, which would be a legally binding act governing the sustainable use of oceans outside national maritime boundaries.—AFP ■

Current flooding an alert to always be prepared

WE know the Earth is warming and that climate change increases the number, duration and intensity of tropical storms and monsoons, making floods more frequent and increasingly dangerous.

The evidence of increased flooding during the rainy season is lapping at our doorsteps.

To deal with flooding risks and to find solutions, cooperation and coordination between the Union Government and local authorities in regions and states is sine qua non.

The authorities see the impact of floods, and are taking a proactive approach to dealing with the risks and also providing aid to flood victims nationwide.

If floods happen due to overflowing rivers caused by the deposit of sediment, we must dredge the rivers. Floods have destroyed bridges, causing transportation chaos for local people. We must reconstruct these bridges in a timely manner.

We need to inform and educate the people about the risks and educate the flood victims staying currently at the shelters about water-borne infectious diseases, how to prevent them and how to treat them.

At the same time, strict enforcement on how garbage is disposed should be carried out in regions and states to prevent blockages in drains.

Assessing the risks will result in a series of options for dealing with the flooding in regions and states.

For flood-prone areas, that could mean revising structures such as putting houses on stilts and constructing reinforced bridges that meet minimum standards. It may mean raising roads and utilities.

It could mean retreating from an area. For future development, it means building flood resistance into plans as well as protecting neighbouring structures.

Local authorities in flood-prone areas have their role in drawing up plans and should take a thoughtful approach to dealing with flooding issues.

Preparedness such as digging irrigation channels, ditches, embankments, building multi-purpose shelters for disasters, dredging sand-silted creeks and rehearsing for preparedness for quick response to disasters would be helpful in reducing the impact of natural disasters.

The whole nation should take part in a four-level management system — prevention, preparedness, emergency response and resettlement.

The Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forests and related ministries consider the increase in alluvial deposits in rivers due to deforestation and mineral mining as a national concern because it has caused the level of rivers and creeks to rise, causing more floods during the rainy season. ■

Viral hepatitis: What each of us needs to know and why

*Viral hepatitis can be prevented, tested for, treated and in many cases cured.
Its elimination is both possible and necessary*

By Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh,
Regional Director World Health Organization South-East Asia, on the occasion of World Hepatitis Day observed on 28 July every year

THERE are few infectious diseases as amenable to control and elimination as viral hepatitis. In fact, WHO South-East Asia and its Member States' quest to eliminate viral hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030 is readily achievable, despite the disease currently killing an estimated 410 000 in our Region annually – more than HIV and malaria combined.

Sound like a long arrow to draw? Let me explain.

First, viral hepatitis' spread is 100% preventable. Routine immunization, safe blood, safe sex and safe needle usage among other measures can prevent hepatitis B and C infections. Clean food and good personal hygiene, along with access to safe water and sanitation can meanwhile guard against hepatitis A and E.

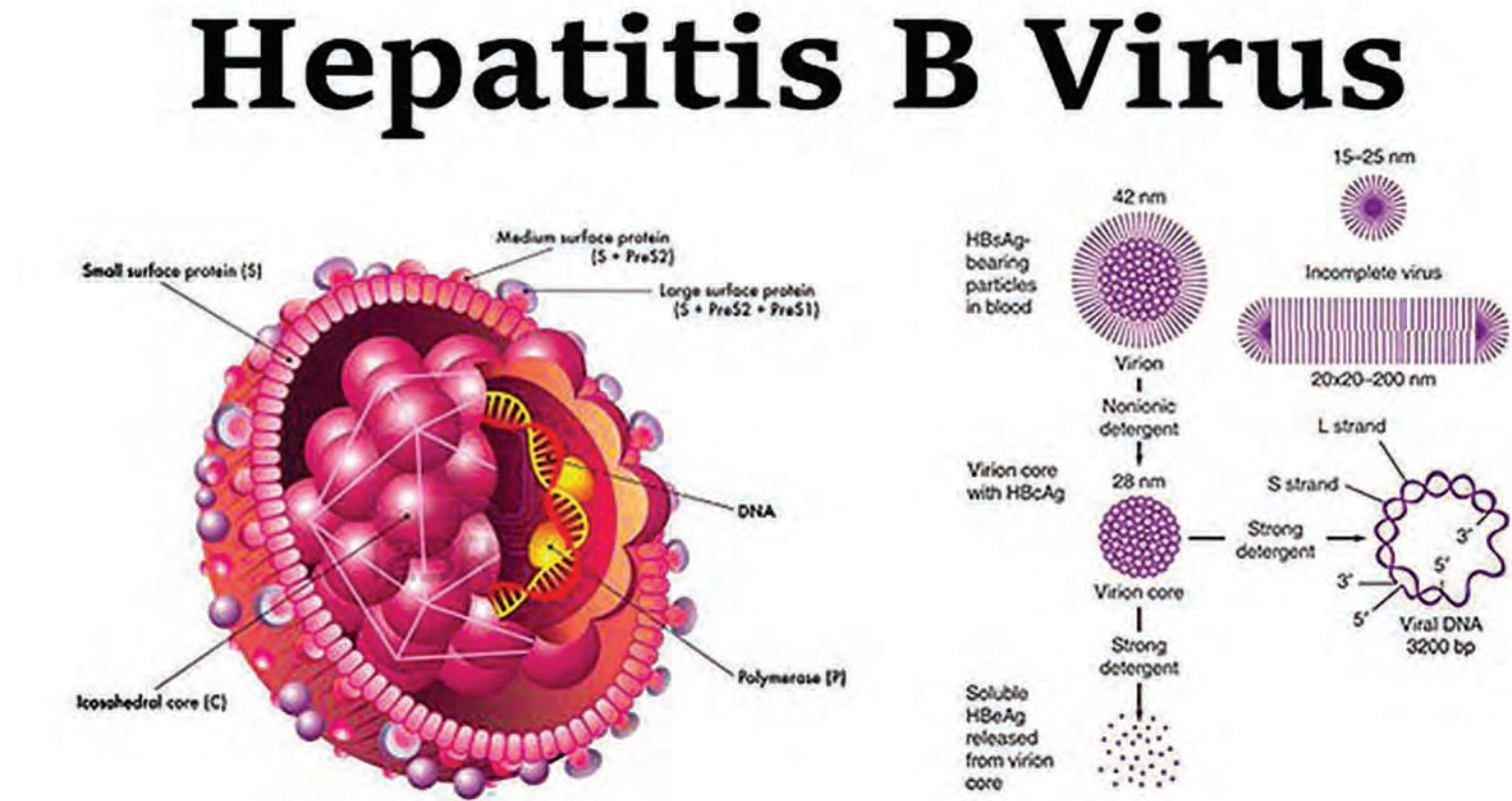
Second, viral hepatitis can be rapidly and inexpensively tested for and detected. So much so that whole birth cohorts or high-risk populations can – regardless of whether symptoms are experienced – be easily tested and provided an accurate diagnosis.

That provides immense opportunities to find the millions of missing viral hepatitis cases, to ensure infected persons receive the care they need, and to stop the disease's progression and spread.

And finally, powerful new drugs are available to treat hepatitis B and cure hepatitis C in nearly 95% of cases. In recent years countries across the South-East Asia Region have taken advantage of these developments by registering and licensing many of these drugs, while also leveraging flexibilities in global trade agreements to drive down costs and increase access, thereby helping close treatment gaps.

