YANGON, 31 March— Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt, accompanied by officials of the State Peace and Development Council Office, arrived at the factory of Myanmar Asia Optical International Co Ltd in Mingaladon Industrial Zone, here, at 9 am today.

The Prime Minister and party were welcomed there by Chairman of Yangon Division Peace and Development Council Commander of Yangon Command Maj-Gen Myint Swe, ministers, the Yangon Mayor, deputy ministers, departmental heads, Chairman of Asia Optical Company Inc Group Mr Robert Lai, Managing Director of Myanmar Optical International Co Ltd Mr Eric Chen and officials.

At the briefing hall, Chairman of Asia Optical Company Inc Group Mr Robert Lai reported that as construction of the factory of Myanmar Asia Optical International Co Ltd has completed, commercial-scale production will be carried out soon.

Asia Optical Company Inc Group is manufacturing over 50 per cent of the world’s lens demand and also producing optical apparatuses, electronic apparatuses and other apparatuses. The group formed joint ventures with famous camera companies to produce brand products. The company also manufactures OEM/ODM optical products for other global companies.

The group carries out production of office machines, cameras, optical components, rifle-scopes, prisms, laser range finders, plastic injections, cases & bags, DVD, micro motors and SMT electronics. Furthermore, the company runs moulding, precision, pressing, coating and printing businesses.

The company chose Myanmar among the FDI-inviting Asian countries as the most suitable country for investment for her human resources, stability and investment opportunities. If Myanmar Asia Optical International Company Ltd can realize the aims of the initial stage, it will make arrangements to set up the largest lens factory in the world employing about 5,000 workers and manufacturing about 10 million units of lens monthly within a five-year period by gradually promoting investment in Myanmar and by channeling investment from other countries into Myanmar.

(See page 8)

Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt views the production line of the factory of Myanmar Asia Optical International Co Ltd in Mingaladon Industrial Zone. — MNA

Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt views the production line of the factory of Myanmar Asia Optical International Co Ltd

Four political objectives
- Stability of the State, community peace and tranquility, 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 dynamism of patriotic spirit
- Uplift of health, fitness and education standards of the entire nation

Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt views lens factory of Myanmar Asia Optical International Co Ltd

Emergence of the State Constitution is the duty of all citizens of Myanmar Naing-Ngan.
Towards speedy implementation of national development plans

Adhering to “Our Three Main National Causes”, which is the national policy, the Government of the Union of Myanmar is making every endeavour for the speedy implementation of the plan for development of border areas and national races, the 24-region development plan and the five rural development tasks, aiming at the emergence of a peaceful, modern and developed nation. Respective regions and departments are implementing the special projects for the speedy and harmonious development of the entire Union.

The Special Projects Implementation Committee held its coordination meeting 1/2004 at the meeting hall of the Office of the Commander-in-Chief (Army) in the afternoon of 30 March. Chairman of the Special Projects Implementation Committee Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Than Shwe attended the meeting and delivered an address.

In his address on the occasion, Senior General Than Shwe said that, to be able to modernize our nation and catch up with the development of other industrialized nations of the world, it was required to speedily implement the national development plans. The earlier the projects are completed, the sooner the people will be able to enjoy the benefits of these projects and the State will be developed, he added.

The plans are too enormous for the respective ministry to carry out alone and the implementation of them requires the support and assistance of other related ministries. Therefore, the Special Projects Implementation Committee was formed to enlist the assistance and coordinate the efforts of all the related ministries. In executing the plans, it is very important to be cost-effective and to avoid unnecessary delays. Moreover, it is essential to implement them systematically and complete them in time. Of all the special projects, the electric power projects are the most important and special emphasis should be placed on the speedy implementation of them.

We would like to call upon all those responsible to put their energies into the national development plans so that they can be completed earlier than schedule. Only then will the people be able to enjoy the benefits of these projects sooner.
Watchdog agency faults lack of Iraqi oil metering

**United Nations, 31 March—** The US-led authority in Baghdad is failing to meter Iraq's oil production, leaving a door open to smuggling, an international watchdog agency said on Tuesday, calling for urgent steps to address the problem.

The International Advisory and Monitoring Board, set up by the UN Security Council to watch over Iraq's oil production in the post-war era, said the Coalition Provisional Authority informed it two weeks ago that crude oil was unmetered.

Metering production, referred to by the monitoring board as a standard oil industry practice, allows the producer to verify that no oil is diverted from time it is taken out of the ground to the time it is marketed.

The absence of metering "represents an internal control weakness which needs to be addressed urgently," the board said in a notice posted on its web site (www.iamb.info).

"As an interim step to strengthen controls over oil extraction and limit possible diversion, the IAMB welcomes steps taken by the CPA to curtail smuggling activities," it said. The IAMB recommends the expeditious installation of metering equipment in accordance with standard oil industry practices."

Iraq has exported more than 6.9 billion US dollars in crude oil since Saddam Hussein's government fell nearly a year ago, the coalition authority reported on its own web site (www.iraqcoalition.org/budget/DIffintro1.html).

The authority had deposited 6.93 billion US dollars in its Development Fund for Iraq as of last Thursday, it said. A total of 335 million US dollars was deposited in the fund during the week ending last Thursday, compared to 205 million US dollars the previous week, it added.

Beyond the weekly figures on oil proceeds deposited in the development fund, the CPA provides no public information on sales of Iraqi oil, such as volume or price data or the reasons for weekly fluctuations in deposits into the fund.

Under a resolution adopted by the Security Council last May, the authority is required to deposit all the proceeds of Iraqi oil exports into the fund.

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**Afghanistan’s neighbours plan joint drug offensive**

**Brussels, 31 March —** Afghanistan’s neighbours are drawing up a plan to tackle the flow of heroin from the world’s top producer of opium poppy into Russia and the US State Department’s Afghan coordinator said on Monday.

The Central Asian nations’ initiative, which will complement a drive by Kabul to destroy poppy fields and heroin factories, is likely to be signed at the international conference on Afghanistan which opens on Wednesday in Berlin.

“Rubbernecks have both a responsibility and a concern that opium poppy and heroin are leaking through their countries,” William Taylor told a video-linked news conference from Berlin. "If neighbours can join together and begin to shut off that flow this will be an important commitment.”

Diplomats say, however, that persuading some of these countries to put action behind a written commitment may be difficult as the heroin trade is largely a huge business.

Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Iran are the main transit states for opiates from Afghanistan, whose output has soared since the 2001 ouster of the hardline Taleban regime.

The Taleban had almost eradicated opium production during its final year in power. But output has since taken off and — according to UN estimates — last year reached 3.600 tons, more than three-quarters of global supply.

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**Indonesia plans compulsory military service for youths**

**Jakarta, 31 March —** Claiming that the number of military personnel remains far from enough to guard Indonesia’s vast territory, the Ministry of Defence is drafting a bill that would require youths to perform military service.

The ministry’s director general for defence strategy, Major-General Sudrajat, has said that under the civilian participatory defence concept, the youths would be recruited and trained to support the Army’s strike force.

He said the lack of military ground weaponry was the reason why the ministry was not focusing on maritime defence, despite the fact that Indonesia is an archipelagic country.

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**Vietnam likely to raise foreigners’ share cap**

Ho Chi Minh City, 31 March—Vietnam is set to raise the cap on the stake that foreign investors are allowed to hold in a listed company within a couple of months.

A draft to raise, or even remove the current 30 per cent cap on foreign share-holders is being developed, local newspaper Vietnam Business Review quoted Pham Phan Dung, head of the ministry’s Finance and Banking Department as saying on Monday. “We might raise the cap for foreign shareholders in those areas in which joint ventures or fully foreign-invested enterprises are already allowed to be established. We might also consider completely removing the cap in non-strategic areas such as tree plantation and confectionery production,” Dung said.

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**Lusaka, 31 March—** Zambia is to sign the Treaty of the African Union this month for not cooperating with the United Nations’ Co-ordinating Action in the Fight Against Drug Abuse (UNCAPD).

The treaty, which is an African Union instrument to prevent drug abuse, drug trafficking and drug-related crime in the continent, was signed by the UN in July 2003 in Mexico City.

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**Diarke, 31 March—** Irishmen and women said that they were “ashamed to be Irish” yesterday as Grafton Street in the heart of Dublin was smoke-free for the first time.

The historic day by savouring a smoke-free lunch in Grafton Street was marked by a march and rally.

Ireland leads the world by going smoke-free

**Dublin, 31 March —** Ireland became the first country in the world to outlaw cigarettes in all its restaurants and pubs on Monday, to the delight of non-smokers but the dismay of some publicans who say they will have to police the ban.

From midnight on Sunday it became illegal to smoke in virtually all workplaces, closed public spaces and on public transport, with fines of up to 3,000 euros for transgressors. While similar bans have been imposed in cities and states elsewhere in the world, including in California and New York, Ireland is the first country to impose such a ban nationally.

Health Minister Micheal Martin marked the historic day by savouring a smoke-free breakfast in Bewley’s Oriental Café on Grafton Street in the heart of Dublin.

Describing the law as “a no-brainer”, he told reporters in the cafe, a hub of Dublin’s social life since the 19th Century, the argument against smoking in a country with Europe’s highest rate of heart disease was overwhelming.

“We have to do something extra, go the extra mile, to get that rate down,” Martin said. Anti-smoking group ASH said smoking kills six times as many people in Ireland each year than road accidents, work accidents, drugs, murder, suicide and AIDS combined.

“Earlier this year I referred to this legislation as the health initiative of the century,” said Professor Luke Clancy, chairman of ASH Ireland. “I have no doubt that research will in time justify this statement.”

But not everyone was convinced.

“For me personally, it’s a bridge too far,” smoke Mahoney told Reuters as the ban came into force. “I mean, what’s next, compulsory haircuts?” asked Mahoney, who said he has smoked 20 cigarettes a day for the past 20 years but did not think the landlord at his local pub in north Dublin would enforce the legislation.

For thousands of office workers arriving at their desks on Monday morning, the new law will make little difference as their employers have already imposed their own smoking bans.

