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Vol. III, No. 241, 14th Waxing of Nadaw 1378 ME

www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

Tuesday, 13 December 2016

Muslim villagers refute claims of rape and murder by British newspaper

RESIDENTS of the village of Kyetyoepyin in Maungtaw, the site of alleged rapes and killings of Muslim children as reported by the British newspaper The Guardian, said yesterday under questioning from the Rakhine State Investigation Commission that the claimed atrocities did not happen.

The commission, led by its chairman Vice President U Myint Swe, said the denial by villagers of the human rights abuses were discovered during their continuing tour of villages in the Maungtaw area in Rakhine State yesterday to conduct transparent investigations into the 9 October and 12-13 November attacks on border police outposts.

"Commission members conducted field trips yesterday to meet village elders, women, Muslim youth and children. All were questioned in detail on whether the reports of alleged rapes and the killing of Muslim children in

The locals replied that they only heard of such cases in the form of rumours.

the village of Kyetyoepyin in Maungtaw that had been reported in the UK newspaper The Guardian were true. All who were questioned and told of the allegations in The Guardian newspaper said the report was not valid and the alleged cases had not taken place in their village", the commission said in a statement obtained by the *Myanmar News Agency*.

The names of the villagers were not released by the commission.

The denials by villagers



Members of the Rakhine State Investigation Commission talk to villagers at Gwazon Village in Maungtaw Township. PHOTO: MNA

about the alleged rapes and killings of Muslim children came about during questioning by teams of commission members led by members U Aung Kyi and Dr Daw Thet Thet Zin about the 12 October incident in which assailants attacked government troops outside their village. The incident resulted in the death of

10 attackers, an outbreak of fire in the village and the seizure of a single-barreled gun.

The teams made up of commission members spoke to Muslim villagers, women and children to ask if there had taken place any cases of rape and/or prosecution of children. The locals replied that they only heard of such cases in

the form of rumours. They said they did not know or see anything of the events described, according to the commission.

In Saturday's online and print editions of The Guardian, a Muslim woman named Noor Ayesha is profiled and quoted as saying mass atrocities occurred in mid-October in her village. Noor

Ayesha claims a group of 20 soldiers came to her home in Kyetyoepyin in mid-October, killed her husband and seven of her children, raped her and burned her home down. Noor Ayesha told The Guardian that two of her daughters were raped by soldiers before they were killed.

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သဒ္ဓါထက်သန် မြန်မာအားမန် ကမ္ဘောဇဘဏ်

Pyithu Hluttaw

2nd Pyithu Hluttaw 3rd Regular Session's 15th Meeting Held

PYITHU HLUTTAW held on Monday approved the recording of the motion calling for the government to take action as regards reforestation under natural ways after re-confiscating land granted under section 45 of the law on management of virgin and vacant land, for not complying with the provisions of the law under section 57 of the above law.

Dr Aung Thu, Union Minister for Agriculture, Livestock Breeding and Irrigation, replied to the question raised by U Tun Wai of Phaungpyin constituency, "Duty has been assigned to Nay Pyi Taw Council, Regions and States to confiscate uncultivated land after taking the lease

of the land, under the prescribed law after careful scrutiny. And instruction has been given to promptly report on their performances back. At the same time, the process of re-confiscating was under way. The management of natural forests was chosen under the Myanmar system to carry out 30-year plan reforestation. Expansion of the forest is being implemented, hence it should be recorded."

The motion was discussed by U Thaung Htay Lin of Patheingyi constituency, Dr Aung Khin of Pyinoolwin constituency, U Myo Zaw Oo of Lewe constituency, Daw San San Ei of Moehnyin constituency, U Sein Win of Maubin constitu-



Thura U Aung Ko, Union Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture. PHOTO: MNA

ency, Daw Yin Min Hlaing of Gangaw constituency, U Myat Lay Oo of Htilin constituency, U Naing Naing Win of Tamu constituency, Dr Daw Khin

Nyo of Dedaye constituency, U Ne Htet Win of Hsinpaungwe constituency, Daw Khin Than Nu of Mindon constituency, U Thant Zin Tun of Dekkhina Thiri constituency, Mi Kun Chan of Paung constituency, U Myint Tun of Daze constituency and U Maung Maung of Htigyaing constituency.

Following the clarification made by the Union Minister, the motion presenter was interrogated of his attitudes, agreeing to put the motion on record.

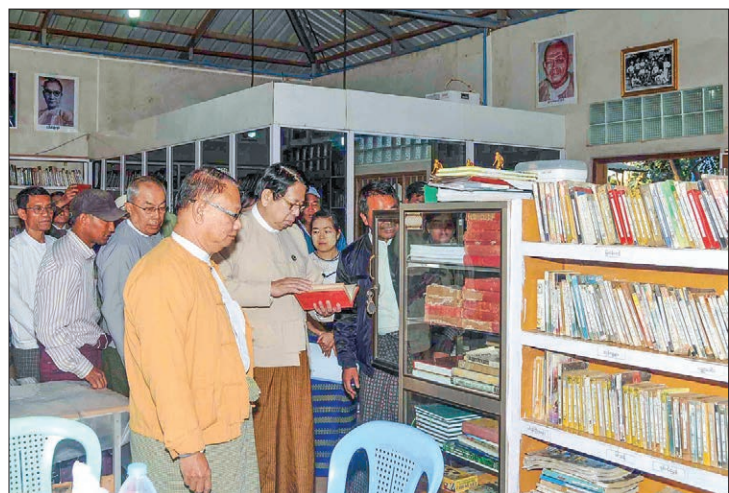
And parliamentarians agreed to donate their one-day daily allowance amounting to K 8520000, to displaced people in Muse. Afterward, U T Khun Myat, Vice Speaker of Pyithu

Hluttaw declared that amount of money is still needed to add under the title of Hluttaw Speaker's Donation Money.

Thura U Aung Ko, Union Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture replied to the question raised by U Aung Khin Win of Myaing Constituency as to whether there was an arrangement to build a magnificent Martyrs' Mausoleum on the ground of Azarnigone in time for 2017 Martyrs' Day.

He added that the present mausoleum's feature look grandeur as it is. For reason of security, there is no arrangements yet to build weather-proof mausoleum, it is replied. —Myanmar News Agency

Union Minister for information inspects libraries in Pyin Oo Lwin



Union Minister Dr Pe Myint visits Lamin Tayar Dhamma Ooyin Philanthropic Library in Pyin Oo Lwin. PHOTO: MNA

UNION MINISTER for Information Dr Pe Myint inspected libraries and a relay-station of Myanma Radio and Television in Pyin Oo Lwin District on Sunday.

The Union Minister and party inspected libraries in Ohnchaw and Anisakhan and the library of the Pyin Oo Lwin District Information and Public Relations Department (IPRD).

Then, the Union Minister visited the district IPRD office

and the Lamin Tayar Dhamma Ooyin Philanthropic Library on Club Street, where he expressed thanks to U Hla Min, founder of the library.

The Director-General, Regional Director and District Officers of the IPRD explained the tasks of the department to the Union Minister.

Later, the Union Minister and party visited a relay station of MRTV in Pyin Oo Lwin. —Myanmar News Agency

Thura U Shwe Mann, Chairman of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Legal Affairs And Special Cases Assessment Committee Receives Indian Ambassador

THURA U Shwe Mann, chairman of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Legal Affairs & Special Cases Assessment Committee received H.E Mr Vikram Misri, Indian ambassador at the Hluttaw Affairs building No 1/11 on 1:30 pm on Monday.

In the meeting, matters on bilateral friendship, affairs on peace and development between the two countries and matters on promotion of relations between the two parliaments were discussed, it is learnt. —Myanmar News Agency

Amyotha Hluttaw

2nd Amyotha Hluttaw 3rd regular session's 15th day meeting held

A LARGE increase in visa fees imposed by the Malaysian government and alleged illegal building by India near Myanmar's border in apparent violation of a demarcation agreement were two of the issues discussed yesterday at the 2nd Amyotha Hluttaw, 3rd Regular Session's 15th Day meeting.

U Kyaw Tin, minister of state for foreign affairs, said the dramatically higher cost for a visa to visit Malaysia was the result of a change in the Malaysian government's visa system.

"Raising visa fees is the policy laid down by the respective country; thus Myanmar has no right to intervene. It is impossible for us to assess and stop the One Stop Center (OSC), which raises the cost of visa fees from US\$6 to US\$57.

"The Ministry of Home Affairs in Malaysia appointed Bukti Megah Sdh Bhd, a business company in Malaysia & its internal aligned company Diamond Palace Group, to open the One Stop Centre for issuing Malaysia entry visas starting in January 2016. They started collecting a visa fee of US\$6, system fee US\$26, service fee US\$25. We discussed the possibility of reducing the visa fee, but the Malaysian ambassador replied that the higher fees were caused by a change of the system. Embassies are carrying out the task on behalf of the Ministry of Home Affairs of Malaysia and they cannot perform anything beyond their instructions."

The minister of state's remarks came in response to a question raised by U Hla Hsan of constituency 1 of Magwe Region.

A query by U Maung Maung Latt of constituency 9, Sagaing



Senators are seen on their arrival at the parliament to attend the parliamentary meeting on 12 December, 2016. PHOTO: MNA

Region on improper construction by India near its border with Myanmar was also answered by U Kyaw Tin.

"There were nine demarcation monument stones left to be erected between Myanmar and India, with only 79 miles at the meeting points of Myanmar-India-China left to be demarcated. Under the agreement of demarcation between the two countries' high-ranking officials, it is agreed that any buildings must not be built within 10 meters from the border line on both sides. Illegal actions from the side of India, which have been recorded, were objected in diplomatic ways, to be demolished. If they make no responses, we will make further objections. For similar events not to occur again, we are adding more demarcation monuments."

Dr Myint Htwe, Union Minister for Health replied to a question raised by U Kyaw Ni Naing of constituency 11, Shan State, on any special efforts to upgrade hospitals. "Detailed examina-

tions and surveys are being made to upgrade the hospitals. According to the number of yearly in patients, there are not yet any plans for upgrading the hospitals with medical doctors, nurses and drugs to be provided more than usual, as a special programme", Dr Myint Htwe said.

Dr Myint Htwe also replied to the question raised by Daw Khin Swe Lwin of constituency 9 in Chin State on changing medical treatment in Myanmar.

"Arrangements are under way to change the process of medical treatment and medical care in accordance with changing times nationwide, under the tactics and strategies of the World Health Organization. With the upgraded medical knowledge, family planning and the development of the health of mother and child will improve."

Also occurring yesterday was an agreement among all parliamentarians to donate their one-day allowances to the displaced people in Muse, in Shan State. —Myanmar News Agency

Development Assistance Coordination Unit holds first meeting with Cooperation Partners Group

THE Development Assistance Coordination Unit-DACU and the Cooperation Partners Group held a first meeting in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday, with opening remarks by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, State Counsellor and Chairperson of DACU.

Following is the opening remarks by the State Counsellor at the meeting of the Development Assistance Coordination Unit with the Cooperation Partners Group.

Objective and basic principles of DACU

Myanmar is committed to working with all Partners in Development to ensure that international development assistance brings maximum benefits to our people. The establishment of the Development Assistance Coordination Unit is in line with this commitment. DACU will seek to improve the coordination and effectiveness of future development assistance to Myanmar, for the benefit of both the people of Myanmar and our Partners in Development.