Those gaps, however, remain significant. Indeed, they are the leading cause of hepatitis' out-sized burden across the Region, with a general lack of awareness the primary reason. Less than one in ten infected people, for example, are estimated to be aware of their status, while less than 10% of those who do know their status are receiving appropriate treatment. That is particularly problematic given that 40 million people in the Region are estimated to live with hepatitis B and around 10 million with hepatitis C. A large majority of them are at risk of progressive liver damage and a series of life-threatening conditions such as fibrosis and cancer of the liver.

It is for precisely these reasons that WHO South-East Asia's Regional Action Plan for Viral Hepatitis focuses on the need to find, test and treat every case of viral hepatitis, with a specific emphasis on increasing awareness of the disease's signs and symptoms and the many treatment options available. As per the Plan's targets, by 2020 at least 50% of infected people should know their status and at least 75% of those diagnosed with the disease should be provided treatment by the same deadline. Importantly,



at least 90% of newborns should receive the hepatitis B vaccine's birth dose, while at least 95% of children should complete the vaccine's three-dose schedule. Increased injection safety in health facilities is likewise critical.

In noting the range of challenges faced, however, by focusing attention on three key areas, Member States can achieve rapid, game-changing progress.

First among them is enhancing knowledge and awareness

of viral hepatitis among high-risk groups, civil society and the public more generally. Health authorities Region-wide should deploy clear messaging regarding how viral hepatitis can be prevented, its signs and symptoms and where people can get tested and treated. Not only will this help stop the disease's transmission; it will also ensure more people are aware of their status. Health authorities should also build health workers' capacity to better detect hepatitis and ensure all suspected cases are tested.

To do that, health workers must have access to quality point-of-care diagnostics and laboratory testing. All testing kits, for example, should be affordable and quality assured. Results should meanwhile be communicated to individuals confidentially and without prejudice or stigma. Significantly, viral hepatitis testing should be integrated with HIV, antenatal care and cancer screening and treatment services. It should also occur under a clear set of national viral hepatitis testing guidelines.

Where individuals test positive for hepatitis B or C, access to effective and affordable treatment is vital. While treatments have existed for hepatitis B for some time, directly-acting antiviral drugs can now cure almost all cases of hepatitis C. To further increase access, Member States should enhance their use of flexibilities in global trade agreements, increase investment in what are life-saving treatments, expand the number of drugs registered and licensed, and consider adding them to their national lists of essential medicines. Member States should also earmark adequate funds for national hepatitis action plans.

WHO South-East Asia is committed to supporting its Member States pursue each of these priority actions and ensuring the Regional Action Plan is fully implemented. Indeed, given that knowledge really is power, together we have the means to eliminate viral hepatitis' unnecessary burden, to save more than 400 000 lives a year, and to create a Region that is healthier, happier and stronger than ever before. ■

Flood Bulletin

(Issued at 14:00 hrs MST on 27-7-2018)

Flood condition of Sittoung River

According to the (13:30) hrs MST observation today, the water level of Sittoung River has exceeded by about (5½) feet at Madauk above its danger level. It may continue to rise about (½) foot during the next (1) day and may remain above its danger level.

Flood condition of Thanlwin River

According to the (13:30) hrs MST observation today, the water level of Thanlwin River has exceeded by about (4½) feet at Hpa-an above its danger level. It may continue to rise about (1) foot during the next (2) days and may remain above its danger level.

Flood condition of Bago River

According to the (13:30) hrs MST observation today, the water level of Bago River has exceeded by about (2½) feet at Bago above its danger level. It may continue to rise about (1) foot during the next (1) day and may remain above its danger level.

Flood condition of Shwegyin River

According to the (13:30) hrs MST observation today, the water level of Shwegyin River has exceeded by about (2½) feet at Shwegyin above its danger level. It may continue to rise about (½) foot during the next (1) day and may remain above its danger level.

Advisory

It is especially advised that the people who have settled near the river bank and lowlying areas in Madauk to avert due to the rise of water level, and in Hpa-an, Bago and Shwegyin townships, to take precautionary measures.

Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Issued at 7:00 pm Friday 27th July, 2018)

BAY INFERENCE: Monsoon is moderate to strong over the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL AFTERNOON OF THE 28th JULY, 2018: Rain or thundershowers will be isolated in Lower Sagaing and Magway regions, scattered in Mandalay Region, fairly widespread in Upper Sagaing Region and Chin State and widespread in the remaining regions and states with regionally heavy falls in Nay Pyi Taw, Rakhine, Kayin and Mon states and isolated heavy falls in Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin State. Degree of certainty is (100%).

STATE OF THE SEA: Squalls with moderate to rough seas are likely at times off and along Myanmar Coasts. Surface wind speed in squalls may reach (35)mph. Wave height will be about (7 -10)feet off and along Myanmar Coasts.

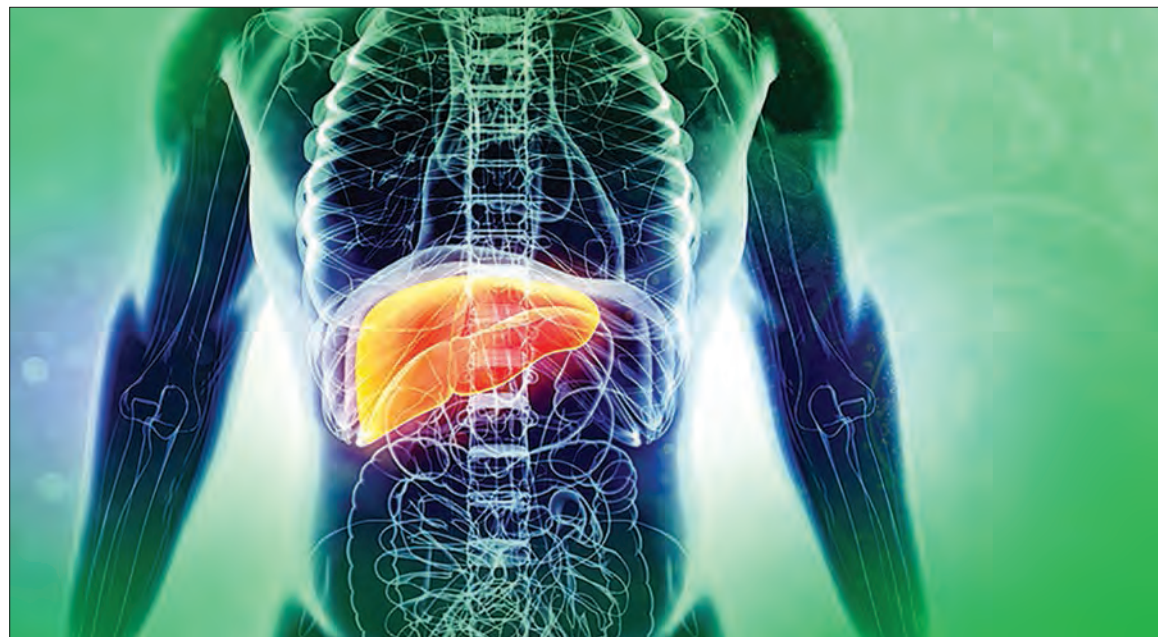
OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Likelihood of increase of rain in Upper Sagaing Region and Kachin State. **FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 28th JULY, 2018:** Some rain or thundershowers. Degree of certainty is (100%).