But the real test will come later in the day when the country’s famously hospitable pubs open their doors.

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**Poll shows Bush’s security ratings slip after Clarke**

**Washington, 31 March—** Voter approval for US President George W. Bush’s handling of homeland security has fallen since former counterterrorism chief Richard Clarke questioned Bush’s commitment to fighting terror before the September 11 attacks, according to a Newsweek poll.

The survey found 57 per cent of voters said they approved of the way Bush had handled the war on terrorism and homeland security, down from a high of 70 per cent two months ago. The results of the poll were posted on Newsweek’s web site.

The poll was conducted after Clarke’s televised appearance before a 9/11 panel last week and the release of his book that details his allegations. —MNA/Reuters

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**An American soldier drives past the scene of an attack on US transport trucks in Baghdad on Monday, 29 March, 2004. No one was injured in the attack.—i-images**
British troops clash with Iraqi protesters in Basra

**Basra** (Iraq), 31 March — British troops clashed with a crowd of demonstrators outside the offices of a religious organization in the southern Iraqi city of Basra on Monday and at least one protestor was wounded.

Reuters Television pictures showed a squad of British soldiers using riot shields and wadding bullets to try to control the crowd of about 80 demonstrators, who threw stones and swung iron bars at the troops and set fire to several tyres.

One protestor tried to snatch a rifle from a British soldier and was quickly beaten to the ground by other troops. At least four armoured British Land Rovers were at the scene. Pictures showed several objects burning and petrol drums scattered across the road.

Witnesses said one protestor was wounded in the head by a rubber bullet fired by British troops. They said he had been taken to hospital.

The clashes took place in front of the office of the God’s Revenge Islamic Organization, a militant Sunni Muslim group which is accused by some Iraqis of involvement in attacks against Sunnis and members of the former Ba’ath Party regime.

It was not immediately clear what provoked the protests, but locals said British forces had tried to force members of the God’s Revenge Islamic Organization out of their building and had met with resistance.

British troops clashed with demonstrators in Basra last week. An armoured troop carrier was attacked with petrol bombs and several British soldiers were briefly set alight before the flames were doused. Thirteen soldiers were lightly wounded in the clashes, which lasted several hours.

Basra, Iraq’s second largest city, and the rest of the southern Iraq region where British forces are responsible has been generally calmer than the rest of the country, although there have been several recent flare-ups.

Most of the demonstrations are held by former or current members of Iraq’s security forces seeking payment of their pensions or monthly salaries. — MNA/Reuters

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India, China agree to boost military ties

**New Delhi**, 31 March — India and China announced on Monday a series of proposals to strengthen ties between their Armed Forces to help bolster a new friendship between the world’s most populous countries, which went to war decades ago.

The proposals were agreed during talks between Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes and his Chinese counterpart Cao Gangchuan, the first Chinese Defence Minister to visit New Delhi in a decade.

“Both sides presented new proposals to strengthen and develop defence exchanges and confidence building,” the Indian Defence Ministry said in a statement.

“It was agreed that training, including Chinese language training in defence institutions in India, sports and cultural exchanges and friendly interaction between border personnel would be increased,” the statement said.

The two sides invited each other’s officers to witness military exercises.

“This would be in the interest of building familiarity, trust and confidence so as to develop bilateral relations as a whole.” — MNA/Reuters

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AIDS in S Africa civil service hampers govt’s functioning

**Johannesburg**, 31 March — AIDS/HIV infection among South African civil servants threatens to hamper the functioning of government, according to a study reported on Sunday.

More than 100,000 civil servants out of over one million are estimated to be infected with the disease, the Sunday Independent newspaper said.

Up to 250,000 might die of the illness by 2012, it said, quoting a report from the Centre for the Study of AIDS at the University of Cape Town.

“How can the government be maintained and function effectively when many of its officials become ill with HIV and die of AIDS,” the study said.

South Africa suffers the world’s highest HIV/AIDS caseload, with an estimated 3.5 million people infected.

The newspaper said the report, commissioned by the Department of Public Service and Administration, was due to be released this week at a population and development conference.

Neither the centre nor government officials were immediately available to comment.

The disease is already having an impact on education, where employment of teachers is down and sick leave increasing, a teachers’ union official told the newspaper. Teachers make up nearly 40 per cent of civil servants.

HIV/AIDS has also been a factor in slowing enrolments of pupils starting school, the report said. The average rate of increase in enrolments slumped to 0.5 per cent during 1995-2000 from 4.21 per cent in 1990-1995.

The drop was due to declining fertility rates and rising infant mortality, mainly because of HIV/AIDS, it added. — MNA/Reuters

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Indonesia’s leading airlines eyes Asian market

**Jakarta**, 31 March — Indonesia’s national flag carrier Garuda Indonesia planned to expand its markets in Asia this year, with more flights to and from China particularly in mind, amid tougher global competition.

“We will be concentrating on the Asian market for now. As for other markets, like the European market, we will simply maintain our current operations as ‘as is airlines,’ Marketing Director Bachrul Hakim was quoted Monday by The Jakarta Post as saying.

He added that Garuda’s sales mission to China’s capital, Padang and Pekanbaru. “Later on, we will also work on our market in India, the Philippines, and the Middle East,” said Bachrul, who was on a promotional tour to Beijing. Data from Garuda shows that the Asian market contributed at least 30 per cent to the company’s revenue from international flights, and up to 18 per cent of its total revenue last year. — MNA/Xinhua

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Houston soldier dies in Iraq

**Houston**, 31 March — Marine Pfc Leroy Sandoval Jr died last week fighting guerrillas in Fallujah, Iraq. He had been in the country for less than two weeks.

Sandoval, who grew up in South Houston and Pasadena, died of a gunshot wound Friday while manning a machine gun for the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force. He was 21.

Seven other Marines were wounded during the battle.

The Houston Chronicle reported the death.

Internet

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**HK starts building of AsiaWorld-Expo**

**Hong Kong**, 31 March — Hong Kong started Monday the construction for a world-class centre that will contribute significantly to Hong Kong’s position as the trade fair capital of Asia-Pacific.

The first phase is expected to absorb 295 million US dollars of the project, which is expected to generate economic benefits of more than 1.28 billion US dollars over a 25-year period.

AsiaWorld-Expo will provide the largest column-free exhibition hall in Hong Kong. Its phase 1 development of 66,000 square metres will be completed for full operation in the first quarter of 2006. The facility is capable of hosting up to 100,000 square metres of exhibition space in response to future market demand.

Secretary for Commerce, Industry and Technology John Tsang said at the ground-breaking ceremony for AsiaWorld-Expo Monday morning that AsiaWorld-Expo is a joint venture between government, Airport Authority and a private sector consortium led by Dragages.

He said it is an excellent example of public-private partnership that promises to provide enormous benefits to the economy of Hong Kong. The government and the private sector participants will pay for the construction costs, while the Airport Authority will contribute the land for the new exhibition centre.

Together with other planned or proposed large-scale infrastructure projects on Lantau, such as Disneyland, the Tung Chung Cable Car, the HK-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge and the Value AddedLogisticsPark, AsiaWorld-Expo will transform this island into the prime location for sustainable economic and infrastructure developments in the coming decade.

Tsang said Hong Kong is the premier location for international exhibitions in the region. “I am sure that AsiaWorld-Expo will take HK’s convention and exhibition business to a new level of excellence, and it will cement HK’s position as the trade fair capital and the best international business centre in the Asia-Pacific.” — MNA/Xinhua

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*Photograph* An Iraqi youth, armed with a truncheon, runs from British Army soldiers during a violent protest in the southern Iraqi city of Basra on 29 March, 2004. — Internet
UN leader says security vital for Iraq vote

BAGHDAD, 31 March— The head of a UN team said Monday that better security in Iraq is vital for elections to take place by a Jan 31 deadline. A US soldier was killed in a bomb west of Baghdad and British troops in the south fired rubber bullets to disperse anti-coalition activists.

The UN team met with members of the US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council to discuss setting up an interim government before the US-led coalition transfers power to the Iraqis by 30 June, and plans for general elections after that.

A bomb explosion near a US military convoy west of Baghdad killed and wounded American civilians and Iraqi civilians, a US official said. The attack occurred northwest of the restive city of Fallujah. Late Monday, residents in Fallujah reported heavy gunfire in the city’s al-Askari neighborhood. Fighting in the same area on Friday killed a US Marine and at least five Iraqis, including an ABC News cameraman.

In the southern city of Basra, British troops in riot gear fought with dozens of anti-coalition Iraqis who resisted eviction from a government-owned building. At least four Iraqis were injured. Two British soldiers suffered injuries. Iraqis threw stones and bricks at the soldiers and set fire to tires in the streets. Associated Press Television News footage showed two soldiers with plastic shields and wooden batons struggling with an Iraqi who grabbed one of their weapons.—INTERNET

German clerk catches thief with own stolen card

BERLIN, 31 March — A German man was arrested for credit card theft after trying to buy 76 euros worth of beer and cigarettes at a gas station with a stolen card that belonged to the cashier, Berlin police said.

“When I looked at the credit card I saw it was my own,” said the 33-year-old named Heiko told Berlin’s BZ newspaper. He locked the man inside the shop and called the police. He said he had recently ordered a credit card but it never arrived in the post.

“It was not a common name, so there was no chance of coincidence,” a police spokeswoman said.

Foreign investment in Vietnam up in first quarter

HANOI, 31 March — Vietnam licensed 120 foreign-invested projects worth 420 million US dollars in the first three months of this year, down 27 per cent in project number, but up 11 per cent in capital over the same period last year.

Meanwhile, an addition of 290 million US dollars was poured into 29 operational projects, a year-on-year increase of 51 per cent, according to the Foreign Investment Department under the Ministry of Planning and Investment on Monday.

The industry sector lured most foreign direct investment (FDI), accounting for 80 per cent of the total registered capital and 65 per cent of the project number between January and March.

Localities with most FDI were Binh Duong Province, southern Dong Nai Province and Ho Chi Minh City.

