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President U Win Myint: Rare opportunity to transform from old to new system being realized

PRESIDENT U Win Myint, accompanied by Union Ministers Lt-Gen Kyaw Swe, Lt-Gen Ye Aung, Dr. Aung Thu, U Thein Swe and officials, left Nay Pyi Taw by air and was welcomed upon arrival at Shan State (south) Heho airport by Shan State Chief Minister Dr. Linn Htut, Shan State Hluttaw Speaker U Sai Long Hseng, Kayah State Hluttaw Speaker U Hla Htwe, High Court of Kayah State Chief Judge U Kywe Kywe, state ministers, Hluttaw representatives, dance troupes and officials yesterday morning.

After a brief stop at Taunggyi Hotel, President U Win Myint attended a meeting with officials from the state government, state high court, members of Self-Administered Division and Zone, state Hluttaw and state/district/township departmental officials at the Shan State government of office meeting hall. At the meeting, the President said the visit was conducted to realistically understand the reform work conducted and progress achieved by the government and to increase the momentum of the reform work.

A rare opportunity to change and transform from an old to a new system is being realized. Only when relevant and responsible officials transform, can the transformation succeed. Officials from departmental organizations are the ones who are implement-



President U Win Myint visits Sao San Tun Hospital in Taunggyi during his visit to Shan State yesterday. PHOTO: MNA

ing the transformation. Public servants enjoy the salary and benefits provided by the State. They have their rights and responsibilities. They are to properly enjoy the benefits, while performing the duties assigned for the public. They are to follow the policies set by the government.

These policies are being implemented by departmental officials and officials in the administrative, judicial and legislative sectors. All should know and see that they are at their assigned posts to serve the public and not to misuse their rights. They are to serve the people, be loyal to the State

and follow the laws, rules, procedures and instructions. At the same time, they will have to follow the rules and regulations of their respective entities. Care must be taken so that whatever they do benefit the State and the people. Care must also be taken so that State funds are not wasted or lost.

It should also be noted that there should be no misuse of State property. They must be people-centered and orient themselves towards the public interest. They should not be part of a machine that oppresses and harms the people.

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UPDJC holds meeting in preparation for Peace Conference

THE Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) held its 16th meeting at the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre (NRPC) in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday morning.

The meeting was attended by UPDJC Vice-Chairmen Union Minister for the Office of the State Counsellor U

Kyaw Tint Swe, Dr. Tin Myo Win, Dr. Salai Lian Hmung Sakhong, and U Thu Wai; UPDJC members consisting of members from the government, the Hluttaw, Tatmadaw groups, ethnic armed organisations (EAOs), representatives from political parties, and officials.

Union Minister U Kyaw Tint Swe

UPDJC Vice-Chairman U Kyaw Tint Swe addressed the meeting and said that the meeting is important for the future of the nation's reconciliation and peace process, as it will discuss which basic policies and points will be submitted at the upcoming

peace conference.

He said papers submitted in accordance with the UPDJC's set framework for political discussions, guidelines and regulations were approved at the previous 15th UPDJC meeting. The present meeting is also important,

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UK police rush to solve Novichok nerve agent death

SALISBURY (United Kingdom) — British police rushed to solve a murder mystery on Monday after a woman died following exposure to the nerve agent Novichok, four months after the same toxin nearly killed a former Russian spy in an attack that Britain blamed on Moscow.

Prime Minister Theresa May said she was “appalled and shocked” by the death of Dawn Sturgess, a 44-year-old mother of three who had been living in a homeless hostel in Salisbury in southwest England.

Sturgess and Charlie Rowley, 45, fell ill last weekend in the town of Amesbury, near Salisbury, the city where former double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia were attacked with Novichok in March. They have since recovered.

The British government has called a meeting of its COBRA emergencies committee for 1:00pm (1200 GMT).

The Kremlin said it would be “absurd” to suggest Russia was involved in the death of Sturgess.

“We don’t know that Russia has been mentioned or associated with this,” President Vladimir Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

“We consider that in any case it would be quite absurd.”

Russia is “deeply concerned by the continuing appearance of these poisonous substances on British territory,” which “present a danger not just for the British but for all Europeans,” Peskov added.

Britain and its allies accused Russia of trying to kill the Skripals, prompting angry denials and sparking an international diplomatic crisis.

‘No guarantees’

Police said they could not yet say whether the nerve agent



Pedestrians walk past police officers standing guard near barriers across Rolleston Street, outside the John Baker House Sanctuary Supported Living in Salisbury, southern England, on 8 July, 2018. **PHOTO: AFP.**

in the Amesbury case was linked to the Salisbury attack — but it was their main line of inquiry.

The head of Britain’s counter-terror police also said he could not rule out further contaminations.

“I simply cannot offer any guarantees,” said Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu, who is leading the investigation.

He said people in Salisbury should not pick up strange items such as needles, syringes or unusual containers.

Whilst 21 other people have come forward with health concerns, they have been screened and “all been given the all-clear”, he said.

Police and public health officials insist the risk to the wider public remains low.