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 28th JULY, 2018: Some rain or thundershowers. Degree of certainty is (100%).

FORECAST FOR Mandalay AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 28th JULY, 2018: Isolated rain or thundershowers. Degree of certainty is (100%).

WEATHER OUTLOOK FOR WEEKEND: Rain or thundershowers will be widespread in Nay Pyi Taw and Yangon Region and scattered in Mandalay Region.

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China's special envoy calls for preserving sovereignty of Syria

DAMASCUS — China's Special Envoy for Syria Xie Xiaoyan on Thursday renewed the Chinese government's calls for respecting and preserving the unity of Syria.

Speaking at a press conference in the capital Damascus, the envoy said that the Chinese government has always called for preserving the territorial integrity of Syria.

Xie stressed that China rejects any fragmentation of Syria while supporting a political solution to the country's over seven-year-long crisis.

"We always say that the sovereignty, independence and its territorial integrity of Syria must be respected and preserved," he said.

The Chinese envoy said the prolonged crisis in Syria has created a tough humanitarian crisis, noting that the international community must do more to provide assistance to Syria.

He pointed out the fact that the crisis left "large destruction in Syria for both the country and the people," urging "the international community must offer more assistance to Syria in order to enable it to overcome this severe crisis."

Xie highlighted China's willingness to participate in the reconstruction process with the international community, adding that China has held a reconstruction training course for Syrian officials, business people and scholars in Shanghai in May.



China's Special Envoy for Syria Xie Xiaoyan (C, Rear) speaks at a press conference in Damascus, Syria, on 26 July 2018. Xie Xiaoyan on Thursday renewed the Chinese government's calls for respecting and preserving the unity of Syria. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

He underlined that the reconstruction work takes joint efforts of the international community and should be considered a comprehensive systematic project integrated with economic development, social progress, and real

reconciliation.

"We care a lot about the reconstruction process after the war and we encourage the Chinese companies to participate in this process," he said.

Xie also condemned the wide-scale offensive and bomb-

ings carried out by the Islamic State in Syria's southern province of Sweida a day earlier, which left over 215 people killed and 180 others wounded.

He stressed that there should be a unity to confront terrorism.—Xinhua ■

UNRWA employees on protest in Gaza against layoffs

GAZA — Dozens of employees of United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) continued a general strike on Thursday in the Gaza Strip against job cuts of the UN agency.

Youssef Hamdouna, secretary of UNRWA's staff union in the Gaza Strip, said the strike "is a message of perception of the great danger that threatens the staff of UNRWA," slashing the agency's decision of firing employees due to a financial deficit in UNRWA's budget.

"The strike is an escalation of the protests against the reduction of the agency's services, the demobilization of its employees and a refusal to resolve its financial crisis at the expense of Palestinian refugees and employees," said Hamdouna.

On Wednesday, an UNRWA senior official said on condition of anonymity that the agency may suspend its services in the Gaza Strip in case protests against its financial cuts go on.

The warning came shortly after Wednesday's protests of hundreds of local UNRWA em-



The United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) Health Center building is pictured in Gaza City, on 26 July 2018. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

ployees inside the agency's headquarters in central Gaza.

During the protest, demonstrators forced permanent employees to leave their offices.

UNRWA official confirmed that the agency has officially informed 1,000 UNRWA employees who work in its emergency program in the Gaza Strip that the contracts of 100 emergency employees were terminated.

The other 900 employees will be transferred to the part-time system until the end of this year,

the agency said.

Hundreds of UNRWA employees demonstrated on Tuesday and Wednesday inside the agency's headquarters, calling on the agency to cancel the decision.

UNRWA officials had warned earlier that measures of cuts were to be taken due to a severe financial crisis the humanitarian agency has been passing through since the United States decision of cutting around half of UNRWA's annual budget.—Xinhua ■

High-level meeting on Syria to be held in Sochi 30-31 July

MOSCOW — The tenth meeting of the deputy foreign ministers of the countries acting as guarantors of the Astana process (Russia, Iran and Turkey) on the settlement in Syria will be held in Sochi on July 30-31, Russian Foreign Ministry Deputy Spokesman Artyom Kozhin said on Thursday.

"The tenth high-level Astana-format international meeting on Syria will be held on July 30-31 in Sochi. Taking part in the event will be representatives at the level of the deputy foreign ministers of Russia, Iran and Turkey as the guarantor nations of the Astana process to promote the Syrian settlement," the diplomat said.

He noted that the delegations of the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition, observers from the UN and Jordan would take part in the meeting, adding that an invitation has been sent to the US as well.

According to Kozhin, "the participants in the meeting will consider the developments in and around Syria, exchange views on the process of launching intra-Syrian negotiations based on UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and taking into account the decisions of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi and continue to discuss further steps to launch the work of the Constitutional Committee at an early date as an important tool to promote a political solution to the Syrian crisis."

The diplomat added that the parties would discuss in detail efforts to resolve the humanitarian situation in that country. The fourth meeting of the working group on the release of detainees and hostages, transfer of bodies and the search for missing persons set up as part of the Astana process is expected to be held in Sochi too.—Tass ■

Trump pledge EU to become big importer of US gas met with skepticism

NEW YORK — President Donald Trump said the European Union would soon become a “massive” importer of US natural gas, but some energy analysts expressed skepticism at such an outcome.

Trump, joined by European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker, said Wednesday that the two key economies reached agreement to boost trade of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and soybeans as they defused an escalating trade dispute.

But exporting LNG is an expensive business and likely will not be a big part of European energy anytime soon, experts said Thursday.

“What counts for the European consumer is the price,” said Thierry Bros, a researcher at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, who noted the lofty costs of US LNG.

After Europe liberalized its energy markets, “the price is set between buyers and sellers at the exchange in Holland,” he added.

Unlike oil, which already is in liquid form, natural gas must first be liquefied at a factory in the United States before it is shipped and then re-gasified in Europe at another plant.

By contrast, conventional natural gas can just be sent to



US President Donald Trump meets with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in the Oval Office of the White House, in Washington, DC, on 25 July 2018. PHOTO: AFP

the EU via pipeline.

“I don’t see how the US can force European clients to buy US liquefied natural gas that is more expensive,” said Matt Smith, analyst at ClipperData.

A senior EU official agreed with that assessment. “We are not going to turn into a Soviet style economy” that can order up more imports, the official said.

“The EU wants to increase imports... the text does not say that the EU is committing to increase imports. It is not a declaration of intent.”

US shale boom

The spotlight on US natural gas exports comes as supply of the commodity remains robust amid an American shale boom that has elevated US standing in the world of oil and gas.

LNG exports from the US quadrupled in 2017 and the country became a net exporter of natural gas for the first time in 60 years.

Boosting exports further would lower the US trade deficit, a focal point for Trump.

“The European Union wants

to import more liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the United States to diversify its energy supply,” the joint agreement said.

Juncker said the EU was prepared to invest to build additional infrastructure for LNG.

But analyst Bros notes that is not really the issue: current LNG import facilities are only running at about 26 per cent of full capacity. European gas imports have been on the rise for a while, increasing 4.3 per cent in 2017 to 467 billion cubic meter as production fell 5.3 per cent to 118

billion cubic meters. The trading bloc has sought to diversify supply away from Russia, which currently accounts for about one-third of the region’s gas.