Foreign-invested enterprises obtained export turnovers of 1.7 billion US dollars and import turnovers of 2.1 billion US dollars in the first quarter of this year, year-on-year rises of 26 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively.

Vietnam has targeted 4.4 billion US dollars worth of FDI this year. By late March, it had attracted 3.3 billion US dollars from all industries.

Philipine Daily Inquirer quoted the International Business Survey conducted by research firm Grant Thornton as saying that 53 per cent of the 150 respondents from all industries are negative of increased revenue in 2004, when the economic environment will be negatively affected by the political uncertainties before and after the May elections.

The survey also found 41 per cent of respondents considering increasing market competition from local or foreign counterparts to be a major threat to their businesses, while 40 per cent cited tight government regulations and the rising cost of doing business as the biggest stumbling blocks to smooth business operations.

Iraq dramatically revives Bam earthquake death toll

TEHRAN, 31 March— Iraq has dramatically revised the death toll of a strong earthquake, which destroyed the southwestern Iranian city of Bam 26 December last year, from previous 43,000 people to over 26,000.

The devastating quake measuring 6.8 on the open-ended Richter Scale actually killed 26,271 people, not the previous official toll of 43,000 announced by Bam Governor Ali Shafii in February, the country’s official statistics centre said on Monday.

“The final and definite number of people dead from the Bam earthquake stands at 26,271, and there are 525 people still missing,” state media quoted chief of Iran’s statistics centre, Abbas Ali Zali, as saying.— MNA/Xinhua

Jordan ready to return stolen antiquities to Iraq

AMMAN, 31 March — Jordan is ready to return to Iraq more than 700 stolen antiquities that were seized from smugglers, the official news agency Petra said on Tuesday.

Quoting the director-general of Jordan’s Department of Antiquities, Fawaz Khreisha, Petra said the pieces, confiscated by security and Customs authorities, were well preserved, scientifically documented and ready for delivery upon the request of the Iraqis.

The department has sent a compact disc with pictures of the artefacts to the Iraqi authorities renovating the National Museum in Baghdad which was looted after the fall of Saddam Hussein last year.

Iraqis then blamed invading US troops for not protecting the museum as treasures dating back thousands of years were plundered.

Khreisha said Jordan had previously handed to Iraq 1,000 pieces of antiquities.— MNA/Reuters

India fights anthrax that killed two elephants

BANGALORE, 31 March — Anthrax has killed two elephants in southern India, spurring health authorities to vaccinate cattle as they try to stamp out the deadly disease.

The alert was sounded after tests confirmed that two recent elephant deaths in the state of Karnataka were caused by the anthrax germ, G Krishnappa, director of the Institute of Animal Health and Veterinary Biologicals, said on Monday.

The elephants died about two months ago in a remote village near a forest in Heggadadevanakote, 110 miles southwest of Bangalore, the state capital, and the bacterium was confirmed by a medical team two weeks ago after a visit to the area. “All precautions were taken and they are going for vaccination of domestic cattle in the area,” Krishnappa said. “Anthrax is not unusual in cattle. It is unusual for elephants but they are also susceptible.”— MNA/Reuters

Other constraints mentioned included shortage of working capital and increasing cost of financing, the survey said.

To maintain or improve profitability, 93 per cent of the respondents said they had been improving cash and credit management and reducing cost.

Philippine medium-scale businesses pessimistic about 2004

MANILA, 31 March — A latest survey showed medium-scaled Filipino businesses are “slightly pessimistic” about 2004’s prospects because of pre-election uncertainty, increasing competition and tight government regulations, a local newspaper reported Tuesday.

A wounded Iraqi man runs during a fight with British troops in the southern Iraqi city of Basra on 29 March, 2004. The clashes followed the eviction of anti-coalition activists from a government building they were occupying.—INTERNET

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Iraqis holding a poster of cleric Moqtada Al-Sak at rear, demonstrate near the US Green Zone in Baghdad, on 30 March, 2004, in response to the closure of the Al Hawza newspaper. — Internet

Iraqi man inside the shop and pointed to a compact disc with pictures of the artefacts to the Iraqi authorities...
Paris, Berlin seek 50% Iraq debt write-off

**Berlin, 31 March** — France and Germany have agreed to push for a 50% per cent reduction in Iraq’s debts to sovereign country creditors, sources familiar with the negotiations said, in a move that may disappoint supporters of a bigger write-off.

France owes about 42 billion US dollars to the Paris Club, a group of 19 creditor states including all of the world’s industrialized economies, according to Paris Club estimates.

In a bid to rebuild Iraq’s war-torn economy, major creditors have spoken of the need for a “substantial” debt cancellation for Iraq, seen by analysts as anything up to 80 per cent.

One official closely following the stance of France and Germany said, “Fifty per cent is what they are looking at.”

France and Germany, which are increasingly trying to take joint stands on European and international issues, are among the bigger creditors in the club behind Japan and Russia, and are owed almost 6 billion US dollars and 5 billion US dollars respectively.

Russia has spoken of a 65-per-cent write-off of debts owed to it, but officials have said this promise is far from definitive and linked to demands for confirmation of business contracts for Russian oil and gas exploration in Iraq.

Analysts also believe the United States will push for a greater sizeable relief in the Iraqi debt burden. Former US Secretary James Baker has been touring foreign capitals drumming up support for move to cut the amount of money Baghdad owes.

Sources watching the deal say progress on tackling Iraq’s debts is slow, partly because the International Monetary Fund is finding it harder than expected to come up with a calculation of what could be considered a bearable level of debt for Iraq. Iraq is estimated to owe about 120 billion US dollars in all, of which much of the non-Paris Club debt is owed to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia as well as countries like China and Bulgaria.

**Jiangsu rescues cultural relics for water diversion project**

**Nanjing, 31 March** — Jiangsu Province has begun to explore and rescue cultural relics in areas where China’s huge south-north water diversion project will be built, a provincial cultural department official said Monday.

The Jiangsu section of the water diversion project involves the four cities of Xuzhou, Yangzhou, Hui’an and Suzhou. A preliminary inspection shows at least 110 underground historical sites and ancient relics in areas where the China’s huge south-north water diversion project will be built, a provincial cultural department official said Monday.

The place covering an area of more than 200 square miles is likely to increase over the coming years.

Rescue efforts will concentrate on the exploration, excavation and protection of underground historical sites and ancient graves, said Gang Liang, director of cultural relics protection under the provincial cultural department.

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**Africa loses some $500m by technology transfer due to migration**

**Addis Ababa, 31 March** — Africa is losing annually an amount of some $500 million USD by reverse technology transfer due to the increasing of migration from the continent, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said here Monday.

The continuing migration of highly skilled and trained Africans has left many Africans countries with insufficient human resources to sustain economic development and growth or to rebuild communities and societies in post-conflict conditions, said Ndoro Ndiaye, deputy director general of the IOM at a two-day experts group meeting on policy framework on migration in Africa. According to Ndiaye, the problem is likely to get worse as demand for skilled workers in developed countries is likely to increase over the coming years.

She said in Africa, about 3.1 million refugees and asylum seekers, 21.8 million internally displaced persons and 20 million labour migrants are estimated to have left the continent, which constitute for one fifth of the total global. The prevalence of conflicts, strong democratic institutions, and natural disasters, are among others which the director mentioned as a problem to the migration of African citizens.

A US Marine fires a rocket at a target on the opposite bank of the Euphrates River south of Nasiriyah during last year’s fighting. A military investigation has blamed a forward air controller for a US air attack that mistakenly struck US Marines in Nasiriyah a year ago in the worst friendly fire incident in the US-led invasion of Iraq.

**Oil prices rise after Saudi Arabia backs OPEC output cut**

**London, 31 March** — Oil prices rose on Tuesday after OPEC’s most influential member Saudi Arabia threw its weight behind imminent supply cuts, though divisions within the cartel prevented a steeper rally, analysts said.

US light crude was trading 25 cents higher at 35.70 US dollars, while London’s Brent crude climbed to 31.97 US dollars, up 23 cents.

US prices had fallen to a session low of 35.25 US dollars a barrel, but rallied after Saudi Oil Minister Ali al-Naimi stated his opposition to relaxing supply curbs.

Naimi dismissed suggestions that the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, which meets in Vienna on Wednesday, to be blame for prices that earlier this month hit a 13-year high.

Instead, he said speculators, economic growth and US refinery problems, as opposed to a shortage of OPEC crude were the reasons behind high oil prices.

“As far as Saudi Arabia is concerned April 1 has been implemented and I believe others have done so as well,” Naimi told reporters.

“Throwing more oil on the market, because of prices where they are today, would be destructive,” he added.

That would make a glut and there is already a surplus on the global market.

Some other OPEC ministers have suggested that a one million barrels per day output cut from April 1 should be delayed.

Kuwait Oil Minister Sheikh Ahmad al-Fahd al-Sabah said on Tuesday OPEC should postpone the cut and reconsider it at the group’s next planned meeting in Beirut on June 3.

“Tunisia’s sudden and unilateral decision to postpone the overproduction but postpone the output cut itself is the same vaccine given to US soldiers for protection of the chemical weapons. The burns department in the hospital was closed and an extensive and concentrated process of sterilizing was conducted, and the officials at the hospital refrained from discussing the issue or giving any media announcements about the kind of the disease and its source.”

**Anthrax-like contagious disease kills 6 in northern Iraq**

**Baghdad, 31 March** — Six Iraqis died last week of a serious skin disease, which workers at the Republican hospital in Mousil, 400 kilometres north of Baghdad, said looks like the anthrax, local newspaper Al-Azam reported Monday.

Workers at the hospital confirmed that highly secretive health and security procedures were taken in the burns department in the past days.

A small girl was brought to the hospital by her father two weeks ago to treat her from what was thought a sun burn on her hand, and was discovered later to be the source of the disease.

The girl is thought to have transferred the disease, which is the same vaccine given to US soldiers for protection of the chemical weapons.