DACU's work will be based on internationally-accepted principles of development assistance, namely: that Myanmar, as host country, should exercise ownership, leadership and guidance with regard to development coordination; that Partners in Development will align their assistance with Myanmar's development priorities and policies, and act in a transparent fashion; and that both our government and Partners in Development will be accountable to the people of Myanmar and to donor taxpayers for achieving



State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi addresses the first meeting of the Development Assistance Coordination Unit-DACU and the Cooperation Partners Group in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

development results.

It is in all of our interests to ensure that 'development assistance' in Myanmar has a good name. In many other developing countries today, 'development assistance' is now viewed with scepticism, and seen as donor-driven and inefficient. Partners in Development have each done their own thing, leading to piecemeal projects, duplication and waste. But through improved coordination, and through DACU working closely with Partners in Development, I believe we can avoid a similar situation here in Myanmar.

Primary responsibilities of DACU

Among DACU's primary responsibilities will be to: identify priority projects and programmes for development assistance;

draw up a national policy for development assistance; review and revise the existing Sector Working Group structures, so as to ensure better coordination at Sector-level; support the Economic Committee in reviewing potential loans and major grant and technical assistance projects; and identify and where possible to resolve 'implementation constraints' to the effective delivery of development assistance. I will briefly address each of these areas in my opening remarks, and other DACU members will cover these areas in more detail later.

Identification of Priorities for Development Assistance

Identification of priorities for development assistance requires, as a first step, the identification of overall national development priorities. Over the coming months,

through a coordinated cross-ministry process, and based on the government's twelve economic policies, we will be identifying priority projects and programmes for national development.

As part of this process, DACU will assist Ministries to develop criteria for determining whether a given priority project can be financed through Public-Private Partnerships, national budget, or development assistance. DACU will then pro-actively identify priority projects requiring development assistance, and link those projects with suitable potential donors.

In the meantime, our government has already identified some priority sectors for development assistance. These include basic infrastructure; job creation; and agriculture and rural development.

Drafting a National Policy on Development Assistance

Over the coming months, DACU will be drafting a national policy on development assistance, setting out what kinds of assistance our country would prefer to receive. The policy will also seek to streamline and clarify current procedures relating to development assistance. In drafting the policy, DACU will consult closely with Line Ministries and Partners in Development. The policy will draw on international best practice, but also be based on close consideration of Myanmar's context. We aim to be innovative and creative, and to take account of the many non-traditional donors and major domestic philanthropists that we are fortunate to have in this country.

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Vice President and Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker visit injured service personnel, civilians in Lashio hospitals

VICE President U Henry Van Thio and Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint met with internally displaced persons, injured service personnel and civilians in Lashio yesterday.

They first visited the 100-bed Defence Services Hospital No. 9 in Lashio and presented cash assistance to injured government troops and police wounded in the recent fighting with armed groups in north-eastern Shan State.

Afterwards, they visited the Kachin Baptist Church and delivered cash assistance and aid including food and household goods to IDPs being sheltered at the church.

At the meeting with the IDPs, the Vice President expressed his sympathy to the women who are

suffering due to the armed conflict, calling on the armed groups and the people to work together for regional peace and stability.

Speaker U Win Myint reiterated that the parliament has been monitoring the community peace and stability in the region in order to provide mental and physical security and the rule of law to the people.

During the visit to the 500-bed Lashio People's Hospital, the Vice President and the Speaker comforted the patients receiving medical care for injuries sustained during the fighting and presented cash assistance to them.

They also met with families of police officers killed and injured in the fighting between gov-

ernment troops and armed groups in north-eastern Shan State and pledged to give necessary support to them.

The Vice President also expressed pride for the fallen police officers and encouraged the families to overcome their obstacles with a strong spirit.

Speaker U Win Myint also expressed his regret over the loss of human resources at a time when the country is on the path to a democratic union, calling for active participation of the people in nation building.

At the meeting, the Vice President, the Speaker and Union Minister for Home Affairs Lt-Gen Kyaw Swe presented cash assistance and aid to the families



Vice President U Henry Van Thio and Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint comfort an injured service personnel at 100-bed Defence Services Hospital No 9 in Lashio, northern Shan State yesterday. PHOTO: MNA

of the fallen police.

In the afternoon, they provided Ks150 million to the fallen soldiers and the injured from the operations in the north-eastern Shan State through Commander of North-East Command Maj-Gen Phone Myat.

During the visit, the dele-

gation led by the Vice President provided IDPs with more than Ks409 million contributed by the National Disaster Management Committee, the parliament, the Ministry of Border Affairs and Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement.—
Myanmar News Agency

Indonesia's Dompot Dhuafa delivers aid to IDP camps in Sittway



Indonesia's DOMPET DHUFAFA delivers aid being handed over in Sittway. PHOTO: MNA

AID from the Indonesian humanitarian organization Dompot Dhuafa reached the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Sittway, Rakhine State, on Saturday.

Together with local authorities, the Indonesian aid organization delivered 70 bags of rice to IDP Camp Aungmingalar Ward and 71 in bags of rice to Darpaing IDP camp and vis-

ited the IDP Camp in Mingan Ward.

The aid group also donated Ks3 million to the Khaymar Mandaing Parahita Monastery.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Former TNLA member detained with a bomb

ON a tip, security forces searched the house of Daw Ngwe Tin in Zayangyi Village in Namhsam Township on Sunday and detained her son Aung San Myint with a China-made bomb.

He was recruited by the TNLA in December, 2015 and underwent a military training near Hukin Village in Namhsam Township and deserted the armed groups due to hardships. About one hundred people

from 25 households abandoned Pankwan Village in Kyaukme due to recruitments of the TNLA on Sunday and they are taking shelter in a prayer hall in Ward-8. —*Myanmar News Agency*

Malikha Bridge in Kachin State 77 per cent finished

THE Malikha (Machanbaw) bridge over the Malikha River is now 77 per cent completed and

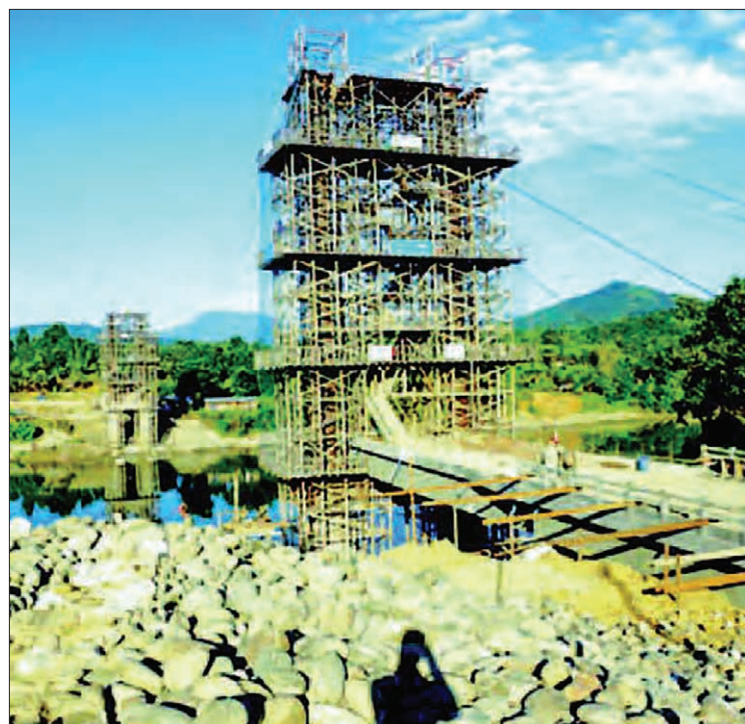
the project is expected to be finished next March, according to project implementers. Engineers

from the Bridge Department under the Ministry of Construction have made continuous efforts to be able to open the bridge no later than the set time frame, said its project manager.

After the work is finished, the bridge will help residents not only in Machanbaw but in Naungmon, Pannandin and Khaunglelphu townships by effectuating economic growth and saving the travel time.

The new bailey suspension bridge will be 600 feet long. Thanks to the new facility, the flow of commodities will be smoother between Machanbaw and nearby regions.

Machanbaw, a town in Kachin State, is situated in northernmost Myanmar. The economy of the area is predominantly agriculture. Locals mostly grow rice, sugarcane and other marketable crops. —*Kimono*



Malikha Bridge in Kachin State. PHOTO: KYEMON

Crime NEWS

Methamphetamine pills worth K3billion seized in Maungtaw

NAVY forces found 1-million Methamphetamine pills in the sea about six miles west of Innidin Village, Maungtaw Township, Rakhine State, on 11 December, according to the police source.

The security forces discovered the drug in five bags in a boat and arrested five namely Aung Aung, Aye Maung, Maung Hla Chay, Nyein Chan and Than Win Chay found in the boat.

The security forces found 200,000 pills in five bags each which were threw away by the drug traffickers into the sea before they were intercepted by the navy water craft.

Similarly, the Navy forces intercepted a suspected boat which threw two bags in the sea.

The forces arrested six suspects in the boat. During the interrogation, they confessed that they were arrested while trying to transport about 450,000 Methamphetamine pills in two bags from Thaechaung Village to the neighbouring country.

Similarly, a combined team comprising member of the Anti-drug squad in Pinlaung and local police forces, stopped and searched a vehicle on the Pinlaung-Hmawbi Road on 10 December and found 86.98 kilos of raw opium worth more than K56 million. Action has been taken against Khun Aung Kyaw Oo, the driver of the vehicle, under the Anti-narcotic law.—*Myanmar News Agency*



(From Left to Right) Aung Aung, Aye Maung, Maung Hla Chay, Nyein Chan and Than Win Chay. PHOTO: MNA

Four killed in head-on crash on Pathein Road, Ayeyawady

FOUR people died on the spot yesterday morning in a crash between a motorbike and a passenger bus on Pathein Road in Ayeyawady Region, according to a police report.

Investigators say they found four people, including two women, whose age or race could not be determined, dead on the road between mile posts No. 21 and 23.

At about 8am yesterday, a passenger transport bus from

Yangon-Hinthada Bus Line collided head-on with the motorcycle with four people aboard.

Police are still investigating the case in an effort to arrest the driver of the bus, who fled at the scene, said U Tin Maung Shwe, the police inspector from the Maezali Police Station.

The reckless driver will face charges under the existing law, he added.—*Myitmakha News Agency*



The bus and the motorbike seen after the crash. PHOTO: MMK

LOCAL Business

Sale of maize from northern Shan State to resume next month

THE sale of maize produced in northern Shan State was suspended during the second week of December due to low demand from foreign countries, but will resume in mid-January, said maize merchants.

The merchants are waiting for the fresh maize to produce and then, they will clear out all the stocks together with the fresh maize newly harvested. Both the maize and the rice are harvested at the same time. Therefore, the merchants turn to rice to trade, said a maize merchant.

Maize is grown mostly in Namhsan, Namtu, Kyaukme, Hsipaw and Lashio. Maize

from Shan State is exported to Thailand through the Lashio depot and to China through the Muse 105th Mile border trade camp. Over 400,000 tonnes of maize are annually exported to foreign countries, it is learnt.

