

NEW MINDSET FOR 1378

Continue to co-operate with us, countrymen



Following is the unofficial translation of the new year message sent by President U Htin Kyaw to the people on the Myanmar new year day today.

On this auspicious occasion, the Myanmar new year, I'd like to wish all Myanmar people throughout the nation, physical and mental wellbeing. In the last few days, everyone has enjoyed the water festival and beginning today, the auspicious new year will begin.

On such a day of significance, I'd first of all like to express words of thanks to citizens for their overwhelming 'yes' vote in the November 8, 2015 general elections, which has enabled our government to take over the responsibilities of the State. I'd

also like to express my heartfelt thanks to the voting public for giving me the chance to deliver a new year's greeting message. We continue to strive for the release of political prisoners, political activists and students facing political charges and are using the means as prescribed in the constitution and criminal procedures to lift these sentences and to acquit them in the new year period. This is a solution for current cases, and in future, a sustained effort will be made to prevent those who act illegally for political causes or for their own

conscience from being imprisoned.

We believe everybody is hoping that this new year and in the years to come there will bring many opportunities to enable our nation and our people to reach a higher level politically, economically and socially. However, to be able to utilize these opportunities most effectively and to bring about the best results for the country, our government will be required to exert effort with constant vigil and relentless diligence.

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Presidential pardon given to 83 prisoners on Myanmar New Year Day of ME 1378

EIGHTY three prisoners serving jail term in various correctional facilities were given amnesty today, Myanmar new year's day, the 10th Waxing of Tagu, 1378 Myanmar Era (Sunday April 17, 2016), under Order 33/2016 of the President's Office, issued on April 16.

The prisoners were given amnesty according to Article 204, Sub-article (a) of the constitution, the order said. The presidential pardon was granted with an aim to bring about national reconciliation and to ensure the peace of mind of the people on this new year's occasion, said the presidential order.

On April 8, 199 'prisoners of conscience', including political activists and students facing trial connected with political causes, were released from prisons across the country, a day after State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi pledged to grant presidential pardon to political prisoners and other political activists.

Among them, there were 161 men, 36 women and two children, according to the Myanmar Police Force.—GNLM



Dance troupes perform at closing ceremony of the Thingyan festival outside Yangon City Hall. (News on Page 2) PHOTO: MNA

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Bird flu outbreak in Monywa

THE Ministry of Health confirmed yesterday that there was an outbreak of bird flu in a poultry farming zone in Monywa in upper Myanmar, also announcing that as of yet there has been no humans infected.

The ministry's announcement said that it had been taking measures to control the avian flu outbreak to the infected zone as of last Friday.

The ministry said it is carrying out fever surveillance on the workers, their family members and staff of the ministry that were tasked with culling the infected chickens.

A team from the ministry, comprised of local authorities, are combating the outbreak and have implemented a quarantine zone of the infected area and are carrying out sur-

veillance, infection control measures as well as providing medical assistance to those with suspected human infection.

The ministry has established an isolation ward at Monywa General Hospital in order to provide treatment for people suspected of infection. Temporary clinics have been set up at the poultry farming zone and at a village close to

the zone which will provide health care to villagers and raise awareness about bird flu.

From April 3-5, around 7,000 chickens from 13 farms were culled, according to local report.

The same farming zone also saw an outbreak of bird flu in February last year which resulted in more than 140,000 chickens and 500,000 quails being culled.—GNLM

Yangonites enjoy last day of water festival



Traditional dance troupes performing at Yangon City Hall Pandal. PHOTO: MNA

MAHA Thingyan Water Festival celebration conducted by Yangon Mayor concluded at a pandal outside the City Hall in Yangon, with entertainment from traditional dance troupes.

As the last day of performance, dance troupes performed traditional and ethnic dances in groups.

After the performance, Yangon Region Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein presented

awards to the artists.

The audience at the City Hall pandal were entertained with dances and songs from the early evening until late into the night.— *Myanmar News Agency*

Heavy police presence in Mandalay Thingyan celebrations

THE water festival came to a successful and peaceful conclusion in Mandalay Region yesterday, according to local police forces.

Some 2,700 security troops were placed on full alert in the

five-day festival to ensure that the people enjoyed the festival in a peaceful manner.

The presence of traffic police lessened traffic congestion and reduced accidents to a great degree, with a

police officer on duty saying that social organisations had their ambulances ready for emergency use.

The country celebrated Water Festival from 12 to 16 April.—*Aung Thant Khaing*



Heavy police presence seen in Mandalay Thingyan celebrations . PHOTO: AUNG THANT KHAING

Water festival death toll reaches 32

THE nationwide death toll for the water festival, which ended yesterday, reached 32 while there were 235 people injured over the five day period according to the Myanmar Police Force.

Thirty-four cases of traffic accidents were reported during the festival, resulting in 14 deaths and 176 being injured.

There were 16 reported deaths as a result of other incidents, mostly drownings, during the festival.

Pickpocketing topped the cases with 58, followed by 37

cases of grievous bodily harm.

During the five day festival, more than 50 per cent of patients being treated at the hospital were those injured in road accidents and fights while under the influence of alcohol, said U Min Lwin, Public Relations Officer at the Mandalay hospital.

According to Mandalay Region Police, seven were killed in road accidents and fights while two men were found dead in Mandalay moat up until yesterday. Myanmar's Thingyan festival kicked off last Tuesday.— *GNLM*

Less incidents in this year's water festival in Yangon

YANGON Police have thanked the people for their cooperation as the Yangon Region saw a decrease in the number of cases related to the Thingyan water festival compared with last year.

During the five day period of the annual festival which began on 12 April, seven people were injured in two car accidents, 12 injured in eight incidents of violence between revelers and there was one case of death.

Meanwhile, 42 pickpocketing cases occurred during the festival in Yangon.

During last year's water festival, around 70 cases were reported in Yangon, leaving three dead and 69 injured.

This year, police began controlling the sale of alcohol and tightened security before the festival commenced.

"We did not allow revelers to use bottles and sent those who were intoxicated back to their homes. The number of cases dropped this year thanks to the cooperation of the people," said Police Col Pyai Sone.— *Zaw Gyi (Panita)*

Preventive measures under way for possible aftershocks

THE Ministry of Health, in partnership with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, are working on a framework for post-disaster emergency measures to be carried out in hospitals.

The Ministry of Health has systematically prepared

emergency measures for possible aftershocks following the 6.9 magnitude earthquake in northern Myanmar on 13 April.

The preventive measures include effective provision of medical treatment and rapid distribution of relief.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Myanmar migrant workers celebrate New Year in Mahachai

MYANMAR migrant workers enjoyed themselves in the water festival in Mahachai, Thailand, on 15 April, according to the Myanmar Association in Thailand.

Religious organisations conducted meditation retreats in

conjunction with ordination and noviciation ceremonies at Buddhist monasteries.

Offertories were also donated to members of the Sangha on a grand scale, said Ko Saw Maung, incharge of MAT's information centre.—*Soe Win*

Continue to co-operate with us, countrymen

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In this function, the citizens are particularly needed to co-operate to ensure success.

This being so, in our administration's effort to implement such policies as national recon-

ciliation, internal peace, emergence of a constitution that aims to establish a democratic federal union and the promotion of the social life of our people for the sake of the country, we would like to earnestly ask you, the vot-

ing public, to actively continue to co-operate in your respective sectors, to criticize and point out our discrepancies and fallacies where you see them, and make suggestions as to what ought to be done.

I wish you the best in getting through the new year with new vigour, new strength, and a new mindset and mentality.

I'd also like to express my special delight and appreciation for your satudisa donations and

contributions of voluntary labour all over the country, as a warm welcome to the Daw Aung San Suu Kyi led government as it assumes the duties of State.

I wish you all physical and mental well-being.

C-in-C joins New Year celebrations in Pyin Oo Lwin

COMMANDER-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and wife Daw Kyu Kyu Hla visited pavilions of military families in Pyin Oo Lwin, Mandalay Region, on the last day of the Thingyan festival yesterday.

They watched families of military personnel enjoying the New Year celebrations and awarded entertainers with cash prizes. At the pavilions, military cadets and vocalists entertained the public with music and dance. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing joined the celebrations and poured water on officers, other ranks and their families.—*Myawady*



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing participates in the new year water festival in Pyin Oo Lwin. Photo: Myawady

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi undergoes second eye operation

DAW Aung San Suu Kyi received a second operation to remove a cataract from her left eye yesterday in Nay Pyi Taw.

The successful operation started around 9 am at the Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital and finished around 10.30 am, according to the State Counsellor's Office.

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who is also Union Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister of the President's office, underwent an operation on her right eye at the same hospital on April 9.

According to sources, eye specialists have advised her to rest and to limit using her eyes for a few days.—*Myanmar News Agency*

New Year celebrations end at Commander-in-Chief Office (Army, Navy, Air) pavilion



Vice Senior General Soe Win and wife enjoy dances at the new year water festival in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MYAWADY

THE Office of Commander-in-Chief (Army, Navy, Air) held a ceremony to bring an end to the New Year celebrations at its water pavilion in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday, the last day of the Thingyan festival.

Present at the closing cere-

mony were Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services and also Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice Senior General Soe Win and wife Daw Than Than Nwe, Home Affairs Union Minister Lt-Gen Kyaw Swe and wife, Defence Union Minister Lt-Gen

Sein Win and wife, and Border Affairs Union Minister Lt-Gen Ye Aung and wife.

The vice senior general and the union ministers awarded dance troupes and vocalists for their entertainment at the pavilion.—*Myawady*



Daw Suu Kyi's New year's message to be televised

A new year's message from State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will be broadcast by MRTV News Channel and Myanmar Radio following the 7am, 3pm and 8pm news programmes on April 18.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Viettel to invest \$1.5b in telecom network

VIET Nam-based Viettel, has been chosen as fourth telecom operator in a joint venture system with 11 local public companies and Star Height Public Co Ltd. The license will see Viettel invest US\$1.5 billion in Myanmar's telecommunication network.

Viettel, which is owned by Viet Nam's military, will own 49 per cent of stakes while a group of Myanmar public companies will share a 51 per cent stake in the license. It was announced

yesterday that the US\$1.5 billion project will cover 95 per cent of Myanmar's population within three years, according to the Vietnam News. Under the plan, Viettel will build up 3G technology in the frequency bands of 900 MHz and 2100 MHz. The firm said it would quickly supply the 4G service in the 1800 MHz frequency band if it receives an additional license from the Government of Myanmar by the end of this year.—*GNLM*



People cool themselves down at Hlekhwin Taung in Nay Pyi Taw. Photo: MNA

More people get doused on Thingyan's last day

THE Thingyan festival entered its final day yesterday, attracting more enthusiasts and revelers than the previous days to get doused on streets across the capital city.

The streets across Nay Pyi Taw were packed with people enjoying the festival accompanied by entertainment and food charities.

At water-throwing pavilions in different townships, dance

troupes and vocalists entertained the public on the last day of the festival.

In the afternoon, the revelers retreated from intense heat to recreation centres, including parks, zoological gardens and hot springs.

Pagodas in the capital city were also crowded with pious people doing meritorious deeds.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Crime NEWS

214 tablets of Yaba seized in Tang Yang

AN anti-drug squad found Yaba tablets and cash on Tin Myo Win, a passenger in a car stopped at the Tar Kaw Ek check point, Tang Yang township on April 14.