The burns department in the hospital was closed and an extensive and concentrated process of sterilizing was conducted, and the officials at the hospital refrained from discussing the issue or giving any media announcements about the kind of the disease and its source.

**Saudis seeking visit to Egypt**

**CAIRO, 31 March** — Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal left here on Monday after wrapping up a short visit to Egypt, his official MENA news agency reported.

During his stay, Faisal met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. He was invited by Egypt’s offer to host an aborted Arab summit, originally due in Tunisia on 29-30 March.

“The meeting is part of Egypt’s contact and consultations with other Arab countries to host the summit at the Arab League headquarters as soon as possible after Tunisia,” an Egyptian source was quoted as saying.

“The meeting held with Faisal was an attempt to understand the Arab League’s reluctance to postpone the summit,” Mena said earlier.”
Valuable gas discovery in the Golden Land

Maung Phyu (Energy)

Myanmars value gold and highly regard it as a valuable jewel. They even name their country 'the Golden Land' and themselves 'the Golden People'.

The 1994 in the Golden Land was blessed with the news of the discovery of a new natural gas deposit at block No A-1 off Rakhine coast on 7 January 2004 (oil and natural gas are referred as black gold).

Talking in detail about the new gas deposit, I would like to present the Yadana and Yetagon natural gas projects first. Myanmar, rich in underground and aboveground natural resources, has been exploring and producing oil and gas since many years ago. Oil has been found in Yenangyoung, one of the oldest oil fields in the world, since 1887. Yenangyoung still yields oil till today. Oil and gas have also been found and produced in Ayadaw, Chauk, Phayagon, Myanmar; Pyay, Shwepyitha, Pyaoh, Mann, Lepanto, Petpe, Hunkhsabin, Htantabin, Kani, Aphyauk, Kyaukkwet, Sabe, Thagyitaung, Indaing and Myanmar.

The country is exploring, drilling and producing offshore oil to the utmost of her capacity. But offshore oil business needs much capital. In this regard, the Ministry of Energy since 1989 has been inviting foreign companies to do business in Myanmar under the production sharing contract in accord with the objective — Development of the economy inviting participation in terms of technical knowledge and investments from sources inside the country and abroad.

Thanks to the invitation, the nation discovered two offshore oil fields — Yadana and Yetagon — that are contributing much towards the nation’s economy.

The State-owned enterprise, the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, found an oil reserve at block M-5 and block M-6 off Mottama coast in 1983. Total Company of France, ENELCAL of the US and PTTEPI of Thailand developed the oil field together with MOGE of Myanmar under the production sharing contract. The estimated yield of the Yadana reserve is up to 6.52 trillion cubic-feet of natural gas. From the gas field a 36-inch diameter pipe was laid under water and on land and 525 million cubic feet of gas per day is sold to Thailand beginning 1 July 1996.

Similarly, Yetagon gas field is located in blocks M-12, M-13 and M-14 off Tanintharyi coast. And beginning 1 April 2000, 200 million cubic feet of gas is being piped to Thailand. In addition to natural gas, the Yetagon also yields condensate crude oil. The estimated reserve of Yetagon is 3.167 trillion cubic feet of gas and 84.6 million barrels of oil. The foreign oil companies that are running the Yetagon field together with the MOGE are Petronas of Malaysia, the Nippon Oil of Japan, and the PTTEPI of Thailand.

The combined reserve of the Yadana and Yetagon is 9.687 trillion cubic feet of gas and 84.6 million barrels of oil.

Now, I would like to present the latest discovery of the gas reserve off the Rakhine coast in block No A-1. In exploring oil and gas, all places with high potentials are labelled with numbers. There are 47 onshore blocks, seven offshore blocks in Rakhine coastal area and 18 offshore blocks in Mottama and Tanintharyi coastal areas totalling 72.

A production sharing agreement was reached with Daewoo International Corporation of the Republic of Korea on 4 August 2000 to explore oil and gas in the block A-1. Acting as the operator, the ROK company owns 60 per cent of the shares of the A-1. Another Korean company, Korea Gas Corp, owns 10 per cent stake in the business, while two Indian companies, ONGC Videsh Ltd and GAIL (India) Ltd hold 20 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. After conducting the seismic survey up to 3,552.75 line kilometers in 2001, calculations and follow-up mapping is being taken.

After the completion of follow-up procedures, experts of Daewoo Corporation and MOGE decided to drill the first test well — the Shwe-1 (Gold-1) — in the A-1 block.

The offshore drilling machine, Energy Searcher, started drilling the test well on 21 November 2003, and struck a large gas deposit on 26 December 2003 at the G-5 sand layer 10,588 feet below the sea-bed. Minister for Energy Brig-Gen Lun Thi attended the spud-in ceremony of the test well. The results of a geological experiment showed that the sand layer holds a commercial-scale gas deposit. Further experiments have shown that the reserve may yield from 4.2 trillion cubic feet to 5.8 trillion cubic feet of gas.

According to the promising geological condition, the gas deposit of the whole A-1 block is estimated at 14 trillion cubic feet, larger than the combined deposit of Yadana and Yetagon which is only 9.687 trillion cubic feet. As the nation is the owner of the world-class gas deposit, it has the right to enjoy the proportionate share of the benefits which will be larger than both Yadana and Yetagon.

But, what is more important than the financial benefit is the Tatmadaw Government’s efforts to stand on its own strength that has contributed much to the discovery of the gas field. Despite the handicap, the Ministry of Energy is making efforts, based on self-reliance, in accord with the economic objectives, and its discovery of the gas field will provide invaluable assistance to the nation’s march toward modernization and development.

Efficient use of electricity

* Use daylight as the main source of light
* Use the least possible amount of electricity only if there is not enough natural light
* Use the least possible amount of electricity required in production and service enterprises
* Preventing waste of electricity benefits the user and others

There are about 500,000 households using electricity in Yangon. Thus, saving a four-foot-fluorescent lamp everyday by each household amounts to saving power that is equal to the capacity a 20-megawatt power station can supply.

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

All this needs to be known

* Do not be frightened whenever intimidated
* Do not be bolstered whenever flattered
* Do not be softened whenever approached

59th Anniversary

Armed Forces Day

Exhibition

Defence Services Museum on Shwedagon Pagoda Road, Yangon.
26-3-2004 to 4-4-2004 (Free admission)
Transport Minister inspects prevention of bank erosion in Nyaungdon

YANGON, 31 March—Minister for Communications, Posts and Telecommunications Mr U Tha Maung Swe, accompanied by Deputy Minister U Pe Than and officials of Directorate of Water Resources and Improvement of River Systems, this morning inspected measures for prevention of bank erosion in Nyaungdon.

The minister gave a supplementary report.

The minister gave a supplementary report.

Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt views lens factory…

YANGON, 31 March—For the first step, lens will be manufactured and then, production of optical apparatuses and electronic apparatuses such as lenses units and digital camera will be extended. Skilled personnel for production and management sectors are required.

The company will cooperate with universities in Myanmar to meet requirement of technicians because the company is carrying out high-tech works.

In addition to emergence of many job opportunities at technician level, it will contribute much towards technological development of Myanmar.

CPT Minister receives Thai guests

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Panasonic Professional Video Systems Road Show 2004 demonstrated

YANGON, 31 March—A demonstration on Panasonic Professional Video Systems Road Show 2004, jointly organized by Trinity Systems & Supplies Pte, Ltd, Singapore and Panasonic Singapore was held at the Traders Hotel on Sule Pagoda Road here this morning.

On the occasion the director-general of information and communication affairs at the Ministry of Information and Communication Affairs Mr. Htin Lin Naing, the commandant of Tatmadaw Broadcasting Unit, directors, the chief engineer and departmental personnel of departments and enterprises, member reporters of Myanmar Foreign Correspondents Club, film companies and directors, officials of Trinity Systems & Supplies Pte, Ltd, Singapore and guests, first, resident representative U Soe Soe of Trinity Systems & Supplies Pte, Ltd, Singapore explained the purpose of the demonstration.

Next, executive manager U Khin Maung Win demonstrated work process of film cameras such as DV, DVCPRO 50 and HD Camera manufactured with advanced technologies, distinctive situation of movies and advertisement shot by Varicam HD camera in Asian countries, editing operation by using Varicam camera, computer graphic which is used in movies and advertisement. Officials concerned replied to queries raised by those present.

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Rural gravel roads, water supply canals opened to hail 59th Anniversary Armed Forces Day

YANGON, 31 March—As a gesture of hailing the 59th Anniversary Armed Forces Day, the opening of Sinhe-Hsule rural gravel road which was one mile and five furlongs in length and 12 feet in width constructed by Taunggyi Township Development Affairs Committee took place at the archway of the road in Sinhe village on 17 March morning.

It was attended by Chairperson of Shan State Peace and Development Council Mr. Maung Maung Kyaw and officials of Shan State Peace and Development Affairs Committee and Shan State (East) Peace and Development Affairs Committee U Tin Soe and Secretary of Shan State (East) Peace and Development Affairs Committee Lt-Col Khin Maung Kyaw cut the ribbon to open the facility.

Likewise, the opening of 11,200-foot-long water supply canal to hail the 59th Anniversary Armed Forces Day undertakings by Kayanke Township Development Affairs Committee took place at the Hoywot village on 23 March morning. The chairman of the village Peace and Development Council formally opened the facility.

The opening of Kayanke Township Development Council was held at the village on 26 March. Secretary of Township Peace and Development Council U Tin Huan On and Township Development Affairs Committee Executive Officer U Yan Myo Aung formally opened the road.

To hail the 59th Anniversary Armed Forces Day, Naunggein-Htatapin-Mawma-Mawauk village-to-village earth road with seven miles and four furlongs in length and 30 feet in width constructed by Kayaukme Township Development Affairs Committee was held at Naunggein village on 25 March morning. Chairman of District Peace and Development Council Lt-Col Soe Win, Township Development Affairs Committee Executive Officer U Win Naing and Chairman of village Peace and Development Council U Aung formally opened the road.