Police said that given the deadly dose, the British couple

were believed to have become exposed to Novichok by handling a “contaminated item”, with speculation that it could have been the container used to administer the nerve agent to the Skripals.

Christine Blanshard, medical director at Salisbury District Hospital, where Sturgess and Rowley were being treated and where the Skripals were hospitalised, told The Daily Telegraph newspaper that staff had “worked tirelessly to save Dawn”.

“This latest, horrendous turn of events has only served to strengthen the resolve of our investigation team as we work to identify those responsible for this outrageous, reckless and barbaric act,” said Basu.

He said Rowley remained critically ill in hospital.

‘Praying for Charlie’

Residents of the homeless hostel in Salisbury where Sturgess lived, which was evacuated after the couple fell ill, expressed their devastation at the news of her death.

“It could easily have happened to anyone, to me or my partner,” 27-year-old Ben Jordan told AFP. “We are really, really sad. I am praying for Charlie.”

Around 100 counter-terrorism officers are helping in the investigation, which police said Friday could take “weeks and months”.

So far, there is no evidence that the couple visited any of the sites involved in the Skripal case.

“Detectives will continue with their painstaking and meticulous work to gather all the available evidence so that we

can understand how two citizens came to be exposed with such a deadly substance that tragically cost Dawn her life,” Basu said.

Sturgess collapsed on the morning of 30 June and was taken to hospital. That afternoon, Rowley fell ill at the same address in Amesbury and was also hospitalised.

On Wednesday, the government’s Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down confirmed their exposure to Novichok.

Police said Sunday they were not yet able to say whether the nerve agent was from the same batch that the Skripals were exposed to.

The Skripals have been released from hospital but the investigation into the attack on them continues. No arrests have been made.—AFP ■

Trump slams NATO spending on eve of departure for summit

WASHINGTON — US President Donald Trump on Monday criticized NATO member states’ military spending and said it benefits Europe more than America, setting the stage for a potentially-acrimonious summit with leaders of the alliance.

“The United States is

spending far more on NATO than any other country. This is not fair, nor is it acceptable,” Trump tweeted a day before he departs for the summit, which will take place on 11-12 July in Brussels.

“While these countries have been increasing their contribu-

tions since I took office, they must do much more,” he wrote, adding that NATO benefits “Europe far more than it does the US.”

Trump has repeatedly criticized NATO states for allegedly not pulling their financial weight, and has been reach-

ing out to Russian President Vladimir Putin even as his ties with some of his western allies have become strained.

Diplomats fear a rancorous meeting in Brussels could undermine efforts to show unity in the face of the growing threat on the alliance’s eastern flank,

particularly with Trump set to meet Putin in Helsinki a few days later.

Trump has insisted that he will be “totally prepared” for the summit with Putin, saying that he “might even end up having a good relationship” with the Russian strongman.—AFP ■

Philippines' Duterte could extend rule under draft constitution

MANILA— The draft of a new Philippine constitution submitted to President Rodrigo Duterte on Monday would grant him new powers and a chance to extend his stay in office by up to eight years.

Under the current law Duterte will have to step down in 2022, when his six-year term is up. But the proposed shift to a federal system laid out in the draft would allow him to run for two additional terms of four years each.

“The adoption of a new constitution... effectively results in a fresh start for all,” said a statement from the committee that crafted the draft on the president’s orders.

The draft constitution has several obstacles to clear before it can become law, including a congressional debate and a public referendum.

The latest polls — surveying around 1,200 people — show only 37 per cent of Filipinos back changing the constitution while 29 per cent are against it

According to the draft the country would be divided under

a federal system into 18 regions which would have a greater degree of control over their own affairs.

Duterte says the reforms would shift power away from Manila elites and help seal long-stymied peace agreements with insurgent groups fighting for greater regional autonomy.

‘Lawless violence’

However critics fear the 73-year-old president is aiming to hold on to power past constitutional limits which were put in place after the fall of the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship.

Duterte said over the weekend that he would not seek to stay in office beyond his term’s end in 2022.

Christian Monsod, one of the framers of the Philippines’ current constitution, said the reforms are the only legal way to get around term limits.

“In other words, the question is... is federalism a Trojan horse to stay in power?” he asked at a policy forum last week.

The draft also allows the president to use “lawless violence” as a justification for imposing military rule. Under the current constitution, “invasion or rebellion” are the only two legitimate reasons for declaring martial law.



Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte. PHOTO: AFP

“In other words, the question is... is federalism a Trojan horse to stay in power?” he asked at a policy forum last week.

Military rule has a dark past in the Philippines, where it was used by Marcos to jail thousands

of political foes, with thousands of others allegedly killed by the security forces.

Duterte has made law and order a centrepiece of his administration, in particular his deadly drugs war that has killed thousands and prompted allegations of crimes against humanity.

“Despite my best efforts to believe in this process, I find it difficult to believe we can effectively introduce a new constitution given the present political landscape,” said political expert Ronald Mendoza at Ateneo de Manila University School of Government. —AFP ■

Taiwan issues warning as Typhoon Maria approaches

TAIPEI, (China) — Ferries were suspended and farmers rushed for last-minute harvests on Monday as Taiwan braced for Typhoon Maria, with warnings of possible mudslides and flooding as the storm nears.

