

MARINE SAFETY NEWS

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

Habit is habit and not to be flung out of the window by any man, but coaxed downstairs a step at a time. - Mark Twain

INFOTAINMENT DVD 46

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China, Myanmar To Discuss Suspended Dam Project

BEIJING - China says Myanmar has agreed to hold further talks on a major dam project that was suspended apparently without warning by the country's president.

The announcement follows talks on Monday between Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and his Myanmar counterpart, Wunna Maung Lwin, who is visiting Beijing as a special envoy of President Thein Sein.

The official "Xinhua" news agency gave few details, but said the sides had "agreed to properly settle matters."

Thein Sein announced the suspension of the USD3.6-billion Myitsone dam project on September 30, drawing sharp criticism from the Chinese company behind the project but praise from activists who say it would displace many villagers and upset the ecology of the Irrawaddy River.

The dam has also been criticised because about 90% of the electricity it would generate would be exported to China, while the vast

majority of Myanmar's citizens have no power.

The decision was seen as a huge turnabout in relations with China, Myanmar's second-biggest trading partner after Thailand, and is likely to have political repercussions.

Beijing has poured billions of dollars of investment into Myanmar to operate mines, extract timber and build oil and gas pipelines.

China has also been a staunch supporter of the country's politically isolated government.

China Power Investment Corp has threatened legal action over the move.

Wunna Maung Lwin's visit appears to be an attempt to repair the damage to ties, although it is not clear if the project will be resumed.

In a later meeting with Chinese Vice-President Xi Jinping, the foreign minister was quoted as saying that Myanmar "treasures its friendship with China, treats China's relevant concerns seriously, and is willing to work closely with China to strengthen mutually beneficial co-operation." (AP)

Myanmar Seeing 'Dramatic Developments': US Official

BANGKOK - A top official from the United States on Monday said there are "dramatic developments under way" in Myanmar, where the government has shown increasing signs of political reform.

Kurt Campbell, US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, said there had been "very consequential dialogue" between democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and the leadership.

He told a lecture in Bangkok, Thailand, that while concerns remain, "it is also undeniably the case that there are dramatic developments under way."

US President Barack Obama's administration, which has pursued both diplomatic engagement toward and continued sanctions against Myanmar, has welcomed signs of political change in the Southeast Asian nation. But it has stopped short of changing its stance on the country amid continuing concern over political prisoners and human rights abuses in conflicts with armed ethnic minority rebels. "We have made clear our desire to see continued progress on issues such as prisoner releases," said Campbell. "We will match their steps with comparable steps." (AFP)

Political Prisoner Amnesty Soon

YANGON - Officials said on Monday that the government is on the verge of freeing political prisoners.

"Political prisoners will be released. But we still do not know whether all of them will be freed," said a government official who did not want to be named, adding that the pardon was expected "within days."

A second official said the release would come before President Thein Sein leaves on Wednesday for an official visit to India.

An amnesty would be the latest sign of political change under a new nominally civilian government that has reached out to critics including opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, freed in November after seven straight years of detention.

Her National League for Democracy said it was "expecting" all political detainees to be released. NLD spokesman Nyan Win said he was optimistic that hundreds of the party's imprisoned members would be freed. "We are expecting the release of all political prisoners," including student activists, he added. (AFP)

CLMV Seek To Narrow Regional Development Gap

PHNOM PENH - Economists and experts from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV) met here on Monday to discuss the issues and prospects in the post-Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community in 2015.

Speaking at the opening of the seminar, Prince Norodom Sirivudh, privy counsellor to Cambodian King Norodom Sihamoni, said the CLMV have seen relatively high growth over the past years and expect continuous upward economic performance.

However, the starting point was very low compared with other countries in the region.

"The development gap remains a stumbling block of our regional economic integration," he added, noting that it is "necessary for more developed countries in the region to assist CLMV in narrowing the development gap."

"We need to build a strong pool of human resources and strengthen our public and private institutions in order to work hand in hand towards regionally inclusive growth," the prince said. (Xinhua)

Locally-Made Film In Running For Asian Award

BUSAN - A movie shot secretly in Myanmar is in the running for a major award at Asia's top film festival this week with its director saying he wanted to portray the "real" state of life in the country.

"It is about the truth of Burma," said Myanmar-born director Midi Z of his first full-length feature, "Return To Burma." "It is reality cinema."