Currently, the maize produced in Kayah State enters the Muse trade camp. Over 800 tonnes of maize flowed into the Muse market from Kayah State in the previous week, and the trade volume dropped down over 140 tonnes during this week. The maize is offered from Ks280 to Ks300 per viss, depending on quality and moisture content.—200

Publicity campaigns needed for moribund YSX

AS the Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX) celebrated its first birthday on Friday, it still had not garnered significant popularity among local investors.

Awareness campaigns are needed to reach the public so that they realise the advantages of the stock market and begin to observe world stock market and Yangon stock market. Innovative ideas are required to attract attention of the public, experts said.

Of the three listed companies at YSX — First Myanmar Investment (FMI); Myanmar Thilawa SEZ Holdings (MTSH); and Myanmar Citizens Bank (MCB), MCB has not attracted much interest

compared to other two listed companies. MCB hit zero trading volume for the fourth time on 12th December after similar events on 21st November and 6th and 8th December.

Like the share prices on 9th December, the stock prices remained unchanged on 12th December at Ks16,000 for FMI, Ks4,500 for MTSH and Ks9,400 for MCB.

Nevertheless, the total volume of stock trading dropped from 12,703 to 8,041 shares on 12th December, with zero trading volumes of MCB. On 12th December, FMI traded 1,506 shares whereas MTSH traded 6,535 shares.—*Mon Mon*



Visitors look at the screen displaying stock information at Yangon Stock Exchange in Yangon on 11 November. PHOTO: PHOE KHWAH



A Tea leaf field seen at Mong Mao in northeast Myanmar on 1 October 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

10 tonnes of Myanmar green tea and tea leaf to be exported to Germany, Singapore

THE Myanmar Fruit, Flower and Vegetable Producers (MFVP) Association is gearing up to export about 10 tonnes of Myanmar's green tea and tea leaf to Germany and Singapore next year, according to the association.

This year, Germany agreed to buy three tonnes of Myanmar's green tea, said U Soe Than Min Din, the chair of MFVP.

"This was the first time that

Germany had agreed to purchase Myanmar's dried tea leaves. We have reached an agreement to export three tonnes of dried tea leaves this year", U Soe Than Min Din said.

The fresh tea leaves produced from the Ywangan area are planned to be placed onto the Singapore market in the coming year, said U Maung Nu, the chairman of the Ywangan Tea Association.

"We, locals from Ywangan, jointly established two dried tea leaf plants and the green tea produced from these plants will be exported to Germany. Additionally, efforts are being made to improve more international market access", said U Maung Nu.

The prevailing price of Myanmar's dried tea leaves are about Ks15,000 per viss, it is learnt.—*Phyo Lwin Aung (AMIA)*

Price of kitchen crops careen up and down

THE price of kitchen crops went on a roller coaster ride in the market this week, especially Fair-average quality/Respective of color (FAQ/RC) mung bean and RC red pigeon peas, according to the market.

The price of FAQ/RC mung bean, which are mainly exported to foreign countries, remarkably decreased from Ks1.2 million to Ks104,700 per tonne. The price

slumped by about Ks153,000 per tonne within a week. Mung bean fetched up to Ks1,642,000 per tonne in August.

Similarly, red pigeon peas (RC) slumped by about Ks9,000 per tonne within a week. Pigeon peas hit Ks1,500,000 per tonne in July. Meanwhile, the price of green grams did not have large changes, selling between Ks98,000 and Ks105,000 per 60 visses.

The price of rice is stable this week, ranging from Ks18,500 to Ks45,500 per bag depending on the quality of the rice. And the price of onions rose a bit during a week.

The commodity prices are on the rise in eight months, resulting in difficulties for low-income people. The farmers do not get any benefit in spite of the high price, it is learnt.—*Myanma Alin*

Prawns from Taninthayi to be bought by Japan, China, Thailand

JAPAN, China and Thailand have proposed to purchase saltwater white prawns farmed in Taninthayi Region, said U Kyaw Lin, a project manager of Katalu saltwater prawn farms.

The saltwater prawns are being farmed in Katalu village, Katan Island in Taninthayi Region with the use of modern technology.

Thailand is the main buyer of these prawns. The shrimp species are imported from Thailand to farm. In prawn farming, a prawn lake can produce about 20 tonnes of prawn annually at a minimum, it is learnt.

A kilo of white prawns consisting of 40 prawns or more sells for 130 to 150 Bahts, whereas a kilo of white prawns consisting

of 40 prawns or less is offered at 150 to 160 Bahts. Currently, there are 20 prawn-farming lakes, with plans to extend farms into 32 more lakes in the coming year, according to U Kyaw Lin.

The imported pedigree prawn species continue to be farmed in Pahtaw Pahtet Island to meet market criteria, it is learnt.—200



UN officials deliver aid to villagers in Rakhine. PHOTO: STATE COUNSELLOR'S OFFICE INFORMATION COMMITTEE

Aid flowing into villages in northern Rakhine State

THE Union Government, Rakhine State Government and UNHCR are working together in Rakhine State, sending aid to villages in conflict areas in northern Rakhine.

Aid from the government and UNHCR reached 2,797 households from six village-tracts : Ducheertan, Gaw-

duthar, Ohntaw, Alethankyaw, Oodaung and Shwebaho: in Maungtaung Township on 9th December.

Besides, dry ration including about 80 bags of rice, 159 viss of cooking oil, 159 viss of beans and 159 viss of salt and medicines were sent to 318 families in another five vil-

lage-tracts in the township.

Similarly, with the National Disaster Management Committee of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, food worth K70 million provided by were sent to the villages yesterday which are experiencing shortage of food.—*Myanmar News Agency*



Peace Commission and eight signatories to the NCA hold a meeting in Yangon. PHOTO: PO HTAUNG

Signatories to NCA ready for national political dialogues

Ye Khaung Nyunt

SAW KWE HTOO WIN, leader of the Peace Process Steering Team (PPST) of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) signatories, said that they have fulfilled all requirements and urged all to organise national political dialogues as soon as possible, it was revealed at the meeting between the Peace Commission and eight signatories to the NCA in Yangon yesterday.

"I would like to request authorities to organise national level political dialogues as soon as

possible and to approve regions for the dialogues to take place", Chairman of the Peace Commission Dr Tin Myo Win was quoted as saying at the meeting.

"The peace process has always opened its door to all ethnic groups regardless of any differences, as political dialogues are of utmost importance for the further steps of the process".

Dr Tin Myo Win also expressed his desire to achieve peace through continued negotiations in the political dialogues with ethnic leaders.

Yesterday's meeting also discussed formation of ceasefire supervisory committees composed of representatives from state/region governments, the Tatmadaw, ethnic armed groups and political parties.

The meeting was attended by the Peace Commission on behalf of the government, signatories to the NCA, U Thu Wai and special guests including Kayin State Chief Minister Nang Khin Htwe Myint and U Min Shwe, Secretary of Kayin State Government.

TNLA armed group conscripts 21 villagers from Pankum

TNLA armed group conscripted 21 villagers from Pankum of Pankum village-tract in Kyaukme township in northern Shan State at 7 pm on Sunday, it is learnt.

The villagers forced to be taken away are said to be U Nyein aged 60, U Tun Yin

aged 50, U Tun Tun aged 25, U Sai Thein Aung and U Sai San aged 45, U Aung Phyto aged 25, U Nyein aged 50, U San Lun aged 50, U Aik Soe aged 30, U San Win aged 40, U Aung San aged 40, U Sein Aung aged 45, U Kyin Myint (a) U Sit Win aged 60, U Tun

Yi aged 50, U Maung Kyan aged 35, U Aung Pwint aged 25, U Aik On (a) Maung Khet aged 60, U Swe Lan aged 45, U Kyaw Myint Htay aged 40, U Aik Lwe aged 30, U Aung Khan aged 50 and one unidentified (under investigation).—*Myanmar News Agency*

Republic of the Union of Myanmar
President Office
Order 60/2016
13th Waxing of Nadaw 1378 ME
12 December, 2016

Appointment of Deputy Ministers

The following persons are appointed as Deputy Ministers of the ministries shown against each, in accordance with the sub-section (a), (d) under Article 234 of the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and sub-section (9)(b) under the Section 16 of the Union Government Law.

- (1) U Min Thu Deputy Minister
Ministry of President Office
- (2) U Hla Kyaw Deputy Minister
Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation

Sd/
Htin Kyaw
President
Republic of the Union of Myanmar

Government troops skirmish with KIA in Shan State

IN an area clearance operation in northern Shan State, government troops were confronted with the KIA armed group six miles west of Nam On village on the western part of Muse-Lashio road at approximately 12 noon on Sunday, forcing the armed group to retreat

along the gorge of the south-west portion of the area. During the fighting, the government discovered a dead body and seized 3 land mines, conducting a clearance operation in pursuit of their attackers, it was learnt.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Muslim villagers refute claims . . .

>> FROM PAGE 1

Noor Ayesha is now in Bangladesh, The Guardian reports.

The Myanmar government has consistently denied the allegations.

A commission member said yesterday that media access to northern Rakhine has been restricted for security reasons but will be lifted in the future.

"Right now, only official statements can be released due to the current situation", said Dr Aung Tun Thet. "After that, other media, including international media, will be allowed".

Dr Aung Tun Thet said that, in the meantime, the public should be wary of social and on-line media.

"We can easily see how rumours can spread, how biased information can be disseminated

on social and on-line media", he said.

The vice president and the rest of the commission also visited the Muslim-majority village of Gwazon, where they conducted interrogations concerning the 12 November afternoon event during which a commanding officer was killed as his Tatmadaw column was attacked by about 500 assailants using small arms, swords, spears and harpoons.

Later, the commission visited the villages of Dargyizar, Pwint-byuchaung and Nganchaung. Yesterday evening, the commission was briefed on the measures taken by the Rakhine State cabinet, and the vice president discussed in detail matters relating to the rule of law and effective delivery and distribution of humanitarian aid.—*GNLM*

Villagers discover a revolver in Kyikanpyin Village-tract in Maungtaung Township

TWO villagers unearthed a gun while they were digging roots of turmeric near Warpeik (Middle) village in Kyikanpyin Village-tract, Maungtaung Township, on 10 December.

U Aung Zan, 41, an U Abu Maung, 33, from Aungtharyar Village, found a point 38 revolver with six bullets, and handed it over to the security forces.—*Myanmar News Agency*



Sri Lankan Airlines cancels all flights to Chennai due to cyclone

COLOMBO — Sri Lanka's state-owned airline, Sri Lankan Airlines, on Monday announced that it had cancelled all flights to Chennai, the city in southern India due to a cyclone hitting the Tamil Nadu coast.

Sri Lankan Airlines Spokesman Deepal Perera told Xinhua that the Chennai International Airport had been shut down due to severe weather and Sri Lankan Airlines had cancelled all its flights till Tuesday morning.

"There has been a red alert issued. Therefore all flights to Chennai will re-

sume only on Tuesday morning," Perera said.

Sri Lanka's Department of Meteorology on Monday also warned residents living along the coastal areas of northern Sri Lanka to be cautious due to heavy winds and rains as the Cyclone Vardah was moving away from the island country towards southern India.

However the department said that disaster management teams were on alert in case of an emergency and officials were continuously monitoring the cyclone pattern.—Xinhua

81 per cent of Vietnamese population covered by health insurance

HANOI — Health insurance has covered some 80.8 per cent of Vietnamese population, according to Pham Luong Son, deputy director of Viet Nam Social Insurance (VSI) on Monday.

