Commander Maj-Gen Myint Swe inspected dredging of No 5 main drain in Thakayta Township. — YANGON COMMAND

Minister inspects construction of sluice gates
YANGON, 24 Jan—Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation Maj-Gen Nyunt Tin, together with officials inspected construction of Kayan sluice gate in old Chaungwa Village in Thantlin Township and flow of water in Bago River this morning. Director of Construction-6 of Irrigation Department U Khin Maung Myint reported on construction of the sluice gate, measures taken for digging of caisson and design of the sluice gate. Director-General of Irrigation Department U Kyaw San Win gave a supplementary report.

The minister discussed flow of salty water into the farmland and contribute towards the development of the region.

In the afternoon, the minister and party inspected Ngamoyeik sluice gate on Ngamoyeik Creek near Hlegu and Dagon Myothit (East) Townships, irrigation of 6,000 acres of farmland near Ngamoyeik Creek and building of temporary dam for summer paddy cultivation.

Officials reported on construction of the sluice gate, storage of water for cultivation of double and triple crops in six village-tracts in Hlegu Township and cultivation of 4,000 acres of summer paddy — MNA

Four political objectives
- Stability of the State, community peace and tranquillity, prevalence of law and order
- National reconsolidation
- Emergence of a new enduring State Constitution
- Building of a new modern developed nation in accord with the new State Constitution

Four economic objectives
- Development of agriculture as the base and all-round development of other sectors of the economy as well
- Proper evolution of the market-oriented economic system
- Development of the economy inviting participation in terms of technical know-how and investments from sources inside the country and abroad
- The initiative to shape the national economy must be kept in the hands of the State and the national peoples

Four social objectives
- Uplift of the morale and morality of the entire nation
- Uplift of national prestige and integrity and preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage and national character
- Uplift of dynamics of patriotic spirit
- Uplift of health, fitness and education standards of the entire nation
The 57th Anniversary Union Day objectives
— for all national races to safeguard the national policy— non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national solidarity and perpetuation of sovereignty
— to keep the Union Spirit ever alive and dynamic among the national people
— for all national people to defend and safeguard the Union for its perpetual existence
— to prevent, through national solidarity, the danger of internal and external destructive elements undermining peace and stability of the State and national development, and
— for all national races to make concerted efforts for successful implementation of the seven-point future policy programme.

Efficient use of electric power
* Oppose those relying on external elements, acting as stooges, holding negative views
* Oppose those trying to jeopardize the stability of the State and progress of the nation
* Oppose foreign nations interfering in internal affairs of the State
* Crush all internal and external destructive elements as the common enemy

Efficient use of fuel
* Saving one gallon of fuel per car per month will save the nation one US dollar
* Thus, a total of 455,822 cars in Myanmar can save US$ 5.5 million in a year
* The amount, US $ 5.5 million, can build a major bridge across Ayeyawady River

Computers, Farm implements, building donated
Yavvo—24 Jan—The World Canaan Farmers’ Movement of the Republic of Korea donated computer sets and farm implements worth US$ 26,000 and a building worth K 15 million to the Myanmar Farms Enterprise under the Ministry of Agriculture & Irrigation on 21 January.

The ceremony to hand over documentaries relating to the donation was held at the Myanmar Canaan Farmers’ Training School in PyinOoLwin Township. Present on the occasion were World Canaan Movement President Dr Kim Bum Il, Managing Director of Myanmar Farms Enterprise Col Myint Shwe, PyinOoLwin District Agriculture Supervisory Committee members, the principal of the training school, course instructors, factory managers and those in charge of the farms.

The training school is under the joint sponsorship of the Ministry of Agriculture & Irrigation and the Korean NGO named World Canaan Farmers’ Movement. Altogether four training courses were conducted in 2003-2004 fiscal year at the school for ensuring development of technical know-how among the farmers. Altogether 138 trainees attended the courses.

Wellwishers invited for sinking tube-wells
YANGON—24 Jan—The Development Affairs Committees under the Ministry for Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs are making concerted efforts in sinking tube-wells in order to get sufficient fresh water in rural areas in States and Divisions where water is scarce.

One 200 feet deep two-inch diameter tube-well costs K 250,000; one 400 feet deep two-inch diameter tube-well costs K 500,000; and one 200 feet deep four-inch diametre tube-well costs K 500,000.

Those who wish to donate cash for the tube-well sinking projects for rural areas may contact the Director-General (Tel: 01-245420 & 253088), the Deputy Director-General (Tel: 01-240118), the Director (Engineering) (Tel: 01-291967), the Directors (Sagay Division Development Affairs Committee) (Tel: 071-21012), the Director (Magway Division Development Affairs Committee) (Tel: 063-23164) and the Director (Mandalay Division Development Affairs Committee) (Tel: 02-54657).—MNA
At least 13 US military court martial hearings in Iraq since May 1

At least 13 soldiers have gone up for court martial hearings in Iraq since May 1, the official end of major combat in the strife-torn country, according to an official armi list obtained by AFP.

Seven have been handed bad conduct discharges, while the others have been sentenced to jail terms of anywhere from between two and six months.

“It’s a microcosm of society,” said army court reporter Jennifer Santiago about the excesses of military life nine months into the US occupation of Iraq.

Many other cases are still under investigation and are not at the stage where the top US commander in Iraq, Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, would recommend court martial proceedings, said Santiago, who serves at the coalition’s command in Baghdad.

Last week, the US military announced an investigation into cases of abuse at an Iraqi detention centre, widely believed to be Baghdad’s massive Abu Ghraib prison.

That investigation is on top of a “handful” of inquiries into whether US soldiers have maltreated Iraqi detainees, Santiago said. Since May, the US military in Iraq has discharged at least four soldiers and one non-commissioned officer for assault, according to the list given to AFP.

Three of the soldiers were involved in attacks on an officer or fellow enlisted man. But the military said it was unable to specify if the other two assault cases involved attacks on Iraqis or fellow soldiers. In two separate cases, non-commissioned officers were sentenced to jail time, demoted and fined for stealing government laptops and trying to send them home by mail.

She also said the greater number of court martial cases involved US army reservists.

Eight Marines are also on trial at Camp Pendleton, California for the beating of Iraqi prisoners during the war. — Internet

Auto competition heats up as multinationals grow in China

BEIJING, 24 Jan — Competition in China’s auto market is intensifying as multinational carmakers like Volkswagen and Daimler Chrysler keep increasing investment to seize a bigger share of the lucrative market.

Volkswagen, the first foreign automaker to assemble passenger cars in China in 1985, has vowed to keep its leadership in the nation’s passenger car market.

With plans to invest another six billion euros, Volkswagen expects to double its annual production capacity to 1.6 million units within the next five years.

Like Volkswagen, which taps the Chinese market with local partners First Automotive Works Corp. and Shanghai Automotive Industry Corp., the nation’s top two vehicle manufacturers, other foreign automakers have started to form new joint ventures or strategic alliances with Chinese partners to expand business.

German-US auto giant Daimler Chrysler is one of them. Under last September’s cooperation agreement signed with Beijing Automobil Industry Holdings, one of China’s major state-owned automakers, the two will invest one billion euros to produce sedan limousines, passenger cars and key spare parts.

Ford, the world’s second-biggest carmaker, signed in October last year with Chang’an Ford from the current 60,500 units to 150,000 China’s brisk market demand in recent years has fuelled the multinationals’ expansion.

In the past year, China produced 4.44 million autos and sold 4.39 million, a yearly rise of 35.2 per cent and 34.21 per cent respectively.

This year, China’s automobile production and sales figures are both expected to exceed five million, up about 20 per cent year-on-year, experts say.

Government policies have encouraged foreign carmakers to speed up investment and localized production instead of aggressively exporting vehicles to the nation.

With their battle to find a challenger to Bush turned upside down by the results in Iowa, the Democrats refused to attack each other and concentrated on condemning the President’s economic and foreign policy leadership andouting their own candidates.

“This country is being led in a radically wrong direction by this President,” said John Kerry, the Iowa winner who surged into a lead in New Hampshire polls ahead of Tuesday’s primary.

The Democrats, mindful that the negative exchanges in Iowa between former Gov. Howard Dean and Missouri Representative Richard Gephardt had backfired on both, responded cautiously even when pressed to criticize each other.