Acting on a tip-off, the police searched a car driven by Sai Aung Sein and found Tin Myo Win in possession of 214 tablets of Yaba, Ks 3.83 lakhs and 430 Chinese Yuan. The police have filed charges against them under the Anti-Narcotic Law.— *Myanmar Police Force*



Sai Aung Sein and Tin Myo Win. PHOTO: MPF

Police search in Mandalay finds hundreds of weapons in vehicles



A combined investigation team made up of officers and staff from Mandalay police force found 295 empty bottles, 75 wooden and bamboo sticks and 72 iron poles in vehicles they searched while patrolling the city of Mandalay. The traffic police also gave educational talks to those in the vehicles to prevent further cases.— *Myanmar Police Force*

Weapons found from the vehicle. PHOTO: MPF

Man dies following fall from vehicle

A man fell from a vehicle while dancing on the roof as the vehicle arrived at ThaungPyin 2 ward, Taungdwingyi township, Magwe region on April 14. According to the investigation, the vehicle driven by Hlaing Min Soe, 30, had 30

people on board. The victim is KyawKyaw, 36, from PyayNyin village was dancing on top of the vehicle when he fell. Zaw Lwin Oo, 17, and Chit MyoZaw, 18, tried to save him by catching him but all three of them fell off the

vehicle. KyawKyaw was seriously injured and succumbed to his injuries while ZawLwinOo and Chit MyoZaw only sustained minor injuries. The driver has been found guilty of careless driving by the police.— (085)

118 tablets of Yaba seized in Myeik Airport

A passenger on an APEX Airways flight was caught with 188 tablets of Yaba by authorities at Myeik Airport on April 14. Nyein Chan Kyaw, 30, who goes by the aliases of Ka Min and Min Min, has had charges filed against him by police under the Anti-Narcotic Law.— *Myanmar Police Force*

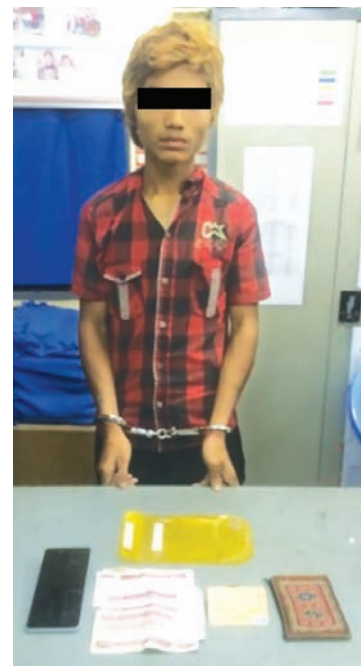


Nyein Chan Kyaw alias Ka Min alias Min Min. PHOTO: MPF

A man charged for snatching mobile phone

POLICE have filed charges against a man on suspicion of snatching a mobile phone on 26th street, Aungmyaythasan township, Mandalay on April 13.

Police officers arrested Aung Aung Soe, 19, who goes by the aliases Aung Soe and Soe Aung in Aungmyaythasan township after he allegedly snatched a mobile phone from a reveler at the Ninja water pandal.— *Myanmar Police Force*



Aung Aung Soe (a) Aung Soe (a) Soe Aung. PHOTO: MPF

Police arrest chain snatcher at Yay railway station

POLICE have arrested a suspect who allegedly snatched a gold chain from a woman at Yay railway station in Mon State on April 13.

According to the investigation, a man approached Ma Khine, 38, as she was talking on the phone. The man snatched the gold chain from her neck and fled the scene. Ma Khine shouted for help and people nearby helped apprehend the culprit and brought him to the police station. The police identified that the culprit is Nay



Nay Lin Aung. PHOTO: MPF

Lin Aung, 29, from ward 2, Yay town.— *Myanmar Police Force*

Illegal squared logs seized in Sagaing

AUTHORITIES seized 10.9 tonnes of illegal squared logs on the Monywa to Mandalay road, in Amarapura township on April 12.

Acting on a tip-off, a combined team comprising officers and staff from Township Forestry Department searched a vehi-

cle driven by Kyaw Thein Tun, 36, with Sai Thu Aung, 17, and U Myint Swe, 52, on board, and found 79 illegal squared logs. The three suspects have been charged under section 6(1) of the public property protection act by Sagaing township police station.— *Myanmar Police Force*

Police arrest pick pockets in Aungmyaythasan

POLICE came across a crime in progress while on patrol and managed to apprehend Kyi Win alias Myet Pyu, 19, from Than Hlet Hmaw ward at 26 street, Aungmyaythasan township, Mandalay on April 14.

According to the investigation, Kyi Win allegedly snatched a mobile phone and a wallet from two people in front

of the Ninja water pandal. The police have filed charges against him. On the same day, the police also arrested Kyaw Swe Tun alias Kywe Gyi, 29, who snatched a Samsung mobile phone, keys and a knife from a man who was playing at the Ninja water pandal. The police have filed charges against him.— *Myanmar Police Force*

India says talks on Rafale jet deal in final stage

NEW DELHI — Negotiations for India to buy 36 French Rafale fighter jets are nearing the finish line, the Indian defence ministry said, with sources saying the price will be set at around \$9 billion.

Both sides had hoped to wrap up the strategic order during President Francois Hollande's visit for India's Republic Day celebration in January, but hard bargaining on price stalled a final result.

A ministry source said the price agreed for the Dassault Aviation jets was around 600 billion rupees (\$9 billion), although a spokesman declined to confirm this on the record.

"Negotiations are in the final stage. Nothing has been concluded so far," the spokesman said late on Friday. Dassault also declined comment. The price named is significantly below that originally sought by the French plane maker. There have been several leaks to the Indian press over recent months that a deal had been reached that proved to be premature.

Hollande and Prime Minister Narendra Modi intervened in the troubled Rafale procurement last year, ordering government-to-government talks after commercial negotiations with Dassault had collapsed.—Reuters



A Dassault Rafale combat aircraft, which has been selected by the Indian Air Force for purchase, performs during the inauguration ceremony of the "Aero India 2013" at Yelahanka air force station on the outskirts of the southern Indian city of Bangalore in 2013. PHOTO: REUTERS

GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

Chief Executive Officer - Nakagawa Kiyoshi
ceo@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

Chief Editor - Khin Maung Aye
ce@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

Deputy Chief Editor - Aye Min Soe
dce@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

Chief Reporter - Ye Myint
chiefreporter@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

Consultant Editors

Jacob Goldberg
counsultanteditor1@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

Alec Wilmot
counsultanteditor2@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

Editors

Ye Htut Tin
editor1@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

Kyaw Thura,
editor2@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

International news

Tun Tun Naing
intlnews@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

Reporters

Khaing Thanda Lwin
reporter1@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

Tun Aung Kyaw
reporter2@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

Translators

Hay Mar Tin Win
translator@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

Proof reader

Nwe Nwe Tun

Computer Team

Tun Zaw, Thein Ngwe, Zaw Zaw Aung, Ye Naing Soe,
Nyi Zaw Moe, Hnin Pwint, Kay Khaing Win, Sanda Hnin,
Zu Zin Hnin

Circulation & Advertising

San Lwin (+95) (01) 8604532

Ads and subscription enquiries:

subscription@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

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Landslide site caused by an earthquake is seen in Minamiaso town, Kumamoto prefecture, southern Japan, on 16 April. PHOTO: REUTERS

M7.3 quake hits southwestern Japan, death toll rises to 37

KUMAMOTO — A powerful magnitude-7.3 earthquake struck the island of Kyushu in southwestern Japan early Saturday, bringing the total number of fatalities since a strong temblor in the same region barely a day earlier to 37.

Over 1,000 people were injured across Kyushu and about 90,000 people were evacuated to shelters in hardest-hit Kumamoto Prefecture. More than 1,700 houses were destroyed or partially damaged in the prefecture, including over 1,400 in the village of Nishihara.

The M7.3 quake struck at the depth of about 12 kilometres at 1:25am on Saturday. It registered upper 6 on Japan's seismic scale of 7 and is believed to have been "the main quake," the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

Earlier temblors, including the M6.5 quake on Thursday night, which registered a maximum 7 on the Japanese seismic scale in some area, are now consid-

ered foreshocks, it said.

The magnitude of 7.3 matches that of the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, which devastated the western port city of Kobe on 17 January 1995. Information showing extensive damage from the latest quakes flowed in almost nonstop throughout Saturday. It ranges from collapsed bridges and buildings to mudslides that washed away homes and closed sections of expressways and other roads, and to

people buried alive.

Blackouts affected as many as more than 200,000 households in Kumamoto and two nearby prefectures, and 380,000 homes were cut off from water supplies in Kumamoto Prefecture.

Police officers and members of the Self-Defence Forces carried out search and rescue operations.

But heavy rainfall and strong winds were forecast to hit northern Kyushu, including Kum-

amoto, on Saturday night, threatening to further complicate the rescue operations and cause more mudslides.

Many of the victims died of multiple injuries or were crushed to death and assumed to have been caught in the collapsed buildings or struck by toppling furniture.

"Relief and rescue operation at night will be extremely difficult as rain and winds are expected to be heavy," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said at an emergency meeting in Tokyo on Saturday. "But I want utmost efforts to be exerted, while putting priority on people's lives."

The premier said the government will mobilize all available resources to cope with the situation.

The Kumamoto prefectural police said they have received reports of 97 cases of people trapped or buried under collapsed buildings, while 10 people were caught in landslides in three municipalities in the prefecture.—Kyodo News



An eight-month-old baby is carried away by a rescue worker after being rescued from her collapsed home caused by an earthquake in Mashiki town, Kumamoto prefecture, southern Japan, on 15 April. PHOTO: REUTERS

UN Security Council condemns North Korea's failed missile test

UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations Security Council on Friday condemned North Korea's failed ballistic missile launch, warning that it was a "clear violation" of UN resolutions and the council could take further punitive measures against Pyongyang.

Experts believe North

Korea attempted to launch an intermediate-range ballistic missile on Friday in defiance of UN sanctions.

"The members of the Security Council strongly condemned the firing of a ballistic missile by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on 15 April," the council said in a statement, using North

Korea's official name.

"Although the DPRK's ballistic missile launch was a failure, this attempt constituted a clear violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions," it said.

The launch, on North Korea's so-called Day of the Sun which marks the birthday of the country's

founder Kim Il-sung, followed its fourth nuclear test in January and a long-range rocket launch in February, which led to new UN sanctions. The council said it "would continue to closely monitor the situation and take further significant measures in line with (its) previously expressed determination."—Reuters

Indian steel policy draws Japanese-led criticism at WTO

GENEVA — India's decision to put minimum prices on imported iron and steel and to impose emergency "safeguard" tariffs on some steel imports drew wide criticism at a meeting of the World Trade Organisation's Goods Council on Friday, a WTO official said.

Japan led the criticism of India, and its concerns were echoed by Taiwan, Canada, Australia, the European Union and South Korea. China, the world's biggest steel producer, commented on India's restrictions on trade in apples but did not join the criticism on steel, the official said.

Japan's representative told the closed-door meeting that the minimum import prices announced by India on 5 February on more than 170 products had significant adverse impact on Japan's exports, and were clearly inconsistent with WTO rules, the official said.

Japan also criticised the "safeguard" tariff that India imposed on hot-rolled flat products to protect its own industry from a damaging surge in imports of those products.

The world steel market has been hit by massive oversupply from China, by far the world's dominant producer, coupled by falling demand around the world.