It is now for sure that Viet Nam will realize the target of health insurance coverage of 91 per cent of the total population by

2020, local Sai Gon Giai Phong (Sai Gon Liberation) newspaper quoted Son as saying. According to statistics by Viet Nam Ministry of Health, in over 12,000 medical facilities at all levels across the country each year, over 130 million person-times of patients with health insurance are provided healthcare services.—Xinhua



Rescue members cut a tree that fell on a road after it was uprooted by strong winds in Chennai, India, on 12 December 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Cyclone batters south India coast killing two

CHENNAI — A cyclone barrelled into the south-east coast of India on Monday, killing at least two people and bringing down trees and power lines as authorities moved tens of thousands of people from low-lying areas.

Cyclone Vardah moved west over the Bay of Bengal before hitting Chennai, capital of the southern state of Tamil Nadu, as well as neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, the Indian Meteorological Department said, describing it as a "very severe storm".

Strong wind of up to 140 kph (87 mph) battered the densely populated coast, uprooting trees and bringing down electricity pylons.

Flights at Chennai airport were cancelled, railway services in the area suspended and schools and colleges were closed.

Chennai is home to Indian operations of major auto firms such as Ford Motor Daimler Hyundai and Nissan.

Vardah is forecast to pass over Chennai over the next few hours, drenching the city in heavy rain before easing in intensity, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) said.

"Winds to pick up after current lull period. Everyone to not venture out," the NDMA said on Twitter, adding that two people had been killed and 24 homes damaged.

"Expect very heavy rainfall after few hours. To become better once system crosses completely."

A "storm surge" will be about one metre (three feet) high.

More than 23,000 people in Tamil Nadu have been moved to relief centres, with plans for tens of thousands more to be evacuated if needed, a senior state official, K. Satyagopal, told Reuters.

More than 10,000 people from two districts in Andhra Pradesh state had also been moved, its disaster management commissioner, M.V. Seshaagiri Babu, said. The NDMA warned fishermen not to venture out to sea for the next 36 hours, and

urged residents to stay in safe places.

Navy ships and aircraft, as well as 30 diving teams, were on standby to help move people and deliver aid if needed, a navy spokesman said.

India's cyclone season usually runs from April to December, with storms often causing dozens of deaths, evacuations of tens of thousands of people and widespread damage to crops and property. Wind speeds topped 300 km per hour (186 mph) in an Indian "super-cyclone" that killed 10,000 people in 1999, while a cyclone packing speeds of more than 200 kph (124 mph) lashed the east coast in 2013. —Reuters

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Printed and published at the Global New Light of Myanmar Printing Factory at No.150, Nga Htat Kyee Pagoda Road, Bahan Township, Yangon, by the Global New Light of Myanmar Daily under Printing Permit No. 00510 and Publishing Permit No. 00629.

Japan protests over China's complaint about fighter jets

TOKYO — Japan said on Monday it had protested to China over a Chinese complaint that Japanese fighter jets had engaged in "dangerous and unprofessional" behaviour when they scrambled at the weekend as Chinese aircraft flew near Japanese islands.

Chinese military aircraft on Saturday flew between Japan's Okinawa and Miyako islands, and over waterways near self-ruled Taiwan — seen by Beijing as a renegade province — as part of long-range exercises, Taiwan said.

Chinese defence min-

istry spokesman Yang Yujun said in a statement on Saturday that two Japanese F-15 fighter jets flew over the Miyako Strait and conducted "close range interference", firing decoy flares and "jeopardizing the security of Chinese aircraft and pilots".

Yang said China had grave concerns and lodged a protest over the behaviour of the Japanese aircraft during what he called "routine" drills in international waters.

But Japan rejected China's assertion.

"I have received a report from the defence

minister that the Japanese planes did not conduct any close-range interference toward the Chinese military planes ... or threaten the safety of Chinese military planes or its personnel," Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said.

"The fact that China's military unilaterally announced something clearly different from the facts is extremely regrettable and harms the improvement of relations between Japan and China, and we have strictly protested to the Chinese side," he said.

Suga said Japan

would watch the actions of the Chinese military, "which are expanding and increasing", and make every effort towards "firmly protecting our country's land, sea and air space and, in accordance with international and domestic law, take strict measures against any invasion of our airspace".

In Beijing on Monday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang urged Japan to take steps to prevent "safety problems on the sea and in the air".

He did not elaborate.—Reuters

Opinion

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.

Conflicts began with hate speech of one kind or another

Tha Sein

MYANMAR people are well aware of the prevailing situations relating to the Rakhine incident including the exercise of restraints by security forces in its area clearance operations and development of effective policies by the government for the long-term development of the country's northwest.

Regrettably, some internal and external organizations, turning a blind eye to the prevailing situations, accused security forces of committing rape, torture and

murder at a time when the latter are acting in full compliance with the rule of law, taking great pains to manage to keep the situation under control and to calm it down.

There are still incendiary messages in the form of speeches disseminated by some internal and external elements, making good use of social media platforms like Facebook. Concentrating on the negative side of the situation, they misled those who could not distinguish what is fact and what is fiction. In

the meantime, there emerged unsubstantiated allegations over the treatment of perpetrators who launched coordinated attacks on three border police outposts. The groundless accusations did not help but simply resulted in renewed international criticism.

In tackling deep-seated mistrust and divisions between the two communities, the government needs to give the process a sufficient time, as it will have to address the pressing issues step by step cautiously in order not to

compromise the rights of the local people. As the advocacy of hatred based on nationality, race or religion has a long history in the country, we would really appreciate it if the international community would help us in building better relations between the two communities, realizing that all conflicts in the country have begun with hate speech of one kind or another. Only then, will our efforts to come up with long-term solutions to the deeply-entrenched problems be met with success.

Retracing the footsteps back to the Bronze Age

Khin Maung Myint

IN 1997, I had visited a Bronze Age archaeological site at the village of Ban Chiang in Thailand. It was first thought to be the oldest Bronze Age human settlement in the world but was proved to be wrong later. In those days I wasn't very much interested in such matters as I'm today. So, how come I visited that place in the first place may be a bit strange. It was in fact a casual visit, or rather out of curiosity I dropped in, at that place while traveling by car from Udon Than to the town of Ubon Ratchathani--both located in the north eastern part of Thailand, commonly known as **Isan**.

Just outside Udon Thani, my attention was drawn to the roadside signs, written in Thai and English, giving directions to Ban Chiang, the site of a Bronze Age archaeological museum. Only a few days before, while enroute from Yangon to Bangkok, I had read an article in an inflight magazine on the Thai Airways International flight, about how a foreign student conducting a research in that area stumbled upon a very important archaeological find. He actually stumbled and that led to the discovery of that site. Though I wasn't interested in history or archaeology in those days, I was intrigued by the story of the accidental discovery of a Bronze Age archaeological site. That must be the reason that aroused my curiosity and made me drop in.

However, as we had to travel another three hundred or so kilometers to our destination and as

the time was getting late, I didn't have much time to look around. What I remembered from that visit were some human skeletons kept on display at the same spots, as they were found. There were also ancient earthen pots of different shapes and sizes, some shards of broken pottery, some bronze artifacts, rice grains and many other ancient objects and ornaments on display. The discovery of rice grains indicated that those Bronze Age people in Ban Chiang were farmers.

Not very long ago, I came across a very interesting news of the discovery of a human settlement from the early Bronze Age in the Butalin township in the Sagaing Region. That piece of news led me to write an article "Who were Our Real Ancestors?" (12/10/2016 GNLM). While writing that article an old memory came back to me. That was the memory of my visit to Ban Chiang in 1997 and wondered whether our Bronze Age period was contemporary to that one. Thus, I decided to learn more about the Ban Chiang discoveries and intended to visit that site again if I get an opportunity and noted down in my bucket list.

My wish was fulfilled a few days ago. This time around, the visit was more purposeful. I spent much time looking at all the artifacts that are displayed and read all the informations about each one, posted on display cards. Although I'm not an anthropologist or an archaeologist, I was totally attracted by the sights and informations related to the skeletons and artifacts unearthed from the excavations.

The visit provided me some interesting insights into the cultures and civilization of the Bronze Age people of that region.

However, I will not be describing everything I saw there in detail as it would take much time and space, but I will describe briefly how that site was accidentally discovered and some salient and interesting facts. In 1966 Steve Young, an anthropology student at Harvard College was conducting interviews in the area around the village of Ban Chiang for his thesis papers. He spoke Thai language quite well and was staying in Ban Chiang at that time.

While he and his assistant, a Thai teacher from the village were walking along a path, Young tripped over a tree root and fell on his face. Under him were the exposed tops of pottery jars of small and medium sizes. He recognized that the firing techniques used to make the pots were very rudimentary, but the patterns drawn to the surface of the pots were unique and wonderful. Today, same design of earthen pots are still being produced in that region. They are almost exact copies of the ancient ones down to the tiniest details of the patterns drawn in dull rouge colour. They are very popular as souvenirs.

The excavations of the site started in the 1970s. As there were a few skeletons found, it was first thought to have been a burial ground. However, more evidences emerged that indicate it to be a residential area. In those days the customs of residential burials were normally carried



out.

Long before that discovery, the villagers had found old pots, jars, broken shards and some other artifacts in their cultivation fields, but had no idea that they were from an ancient human civilization. That archaeological site had been on the UNESCO International Heritage list since 1992. The site attracted enormous publicity due to the attractive red painted pottery found there. Many artifacts had found their ways to museums across the world, including the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Germany. USA had confiscated some of them from their museums and returned them to Thailand as they were illegally smuggled into their country by unscrupulous persons and donated to the museums to claim large tax write-offs.

At this point, I would like to mention a very interesting information related to the dating of the Ban Chiang Bronze Age. At first it was assumed, based on initial dating results, to have flour-

ished during a period that ranged from 4420 BCE to 3400 BCE, which made it the oldest Bronze Age human settlement in the world. However, later re-dating using the carbon dating process, it revealed that it dated about two millennia later. Thus the Ban Chiang Bronze Age site wasn't that old as thought to be after all.

Whereas, our Bronze Age was thought to have existed from 3500 to 500 BCE. If we can prove the finds at Butalin and Nyaunggan really date back to the early Bronze Age, we can safely assume our Bronze Age settlements and hence our civilization preceded those of some of our neighbours'. This assumption is based on the fact that the Ban Chiang settlement existed only around 2100 BCE at the earliest. This date was arrived at by carbon dating the bones of people and rice grains found in earthen jars in the graves at that site. Also the findings indicated that bronze working there began about 2000 BCE only.

Development Assistance Coordination Unit holds first meeting with Cooperation Partners Group

>> FROM PAGE 3

Consultants

One of the important issues that the development assistance policy will address is the role of consultants. Many consultants working in Myanmar have minimal country knowledge. Despite this, some—though certainly not all—try to impose pre-conceived ideas and templates onto the Myanmar context. And many government officials, for a variety of reasons, do not feel able to put across their own perspective when engaging with visiting consultants.

Consultants must of course have subject-matter expertise, but they also need to have a sensitivity and awareness to the country context, and a readiness to collaborate and transfer knowledge. Costs associated with consultants must also be scrutinised carefully, so as to ensure they are reasonable and proportionate.