Needling to halt his slide and regain the early momentum that put him at the front of the pack last year, Dean emphasized his experience as governor of Vermont during the debate and stuck up front to provide help on key security and other issues.

“We are available but clearly want to do this with a sovereign Iraqi government which, when the time comes, would be prepared to say just how it views Iraq’s security,” he said. — Internet

Russia, France seek international Iraq conference

MOSCOW, 24 Jan — Russia and France, which opposed the US invasion of Iraq, called Friday for an international conference to discuss rebuilding the troubled country and efforts to put together a government under national control.

The two countries’ foreign ministers made the suggestion after a day of talks, but offered few details on an agenda or time frame. Both said progress on reconstruction was possible only once full Iraqi sovereignty was restored.

Russia’s Igor Ivanov told a news conference Moscow wanted to take a more active role in the reconstruction process, but only after “the formation in Iraq of a real, independent and democratic government. “It would be very important to hold an international conference to examine all aspects of an Iraqi settlement, work out a program which could receive key international support and examine regional stability in a broader sense,” he said.

His French opposite number, Dominique de Villepin said a conference could “bring together all countries in the region and in the world community to deal with all difficult issues.”

France, he said, was ready to provide help on key security and other issues.

“We are available but clearly want to do this with a sovereign Iraqi government which, when the time comes, would be prepared to say just how it views Iraq’s security,” he said. — Internet

Chinese State Councillor calls on Cambodian King

BANGKOK, 24 Jan — Chinese State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan called on Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk and Queen Monineath Sihanouk here Thursday.

Sihanouk arrived in Beijing on Monday for a routine medical examination and vacation.

Tang conveyed greetings and regards to Sihanouk from Chinese President Hu Jintao and his wife, Liu Yongqing, on the occasion of China’s traditional Lunar New Year, which fell on Thursday.

Tang appreciated Sihanouk’s contribution to developing bilateral friendship, and thanked the Cambodian Government and people for their support.

China and Cambodia had made joint efforts to boost good-neighbourly cooperation in a sustainable and all-round way, he said.

Sihanouk asked Tang to pass on his greetings and New Year blessings to President Hu and his wife, and to other Chinese leaders. — MNA/Xinhua

Democrats focus criticism on Bush

GOFFSTOWN (NH), 24 Jan — The Democratic presidential hopefuls focused most of their criticism on President George W Bush on Thursday, treading carefully with each other in a polite final debate before next week’s crucial New Hampshire primary.

With their battle to find a challenger to Bush turned upside down by the results in Iowa, the Democrats refused to attack each other and concentrated on condemning the President’s economic and foreign policy leadership andouting their own candidates.

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Members of the Iraqi Civil Defence Corps walk down a street in central Baghdad as they conduct a joint patrol with US soldiers on 24 Jun, 2004. Six Iraqis, 2004 US soldiers and a Turkish driver were wounded when their patrol was struck by a large explosion in the northern city of Mosul, police officer Fath Ahmed Abdul Jabbar said. — Internet

At least 13 US military court martial hearings in Iraq since May 1
Former UN weapons inspector replaces David Kay as Iraq WMD adviser

WASHINGTON, 24 Jan — CIA director George Tenet named former UN weapons inspector Charles Duelfer to succeed David Kay to lead the search for Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, an effort that so far has failed to substantiate pre-war US claims.

Duelfer, 51, said he had been assured of independence and was confident he would have the resources to produce an investigation into Iraq's weapons of mass destruction that would stand up to public scrutiny.

"When I spoke to the DCI (Director of Central Intelligence), he assured me he wanted one thing and that was the truth, however I got that," said Duelfer in a telephone conference call.

"My goal is to find out what happened on the ground, what was the status of the Iraqi weapons programme, what was their game plan, what was the goal of the Iraqi regime, to find out what is the ground truth," he said.

Duelfer, who recently said he does not believe weapons of mass destruction will ever be found in Iraq, said he had an open mind and did not intend to change the approach taken so far by Kay and the Iraq Survey Group.

The group has so far failed to find any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and has come up with scant evidence of active chemical, biological or nuclear programs at the time of the US-led invasion of Iraq last year.

The failure to find banned weapons or programmes has become a major embarrassment for Washington, which made them the central element of its case for war against Iraq.

As Tenet's special adviser on matters regarding Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs, Duelfer will direct the efforts of the 1,400-member Iraq Survey Group.

Duelfer, Tenet has selected an expert with broad experience in tracking Iraqi weapons of mass destruction programs but also one who in recent comments has expressed doubt that any weapons would ever be found.

"The prospect of finding chemical weapons, biological weapons, is close to nil at this point," Duelfer said this month in an interview with PBS, the public television network. —Internet

Hebei Province exports more fruits to Thailand

SHEKHALIANG, 24 Jan — North China's Hebei Province, a major agricultural production base around Beijing, has posted a 90-per-cent year-on-year rise in fruit exports to Thailand, thanks to a zero-tariff agreement signed between the two countries on 1 October, 2003. The province exported 1,363 tons of fruit to Thailand in 2003, earning 672,000 US dollars of foreign currency revenue.

Over 60 per cent, or 830 tons, of the fruit was exported between October and December, after the zero-tariff agreement went into effect, said sources with the provincial Customs. —MNA/Xinhua

Nepal's outgoing workers decrease

KATHMANDU, 24 Jan — The number of Nepalese workers leaving the country for foreign employment decreased by 2.63 per cent in the first half of the fiscal year compared with the same period of last fiscal year, according to government statistics.

The total number of outgoing Nepali workers in the first six months of the current 2003/2004 fiscal year, beginning from 1 July, 2003, stood at 49,758, a decline from 51,104 in the same period of 2002/2003 fiscal year, the statistics released by the Nepali Ministry of Labour and Transport Management on Friday showed. The official statistics further revealed that the total number of Nepali people working abroad has reached to 396,818.

"Slightly improving domestic economic environment might be one cause to the decrease of the number of outgoing workers," said Dhruba Kumar Sharma, spokesman of the ministry. "The Iraq war, disturbing Gulf countries directly or indirectly, might be another major reason behind the fall," Sharma noted, adding that most of the Nepali workers spread in the Gulf countries. —MNA/Xinhua

EC acts against 9 EU members for air pollution

BRUSSELS, 24 Jan — The European Commission (EC) is taking legal action against Belgium, Italy, Greece, Portugal, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, Austria and Spain, urging them to comply with the legislations on air pollution of the European Union (EU).

A Press release issued Thursday by the EC said the cases relate to seven separate EU laws on air quality, all of which are "aimed at preventing or reducing the harmful effects of air pollution on public health and the environment". The EU's executive arm has referred Belgium, Italy, Greece and Portugal to the Court of Justice of the European Communities (ECJ) for having failed to comply with the national laws on waste incineration with the EU's directive on the incineration of waste. This directive imposes stringent operational and technical requirements and sets emission limits for waste incineration and co-incineration plants within the EU, and the deadline for transposing this directive into national law was 28 December of 2002.

Apart from this, the nine EU members were sued for failing to adopt or one of the EU laws concerning air quality limits for benzene and carbon monoxide, national emission ceilings for sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds and ammonia, emission limits for large combustion plants, and protection of the Ozone Layer.

Some of the nine EU members also received oral written warnings issued by the EC for their relevant laws on environmental protection as "incomplete". "Large member states to speed up their implementation of EU laws on air pollution. Delays put citizens at greater risk of suffering health problems associated with poor air quality," said European Environment Commissioner Margot Wallstrom, the EC's watchdog for environmental protection. —MNA/Xinhua

Iraqi children, march on the street in the Baghdad neighbourhood of Sadi City on 23 Jan, 2004. Sadi City is the home of more than 2 million Shiite Muslims, with strong support for Sadri who has been loudly outspoken against the US occupation of Iraq. Internet

Iraq weapons hunter quits

BAGHDAD, 24 Jan — America's chief arms hunter in Iraq has resigned, and said he does not believe the country had any large stockpiles of chemical or biological weapons.

In a direct challenge to the Bush administration, which says its invasion of Iraq was justified by the presence of illicit arms, David Kay said on Friday that it is unlikely anything significant will be found.

"I don't think they existed," Kay said. "What everyone was talking about is stockpiles produced after the end of the last (1991) Gulf War, and I don't think there was a large-scale production programme in the nineties," he said.