Maria was 1,100 kilometres (684 miles) east-southeast of the capital Taipei with gusts of up to 200 kilometres an hour as of 2:30 pm local time (0630 GMT).

Waves were starting to pound the island’s north and east coasts with the weather bureau predicting the typhoon’s impact would be strongest on Tuesday night and Wednesday morning.

“We urge the public to be vigilant and to cooperate with any preventative evacuation,” interior minister Yeh Jiunn-rong said.

No evacuations have taken place so far but Yeh warned that heavy rains posed the risk of floodwaters and mudslides.

An official announced more than 30,000 soldiers would be on standby to help with disaster prevention.

The typhoon would not make a direct hit if it continued on its current trajectory, which would see it skim Taiwan’s northern tip, according to the weather bureau.

The bureau urged the public to avoid water activities and warned fishing boats to take precautions in a Monday afternoon sea warning.

Dozens of ferry services to offshore islands were suspended on Monday. Local television footage also showed farmers rushing to harvest fruit and vegetables ahead of the typhoon. Taiwan is frequently hit by typhoons in the summer. Last year, more than 100 people were injured when Typhoon Nesat battered the island, causing flooding and widespread power outages.—AFP ■

N Korea talks sidelining human rights: UN rapporteur

SEOUL (South Korea) — The North Korean talks process with the US and the South is sidelining the human rights of Pyongyang’s oppressed citizens, the UN’s top official on the issue said on Monday.

In a whirlwind of diplomacy, the leader of the isolated, nuclear-armed North Kim Jong Un held an unprecedented summit with US President Donald Trump in Singapore last month, after two earlier meetings with the South’s Moon Jae-in.

It was a marked contrast to the mutual threats and mounting fears of last year, instead raising hopes of reaching a deal over North Korea’s arsenal, which include nuclear bombs and missiles capable of reaching the US mainland.

But Pyongyang remains accused by many — including the UN — of a litany of rights abuses against its population.

Neither the joint statement issued by Trump and Kim in Singapore, nor the earlier Panmunjom Declaration signed by Kim and Moon, mentioned the

issue of human rights.

“It seems that those who are negotiating are losing sight of this important thing, which is would this process benefit at the end the people living in North Korea,” said Tomas Ojea Quintana, the United Nations’ Special Rapporteur on human rights in the North.

Instead Washington and Seoul were prioritising their own concerns, he said.

“In principle the interests that the president of the United States has shown is that they want to denuclearise North Korea so their territory is not in danger, and that of course is something that has to do with their own interests,” Ojea Quintana told AFP in Seoul.

“I’m still trying to understand to what extent human rights was raised” by Trump in Singapore, the Argentinian lawyer added.

“It seems that it was not comprehensively addressed.”

He was particularly concerned, he said, by Trump’s remarks that the focus should be on the future rather than

the past.

“Those are not the kind of statements that we those who advocate for human rights would like to hear,” he said, “especially from someone who is negotiating with the leadership” of North Korea.

In the Singapore statement, Kim signed up to a vague commitment to work towards “complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula”, but Pyongyang has long seen that as a lengthy process of undefined multilateral disarmament, rather than a unilateral dismantling of its own weapons.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was in Pyongyang at the weekend to try to flesh out the process, only for the North to warn that it was being jeopardised by overbearing “gangster-like” US demands.

Pompeo shrugged off the accusations, insisting the talks were being conducted in “good faith” and making progress, and adding sanctions would only be lifted with “final” denuclearisation.— AFP ■

Pompeo makes surprise visit to Kabul: Afghan official

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN — US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made a surprise visit to Kabul Monday for talks with Afghan leaders, an Afghan official said, amid renewed optimism for peace in the war-weary country.

Pompeo's first official visit to Afghanistan since he was sworn in as America's top diplomat in April follows an unprecedented ceasefire during Eid last month.

The Islamic holiday was marked by spontaneous street celebrations involving Afghan security forces and Taliban militants. The official confirmed Pompeo's arrival on the condition of anonymity. A joint press



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. PHOTO: AFP

conference with President Ashraf Ghani is due to start shortly.

Fighters on both sides have expressed a deep fatigue with the grinding conflict, raising hopes that an end to hostilities was possible after 17 years of

war that began with the US-led invasion in 2001 that ousted the Taliban from power.

But the insurgents refused the government's request to extend their three-day ceasefire, launching attacks that

have seen scores killed or injured.

A security official told AFP that the number of Taliban attacks across the country had fallen since the ceasefire, but the claim could not be verified.

US-backed President Ashraf Ghani, who is under international pressure to ensure credible parliamentary elections are held in October ahead of next year's presidential vote, has been leading the push for peace talks.

The Taliban have so far ignored Ghani's offer of negotiations. Instead, they have insisted on direct talks with the United States, which Washington has repeatedly refused.

One of the Taliban's

key demands for engaging in talks has been the complete withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan, but observers say they now appear amenable to a timetable for their pullout.

Currently, there are about 14,000 US troops in Afghanistan, providing the main component of the NATO mission there to support and train local forces.