Line Ministries must also be accountable. We will expect Ministries to hire consultants only when there is a genuine need, give clear direction to consultants once hired, and monitor performance to ensure this expensive resource is utilized properly. Ministries must also ensure that consultant ToRs are appropriately drafted. And if Ministries believe that the consultant is not fulfilling the terms of his or her contract, they should take ap-

propriate action.

DACU will be supporting Line Ministries in this area through developing a standardized template for consultant ToRs, and in some cases will be reviewing proposed ToRs prior to approval. Our goal is to reduce waste for all concerned, while making the most of the valuable expertise that we are fortunate to have access to. We should also bear in mind that some consultants have offered pro-bono assistance.

Refreshing the Sector Working Groups

DACU's role is to oversee coordination at a cross-government level. But coordination at a sector-level is also essential. Among the existing Sector Working Groups, it is clear that some are more active and effective than others. In the coming weeks, DACU will be proposing a revised set of SWGs that better reflect development assistance priorities. DACU will also be setting out guidance for Line Ministries on how SWGs should operate, and SWG Chairs will be held accountable for their effectiveness.

Evaluations of development assistance proposals

The Economic Committee will retain ultimate responsibility for reviewing and approving development assistance projects.

DACU's role will be support the Economic Committee in this process. I wish to emphasise that DACU will facilitate review processes, rather than cause additional delays or become a bottleneck.

Addressing implementation constraints

We are grateful to Partners in Development for already identifying some major implementation constraints that you face. Where possible we have already sought to act.

With regard to travel authorisations, Cabinet has now agreed that Partners in Development will now be able visit permitted areas without needing prior permission. And for visits to restricted areas, we will be reducing the minimum notice period required for submission of travel authorisation requests. With regard to taxes, we agree that in normal circumstances it is unreasonable to impose taxes on grant aid, and I have asked DACU to ensure that this approach is applied consistently across government. With regard to visas, with the introduction of new regulations earlier this month, all Partners in Development should now be able to renew visas inside the country. With regard to MoU approvals, DACU will seek to streamline existing bureaucratic procedures.

Addressing implementation

constraints must be a two-way street. On the government side, we will do what we can to facilitate the smooth delivery of assistance. But we also ask that Partners in Development seek to standardize and simplify your own processes, so as to minimize the burden on Ministries.

Implementation / monitoring

Related to the work of DACU is the need for improved monitoring of actual implementation of development projects, including those projects supported by donor assistance. Implementation and evaluation of projects is frequently weak. Reliable statistics are scarce, local project beneficiaries are reluctant to criticize donors or implementers, and evaluations are too often carried out by those with interests in the relevant project. The government therefore plans to establish an 'implementation unit', comprising partly of independent third-party experts. The unit's scope will cover, though not be limited to, projects supported by development assistance. Further details on this will follow in the coming weeks.

DACU- wider engagement

Although today's meeting is only with bilateral, multilateral and UN Partners in Development, DACU intends to engage with all development partners,

in the broadest sense of the term. The private sector will have critical role in the country's development. Grants and loans alone cannot address our massive infrastructure requirements, or foster sustainable long-term job creation. Coordination between government, private sector, and Partners in Development will be key to bringing in the investment that we need. DACU also intends to further strengthen our government's engagement with CSOs, INGOs, and major domestic and international philanthropists, to encourage greater coordination and alignment of their valuable efforts with our national priorities.

Conclusion

DACU seeks to be innovative, dynamic and creative, and we welcome your ideas and feedback on how to improve the unit's effectiveness. Looking ahead, we plan to hold a larger development forum before Thingyan, at which we hope to be able to present concrete results on the various work streams I have briefly outlined today. In conclusion, DACU will have one simple but challenging objective: to ensure that the generosity and support of our friends here in this room and across the world is translated most effectively into genuine improvements in the lives of our people in the years ahead.

18th intake of Defence Services Medical Academy graduates in Yangon

SENIOR GENERAL Min Aung Hlaing, Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services, addressed the latest intake of the Defence Services Medical Academy held at the parade grounds of the DSMA in Yangon yesterday morning.

At the graduation ceremony for the 18th intake, the commander-in-chief received the salute of the medical officers as he inspected the graduating companies. Afterward, the companies of medical officers honoured the senior general with a slow and quick march parade.

As part of the graduation, the commander-in-chief presented excellence awards, including: Best Medical Officer award to Cadet No. 5280 Nyan Min Aung; award for excellent performance in training to Cadet No. 5279 Zin Moe Tun; and the award for excellent performance in study to Cadet No.



18th intake of Defence Services Medical Academy graduation parade in progress in Yangon. PHOTO: MNA

5315 Ye Lin Tun.

The senior general noted the accomplishments of the elite graduates not only as medical doctors, but also as military officers.

"The DSMA is listed among the internationally recognised medical universities, in accord with the standards laid down by the Board of International Med-

ical Teaching Faculty. Nowadays, we are making attempts to sustainably compete with techniques of military weapons related to National Defense as well as other techniques of respective sectors linked with defence. Thus, we need to keep up with international armies in sectors of medical treatment and protective knowledge," Sen-

ior General Min Aung Hlaing said.

Present at the ceremony were U Phyo Min Thein, Chief Minister of Yangon Region Cabinet, General Mya Tun Oo, Chief of General Staff (Army, Navy, Air) and wife, Commander-in-Chief (Navy) and wife, Commander-in-Chief (Air) and wife, high-ranking officials of

the Tatmataw and Commanders, Principal of DSMA and invited guests.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing met with outstanding cadets of 18th Intake of the DSMA and their parents, giving words of encouragement and congratulations. —*Myanmar News Agency*

High price of cauliflower helps farmers to earn a profit

THE PRICE of cauliflower is on the rise in KhinU, a town in Shwebo District, Sagaing Region, due to growing demand in the domestic market, according to local growers.

A hundred cauliflowers sold for at least K25,000 in the first week of this month. The price increased to K40,000 in the second week of December, a broker said.

"This is the harvest time to produce cauliflowers on a commercial scale

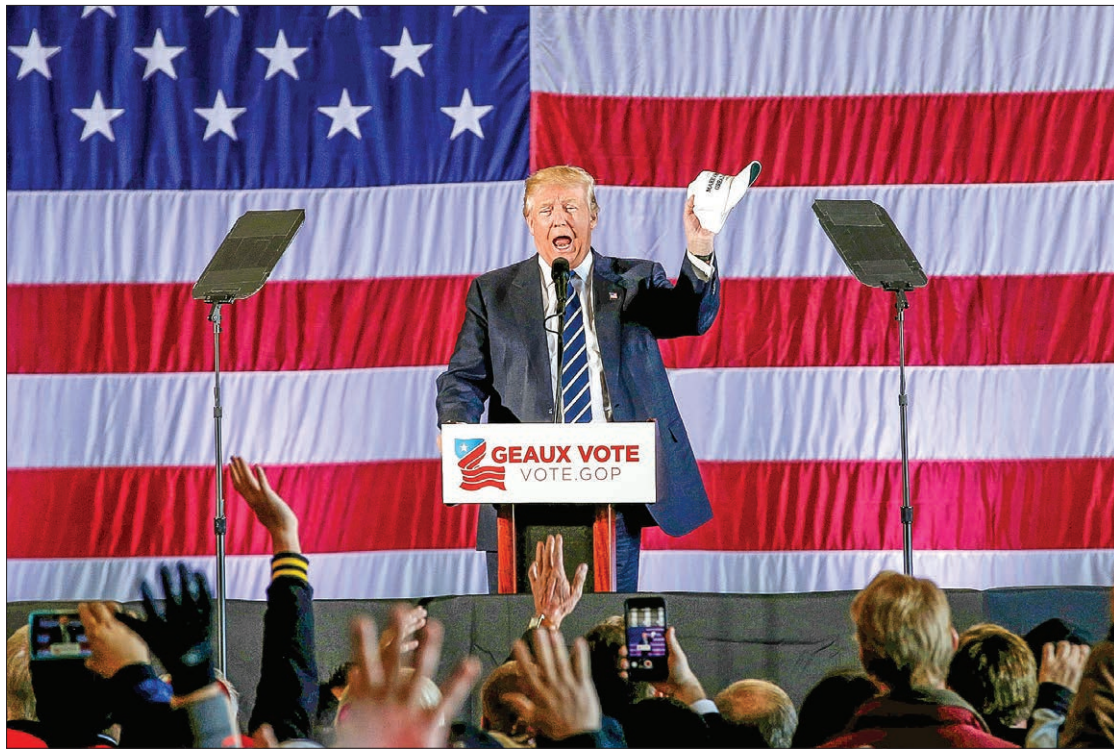
across our town, KhinU. This season, growers received a healthy profit for the vegetable. Some buyers visited plantation complexes to purchase the crop as many as possible," said U Myo, a farmer from Thegonlay village.

Cauliflower is a cool-season crop. It needs rich soil and a steady supply of water and nutrients. Cauliflower plantations are usually developed in early August. It takes about 75 days or so to mature after planting.

"The trade in cauliflower is in good condition during the past two weeks. It was difficult to collect last week because of low production. Now the price continues to rise even though a large amount of cauliflowers are entering the market," said U Hla Win, a local vegetables broker.

Cauliflowers produced from KhinU mostly go to Monywa, Mandalay, Shwebo, KhinU, Tantse and Lansone towns.—*Myitmakha News Agency*

Trump says US not necessarily bound by 'one China' policy



US President-elect Donald Trump speaks during a "Thank You USA" tour rally in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, US, on 9 December, 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

WASHINGTON — US President-elect Donald Trump said the United States did not necessarily have to stick to its long-standing position that Taiwan is part of "one China," questioning nearly four decades of policy in a move likely to antagonize Beijing.

Trump's comments on "Fox News Sunday" came after he prompted a diplomatic protest from China over his decision to accept a telephone call from Taiwan's president on 2 December.

"I fully understand the 'one China' policy, but I don't know why we have to be bound by a 'one China' policy unless we make a deal with China having to do with other things, including trade," Trump told Fox.

Trump's call with President Tsai Ing-wen was the first such contact with Taiwan by a US president-elect or president since President Jimmy Carter switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in 1979, acknowledging Taiwan as part of "one China."

Beijing considers Taiwan a renegade province and the sub-

ject is a sensitive one for China.

Chinese officials had no immediate reaction to Trump's remarks.

After Trump's phone conversation with Taiwan's president, the Obama administration said senior White House aides had spoken with Chinese officials to insist that Washington's "one China" policy remained intact. The administration also warned that progress made in the US relationship with China could be undermined by a "flaring up" of the Taiwan issue.

Following Trump's latest comments, a White House aide said the Obama administration had no reaction beyond its previously stated policy positions.

In the Fox interview, Trump criticised China over its currency policies, its activities in the South China Sea and its stance toward North Korea. He said it was not up to Beijing to decide whether he should take a call from Taiwan's leader. "I don't want China dictating to me and this was a call put in to me," Trump said. "It was a very nice call. Short.

And why should some other nation be able to say I can't take a call?"

"I think it actually would've been very disrespectful, to be honest with you, not taking it," Trump added.

Trump plans to nominate a long-standing friend of Beijing, Iowa Governor Terry Branstad, as the next US ambassador to China. But Trump is considering John Bolton, a former Bush administration official who has urged a tougher line on Beijing, for the No. 2 job at the US State Department, according to a source familiar with the matter.