The CIA announced earlier that former UN weapons inspector Charles Duelfer, who has previously expressed doubts that unconventional weapons would be found, would succeed Kay as Washington's chief arms hunter. Kay said he believes most of what was going to be found in the search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq has been found, and the hunt would become more difficult once America returns control of the country to the Iraqis.

The United States went to war against Baghdad last year citing a threat from Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. To date, no banned arms have been found. Former Iraq Survey Group leader in his annual State of the Union on Tuesday, President George Bush insisted former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had actively pursued dangerous programmes right up to the start of the US attack in March. —Internet

Two US pilots killed in Iraq copter crash

BAGHDAD, 24 Jan — An Army OH-58 Kiowa Warrior helicopter attached to the 101st Airborne Division crashed Friday in northern Iraq, killing the two pilots, the American military said.

The helicopter went down about 8.30 pm near Qayyara, about 30 miles south of Mosul, the military said. The cause of the crash was unclear. The military said "an initial report from the accompanying second helicopter did not make mention of hostile activity."

The death brought to 507 the number of American service members who have died since the Iraq war began on 20 March.

It was the fourth helicopter crash suffered by American forces in Iraq this month. On 2 Jan, an Army OH-58 Kiowa Warrior helicopter was shot down near the central city of Falluja, killing one pilot. Six days later, an Army Black Hawk medical evacuation helicopter was shot down by a rocket near Falluja, killing all nine American soldiers aboard.

An Army Apache attack helicopter was brought down by apparent enemy fire on 13 Jan, but both crew members escaped injury. —Internet

David Kay has quashed the hunt for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq which so far has failed to find any actual arms, and will be replaced by former UN weapons inspector Charles Duelfer ( Bert R), the CIA said on 25 Jan, 2004. The search has so far not found any actual stockpiles of such weapons, which critics say is an indication that the White House exaggerated the threat from Iraq in making its case for war last year.—INTERNET

Iraqi kids march on the street in the Baghdad neighbourhood of Sadi City on 23 Jan, 2004. Sadi City is the home of more than 2 million Shiite Muslims, with strong support for Sadri who has been loudly outspoken against the US occupation of Iraq. Internet
UN chief Koit Annan who pulled staff out of Iraq after two deadly attacks on the UN’s Baghdad headquarters, promised to announce “shortly” his plans for the UN’s future role in the US-led coalition’s plan to end its nine-month occupation.

A UN spokesman stressed the team that arrived Friday was charged only with opening channels of communication with the coalition, not with assessing the safety of returning a full-blown UN mission.

“The opening of a direct line of communication with the coalition on security matters is necessary for the planning for the safety and security of UN personnel, activities and assets in Iraq and for an eventual return of UN international staff to Iraq,” UN spokesman Stéphane Dujarric said.

Dujarric said a separate security assessment would be needed if Annan announces a full mission return, as he is widely expected to do next week.

The White House supported a resumption of UN presence in Iraq.

“They have an important role to play,” spokesman Scott McClellan told reporters. “They have a lot of special expertise that they can offer. And so we are hopeful that they can return to Iraq as soon as possible.”

He said President George W Bush had met briefly with Lakhdar Brahimi, a widely respected UN diplomat newly appointed as Annan’s special advisor on Iraq.

The spiritual leader of Iraq’s Shiite Muslim majority gave the coalition and the UN a breather when he called for a halt to protests against plans for the transfer of power until UN experts can rule on whether direct elections can be held in the next six months.

Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani directed his followers to give the world body time to organize an evaluation mission, just a week after he threatened a campaign of civil disobedience unless the coalition organize elections for the first post-occupation government that is due to take power by the end of June.

It is vital “to wait until the United States and the UN clarify their positions on the election procedure to choose the nature of the next Iraqi government,” Sistani’s envoys, Sheikh Abdel Mahdi al-Karbalaï, said in his sermon at the main weekly Muslim prayers in the Shiite pilgrimage city of Karbala.

While the arrival of the UN mission appeared to address the demands of Sistani and the mainsteam Shiite hierarchy, it stirred the wrath of radical Shiite leader Moqtada al-Sadr, who branded the world body “dishonest” and subservient to the United States.

Iraqi forces seize 26 kilos of hashish

ANKARA, 24 Jan—Turkish gendarmerie forces seized 26 kilos of hashish in Diyarbakir Province of southeastern Turkey on Thursday.

Acting on a tip-off, the gendarmerie forces searched a house in Silvan Town of Diyarbakir and confiscated 26 kilos of hashish hidden in the house, reported Anatolia news agency.

The report said that the gendarmerie forces detained two people in connection with the haul.

For its central geographic location at the crossroad between Europe, Asia, the Middle East and the Mediterranean Sea, Turkey plays a central role in the heroin trade destined for Europe—MNA/Xinhua

US nabs key guerrilla figure in Iraq

WASHINGTON, 24 Jan—US Special Forces troops have captured a leading figure in Ansr al-Islam, a guerrilla group operating in Iraq that the United States says has ties to al-Qaeda. US officials said on Friday.

Usama al-Yemeni was taken into custody during an operation last week near the town of Fallujah, about 30 miles west of Baghdad, said one official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

“There’s a strong possibility that this guy was involved in some of the major attacks in Iraq,” this US official said, declining to specify which attacks.

The official described al-Yemeni as a top associate of Abu Musab Zarqawi—who is suspected of plotting the murder of a US diplomat in Jordan, overseeing a guerrilla camp in Afghanistan and having links to al-Qaeda as well.

The United States last year offered a reward of up to five million US dollars for information leading to Zarqawi’s arrest or conviction.

The US official said al-Yemeni was the highest ranking member of Ansr al-Islam captured by US forces in Iraq to date, and was suspected of having links to al-Qaeda as well.

He said three party members were still in the office, clearing up, when the bomb went off, killing two and injuring one.

Iraqi security forces searched a house in Silvan Town of Diyarbakir Province of southeastern Turkey on Thursday.

Iraq office explosion kills two men

BAGHDAD, 24 Jan—A bomb planted in a meeting room exploded after a meeting of the Iraqi Communist Party, killing two men in an apparent attack on supporters of the US-backed government, officials said Friday.

The attack in Baghdad on Thursday appeared aimed at undermining the Communists, who have become the most organized political group in the country since the collapse of Saddam Hussein’s Baath Party.

The officials have one representative on the US-backed, 25-member Iraqi Governing Council.

The bombing came as US forces arrested a father and son suspected of carrying a mortar and rocket barrette that killed two American soldiers at US outpost.

The attacks were part of a spate of assaults that killed 11 people on Wednesday and Thursday in central Iraq, where Saddam loyalists are waging a guerrilla war.

Two other victims included four Christian women who were slain Wednesday as they headed to jobs at a US military base.

The security chief of Spanish troops in Iraq was shot and critically wounded Thursday during a raid south of Baghdad.

The bomb, suspected to have been planted in a meeting hall of the Iraqi Communist Party’s local office, blew up Thursday evening, an hour after a meeting of 50 party members, said Mohammed Khudeir, a party official.

He said three party members were still in the office, clearing up, when the bomb went off, killing two and injuring one.

Internet

Turkey's forces seize 26 kilos of hashish

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An armed Iraqi policeman stands on top of a bomb damaged wall as he guards the police station in Bouqoba, Iraq where a car bomb exploded recently. At least three people, including the driver of the car bomb-loaded vehicle were killed, and nearly 30 others injured in the explosion, police and witnesses said.

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INTERNET

Reservoir dyke breach brought under control in N-W China

Urumqi, 24 Jan—More than 2,000 soldiers, armed police and militia have managed to plug a 30-metre-wide breach in a reservoir dyke in northwest China’s Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

Water was gushing from holes in the wall of the reservoir, known as “Bayin” on Wednesday afternoon.

The breach was 30 metres wide by noon Thursday, the first day of Spring Festival, the traditional Lunar Year for Chinese.

No casualties have been reported though the waters submerged three companies of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corporation (XPCC). The reservoir was built in 1957 with a design capacity of 2.1 million cubic metres.

The rescue forces have helped evacuate more than 8,000 people, most of whom were sheltered in hotels, schools, and office buildings in Wujiaqiu City.

Donated tents, quilts, dried noodles and cooking oil had reached the evacuees, said Liu Gang, in charge of civil affairs of XPCC.

Hotels in Wujiaqiu City were busy preparing meals for the victims who had to flee from their homes on the eve of the Spring Festival.