A Western official told reporters in Kabul recently that there was increasing debate within the Taliban leadership over how to respond to growing pressure to take part in negotiations.

But the renewed violence and the Taliban's recent vow to continue

their bloody fight against the government and their foreign backers, has dampened optimism that the truce would provide a clear path to peace talks.

Pompeo's visit to Kabul comes almost a year since US President Donald Trump announced his much-vaunted South Asia strategy to tackle Afghanistan by including a broader regional approach.

The aim is to convince the Taliban through diplomatic, military and social pressure that it cannot win and must reconcile.

International Islamic scholars meeting in Saudi Arabia this week are expected to add their weight to stopping the Afghan conflict.—AFP ■

Britain's Brexit minister steps down in blow to May

LONDON — British Prime Minister Theresa May faced a crisis in her cabinet on Monday after Brexit minister David Davis and one of his deputies resigned over a plan to retain strong economic ties to the EU even after leaving the bloc.

All eyes are on whether there will be further resignations by Brexit hardliners that could threaten May's leadership, after junior minister Steve Baker followed Davis out the door.

The Brexit ministry denied that junior min-

ister Suella Braverman had also quit, and Davis himself said it would be "wrong" for his departure to create a full-fledged rebellion.

"I wouldn't be encouraging people to do that," he said in an interview with BBC radio, adding that "of course" May would survive.

May will address parliament later to explain her proposal for Britain to adopt EU rules on goods after Brexit, which she persuaded her divided cabinet to support during marathon talks on Friday.

Even ministers who want a clean break with Brussels agreed to the plan, finally giving May a proposal to take to the EU in the hope of agreeing a deal before Brexit in March 2019.

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, a leading Brexit campaigner, criticised the plan in private but has so far has refrained from public comment.

But the truce did not last long, and Davis quit late Sunday with a scathing letter to May.

"The general direc-

tion of policy will leave us in at best a weak negotiating position, and possibly an inescapable one," he said.

Speaking to the BBC, the long-time eurosceptic said he hoped his resignation would put pressure on May to make a stronger stand against the EU.

"It seems to me we're giving too much away too easily and that's a dangerous strategy," he said.

"Hopefully we will resist very strongly any attempt to get any further concessions."

He was later replaced

by Dominic Raab, a eurosceptic junior housing minister.

'Reluctant conscript'

In his letter, Davis said the deal agreed by the cabinet last week would "make the supposed control by parliament illusory rather than real".

He was particularly critical of the plan for a "common rulebook" to allow free trade in goods, saying this "hands control of large swathes of our economy to the EU".

He concluded that his post required "an enthusi-

astic believer in your approach, and not merely a reluctant conscript".

May replied in a letter rejecting "your characterisation of the policy we agreed", she said.

She said it would "undoubtedly mean the returning of powers from Brussels to the United Kingdom".

Davis was appointed two years ago to head up the newly created Department for Exiting the European Union after Britain voted to leave the bloc in a referendum.

—AFP ■

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Death toll from torrential rain in western Japan rises to 109

OSAKA — The death toll from widespread flooding and landslides in western Japan rose to 109 on Monday, with over 80 more people missing and tens of thousands displaced.

Rescue and search operations by Self-Defence Forces personnel and others were continuing in disaster-hit areas on Monday, while the Japan Meteorological Agency

warned the public of the dangers of more landslides and flooding.

The number of deaths is the highest among disasters caused by major typhoons or heavy rain in recent decades — much higher than the 77 during record rainfall in Hiroshima in 2014 and 40 in last year's torrential rain in some southwestern prefectures. The figure is ex-

pected to rise further as damage in affected areas unfolds.

Many people are believed to be stranded in their homes due to a lack of access to roads because of flooding.

At one point, evacuation orders or advisories were issued for up to 5.9 million people in 19 prefectures, while around 23,000 people were staying at

evacuation centres as of Monday morning, according to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told a meeting of a disaster response unit set up to deal with the flooding that the number of police, SDF and rescue personnel dispatched to the scene has increased to 73,000 and that they are "making utmost efforts to save lives."

A senior member of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party said the prime minister will cancel his trip to Europe and the Middle East scheduled from Wednesday to deal with the disaster and visit areas affected.

In Okayama Prefecture, one of the hardest-hit areas, more than 1,000 people were temporarily trapped on the roofs of

buildings submerged by floods following the bursting of three dikes on the nearby Oda River. Most of them were rescued by boats or helicopters.

In the Mabicho district, about 1,200 hectares, or one-third of the district, was submerged. About 4,600 homes were inundated in the area, displacing about 3,000 to 5,000 residents.—Kyodo News ■

8th boy rescued from Thai cave, 5 people remain: military source

CHIANG RAI (Thailand) — Four more boys were brought out on Monday from a deep cave in Thailand where four others were rescued on Sunday, leaving just four boys and their soccer coach inside, a military source said.

The four boys emerged from Tham Luang Nang Non cave, in the northern province of Chiang Rai, after foreign and Thai divers resumed rescue work earlier in the day to extract those remaining in the cave after being stranded there for over two weeks.