Hailing the 59th Anniversary Armed Forces Day, Kawgoj gravel road under taken by Mongyaw Township Development Affairs Committee in Shan State (East) in 2003-2004 fiscal year was commissioned into service on 19 March morning. The road is 1,150 feet long and 12 feet wide. MNA
LatAm nations rally behind Brazil and Argentina against IMF

LIMA (Peru), 31 March — Latin American nations are rallying behind an initiative to press the International Monetary Fund to relax rules on accounting for infrastructure projects, and to recommend Spaniard Rodrigo Rato for the Fund’s top job.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Argentina’s Nestor Kirchner called on the IMF earlier this month to relax the accounting rules in a proposal aimed at making it easier for countries to meet IMF fiscal targets without jeopardizing growth or spending on roads, ports and bridges. Mexico, Chile, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Uruguay, Paraguay and Ecuador backed the call in Lima.

The governors argue that (infrastructure) investments should have a different treatment in the calculation of parameters for current spending,” the 11 Latin American nations said in a declaration released at an Inter-American Development Bank meeting in Peru.

Earlier, Brazil’s Planning Minister, Guido Mantega, said that all but one of the Latin American countries were supporting the proposal, but eventually all of Latin America’s biggest economies came on board.

Saying it could have far-reaching implications, the IMF said. “Inflation in infrastructure is considered spending today. We have discovered our biggest problem that is common to all our countries and we took a joint initiative that appears unprecedented in the last few years,” Mantega said.

An IMF official said the Fund had no official position but would discuss the subject at a board meeting next month.

Venezuela pledges oil to help alleviate Argentine energy crisis

BUENOS AIRES, 31 March — The Venezuelan state-run oil company PDVSA pledged to send oil to Argentina in an effort to help alleviate the energy crisis affecting the country, local Press reported Tuesday.

Argentine Planning, Public Investment and Service Minister Julio de Vido said at a Press conference that some 700,000 tons of fuel oil and approximately 250,000 cubic metres of gas oil would arrive in the following days, which would be paid with agricultural food.

Based on the swap of “absolutely necessary elements,” the fuel shipments would guarantee gas supply for the system, the minister assured.

Experts estimated however that the volumes promised could only cover the needs of a month.

Facing a gas shortage to supply power plants, Argentina has been exercising internal supply rationing, and power companies began an energy reduction Monday afternoon without completely cutting service.

Dependent on Argentine oil and gas supply, Chile and Uruguay also sustained fallout of the energy crisis, with both scrambling to seek solutions to weather the supply shortage.

Japanese fashion company expands retail business in HK

HONG KONG, 31 March — Famous Japanese fashion retailer Tokyo Style Hong Kong Co Ltd announced Tuesday the opening of its first two overseas retail outlets in Sogo Store in Hong Kong. The retail outlets will sell two of its ladies’ wear labels—“22 OCTOBRE” and “AYLESBURY.”

Managing Director of Tokyo Style Hong Kong Co Ltd, Takahisa Hirohama, said, “I am very excited about our expansion in Hong Kong with the opening of two new stores.

Having been doing business in Hong Kong for more than 15 years and witnessing the ever-growing market, I have strong confidence on Hong Kong’s retail business.”

“Hong Kong is the most sophisticated retail market in the world. We are also impressed by the unique character of this city—full of dynamism and international cultural influence.

With free trade, low tax regime, and language capabilities of Hong Kong people, we see no barrier in doing business here. Tokyo Style simply cannot think of being on the side of Japan.

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Five killed as helicopter crashes in Spain’s Canary Island

MADEIRA, 31 March — A rescue helicopter evacuating tourists injured in a highway accident on Spain’s Canary Islands crashed on Tuesday, killing five people aboard the aircraft, police said.

The helicopter, carrying two Dutch tourists and three crew members, hit power lines after picking up the two Dutch women who were injured when their tour bus veered off an embankment on the island of Gran Canaria.

On the bus were 36 tourists, including 28 Dutch, four French, two British, one Spanish and one German.

After the bus accident occurred, two helicopters flew to the scene, and one of them struck power lines and burst into flames on impact, killing the two Dutch women, the helicopter pilot, a doctor and a nurse, a government statement said.

Twenty-seven of the passengers on the tour bus were taken to hospital, some of whom were seriously injured, the statement said.

Within this year, the company plans further expansion in the region, with eight new shops in Shanghai and six shops in Taiwan.
Profit of China’s machinery industry breaks record

Beijing, 31 March — China’s machinery industry posted a profit of 153.1 billion yuan (18.5 billion US dollars) in 2003, up 48.7 per cent over the previous year and setting a historical record.

Figures released Tuesday by the China Machinery Industry Federation (CMIF) showed that the machinery industry witnessed rapid growth in production, sales, export and profit last year, with production of electricity generating equipment, numerical control machine tools, automobiles and other major machinery products reaching their respective records.

The machinery industry also encountered four fresh features in recent years, said CMIF Chairman Yu Zhen at the CMIF Congress held Tuesday.

First, the successive start of the nation’s major and long-lasting projects like the Three Gorges Project drives a strong demand for heavy equipment, creating a sound market for the industry’s development.

Vigorous demand for automobiles has become the driving force for the industry’s rapid growth. Statistics showed that China produced 4.44 million automobiles in 2003, up 35.2 per cent over the previous year, accounting for 37 per cent of the whole machinery industry in sales volume, and 48 per cent in profit.

Individuals and private companies purchase increasingly more machinery equipment. Heavy equipment and new-type agriculture equipment enjoy an especially broad market along the fast-growing private steel plants and the industrialization of agriculture.

Private enterprises and joint-ventures begin to produce more machines than the state-owned enterprises, and make an overwhelming larger part of the profit. Yu said.

Yu also predicted a continuous high growth of the industry and new records for the major products in 2004. He said the industry will produce 5.1 to 5.3 million automobiles, including 2.5 to 2.6 million cars, over 40-million-kilowatt electricity generating equipment, and over 40,000 numerical control machine tools.

Microsoft finds hard to recruit software engineers in China

Beijing, 31 March — Microsoft has found it difficult to satisfy its goal of recruiting 300 software engineers in China and new sources with the Microsoft Research Asia Advanced Technology Centre (ATC) said.

To satisfy the demand of its ongoing ten major programmes, the ATC hoped that it could recruit about 100 software managers, architects and testes before this July. It has received more than 120,000 resumes, mainly from college students, after it released the employment announcements through the media.

After strict selections, the ATC only found 70 people who met the post’s requirements, said Shang Xiaoli, public relations manager of ATC. She said that because there were too many candidates, only about 3,000 got the chance to take part in the preliminary exam, followed by a series of professional interviews.

The outcome of the selection shows that most candidates are good at coding, but only a few of them have the abilities to transfer research innovations into products or incoporate new innovative products, which are indispensable skills of software managers or architects of Microsoft Dr Zhang Hongjian, president of the ATC.

“It is hard to find a qualified manager from those candidates. By now, all software managers in ATC are ones who once worked for Microsoft or from other Microsoft departments,” said Zhang.

He said the outcome, which was seriously delayed the ongoing research programmes, shows that there are some erroneous ideas on the software industry in students’ minds.

“What we need most are engineers with abilities to transfer the demands of consumers into the functions of our products, not single-minded programme writers,” said Zhang. Zhang and his colleagues have planned to give lectures at more than ten universities, aiming to tell what kind of talents they want and how the students should improve.

As one of the most well-known transnational companies, Microsoft attracts thousands of college graduates every year, who go after several hundred posts in its Chinese departments. The ATC, founded in Beijing in November 2003, is a new division of Microsoft Research Asia that will focus on further development of innovations produced in the labs. — MNA/Xinhua

Nokia snatches lead in camera-phone market

Washington, 31 March — Nokia corp, facing intense competition from Asian consumer-electronics companies, has snatched the lead in the red-hot market for camera phones, The Wall Street Journal reported Monday.

In the final quarter of 2003, the Finnish phone maker sold more camera phones than any other manufacturer, compared with 12 per cent for Samsung Electronics Co, South Korea, and 12 per cent for Sony Ericsson Mobile Communications Ltd, said the report citing a research firm Strategy Analytics.

Sony Ericsson is a joint venture of Sony Corp, Japan, and Telefon AB LM Ericsson of Sweden.

Still, Neil Mawston, a British analyst with Strategy Analytics, said he is confident Nokia will be the leading camera-phone supplier this year thanks to growing demand for devices with cameras in Europe and the United States.

“We definitely expect them to retain that lead through 2004,” he said. “But Samsung may run them close.”

Ecuador, Colombia, Peru to hold joint FTA talks with US

Quito, 31 March — Ecuador, Colombia and Peru are to hold joint negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States in May, Ecuadoran Central Bank Governor Mauricio Yepes said.

“The announcement of the US authorities tells us to be ready and that they want to negotiate as of May 18,” Yepes was quoted by Monday’s El Tiempo as saying.

The chief Ecuadorian negotiator said the aim of the three country’s launching of joint negotiations is to save logistic costs and time.

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Japan’s Fukui Prefecture approves two N-reactors

Tokyo, 31 March — A Japanese regional government approved on Monday the construction of two new nuclear reactors, Japan, the world’s second-largest economy, has virtually closed coal and relies on nuclear power for more than 30 per cent of its power needs.

The governor of Fukui Prefecture, in western Japan, approved a plan by Japan Atomic Power Co to build two new reactors at a new station in the city of Tsuruga, a Fukui official said.

“The go-ahead was given to build the Number 3 and Number 4 reactors,” the official added. The reactors would go on-line in 2013 and the following 2014 fiscal year.

The decision comes two days after Fukui approved for Kansai Electric Power Co to use controversial mixed-oxide (MOX) fuel in two nuclear reactors at its Takahama plant in Fukui. Japan relies mainly on imported energy — 52 per cent of its own virtually all of which comes from volatile Middle East — and policy framers have long emphasized nuclear power as one way of reducing this dependence. — MNA/Reuters

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Vietnam declares bird flu over

Hanoi, 31 March — Vietnam declared on Tuesday it had stamped out the bird flu epidemic, which killed 16 people in the country and wiped out millions of poultry, following more than one month of no new outbreaks.