A panel sent by the State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters has arrived at the flood-hit area—MNA/Xinhua

Internet

Floods kill 51 in Brazil

BRASILIA, 24 Jan—Floods and mudslides triggered by continuous rains since the beginning of this year have killed 51 people and displaced about 20,000 in eastern Brazil, authorities reported on Thursday.

During the past weeks, storms hit 119 cities and towns in seven states in the southeast and northeast, damaging about 16,000 buildings, 3,500 kilometres of roads and 192 bridges. Floods are still blocking some towns from links with the outside.

The national meteorological authorities had reported rainfall much heavier than the level for this time of the year, and in some areas more than tripling the January average.

The storm weather is expected to stay and keep the civil emergency departments in affected regions further on alert,—MNA/Xinhua

The new light of myanmar Sunday, 25 January, 2004
At least 280 Iraqi police killed since fall of Baghdad

KARBALA, 24 Jan — Some scars from the bomb blast are easy to see: glass fragments tore Sgt. Kassim Madloul Shinjar's left ear and right hand; the Iraqi policeman still clings to the bloodstained shirt he was wearing that day. But other scars remain hidden, and show how violence waged by Iraqi resistance fighters against US occupation forces — and Iraqi “collaborators” — is undermining efforts to restore calm.

Sergeant Shinjar survived. The chief of Karbala’s traffic police and his deputy — both passers in the car Shinjar was driving — were killed by the car bomb on Dec. 27.

Today a dilemma gnaws away inside Shinjar’s mind: Is the risk of being targeted as a collaborator worth the satisfaction of helping your community in the aftermath of war?

“I haven’t decided until now — maybe I will come back; maybe not,” says Shinjar, beginning to tremble, as thoughts of ending a 16-year career as a traffic cop mix with memories of the explosion that killed his closest colleagues.

Shinjar’s car bomb was just one of four that rocked Karbala that day. That violence is killing an increasing number of Iraqi policemen, who walk the front lines of the US occupation. Two more policemen were killed and three wounded Thursday, in a drive-by-shooting at a checkpoint west of Baghdad.

Shinjar’s dilemma is shared by the growing ranks of Iraq’s police forces. Government sources indicate at least 280 police have been killed nationwide since the fall of Baghdad in April, 2003. In the capital itself, police officials say that 60 have died and 367 were injured between May 2003 and Jan. 9. During the Saddam Hussein era, one or two lost their lives each year. — Internet

WEF says China’s growth important for global eco recovery

DAVOS (Switzerland), 24 Jan — The World Economic Forum (WEF) said in a report released Thursday that the growth of the Chinese economy has become an important ingredient in global economic recovery.

With total imports exceeding 400 billion US dollars, China will surpass Japan as the world’s third-largest importing nation in 2003, said the report released on the WEF’s annual meeting held in the Swiss alpine resort of Davos from January 21 to 25.

Demand from China has driven up prices around the world — from shipping rates to commodities. Indeed, together with the re-covering American economy, China is providing a much-needed lift to global economic growth, said the report. China’s economic dynamism has made the country a favourite of the international business community, which is now pouring more than 50 billion US dollars in direct investment into China each year, and has begun to treat China as the centre-piece of its collective growth strategy. The report holds an optimistic view of investment in China, saying that most believe there are still untapped opportunities. — MNA/Xinhua

Serbia-Montenegro offers humanitarian aid for quake-hit Iran

BELGRADE, 24 Jan — Serbia-Montenegro Council of Ministers decided on Thursday’s session to send humanitarian aid worth 150,000 euros to Iranian earthquake victims, the Tanjug news agency reported. The aid included beds, blankets, sleeping bags, medicines, food, beverages, clothes and other items needed by the earthquake victims, said a statement issued by the Council of Ministers.

A Serbia-Montenegro delegation, headed by Minister for International Economic Relations Branko Lukovic and Minister for Human and Minority Rights Rasm Ljajic, will visit Tehran to present the relief and hold talks with Iranian authorities on bilateral cooperation, Tanjug reported. — MNA/Xinhua

505 US service members killed since beginning of military operations in Iraq

BAGHDAD, 24 Jan — As of Friday, Jan. 23, 505 US service members have died since the beginning of military operations in Iraq, according to the military. Of those, 349 died as a result of hostile action and 156 died of non-hostile causes, the department said.

The British military has reported 55 deaths: Italy, 17; Spain, eight; Bulgaria, five; Thailand, two; Denmark, Ukraine and Poland have reported one each. Since Jan. 5, when President Bush declared that major combat operations in Iraq had ended, 367 US soldiers have died — 234 as a result of hostile action and 133 of non-hostile causes, according to an AP analysis of releases from the Defense Department and US Central Command. Since the start of military operations, 2,531 US service members have been injured as a result of hostile action, according to the Defense Department’s figures. Non-hostile injured numbered 397.

The latest casualties reported by the military:
— Two pilots were killed Friday when their helicopter crashed northwest of the city of Quayyarah in northern Iraq.

WEF says China’s growth important for global eco recovery

Prime Minister Jamali said in an interview that both countries should forget the past and look for a better and brighter future for their people.

“Time will honour you if you utilize it properly. It is proper time for Pakistan and India to move forward in the right direction,” the Prime Minister said. “If the two countries lose time, it will not give them a chance in future,” he added.

To a question he said: “It is for the first time that a joint declaration has been issued and the time table for resumption of dialogue between the two countries has been agreed.”

The step taken by Pakistan Prime Minister Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee toward peace is a positive development, he said.

“We should try to take ahead the process scheduled to begin in February to a logical conclusion, and it is not in the interest of two countries to retreat,” Jamali said.

Both countries will have to move ahead, the Prime Minister said, adding that though it is an old matter, it is now heading forward in a new way.

Jamali said President Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee, during their meeting on the sidelines of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation summit, agreed to hold dialogue in the best interests of both the countries. He said both countries have to come out from their ego and personality to make the forthcoming dialogue a success.

Maximum flexibility must be shown in the dialogue process for the betterment and prosperity of the people of the two countries, said the Prime Minister. — MNA/Xinhua

WHO praises China over SARS, adds word of caution

BEIJING, 24 Jan — The World Health Organization offered New Year praise to China on Friday for its efforts in containing the SARS virus, but stressed that it was too early to say the health scare was over.

The third Chinese patient diagnosed with SARS this year left hospital on the first day of the Year of the Monkey on Thursday, following the discharge of two others with clean bills of health.

Contact tracing is working pretty well and the system in place is far stronger than last year,” WHO spokesman Roy Wadia told Reuters, praising China’s practice of isolating suspect cases for 14 days.

“But it is too early to say there won’t be any more cases.” SARS first emerged in Guangdong in late 2002 and was spread by travellers to more than 30 countries, infecting about 8,000 people and killing nearly 800.

Hundreds of millions of Chinese are on the move during the Lunar New Year break, sparking tighter health controls at all ports, railway stations and airports.

A centre for disease prevention and control had even been set up the far-flung autonomous region of Tibet, Xinhua said.

Pakistan, India should move ahead on road to peace

ISLAMABAD, 24 Jan — Pakistani Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali has said that there is a need for India and Pakistan to move ahead on the road to peace, official Pakistan TV reported on Thursday.

Prime Minister Jamali said in an interview that both countries should forget the past and look for a better and brighter future for their people.

“Time will honour you if you utilize it properly. It is proper time for Pakistan and India to move forward in the right direction,” the Prime Minister said. “If the two countries lose time, it will not give them a chance in future,” he added.

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Map of Iraq locating latest attacks. — Internet
Mars rover resumes sending data back to Earth

LOS ANGELES, 24 Jan — The Mars rover Spirit resumed sending some data to Earth on Friday, allaying some fears it had failed after two days of garbled communications and periods of intermittent silence, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory said.

JPL, which manages the Mars project for NASA, said in a statement on its web site that the rover had received a low-speed data transmission from Spirit starting at 1326 GMT (8.26 am EST) and continuing for 20 minutes. “The spacecraft sent limited data in a proper format that the flight team could command, and we’re planning for communicating further communication sessions later today,” Mars Exploration Rover Project Manager Pete Theisinger said.

The flight team had sent a signal beforehand to a NASA antenna complex in Spain with commands for Spirit to begin transmitting.