The boys were being taken by helicopter to Chiangrai Prachanukroh Hospital in the provincial capital Chiang Rai.

Rescue operation commander Narongsak Osottanakorn earlier told a press conference that the operation resumed at 11 am after divers finished reinstalling oxygen tanks and doing rope checks along the exit route that includes flooded narrow passageways.

The former Chiang Rai governor declined to say how many people would be taken out Monday, but a Thai navy source said it was likely to be four or five.

The rescue team included both divers who participated in Sunday's operation and new divers to replace those exhausted from the previous day's mission, Narongsak said.

He cited favorable factors for a successful rescue, including the fact



A stretcher carrying what is believed to be a fifth boy rescued from a cave in northern Thailand is carried from an ambulance parked near the Tham Luang Nang Non cave in the northern province of Chiang Rai on 9 July 2018. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

that water levels in the cave remain stable amid a break in the weather even as Thailand enters the monsoon season. "Everything is all good — weather, water and the boys' conditions," he said, adding, "We will speed up (the operation)." There was scattered rain in the area of the cave on Sunday afternoon and Monday morning, but no heavy rain as had been feared. Sustained rain could raise water levels inside the cave, potentially complicating the rescue operation. Regarding the four boys rescued Sunday, Narongsak said they are doing well and some already asked for solid food.

Interior Minister Anupong Paochinda told reporters separately that the boys are in hospital and are fine but require

thorough medical checks.

An army commander has said the extraction of all 13 could take up to four days.

In Sunday's rescue, which involved about 90 personnel, the first boy left the cave at 5:40 p.m. and the fourth before 8 p.m., according to the navy. Two divers were allocated for each boy to guide them through the exit route, one in front and one behind.

The rescue of the first four boys had brought joy and relief to the families and friends of the 13, with one school friend of some of the boys telling media that he is very happy and thanking the rescue team for bringing his friends out.

A relative of one of the 12 boys, speaking to Kyodo News, compared Sunday's rescue to a miracle, adding that she wishes to see the

remaining boys and coach get out soon.

Authorities have not identified the six rescued so far.

The 12 boys, ranging in age between 11 and 16, and their 25-year-old coach, entered the cave on June 23 after soccer practice and were subsequently trapped by rising flood waters. Amid a frantic search effort by hundreds of rescuers and support personnel, divers found the group sheltering on a dry patch about 4 kilometers from the entrance of the cave on July 2.

Also Monday, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha visited the cave for the first time since the extraction operation began.

An army commander has said the extraction of all 13 could take up to four days.—Kyodo News ■

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Dated 10th July 2018

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Beyonce leads S Africa anti-poverty festival for Mandela

NEWYORK—Beyonce and Jay-Z will lead an A-list lineup to mark 100 years since Nelson Mandela's birth in a Johannesburg festival by the Global Citizen movement to eradicate poverty.

The 2 December event, which will be internationally broadcast, will celebrate the late anti-apartheid icon and draw a number of leaders in an attempt to throw a spotlight on fledgling efforts to eradicate the world's worst poverty, Global Citizen announced on Monday.

Beyonce and her husband Jay-Z will headline the music at the FNB Stadium alongside several other stars: Coldplay frontman Chris Martin, English singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran, Pearl Jam singer Eddie Vedder, hit pop producer Pharrell Williams and R&B chart-topper Usher.

The festival will also feature some of the continent's most popular musicians including South African hip-hop producer Cassper Nyovest and Nigerian artists Wizkid, D'banj and Femi Kuti, who is the son of Afrobeat legend Fela Kuti.

Global Citizen said it hoped that the run-up to the festival would raise commitments of \$1 billion to help the world's poorest, with half of the amount aimed at women and girls.

Global Citizen has held festivals since 2012 in New York's Central Park on the sidelines of



Beyonce and her husband Jay Z, pictured with their daughter Blue Ivy Carter, will headline an anti-poverty music festival in Johannesburg, South Africa. **PHOTO: AFP**

the annual UN General Assembly to rally support, especially among young people, in the fight against poverty. The group has since branched out overseas with seminars and music in India, Germany and elsewhere.

Hugh Evans, the founder and CEO of the movement, said he expected the Johannesburg festival to be the biggest Global Citizen festival ever in terms of reach, symbolism and lineup.

"On every way that we measure outcomes — the number of

citizens engaged, the number of policy outcomes that are achieved, the number of lives that are affected as a result of those policy outcomes — we believe it has the potential to be the most significant campaign we've ever been part of," Evans told AFP.

Unlike traditional benefit concerts, Global Citizen distributes tickets for free to supporters who pledge to take actions such as writing their governments to support international development assistance.

For the Johannesburg edition, Global Citizen will also hand out tickets to people who are taking direct action for good including community health workers who conduct HIV tests or who instruct mothers on child nutrition as well as teachers and South Africans who recycle plastics.

Mandela as inspiration

Evans said that Mandela offered a model for the Global Citizen movement through his magnanimous efforts at racial reconciliation and democracy as

well as through his focus on tackling poverty and global health.