“As of today we are free of bird flu,” Bui Quang Anh, director of the Animal Health Department of the Agriculture Ministry, told Reuters.

The announcement drew wary reactions from the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization, particularly since a 12-year-old boy died just two weeks ago from the H5N1 virus in Vietnam.

“A lot of caution is required. There’s still a lot of potential for a new outbreak,” said Peter Horby, epidemiologist at the United Nations’ health agency.

The WHO has not received official confirmation from the Ministry of Health about the most recent fatality, Horby said. FAO representative Anthony Rychener said his agency was not consulted on the bird flu-free declaration.

“The international community does not have any evidence to say the contrary, but we nonetheless caution the government not to announce it prematurely,” Rychener told Reuters.

While Vietnam has said it will require safety certification of poultry and meat sold in markets, Rychener said the country lacked the capacity to properly police the products.

Thailand, where eight people have died from the virus, has not officially declared the epidemic over. But China said earlier this month it had stamped out the disease, which may have originated from migratory birds.

About 38 million poultry in Vietnam either died from the disease or were culled, representing about 15 per cent of the country’s fowl.

Earlier this month, the FAO urged affected nations not to restock poultry farms too quickly to prevent the disease from flaring up again.

The virulent H5N1 avian flu virus spread across much of Asia from late 2003, causing the deaths of more than 400 million fowl. MNA/Reuters
Russia proposes longer space trips to save cash

MOSCOW, 31 March — Astronauts could soon double the time they stay in orbit under a cash-saving plan announced on Tuesday by Russia’s impoverished space agency.

Russia’s rockets have been the only link between the International Space Station and Earth since the space shuttle Columbia broke up on re-entry 14 months ago, prompting Washington to ground its remaining fleet.

Russia can ill afford the role, and making astronauts mission longer would cut the frequency of costly manned launches, which Russia undertakes twice a year. The Russian side has sent a suggestion to NASA to prolong the work of the main crew from six months to a year, Sergei Gorbunov, spokesman for Russia’s space agency, said by telephone.

“After the loss of the shuttle, Russia lost a part of its extra-budget funds, therefore we are suggesting this option,” Gorbunov said. Astronauts would benefit from spending time on an orbital platform and their health would not be damaged.

“The crew does not have enough time to carry out all their tasks in six months. That is why the term should be extended,” he said. “Doctors allow people to spend this much time in space. It does not affect health in any way.”

The record for the longest time spent in space is held by Valery Polyakov, who spent 438 days on board Mir in 1994-5.

If NASA agrees to Russia’s proposals, crews will begin training for a year-long stay. NASA was not immediately available to comment. — MNA/Reuters

Nursery Market Festival continues

YANGON, 31 March — The Nursery Market Festival continued at Myay Padetha Park in Bahan Township here today with the aim of providing necessary assistance to growers and attracting the public to be interested in agriculture, horticulture, livestock breeding and vegetable farming.

Kitchen crops, fruits and saplings of herbal plants are being shown at the festival. Poultry farming and fish breeding are also exhibited there.

Booklets and pamphlets on utilization of natural and chemical fertilizers, modern scientific cultivation methods, pest control, application of insecticides, etc are available at the Nursery Market Festival.

Educative books on landscaping, floral arrangements, nurturing of shady trees and flowering plants can also be bought there. — MNA

Space station technique expands use of ultrasound

WASHINGTON, 31 March — Hockey players on a roadtrip, soldiers at the battlefield and rural trauma patients could all benefit from a NASA ultrasound technique developed for astronauts on the International Space Station, doctors said on Tuesday.

The technique involves portable ultrasound machines, which are becoming increasingly common diagnosis tools, and a NASA training regimen that teaches medical personnel the basics of an operation in a matter of hours or even minutes.

Station astronauts get two hours of training six months before their trip to the orbiting outpost, where long-duration space flight can increase the possibility of back or kidney illness, said Dr Scott Dulschavy, a surgeon at Henry Ford Hospital who works with astronauts on the ultrasound programme.

Once aboard the station, the astronauts practise using the ultrasound machine, scanning fellow expedition members with a wand while a medical doctor on the ground guides them through the procedure, with the help of a video link.

So far, the ultrasound technique has only been used for practice in space. Dulschavy said at a briefing but if needed to examine an ailing astronaut, the Earth-based doctors would make a diagnosis based on the video image.

“The images are of excellent diagnostic quality,” Dulschavy said. “We could use them to exclude a whole variety of conditions that might occur two days or a long-duration space flight.”

Ultrasound technology, which uses sound waves to look inside the body, is most familiarly used to examine pregnant women for signs of foetal problems. It is also used in the treatment of ailments ranging from gallbladder disease to kidney stones.

Dulschavy said this could expand to include broken bones, abdominal trauma and some infections. Dulchavy applied the NASA technique to members of the Detroit Redwings National Hockey League team, where a portable ultrasound device in the locker room allowed quick checks of on-ice injuries, according to team physician Dr David Collon. He also permits fast decision making when the team goes on the road, Collon said.

He cited the case of Redwing Derian Hatcher’s shoulder injury.

A portable ultrasound exam monitored by hospital doctors, was able to rule out a rotator cuff injury—which could have been serious enough to require surgery—and diagnose a more minor injury that needed only time to heal. Collon said. — MNA/Reuters

Wellwishers invited for sinking tube-wells

YANGON, 31 March — 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 diameter tube-well costs K 500,000.

Those wishing to donate cash for the tube-well sinking projects for rural areas may contact the Director-General (Tel: 01-245420 & 253988), the Deputy Director-General (Tel: 01-240118), the Director (Engineering) (Tel: 01-291967), the Directors (Saguing Division Development Affairs Committee) (Tel: 071-21012), the Director (Mayway Division Development Affairs Committee) (Tel: 063-23164) and the Director (Mandalay Development Affairs Committee) (Tel: 02-54657). — MNA

Annual traffic death toll reaches 1.2 million worldwide

Ros, 31 March — Traffic accidents worldwide claim some 1.2 million lives a year and between 20 to 50 million people are seriously injured, according to the report by World Health Organization (WHO) issued here Monday.

WHO coordinator for accident prevention Margie Peden presented the WHO report at the opening of the 14th European Conference on Travel Medicine held at Italian National Research Council on Monday.

It was also released ahead of World Health Day, April 7, which WHO this year has dedicated to road safety.

Peden said 90 per cent of the accident victims live in medium-to-low income nations in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and most of them are either pedestrians or people travelling on bicycles and motor bikes. In the wealthier nations cars are the preferred means of transport.

The study found that most road victims are between the ages of 15 and 44 and three out of four of them are men. Since road deaths have reached epidemic proportions, Peden said, WHO is trying to work on two fronts. The first is to educate people aware that driving involves both risks and responsibilities, and the second is pinpoint places with the highest risks of accidents. WHO will focus on five key areas in prevention campaign, including road speed, the use of seat belts and car seats, helmets for those on two-wheeled vehicles, alcohol consumption and proper clothing, Peden added.

MNA/Xinhua
Uruguay will purchase 300 megawatts and Roussef. Argentina will need smaller volumes, said a government official. Capacity stood at 2,000 megawatts at the end of last year. It jumped 8 per cent in the same period. Electricity because its gross domestic product (GDP) increased by 6 per cent in the same year. Brazil’s energy export capacity stood at 2,000 megawatts, but the three nations decided to begin with smaller volumes, said Roussef. Argentina will purchase 300 megawatts and Uruguay 70 megawatts.

A variety of livestock is exported to Brazil, the inverse process is completely new. As a consequence of 0.2 per cent economic slump in 2003, Brazil now has excessive energy supply while Argentina needs more electricity because its gross domestic product (GDP) jumped by 6 per cent in the same year. Brazil’s energy export capacity stood at 2,000 megawatts, but the three nations decided to begin with smaller volumes, said Roussef. Argentina will purchase 300 megawatts and Uruguay 70 megawatts.

French rocker Cantat jailed for actress death

VILNIUS, 30 March — A Lithuanian court sentenced French rocker Bertrand Cantat to eight years in jail on Monday for beating his actress girlfriend Marie Trintignant to death in a hotel room on 15 July 2003. Trintignant, a member of one of France’s most famous acting families, died last August of head injuries sustained during the fight, which happened as she was shooting a film in Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital. She was aged 41.

China calls for greater stress on eco, cultural rights

GENNAI, 31 March — The Chinese delegation on Monday called on the international community to respond positively to the legitimate demand of the developing countries for greater prominence to be given to economic, social and cultural rights in the protection of human rights.

“Economic, social and cultural rights, together with civil and political rights, are the two pillars of the international human rights regime,” said Liu Zhonghui of the Chinese delegation to the 60th Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

He urged the international community to take measures correctly to correct the prevailing imbalance between the two categories of human rights. “The responsibility of realizing economic, social and cultural rights falls first and foremost on national governments. But international cooperation is indispensable,” he said.

He also briefed the Commission on China’s significant achievements in this area. “China’s respect for the rule of law, protection for human rights, andadherence to the principles of equality before the law, is internationally recognized. As a result, its per capita GDP of 1.18 billion US dollars in the first quarter of this year, year-on-year rises of 16.2 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively. In March alone, the country exported 1.75 million tons worth 402 million dollars, up 20.7 per cent and 13.2 per cent, respectively, over last March, the General Statistics Office on Tuesday. Key importers of crude oil include the United States, China, Singapore, Japan and Britain.

China’s Hubei Province. The cruise service is operated by the Chiangjiang Cruise Overseas Travel Corporation (CCOTC), based in Wuhan, capital of central China’s Hubei Province. The route will sail through five provinces in the country, with more than 300 renowned scenic spots along the way. Tourists will spend nine days and eight nights on the voyage going downstream, and ten days and nine nights going upstream from Shangh hai to Chongqing, the world’s longest inland water cruise route.

The cruise is now offering a total of 2.399 million voyage tickets on China’s Yangtze River from Chongqing to Shanghai, the world’s longest inland water cruise route.