Chinese crude steel output hit a record 70.65 million tonnes in March, while exports were up 30 per cent from a year ago.



A worker cuts a steel rod inside a steel factory on the outskirts of Jammu in 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

Meanwhile Indian steel imports jumped 18.2 per cent, adding to pressure on the government from firms such as JSW Steel, Tata Steel and Kalyani Steels to step up protection against competing supplies from China, as well as Russia, Japan and South Korea.

The US representative at the WTO meeting also raised concerns about India's import tariff increases on 96 budget lines,

including manufacturing inputs and across the information technology sector, the WTO official said.

India had also raised the customs duty on medical devices and pharmaceuticals, put compulsory registration orders on some electronic products, and required that some foreign products get re-tested in India to standards that were identical to foreign standards, the US repre-

sentative told the meeting.

India's representative said India took its WTO obligations very seriously and said it was premature to bring up minimum import prices at the WTO's Goods Council before discussing it at subsidiary committees, the WTO official said.

The concerns about safeguards and tariff increases would be relayed to New Delhi, India's representative said.—Reuters

Pakistan army takes over operation to flush gang from island stronghold

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan's army on Saturday took over an operation to dislodge a criminal gang holding 24 hostages on its island hideout in the prosperous province of Punjab, the military's spokesman said.

The security operation involving more than 1,600 security forces is now in its eleventh day and is an unprecedented use of force by the military in Punjab, which is the political power base of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

The head of the army's publicity wing, General Asim Bajwa, announced that the army had been officially deployed to flush gangsters from the 10 kms (6 mile) long island in the centre of the Indus River.

"Army troops deployed. Take over charge of op," Bajwa said in a tweet. "Cordon reinforced, Police&Rangers already in op will cont to participate under Army." On Friday, the Punjab law minister had given the gang 48 hours to surrender or "be wiped out".

Pakistani TV stations reported early on Saturday that the head of the gang, Ghulam Rasool, also known as Chotu, a longtime criminal active in the border areas of the provinces of Punjab and Sindh, had surrendered. But the reports could not be independently confirmed and the army's latest announcement indicated that the siege was ongoing in the afternoon.—Reuters

Blue alert for rain renewed for south China

BEIJING — The national observatory renewed a blue alert, the lowest in its four-tier warning system, on Saturday for rainstorms in south China over the coming two days.

On Saturday, heavy rain is expected in parts of Anhui, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Zhejiang, Fujian, Hunan, Yunnan, and Guizhou provinces, the National Meteorological Centre (NMC) announced.

Some areas of Anhui, Jiangxi and Guizhou will see torrential rain accompanied by thunder or hail, according to the NMC. On Sunday, the rain will get heavier in these regions. The NMC issued a blue alert for rain on Friday before this renewal. The public have been told to reduce outdoor activities and prepare for possible floods and landslides, said the NMC.—Xinhua

Japan offers up to \$970m aid to help Syrian refugees

WASHINGTON — Japan on Friday offered aid worth up to some \$970 million over the next five years to help stabilise Jordan and Lebanon, which have been accepting a huge number of refugees from war-torn Syria, the Japanese Foreign Ministry said.

Japanese Finance Minister Taro Aso said Tokyo is ready to provide the aid package which includes a \$50 million grant and a

yen loan of up to 100 billion yen (\$920 million), during a ministerial meeting on assistance to the Middle East and North Africa in Washington. Japan will provide the fund through the MENA Financing Initiative, which the World Bank established in October last year with the United Nations and the Islamic Development Bank, according to the ministry.—Kyodo News

Indonesia moves militant Muslim cleric to maximum security prison

JAKARTA — Firebrand Muslim cleric Abu Bakar Bashir was moved from a prison island, dubbed Indonesia's Alcatraz, to a super maximum security prison, intended for the most dangerous and large-scale criminals, near Jakarta, local authorities said on Saturday.

Hendra Eka Putra, warden at the Pasir Putih Prison on Nusakambangan Island, off the

southern coast of Central Java Province, confirmed that Bashir left his isolation cell at 9am, before being moved by car and boat to the town of Cilacap in Central Java.

With an escort of 50 personnel from the Mobile Brigade elite police unit and 180 local police officers, Bashir was then flown by plane to an airport in Jakarta before being moved to

the Gunung Sindur Prison in the town of Bogor, near the capital.

Asked the reason behind his movement to Bogor, Hendra replied, "He has become old. It will be easier for him to get medical treatment. So, this is only for humanitarian reasons."

His aide and lawyers said they had not been informed about the movement.—Kyodo News

Singapore launches 2nd littoral mission vessel

SINGAPORE — Singapore launched the second littoral mission vessel (LMV) "Sovereignty" on Saturday, which is expected to be operationally ready by 2017.

"Sovereignty" is the second of eight new LMVs that will replace the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN)'s Fearless-class patrol vessels (PVs), which have been in service for 20 years.

Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security Teo Chee Hean, Minister for Defence Ng Eng Hen and Senior Minister of State for Defence Maliki Osman attended the launching ceremony.

As maritime security landscape is becoming increasingly complex and challenging, it's important to safeguard Singa-

pore's maritime borders and a key way of doing that is for the navy to remain a strong force, said DPM Teo. Teo also stressed the importance of innovation in boosting RSN's capabilities to safeguard Singapore's waters.

RSN's first LMV "Independence" was launched in July last year. All eight LMVs are expected to be fully operational by 2020.—Xinhua

In slow dance with capitalism, Cuba's Communists turn to future



A graffiti of Cuba's President Raul Castro is seen on a street in Havana on 5 April. PHOTO: REUTERS

HAVANA — Cuba's Communist Party meets on Saturday under pressure for the slow pace of promised market reforms as it prepares for a future without the octogenarian leaders who guided the country from a 1959 revolution to a cautious embrace of the United States.

The meeting is the Communist Party's first congress in five years and the first since President Raul Castro and his US counterpart Barack Obama announced they were to end decades of enmity and seek normal relations.

The party has been secretive about the agenda of the meeting,

even by Cuba's opaque standards, triggering grumbling among younger members who have grown accustomed to a freer flow of information and contact with the world.

As well as the lack of discussion, party foot soldiers said they were worried that the country had not implemented quickly enough the sweeping market reforms adopted at the last party congress in 2011 to avoid economic collapse.

"The economic plan is still getting on track but it needs to accelerate," said Wilson Batista, who has been a party member for twenty years.

"The world's policies, the

world's economy changes daily and we need to adjust ourselves exactly. We need to get on the world economic train."

Cuba has improved its financial credibility over the last five years, running trade and current account surpluses and restructuring \$50 billion in mainly old debt, although harsh US sanctions remain in place. A nascent middle-class has emerged, making money from small businesses such as construction and hospitality. But in what one Cuban blogger called "paralysis at the cliff edge," the party has not relinquished control of trade or larger businesses.—Reuters

Sanders' tax returns highlight contrast with rival Clinton

WASHINGTON — US presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, who has made income inequality a top campaign theme, had taxable income of \$205,271 in 2014, putting him almost in the top 5 per cent of American earners, according to the release of Friday of his federal tax return.

That figure was still far below the millions earned by his main Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton, in recent years.

Sanders and his wife, Jane, paid \$27,653 in federal income taxes in 2014, an effective federal tax rate of 13.5 per cent, on income of \$205,271, which is their adjusted gross income before deductions. That figure is just below the \$206,563 that Census data show as the lower limit for the top 5 per cent of US households in 2014.

But Hillary Clinton and her husband, former President Bill



US Democratic presidential candidate Sanders addresses a conference at the Vatican, on 15 April. PHOTO: REUTERS

Clinton, had income approaching \$140 million over the last eight years, according to previously released returns.

Sanders on Thursday described himself as "one of the poorer members of the United States Senate."

Median net worth among members of the US Senate in 2014 stood at \$2.9 million, according to the Centre for Responsive Politics, a non-profit organisation that tracks money in politics.

The return released on Friday does not include information on

Sanders' net worth.

The return does show Sanders had federal taxable income after deductions of \$140,994.

Sanders has run a populist effort, vowing to reform what he calls a "corrupt" campaign finance system reliant on millionaires and billionaires at the expense of average voters.

Clinton, in contrast, has much stronger ties to the financial system, including six-figure payments for speeches she gave to several financial institutions in recent years.—Reuters

NEWS IN BRIEF

Four soldiers killed, two wounded in bomb attack in southeast Turkey

ANKARA — Four soldiers were killed and two wounded when a bomb hit a military vehicle travelling in the southeastern Turkish province of Mardin on Friday, security sources said.

The vehicle was on patrol between the villages of Yazdir and Taslikli in Mardin's Savur District when a handmade explosive was detonated, the security sources said. The two wounded soldiers were being treated in hospital, they said.—Reuters

Mali has made 2,000 arrests under state of emergency: minister

BAMAKO (Mali) — Malian security forces have made some 2,000 arrests since November, when a state of emergency was introduced after an al Qaeda attack on a luxury hotel, the West African nation's security minister told Reuters on Friday.

Some 700 searches have been conducted and around 50 weapons seized, said Colonel Major Salif Traore. He did not say how many of those arrested were eventually imprisoned.

"We are the police," Traore said. "We arrest people. We detain them 48 to 72 hours. And after, we send them before a judge who decides what happens next."

Gunmen from al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the group's North African affiliate, killed 20 people when they stormed the Radisson Blu hotel in Mali's capital, Bamako, on 20 November. Mali's parliament voted on Thursday to prolong the ensuring emergency measures another three months.—Reuters

Rousseff scraps impeachment broadcast after criticism

BRASILIA — Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff canceled an address to the nation on Friday night in which she was to defend her government in the face of imminent impeachment, a presidential aide told Reuters.

The lower house of Congress will vote on Sunday on whether Rousseff should be impeached by the Senate for breaking budget laws, a vote that the leftist leader is widely expected to lose. An opposition party sought a Supreme Court injunction to block her speech, arguing that she was using the resources of the Brazilian state to defend herself.—Reuters

Venezuela scraps half-hour time difference set by Chavez

CARACAS — Venezuela on Friday reversed a half-hour time change that was one of the signature measures of former president Hugo Chavez's idiosyncratic 14-year rule.

Chavez turned Venezuela's clocks back 30 minutes in 2007 so that children could wake up for school in daylight.

But his successor Nicolas Maduro has decided to return to the previous system, four hours behind GMT, to ensure more daylight in the evening when energy consumption peaks.

A severe drought is affecting the Guri reservoir that provides two-thirds of Venezuela's power needs, and water and electricity outages are frequent.—Reuters

Suspected drug trafficker nabbed in Lagos airport

LAGOS — Nigeria's National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) said on Friday it recovered 193 wraps of substance suspected to be cocaine inside a passenger's socks at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport (MMIA) in Lagos.

Ofoyeju Mitchell, spokesman of the agency in Lagos, said the drug, which tested positive for cocaine with a total weight of 3.4 kilograms, was detected during routine screening of passengers on an Emirates flight from Dubai.

He said during screening at the arrival hall, officers noticed that the suspect had some items attached to his legs.

"It was cleverly done but not good enough to escape our notice. When his socks were pulled down, suspected wraps of narcotics found to be cocaine fell down on the floor," he added.