Europe has embraced gas from Azerbaijan as part of this strategy. But LNG also is a promising source of additional supply, whether from Qatar, Mozambique, Australia or the United States.

Trump has repeatedly touted US gas as a solution to Europe’s conundrum, while castigating the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project that could double gas shipments from Russia to Germany.

US exporters until now have sent most gas to Asia and Latin America. In 2017, more than 50 percent of US LNG exports went to three countries — Mexico, South Korea and China.

But “the ramp up in US LNG exports has only just begun,” said S&P Global Platts, which projected that LNG exports from the US would more than quadruple by 2020 following construction of new liquefaction plans, according to S&P Global Platts.

US natural gas producers have become more efficient in extracting natural gas, another factor that “would likely raise the competitiveness of US LNG,” said S&P Global Platts. —AFP ■

Facebook shares sink on perfect storm of bad news

WASHINGTON — It has turned into a brutal reality check for Facebook.

The social network star — which has weathered storms over privacy and data protection — is now looking at cooler growth following a years-long breakneck pace.

Shares in Facebook plummeted 19 percent to close at \$176.26 Thursday, wiping out some \$100 billion — believed to be the worst single-day evaporation of market value for any company.

The plunge came one day after the firm missed revenue forecasts for the second quarter and warned that growth would be far weaker than previously estimated.

Chief financial officer David Wehner warned Wednesday in an earnings call with analysts that revenue growth had already “decelerated” in the second quarter and would drop “by high single digit percentages” in coming quarters.

At one point during the call, Facebook shares were trading

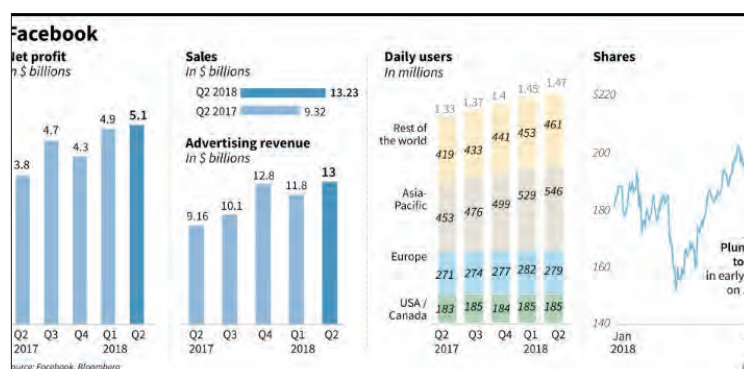
down as much as 24 per cent, an unprecedented drop for a large firm.

On the call, Jefferies & Co. analyst Brent Thill said that “many investors are having a hard time reconciling that deceleration... It just seems like the magnitude is beyond anything we’ve seen.”

Facebook said the slowdown will come in part from a new approach to privacy and security, but also appeared to acknowledge the limits of growth in advertising, which accounts for virtually all its revenue.

Brian Sheehan, a Syracuse University professor of communication and advertising, said the weak forecast “made investors nervous about more basic long-term issues” with the huge social network, notably its diminished appeal to younger users.

“With or without privacy issues, investors are scared that Facebook’s interactions, particularly with those under 25, are falling,” Sheehan said. —AFP ■



Quarterly results for Facebook, with sales, advertising revenue, daily users and share price. PHOTO: AFP

State of emergency declared in California over fast-moving wildfires

LOS ANGELES — California’s Governor Jerry Brown declared Thursday a state of emergency in two counties in Southern California due to fast moving fires in the western US state.

Brown issued emergency proclamations for Riverside and Shasta counties due to the effects of the fires, dubbed the Cranston and Carr fires, which have destroyed homes and structures, threatened critical infrastructure and caused the evacuation of residents.

High temperature, low humidity, and erratic winds have further increased the spread of the fires, according to the statement of Brown.

The circumstances of the fires, “by reason of its magnitude, are or are likely to be beyond the control of the services, personnel, equipment,

and facilities of any single local government and require the combined forces of a mutual aid region or regions to combat,” read the statement.

The Cranston Fire erupted around noon on Wednesday in the San Jacinto Mountains in the Riverside County, about 90 miles east of Los Angeles. It exploded to around 4,700 acres with only 5 per cent containment as of Thursday noon, according to the latest update from the US Forest Service.

At least 3,000 people were asked to evacuate more than 2,000 homes in the area.

Law enforcement officers said they arrested Brandon N. McGlover, 32 of Temecula for allegedly setting multiple fires, including the Cranston Fire, in southwest Riverside County Wednesday. —Xinhua ■

EU chief negotiator “kills off” PM May’s soft Brexit plan

LONDON — Britain’s newly appointed Brexit secretary Dominic Raab insisted Thursday that Prime Minister Theresa May’s latest white paper on a new trading relation with the European Union has brought a new dynamism in negotiations with Brussels.

But Britain’s national newspapers following a meeting in Brussels between Raab and the EU’s chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier took a more pessimistic view of the latest round of talks.

Raab and Barnier faced the media at the end of three days of negotiations over Brexit between Britain and the EU.

The Daily Telegraph in London commented Thursday night that Barnier had killed off May’s Brexit customs plan and vowed the EU will never accept it.

The *Telegraph’s* Brussels correspondent said Barnier refused to accept that Britain had “evolved its position” and he offered no concessions in return for May’s soft Brexit plan, which led to the resignations of Raab’s predecessor David Davis and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson.

Instead, Barnier said Britain could still join a customs union, which would mean Britain could not make its own trade deals after Brexit.

That comment is at odds with the British government’s statements that during a 21-month implementation period after Britain ends its membership of the bloc next March, it will be free to make trade deals with countries around the world.

“The UK wants to take back

control of its money, law and borders. We will respect that. But the EU also wants to keep control of its money, law and borders. And the UK should respect that,” Barnier said in Brussels.

British government ministers are currently touring EU member states to win support for May’s Brexit plans.

The *Guardian* in London took a similar view on the Brussels meeting, headlining their report: “Michel Barnier kills off Theresa May’s Brexit customs proposals”

It commented that Barnier warned that attempts by British government ministers to appeal to EU leaders over his head were a waste of time as he rejected May’s proposals on customs after Brexit, in effect killing off her plan.—Xinhua ■



Wildfires in Sweden have laid waste to at least 25,000 hectares (62,000 acres) of mainly forested land. **PHOTO: AFP**

Heatwave grips northern Europe as Greece burns

ATHEN (Greece) — Scorching hot weather set the conditions for Greece’s wildfires — Europe’s deadliest this century with scores killed — while record temperatures in the north of the continent have also sparked blazes causing widespread damage in recent days.

Ten EU countries have mobilised firefighters and equipment to help battle the fires in Greece as well as Sweden and Latvia.

Here is a roundup of the devastation.

Greece

The fires in Greece, which broke out Monday, are the deadliest in living memory. At least 82 people have been confirmed dead, while emergency crews were Thursday searching incinerated homes and vehicles for at least 27 missing, who include nine-year-old twin girls from the village of Mati.

Coastal villages near Athens popular with holidaymakers were especially hard hit, with at least 300 homes destroyed or badly damaged.

Sweden

Sweden, experiencing an unprecedented drought and the highest temperatures in a century, is battling 23 fires across the country, down by half since last week.

