

NATIONAL
Rice listed as main export to Bangladesh through Maungtaw Trade Zone
PAGE-6



NATIONAL
Union Minister Dr. Pe Myint attends public talk and library opening in Pyapon
PAGE-3

SUNDAY SPECIAL

SUNDAY SPECIAL
Let's preserve our tradition and culture
Today's issue contains an 8-Page special pull-out supplement.

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Sunday, 21 January 2018



in
Picture

Myanmar Cultural Variety Show opened in Nay Pyi Taw

Cultural performances will be staged monthly at the National Landmark in Nay Pyi Taw, free of charge. **PHOTO: MNA (NEWS ON PAGE-15)**

12 hornbills sighted in Chin State

A GROUP of a dozen hornbills, a species that is near extinction, were found recently by conservationists in Chin State.

“Twelve hornbills were recorded by conservationists with the use of SMART technology near Nhone Village in Mindet,” said U Thein Lwin of the Department of Wildlife Conservation of the Natmataung National Park.

The population of the great hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*) also known as the great Indian hornbill or great pied hornbill, is declining in Chin State, according to environmental conservationists.

The government has urged local people to protect Chin State’s great pied hornbills and the Taungzalat trees, which are also in danger of becoming extinct, as they are also symbols of the state.

To save the two symbols of the Chin people from extinction, conservationists are making monthly conservation efforts for the birds using SMART Technology. “We have to report the investigation process once every three months, getting suggestions from the township wildlife and natural plants conservation committee.

SEE PAGE-6

Tourism needs money, management, modernisation

VICE PRESIDENT U Henry Van Thio said yesterday that, in order for tourism to be successful in the future, foreign investment, effective management and safe, modern,

well-maintained hotels need to be developed.

The meeting was attended by Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism U Ohn Maung, the Myanmar Hotelier Associ-

ation chairman and executive committee members, hotel zones chairmen and officials. At the meeting, the Vice President said there are things that need to be done by relevant

ministries and state and regional governments, as well as to coordinate with private organisations in the second meeting of CCDNTI.

SEE PAGE-3

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A donation ceremony to 10,000 monks for the first time held in Nay Pyi Taw. **PHOTO: MNA**

For first time, rice and provisions donation held for 10,000 monks in Nay Pyi Taw

TO achieve peace, stability and development, as sought by the people, as well as to prevent dangers, a rice and provisions donation ceremony for 10,000 monks was held yesterday afternoon, for the first time, in Nay Pyi Taw at Uppatasati Pagoda.

The ceremony was attended by aged and eminent Sayadaws, State Ovadacariya (patron) Sayadaws, State Sanghamahanayaka Sayadaws, Tipitakadhara Sayadaws, Uppatasati Pagoda Trustee Board Ovada-

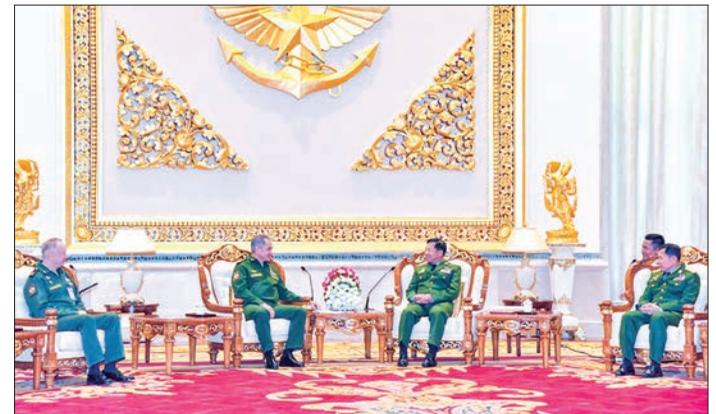
cariya Sayadaws, state, district and township level Sanghanayaka Committee member Sayadaws, sayadaws from Zeyathiri, Zabuthiri, Pobbathiri, Dekkhinathiri, Ottarathiri, Pynmana, Lewe, Tatkon, Taungoo and Yamethin townships and sanghas.

The donation ceremony was held at 2 p.m. Attending the event were Nay Pyi Taw Council Chairman Dr. Myo Aung, officials from governmental departments, companies, civil society

organisations, parahita (welfare) organisations, well-wishers and the public.