In a Wall Street Journal article last January, Bolton said the next US president should take bolder steps to halt China's military aggressiveness in the South and East China seas.

Bolton said Washington should consider using a "diplomatic ladder of escalation" that could start with receiving Taiwanese diplomats officially at the State Department and lead to restoring full diplomatic recognition.—Reuters

Finance Minister English named as New Zealand prime minister

WELLINGTON — New Zealand Finance Minister Bill English was confirmed as the country's new prime minister on Monday, as expected, a week after John Key announced his surprise resignation after eight years in the role.

English, who was the sole contender for the job, announced Social Housing Minister Paula Bennett as the deputy leader, following a special caucus meeting of the ruling centre-right Nation-

al Party.

English, who will be sworn in later in the day, has already lined up senior cabinet minister Steven Joyce, the minister for economic development, to replace him in the finance ministry.

He is expected to announce further cabinet changes in the coming weeks and has also signalled a "stocktake" on policy.

"I am both excited and humbled by this opportunity," English, who comes from a

conservative, Catholic family in New Zealand's south, told reporters after the meeting. English, who 13 years ago oversaw a disastrous election loss for the National Party to the centre-left Labour Party, takes the reins of a country in good economic shape compared to much of the developed world. On Monday, Moody's said it expects New Zealand to remain among the fastest growing of triple-A rated economies.—Reuters

NEWS IN BRIEF

Italy's Renzi says elections should be held as soon as possible

ROME — Outgoing Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi said on Monday that fresh elections should be held as quickly as possible, even as his successor held consultations with parties to put together a new government.

Renzi resigned last week after losing a referendum over his plans to reform the constitution, and on Sunday the head of state asked his foreign minister Paolo Gentiloni to take over and try to form a government. "We hope to go to the polls as soon as possible," Renzi told a meeting of his Democratic Party (PD). Gentiloni has held consultations with most of the parties in parliament and said he would see President Sergio Mattarella later in the day, when he was widely expected to announce that he had the necessary parliamentary majority.—Reuters

Philippine militants free two Indonesian captives — military

MANILA — Islamist militants in the Philippines on Monday freed two Indonesians who were kidnapped six months ago, after the rebels came under pressure from the Philippine army, a military spokesman said.

The two were among seven Indonesian crewmen who rebels from the Abu Sayyaf militant group kidnapped from a tug sailing in waters off the southern Philippines in June, said Major Filemon Tan, spokesman of the military's Western Mindanao Command.

Tan said the militants released the two "after being pressured by non-stop operations", and with the help of members of a rival Muslim group, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

The two were released to an MNLF leader and later handed over to a government official on Sulu island.—Reuters

UK PM May sticks to Brexit timetable in spite of legal challenges — spokeswoman

LONDON — British Prime Minister Theresa May is sticking to her timetable of triggering formal divorce talks with the European Union by the end of March despite further legal challenges, her spokeswoman said on Monday.

The *Sunday Times* newspaper reported that campaigners were ready to take the government to the High Court to try to keep Britain in the EU's single market, while a group of British and Irish lawyers are also seeking to try to establish if Brexit can be reversed once divorce talks have been triggered.

"The prime minister is focused on making sure that the government is doing all the work to prepare for the negotiations and triggering Article 50 by the end of March, and that was backed by MPs (lawmakers) last week," the spokeswoman told reporters. "Now we all need to get on and work to that timetable." —Reuters

Turkey detains 235 people over PKK propaganda after bomb attacks

ISTANBUL — Turkish authorities have detained 235 people found to be "spreading terror group propaganda" and acting on behalf of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militant group, the interior ministry said on Monday.

It said in a written statement that the operation, which followed a twin bomb attack in Istanbul on Saturday which killed 44 people, covered 11 provinces across Turkey from the northwest to the southeast.—Xinhua

Lavrov arrives in Belgrade

BELGRADE — Russian FM Sergey Lavrov arrived in Belgrade Monday to meet with Serbian top officials and attend a meeting of the Ministerial Council of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) on Tuesday.

Lavrov was welcomed at Belgrade's Nikola Tesla airport by Deputy PM and FM Ivica Dacic and received by PM Aleksandar Vucic in the Serbian government building, with a meeting with President Tomislav Nikolic to follow afterward.

Lavrov and Minister of Labour, Employment and Veteran and Social Affairs Aleksandar Vulin will then lay wreaths at the Cemetery of the Liberators of Belgrade.

Lavrov will meet with Dacic in the afternoon, with the two ministers also scheduled to speak to reporters.—Reuters

Syrian army in 'final stages' of Aleppo offensive

ALEPPO, (Syria)/BEIRUT — The Syrian army and its allies are in the “final stages” of recapturing Aleppo after a sudden advance that has pushed rebels to the brink of collapse in a shrinking enclave, a Syrian general said on Monday.

A Reuters journalist in the government-held zone said the bombardment of rebel areas had continued non-stop overnight, and a civilian trapped there described the situation there as resembling Doomsday.

“The battle in eastern Aleppo should end quickly. They (rebels) don’t have much time. They either have to surrender or die,” Lieutenant General Zaid al-Saleh, head of the government’s Aleppo security committee, told reporters in the recaptured Sheikh Saeed district of the city.

Pro-government forces were clashing with insurgents in the Fardous district, which was at the heart of the besieged pocket only days ago, after taking Sheikh Saeed in the south and Saliheen in the east, a rebel official said.

“The situation is ex-

tremely difficult today,” said Zakaria Malahifji of the Fastaqim rebel group fighting in Aleppo.

The rebels’ sudden retreat represented a “big collapse in terrorist morale”, a Syrian military source said.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, backed by Russia, is now close to taking back full control of Aleppo, which was Syria’s most populous city before the war and would be his greatest prize so far after nearly six years of conflict.

The Russian Defence Ministry said that since the start of the Aleppo battle, more than 2,200 rebels had surrendered and 100,000 civilians had left areas of the city that were controlled by militants.

“People run from one shelling to another to escape death and just to save their souls ... It’s doomsday in Aleppo, yes doomsday in Aleppo,” said Abu Amer Iqab, a former government employee in the Sukkari district in the heart of the rebel enclave. While Aleppo’s fall would deal a stunning blow to rebels trying to remove Assad from



Smoke and flames rise after air strikes on rebel-controlled besieged area of Aleppo, as seen from a government-held side, in Syria on 11 December 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

power, he would still be far from restoring control across Syria. Swathes of the country remain in rebel hands, and on Sunday Islamic State retook Palmyra.

Tens of thousands of civilians remain in rebel-held areas, hemmed in by ever-changing front lines, pounded by air strikes and shelling, and without basic supplies, according to the Syrian Observato-

ry for Human Rights, a British-based monitoring group. Rebel groups in Aleppo received a US-Russian proposal on Sunday for a withdrawal of fighters and civilians from the city’s opposition areas, but Moscow said no agreement had been reached yet in talks in Geneva to end the crisis peacefully. The rebel official blamed Russia for the lack of progress in talks,

saying it had no incentive to compromise while its ally Assad was gaining ground. “The Russians are being evasive. They are looking at the military situation. Now they are advancing,” he said. The Observatory said the Sheikh Saeed district had fallen to the army in fighting on Sunday night and early on Monday and troops were firing on the districts of Karam al-

Daadaa and Fardous.

An advance into those districts would take the army into the heart of the area held by rebels as recently as Saturday, pushing them towards a last bastion of control on the west bank of Aleppo’s river and the area southwest of the citadel. The Syrian army is backed by Russian war planes and Shi’ite militias supported by Iran. The mostly Sunni rebels include groups backed by the United States, Turkey and Gulf monarchies as well as hard-line jihadists who are not supported by the West.

A correspondent for Syria’s official SANA news agency said the army had taken control of Sheikh Saeed, and more than 3,500 people had left at dawn. A Syrian official told Reuters: “We managed to take full control of the Sheikh Saeed district. This area is very important because it facilitates access to al-Amariya and allows us to secure a greater part of the Aleppo-Ramousah road.” The road is the main entry point to the city from the south.—Reuters

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Greek police find bomb planted outside labour ministry



Forensic experts search for evidence on a street, next to the Labour ministry building in Athens, Greece, on 12 December 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

ATHENS — Greek police found and later detonated an explosive device that had been left outside the labour ministry in central Athens on Monday, police sources said, after a newspaper was tipped off that a bomb had been planted.

Police found the device in a rucksack propped up against the shutters of the ministry, on a central thoroughfare in Athens. It was one of three suspect packages that police examined on the scene and then destroyed in controlled

blasts. Earlier, a telephone call to a Greek newspaper had warned that a blast outside the ministry was imminent. There was no claim of responsibility for the incident. Such attacks are not uncommon in Greece, which has a long history of

political violence. Small-scale attacks have escalated since 2010, when the government first adopted unpopular austerity measures in exchange for multi-billion-euro bailouts from the European Union and the IMF.—Reuters

British-Algerian journalist dies after hunger strike in Algiers

ALGIERS — A British-Algerian journalist had died six months after staging a hunger strike in Algiers over his detention for publishing articles seen as offensive to President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, prison authorities and his lawyer said.

Rights groups called for an investigation into Mohamed Tamalt's death - Reporters Without Borders said the news was a "hammer blow to all those who defend freedom of infor-

mation in Algeria".

The 42-year-old blogger and freelance reporter succumbed to a lung infection in hospital in Algiers on Sunday, the prison service said in a statement.

"I can confirm the death of the journalist Mohamed Tamalt in Bab el-Oued hospital after a hunger strike of more than three months and a three-month coma," lawyer Amine Sidhoum said on Facebook.

Tamalt, who was based

in London, was arrested in Algeria in June for posts he had shared on Facebook that were seen as critical of Algerian authorities.

Placed in pre-trial detention for "offending the president" and "defaming a public authority", he was later given a two-year sentence for offence against a public official, according to Human Rights Watch.

"It is urgent that lawyers are allowed access to the journalist's medical dossier," Yasmine Kacha,

North Africa director of Reporters Without Borders, said.

"A public apology should be presented to the journalist's family and an investigation immediately opened," she said in a statement.

Algeria's prison service said the hospital had been treating Tamalt for his lung infection, and he had been receiving daily treatment since beginning his hunger strike in late June.—Reuters

Egypt mourns victims of church bombing, angry survivors say security lax

CAIRO — Mourners packed an Egyptian church on Monday for the funeral of 24 people killed in a bomb attack at Cairo's Coptic cathedral and angry survivors said police had failed to protect the Christian minority.

Tearful relatives gathered at the Virgin Mary and St Athanasius Church in Cairo where Coptic Pope Tawadros II prayed over the wooden coffins of victims of Sunday's bombing, one of the deadliest to target Christians in recent memory.

On the walls hung banners bearing the names of the dead, many of them women.

Speaking after the funeral service, during which he shed tears, Pope Tawadros called the dead martyrs and sought to heal any sectarian friction caused by the attack, saying it "is not just a disaster for the church but a disaster for the whole nation." He also condemned attacks against the security forces.

"Those who commit acts such as this do not belong to Egypt at all, even if they are on its land," he said.

At least 24 people died and 49 were wounded when a bomb exploded in a chapel adjoining St Mark's Cathedral, Cairo's largest church and seat of the Coptic papacy, where security is normally tight.