The film is among 13 wildly diverse productions from 12 countries vying for two New Currents awards at the 16th Busan International Film Festival, open to first or second-time Asian film makers and carrying prizes of USD30,000.

Midi Z revealed he had shot 90% of the film in Myanmar and had sneaked his cameras and a small crew into the country after finding official regulations for filming "just far too restrictive." "It is very personal," Midi Z said of the film, the title of which uses Myanmar's alternative name. "Most of the film belongs to my own experiences." (AFP)

REGIONAL NEWS

Vietnam Expects 'Frank' South China Sea Talks

HA NOI - Vietnam expects frank talks over disputed maritime territory in the South China Sea as the leader of the country's communist party travels to Beijing this week, an official has said. Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong is to visit China from Tuesday to Saturday at the invitation of President Hu Jintao.

MARINE NEWS SUMMARY

CONTAINER VESSELS: NEXT-GENERATION WILL BE LARGEST EVER

If the need is for greater efficiency for road and rail freight during an economic slowdown, standard operating procedures might be to downgrade to smaller and lighter means of overland transport. Shipping lines, however, have a different approach: they build bigger ships. The reason, they say, is better economies of scale, costing them less to send a string of three or four huge new ships across the oceans instead of a larger fleet of smaller vessels. These bigger and newer ships will also have more efficient engines and lower emissions, which also means lower fuel costs, as the company hopes an everlasting impression on its customers. One shipping giant is reportedly spending USD 1.9 billion on 10 new ships, each of which will carry 18,000 TEUs. The new Ultra Large Container Ships (ULCS) will be more than 1,312 feet long and more than 193 feet wide, and will outdo cargo capacity of the world's largest container vessel currently afloat, by 16%. The company's chief executive said that building ULCSs was not only a top priority for the firm but also for its customers, who are heavily dependent upon this in their supply chain. Five years ago, the world's largest container ship had a TEU capacity of 9,500. According to a Paris-based maritime research firm, the container carriers' answer to challenges of sustainable shipping and reduction of emissions is to build ever-larger ships, whose sizes have doubled over a decade.

Among the wide range of issues to be discussed are the two countries' conflicting sovereignty claims in what Vietnam calls the East Sea, said Vietnamese Foreign Ministry spokesman Luong Thanh Nghi.

"We think that the existing matters in the bilateral relations, including the marine issues, will be discussed in a frank and sincere manner," Nghi told reporters last Thursday.

"Settling disputes in the East Sea is a long-term, difficult and complicated process requiring efforts and a practical and objective approach by both sides."

China is Vietnam's largest trading partner, but the communist neighbours have a long-standing dispute over sovereignty of the potentially oil-rich Paracel and Spratly island groups, which straddle vital commercial shipping lanes. (AFP)

Merkel Leaves Crisis-Hit Eurozone For Asia

HA NOI - German Chancellor Angela Merkel arrived in Vietnam on Tuesday, leaving behind the debt crisis raging in the eurozone to push a free trade deal and press the communist nation on human rights.

The trip, which will also take her to Mongolia, comes shortly after Merkel vowed with French President Nicolas Sarkozy a response within weeks to the economic storm which has raised fears for Europe's banking sector.

"Vietnam is an emerging country in Asia, has enjoyed fast-paced economic growth in recent years and is increasingly becoming a competitor for large nations like China," Merkel said ahead of her four-day trip.

A senior government source in Berlin said Merkel would push a free-trade accord between the European Union and Vietnam, adding that Germany "is a very strong supporter" of such a deal. (AFP)

Banks Need More Capital: Fitch

HA NOI - A ratings agency on Monday welcomed efforts by Vietnamese banks to beef up their capital buffers but said lenders may have to do more to shield themselves from losses amid the country's economic troubles.

Fitch Ratings said Vietnam's lenders are thinly-capitalised compared with their regional peers, although credit growth has eased this year and banks have received capital injections.

"Banks in general continue to target rapid growth in a country where credit reached 120% of GDP (gross domestic product) at end-2010, high by emerging market standards," Mikho Irawady, of Fitch in Singapore, said in a statement.