The suspect was immediately arrested and taken for further investigation, Mitchell said, noting that the suspect would be charged to court soon.—Xinhua

OPINION

Nothing is beyond the bounds of possibility

Kyaw Thura

TODAY marks the start of the Myanmar Era 1378, according to the Myanmar lunar calendar. In an ordinary year, the country celebrates the New Year for four days but this year, five days, as it is a leap year. The New Year festival, also known as Thingyan or Water Festival, starts on April 12 every year.

What defines it is the involvement of people of all ages and of different social and religious backgrounds in the water pouring festivities.

Since the festival signifies change, we too must prepare ourselves to embrace change. The emergence of a new government led by a civilian president after more than half a century was hailed as a change for the better, with some people going so far as to say that they are salivating at the prospect of new opportunities opening up.

It is, therefore, important for the youth of today not to shy away from challenges that bar them from grasping their dream jobs. It is understandable that young people feel reluctant, as the certificates and degrees they worked hard to get are unable to guarantee them well-paid jobs. The country's declining education standard has deprived them of their creativity and capacity.

Now is the time for them to deaden their inferiority complex by convincing themselves that

nothing is beyond them. It is necessary for young people not to lock themselves up in the common but false assumption "Opportunity knocks but once". It is absolutely vital for them to keep themselves alert so that they are ready to answer the door when opportunity knocks. There is no point in expecting opportunities to enter. They are everywhere, simply because the world is your oyster after all.

Write for us

We appreciate your feedback and contributions. If you have any comments or would like to submit editorials, analyses or reports please email ce@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com with your name and title.

Due to limitation of space we are only able to publish "Letter to the Editor" that do not exceed 500 words. Should you submit a text longer than 500 words please be aware that your letter will be edited.

Emergence of an International Buddhist University

Then the Blessed One addressed the Venerable Ananda: 'It may be, Ananda, that to some of you the thought may come: "Here are (we have) the Words of the Teacher who is gone; our Teacher we have with us no more". But Ananda, it should not be considered in this light. What I have taught and laid down, Ananda, as Doctrine (Dhamma) and Discipline (Vinaya), this will, be your teacher when I am gone.'

(The Last Words of the Buddha, extracted from *What the Buddha Taught* by Walpola Rahula; p. 136)

LAST July, we paid a short visit to a little-known monastery in Hmawbi at the invitation of the Presiding Sayadaw. Before the visit, we had already known that the Venerable Sayadaw would seek our help in his endeavors to establish a Vinaya-oriented international Buddhist university. A disciple of the Sayadaw had already informed us of the latter's wish for the establishment of such a university in the precincts of his monastery. At the time of being informed, we took it quite lightly, thinking that our participation would go only to the extent that an appropriate curriculum was to be developed.

Upon arrival at the monastery and meeting with the Venerable Sayadaw, it dawned on us that it would necessitate our relentless and concerted efforts to make it possible for implementation of such a herculean task. We had to form a think-tank comprising academic intellectuals, skilled practitioners and academics. Almost a year passed as we attempted to take on building up of a satisfactory academic personality for that university including its charter, curriculum and syllabuses, the university council and senate and academic and administrative bodies. Now recruitment of the staff is underway.

In retrospect, with a view to realizing the desires of the Presiding Sayadaw Venerable Vijjananda to turn out the monks who can follow the Vinaya strictly and undertake missionary works in foreign countries, the Working

Committee of the Mahavihara Dhamma-vinaya University was formed at the first meeting held on the full moon of Wagaung, 1377 Myanmar Era (21st July 2015). The committee comprises scholars from various fields and well-wishers from the Rakhapura Missionary Organisation. After a series of meetings on academic, administrative and financial affairs, the opening date of the university was decided to be 12th June 2016.

The name of the university was chosen as Mahavihara Dhamma-vinaya University. It is located near Bodawnagone Village, Hmawbi Township, Yangon. In fact, it is upgraded from Mahavihaya Pariyatti Learning Center established in the year 1364 Myanmar Era (The year of establishment can be more easily memorized by such mnemonic as "Icchasaya hnit coja Mahavihata" or in the year 2546 Sasana Era (This also can be easily memorized by "kyi pwar lo thu kyaung gyi htu sayanbhu sasana" (2002 AD). The Mahavihara Pariyatti Learning Center is the one inhabited by the monks who engage in Buddhist scriptures and meditation.

Historically, at the end of the Third Buddhist Council during the 3rd Century BC, King Sridhammasoka dispatched nine missionary groups to nine different countries. The group led by Venerable Mahinda arrived at Anuradapura in Sri Lanka. Mahavihaya Monastery was established with the support of King Devanampiyatissa, ruler of Anur-

adapura. From then on, Theravada Buddhism started to flourish in Sri Lanka. Today, the Mahavihara Priyatti Learning Center has been founded in tribute to the residing Elders (Senior Bhikkhus) of Mahavihara Monastery in Sri Lanka.

The primary objective of the university is to bring out the virtuous monks, well-versed in Buddhist scriptures and foreign languages applicable in propagating and promoting the Buddha's Sasana. There goes a Buddha's pavaçana "Silaparidhota panna panna paridhotam silan", meaning, "Morality is cleansed by wisdom and vice versa". In other words, wisdom and morality should always go together. Hence, the Mahavihara Dhamma-vinaya University aims at producing many more virtuous, learned monks.

The Mahavihara Dhamma-vinaya University will open its Pre-Diploma Course on 17th July 2016, in accordance with the words of the Elders (Orthodox Bhikkhus): "Live and Practice in Buddhist Traditional Ways, Teach in Modern Methods". The Pre-Diploma Course will last for 18 months (each 6-month forming a semester) and will emphasize acquisition of workable English language skills.

Therefore, applicants need not have basic knowledge of English but that of Buddhist Scriptures, equivalent to Dhammacariya. The applicants will have to sit for the entrance examination that will be held on the Full moon of Nayon, 1378 ME (Monday) (20th June 2016). The interested monks can visit its official website www.mdumyanmar.com for further details.

As for eligibility criteria, an applicant to the Pre-Diploma Course must have already obtained a Dhammacariya degree (Governmental or Private) (or) already digested the prescribed texts for the Dhammacariya course, having obtained a Sasan-

alankara title or a Samanekyaw title (or) passed the Dhammacariya Examination conducted by Pariyatti Learning Centers (or) already obtained a Mahavidu title (a copy of the passing certificate must be submitted). He must not be older than 30 years, having attained 10 vassas. He must also be strict with the Vinaya (Discipline), endowed with the attribute of "Vinayagaruka lajjipesala", and greatly devoted to the Teachings of the Lord Buddha. In addition, he must not be physically or mentally handicapped. This 18-month course is a special training that focuses on Buddhist English and the communicative skills. English will be used as the medium of instruction at the diploma class and higher classes. The student-monks will be provided with lodging.

As the Pali phrase "Vinaya nama Sasanassa ayu" goes, the Vinaya is the life-blood of the Buddha's Sasana. Accordingly, the present university will attempt to produce the virtuous monks, well-versed in not only mundane but also supra-mundane affairs. Myanmar has already seen the gradual increase in the number of international Buddhist missionary universities of both state-run and private especially in the recent years. Of late, Dr Dhammasami of Oxford Vihara has established the Shan State Buddhist University. There will emerge a few more Buddhist universities in different parts of Myanmar in the near future.

Nowadays, world-famous religious universities are making more attempts to understand the essence of the Dhamma (the Teachings of Lord Buddha or Buddhism) and some universities even prescribe Vipassana meditation as a text for students and teachers alike to practice in their daily lives. In return, the international Buddhist universities in Myanmar are also helping their students learn aspects of other religions. All of these interrelated

Tun Myint Aung

disciplines are intended to achieve better understanding amongst followers of different religions, thence, world peace. In this respect, it is no doubt that, in the near future, the result of the emergence of Mahavihara Dhamma-vinaya University will be primarily two-fold; attempts to maintain world peace and at the same time, to propagate the Teachings of the Buddha along with its products of Vinaya-oriented erudite monks.

At present, we have seen a lot of reforms in each and every sector during the transition period of Myanmar leading to a new, modern, developed, democratic nation so as to stand tall in the global community. At such an opportune time, one of the first priorities is to establish a good foundation of social and civic institutions in all concerns - educational, cultural, economic, religious, etc. So we should regard it as one of the chief things needed in Myanmar to have such a prestigious university endowed with Dhamma and Vinaya in accordance with the Teachings of Lord Buddha. With the Buddhist *kammic* conviction that goes thus: "One should reap whatever sown", the Mahavihara Dhamma-vinaya University serving as one of the leading monastic institutions (*Pirivena*) in Myanmar has started to take a step to produce well-versed and erudite scholar-monks included in the Three Gems (*Tiratana*), in order to promote progress that will surely contribute not only to our nation but also to the Buddhist society and to the global community.....

Tun Myint Aung
Associate Lecturer,
Department of English Relating to Pitakas,
State Pariyatti Sasana University (Yangon),

Welcome New Year with positive energy and hope

Following is the new year message sent by Oxford Sayadaw Venerable Prof. Dr. Dhammasami on the Myanmar new year Day today.

Let us all welcome the Myanmar New Year, Thingyan, with positive feelings. Of course, to embrace the New Year with positive emotions requires some effort, to be precise, some mindful effort on our part.

Thingyan, like any New Year culture in the world, is about community. We use a calendar to calculate days and dates so that we can establish good understanding with our neighbours and the whole community. If we live in isolation, the need for a calendar system is limited. So, we can use our mindful energy on this special festive occasion in the Myanmar calendar to connect with the wider community and the whole nation.

The way we relate to the community, especially at the emotional level, determines if we as individuals are prepared to welcome the New Year. This community starts from home. Our family members are the one we have to relate to on day to day basis, from the emotion aspect or otherwise. There may have been ups and downs in that relationship. Moments of agitation, disappointment and frustration are common among the family. Those feelings, if left unmanaged, can accumulate themselves and in some worse cases explode. If a negative emotion is the mark of any relationship that cannot be a healthy one. And, the family will not be able to welcome the New Year with positive energy and hope. The

negative emotion will continue to shadow their attitude and thought toward each other.

This is why it is crucial to look after one's emotion through mindfulness and compassion practice.

When we consider Thingyan, Myanmar New Year, as having its foundation on community value, we can even extend this awareness to embrace our brother and sisterhood in some South and Southeast Asian nations who also celebrate their New Year at around the same time. Thingyan is a national festival also in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Lao, Cambodia and Yunnan of China. Roughly about one and half a billion people celebrate New Year in the second and third week of April each year. And, this festival season is special, not just for Theravada Buddhists but also for the followers of Hinduism, Sikhism and Jainism. Even the holy month of the Christians, the Easter and Lent, usually takes place from late March to the third week of April. If one is willing to make an effort to connect, there can be a real sense of community being strengthened at this time of the year.

However, as discussed at the beginning, for a sense of community to happen and for community members to be able to genuinely embrace the New Year one needs to acknowledge the disappointments and even the hurts that have happened in

the last year. Sincere and mindful acknowledgement through non-judgemental awareness of the pain caused intentionally or unintentionally in the past helps us heal our wounds and build a brighter future. How bright our future can be depends on how well we understand and deal with our past. This healing process has to take place first at the individual level when we each reconcile with ourselves for any disappointment that may have been in the last twelve months; then, as a family we need to talk, acknowledge and forgive each other. This emotion management can also be applied at the organizational level and beyond.

One very prominent feature of Myanmar New Year is the sprinkle of water on each other. This symbolises the washing away and purification of negative emotion from the old year to enable us as a community to genuinely welcome the New Year.