The six-wheeled craft landed on the red planet on January 3 for a planned 90-minute pass at 1426 (8.26 am EST), with a full health and safety report, the agency said in a statement on its web site. The transmission from Spirit indicated that the rover is performing normally and in good health.

“Of course that made everyone very happy…” but it contained little information,” NASA’s representative in Madrid, MNA/Reuters

NASA sent another command via Robledo de Chavela at 1402 (8.02 am EST) and received a 20-minute pass at 1426 (8.26 am EST), with a full health and safety status report,” he said, adding: “We are evaluating the data we received and are cautiously optimistic at this point in time.”

Mars China develops mobile food safety monitoring facilities

BEIJING, 24 Jan — China has developed its first mobile food safety monitoring facilities for fast checking of chemical residues and other harmful substances on vegetables and fruit, quality control officials said.

A growing number of Chinese consumers are increasingly sensitive to food safety issues that used to be overlooked, as living standards keep improving. — MNA/Xinhua
Renovation of ancient pagoda inspected

YANGON, 24 Jan — Minister for Culture Maj-Gen Kyi Aung, Deputy Director-General of Department of Archaeology (Upper Myanmar) Mandalay Branch U Aung Kyang and officials inspected renovation of Aungsigon.

Dinner hosted to participants in School Family Day

YANGON, 24 Jan — Minister U Than Aung gave away cash awards to the students who presented entertainment programmes.

Delivery room, rural health care centre opened

YANGON, 24 Jan — A ceremony to open a delivery room and a rural health care centre in Phosawdaw village.

Product Promotion...

WWF launches multinational wetland protection campaign

NANCHANG, 24 Jan — The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has launched a major wetland protection campaign involving China and five other Asian nations.

Drug possessor jailed

YANGON, 24 Jan — A combined team including members of local intelligence unit and Yangon Special Anti-drug Squad, acting on a tip-off, searched the house, No 98, Ward-5, Yangon, on 11 January and arrested Mr Maung Hla Law Shan, Aik Sam Maung and Kyun Phone together with six blocks of heroin weighing 2.1 kilos from the kitchen.

Heroin seized in Kyugok (Pansaing)

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Road accident kills 7 in northeastern Thailand

BANGKOK, 24 Jan — A tour bus full of passengers on late Thursday turned over on a highway in northeastern Bangkok, killing seven passengers, local police said on Friday.

When the accident took place, the bus from Bangkok was running fast on a highway in the northeastern province of Nakonratchasima, some 259 kilometres northeast of Bangkok, a local policeman told Kyemon.

The bus suspected of racing with another bus then turned over and veered off the road, killing seven and injuring 40 including the driver in serious condition.

Police were now carrying out related investigation to find out the exact cause of the accident.

Road safety has become a major concern of the Thai authorities, which reported more than 900 people killed and 45,600 wounded by road accidents in the New Year season started from December 27 to January 4.

Traffic accident kills 14 in north China

TAIYUAN, 24 Jan — A coach carrying 28 people overturned Thursday, killing 14 including the driver in north China’s Shanxi Province.

The accident took place at 7:55 am near Gaoping City in the south of the province. Nine people died at the scene and another five died in a nearby hospital. The other 14 people were all injured, some critically.

The initial investigation indicated that the coach was overloaded and the driver was fatigued due to overnight driving. — MNA/Xinhua

25 killed in wedding fire in southern India

NEW DELHI, 24 Jan — At least 25 people were killed in a major fire at a marriage ceremony in southern India’s Tamil Nadu on Friday morning, police and fire sources said.

The fire which broke out at a marriage hall on the busy street in the temple town of Srirangam near the city of Tiruchirapalli has been brought under control, the Press Trust of India quoted fire sources as saying.

Fire service personnel were engaged in removing the bodies of the victims. — MNA/Xinhua

Weather forces closure of Suez Canal

CAIRO, 24 Jan — Strong winds, high waves and a sand storm forced the closure of the Suez Canal on Friday, an Egyptian shipping agent said.

He said ships passing through the waterway linking the Mediterranean and Red Sea had ground to a halt. An Egyptian Ports Authority official said the weather had also forced the closure of some sea ports for the second consecutive day.

The authorities closed ports in Alexandria and Dakhila on Egypt’s Mediterranean coast, Adabiya, Tewfiq and Dikhelia on Egypt’s Red Sea coast.

25 killed in wedding fire in southern India

Article by Htay Kyi

Photos by Khin Maung Win (Kyemon)

The Third Myanmar ICT Week 2004 is being kept open at the Myanmar ICT Park in Hline Township starting from 21 to 27 January. It is learnt that around 50 local and 20 foreign companies are taking part in the exhibition. We, Kyemon daily staff, visited it to observe the booths.

At the exhibition, we had an opportunity to interview Chief Executive Officer Daw May Zin Aye about training courses of Myanmar World Wide Web Institute (M3WI) being systematically conducted by the Advanced Technologies & Solutions at the MICT Park and about the schedules for staging its booths at the exhibition. Replying to our queries, she said “Technologies are advancing worldwide, and so Myanmar needs to achieve greater development of human resources. Nowadays, Internet plays an essential role in economic, social, health and education sectors.”

The number of Internet users is growing in Myanmar thanks to the initiative and constant encouragement of the Government and technological assistance of the Bagan Teleport,” she added.

“I want to see human resources developing significantly and technologically”, she said, “so we launched international level courses on Internet and website in cooperation with the World Wide Web Institute (3WI) in Geneva, Switzerland, that is now in the forefront of technological field in the world. So far the institute has established its branches in Germany, England, China, Canada, America, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Australia and so on and so forth.”

The M3WI conducts courses ranging from primer to master levels including Certified Web Master and Certified Java Master courses. Since it prescribes the same curriculum of the World Wide Web Institute in Switzerland, national trainees can get internationally recognized certificates. And they can study Internet throughout the course. Moreover, seminars on computer, discussions and technological cooperation can be carried out in the MICT Park.

With a view to enabling those wishing to attend the courses to choose appropriate instructors, the M3WI is presenting course counselling and student evaluation programmes at the exhibition, offering the enthusiasts a free chance to try Internet during the exhibition hours.

The Chief Executive Officer pledged that the M3WI will have to set out to establish its branches in the other parts of the nation and to keep abreast with the latest technological advancements and changes for the trainees.

She expressed her goodwill and personal opinion, saying that information and communication technology is making greater progress and IT is related to all fields. Therefore, all students should fulfil knowledge of information and communication technologies as far as they can to be able to grapple with future challenges.

(Translation: MS)

(Kyemon: 21-1-2004)
Annan pleads for fair trade deal for poor

**Davos (Switzerland), 24 Jan — United Nations chief Kofi Annan made an impassioned plea on Friday for the poor to get a fairer deal from trade as officials tried to inject life into stalled talks on freeing up world commerce.**

He urged business leaders at the World Economic Forum’s annual meeting to use their influence to persuade the United States and the European Union it was in everyone’s interest they give ground in areas such as farm subsidies. Negotiations at the Geneva-based World Trade Organization (WTO) have been floundering since a ministerial summit in Mexico collapsed last September, in large part over the differences between rich and poor on reforming world trade.

“More than anything else, we need a poor-friendly deal on agriculture. No single issue more gravely imperils the multilateral trading system, from which you benefit so much,” the UN Secretary-General said in a speech at the forum.

“Agricultural subsidies skew market forces. They destroy the environment. And they block poor-country exports from world markets... For all our sakes, and for the credibility of the system itself, they must be eliminated,” he added.

The EU and the United States, which account for much of the some 350 billion US dollars a year rich states spend on their farmers, have offered cuts, but they are not deep enough to satisfy developing countries or even other rich but efficient farm goods exporters such as Australia.

Around 20 countries, only some represented by trade ministers, met on the fringes of the annual.

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**British Defence Ministry under renewed attacks over war kit**

**London, 24 Jan — The British Ministry of Defence came under renewed attacks from a top military officer Thursday for sending British soldiers into battle in Iraq without effective chemical, biological and nuclear protection suits.**

“Many items of (such) equipment were not available in the right numbers, in the right place, in the right working order at the time they should have been,” Lieutenant-Colonel James Cowan, the commanding officer of Scottish regiment, told the Scottish newspaper The Scotsman.

Cowan’s criticism came following accusations that soldiers had died as a result of failures of the Ministry of Defence.