"This exposes the banks to sharp deterioration in asset quality should the already difficult operating environment take a turn for the worse." Fitch said a greater buffer was needed to protect banks from potential losses, and allow for future expansion. (AFP)

Flood Toll Reaches 24, Mostly Children: Govt

HA NOI - The toll from the worst floods to hit Vietnam's Mekong Delta in a decade has reached 24, most of them children, the government disaster authority said on Monday, as it reported a further six deaths. The Ha Noi-based national flood and storm control committee said 21 of those killed have been children who drowned in flood waters.

The flooding, which began in mid-September and is expected to last until late October, has so far inundated nearly 60,000 homes in the country and damaged more than 6,900 hectares of rice fields.

Vietnam is the world's No 2 rice exporter and the Mekong Delta in the south accounts for half the country's production. Total losses are estimated at more than USD44 million, the committee added. (AFP)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

EU Backs Syrian Opposition, Ponders New Sanctions

LUXEMBOURG - The European Union is reaching out to the nascent Syrian opposition movement to see if it could play an instrumental role in ousting President Bashar Assad, whose crackdown on pro-democracy protesters has so far killed nearly 3,000 people.

Diplomats said Syria's opposition needs more work to become an effective political force and gain formal recognition as a legal representative of the Syrian people.

Still, some drew comparisons to European backing of Libya's National Transitional Council, the rebel-led group that overthrew strongman Muammar Gadhafi.

"I believe we have to get to know them better and get to know their intentions," French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe said of the Syrians after the 27 EU foreign ministers met in Luxembourg and discussed the worsening situation in the Arab nation.

Earlier in the day, Syrian opposition members, including representatives of the newly formed Syrian National Council, said they had agreed on a democratic framework for a future nation and that they want international observers to be allowed into the Arab state to examine the situation there.

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said the bloc is planning to expand action against Syria. A third round of measures will be necessary, she said, especially after Assad's "disappointing" speech over the weekend in which he criticised alleged foreign intervention in the country. (AP)

Customs Strike Hits Kuwait Trade, Oil Exports At Risk

KUWAIT CITY - - Kuwaiti customs officers pressed a strike into a second day on Tuesday, severely disrupting air, sea and land trade and threatening to halt oil exports, a trade union official said.

"The strike is still on and we will continue until our demands are fully met," Fahhad al-Ajmi, board member of the customs trade union, told AFP.

More than 3,000 customs employees went on strike Monday demanding a pay raise and improved working conditions.

Ajmi said that movement at Kuwait's border exit points, including three commercial seaports and the only international airport, were "severely affected" and only humanitarian cases were allowed.

As many as 1,000 trucks loaded with fruits, vegetables and other goods "remained stranded at the border posts," Ajmi said, adding that only passenger vehicles were inspected by customs officers.

The oil-rich desert state, OPEC's third largest producer, depends almost entirely on imports to meet consumption needs, especially in the fresh produce sector. (AFP)

World Bank Suspends Loan For Bangladesh Bridge

DHAKA - Bangladesh's finance minister said the World Bank has suspended a USD1.2-billion loan for the country's longest bridge amid corruption allegations in the bidding process. Finance Minister AMA Muhith told reporters on Tuesday that the government is investigating the allegations.

He said the World Bank, the key financier for the USD2.9-billion project, will not proceed until the allegations are cleared.

He did not specify the allegations. World Bank officials in Dhaka were not immediately available for comment. The controversy is delaying the building of the 6.15-kilometre bridge over River Padma connecting Dhaka with the southern region. (AP)

UN Official To Hold Food Talks In North Korea

UNITED NATIONS - United Nations humanitarian chief Valerie Amos was headed for China ahead of a visit to North Korea, stricken by a new food crisis, as the UN presses Pyongyang to give aid agencies more freedom.

Amos will have talks with government officials in China this week, before going on next Monday to meet ministers in the isolated North where the UN estimates that a third of children aged under five are malnourished.

North Korea puts severe restrictions on the movement of foreigners, however, and the UN became so frustrated that it would only send aid to areas where it could get access.

"Those living in counties which remain off limits to humanitarian agencies, therefore, do not receive assistance," UN leader Ban Ki-moon said in a report last month on human rights in the North.

Ban again pressed for more co-operation when he met North Korean Vice-Foreign Minister Pak Gil-yon in New York City last month. Many governments have raised concerns that food aid could be diverted to the North's 1.1 million strong Army. (AFP)

Afghanistan Opium Production Set To Rise 61%: UN

KABUL - Opium production in Afghanistan is set to rise by nearly two-thirds this year, with farmers' revenues from the crop set to soar compared to last year's disease-hit harvest, the United Nations said on Tuesday.