Beyonce previously performed in South Africa in 2003 at a concert hosted by Mandela to raise awareness on HIV and AIDS. Two years later Mandela delivered a landmark speech in London's Trafalgar Square urging concerted efforts to "make poverty history."

But Evans said that the world was falling behind on the UN Sustainable Development Goals which include ending hunger and ensuring educational opportunities to all children, regardless of gender, by 2030.

While Britain, Germany and Nordic countries are meeting the UN-backed goal of devoting 0.7 percent of gross domestic product to international aid, other major countries are lagging behind.

In the United States, President Donald Trump has called for slashing foreign assistance by one-third, although Congress has largely resisted his "America First" push on aid. "The truth is the world is not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals unless there is greater political will," Evans said.

Global Citizen said that South African President Cyril Ramaphosa as well as the leaders of Norway and Ghana plan to attend the 2 December festival in honor of Mandela, who was born on 18 July, 1918.—AFP ■

Mick Jagger reacts to Walesa appeal in Poland judicial row

WARSAW—Rolling Stones legendary frontman Mick Jagger touched on Poland's controversial judicial reforms at a concert on Sunday in Warsaw, after anti-communist freedom icon Lech Walesa urged the rockers to support Poles "defending freedom" over court changes that critics say undermine democracy.

Thousands of Poles protested this past week against a controversial law passed by the nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) government that has forced dozens of senior judges to retire early.

"I'm too old to be a judge, but I'm young enough to sing," Jagger said, speaking in Polish, according to a Periscope recording of the concert posted by Poland's liberal Gazeta Wyborcza daily.

"You know we came to Poland a long time ago in 1967," Jagger then said in English, re-

ferring to the Stones' first concert in Poland that made them one of the first Western bands to perform behind the Iron Curtain.

"I hope you get to hang onto everything you've learned since then, God bless you!" he added.

The European Union has criticised the law forcing the early retirement of judges as a threat to the country's judicial independence and the separation of powers in a democracy.

Walesa, who won the 1983 Nobel Peace Prize as leader of the freedom-fighting Solidarity trade union, told the Stones in a Saturday Facebook post that "bad things are happening in Poland right now."

"Many people in Poland are defending freedom, but they need support. If you can say or do anything while in Poland, it would really mean something to them," Walesa, the country's first post-communist president,



British rock star Mick Jagger of The Rolling Stones touched on Poland's controversial judicial reforms at a concert in Warsaw, after anti-communist freedom icon Lech Walesa urged the rockers to support Poles "defending freedom". **PHOTO: AFP**

said in the post addressed to "Mr. Mick Jagger and The Rolling Stones".

'Systemic threats'

Walesa's appeal followed turmoil over the forced early retirement of Poland Supreme

Court's chief justice Malgorzata Gersdorf, who has rejected the move that cuts short her six-year term as unconstitutional.

European judicial authorities backed Gersdorf on Friday, urging the ruling PiS party to restore judicial independence.

The European Union launched legal action against Poland last Monday over the dubious retirement rules that could end up in the European Court of Justice (ECJ), the bloc's top tribunal. But the PiS government has refused to back down despite the EU legal action, insisting the reforms are needed to tackle corruption and overhaul a judicial system still haunted by the communist era.

In December, the EU triggered Article Seven proceedings against Poland over "systemic threats" to the rule of law, which could eventually see Warsaw's EU voting rights suspended.

Tens of thousands of Poles have hit the streets since the PiS party came to power in 2015, protesting against its judicial reforms and attempts to tighten Poland's already strict abortion law, among other causes.—AFP ■

Kayin traditional curry cooking contest held in Hpa-an

ON the instructions of the Kayin State Government, the Myanmar Restaurant Association (Kayin Zone) and Myanmar Hotelier Association (Kayin Zone), the first Kayin traditional cooking contest was held at Hpa-an, Kayin State.

The opening ceremony of the contest was held at 9 am.

First, officials delivered speeches, and then, the awards ceremony was held. The first place was won by Mode Keith Dhi Village and they were awarded Ks200,000, the second

place went to Veelice, who won Ks150,000 and the third place was won by Sagaing restaurant with Ks100,000. The consolation prize winners won Ks20,000 each.

The ceremony concluded after the awarding ceremony. — Myo Minn San ■



Judge take some note in the cooking arena in Hpa-an. PHOTO: MYO MIN SAN

China chilli fest gets off to scorching start

NINGXIANGPU (China) — An annual chilli pepper festival kicked off on Monday in central China's spice-loving Hunan province with a chilli-eating contest in which the winner set a blistering pace by downing a gut-busting 50 peppers in just over a minute.

Local boy Tang Shuaihui took home a 3-gramme 24-karat gold coin for winning the competition, which is put on by a local theme park in the county of Ningxiang and is now in its second year.

With doctors on hand just in case, ten contestants each held plates heaped with 50 Tabasco chilli peppers, racing to be the first to finish off the red-hot fruits.

Tang cleared his plate in just 68 seconds in a contest held in nearly sweltering temperatures and as competitors sat in a shallow pool filled with water and three tonnes of floating chillies.