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China plans regulation to guide beauty industry

BEIJING, 31 March — The Chinese Ministry of Commerce plans to make public a regulation to govern the booming beauty and cosmetics industry, China Daily reported Tuesday.

The ministry is circulating a draft regu-
luation, which will soon appear on its of-
icial web site for public comment. Pan Xiaoming, president assistant of China Beauty and Cosmetics Chamber (CBCC), said Monday that the regulation will play a big role in the industry.

Some 120 million people now work in
the industry which involves investment of
over 200 billion yuan (24 billion US dol-
lar) in fixed assets. With larger pockets since the 1980s, many Chinese are willing to spend more on hair and beauty products. Streets in some cities have been crowded with ads for beauty and cosmetics every month.

However, there have been more than 200,000 malpractice lawsuits filed in
the last decade, according to the China Cosmetology and Hairdressing Association.

Statistics show only 11.7 per cent of practitioners have a higher education. Most have not even attended qualified training programmes.

The latest to be again attacked for its prof-
ity to make money at any means, legal or
illegal,” said Luo, adding there should be an
organized institution to issue standards and
regulations.

China cracks down on electricity theft

BEIJING, 31 March — The Chinese State Electricity Regulatory Commission (SERC) announced Tuesday that it has cracked a number of major criminal cases of electricity theft and sabotage of power grids in a joint raid with the Ministry of Public Security.

The SERC said in a statement that a joint raid in 15 provinces and autonomous regions around China, 10 of the 27 major cases directly handled by the Ministry of Public Security have been completed and that 87 of the 286 cases at provincial level have been solved.

According to SERC, nearly 50,000 cases of electricity theft and sabot-
age of power grids occurred in the 21 months before September 2003, incurring 200 million yuan (24 million US dol-
lar) worth of direct losses.

A SERC spokesman said the commission will step up cooperation with other law enforcement agencies and electricity enterprises to curb the rampant theft of electricity and grid equipment.

China’s fertilizer maker earns great profit from exports

GUANGZHOU, 31 March — China’s largest phosphate fertilizer producer, the Hongfu Industrial Development Company, based in southwest China’s Guizhou Province, earned a record 128 million US dollars from exports in 2003.

In 2003, there was a rise of 46 per cent in ammonium sales. The company outsells Mickey Mouse, a globally popular icon whose merchandising rights to the character were bought by Disney in 1930, and his family later partnered with Disney to build the character into a lovable one whose merchandise and films sell well in the 5 billion US dollars of sales yearly. In 1991 the family sued Disney saying the Burbank, California media company reneged on a promise to pay royalties on Pooh videos and short-changed it on other fees. The Slesingers did not address Lew’s charges, saying in a 28-page opinion that the case was so tainted by the Slesingers conducting that it should not go to trial.

“Have seldom ever seen an order this harshly worded. This strongly written, this much of an indictment against a party in a lawsuit,” said trial lawyer Michael Lee, a partner at Beirne, Maynard & Parsons in Houston. “Wow.”

He said he would be very surprised if the appellate court overturned the opin-
ion. — MNA/Reuters

Dengue fever cases in Vietnam up in first quarter

HANOI, 31 March — Viet-
nam has recorded 3,500 dengue fever

California judge on Monday threw out a lawsuit that could have cost Walt Disney Co hundreds of millions of dollars from Winnie the Pooh product sales, saying Disney lied and stole evidence.

Stephen Slesinger Inc., the family firm suing Dis-
ney, “is dishonest and shows no remorse,” Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Charles McCoy wrote in his decision.

He ruled that Slesinger’s actions threat-
ed the integrity of the leg-
islative body and the 13-year-
old case should be dismissed as punishment.

The Slesingers, who had won sanctions earlier in the case against Disney after a witness destroyed documents, prom-
ised to appeal and said they were considering a new case. But two outside lawyers agreed the decision would be hard to overturn and that a new case would be difficult at best.

Disney attorney Daniel Petrelli was categorical. “It is all over. After 13 years the Winnie the Pooh case is fi-
hished,” he told Reuters.

The legal victory comes as Disney executives, includ-
ing Chief Executive Michael Eisner and his brother Michael L., who claim they mismanaged the company. Disney had said a loss in the Pooh case could have cost it hundreds of milli-

China has world’s highest road accident rate

BANGKOK, 31 March — Thailand had the highest road accident rate by interna-
tional standard, the Deputy Transport Minister Nokh Chamong on Tuesday was quoted by local Press as saying.

Statistics show that each urban resident incurring 200 million dollars of sales yearly. In 1991 the family sued Disney saying the Burbank, California media company reneged on a promise to pay royalties on Pooh videos and short-changed it on other fees. The Slesingers did not address Lew’s charges, saying in a 28-page opinion that the case was so tainted by the Slesingers conducting that it should not go to trial.

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ion. — MNA/Reuters
Ronaldo heads for the golf course in Paraguay

ASUNCIÓN, 31 March — Brazil striker Ronaldo shrugged off jet lag andaring heat and headed straight for the golf course after the world champions arrived in Asuncion on Monday after journeys of around 15 hours, had been advised to spend the afternoon resting.

But coach Carlos Alberto Parreira said that he was not upset that Real Madrid striker had joined AC Milan’s Kaka for a 90-minute round on the golf course at the Brazil team hotel on the banks of the Paraguay river.

Ronaldo took up the sport when he was recovering from knee surgery and now lists it as his favourite past-time.

“There was no ban on players getting out of bed,” Parreira told reporters.

“The rest was from training. There was a certain amount of freedom.”

MNA/Reuters

Captain says S Korea must eliminate arrogant streak

YOKOHAMA, 31 March — South Korea must eliminate an “arrogant” streak in order to preserve their status as the best team in Asia, captain Yoo Sang-chul warned.

“Don’t think we have anything to prove after the World Cup,” Yoo, who plays for Japanese champions Yokohama F-Marinos, told Reuters in an interview.

“But if you keep harking back to the 2002 World Cup, you will never win anything again.”

South Korea suffered humiliating set-backs against Vietnam and Oman last year during the 2004 Asian Cup qualifying campaign — results that almost cost coach Humberto Coelho his job.

However, Yoo insisted it was the players, not Coelho, who were to blame and demanded that South Korea take Wednesday’s World Cup qualifier in the Maldives seriously.

South Korea are also drawn alongside Vietnam and Lebanon in the qualifiers.

“We have to stop thinking these games are walk-overs and prepare properly,” said Yoo, still recovering from a knee injury that will keep him out of the Maldives game.

“That’s why we lost to Oman and Vietnam. At the Asian Cup, if we are arrogant enough to think we can automatically repeat what happened at the World Cup, we’ll get beaten. Simple as that.”

Yokohama and South Korea teammate Ahn Jung-Iwan also gave Coelho his backing and promised there would be no mental let-ups at the Asian Cup in China, which begins on July 17.

“Last year, South Korea took things a bit easy and it was also hard to get our best team out with lots of players in Europe,” Ahn told Reuters.

“It was difficult for Coelho because the players just didn’t take it seriously enough. But this year, the motivation and confidence has returned and the players are fired-up.

“We won’t be taking it easy in the Maldives.”

Both Ahn and Yoo acknowledge how important it is for South Korea to win the Asian Cup after failing to lift the trophy since the first two tournaments in 1956 and 1960.

“Winning the Asian Cup is our biggest goal this year,” said the 28-year-old Ahn, who scored the golden goal that knocked Italy out of the 2002 World Cup.

MNA/Reuters

Crespo strike gives Argentina narrow win over Ecuador

Buenos Aires, 31 March — Striker Hernan Crespo struck on the hour to give Argentina a hard-fought 1-0 win over Ecuador on Tuesday.

The Chelsea player cut inside his marker and sneaked between two defenders.

la Cruz and Neicer Reasco.

Reasco hit the post with a shot from just outside the area and shortly afterwards, de la Cruz had a shot turned away by Argentine goalkeeper Pablo Cavallero after he had sneaked between two defenders.

They were willing to come but the situation was absolutely abnormal. They accepted the decision with sadness and disappointment because they have a great identity with the national team.

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“Winning the Asian Cup is our biggest goal this year,” said the 28-year-old Ahn, who scored the golden goal that knocked Italy out of the 2002 World Cup.

The Chelsea player cut inside his marker and scored a low shot from the edge of the penalty area to break the deadlock in the South American group match after the Ecuador defence had lost possession.

The goal was a relief for Argentina after their opponents had slightly the better of the first half and threatened to pull off an upset.

The visitors had two good efforts before halftime from full-backs Ulises de la Cruz and Neicer Reasco.

Argentina were missing Inter Milan midfielder Cristian Gonzalez and Javier Zanetti because the match was too close to their club’s Italian championship game on Sunday when Juan Sebastian Veron was out with injury.

But the twice world champions livened up after Boca Juniors striker Carlos Tevez replaced Mariano Gonzalez at halftime.

After Crespo’s goal, they produced some slick moves in midfield while Andres D’Alessandro provoked the Ecuador defenders with his trickery.

Substitute Juan Riquelme hit the post with a free kick in injury time.

Argentina’s best chance of an equalizer fell to Marlon Ayovi but his shot flew high and wide.

Argentina went top of the group with 11 points from five games but have played one game more than Paraguay (9 points) and Brazil (8), who meet in Asuncion on Wednesday. — MNA/Reuters

Israeli adviser urges Athens to hone WMD response

L Or, 31 March — Greece needs to do more to prepare for any biological or chemical attack on the Athens Olympics and the mass casualties it could inflict, Israel’s security adviser to the Games said on Monday.

Though he voiced no qualms about Israel attending the Olympics, opening on August 13 under record security, Major-General David Tur said Greece to hone the response of emergency teams to save lives should an attack be launched.

“If the main gap the Greeks have yet to bridge is in preparing for the sort of coordination demanded by major terrorist attacks, especially when there are biological or chemical agents involved,” Tur, one of several international security experts advising Athens, told Reuters in an interview.