Afghanistan produces more than 90% of the world's illegal opiates from its mammoth crop that continues despite an internationally-funded eradication drive and funds much of the Taliban's insurgent activity.

FINANCIAL NEWS

PETROLEUM

Brent Spot: USD 108.40 per barrel.

FOREIGN EXCHANGE

USD 1 = MMK 6.4100

GBP 1 = MMK 10.0262

EUR 1 = MMK 8.7466

Central Bank of Myanmar

The UN said that cultivation of the poppy crop reached 131,000 hectares in 2011, seven percent higher than in 2010 "due to insecurity and high prices," in its annual opium survey released by the UN's Office on Drugs and Crime.

And with the crop yield per hectare up markedly from last year's blight-hit harvest, overall production would potentially rise by 61% on last year, the report said.

The price of dry opium rose 43% this year compared to 2010 and total farm-gate income is set to increase by 133% to reach USD1.407 million in 2011, the report added. "Buoyed by higher speculative prices arising from volatile security conditions, the farm-gate income of opium farmers rose markedly," it said. (AFP)

SPORTS NEWS

China, Iraq Face 'Critical' Clash

China Vs Iraq: China and Iraq face a "critical" World Cup qualifying clash on Tuesday as Asia's big powers look set to step closer to the 2014 tournament in Brazil. The match-up is shaping up as a tense affair after Zico, coach of the 2007 Asian champions, called it a must-win.

The teams are level on points in Group A behind leaders Jordan with four rounds to play.

"The situation of Iraq in the qualifiers is critical, we have no choice other than victory against China," the Brazilian legend warned.

"China is good and well prepared team and will be playing at home. We have to be cautious but the players' confidence is sky-high."

China coach Jose Antonio Camacho blasted his team as "lazy" and threatened to banish some players from his squad after last week's friendly against the United Arab Emirates, when they were forced to hang on for a 2-1 win. (AFP)

Other Matches: (Group A) Singapore Vs Jordan, **(Group B)** Lebanon Vs Kuwait, South Korea Vs UAE; **(Group C)** Japan Vs Tajikistan, North Korea Vs Uzbekistan; **(Group D)** Thailand Vs Saudi Arabia, Australia Vs Oman; **(Group E)** Indonesia Vs Qatar, Iran Vs Bahrain.

 WEATHER

Mandalay: 24-29c Thunderstorms
 Patheingyi: 26-32c Thunderstorms
 Bago: 26-32c Thunderstorms
 Yangon: 26-32c Thunderstorms

Scots Plot Shock Downfall Of Mighty Spain

Spain Vs Scotland: Scotland manager Craig Levein sees no reason why a famous victory cannot be achieved against world champions Spain on Tuesday that would guarantee his team a place in the Euro 2012 play-offs.

Currently sitting in the European Championship qualifiers at second place, one point ahead of the Czech Republic in Group I, Scotland need a result that equals or betters their rivals who play away in Lithuania.

"We are in a position where it is ours to lose," said Levein.

"A position that I would have taken at the start of the group. If we win on Tuesday, we are second, that's a fact. There is nothing for us to fear."

Levein underlined his confidence in his team to get a result in Alicante.

"We are playing the world champions, of course, but I believe wholeheartedly in the players and their ability to rise to the challenge."

Defending champions Spain, who top the group after seven straight victories, already did the Scots a big favour by beating the Czechs 2-0 in Prague on Friday. (AFP) **Other Matches (Selected): (Group A)** Germany Vs Belgium; **(Group C)** Italy Vs Northern Ireland; **(Group D)** France Vs Bosnia and Herzegovina; **(Group H)** Denmark Vs Portugal.

Beckenbauer Tips Platini For Top FIFA Job

BERLIN - German football legend Franz Beckenbauer on Monday tipped Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) chief Michel Platini to succeed Sepp Blatter as the next president of world football governing body FIFA.

In an interview with sporting magazine "Kicker," Beckenbauer hailed "the super work" being carried out by Platini as UEFA president where the Frenchman "makes a great effort and gets his ideas across."

"I think he'll (Platini) be the next FIFA president. Sepp Blatter will finish by no longer being a candidate because of his age," said Beckenbauer.

Blatter, 75, was re-elected for a fourth four-year term in June.