This emotion management and healing begins with a simple awareness of one's own physical vitality, symbolised in breathing. Breathing in mindfully, one may acknowledge the hurt and pain that one causes oneself; breathing out mindfully, one may let go of the hurt. For example, one may sit still for a few seconds and say to oneself: breathing in mindfully, I know I have had some disappointments in the last year; breathing out mindfully, I embrace this pain with compas-

sion.

Next, one may contemplate on family members: breathing in mindfully, I know I have disappointed you/ hurt you; breathing out mindfully, I seek your forgiveness. Breathing in mindfully, I know you have hurt me; breathing out mindfully, I forgive you for the pain you have caused.

Mindfully breathing in, I am aware that there have been some moments of negative words and negative emotions in the last year. Mindfully breathing out, I let go of those negative experiences of the past, just as the peaceful wind blows some leaves away. Breathing in mindfully, I embrace the New Year with positive energy. Breathing out mindfully, I resolve to renew my life with wisdom and compassion of the Buddha. Mindfully breathing in, I welcome the New Year, with confidence and joy. Gently breathing out, may the people of India, Nepal, Cambodia, Lao, Myanmar, Thailand and Yunnan of China also welcome their April New Year, with confidence and joy! May all celebrate this festive happily and without danger! May the joy and peace of the New Year in South and Southeast Asia bring spread to every corner of the world! Mindfully, I say goodbye to the negative feelings of the past year... and mindfully I welcome the positive energy of the New Year.

Mandalay to host summer sports courses

IN an attempt to develop sports in Myanmar by attracting potential athletes and making students more interested in a range of sports, Mandalay Region Basic Education Department and the Sports and Physical Education Department will organize summer sports courses in Mandalay from April 25 to May 20.

The courses will include 16 kinds of sports — football, Karate do, swimming, Wushu, Taekwondo, volleyball, Table Tennis, Tennis, Basketball, Sepak takraw, Gymnastics, Judo, Badminton, Boxing and Futsal.

The Mandalay Region Basic Education Department and the Sports and Physical Education Department opened the 2016 Summer Sports Courses for the students of Basic Education schools, Private Schools and Monastic Schools in Mandalay on March 9 which ran until April 8. A total of 750 students attended the course.

Those who want to join the courses may enroll at the Sports and Physical Education Department of Mandalay.—*Thiha Ko Ko (Mandalay)*

Kawthaung Thingyan Water Festival sticks to tradition



A scene of Myanmar Thingyan Water Festival in Kawthaung. Photo: KYAW SOE (KAWTHAUNG—IPRD)

THINGYAN Water Festival activities in Kawthaung Township were held in line with traditional cultural customs with revelers enjoying water splashing on the final day of Thingyan Festival on April 16.

Township Central pan-

dal was crowded with revelers who enjoyed throwing water at each other and the entrainment of Myanmar traditional dance troupes. Families from respective Governmental Departments charitably served a feast to the revelers.

There were no incidents of violence or crime reported at the celebrations, which has been attributed to the conduct of younger festival goers who were said to have enjoyed the festival responsibly.—*Kyaw Soe (Kawthaung—IPRD)*

POEM:

Hail, Myanmar New Year 1378!

The flames of old year doused, the hopes of New Year ushered in, by deeds of merit, of poor and rich.

The azure dome, green gleaming infant leaves, scarlet *seinpan*, golden *padauk*, carmine *letpan*, purple *pyinma*, snowy *jasmine*, yellow *ngu*, cherry pink, red *taung zalat*, creamy *thazin*, multi-hued *thit khwa*, their beauty in unity, all calling for synergy.

Merry times are here with grains in the granary, sesame and beans aplenty, ready to nourish.

Soon, very soon, it will be the time to awaken the earth, the season to cultivate.

Remember, it is not machines that grow, but it is minds that sow.

Remember, it is not wealth that reaps, but it is man that harvests.

So, let this year of thirteen-seventy-eight be our year.

Let it be the year when men, women and youth of Myanmar together make the land more fallow, the tilling easier and the yield higher!

Myo Myint

Damascus skirts transition talk as Aleppo clashes intensify

GENEVA — Syria's chief government negotiator sought on Friday to steer a new round of peace talks away from the political transition that UN mediators hope to promote, as increased fighting near Aleppo threatened to undermine a shaky truce.

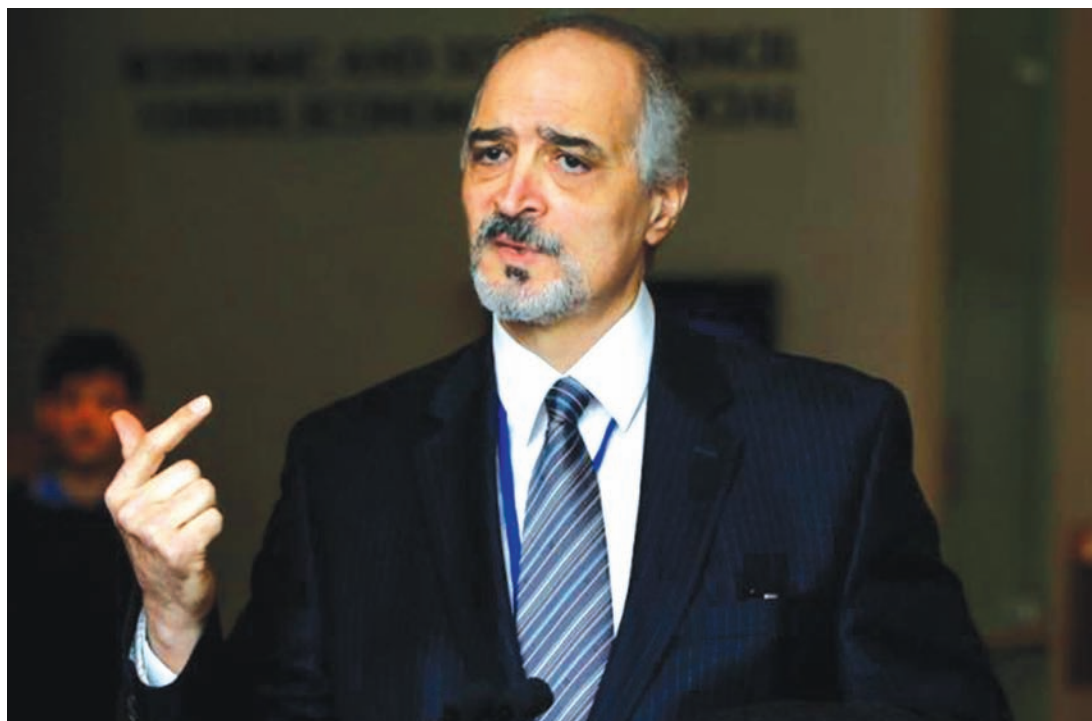
Bashar Ja'afari said his focus was to submit amendments to a framework document for the talks, prompting accusations from the head of the opposition negotiating team that Damascus was "not serious" about seeking a political solution to the five-year conflict.

The Syrian government, buoyed by Russian and Iranian military support, arrived in Geneva six days after UN mediator Staffan de Mistura had hoped to begin negotiations.

The previous round of indirect talks ended on 24 March, with de Mistura issuing a document on 12 guiding principles and vowing to shift the focus to a political transition, which the camp of President Bashar al-Assad has refused to discuss.

After almost two hours with de Mistura, Ja'afari told reporters that he had given the UN envoy amendments to his document and would wait for him and his team to "study in-depth" the paper over the weekend and submit it to other groups.

"We will once again discuss our proposal the next time we will meet on Monday," he said. Ja'afari declined to answer questions, and de Mistura cancelled a planned news briefing.



Syrian Ambassador to the UN Bashar Ja'afari. PHOTO: REUTERS

The main opposition delegation, the High Negotiations Committee, has been in Geneva for two days. After meeting de Mistura on Friday it said the push on Aleppo by forces loyal to Assad showed the government did not want to negotiate a peace deal.

"Today, as usual, the regime ... is sending a strong message that it doesn't want a political solution, but a military solution that will bring destruction to the whole country," said team head Asaad al-Zoubi, referring to intensified fighting in the northern city.

He said the government amendments made to de Mistura

earlier in the day highlighted Damascus was "not serious about the political solution" and "divorced from reality."

The opposition told Reuters on Thursday that it was willing to share seats on a transitional governing body with members of Syria's government, but Assad must leave power and it was now time to discuss a transition.

Assad has rejected the idea of a transitional governing body, saying instead he could broaden the government to include what he described as opposition and independent figures.

Syrian Information Minis-

ter Omran al-Zoubi said Assad's future was not up for negotiation in Geneva or elsewhere, Russia's TASS news agency quoted him as saying in Damascus.

A senior Western diplomat close to the talks said it was clear that Syria's government had no intention of negotiating in good faith. "The regime is doing everything it can to kill the negotiations," the diplomat said.

"If there was one moment when it shouldn't launch an offensive (in the Aleppo region) then it really shouldn't be the day before the government delegation arrives in Geneva." —Reuters

Gun battle kills 15 militants in northern Afghan province

PUL-E-KHUMRI — The Afghan forces have killed 15 Taliban militants and injured another over the past two days in northern Baghlan Province, provincial governor Abdul Sattar Bariz said on Saturday.

The cleanup operations in Dand-e-Ghori and neighbouring Dand-e-Shahabudin districts, according to the official, would last until militants were wiped out from the area.

Bariz, however, did not comment on the casualties on security personnel.

Both Dand-e-Ghori and Dand-e-Shahabudin on the outskirts of Baghlan's provincial capital Pul-e-Khurmi, 160 km north of Kabul, were captured by government forces in mid March.

However, Taliban militants returned to the area over the past couple of weeks and begun threatening provincial capital Pul-e-Khumri.

The Taliban militants, who launched their annual spring offensive on 12 April, engaged in fierce fighting in Baghlan's neighbouring Kunduz Province on Friday to capture the provincial capital of Kunduz city. —Xinhua

Iraq parliament cancels session as MPs challenge speaker

BAGHDAD — Iraq's parliament cancelled a session to discuss anti-graft reforms on Saturday, state TV said, as some MPs disputed the legitimacy of the speaker to chair the meeting in an escalation of a political crisis crippling state institutions.

The session is the third to be cancelled this week as politicians bicker over a plan to overhaul Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's cabinet by bringing in technocrats in a bid to stem corruption.

The session was not held because "parliament couldn't be secured" by the security forces, said a statement from the office of the speaker, Salim al-Jabouri.

The statement was apparently referring to MPs who say Jabouri has no right to chair the session and who met on Thursday in his absence and held a ballot to oust him. They say they have a majority in the assembly, which Jabouri denies.

Abadi has warned that the crisis could hamper the war against Islamic State militants who continue to control regions in northern and western Iraq. —Reuters

Afghan air strike against Islamic State kills 40

KABUL — Afghan aircraft killed more than 40 fighters loyal to Islamic State in a raid in the eastern province of Nangarhar, officials said on Friday.

Although casualty claims by all sides are difficult to verify, Thursday's operation appears to have been an unusually large strike by Afghanistan's fledgling air force, which has been building up its capacity since the with-

drawal of the NATO-led coalition from most combat operations in 2014.

"Based on our intelligence, the Afghan air force carried out the strike and killed more than 40 Daesh fighters," Khogyani told Reuters, using a common Arabic acronym for Islamic State.

He said the militants had gathered to launch attacks in Nangarhar, bordering lawless ar-

eas of Pakistan.