Earlier this week, it emerged that tank commander Steve Roberts was shot dead near the Iraqi southern city of Basra days after being ordered to give his flak jacket to another unit due to equipment shortages.

His widow, Samantha, has called for British Defence Secretary Geoffrey Hoon to resign over the issue.

The issue of British military equipment shortages during the US-led war against Iraq came to the fore last December in a report by the annual Audit Office, Britain’s public spending watchdog, which praised the overall success of the operation but highlighted that British front-line forces were left without vital kit during the war. — MNA/Xinhua
Minister for Rail Transportation Maj-Gen Aung Min addresses the third four-monthly work coordination meeting of the Ministry of Rail Transportation on 23-1-2004. (News reporsted) — mna.

Rules for Armed Forces Day painting, sculpture contests

YANGON, 24 Jan — The Subcommittee for Organizing the Painting and Sculpture Contests under the Work Committee for Organizing Poem and Arts Contests in commemoration of the 59th Anniversary Armed Forces Day announced rules for the painting and sculpture contests on 24 January.

The painting contest comprises six categories — pre-primary level, junior primary level (primary, first and second standards), senior primary level (third and fourth standards), middle school level (fifth to seventh standards), high school level (eighth to tenth standards and technological and agricultural high schools) and open division.

There will be only one category in the sculpture contest with wood sculpture category and plaster sculpture in open division. Anyone may take part in both.

In the pre-primary level to high school levels, the size of the entry must be 15” x 20”. The entry must be endorsed by respective principal with name, standard, school, township, date of birth, father’s name, full address and two passport-size photos attached. The entries are to be sent to the Education Planning and Training Department at 123 Natmauk Street, Bahan Township, by 23 February 2004. Entries for the open division painting contest must be 20” x 30”.

Name, NRC No., date of birth, father’s name, occupation and full address must be expressed with two passport-size photos attached.

The entries for the wood sculpture and the plaster sculpture contests must not be higher than 36 inches high and circumference not larger than 24 inches. At the foot of the works, name, NRC No., date of birth, father’s name and address must be shown with two passport-size photos attached, and they must be sent to Tatmadaw Convention Hall on U Wisara Road between 1 and 3 March. All the entries must reflect the twelve objectives of the State, the objectives of the 59th Anniversary Armed Forces Day and the twelve fine traditions of the Tatmadaw.

Entries for open division painting and sculpture contests are to be sent to Secretary, Myanmar Traditional Artists and Artisans (Central), Pabedan Township, Yangon, by 1 March or to Secretary of the Subcommittee for Organizing the painting and sculpture contests at the Tatmadaw Convention Hall between 1 and 3 March. Apart from the entries, other paintings and sculptures may be sent to be displayed at the exhibition to be opened in honour of the 59th Anniversary Armed Forces Day.

They must also reflect the twelve objectives of the State, the objectives of the 59th Anniversary Armed Forces Day and the twelve fine traditions of the Tatmadaw, and should be sent directly to Tatmadaw Convention Hall between 1 and 5 March. — MNA

Salone Traditional Festival 2004
(Sea Gypsy Festival)
Ma Kyone Galet Village, Myeik Archipelago
Union of Myanmar
14 to 17 February 2004

Chicago Film Critics pick
‘The Lord of the Rings’

CHICAGO, 24 Jan — In the awards runup to next month’s Academy Awards, the 45-member Chicago Film Critics Association chose “The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King” as best picture of 2003.

Bill Murray, for his portrayal of a boozie actor in Japan in “Lost in Translation,” and Charlize Theron, for her chilling turn as a serial killer in “Monster,” were awarded best actor and actress, respectively, a posting on the association’s web site said on Thursday.

“Lost in Translation,” which won best screenplay for director-writer Sofia Coppola and best cinematography for Lance Acord, placed a close second in the best picture category to the final installment of New Zealander Peter Jackson’s trilogy based on JRR Tolkien’s books. Jackson also won for best director.

Tim Robbins was awarded best supporting actor for his role in “Mystic River,” and best supporting actress went to Patricia Clarkson for “Pieces of April.” “The Fog of War,” Errol Morris’ look at former Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara, won best documentary and “City of God,” the tale of Brazilian street life by Katia Lund and Fernando Meirelles, won for best foreign language offering. — MNA/Reuters
Singer Garfunkel charged with marijuana possession

New York, 24 Jan—Singer Art Garfunkel got busted for marijuana possession by a New York State trooper who had no idea he was arresting half of the legendary ’60s duo Simon and Garfunkel, police said on Thursday.

The trooper arrested Garfunkel, 62, after stopping the driver of his limousine for speeding on Saturday in Hurley, New York, 90 miles north of New York City, police said.

"The trooper noted a strong odour of marijuana emanating from the vehicle," police said. "The trooper then found a small amount of marijuana in Garfunkel’s jacket pocket."

Garfunkel, the only passenger, was due to appear next Wednesday at the Town of Hurley Court charged with unlawful possession of marijuana. He faces a $100 US fine and a 12-month suspended sentence, police said. — MNA/Reuters

Croatia says had arrested human smuggling group

ZAGREB (Croatia), 24 Jan—The Croatian police said on Thursday they had arrested 11 people suspected of organizing the smuggling of at least 270 illegal migrants into Western Europe, state news agency Hina reported.

"The police seized 12 people — one Macedonian citizen and 10 Croatian citizens, including one woman — on Tuesday, in a joint operation with the local police."

The suspects appeared before the Zagreb County court on Wednesday, the agency said. Police said they were not available for immediate comment. — Hina

At least 11 dead in shootouts in pre-Carnival Rio

RIO DE JANEIRO (Brazil), 24 Jan—Two overnight gunfights left 11 people dead in Brazil’s crime-ridden city of Rio de Janeiro as it gears up for its famed Carnival next month, police said on Thursday.

Six people who police said were drug traffickers died in what the authorities believed was a showdown between rival drug gangs in the Tres Pontes slum in the western part of Rio.

Resident of the shantytown told police there were more dead bodies inside the slum.

In the Mare slum area on the city outskirts, not far from the Rio International Airport, police shot and killed five people during the night in a raid that followed an attack on two police patrol cars on Tuesday.

Powerful gangs that deal in drugs and arms control many of Rio’s teeming slums.

Last year, a wave of pre-Carnival violence that authorities said was a retaliation by drug gangs for tough police action against them, made the federal government dispatch Army units to guard the annual festivities in Rio.

Carnival begins on Feb. 23, and this year Carnival organizers have tightened security as the city prepares for one of the world’s largest cultural events.

NASA unable to communicate with Mars rover

PASADENA (California), 24 Jan—NASA scientists said on Thursday they had lost contact with the robot rover Spirit on Mars and were unsure what had caused the problem.

"We are getting tougher about it in the sense that we’re wielding our fines more aggressively," said a woman speaking for food firm Uncle Ben’s, which found that over half of Britons have downed chopsticks and use a knife and fork to finish their food. — MNA/Reuters

Scientists teach baffled British diners chopstick tricks

London, 24 Jan—Britons’ enthusiasm for chow mein and Peking duck is often dampened when poor chopstick skills leave more food on their shirts than in their mouths.

But scientists have come to their aid with a mathematical formula for successful chopstick use, just in time for Thursday’s Chinese New Year celebrations.

Researchers from the University of Surrey took into account the number of Chinese meals eaten, how many seconds it takes to get food from bowl to mouth and food slipperiness to calculate the key to chopstick proficiency.

"The formula will come as a welcome answer for those terrified by chopsticks," said a spokeswoman for food firm Uncle Ben’s, which found that over half of Britons have downed chopsticks and use a knife and fork to finish their food. — MNA/Reuters

US telecoms regulator sees broad support for swear word ban

DAVOS (Switzerland), 24 Jan—US regulators will increase the pressure on media outlets to ban foul language from the airwaves, and have broad political support to do so, the top US telecoms regulator said on Thursday.

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Chinese celebrate Year of Monkey with fun, travel, confidence

Beijing, 24 Jan — People of different ethnic groups across China have been celebrating the traditional Lunar New Year which fell on Thursday in different ways. Short message service (SMS) has replaced telephone calls and postcards to become the most popular way for Chinese to extend good wishes to their friends and relatives in greeting the arrival of the Year of the Monkey.