Greece’s security forces close in the site of suicide bombing within minutes, and clear it within hours. This is a function of hard experience,” he said, referring to attacks in a more than three-year-old Palestinian uprising.

Osama bin Laden’s global Islamist network has so far kept to similar suicide tactics, but security analysts believe it could soon turn to weapons of mass destruction.

“The Greeks still have to work on co-ordinating their response teams, medical facilities and security forces. They are in the midst of preparations which I expect will go on until the last minute,” said Tur, chief of Israel’s paramilitary police.

Tur said Israeli security forces have given “tens of millions of dollars” worth of advice to Athens.

Greece is staging the biggest security operation in the 108 year modern history of the Olympics and at a cost of more than $1 billion euros. More than 45,000 security staff, including 7,000 troops, will guard the Games and Olympic sites.

Experts have said they were increasingly concerned about the possibility of chemical or biological attacks.

“The Olympics are an ideal target because no other event enlists the entire civilized world and concentrates its representatives in one place,” Tur said: “Al-Qaeda thinks long-term, but as we have seen of recent years, its terrorists can strike at short notice.”

MNA/Reuters

Argentina to complain to FIFA about Inter

Buenos Aires, 31 March — Argentina are to complain to FIFA, saying Inter Milan failed to release Javier Zanetti and Cristian Gonzalez in time for Tuesday’s World Cup qualifier with Ecuador, media reports said on Monday.

Inter included both midfielders in their squad for Sunday’s Italian Serie A match against Reggina, making it impossible for them to arrive in Buenos Aires the stipulated 48 hours before kickoff.

Argentina coach Marcelo Bielsa, who dropped both players as a result, attacked the Italian club, telling Argentine media that Inter Milan had not followed the 48-hour rule applies. — MNA/Reuters

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Reasco hit the post with a shot from just outside the area and shortly afterwards, de la Cruz had a shot turned away by Argentine goalkeeper Pablo Cavallero after he had sneaked between two defenders.

At the end of other, defender Gabriel Heinze headed narrowly wide from a corner and Crespo forced a good save from Jose Francisco Cevallos after he broke down the right.

Argentine were missing Inter Milan midfielder Cristian Gonzalez and Javier Zanetti because the match was too close to their club’s Italian championship game on Sunday when Juan Sebastian Veron was out with injury.

But the twice world champions livened up after Boca Juniors striker Carlos Tevez replaced Mariano Gonzalez at halftime.

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Argentina went top of the group with 11 points from five games but have played one game more than Paraguay (9 points) and Brazil (8), who meet in Asuncion on Wednesday. — MNA/Reuters

UEFA drop appeal over Keane ban

London, 31 March — Roy Keane will be able to play in Europe next season after UEFA dropped an appeal against its own disciplinary committee over a ban handed to the Manchester United captain, United said on their web site on Monday.

UEFA had asked for Keane’s one-match suspension for stamping on Porto goalkeeper Vitor Baia during United’s 2-1 Champions League quarter-final win in Portugal last month to be extended to at least three games.

European soccer’s governing body wanted the incident to be considered as an act of assault.

“Given the actual situation in the UEFA Champions League competition, and taking into account that Manchester United have been eliminated, there is no reason to bring the case before the Appeals Body,” UEFA disciplinary inspector Gerhard Kapl said.

United were knocked out of the Champions League by Porto after a 1-1 draw in the second leg at Old Trafford, which gave the Portuguese side a 3-2 aggregate win.

The defeat meant the English champions failed to qualify for the quarterfinals in the first time in eight seasons. — MNA/Reuters
THE NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR Thursday, 1 April, 2004

WEATHER

Wednesday, 31 March, 2004

Summary of observations recorded at 09:30 hours MST.

During the past 24 hours, rain or thunderstorms has been isolated in Kachin, Chin States, scattered in Shan State, Sagu and Mandalay Divisions and weather has been partly cloudy in the remaining areas. Day temperatures were (3°C) below normal in Kachin State, (3°C) to (4°C) above normal in Shan, Chin, Kayin States, Sagu, Mandalay, Maungdaw and Tachileik Divisions and about normal in the remaining areas. Significant day temperature was (42°C) in Mayag.

Maximum temperature on 30-04-2004 was 36.5°C (98°F). Minimum temperature on 31-3-2004 was 20.5°C (69°F). Relative humidity at 9:30 hrs MST on 31-3-2004 was 74%. Total sun shine hours on 30-3-2004 was (9.1) hours approx. Rainfall on 31-3 was nil at Yangon Airport, Kaba-Aye and central Yangon. Total rainfall since 1-1-2004 was 5 mm (0.12 inch) at Yangon Airport and nil at Kaba-Aye and central Yangon. Maximum wind speed at Yangon (Kaba-Aye) was 10 mps from Southwest (at 15:30 hours MST) on 30-3-2004.

Expected weather in the next 24 hours will be partly cloudy. Weather is cloudy in the south Bay and partly cloudy elsewhere in the Bay of Bengal.

Forecast valid until evening of 1-4-2004: Isolated rain or thunderstorms are likely in Kachin, Shan States, Sagu and Mandalay, Bago, Yangon Divisions and weather will be partly cloudy in the remaining areas. Degree of certainty is (60%).

State of the sea: Seas will be slight to moderate in Myanmar waters.

Outlook for subsequent two days: Continuation of isolated rain are likely in upper Myanmar areas.

Forecast for Yangon and neighbouring area for 1-4-2004: Possibility of isolated rain or thunderstorms are likely in the afternoon/evening. Degree of certainty is (60%).

Forecast for Mandalay and neighbouring area for 1-4-2004: Isolated rain or thunderstorms are likely. Degree of certainty is (60%).

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Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt receives special envoy of SRV

YANGON, 31 March — Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt received special envoy of Socialist Republic of Vietnam Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Nguyen Dy Nien at Zeyathiri Beikman, Konmyintta at 11am today.

Also present at the call were Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs U Khin Maung Win, Director-General of Government Office U Soe Tint and Director-General of Protocol Department Thura U Aung Htet from Myanmar side and Ambassador of SRV to Myanmar Mr Pham Quang Khoi from Vietnamese side. — MNA

Work Committee for National Electricity Development meets

YANGON, 31 March — Work Committee for National Electricity Development held a coordination meeting at Zeyathiri Beikman on Konmyintta, here at 6.30am today, addressed by Chairman of the work committee Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council Office Lt-Gen Soe Win.

Also present were Vice-Chairman of the work committee Secretary-2 Lt-Gen Thein Sein, members of the committee Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation Maj-Gen Nyunt Tin, Minister for Energy Brig-Gen Lun Thi, Minister for Finance and Revenue Maj-Gen Hla Tun, Secretary of the committee Minister for Electric Power Maj-Gen Tin Hlut, Joint Secretary Deputy Minister for A & I U Ohn Myint, Deputy Minister for Electric Power U Myo Myint, Director-General of the State Peace and Development Council Office Lt-Col Pe Nyein and officials.

In his address, the Secretary-1 said that as electricity is the basic requirement for national modernization and development drive and regional development undertakings the Leading Committee for National Electricity Development led by Head of State Senior General Than Shwe and the nine-member Work Committee for National Electricity Development have been formed to supervise and implement the power projects. The work committee has two sectors — the sector of supervising the power projects and the sector of approving the new projects. The meeting will explain the State’s formation of the leading committee and the working committee, as it is giving priority to the electricity sector.

The Ministry of Electric Power will brief the meeting on the situation of the nation’s energy resources.

Energy including electricity is essential for national development, especially, in building a modern and developed nation enjoying industrial progress. Before 1988, electricity is generated and supplied mainly from hydro power stations, gas-fired stations and steam power stations. The total generation capacity then was over 580 megawatts in which gas contributed 300 megawatts or 51 per cent; hydro power 38.8 per cent; and steam 10.2 per cent.

From 1988 to this date 34 new power plants — 28 hydro power plants and six gas-fired power plants — with a total generation capacity of over 560 megawatts have been built. The nation’s power generation capacity at present reached 1,200 megawatts indicating a two-fold increase when compared with that of 1988.

Due to economic development and rise in the living standard, the generation capacity to fulfill the power requirement of Yangon has reached 450 megawatts, up from 130 megawatts in 1988. The Head of State has given guidance to extend 2,000 more megawatts of generation capacity in the third five-year national economic plans based on the rich water resources of the nation and to give priority to hydro power projects.

The Ministry of Energy has already laid down the 30-year strategic plan, covering five-year projects, to develop the electricity sector. He said there are plenty of the hydro electrical power projects that are to be implemented under the requirements of national development. It is impossible for the Ministry of Electric Power alone to implement these projects because some are so immense. They are to be undertaken with the combined efforts of ministries concerned under the supervision of the State, he said.

Therefore, the government formed the leading committee and work committees in order to systematically implement electric power development projects. Volume of water flowing in the streams and rivers throughout the country is over 876 million acre feet. According to the survey of experts, there are 268 locations from which nearly 40,000 megawatts can be generated through hydro electrical power. At present hydro electric power stations generate only 350 megawatts. There are many projects left to be implemented, he added.

He said some projects are in the power grid area. For example, 280 mega watts Paunglaung hydro-electric power project in Mandalay Division is a power grid project which is bigger than Lawpita hydro-electric power station called Biluchaung-1 and 2 and so is Yeywa electric power project.

He said there are some projects that cover in the power grid area and some are for regional development. For instance Yazagyo electric power project in Sagaing Division. He said the work committees are to provide necessary assistance for implementation of the projects providing correct priority.

Next, Secretary of the work committee Minister for Electric Power Maj-Gen Tin Hlut reported on hydroelectric power projects to be completed in 2004 and in four years and those to be implemented.

He also reported on power grid projects to be completed in 2004 and in four years and those to be implemented, sub-power stations to be completed in 2004 and those to be constructed and development.

Next, member of the work committee Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation Maj-Gen Nyunt Tin reported on hydroelectric power projects being undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, those being carried out in cooperation with the Ministry of Electric Power, progress of work and future programmes.

(See page 8)