"He finished them at an amazing speed, barely after the emcee had finished speaking," said Sun Mingyong, an employee at the theme park, called the Tanhe Ancient City.

The Tabasco pepper has a rank of 30,000-50,000 on the Scoville Heat Scale that measures the piquancy of chillies, which puts it somewhere between a jalapeno and a habanero.

The peppers bobbing in the pool, however, were of a far

weaker variety, partly to avoid irritating the contestants' skin.

Smiling contestants wearing shorts and T-shirts — some armed with small bottles of water — waded into a vast pool of bright red peppers before attempting to clear their plates of chillies. One man floated on his back in the pool of chillies, chomping happily on the fiery fruits.

Hunan cuisine is marked by its spicy peppers and richly coloured dishes and is considered among China's eight great food traditions along with Sichuan, Cantonese and other cuisines. The festival lasts until the end of August, with a fresh chilli-eating contest held daily. —AFP ■



An annual chilli pepper festival kicked off Monday in central China's spice-loving Hunan province with a chilli-eating contest in which the winner set a blistering pace by downing a gut-busting 50 peppers in just over a minute. PHOTO: AFP

Environment related activities performed by students, parents and teachers in Dawbon Township



Students, parents and teachers from Dawbon Township, Yangon Region, plant various flora as commemoration of School Environment Day observed during the second week of July. PHOTO: DAWBON (IPRD)

China optimizes freight train service to Budapest

XIAMEN — A direct freight train service connecting east China's port city of Xiamen and Budapest, Hungary, started on Monday.

At about 10 am, a train with 41 containers of electric products, clothes, shoes and construction materials left Haicang station in Xiamen, marking the first trip of the new

route, said Zhao Liqiang, chief of the station.

Xiamen launched freight train services to Budapest via Xi'an, northwest China's Shaanxi Province, in January, with the new direct route cutting travel time of the original Xiamen-Xi'an-Budapest route by two to three days to 17 days.— Xinhua ■

Six arrested in Vietnam over online betting ring

HANOI — Six people have been arrested in Vietnam for running an online betting ring based on a server in the Philippines that had attracted thousands of gamblers, state media reported on Monday.

The arrests came as authorities across Southeast Asia were on high alert for a betting spike linked to the ongoing World Cup, and followed a raid in Vietnam on an online football gambling operation last month.

The M88 ring "involved thousands of gamblers across the country" who collectively gambled up to \$87 million since 2015, Ministry of Public Security spokesman Cong An Nhan Dan said in the report.

"Its website is on a server based in the Philippines, (operates) in different languages and covered all sorts of gambling."

The report said the operation covered sports, although it did not state if the ring was involved in running World Cup bets.

Police arrested six Vietnamese people during raids in several cities across the country last week, confiscating three cars and hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash, according to the report.

It did not give any further details on the extent of the gambling ring's operations in the Philippines.

Gambling is illegal in Vietnam apart from the state-run lottery and a few casinos which are only open to foreigners.

Betting or running illegal betting operations carries a maximum jail term of 10 years.

But the law is widely flouted, especially during top-tier sport competitions, when many punters head online or to illegal gambling dens to try their luck.

The government last year announced a pilot program that would allow citizens over the age of 21 with a monthly income of at least \$430 to gamble in local casinos. The move has yet to be implemented.—AFP ■

Belgium's Hazard spells World Cup danger for France

STPETERSBURG — Eden Hazard is one of the French academy system's finest exports in the past decade but he could be the man to end Didier Deschamps's bid for World Cup glory.

Born to two footballing parents in the Belgian municipality of Braine-le-Comte, Hazard's reputation spread across the border and saw him snapped up by Lille at the age of just 14.

Two years later Hazard made his professional debut in Ligue 1 and went on to become French football's brightest talent, twice winning the league's player of the year prize and leading Lille to a Ligue 1 and Cup double in 2010-11.

When a big-money move inevitably came, it was Chelsea who won the race in 2012 with a £32 million (\$43 million) capture that now seems like a bargain.

In six seasons in England, Hazard has won two more league titles and won plenty of admirers. But some doubt whether he has the desire to back up his immense talent and challenge Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi as the world's best player.

So far in Russia, Hazard looks like a man on a mission to ensure Belgium's so-called golden generation live up to their billing by bringing home the World Cup for the first time in the country's history.

Handed the armband by Roberto Martinez despite Vincent Kompany's return from injury, the Spaniard has drawn out Hazard's leadership qualities.

"I think Eden is in a great moment of his career," Martinez said before the tournament. "Look at his age, he is the captain, in terms of leadership — he never finds it difficult to show for the ball."

Leading by example

Hazard's willingness and ability to carry the ball under pressure, jinking past helpless defenders, was in evidence as Belgium claimed their greatest-ever World Cup scalp by beating Brazil in the quarter-finals.

With his side clinging onto a 2-1 lead, Hazard repeatedly carried the ball forward in the dying minutes, drawing fouls to offer the Belgian backline some



Fighting back: Eden Hazard (left) and Marouane Fellaini celebrate coming from 2-0 down to beat Japan in the World Cup last 16. **PHOTO: AFP**

respite.