The blast was caused by a bomb containing at least 12 kg (26 pounds) of TNT detonated on a side of the church used by women.

The chapel's floor was covered in debris

from shattered windows, its wooden pews blasted apart, its pillars blackened. Here and there lay abandoned shoes and patches of blood. Dazed church officials wondered around in their black robes.

Several hundred people gathered in the Madinat Nasr area furious at being denied entry to the funeral ceremony, where admittance was by invitation only. Security sources said police, concerned over mounting anger, detained at least 25 youths.

"They beat them up because they were chanting. Now they switched off their phones and we can't find them," said Atef Kamel, whose brother and cousin were taken away by police.

"They came to attend the funeral, so they got arrested ... Isn't it enough what has already happened to us?"

There was also anger at hospitals treating the wounded.

Five survivors at Dar al-Shefa hospital said police did not conduct the usual checks as the cathedral was particularly busy for Sunday's mass, which took place on a public holiday marking the Prophet Mohammad's birthday, just weeks before Christmas. "There were large numbers so people entered without being searched," said Mina Francis, who was at the mass with his mother, who was killed.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who announced three days of mourning and promised justice, is to attend a public ceremony later on Monday.—Reuters

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Midwest snow storm grounds hundreds of Chicago flights

CHICAGO — Hundreds of flights into and out of Chicago's O'Hare and Midway airports were canceled on Sunday as a winter storm system dumped moderate to heavy snow on the Upper Midwest and Lower Great Lakes regions before heading toward the US Northeast.

A winter storm warning was in effect in the Chicago area on Sunday afternoon, with total accumulations of up to 10 inches (25 cm) expected by midnight CST, the National Weather Service said.

It warned of difficult driving conditions in and around the country's third-biggest metropolitan area, where snow began falling on Saturday afternoon. As much as 13 inches of snow fell in parts of Michigan and up to 9 inches in parts of Minnesota by 8 a.m. CST on Sunday, according to the National Weather Service. At O'Hare International Airport, the world's fourth-busiest airport, United Air Lines and American Airlines have scratched most regional flights and some mainline service, while Southwest Air has canceled most flights out of Mid-

way International on Sunday evening and Monday morning, the airports said. Passengers took to Twitter to vent their frustrations over one of the first winter storms to snarl air traffic in the region this season.

"To all our fans in Vegas - we are stuck in Chicago from the snow storm, we are so so sorry. Winter weather is (sic) wrecked our plans. This sucks," wrote the rock band One Republic in a Twitter post. The group had a show scheduled on Sunday night at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada. All told, more than 1,200 flights into and out of O'Hare were canceled as of Sunday afternoon, according to the Flightaware tracking service, while nearly 200 Midway flights were scratched.

At Detroit's Metropolitan Wayne County Airport, a Delta flight arriving from Buffalo, New York, skidded off the runway and came to a stop on a grassy verge around midday on Sunday, but there were no injuries, local media reported.

Representatives of the airport and the airline could not be reached immediately to confirm the reports.—*Reuters*



A woman walks past mounds of snow and ice along Lake Michigan in Chicago, Illinois in 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS



A man dressed as Santa Claus rides his sleigh as he prepares for Christmas on the Arctic Circle in Rovaniemi, northern Finland in 2007. PHOTO: REUTERS

Santa in trouble? Reindeer shrink in Arctic as climate changes

OSLO — Reindeer are shrinking on an Arctic island near the North Pole in a side-effect of climate change that has curbed winter food for animals often depicted as pulling Father Christmas' sleigh, scientists said on Monday.

The average weight of adult reindeer on Svalbard, a chain of islands north of Norway, has fallen to 48 kg (106 lb) from 55 kg (121 lb) in the 1990s as part of sweeping changes to Arctic life as temperatures rise, they said.

"Warmer summers are great for reindeer but winters are getting increasingly tough," Professor Steve Albon, an ecologist at the James Hutton Institute in Scotland who led the study with Norwegian research-

ers, told Reuters.

Less chilly winters mean that once-reliable snows fall more often as rain that can freeze into a sheet of ice, making it harder for the herbivores to reach plant food. Some reindeer starve and females often give birth to stunted young.

In summer, however, plants flourish in a food bonanza that ensures healthy females more likely to conceive in autumn — a pregnancy lasts about seven months. The wild herd studied had expanded to about 1,400 animals from 800 since the 1990s.

"So far we have more but smaller reindeer," Albon said of reindeer on Svalbard, about 800 miles (1,300 km) from the North

Pole. The rising population also means more competition for scarce food in winter.

He noted that one popular children's book, "Father Christmas" by Raymond Briggs, showed a sleigh pulled by two reindeer. If the animals are smaller and weaker, "will two reindeer be sufficient?" Albon asked.

Arctic temperatures are rising faster than the world average amid a build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Most studies of global warming around Svalbard have focused on polar bears that hunt seals at sea, rather than year-round land residents led by reindeer, Arctic foxes and Svalbard rock ptarmigan birds.

Arctic fox numbers have risen slightly because they thrive in severe ice winters by scavenging dead reindeer, said Eva Fuglei, a researcher at the Norwegian Polar Institute and the Fram Centre who was not involved in the reindeer study.

"All the weak reindeer die — the sick, the elderly and calves," she told Reuters. But that means foxes struggle to feed the next winter because only the fittest adult reindeer have survived.—*Reuters*

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PHOTO: REUTERS

Johnny Depp visits children's hospital as Jack Sparrow

LONDON — Hollywood superstar Johnny Depp brightened the day of child patients of Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital by dressing up in his "Pirates Of The Caribbean" character Captain Jack Sparrow.

The actor chatted up with the young patients in his movie avatar, which is very popular with kids.

Depp's daughter Lily-Rose

was successfully treated for renal failure at the same hospital in 2007. One patient captioned the image, saying, "This is actual Johnny Depp. Just came in to the hospital. I'm so confused." —PTI

Daniel Craig may return as James Bond

LOS ANGELES — Actor Daniel Craig might play popular fictional character James Bond again.

The "Spectre" actor could be convinced to sign up for another 007 movie by the producer of his latest theatre project, "Othello", reported AceShowbiz.

Barbara Broccoli, who brought in Craig in 2006 for the string of hits "Casino Royale", "Quantum of Solace", "Skyfall" and "Spectre" is serving as producer for the play and it is believed that she would "ask the actor to reprise his role for the upcoming 'Bond 25'." —PTI



PHOTO: REUTERS

Tom Hanks has a huge influence on me: Ryan Reynolds

LOS ANGELES — Actor Ryan Reynolds says Oscar-winner Tom Hanks has a huge influence on him.

In his acceptance speech at the 22nd Critics' Choice Awards the 40-year-old star, who won the best actor in a comedy for "Deadpool", gave a shoutout to Hanks, reported Entertainment Weekly.

"I was not expecting this. I've prepared nothing. So, I'm just going to focus on Tom Hanks," Reynolds joked during his acceptance speech.

"No really, though. You're a huge influence on me. My two-year-old daughter, the first full sentence she ever said was, 'There's no crying in baseball.' I'm not kidding," he continued.

Reynolds went on to thank screenwriters, whom he called "the architects."

"It's a hugely undervalued asset in Hollywood. Oftentimes their job is very hard. They're alone in rooms in their underwear, weeping softly, their tears working as lube on their old-fashioned typewriter machines," he said. —PTI



PHOTO: REUTERS



(L-R) Producer Gary Gilbert, actors Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling, director Damien Chazelle, producer Jordan Horowitz, costume designer Mary Zophres and composer Justin Hurwitz pose backstage with their award for Best Picture for 'La La Land' in Santa Monica, California, US, on 11 December 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

'La La Land' wins big at Critics Choice Awards

LOS ANGELES — Damien Chazelle's "La La Land" starring Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling, bagged eight trophies including best picture, best director and best original song at the 22nd Annual Critics' Choice Awards.

Accepting the award on behalf of the production was Chazelle, who thanked the film's entire cast and crew for having faith in him, reported Entertainment Weekly.

"I want to thank my producers... For trying to make this movie for six years.

Six years of what seemed like an impossible dream, an uphill climb, and you guys never lost faith. You always pushed me, I can't thank you guys enough," Chazelle said. Moving to film's lead pair Stone and Gosling, Chazelle continued: Thank you for the months of rehearsal, learning, singing, dancing- Ryan learning piano, Emma doing her biggest numbers completely live - both of you giving more than I ever could have expected from actors and giving just the most transformative performances I've ever been lucky enough to film."

In other categories, Natalie Portman won Best Actress at for

her starring role in "Jackie", Pablo Larrain's biopic of Jackie Kennedy Onassis, while Casey Affleck bagged Best Actor for "Manchester by the Sea".

"Moonlight" took home best supporting actor for Mahershala Ali, as well as best acting ensemble. Eric Heisserer won best adapted screenplay for "Arrival".

On the television front, Bob Odenkirk won best actor in a dramatic series for "Better Call Saul", "The People Vs O J Simpson" won four times, including acting prizes for Sarah Paulson and Courtney B Vance and Donald Glover won for best actor in a comedy series. —PTI

Dancing show “Heaven, Earth, People” held in Rome



Performers dance during the dancing show “Heaven, Earth, People” in Rome, Italy, on 10 December 2016. The show “Heaven, Earth, People” is directed by Two Chinese students Zheng Lu and Jiang Churui, who graduated from Beijing Dancing Academy. PHOTO: XINHUA

Premature girl babies more likely to be short adults: New Zealand-Swedish study

WELLINGTON — Baby girls born very premature could be almost three times more likely to grow into very short adults than those born at term, according to a study by New Zealand and Swedish researchers out Monday.

The study also found women born very premature — before 32 weeks — were 2.3 centimetres shorter on average as adults than

their sisters born at term, or 37 to 41 weeks. “We were a little surprised by the results,” said lead author Dr Jose Derraik, of Auckland University’s Liggins Institute. “There is some evidence that babies who were born premature tend to be shorter in childhood, but they usually catch up with those born at term in late adolescence,” Derraik said in a statement.

“But our study shows that women who were born very preterm fail to reach the stature you’d expect based on their parents’ and siblings’ heights.”

The study with Uppsala University in Sweden was the latest collaboration to analyse data from more than 200,000 Swedish women collected from 1991 to 2008.

Researchers were yet

to establish why premature birth should lead to shorter adult stature. “It may be related to the fact that premature babies are often quite thin at birth,” said Derraik. A previous Liggins Institute study showed that small size at birth was associated with changes in the way growth hormone worked in the body, which could eventually reduce adult height.—Xinhua

Nobel Prize award ceremony held in Stockholm; Bob Dylan in absentia

STOCKHOLM — The Nobel Prize award ceremony was held on Saturday in the Swedish capital, with the absence of US musician Bob Dylan.

Dylan, laureate of the Nobel Prize in Literature, was absent, citing “pre-existing commitments”. The 75-year-old was the first singer-songwriter awarded the literature prize.

Carl-Henrik Heldin, Chairman of the Nobel Foundation, said that the prize rewarded those who have conferred the greatest benefit to mankind.

“Just as in the era of Alfred Nobel, today there are dark clouds in the sky around the world. Terrorist acts are a part of many

people’s daily lives, and wars are under way in many places,” he said.