The fires have laid waste to at least 25,000 hectares (62,000 acres) including 13,000 hectares in the central Karbole region alone.

Temperatures are still rising, with Pierre Schaller, the head of a French contingent helping the Swedes, telling AFP that with Thursday’s predicted high of 34 degrees Celsius (93 degrees Fahrenheit) the fires could “take off

again”.

But cooling rains are forecast for the weekend, when two Italian water-dropping aircraft that were deployed in Sweden last week will head to Greece, Swedish authorities told a news conference.

Latvia

A Belarusian helicopter was headed to Latvia on Thursday to help Latvian and Lithuanian firefighters battle a blaze that broke out on July 17.

It has ravaged around 1,000 hectares (2,500 acres) of peat bog, forest and scrubland in the west of the Baltic state but has not claimed any lives.

Latvia has turned to neighbouring Belarus for help because EU resources are stretched fighting the wildfires in Greece and Sweden, according to the local Baltic News Service BNS.

Britain

Britain has been in the grip of its longest heatwave in decades, sparking wildfires in northwest England, water restrictions in Northern Ireland and record-breaking temperatures in Scotland.

Sun worshippers in London’s Hyde Park lounged in deck chairs set out on parched grass. The city’s fire chief Dany Cotton remarked: “I never thought I’d say this, but we are praying for rain.”

A new British temperature record may be set on Friday, topping the 38.5°Celsius (101°Fahrenheit) registered in Kent in August 2003.

With just 47 millimetres (1.8 inches) of rain recorded in Britain between June 1 and July 16, fire chiefs have warned that parks and other grasslands are like a “tinderbox”.—AFP ■

UK doctors given green light to prescribe cannabis

LONDON — British doctors will be able to prescribe medicinal cannabis, the government announced Thursday following a review — but insisted it was not a first step towards legalising recreational use.

Home Secretary Sajid Javid, the interior minister, decided to relax the laws about the circumstances in which specialist clinicians can give medicinal cannabis can be given to patients.

It follows several high-profile cases, including those of young epilepsy sufferers whose conditions appeared to be helped by cannabis oil.

“Making medicinal cannabis available on prescription will benefit the lives of ill patients

currently suffering in silence,” Javid wrote on Twitter.

“There is nothing harder than seeing your loved ones in pain — which is why I have taken this decision.”

Under the new rules, to be brought in later this year, senior doctors will be able to prescribe the medicines to patients deemed to have an exceptional clinical need.

Rapid review

Javid had commissioned a review on June 19.

An initial review by Sally Davies, the government’s chief medical adviser, concluded there was evidence that medicinal cannabis had therapeutic benefits.

The Advisory Council on the

Misuse of Drugs, which conducted the second part of the review, last week said doctors should be able to prescribe medicinal cannabis provided products meet safety standards.

“Recent cases involving sick children made it clear to me that our position on cannabis-related medicinal products was not satisfactory,” Javid said in a statement. “That is why we launched a review and set up an expert panel to advise on licence applications in exceptional circumstances.

“Following advice from two sets of independent advisers, I have taken the decision to re-schedule cannabis-derived medicinal products — meaning they will be available on prescription.

“This will help patients with an exceptional clinical need, but is in no way a first step to the legalisation of cannabis for recreational use.”

The Home Office interior ministry said in a statement that it was not proposing to change wider laws on cannabis.

“The government is clear that today’s announcement does not pave the way towards legalising cannabis for recreational use. The penalties for unauthorised supply and possession will remain unchanged,” it said.—AFP ■



Campaigners for the medical use of cannabis outside the Houses of Parliament in central London. **PHOTO: AFP**

North Korea returns remains of US war dead

PYEONGTAEK (South Korea) — A US military aircraft flew the remains of American servicemen out of North Korea on Friday, a move hailed by the White House as a “positive” step for the fragile detente between the two rivals.

The return of the remains — on the 65th anniversary of the end of the Korean War — marks the partial fulfilment of an agreement reached between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un at their historic summit in Singapore last month.

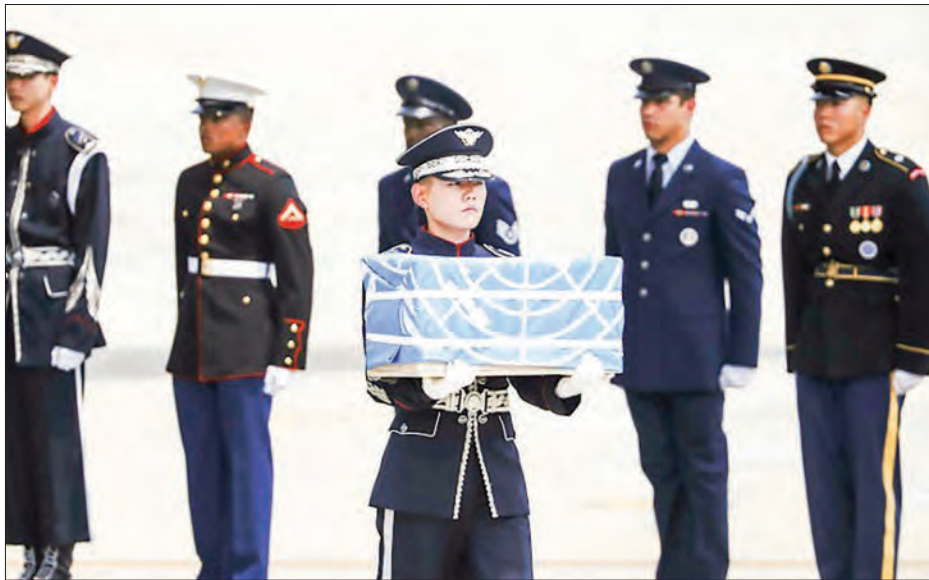
“After so many years, this will be a great moment for so many families. Thank you to Kim Jong Un,” Trump said in a tweet.

The White House said it was “encouraged” by the return of the remains and the “momentum for positive change”.

“Today’s actions represent a significant first step to recommence the repatriation of remains from North Korea and to resume field operations in North Korea to search for the estimated 5,300 Americans who have not yet returned home,” it said.

After leaving the North Korean port city of Wonsan, the C-17 cargo plane landed at the Osan US Air Base in South Korea at around 0200 GMT, where live TV images showed American soldiers lined up for a ceremony.

The United Nations Command (UNC) in South Korea said 55 sets of remains were on board the



A soldier carries a casket containing the remains of a US soldier killed during the Korean War, after they were returned by North Korea. **PHOTO: AFP**

plane. “It was a successful mission following extensive coordination,” General Vincent Brooks, commander of the UNC and United States Forces Korea, said in a statement.

“Now, we will prepare to honour our fallen before they continue on their journey home.”

More than 35,000 Americans were killed on the Korean Peninsula during the war, out of which around 7,700 are still considered missing, including 5,300 in North Korea alone, according to the Pentagon.

Between 1990 and 2005, 229 sets of remains from the North were repatriated, but those operations were suspended when ties deteriorated over Pyongyang’s nuclear weapons programme.

The remains flown to Osan on Friday are expected to be sent to Hawaii for forensic identification, following a formal repa-

triation ceremony next Wednesday.

‘They’ll milk this’

Trump has hailed his summit agreement with Kim as effectively ending the North Korean nuclear threat, although it contained only an ill-defined commitment on Pyongyang’s part to the “denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula” — a long way from the complete, verifiable and irreversible disarmament demanded by Washington.