The Afghan army public relations directorate said 42 IS militants had been killed in a joint operation in Nangarhar and a training centre destroyed. It said the Afghan air force had carried out 83 fighting operations around the country, causing heavy casualties to both the Taliban and IS.

Forces inside Afghanistan allied to Islamic State, whose

core territory covers swathes of Syria and Iraq, have stepped up attacks against the much larger Afghan Taliban movement in pockets of the country's east.

In the past few months, the US fighter planes have also struck against Islamic State fighters in Nangarhar, forcing dozens to relocate to the rugged mountain terrain of the neighbouring province of Kunar. —Reuters

Iran calls on US, EU to help it access global financial system

WASHINGTON — Iran on Friday called on the United States and the European Union to help it access the global financial system, including assets that Tehran says were supposed to be unfrozen following its historic nuclear deal with major international powers.

"They need to do whatever is needed to honour their commitments," Iranian central bank Governor Valiollah Seif said at an event on the sidelines of the

International Monetary Fund and World Bank spring meetings in Washington.

"Otherwise the JCPOA (Iran nuclear deal) breaks up under its own terms," he said.

Seif met with US Treasury Secretary Jack Lew on Thursday and said they discussed Iran's expectations under the July 2015 nuclear agreement. Under that deal, Iran agreed to limit its nuclear programme in exchange for improved access to the global

economy, including the dropping of certain economic sanctions.

Lew told Seif at that meeting that the United States would keep meeting "its sanctions-related commitments in good faith" as long as Iran continues to uphold its end of the bargain, a Treasury official said in a statement.

Iran is increasingly exacerbated that few trade deals are going through as foreign banks shy away from processing transactions with the country even af-

ter the nuclear-related sanctions were lifted. "In general we are not able to use our frozen funds abroad," Seif said.

Iranian hopes of rapidly ending the country's economic isolation are fading as European banks in particular, some of which have already been hit by hit huge US fines for sanctions busting, fear falling afoul of the many other restrictions imposed by Washington that remain in force. —Reuters

Latest battle to wipe out polio begins with vast vaccine switch

LONDON — In a huge immunization effort in 150 countries, health teams will on Sunday launch what they hope will be the final push against polio.

Stopping transmission of the contagious viral disease that has infected millions is possible within a year, experts say. And full, official, global eradication could be declared by the end of this decade.

First, however, the vaccine that has successfully fought polio for more than 30 years needs to be switched for one that targets the last few areas of risk.

It won't be easy, or cheap, but the World Health Organisation's director of polio eradication, Michel Zaffran, says failure now — when there have only been 12 cases worldwide this year, in Pakistan and Afghanistan — means the virus could spread across borders again.

Success would make polio only the second human disease to be eradicated since smallpox was banished in 1980.

"Taking our foot off the pedal now could mean polio will within a few years spread straight back into large parts of the world and create 100,000 or 200,000 cases," Zaffran told Reuters. "The job has not been done and will not be done until we have fully eradicated the virus."

For the endgame in polio to succeed, a coordinated and complex vaccine switch is crucial.

Until now, many countries have been using a shot that pro-



A girl receives a polio vaccination outside her house in Yemen's capital Sanaa. PHOTO: REUTERS

tections against the three types of wild polio virus — type 1, type 2 and type 3 — but type 2 polio transmission has been stopped since 1999, meaning immunizing against it now makes no sense.

In rare cases it also poses a risk that the weakened type 2 virus in the vaccine can seep into circulation and cause "vaccine-derived" polio infections.

So from 17 April to 1 May, some 150 countries will engage in a synchronized switch to a bivalent, or two-strain, vaccine that contains no type 2 virus but targets types 1 and 3.

It's a massive undertaking and a major step towards eradication, says Zaffran. "We're entering into uncharted territory. This

has never been done before. But there's no going back now."

That's partly because polio vaccine manufacturers — among them France's Sanofi Pasteur — have moved production to the bivalent shot and would find it tricky, costly, and time-consuming to reverse that move.

Anil Dutta, a vaccine expert at British drugmaker GlaxoSmithKline, which also makes polio shots, is looking beyond eradication to 2019 or 2020, when all "live" oral polio vaccines need to be discontinued.

Then the world will switch again, to "inactivated" polio vaccine, or IPV, to further reduce any risk of causing disease

through immunization. Scaling up IPV production to meet the needs of the entire world takes years, he warns, and work must start now to avoid potential supply concerns.

But prediction has never been easy in the fight to wipe out polio, and health authorities have missed targets along the way.

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative, launched in 1988, originally aimed to end all transmission of the disease by 2000.

And while there has been a 99 per cent reduction in cases worldwide since the GPEI launch, fighting the last 1 per cent of polio has been far tougher than expected.

In 2013, the GPEI said the global fight against polio would require \$5.5 billion in funding, and more will be needed beyond that to keep a lid on the disease.

The virus, which invades the nervous system and can cause irreversible paralysis within hours, spreads rapidly among children, especially in unsanitary conditions in war-torn regions, refugee camps and areas where health-care is limited.

In Pakistan and Afghanistan, the last two countries where polio currently remains endemic, conflict and propaganda have hampered progress, and in the past posed risks to others.

The campaign to eliminate polio in Pakistan is fraught with risk, with Islamist militants attacking health teams they accuse of being Western spies. A polio

worker was shot and wounded in February and in January a suicide bomber killed 15 people outside a polio eradication centre in the city of Quetta.

In 2011, a polio virus from Pakistan re-infected China, which had been polio free for more than a decade.

In 2013, the disease re-emerged in Syria after a 14-year absence, prompting the need for a vast and expensive regional emergency vaccination campaign.

And last year, cases of type 2 vaccine-derived polio posed new threats in Ukraine and Mali.

David Salisbury, an immunization specialist and associate fellow at Britain's Chatham House Centre on Global Health Security, says the last 1 per cent is a "very long tail" on a stubborn epidemic.

"The original date for interruption of transmission was 2000. The next target was 2014 and it's currently 2016," Salisbury told Reuters, adding that even with case numbers as low as they are now, "2016 may be optimistic".

Liam Donaldson, head of the Independent Monitoring Board of the GPEI, agrees that celebrating the expected extinction of polio virus "would not just be premature, it would be folly".

"Polio is still out there," he told a meeting in London. "(It) has fought back with a vengeance at every stage of the game. And it's still fighting."—Reuters

Tracheal surgery using 4D-printing technology successful in China

XI'AN — Doctors from north-west China's Shaanxi Province recently performed a successful and rare tracheal surgery using 4D printing technology on a woman suffering from breathing problem.

According to a press conference held in provincial capital Xi'an on Friday, doctors with Tangdu Hospital inserted a 4D-printed tracheal stent, a tubular support, outside a female patient's collapsed windpipe to keep the airway open.

The 46-year-old female patient had a severe form of tracheobronchomalacia, which causes the windpipe to regularly collapse, preventing normal breathing.

"Her collapsed trachea is inside the thorax and is 6-centimetres long. It is very risky to cut it directly. Placing a stent inside the windpipe is also impossible because the narrowest section is only three millimetres wide," said Li Xiaofei, director with Tangdu's department of thoracic

surgery. The hospital worked with several other institutions, including 3D printing research centre with the Fourth Military Medical University, to produce the stent made of a biomaterial called polycaprolactone, which dissolves over time.

"4D printing technology is new," said Cao Tiesheng, director with the centre. "It involves 3D printing items that are designed to change over time."

Cao pointed out that for this operation, doctors set the dissolving time of the printed stent beforehand.

It will be gradually absorbed by the patient in two or three years. "The patient does not need to undergo another operation to remove the stent."

The patient has recovered and will be discharged from the hospital soon.

"The long-term effects will be observed. But this successful operation will bring changes to other operations," said Li Xiaofei.—Xinhua



PHOTO: REUTERS

Chile has world's highest rate of depression: WHO official

SANTIAGO — A total of 17 per cent of Chile's population suffer from depression, the highest rate in the world, a World Health Organisation (WHO) official said here Friday, citing a WHO study published on *The Lancet*.

This is the reason "why we feel a law (to address mental health) is necessary," said Roberto Aguila, the WHO's representative in the South American country, at a press conference.

In Chile, 26 per cent of work

absences due to medical reasons are related to mental health, Aguila said, citing the report.

The study also provides detailed estimates of the economic advantages that public investment on mental health will bring to countries.

"Investment (in worldwide mental health) is returned four times through gains in productivity and the well-being of workers," the representative said.

At the moment, governments

only spend 3 per cent of their healthcare spending on mental health, with developed countries spending an average of 5 per cent but emerging economies only 1 per cent, according to the WHO figures.

The study, entitled "Scaling-Up Treatment of Depression and Anxiety: A Global Return on Investment Analysis," was published in *The Lancet*, a well-known weekly medical journal on 13 April.—Xinhua

G20 reiterates commitments to using all policy tools for growth

WASHINGTON — Finance leaders from the Group of 20 leading economies on Friday reiterated their commitments to using all policy tools, including monetary, fiscal and structural instruments, to foster confidence and strengthen growth.

“Downside risks and uncertainties to the global outlook persist against the backdrop of continued financial volatility, challenges faced by commodity exporters and low inflation,” said the G20 finance ministers and central bank governors in a communique issued on Friday.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Tuesday lowered its forecast for global growth in 2016 down to 3.2 per cent, saying that the global economy grows at a sluggish pace that leaves the world economy more exposed to risks.

In the communique, the G20 finance ministers and central bank governors highlighted the risks of a potential UK exit, also

known as “Brexit,” from the European Union. “Geopolitical conflicts, terrorism, refugee flows, and the shock of a potential UK exit from the European Union also complicate the global economic environment,” said the communique.

The heads of the World Bank and the IMF on Thursday also emphasized that Brexit is an “uncertainty” and “one of the serious down side risks” for British and world economy.

In order to restore confidence and shore up the growth, the G20 members repeated its earlier pledges to use all policy tools — monetary, fiscal and structural ones, individually and collectively.

They also reiterated their commitment to refraining from using exchange rates for competitive advantage. “We reaffirm our previous exchange-rate commitments, including that we will refrain from competitive devaluations and we will not target our exchange rates for competitive purposes,”



Finance ministers and central bankers of the G20 pose for a family photo after G20 meeting during the IMF and World Bank spring meetings in Washington DC, capital of the United States, on 15 April. PHOTO: XINHUA

said the G20 finance ministers and central bank governors in the communique.

The G20 members also moved a step forward vowing to curb tax evasion and money laundering. In the communique, the G20 economies called on relevant countries, including all

financial centres and jurisdictions, to commit to implementing the standard on automatic exchange of information by 2017 or 2018.

According to the communique, G20 members will consider “defensive measures” against non-cooperative jurisdictions with

respect to tax transparency and work with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to establish objective criteria for identifying non-cooperative jurisdictions by G20’s July meeting.

The Group of 20 in-

clude Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States and the European Union.—Xinhua

Obamas donated less to charities in 2015 as income slipped

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle donated less to charities in 2015 as their income also dipped, tax returns released by the White House showed on Friday.

The Obamas donated \$64,066 to 34 charities last year, down nearly 9.4 per cent from their donations of \$70,712 in 2014 to 33 charities.

For both years, the cou-

ple donated slightly less than 15 per cent of their income to charity. On average, Americans donate about 3 per cent of their income to charity, according to the Chronicle of Philanthropy.