International cooperation, cross-border movements and openness are being criticised. Science and knowledge are being questioned, the climate issue being one recent example, Heldin said.

“Leading politicians — both in Europe and the United States — are winning votes by denying knowledge and scientific truths. Populism is widespread and is reaping major political successes,” he said. “The grim truth is that we can no longer take it for granted that people believe in science, facts and knowledge,” he added.—Xinhua

SMAP fans collect 370,000 signatures to urge breakup rethink

TOKYO — A group of avid fans of SMAP, one of Japan’s most popular and longest-lived pop groups, has collected 373,515 signatures in Japan and abroad to petition the group’s members to change their mind about breaking up at the end of this year.

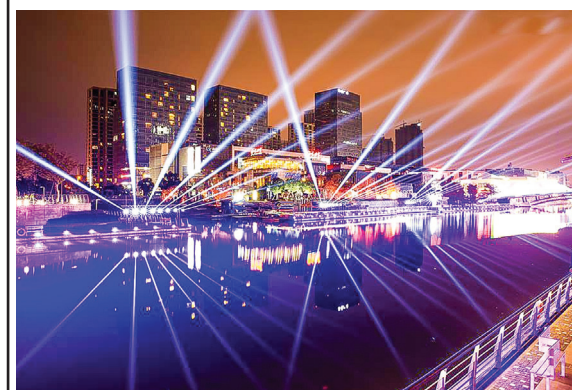
The group, called “5 SMILE,” submitted the signatures to SMAP’s agent Johnny & Associates Inc. in Tokyo on Sunday.

In accepting the petition, the talent agency issued a document stating it “will convey, without fail, your wishes to the mem-

bers” of the now middle-aged boy band formed in 1988. In the document, the agency, which announced in August that SMAP will break up on 31 December, also said that prior to the announcement it tried to have the members to change their mind about disbanding, proposing a “direction for the group’s future activities so it can continue to exist.”

“But we failed to break their determination and made an agonizing decision to accept the fact that the group’s continued existence is difficult,” it said.—Kyodo News

Light festival held in east China’s Ningbo



A light festival is held in Ningbo, east China’s Zhejiang Province, on 10 December 2016. The festival will last three months. PHOTO: XINHUA

mitv Myanmar International Programme Schedule

(13-12-2016 07:00 AM ~ 14-12-2016 07:00 AM) MST

| | | |
|-------|----|--|
| 07:03 | Am | News |
| 07:26 | Am | “Myanmar’s Traditions and Culture” Novicehood in Myanmar |
| 07:51 | Am | Licuala Palm Leaf |
| 08:03 | Am | News |
| 08:26 | Am | A Snake Catcher |
| 08:38 | Am | Adventurous Young Photographer |
| 09:03 | Am | News |
| 09:26 | Am | Archery Session (from Ramayana Play) |
| 09:49 | Am | Today Myanmar: Seatbelt & Road Safety |
| 10:03 | Am | News |
| 10:26 | Am | History And Mystery Behind The Caves |

10:52 Am The Green Corner (Ep-6) “Papier-mache Bead & Bird”

(11:00 Am ~ 03:00 Pm)- Monday 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 | A Day Out With Sarah (EP-7) |
| 07:53 | Pm | A Nun’s Creation in Fruit Carving |
| 08:03 | Pm | News |
| 08:26 | Pm | Taste of Myanmar (Lashio Noodle) |
| 08:43 | Pm | Kayah |
| 08:50 | Pm | Sagaing: Youth Leader |

(11:00 Pm ~ 03:00 Am)- Monday 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)

Costa fires Chelsea back to the top, United beat Spurs

LONDON — Chelsea striker Diego Costa's class shone through as he fired them back to the top of the Premier League on Sunday with a 1-0 win over West Bromwich Albion as the previous day's goal glut turned into a trickle.

The Spain international's fine second-half strike at Stamford Bridge toppled a defensive West Bromwich Albion side and restored the Blues' three-point advantage over Arsenal as they chalked up their ninth league victory in a row.

The Gunners had taken provisional top spot with 34 points from 15 games on goals scored after recovering to beat Stoke City 3-1 at the Emirates on Saturday.

"It was a tough game," said Chelsea manager Antonio Conte. "We played with passion. West Brom is a tough team, a physical team who are difficult to break

down. It was a good win and now we must continue.

"We have won nine in a row which is fantastic because this league is very tough. We are working very well."

All six home teams in action on Saturday scored at least three goals, with Jamie Vardy bagging a hat-trick as champions Leicester City returned to form with a 4-2 home win against

Manchester City.

Sunday's opening three matches all ended 1-0, Chelsea's early scoreline reflected later at Old Trafford and St Mary's with Manchester United and Southampton seeing off Tottenham Hotspur and Middlesbrough respectively

by the same margin.

Only the porous defences of third-placed Liverpool, now three points adrift of Arsenal, and struggling West Ham United raised the average with a 2-2 draw at Anfield in the later kickoff.

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp, whose side lost 4-3 at Bournemouth last weekend, would still have been happier to

see fewer goals on the score-sheet. "The goals could have been avoided. That's how it is in football. Mixed emotions, it's still a point. A draw doesn't feel too good. doesn't feel too bad," he said. With the game at Chelsea heading for a stalemate, Costa seized on a West Brom defensive error to break the deadlock with a superb shot into the top left corner in the 76th minute.

It was the league top scorer's 12th goal of the campaign, as many as he netted in the whole of last season. Manchester United's Henrikh Mkhitaryan

opened his league account with a sizzling strike just before the half-hour mark for Jose Mourinho's side, having scored his first for the club in the Europa League on Thursday.

The Armenian midfielder's afternoon ended painfully, however, when he was taken off on a stretcher

with 10 minutes remaining after a heavy tackle left him clutching his ankle.

The Portuguese coach played down Mkhitaryan's injury, saying it looked more serious than it was and that he could be out for a week.

"Maximum a couple of weeks. It doesn't look like something that is very dangerous or difficult. He brings everything I want an attacker to play. Maybe one week out and it is better to be fresh for Boxing Day (26 December)," he said.

United remained sixth with 24 points, three behind fifth-placed Tottenham who might otherwise have overtaken Manchester City, who are fourth, on goal difference.

Southampton recovered from the disappointment of their Europa League elimination to return to winning ways. Their goal came in the 53rd minute when Sofiane Boufal picked the ball up from James Ward-Prowse and unleashed an unstoppable left-foot shot to claim his first league goal.—Reuters



Manchester United's Henrikh Mkhitaryan celebrates scoring their first goal. PHOTO: REUTERS

Pogba to face brother as Man United meet St Etienne

ZURICH — Manchester United midfielder Paul Pogba could face his brother Florentin after the Jose Mourinho's side were drawn against St Etienne in the Europa League round of 32, a tie which will also stir memories of the dark days of hooliganism in the 1970s.

The sides met in the old European Cup Winners' Cup in 1977-78 but the first leg in St Etienne was marred by violence involving United supporters.

The English side were kicked out of the competition

by UEFA but were reinstated on appeal and ordered to play their home leg outside Manchester, choosing to stage the game in Plymouth in south-west England.

They won the match 2-0 to go through 3-1 on aggregate.

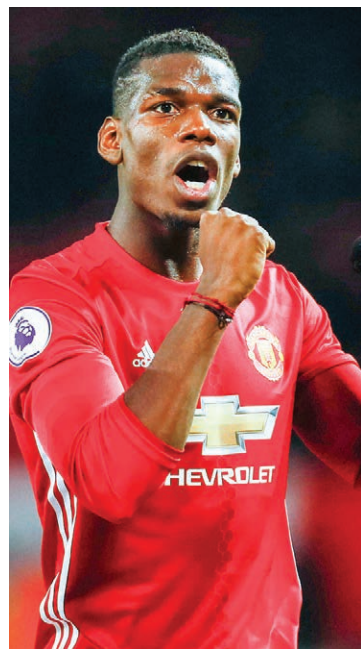
Florentin Pogba, a Guinean international, is a defender for St Etienne although he has only been picked intermittently this season. His brother Paul, who plays for France, joined United from Juventus in the close season for a world record fee.

Borussia Moenchengladbach and Fiorentina, two of the most familiar names in European club football, will meet for the first time.

AS Roma, the only other Serie A team left in the competition after Inter Milan and Sassuolo failed to get past the group stage, are involved in another high-profile match against Spain's Villarreal.

Israel's Hapoel Beer Sheva, who beat Inter during the group stage, were rewarded with a tie against Besiktas, one of eight teams parachuting in from the Champions League.

Two of the other top ties pitted AZ Alkmaar against Olympique Lyonnais and PAOK against Schalke, a repeat of their Champions League playoff tie in 2013-14 which the Bundesliga side edged 4-3 on aggregate.—Reuters



Manchester United's Paul Pogba. PHOTO: REUTERS

Arsenal get Bayern again, Barcelona meet PSG

ZURICH — Arsenal will have another chance to beat Bayern Munich in a Champions League knockout tie after the sides were paired yet again in the round of 16 following Monday's draw.

The teams met at the same stage in 2005, 2013 and 2014 with the German champions winning on all three occasions - 3-2 on aggregate in 2005, on away goals after a 3-3 draw in 2013 and 3-1 in 2014.

Paris St Germain will also try to break a jinx when they face Spanish champions Barcelona, who knocked them out in the quarter-finals in 2013 and 2014.

Holders Real Madrid, who like Bayern finished as runners-up in their group and will therefore play the first leg at home, were given a tricky clash with Serie A side Napoli.

The draw also produced a potential grudge match as it pitted Bayer Leverkusen against Atletico Madrid, whose respective coaches Roger Schmidt and Diego Simeone were involved in an ugly touchline spat when the sides met two seasons ago.

On that occasion, Atletico went through on penalties after a 1-1 aggregate draw. Arsenal may feel this could be their best chance to beat Bayern, whose domestic and European form has not been as dominant as in recent seasons.

"We are through to the knockout stage for the 14th consecutive season, which is testament to Arsene Wenger and the teams throughout that time," club secretary David Miles said.

"The fans will think we have got the rough end of the draw again - at some stage the tide has got to turn and we will beat them."

Serie A champions Juventus were drawn against Porto in a repeat of the 1984 European Cup Winners' Cup final which the Italian side won 2-1.

Sevilla and English champions Leicester City will meet for the first time as will Manchester City and AS Monaco.—Reuters

Kyrgios thinks ban will help him push for top 10 in 2017

SYDNEY — Australian world number 13 Nick Kyrgios thinks his ATP-imposed suspension will stand him in good stead when he makes a push for the top 10 next season.

The 21-year-old rose to a career high ranking this year but his tour season ended with a \$25,000 fine and a two-month ban from the ATP for not trying in a match at the Shanghai Masters.

The ban was reduced to three weeks after he agreed to see a sports psychologist.

"The ATP wanted me to see a psychologist to help me out and I've been doing that," Kyrgios told Fox Sports after helping the Singapore Slammers to the Indian Premier League Tennis title in Hyderabad on Sunday.

"It's actually been good, just relaxing a little bit, spending

more time with my family and my girlfriend as well.

"So the suspension, one way to look at it, is getting more time off with the people you love and I've been training as well, so it's set me up in good stead for 2017.

"Obviously I wouldn't have wanted to get suspended but it gave me time to think about and analyse what I've got to get better at."—Reuters