The issue of repatriating remains of American war dead was seen as a far less contentious one, and the summit agreement specified the immediate return of those remains “already identified.”

According to US officials, North Korea is estimated to have as many as 200 sets of remains ready for delivery.

Former New Mexico governor Bill Richardson, who has worked on repa-

triation issues and visited North Korea several times, warned that Pyongyang might hold up further repatriations in order to squeeze some cash out of the United States.

“They’ll give a certain amount of remains for free right away,” Richardson told the *Washington Post*. “But then they’ll say, ‘The next ones, we need to find them, locate them, restore them.’ And then they’ll start charging, and they’ll milk this.”

The initial repatriation provides the White House with a tangible result from the Singapore summit, which has otherwise failed to deliver on the denuclearisation expectations raised by the US president.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was despatched to Pyongyang in early July to nail down the North’s summit commitments — including returning the remains of US servicemen.—AFP ■

Floods from Laos dam collapse force evacuations in Cambodia

ATTAPEU (Laos) — The torrent of water unleashed in a deadly Laos dam collapse has drained into Cambodia, forcing thousands to evacuate, as rescuers on Thursday battled monsoon rains to find scores of Laotians still missing after entire villages were washed away.

Twenty-seven people have been confirmed dead, with 131 still missing, after the Xe-Namnoy dam collapsed on Monday in a remote southern corner of Laos, leaving villagers with little time to escape.

It is an unprecedented accident to strike the hydropower industry in Laos, where the Communist government has dammed large sections of its myriad waterways to generate electricity that is mostly sold to its neighbours.

The search and rescue effort entered a third day Thursday, with China, Vietnam and Thailand sending in specialists, while villagers picked through their wrecked, mud-caked homes for possessions as the flood waters receded.

Carcasses of livestock floated in the knee-deep waters in a devastated village visited by AFP, as heavy rain pounded the area. Thousands of villagers downstream in Cambodia have also been forced to flee as the water once held back by the dam

flowed south.

“Water is still rising, so more people will be evacuated,” Men Kong, a government spokesman in Cambodia’s Stung Treng province, told AFP.

Cambodian soldiers ferried villagers and motorbikes from flooded zones on wooden boats, while supplies were handed out to some who found refuge on dry land.

In Laos, Chinese rescuers in life jackets and helmets joined local soldiers searching for the missing Thursday, according to an AFP reporter at the scene, while community volunteers pitched in with private boats to return to villages still submerged.

Residents recalled their terror as water rushed through their homes.

Tran Van Bien, 47, from Ban Mai village close to the ruined dam said he was told to evacuate just two hours before the dam burst on Monday evening, running to a neighbour’s house with his family as his home quickly filled with water.

“We were on the roof of that house the whole night, cold and scared. At 4:00 am a wooden boat passed and we decided to send my wife and my kid out,” he told AFP from a nearby town where he eventually found dry land.—AFP ■

CLAIM’S DAY NOTICE

M.V CAPE MONTEREY VOY. NO. ()

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V CAPE MONTEREY VOY. NO. () are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 28-7-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T.T where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S MCC TRANSPORT
(S’PORE) PTE LTD

Phone No: 2301185

CLAIM’S DAY NOTICE

M.V SINAR BATAM VOY. NO. ()

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V SINAR BATAM VOY. NO. () are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 28-7-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T.T /AIPT where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S NEW GOLDEN SEA LINES

Phone No: 2301185

CLAIM’S DAY NOTICE

M.V CAPE FLORES VOY. NO. (095N/S)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V CAPE FLORES VOY. NO. (095N/S) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 28-7-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of H.P.T where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S NEW GOLDEN SEA
SHIPPING LINES

Phone No: 2301185

Arctic Monkeys lead nominations for Mercury Prize

LONDON— Arctic Monkeys became the joint second most-nominated act in the Mercury Prize's history as the prestigious British album award announced its 2018 shortlist.

The band, nominated for its sixth record "Tranquility Base Hotel and Casino", are joined by Florence and The Machine and Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds in the lineup of 12 short-listed albums.

Indie rockers Everything Everything and London ensemble Wolf Alice were both shortlisted for the second time, while first-time nominees included singers Lily Allen and King Krule.

A pair of debut albums also featured: "Novelist Guy" by grime act Novelist and "Lost and Found" by R and B artist Jorja Smith.

"This year... celebrates albums by musicians at all stages of their careers, but with a shared belief in the importance of music for navigating life's challenges — whether personal or political, falling in or out of love, growing up or looking



Florence and The Machine scored their third Mercury shortlisting with "High as Hope". PHOTO: AFP

back, angry or ecstatic," the jury said.

"The music here is funny and inspiring, smart and moving," it added, in a statement unveiling the finalists.

Arctic Monkeys received their fourth-ever nomination for the prize after the Sheffield band's latest album became its

sixth consecutive British number one record in May.

It was the fastest selling vinyl record of the last 25 years.

The group won the award in 2006 with their acclaimed debut "Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not".

Only Radiohead have received more career nomina-

tions with five. P. J. Harvey, the only artist ever to have won the award twice, also has four career nominations.

Gallagher shortlisted

Florence and The Machine scored their third Mercury shortlisting with "High as Hope", while former Oasis gui-

tarist Gallagher's High Flying Birds project was nominated for "Who Built the Moon?"

Lily Allen greeted her nomination for "No Shame" by writing on Twitter she was "so happy" and "on cloud nine".

First-timer Smith also took to the social media platform to celebrate her inclusion.

"Wow! Honoured to be short listed for this year's Mercury Prize. Thank you to everyone who has supported me on this journey!" she wrote.

Sons of Kemet bagged the shortlist's usual spot for a jazz act, while compilation album "Everything Is Recorded", put together by producer Richard Russell, was also nominated.

Featured artists on the record include London singer Sampha, who won last year's Mercury Prize.

English singer-songwriter Nadine Shah also landed on the shortlist for the first time for "Holiday Destination".

The prize will be awarded on September 20 at the Hammersmith Apollo theatre in London.— AFP ■

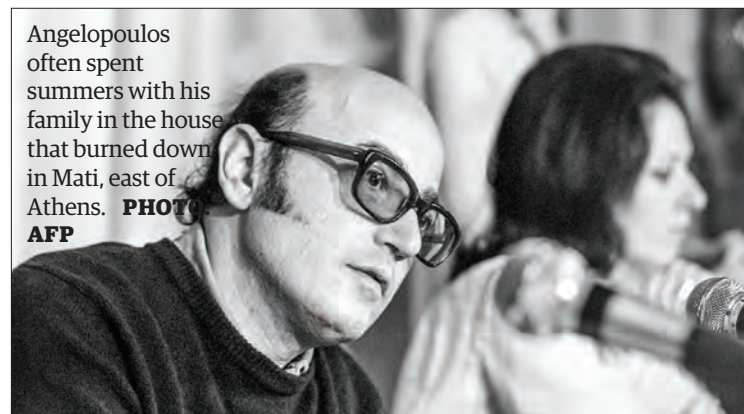
Fire destroys late Greek director Angelopoulos' archives

MATI (Greek) — The house and private archives of Greek cinema godfather Theo Angelopoulos, who died in 2012, were destroyed in this week's deadly wildfires near Athens, his widow said Thursday. The filmmaker, who won the prestigious Palme d'Or at Cannes in 1998 for "Eternity and a Day", often spent summers with his family at the house in Mati, east of the capital.