His leadership was also in evidence with a man-of-the-match performance, including a wonderful assist for Marouane Fellaini's equaliser, as the Red Devils came from 2-0 down to beat Japan 3-2 in the last 16.

In outshining Brazil's Neymar in the last eight, Hazard may have put himself in the shop window.

At 27, he has not hidden his ambition to finally make an impact on the Champions League, which Chelsea missed out on after a disappointing fifth-placed

finish in the Premier League last season.

Long linked with a transfer to Real Madrid, a move to Spain looks more realistic this summer than at any time of his Chelsea career, with Madrid president Florentino Perez often influenced by outstanding World Cup performances and Ronaldo looking set to exit the Santiago Bernabeu.

Even if a move to Madrid does materialise, Hazard will be denied a self-confessed dream of working under another French influence on his formation as a

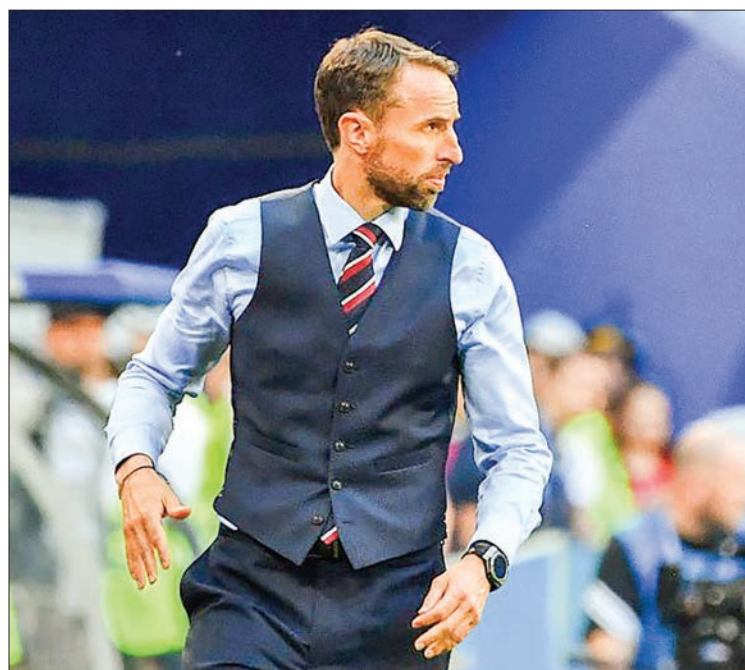
player, Zinedine Zidane.

As a child, Hazard used to study videos of the man who led France to the World Cup in 1998 — and stepped down as Real boss in May, to hone and copy his skills.

Twenty years on, he's just two games away from matching Zidane's feat.

To do so, though, he must prevent France's own talented crop of Paul Pogba, Kylian Mbappe and Antoine Griezmann from following in Zidane's footsteps in Saint Petersburg on Tuesday.—AFP ■

Wear your waistcoat with pride on Wednesday demands *The Sun* of England fans



England fans going to the World Cup semi-final with Croatia on Wednesday should wear a waistcoat as a tribute to manager Gareth Southgate, who has made them fashionable again, says *The Sun* newspaper. **PHOTO: AFP**

LONDON — Gareth Southgate's wearing of a waistcoat throughout England's run to the World Cup semi-final for the first time in 28 years has inspired a call from *The Sun* newspaper for fans to wear one on Wednesday as well.

#WAISTCOAT WEDNESDAY is the hashtag *The Sun* deploys in its headline and calls on fans to "Dress like Boss for Semi".

"*The Sun* today urges Three Lions fans everywhere to smarten up and follow our fashion leader into battle in Moscow," is its tub-thumping message.

Sister paper the *Sun* on Sunday — formerly the *News of the World* — had demanded people don't go to work on Wednesday with a headline "Cancel Wednesday!".

England fan Paul Seligson,

a 61-year-old teacher, told *The Sun* he will heed their call to wear a waistcoat although with Britain currently in the midst of a heatwave he could be in for an uncomfortable time.

"I think it's a great idea," said Seligson, who for the Sweden game on Saturday wore another traditional English apparel, a bowler hat.

"I may be going to the Croatia game as Henry VIII but I'll wear the waistcoat on top," he joked.

Seligson's friend Michael Dobres is also going but not dressed as a monarch but as one of his vassals, a beefeater.

"I'll be dressed as a beefeater but the waistcoat should complement it perfectly in honour of Gareth," he told *The Sun*.

"He appreciates the impor-

tance of an Englishman looking smart when he goes into battle and all fans should follow his lead." Southgate lookalike, airline pilot Neil Rowe, who attended the quarter-final win over Sweden on Saturday after changing his mind over boycotting the tournament, told the BBC it had been tough wearing it in the heat of Samara for the quarter-final.

Nevertheless Rowe, a devoted England fan who has spent around £50,000 (56,600 euros, \$66,500) to follow England over the past two decades, will wear his £65 Marks and Spencer waistcoat again on Wednesday.

Fans have demanded that Marks and Spencer reduce the price to a symbolic £19 and 66 pence — representing the one previous year when England won the World Cup.—AFP ■