The latest information from Beijing Unicom and Beijing Mobile shows that from Wednesday noon through to early Thursday morning, cellphone subscribers registered in Beijing alone sent over 100 million short messages, and the two companies raked in a hefty sum of 10 million yuan (about 1.21 million US dollars) in earnings from SMS.

It is estimated that some 10 billion greeting messages will be sent via mobile phones during the seven-day Lunar New Year holiday season which began on January 22, said industry sources.

Yu Zhuhai, a specialist on folklore, said that the Spring Festival holiday is a time for relaxation. So the number of people who choose to travel during the Spring Festival holiday season has been rising rapidly. Travel agencies in Beijing organized 280,000 people on overseas tour programs for the Spring Festival holiday this year, up 8 per cent from last year. Qin Peiyu, 28, who lives in downtown Beijing’s Chaoyang District, said he believed Spring Festival was a good time for exercise and rejuvenation.

Guangdong ensures safety of live poultry to HK, Macao

GUANGZHOU, 24 Jan — Guangdong Province in south China has strengthened measures to ensure the safety of live poultry and fresh vegetables to be sold to Hong Kong and Macao markets.

The provincial administration of inspection and quarantine has advised poultry suppliers to report one day in advance the amount of live poultry to be sent to Hong Kong and Macao and the blood test results. The provincial administration is responsible for inspection and quarantine of 140,000 live birds to be transported to Hong Kong and Macao each day.

To date, registered suppliers of live poultry in the province have reported any problems. Supplies of live poultry for Hong Kong and Macao are meeting demand during the Spring Festival, the traditional Chinese Lunar New Year which starts on Thursday.

Hong Kong and Macao people have a tradition of cooking chicken for festive meals. Guangdong, a traditional supplier of live poultry, is ready to provide more than 50 million chickens, 170,000 ducks, and 10,000 geese during the Spring Festival which could last for 15 days until the lantern festival.

Germany, France strive for closer integration

BERLIN, 24 Jan — Germany and France are striving to be more connected with each other and continue to act as the motor of the European integration, according to a joint statement issued Thursday.

The statement, issued here by German State Minister Hans-Martin Bury and French European Minister Noelle Lenoir, marked the observation of the first German-French Day, which was initiated last year to deepen friendship between the two countries.

To foster closer relations between Germany and France, it should be made easier for their peoples to live, study and work in the partner country, the statement said. Young people of one country should be encouraged to learn the language of the other and cooperation between border regions of the two countries should be strengthened, it said.

The ministers did not discuss proposals for such closer relations but said that they would be brought up at the next meeting of German-French Ministerial Council.

Nicolas Mayor wants fines for litter bugs

NICOSIA, 24 Jan — Mayor of Nicosia Michalakis Zampelas has declared that anyone dropping litter on the streets of Nicosia could soon face a new penalty, local Press reported Thursday.

Fines of 20 Cyprus pounds (about 40 US dollars) would come into effect by the end of March this year, the report said. The proposal, considered an important step to discourage pollution and protect the environment, has received positive response from the public and the media.

“I have received many letters and phone calls about this issue and each person has congratulated me, telling me that this is a good move,” Zampelas was quoted as saying.

The fines should be approved by the Nicosia Municipal Council before being imposed, but Zampelas was hopeful that it will come into force by the end of March. Nicosia is cleaner in comparison with other European cities, but not enough, the mayor said.

“People are not sensible enough, especially in the old city,” he said, adding that he hopes the move would encourage other municipalities to follow.

US Agent Orange study finds raised cancer risks

WASHINGTON, 24 Jan — Air Force veterans exposed to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War have a higher-than-average risk of prostate and skin cancer, military researchers reported on Thursday.

The ongoing study of 2,000 Vietnam veterans shows for the first time an elevated risk of melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer. Previous studies have found increased risks of prostate cancer, chronic lymphocytic leukemia and also diabetes.


It does not find the veterans are any more likely to die of these cancers than the general population.

“It’s just because we have new numbers, new exams,” a spokesman said.

For this particular study veterans called the Ranch Hand Group are being examined regularly. Operation Ranch Hand was the unit responsible for the aerial spraying of herbicides and medical experts say they got the highest exposure to Agent Orange, which contains dioxins and other toxic chemicals.

Starting in 1986, their letters and phone calls about their exposure to Agent Orange were measured 15 to 30 minutes were accurate but not the last word on cancer and Agent Orange, the Surgeon General’s Office warned. It has many weaknesses and must be studied along with other research.

Fines of 20 Cyprus pounds (about 40 US dollars) would come into effect by the end of March. Nicosia is cleaner in comparison with other European cities, but not enough, the mayor said.

“People are not sensible enough, especially in the old city,” he said, adding that he hopes the move would encourage other municipalities to follow.

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MNA/Xinhua

Snow falls over gondolas moored in front of Venice’s Palazzo Ducale, northern Italy, on 23 Jan, 2004. A cold wave is hitting Italy with snow falls giving an unusual look to the famed monumental sites.

MNA/Xinhua

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Italian soccer players’ chief opposes drugs crackdown

Rome, 24 Jan—The head of the Italian Footballers Association (AIC) has attacked plans to get tough on drugs in soccer by introducing compulsory blood testing.

“To speak about obligatory blood testing is not right. Every test needs the informed consent of the player,” AIC president Sergio Campana said.

“I continue to have grave doubts about the possibility of suspension or sanctions against those who refuse to give their consent,” he was quoted as saying in La Gazzetta dello Sport on Thursday.

Last week the president of Italy’s Football League, Adriano Galliani, said he hoped to persuade the AIC to sign up to compulsory blood testing and threatened suspension for any player who refused to give a sample.

Campana, however, insisted that players were under no obligation to undergo blood tests, adding: “I’m decidedly against Galliani’s ideas.”

Italy’s current drugs testing programme involves random urine tests on players. Blood tests are used if players are suspected of drug use.

Police and club security will be put on alert as fixtures between the rivals have often been marred by crowd trouble. Some 2,000 police officers and 400 PSG security guards were on duty inside and outside the Parc des Princes when the two teams met last year at the same stage of the French Cup.

The minister interior Nicolas Sarkozy supervised the operation. Paris police said that about 40 people were detained for questioning and dozens of knives and pickaxe handles were seized.

According to French police, the toll of 15 years of PSG-Marseille match-ups stands at “more than 350 injured and more than 400 arrests”. On the pitch the match could also be a fiery affair. Marseille, who have sacked Alain Perrin and replaced him with local figure Jose Anigo, will be out for revenge as they have lost their last four games against PSG. The Parisians won last season’s Cup tie 2-1 after extra time and were also victorious in both league encounters.

This season, Marseille also lost 1-0 at home to PSG in the league on November 30 when Fabricre Fiorese scored a last-minute winner.

“We won’t have any problem motivating ourselves… It’s a real showdown,” said Christophe Bouchet, president of Olympique Marseille, who have won the Cup 10 times, the last time in 1989.

Cup holders AC Milan will host Montpellier and Toulouse will entertain Nice in the other two Ligue 1 head-to-heads. Monaco, Ligue 1 champions Olympique Lyon and RC Lens all face tricky away ties against teams from Division Three. Monaco visit Valenciennes, Lyon face Bourg-Peronnas and Lens take on Dijon.

Leeds United will not sell Smith despite financial difficulties

London, 24 Jan—Leeds United will not sell striker Alan Smith despite their financial difficulties, a club spokesman said on Thursday.

The Premier League club have until Monday to find the five million pounds (9.23 million US dollars) they need to cover their operating costs until the end of the season after agreeing a reprieve with creditors, who are owed more than 80 million pounds (147.6 million US dollars).

“Alan Smith is not for sale,” spokesman Don Warters said, although he did not say how the club proposed to meet the deadline.

Leeds were left with few options after creditors rejected a five-million-pound offer from a consortium put together by former deputy chairman Allan Leighton.

Chief executive Trevor Birch met with players earlier this week to discuss deferring 30 per cent of their wages in an attempt to save five million pounds. Newspaper reports on Thursday said the players had rejected the idea and that they would rather top assets such as Smith and Mark Viduka be sold to make up the shortfall.

Smith, an England international, has been linked with a move to Newcastle United, while Tottenham Hotspur are reported to have made a five-million-pound bid for goal-keeper Paul Robinson and Norway midfielder Eirik Bakke.

In a statement on the club’s website on Thursday the players said they had decided against wage deferrals.