"My husband's books, his letters from celebrities, all the texts that authors had dedicated to him" were destroyed in the fire, Phoebe Angelopoulou told local television. She said the collection had also included texts and poems written by her late

husband.

Angelopoulou managed to flee the flames, which struck on Monday evening, with her granddaughter, but the house was severely damaged. Angelopoulos pioneered Greece's "new wave" cinema following the fall of the country's military dictatorship in 1974. His works include "Landscape in the Mist" and "The Dust of Time". He was killed in a freak accident in January 2012 while filming "The Other Sea", a project to document the effects of Greece's debt crisis. More than 80 people have died in Greece this week in the deadliest wildfire outbreak in Europe this century.—AFP ■



Angelopoulos often spent summers with his family in the house that burned down in Mati, east of Athens. PHOTO: AFP

Iraq street satirists peddle culture change

KUT (Iraq) — On a strip of pavement in the southern Iraqi city of Kut, a gaggle of amateur comedians pulls in the crowds every Friday — drawing chuckles, smiles and knowing nods.

With a rich repertoire of skits, Khaled al-Atbi and his peers poke fun at politicians more interested in lining their pockets than rebuilding a country devastated by decades of war. "Theatre is a message," said the 42-year-old al-Atbi, director and actor in the seven-strong troupe.

"With our satire, we condemn... corruption, lack of public services and tribal activities," he said, citing those factors as central to discontent in Iraq.

Since the US-led ouster of dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iraq has been plagued by graft and sectarian fighting, culminating in the Islamic State group seizing around a third of its territory in 2014.

As Iraq seeks to move beyond the brutal war that last year finally defeated the jihadists, al-Atbi is determined to embarrass officials who pocket bribes and hand out plum civil service jobs to relatives.

The father-of-two hopes his little troupe can help trigger a culture change, even as he juggles his satirical ventures with a full-time job as a policeman.

Rubbish piles vanish

In one sketch, al-Atbi plays a diligent official obliged to work with incompetent but politically connected colleagues.

The scene did not require much in terms of props — just a table and a few chairs, which were quickly encircled by rapt onlookers.

"Our audience is very receptive because they know what we are enacting exists in reality," said al-Atbi.

Less than two years after they began working the streets, the group's efforts have already brought about change, according to Kut residents.

"We can challenge leaders and solve social problems," said 48-year-old teacher Abu Ali, who never misses a Friday skit.

Where rubbish was once piled high, roads are now clean and refuse is collected regularly, Abu Ali added — thanks at least in part to pressure created by

street plays.

But not everyone is a fan.

The group has attracted online trolls, and while street audiences are generally very supportive, hecklers make their presence felt.

"You exaggerate!" "Stop insulting the parties and leaders!" are common refrains, al-Atbi shrugged.

'Breath of air'

But the performers are not discouraged.

Once a week, they set up on "Tigris Culture Street", among stalls of second-hand books lining the banks of the river running through the agricultural region. The plays are the only "breath of air... for people of culture" in the area, said hairdresser Karim al-Bahadli.

"They express the feelings that are inside," said al-Bahadli — a must, he believes, for a turbulent country that is ranked by Transparency International as the world's 12th most corrupt.

Southern Iraq was the epicentre of protests in July against corruption and poor public services.—AFP ■

Einstein was right: astronomers confirm key theory

MUNICH (Germany) — A consortium of astronomers said Thursday they had for the first time confirmed a prediction of Albert Einstein's theory of general relativity by observing the gravitational effects of a supermassive black hole on a star zipping by it.

The German-born theoretical physicist had posited that large gravitational forces could stretch light, much like the compression and stretching of sound waves we perceive with the change of pitch of a passing train.

Researchers from the GRAVITY consortium led by the Max Planck Institute for Extraterrestrial Physics realised that they had a "perfect laboratory" to test Einstein's theory with the Sagittarius A* black hole in the centre of the Milky Way.

Black holes are so dense that their gravitational pull can trap even light, and the supermassive Sagittarius A* has mass four million times that of our sun, making it the biggest in our galaxy.

Astronomers followed the S2 star as it passed close to the black hole on May 19 at a speed in excess of 25 million kilometres (15.5 million miles) per hour.



A handout photo released on July 26, 2018 by the European Southern Observatory shows an artist impression of the path of the star S2 as it passes very close to the supermassive black hole at the centre of the Milky Way. As it gets close to the black hole the very strong gravitational field causes the colour of the star to shift slightly to the red, an effect predicted under Einstein's general theory of relativity. In this graphic the colour effect and size of the objects have been exaggerated for clarity. **PHOTO: AFP**

They then calculated its velocity and position using a number of instruments and compared it with predictions made by Einstein that the light would be stretched by the gravity in an effect called gravitational redshift. Newtonian physics doesn't allow for a redshift. "The results are perfectly in line with

the theory of general relativity" and are "a major breakthrough towards better understanding the effects of intense gravitational fields," said the research team, whose findings are published in Friday's issue of *Astronomy & Astrophysics*.

This is the first time observers have been able to measure

such an effect. The European Southern Observatory, whose Very Large Telescope in Chile was used to make the observations, had watched S2 pass by Sagittarius A* in 2016 but the instruments it was using then were not sensitive enough to detect the gravitational redshift.

"More than 100 years after he

published his paper setting out the equations of general relativity, Einstein has been proved right once more — in a much more extreme laboratory than he could have possibly imagined," said the ESO in a statement.

Astronomers already use another effect predicted by Einstein's theory of general relativity — that a black hole can bend passing light. Called gravitational lensing, researchers have used it to peer behind black holes.

Astronomers hope they can make practical use of the latest confirmation of Einstein's theory to track shifts in S2's trajectory due to gravity, which could yield information on mass distribution around the black hole. "I am always blown away by Einstein's predictions, by the power of his reasoning which yielded this theory and which has never been faulted," French astrophysicist Guy Perrin, a member of the GRAVITY consortium, told AFP. Partnering with the Max Planck Institute in the consortium were French research institute CNRS, the Paris Observatory and several French universities along with Portugal's CENTRA astrophysics centre.—AFP ■

New Ebola virus found in Sierra Leone

FREETOWN (Sierra Leone) — A new Ebola virus has been found in bats in Sierra Leone, two years after the end of an outbreak that killed over 11,000 across West Africa, the government said on Thursday.

It is not yet known whether the new Bombali species of the virus — which researchers say could be transmitted to humans — can develop into the deadly Ebola disease.

"At this time, it is not yet known if the Bombali Ebola virus has been transmitted to people or if it causes disease in people but it has the potential to infect human cells," Amara Jambai, a senior ministry of health official, told AFP.

"This is early stages of the findings," Jambai added, calling on the public to remain calm while awaiting further research.

A health ministry spokesman

and a researcher who worked on the discovery confirmed the findings to AFP. Researchers who found the new virus in the northern Bombali region are now working with the Sierra Leone government to determine whether any humans were infected.

"As precautionary measures, people should refrain from eating bats," Harold Thomas, health ministry spokesman told AFP.

The worst-ever Ebola outbreak started in December 2013 in southern Guinea before spreading to two neighbouring west African countries, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

The West African outbreak was caused by the Zaire species, which has historically been the most deadly in humans since it was first identified in 1976.