Beckenbauer added that he was very concerned by the Financial Fair-Play project adopted by UEFA last May, designed to crack down on debt-laden clubs. The initiative aims to prevent clubs from spending more than they generate to play in European competition and will progressively come into force with the first sanctions from 2014-2015. (AFP)

Andy Roddick Survives Shanghai Scare

SHANGHAI - A frustrated Andy Roddick dug deep to beat Taiwan's Lu Yen-hsun, 6-2 3-6 6-2, at the Shanghai Masters on Monday and avoided a second ignominious first-round exit in a week in China.

The American tenth seed, who lost to Lu at Wimbledon last year in their most recent meeting, started the match in blistering form, breaking twice and racing into a 4-0 lead, taking the first set 6-2. But the Taiwanese world No 74 hit back strongly in the second set, striking a stunning two-handed backhand down the line to force a break for a 3-1 lead, which proved enough to level the match against an erratic Roddick.

Clearly unsettled, the American voiced his frustration at noise and movement in the sparse crowd and at a ball-boy, but he refocused and crucially broke in the fourth game of the decider.

Roddick, ousted from the first round of the Beijing Open by South Africa's Kevin Anderson last week, kept his grip as the Lu challenge faded, breaking again to seal the match in a little under two hours.

"He plays so high risk. You know, a lot of it's two sets with two breaks, one set where I had more break opportunities and didn't get it," Roddick said of his opponent. (AFP)

F1 Update

Hamilton Will Bounce Back, Warns Team Boss: McLaren team chief Martin Whitmarsh has backed Lewis Hamilton to bounce back from his recent string of disappointments to win again and be a title contender next season.

Whitmarsh said he believed the 26-year-old Englishman's difficulties this year have sapped his confidence, but he is just one win away from rediscovering his form as the world's fastest and most exciting racing driver.

Speaking after Sunday's Japanese Grand Prix won by Hamilton's team-mate and fellow-Briton Jenson Button, Whitmarsh said: "He's a great racing driver. His heart is in it and he is very open about his emotions. He doesn't like not winning, but it will come good."

"I hope that this time next week we are celebrating one of Lewis's greatest ever victories - and that is entirely possible. We all know he's got it, we know we've got a car that can win and he has got the capability to do it," he added.

"We just have to make sure he has the focus and ensure that we do that."

Whitmarsh spoke out as Hamilton avoided being dragged into a new controversy after a brush with Brazilian Felipe Massa of Ferrari in Sunday's race in which Hamilton finished fifth. (AFP) **Vettel Tipped To Emulate Schumacher:** Sebastian Vettel is on course to become one of the greatest champions in Formula One (F1) history - and has the potential to secure more glory than Michael Schumacher, according to two of the greatest drivers of all time.

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Jackie Stewart and Niki Lauda, both triple world champions, believe the 24-year-old German can go on and emulate his compatriot's achievements providing Red Bull can maintain their levels of car design.

And if he does, it will cement an era of German supremacy in F1.

Stewart, champion in 1969, 1971 and 1973, said: "He (Vettel) is unquestionably the most mature 24-year-old racing driver I have seen. He has made slight errors, such as losing in Canada to Jenson Button, who was supreme that day, but his second world title is an incredible achievement for one so young."

He added: "Vettel's greatest strength lies in his mind management. God gives you your natural talent, but it is what you do with that talent. So many people have let it slip away or abused it. Vettel hasn't."

Lauda, who took the title in 1975, 1977 and 1984, said: "If you choose the wrong car, or the car you are driving doesn't work, then you can't win because it's always the combination of the two." (AFP)

!?! THAT'S ODD

No Turkeys Fall On Arkansas Festival This Year

YELLVILLE - Turns out turkeys don't fly. The "Baxter Bulletin" reports that attendees at the Turkey Trot festival in Yellville were disappointed when no turkeys dropped from planes on Friday or Saturday. The turkey drop is a mainstay of the event in northern Arkansas, though organisers don't sanction it. Supporters say the turkeys can fly just enough to descend safely, but animal-rights advocates call it cruel.

The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals posted a USD5,000 bounty for information leading to an arrest. The Federal Aviation Administration said any pilots dropping turkeys could lose their licenses.

People at the festival wore "I am the Phantom Pilot" T-shirts, and at least one sign offered a USD10,000 reward for the arrest of the PETA employee who came up with the USD5,000 bounty.