The Obamas earned \$436,065 in 2015, down nearly 8.7 per cent from \$477,383 in 2014, continuing a downward trend as sales of the president’s books slowed.

As president, Obama is entitled to a \$400,000 annual salary. Most of the rest of the couple’s income came from the book sales.

Their top charity donation of \$9,066 went to Fisher

House Foundation, which provides housing for military families near military hospitals. The couple gave the organisation \$22,012 in 2014.

The couple also gave \$5,000 to the Beau Biden Foundation, an organisation that honors the life of Vice President Joe Biden’s son, who died of brain cancer last year. The Obamas paid \$81,472 in total tax, with an effective federal income tax rate of 18.7 per cent.

Biden and his wife Jill, a community college professor, reported a combined income of \$392,233, up from \$388,844 in 2014.—Reuters

South Africa’s Zuma to launch ANC manifesto in Mandela Bay

PORT ELIZABETH — South African President Jacob Zuma launches his African National Congress’s election manifesto on Saturday in Port Elizabeth, where the party risks losing an important local poll in August.

Losing power in Nelson Mandela Bay municipality would be doubly embarrassing for Zuma and his party since the area was a stronghold of the ANC’s fight against apartheid and later named after its greatest liberation hero.

The president has

faced calls to resign from within the ANC since a court ruled this month that he breached the constitution by ignoring an order to repay some of the \$16 million in state funds spent renovating his private home.

Zuma survived an impeachment vote last week thanks to the ANC’s big majority in the 400-seat national assembly and hopes to now put the scandal behind him. He is required by law to step down in 2019 after two five-year terms.—Reuters



US President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle talk with the staff of the US embassy at a Havana hotel, soon after their arrival for a three-day trip, on 20 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV IRRAWADDY STAR VOY NO (003N)

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

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

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Greece must stop locking up child migrants, charity warns ahead of pope's visit

LONDON — At least 1,500 unaccompanied migrant and refugee children stranded in Greece have nowhere safe to stay, with many sleeping rough in the cold and others incarcerated, a charity warned on Saturday ahead of Pope Francis' visit to Lesbos.

Save the Children said Greece must stop locking up children and called on the European Union to help open more safe shelters for them.

"Children ... are sleeping rough in increasingly volatile unofficial accommodation sites, are being incarcerated in detention centres and are slipping through the cracks of the system," said Amy Frost, Save the Children's team leader in Greece.

"They are at risk of violence, abuse and exploitation by people traffickers."

The children — some as young as 10 — come from countries including

Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Many have fled war and other violence. Some have travelled alone to Europe, while others have become separated from their families.

Pope Francis will visit the Greek island of Lesbos on Saturday in a trip which aims to draw attention to the frontline of Europe's migrant crisis.

Hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees entered Europe last year after crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Greece.

But the European Union last month struck a controversial deal with Turkey aimed at closing the Aegean route, and Balkan states have closed their borders.

The closures have left an estimated 2,000 unaccompanied children trapped in Greece, but Save the Children said there were just 477 shelter spaces for them in the country.—Reuters



Migrant children play with rubber bullets and empty cases at a makeshift camp for refugees and migrants at the Greek-Macedonian border near the village of Idomeni, Greece, on 11 April. PHOTO: REUTERS

British royals hike to mountain monastery in Bhutan

PARO VALLEY (Bhutan) — Britain's Duke and Duchess of Cambridge trekked on Friday to a Buddhist monastery on a mountainside in Bhutan, going one better than the duke's father, Prince Charles, who on a 1998 trip broke off his hike to paint a watercolour.

Prince William and wife Kate dressed down for the three-hour expedition to the so-called Tiger's Nest that is perched on a mountainside at 3,000 metres (10,000 feet).

Kate's outfit featured knee-length boots, olive trousers and a leather waistcoat, while William wore an open-necked shirt and beige slacks. The couple stopped along the way to smile for the cameras before the back-drop of the 17th century Taktsang Palphug Monastery across the Paro valley.

"It was amazing," William said after the climb.

"Beautiful scenery as you saw and with the mountains like this, the temples at the top — it was just stunning to walk up there," he added in a sentiment echoed by Kate.

William admitted that after an easy start "it was a little bit cheeky on the second part, definitely."

Reminded of Prince Charles' visit, he said: "Well, my father didn't



Britain's Prince William, Duke of Cambridge and his wife Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, spin prayer wheels at the Paro Taktsang Monastery, Bhutan, on 15 April. PHOTO: REUTERS

make it to the top. That's something I'll be reminding him of when I see him."

Porters were on hand, including one with an oxygen cylinder, but the couple — William is 33, Kate a year older — managed without difficulty as they walked earlier hand-in-hand through sunlit wooded uplands.

The royal couple finally got some time to themselves on the sixth day of their hectic tour of India and Bhutan, where they were welcomed on Thursday by the young — and equally glamorous — king and queen of the tiny Himalayan nation.

On Saturday, they return to India to visit the Taj Mahal, which was built in 1632 by Moghul Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his favourite wife.

William's mother, the late Princess Diana, visited in 1992 and was memorably photographed sitting alone on a bench on front of the marble mausoleum, in an image that came to symbolise her unhappy marriage.

Indian newspapers have reported that the British High Commission had asked for scaffolding, erected for repair work, to be removed from the onion-domed Taj

Mahal. The Archaeological Survey of India turned down the request.

There are also concerns that the site may be overrun by tourists when William and Kate are there, as it only closes for visits by heads of state or government. The British High Commission in New Delhi did not reply to a request for comment.

There has been fierce competition among news organisations trying to secure the best spot on a viewing platform for the most sought after shot of William, second in line to the throne, and Kate.—Reuters

Firefighter fatally shot bringing aid to Maryland resident, suspect arrested

WASHINGTON — One firefighter was killed and a second was critically wounded on Friday by gunfire at a Maryland residence where the pair had answered a medical distress call, and the suspect who fired on them from inside the home was in custody, officials said.

The firefighters were responding to a call in the Washington, DC suburb of

Temple Hills, the Prince George's County Fire Department said.

Both firefighters were in critical condition and transported to area hospitals following the evening shooting. One firefighter succumbed to his injuries later on Friday. The second firefighter, a volunteer, was in serious condition and undergoing surgery.

While details of the incident were still under investigation, the firefighters arrived at the home in the evening to conduct a routine welfare check on a resident prompted by a concerned neighbour, the department said.

"The resident in the home was not responsive so a decision was made to gain entry to the home and check

on that person's welfare," Prince George's County Police Chief Hank Stawinski told reporters.

"As that was unfolding, the individual inside the home fired a number of rounds, striking two Prince George's County firefighters and the concerned individual who had led public safety to that address," Stawinski said.—Reuters

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

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Artists from Cirque du Soleil perform at the Royal Albert Hall in London, in 2014. PHOTO: REUTERS

Cirque du Soleil cancels North Carolina shows over transgender law

WINSTON-SALEM — Cirque du Soleil said on Friday it was cancelling shows in North Carolina over a new state law that it called discriminatory, the performance group said on Friday, becoming the latest entertainment act to take a stance against the measure.

“The new HB2 legislation passed in North Carolina is an important regression to ensuring human rights for all ... Cirque du Soleil believes in equality for all,” the group said in an online statement.

North Carolina last month became the first state to enact a measure requiring transgender people to use restrooms and

locker rooms in schools and other public facilities that correspond with their birth gender instead of the gender with which they identify.

The law also prohibits local governments from enacting anti-discrimination protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Former Beatles drummer Ringo Starr and rock star Bruce Springsteen have canceled concerts in the state in protest of the law. Singer Cyndi Lauper said she would donate the profits of her June show in Raleigh to efforts to repeal it.

The decision by Cirque du Soleil, a privately held Canadian

company, affects performances scheduled through July in Greensboro, Charlotte and Raleigh.

More than 160 business executives have signed a Human Rights Campaign letter pushing for the law to be repealed, and PayPal Holdings (PYPL.O) and Deutsche Bank (DBKGn.DE) halted plans to add jobs in the state.

The National Basketball Association said on Friday that it had not yet decided whether to move the 2017 All-Star Game out of Charlotte in reaction to the law.

“The current state of the law is problematic for the league, but

we’re not making any announcements now,” Silver told a news conference after a two-day NBA board of governors meeting in New York. “We can be most constructive by working with the elected officials to effect change.”

North Carolina Republican Governor Pat McCrory on Tuesday tweaked the law with an executive order, adding protections against discrimination for state employees based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

But McCrory and top Republican lawmakers have stood firm on the provision targeting transgender bathroom access.—*Reuters*

Drew Barrymore’s puppy love

NEW YORK — Drew Barrymore was given a special honour by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) as it celebrated its 150th year with a celebrity gala in New York on Thursday. The “Charlie’s Angels” actress, who last week announced her separation from husband Will Kopelman, has adopted and fostered many abandoned dogs.

The event drew dozens of celebrities, many with their pets, including lifestyle guru Martha Stewart, Pink Floyd rocker Roger Waters, and actor Nathan Lane, who was the emcee for the gala. Lane said the ASPCA is doing important work for animals. “We’re giving a voice to them, We’re helping them, they need our help. It’s been a great organisation — it’s 150 years now.. It’s great that it’s still going strong and doing this kind of work.”—*Reuters*



PHOTO: REUTERS

Victoria Beckham coming up with new makeup collection

LOS ANGELES — Fashion designer Victoria Beckham is set to launch her new makeup collection.

The 41-year-old fashionista has teamed up with cosmetic brand Estee Lauder for her latest project, reported *Aceshowbiz*.

“I am thrilled to be launching this limited-edition makeup collection with Estee Lauder. The whole process has been both inspiring and eye-opening... This feels like the perfect makeup partnership for me and my brand,” Victoria said in a statement.

“I had long admired Estee Lauder the woman, and the powerful brand that she created, so I am excited to offer both of our customers this makeup range and play a small part in her vision for women,” she added.

In November last year the Spice Girls alum had hinted at her endeavour to come up with a cosmetic line of her own.—*PTI*

I’m in a magical relationship right now: Taylor Swift

LOS ANGELES — Singer Taylor Swift says her relationship with boyfriend Calvin Harris is “magical”.

The 26-year-old “Bad Blood” hitmaker said she is not thinking about future and is taking things as they come, reported *Us* magazine.

“I’m just taking things as they come. I’m in a magical relationship right now. And of course I want it to be ours, and low-key. This is the one thing that’s been mine about my personal life,” Swift said.

The songstress said she has grown since her early twenties, when she very publicly dated celebrities like Jake Gyllenhaal and Harry Styles.

“You know, I went out on a normal amount of dates in my early twenties, and I got absolutely slaughtered for it. And it took a lot of hard work and altering my decision-making.

“I didn’t date for two and a half years. Should I have had to do that? No... I’ve had people say really hurtful things about me, and so I’ve kind of learned how to gauge it: ‘This is, like, low-to-medium-level hurtful.’,” she said.

Swift and 32-year-old Scottish DJ made their relationship public early last year.—*PTI*



Taylor Swift. PHOTO: REUTERS



Mickey Mouse and other characters dance during a special show, which was opened to the media at Tokyo DisneySea in Urayasu, east of Tokyo, on 11 April 2016, prior to an event from 15 April to mark the 15th anniversary of the theme park's opening. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

15th anniversary events start at Tokyo DisneySea

CHIBA (Japan) — A series of 15th anniversary events began Friday at the DisneySea theme park east of Tokyo.