That outbreak killed more than 11,300 people out of nearly 29,000 registered cases, according to World Health Organization estimates.

The WHO declared the epidemic over in January this year, but this was followed by flare-ups in all three countries.—AFP ■



A new Ebola virus has been found in bats in Sierra Leone, like this one trapped to be examined for research in Gabon in June 2018, though it's still unknown if the new species can develop into the deadly Ebola disease. **PHOTO: AFP**

Team finds sacred part of Vilnius synagogue razed by the Nazis

VILNIUS — For decades, little did the principal of a kindergarten in Lithuania's capital realise that his office stood on top of a sacred part of Vilnius' 17th century Jewish temple, once famous across Europe.

An international team of archaeologists on Thursday announced the discovery of the most revered part of the Great Synagogue of Vilnius, Lithuania's major Jewish shrine before it was destroyed by Nazi and Soviet regimes. "We've found the bimah, the central prayer platform which was in Tuscan Baroque style. It was one of the central features of the synagogue," Jon Seligman from Israel's Antiquities Authority told AFP.

"It is really a very exciting development. When we talk about the presentation of the site to the public in the future, this will be one of the central fea-

tures of the display," he added.

The green and brown, brick and mortar bimah -- a raised platform from which the Jewish holy book, the Torah, is read -- was unearthed just beneath the principal's office of a former school built in the 1950s by the Soviet regime. The synagogue, dating from the 1630s, was the most important shrine for Lithuania's once vibrant Jewish community. The city attracted Yiddish-speaking writers and scholars, earning it the title of "Jerusalem of the North".

Before the war, Jews accounted for around one-third of the city's then 60,000 residents, but most of them perished under Nazi Germany's 1941-1944 occupation. The Nazis burned down the shrine and the remains were later demolished by the Soviet regime that built a kindergarten, later turned into the primary school, on the property.—AFP ■

Ronaldo to make Serie A debut for champions Juventus at Chievo

ROME — Cristiano Ronaldo will kick his first ball in Serie A at troubled Chievo on the weekend of August 18/19 when new club Juventus begin their bid for a record eighth straight league title.

The fixture list for the 2018-19 season of the Italian championship was announced on Thursday with all eyes on where the superstar attacker, signed for 100 million euros from European champions Real Madrid earlier this month, would begin what he called “a new adventure”.

Juventus are strong favourites to further cement their domestic dominance following the Portuguese international's arrival, with the league's other big hitters in a transition period.

Napoli, who finished four points behind Juve last year, will



Star man: Cristiano Ronaldo. **PHOTO: AFP**

be a different prospect from the free-flowing purists of recent years after replacing new Chelsea coach Maurizio Sarri with Carlo Ancelotti, a double winner with the Premier League club

in 2010.

Ancelotti begins his new job with a tough away trip to Lazio, who were top scorers last season with 89 goals and only missed out on Champions League football

on the final day after a dramatic defeat by Inter Milan.

Three-time Champions League winner Ancelotti follows that up with the visit of AC Milan, themselves hoping to rebuild after being taken over by American hedge fund Elliott Management earlier this month.

Juventus will host Lazio in the second week of the season on August 26, the first proper test for the reigning champions and 33-year-old Ronaldo in what should be his home debut.

Roma, who begin at Torino, have already brought in 11 new players after finishing third and reaching the Champions League semi-finals last season, but doubts remain after they sold fan favourite Radja Nainggolan to Inter and goalkeeper Alisson

to Liverpool for a record-busting 72.5 million euros (\$84.4 million).

Boosted by their qualification for Europe's top competition and the signing of Nainggolan, Inter are nonetheless not expected to trouble all-conquering Juve's charge for the title. However Massimiliano Allegri's side are unlikely to have it all their own way, after a draw that gives them trips to both Luciano Spalletti's Inter and Roma in the final five weeks of the season. Juve's opening-day opponents Chievo were let off from being deducted points from last season and relegated after a legal technicality meant charges that they deliberately inflated the figures of transfer dealings with now-bankrupt Serie B club Cesena were thrown out. —AFP ■

Myanmar men's national football team to play at 2018 Asian Games

WITH national football team opponents from North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Iran in Group F, Myanmar national football team will be playing at the 2018 Asian Games in Indonesia.

The men's football matches of 2018 Asian Games will be played from 14 August to 1 September in Indonesian cities of Bekasi, Cibinong, Cikarang, and Soreang.

A total of 26 teams, divided into six groups, will play in the tournament.

All of the groups are comprised of four teams each, except Group A and Group E, whose groups include five teams each.

The matches of the group stage will be played from 10 August to 21 August after which the advanced 16 teams will play on 23 and 24 August at the stage of round 16.

The quarter-finals will be played on 26 and 27 August, while the semi-finals will be played on 29 August. The final and third place matches will be played on 1 September.

All matches of the men's competition will be played in four venues — the Jalak Harupat Stadium in Soreang, the Pakansari Stadium in Cibinong, the Patriot Chandrabhaga Stadium in Bekasi and the Wibawa Mukti Stadium in Cikarang cities. —GNLM ■



Myanmar national U-23 football team seen during their training session. **PHOTO: MFF**

Bonucci wants Juve return, reveals AC Milan's Leonardo

ROME — AC Milan's new sporting director Leonardo revealed Thursday that team captain Leonardo Bonucci wants to return to Juventus just one season after signing for the club from the Serie A champions.

“I've met with a range of clubs, including Juventus,” the Brazilian said at a press conference in which he was unveiled in his new role at Milan.

“The desire (to talk to Juve) came from him, so if the conditions are right, we'll try to make it happen.”

On Tuesday coach Gennaro Gattuso admitted that Bonucci wants to leave Milan, who could only finish sixth last season despite spending over 200 million euros (\$233 million) on new players last summer — of which 42 million euros were reportedly spent on the Italian international centre-back.

However Leonardo's announcement was confirmation of reports that he wanted to return to Turin, where he won six league titles and reached two Champions League finals with Juve.

Bonucci's potential departure shows that the troubled times are not yet over for AC Milan despite being readmitted to next season's Europa League last week, thanks to the



Juventus return for Leonardo Bonucci, pictured in October 2017. **PHOTO: AFP**

Court of Arbitration for Sport overturning a season-long ban for violating UEFA's financial fair play rules.

American hedge fund Elliott Management took over Milan earlier this month after the club's former Chinese owners, long rumoured to be struggling financially, failed to repay 32 million euros lent by Elliott to finance the final instalment of two capital increases worth a total of 120 million euros.

Elliott has pledged to inject 50 million euros to bring financial stability to the seven-time European champions. Leonardo, a former Milan player admitted that Milan wouldn't be making any big moves in the summer transfer market

and said that Gattuso would remain coach despite rumours of Antonio Conte replacing him.

Gattuso stabilised the club last season after stepping up from youth team coach to replace sacked Vincenzo Montella in late November, with Milan in disarray place after losing six of their opening 14 matches.

He took his side to the Italian Cup final, where they were soundly beaten 4-0 by Juve, who conquered their fourth straight domestic double.

“I and the club agree. Gattuso was the first person to be confirmed,” Leonardo said.

“He is a coach who is constantly developing, he is a Milan man and it's with him that we will begin.” —AFP ■