“We wish to make it clear that we are fully behind the club and are working with Trevor Birch and the Professional Footballers’ Association in the hope of solving the problems,” the statement read.—MNA/Reuters

Milan beat Roma to set up Cup semi against Lazio

Rome, 24 Jan—AC Milan will meet Lazio in the semifinals of the Italian Cup after beating AS Roma 2-1 on Thursday for a 4-2 aggregate win.

Second half goals by defender Alessandro Nesta and striker Daniele Massaro gave the Cup holders victory at Rome’s Olympic Stadium. It was the third time in six years that Milan have beaten AS A leaders. “This (win) was a bit different from the others because they closed us down a lot more,” Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti told reporters.

“But I’m delighted with the result and the fact that we’ve come out of here with a win again,” he continued, referring to his team’s 2-1 league victory over Roma on January 6. Roma were marginally the better side in the first half and midfielder Daniele De Rossi had a shot cleared off the line, while at the other end Brazilian winger Serginho narrowly failed to connect with a cross that flashed dangerously across the goal. Four minutes after the break, however, Nesta put the visitors ahead, nodding Serginho’s cross past reserve keeper Andrea Zotti.

Tomasson added a second in the 57th minute, spinning round defender Christian Panucci on the edge of the area before firing into the net. Defender Mancini pulled a visitor back nine minutes from time, but Roma never looked capable of hauling themselves back into contention. “At the moment I think we’re stronger than Roma, though as far as Serie A is concerned these two (Cup) wins don’t mean anything,” said Ancelotti.

“I don’t know why we’ve had so much success against them. Milan’s a team that works by getting plenty of possession. Roma likes to attack, but we tend to stifle them.” —MNA/Reuters
Summary of observations recorded at 09:30 hours MST:

During the past 24 hours, light rain has been in isolated areas of Sagaing and Tanintharyi Divisions and weather has been generally partly cloudy in the remaining areas. Night temperatures were (3°C) below normal in Bago Division, (3°C to 4°C) above normal in Kayin State, upper Sagaing and Mandalay Divisions, (3°C) to (4°C) above normal in lower Sagaing and Tanintharyi Divisions than Mon and Manbi States about normal in the remaining areas. Maximum temperature on 23-1-2004 was 35.0°C (95°F). Minimum temperature on 21-1-2004 was 9.0°C at Meiktila. Relative Humidity at 9.00 MS at 24-1-2004 was 74.0%. Sunshine hours on 23-1-2004 was 9.00 hours. Rainfall on 24-1-2004 was nil at Yangon Airport, Kaba-Aye and central Yangon. Total rainfall since 1-1-2004 was nil at Yangon Airport, Kaba-Aye and central Yangon. Maximum wind speed at Yangon was 35 mph from North at 22.00 hours MST on 23-1-2004.

Bay inference: Weather is partly cloudy to cloudy in South-West and North and generally fair everywhere in the Bay of Bengal.

Forecast valid until 25-1-2004: Isolated rain or thunderstorms are likely in Kayin, Chin, Shan and northern Rakhae States. Saging, Mandalay and Tanintharyi Divisions and weather will be partly cloudy in the remaining areas. Degree of certainty is (60%). State of these areas: Seas will be slightly to moderate in Myanmar waters.

Outlook for subsequent two days: Continuation of isolated rainfall is likely in Sagaing and Tanintharyi Divisions.

Forecast for Yangon and neighbouring area for 25-1-2004: Partly cloudy. Forecast for Mandalay and neighbouring area for 25-1-2004: Possibility of isolated light rain or thunderstorms. Degree of certainty is (40%).
Construction of sluice gates on Ngamoeyek Creek inspected

Chairman of Yangon Division Peace and Development Council Commander of Yangon Command Maj.-Gen Myint Swe inspected summer paddy plantations and development tasks in Mingaladon and Hlegu townships, Yangon North District, this afternoon.

The commander inspected construction of Hsinpon Bridge Project on the road under construction to link Khayaybin Road on the border of Mingaladon and Hlegu townships and No 7 Circular Road, and summer paddy fields in Hsinpon and Balar regions in Hlegu Township. Officials reported to the commander on construction and agriculture and water supply tasks. The commander gave instructions on timely completion of the project and carrying out water supply tasks under the supervision of officials concerned.

Next, the commander and party inspected digging of canals with the use of heavy machinery for supply of water to summer paddy plantations in Sanygyiwa Ward, Mingaladon Town.

The commander gave instructions on cultivation of paddy on all vacant lands. He attended to flooding in the rainy season. Efforts are to be made to ensure completion of the project as soon as possible, he noted. He stressed the need to make use of irrigated water. He also urged the officials to cultivate summer paddy, beans and pulses, edible oil crops, vegetables and cash crops by means of double or triple cropping, he urged.

Afterswards, they proceeded to the sluice gate project on Ngamoeyek Creek and inspected the damming of the creek and construction of an earth embankment. Officials reported on facts about the project, steps to be taken for extended cultivation of summer paddy, and growing summer paddy in the division. Referring to the reports, the commander said that on completion, the project will be able to benefit some 5,000 acres of summer paddy and it will prevent the paddy fields from flooding in the rainy season. Efforts are to be made to ensure completion of the project as soon as possible, he noted. He stressed the need to make use of irrigated water. He also urged the officials to cultivate summer paddy, beans and pulses, edible oil crops, vegetables and cash crops. The commander inspected the sluice gate project site and left necessary instructions.

Product Promotion seminars held


Next, Marketing Manager Daw Mi Mi Aye of ACE Data System explained the computer systems suitable for small and medium entrepreneurs.

The seminar continued at 1 pm. Director U Di Pa of Myat Tha Pyay Co explained sales of six kinds of i-Ledger Account System.

Minister meets industrialists

Next, Minister for Communications, Posts and Telecommunications Brig-Gen Hein Zaw, in charge of Yangon Division, Mingaladon Township and Yangon West District industrial zone met industrialists in Mayangon and Hline townships yesterday.

In the meeting, the minister dealt with greater efforts to be made for contributing towards the industrial sector and priority to be given to production of farm implements and machinery necessary for transforming the manual farming to mechanized farming and fulfilled their requirements.

The minister looked into production process at Lathu Industry and U Thaung Sein & Sons Industry in Mayangon Township.

The minister also inspected the Multipurpose Community Tele-centre in Phaunggyi village, Hlegu Township, and left necessary instructions on ensuring installation of telephone lines and dissemination of information technologies for upgrading of the rural areas.

Rural road opened

YANGON, 24 Jan — A newly-constructed Naungbyet tarred road put under use by dwellers of Ward 4 and Kutka Township Development Affairs Committee was commissioned on 2 January morning.

Col San Shwe Tha of Kutka Station, Director of Shan State DAC and Chairman of the committee for building the road U Kyee Myint formally opened the 2,000 feet long and 12 feet wide road.

Present on the occasion were members of social organizations and townsmen totalling over 1,000.

Myanmar ICT Week-2004 continues

YANGON, 24 Jan — The Third Myanmar ICT Week 2004 continued for the fourth day at Myanmar Information and Communication Technology (MICT) Park on Hlone University Campus in Hlone Township here today. The exhibition is crowded with Internet and IT enthusiasts, students, service personnel, and the public.

Digital EPARK machines and telephones and security system of Expo Myanmar Co are displayed at the exhibition. At the booth of Forever Group (Myanmar e-book), Myanmar books and Myanmar e-book accounts can be bought at 10 percent discount through the Internet. During the exhibition e-books can be read free of charge through online computers.

Computers, JBM, Sony VA 10, Toshiba, notes books, digital camera, network products device, mobile, GSM and other electrical goods can be bought at reasonable price at the booth of Myat Tha Pyay Family Co. In addition, booths of Suntac Technologies, Soft Guide Computer Centre, Myanmar Golden Rock Int’l Co and Integral Systems Co put on display their products at the exhibition.

The Myanmar ICT Week is kept open daily from 9 am to 5 pm till 27 January. At the MICT Park Security Issues and Related Products Seminar and e-Procurement Seminar will be held at 9 am and at 1 pm respectively on 25-1-2004.

Wireless and Broadband Application Seminar and Myanmar National Counter-Strike Championships Final will be held at 9 am and at 1 pm respectively on 26-1-2004 at the same venue — MNA.

The Myanmar ICT Week 2004 draws visitors. — MNA