Special attractions will be held through mid-March next year on a theme of "Wishing" — beginning with the "Crystal Wish Journey" dance show by Disney characters at the park's Mediterranean Harbor area from Friday.

The park, featuring attractions related to the sea, opened in September 2001 in Urayasu, Chiba Prefecture, next to Tokyo Dis-

neyland, which started operations in April 1983.

Tokyo DisneySea and Disneyland had together drawn a total of 660 million visitors by the end of March.

Tokyo DisneyResort operator Oriental Land Co. had planned to hold an opening ceremony for the anniversary events Friday but canceled the idea following a magnitude-6.5 quake that hit Kumamoto Prefecture, southwestern Japan, on Thursday night. —Kyodo News

Some 500,000 world visitors coming to Thailand's Songkran festival

BANGKOK — An estimated 500,000 world visitors are joining the water splashing Songkran festival, beginning on Wednesday, at varied tourist spots throughout Thailand, Thai tourist official said.

According to Yuthasak Supasorn, governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), some 500,000 visitors from China, Europe, Southeast Asia and elsewhere around the globe are coming to join the nationwide,

annual festival which lasts for five days. The foreigners would mingle with Thais at selected venues to splash water onto each other under the scorching sun.

About 433 million US dollars are expected to be spent in Thailand during the Songkran festival, and some 234 million dollars of the total are from the pockets of the foreign visitors, the TAT governor said. The estimated number of foreign revelers during the current festival

is 26 per cent up over last year and their combined expenditure represents a 34 per cent increase from last year, he said.

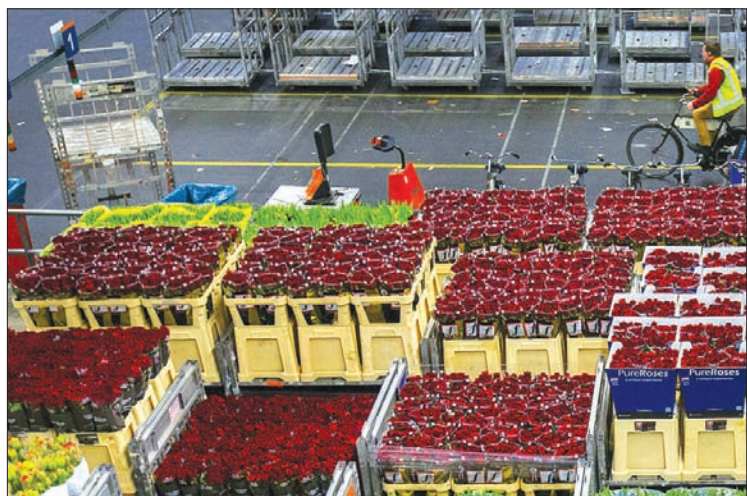
The foreign visitors are expected to stay an average of three days for the fun-filled festival.

Favourite Songkran venues include Khaosarn Road and Si-lom Road in the heart of the Thai capital, and Phuket, Koh Samui and Krabi in southern Thailand and Chiang Mai in the northern region. —Xinhua



A woman splashes water during the Songkran Festival celebration near Bangkok, Thailand, on 13 April 2016. Songkran Festival, also known as water festival, is celebrated in Thailand as the traditional New Year's Day, which began on Wednesday. PHOTO: XINHUA

Beyond the tulip fields, Dutch flower market draws tourists



Flowers are prepared at a FloraHolland warehouse in Aalsmeer, the Netherlands, on 16 March. PHOTO: REUTERS

THE HAGUE — Warehouses are not normally tourist stops, but one exception is the century-old Royal FloraHolland depot outside of Amsterdam where millions of flowers are distributed every day.

The same tourists who flock to the flower barges in central Amsterdam get up at dawn and pay 7 euros (\$8) to visit the warehouse. It is the size of 400 football fields and some 20,000 varieties of flowers and plants are sold there.

Each morning, the world's largest flower market swings into action by 6am, when a cooperative founded in 1911 by Dutch

growers holds an auction where bidders buy products to be exported all over the world.

Chances are that the flowers for weddings in London, birthdays in Spain and funerals in Germany passed — quickly — through FloraHolland.

By the time the doors open for visitors at 7am, dozens of electric carts pulling trolleys stacked with flowers and plants are zipping across the warehouse floor, sending scents floating toward the rafters.

While it is the opportunity to see millions of flowers at once that draws tourists, equally striking is the logistical prowess of

the cooperative, founded to bring the supply of a highly perishable product into a single space.

Within 90 minutes, flowers bought at the auction are delivered to the buyers, who load them onto trucks and send them speeding toward every corner of Europe or flown around the world.

Today the market has some 4,500 members from countries including Kenya, Ethiopia, Israel, Colombia, Ecuador, Belgium, Italy and Britain, with 4.5 billion euros (\$5 billion) in annual revenue, helping to make the Netherlands the largest exporter of cut flowers in the world. —Reuters



Entertainment Channel

(17- 4-2016, Sunday)

6:00 pm

- Weather Report
- Music Programme

6:40 pm

- Sitagu International Buddhist Academy (Part-1)

7:00 pm

- Myanmar Video

8:40 pm

- Music Programme

8:50 pm

- Bogalay Tint Aung: A Man of Versatility (Part- 2)

9:20 pm

- International Movie Songs

9:30 pm

- Myanmar Video

* Night 9:30 pm — Live: "English Premier League "ARSENAL Vs CRYSTAL PALACE"

From 17-4-2016 (Sunday) 6:00 Pm
To 18-4-2016 (Monday) 6:00 Pm



Myanmar International

(17-4-2016 07:00am ~ 18-4-2016 7:00am) MST

Today Fresh

07:03	Am	News
07:26	Am	Sitagu International Buddhist Academy (Part-2)
07:45	Am	Visiting A Serene Village In The Northwest of Myanma
08:03	Am	News
08:26	Am	The Precious Lands of Myanmar (Mandalay Region)
09:03	Am	News
09:25	Am	Wonderful Indonesia
09:52	Am	Coin Collectors
10:03	Am	News

10:25	Am	"Myanmar's Traditions and Culture"
		Myanmar's Secret Beautifier
10:49	Am	Grow Back For Posterity "The Dawn of Development"

(11:00 Am ~ 03:00 Pm) - Saturday Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(03:00 Pm ~ 07:00 Pm) - Today Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)

Prime Time

07:03	Pm	News
07:26	Pm	Dawei -Tavoy, Travel To The Southern Part of Myanmar
07:45	Pm	Hip-Hop and Design
07:50	Pm	Today Myanmar
08:03	Pm	News
08:26	Pm	The Writer: Chit Oo Nyo (Part-I)
08:52	Pm	Myanmar Masterclass: Impressionism

(09:00 Pm ~ 11:00 Pm) - Today Repeat (09:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(11:00 Pm ~ 03:00 Am) - Saturday Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(03:00 Am ~ 07:00 Am) - Today Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(For Detailed Schedule – www.myanmaritv.com/schedule)

Federer knocked out by Tsonga in Monte Carlo

MONACO — Roger Federer was knocked out of the Monte Carlo Masters when he slumped to a 3-6, 6-2, 7-5 defeat by local favourite Jo-Wilfried Tsonga in the quarter-finals on Friday.

The Swiss third seed, back in action this week after a 10-week layoff, started brightly as he breezed through the opening set but Tsonga, targeting Federer's forehand, played tighter and levelled with a strong display in the second.

The Frenchman broke in the 11th game of the decider with a passing shot winner and he closed it out on serve on his first match point to set up a meeting with compatriot Gael Monfils, who beat Spain's Marcel Granollers 6-2, 6-4. Earlier, there were glimpses of the formidable Rafa Nadal as the eight-times champion swept aside French Open winner Stan Wawrinka 6-1, 6-4.

The Spaniard, who set a tournament record of 46 wins in a row in the principality from 2005 to 2013 when he finished runner-up, will take on Andy Murray for a place in the final.

World number two Murray raced into last four with a 6-2, 6-0 demolition of Canadian Milos Raonic. Opening proceedings on centre court, the Briton, who struggled in the previous round, was never bothered by 10th seed Raonic in a one-sided match.

Murray, who hit 19 winners and did not face single break point, was beaten twice by Nadal in the semi-finals of the first clay-court Masters of the season. The fifth-seeded Nadal, who broke decisively in the ninth game of the second set, has yet to win a title this year.

"It's exactly what I need, it's what I'm looking for, it gives me confidence," Nadal said.—Reuters

Roger Federer of Switzerland plays a shot to Roberto Bautista Agut of Spain during Monte Carlo Masters at Monaco on 14 April 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS



Hungarian Games? Budapest will test drive for more frugal Olympics

BUDAPEST — Hungary is plying Olympic authorities with visions of a 2024 games played out from the elegant Danubian capital Budapest to the shores of Lake Balaton, eschewing the extravagance of recent years in a turn to a more modest global sporting celebration.

Hungary is wagering its offer of a more frugal summer games than those that might be offered by richer rivals Los Angeles, Paris and Rome will better reflect the spirit of the International Olympic Committee's Agenda 2020 — a new policy seeking a return to simpler values and smaller price

tags. A return to more modest, functional facilities, less lavish ceremonies, could break the hold of bigger cities like, this year, Rio de Janeiro, which with its economic and political troubles has highlighted the hazards of hosting.

"The IOC returns to its roots," said Balazs Furjes, the Hungarian government's commissioner for the Games. "Antwerp, Stockholm, or Helsinki once hosted very successful Olympics; each is smaller than Budapest. The IOC wants to make that possible again." The 2024 Games will be the first time that principle is put

into practice, and the IOC hopes 11-digit price tags for facilities that would go largely unused after the Games will become a thing of the past.

"There have been maybe twenty cities around the world that had a chance to host the Games, and they rotated," Hungarian Olympic Committee Chairman Zsolt Borkai told Reuters.

"At last smaller cities have a shot now."

Hungary is not without its own problems. Prime Minister Viktor Orban has been criticised by EU allies for moves to reshape the judiciary and tighten control

on media as well as his hard line on migrants.

The London Games in 2012 cost an estimated \$26 billion — but those Games are often mentioned as a good example for the widespread use of temporary facilities.

Beijing 2008 costs ran to nearly \$40 billion. Athens 2004, at \$16.7 billion, is widely seen as an example for inefficiency and Sochi 2014's \$50 billion budget drew scorn for exuberance. There have been signs of even some bigger cities, such as Boston, baulking at taking on the ever increasing burden.—Reuters

Events cancelled in Japan after second deadly quake

TOKYO — Sports events scheduled for Saturday in southwestern Japan have been cancelled due to the powerful 7.3 magnitude earthquake that struck the country earlier in the day, the Kyodo News Agency reported.

The earthquake killed at least 16 people, injuring hundreds more and trapping people in collapsed buildings, barely a day after a quake killed nine people in the same region.

The epicentre of the quake was near the city of Kumamoto on the southern island of Kyushu and measured at a shallow depth of 10 kilometres (six miles), according to the US Geological Survey.

Soccer, baseball and basketball games were called off for safety reasons as aftershocks hindered rescue efforts and fuelled fears of more powerful quakes.

Two matches were cancelled in the J-League, the country's top soccer division, while four matches in the second and third tier were also called off.

Horse racing and cycling events in Kumamoto and Fukuoka prefectures were also cancelled.—Reuters



Hungarian officials unveil the logo of the official candidacy of the capital Budapest for the 2024 Olympic Games on 14 April. PHOTO: REUTERS