In addition to this, in the field at Uppatasani Pagoda a successful completion ceremony was held for the January 17 to 20 non-stop recitation of paritta and Patthana Pali by 900 sanghas, in which devotees took the nine precepts from State Ovadacariya Sayadaws and State Sanghamahanayaka Sayadaws, donated offerings and shared merits. — Myanmar News Agency ■

Senior General welcomes Russian Minister of Defence



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing receives Russian Army General Sergei K. Shoigu in Nay Pyi Taw. **PHOTO: MNA**

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, welcomed Army General Sergei K. Shoigu, Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation, at Zeyathiri Beikman Hall in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday afternoon.

As part of the ceremony, the Commander-in-Chief and the Minister for Defence of the Russian Federation took the salute and inspected the guard of honour, and were then introduced to high ranking armed forces officers of the two countries.

Also, they held talks on exchanges of visits between the two armed forces, cooperation in training and technology, and

potential areas of cooperation.

Afterwards, a ceremony was held to sign a military cooperation agreement between the two countries, as Deputy Minister for Defence Maj-Gen Myint Nwe and Lieutenant General Alexander V Fomin signed a military cooperation agreement between the two countries, in the presence of Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and the Minister for Defence of the Russian Federation.

Later, the Senior General hosted a luncheon in honour of the Minister for Defence of Russian Federation and his delegation.—Myanmar News Agency ■

UCSB Chairman inspects conduct of civil service entry-level officers in second stage written test

UNION Civil Service Board (UCSB) Chairman Dr. Win Thein, accompanied by Yangon Region Minister for Agriculture, Livestock, Forest and Energy U Han Tun, Civil Service Selection and Training Department Director-General U Kyaw Soe and officials, inspected the conduct of the civil service entry-level officers second stage written test held at Landmadaw Basic Education High School No. (1) Yangon yesterday morning.

The 10 July 2017 guiding remarks of the State Counsellor, made at the launch of the Civil Service Reform Strategic Action Plan, called for recruiting the most qualified and best people for the civil service through a merit based system.

The Union Civil Service Board has since put in place a screening test, which includes Myanmar, English and general knowledge written tests, instead of the written test system which

was used previously. This was done to meet two of the four priorities included in the Civil Service Reform Strategic Action Plan. The two priorities are priority no. 2 on Merit Based selection and promotion, and priority no. 4, to be responsible and transparent. An announcement was made by the Union Civil Service Board to select 480 officer positions for 11 ministries and departments, and

a screening test was conducted on 16 December 2017.

The 2,493 who passed the screening test were to next take the second stage written tests. The second stage written tests were held in Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon, Mandalay, Magway and Mawlamyine test centers on 20 and 21 January, where 2,325 will be taking the test. — Myanmar News Agency ■



Dr. Win Thein visits the civit service entyr-level test in Yangon. **PHOTO: MNA**

U Aye Tha Aung, Amyotha Hluttaw Deputy Speaker, inspects Mandalay Region Hluttaw



Deputy Speaker of Amyotha Hluttaw U Aye Tha Aung inspects Mandalay Region Hluttaw in Mandalay yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

Yesterday afternoon, Amyotha Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U Aye Tha Aung inspected the Mandalay Region Hluttaw.

Mandalay Region Hluttaw Speaker U Aung Kyaw Oo, Deputy Hluttaw Speaker Dr. Khin Maung Htay, Regional Hluttaw Representatives and departmental heads explained the

process of Hluttaw.

Also, the Mandalay Region Hluttaw Speaker explained the implementation of the Hluttaw process and other matters.

Afterwards, the Amyotha Hluttaw Deputy Speaker explained Hluttaw matters and discussed Hluttaw affairs. — Myanmar News Agency ■

Tourism needs money, management, modernisation

FROM PAGE-1

For the tourism industry to develop, there is a need to set up proper plans and implement them, as well as to have the necessary funds.

Also, tourism development funds are to be systematically collected and maintained, and the management processes must be properly setup, and effectively and efficiently used.

The income obtained from the tourism business is beneficial, not only for the country's development, but to all those related to it. The tourism business is sensitive, so for there to be a regular income from it, superior conditions and surroundings are required. Hotel room rates in Myanmar are comparably higher than in other countries. The reason may be the unequal ratio between the numbers of hotels and visitors. The numbers of hotels, motels and rooms available, the numbers of visitors, excess rooms or the possibility of more visitors, and plans to open more hotels need to be assessed by zones and reports submitted.

All those involved are also urged to invite more foreign investment to tourism related



Vice President U Henry Van Thio discusses relating to tourism development with Myanmar hoteliers at the meeting in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

infrastructures and priority investment in the development of hotels

Ngapali, Ngwesaung and Chaungtha are places where the development of the tourism business is related to beaches, and the examples of other nations need to be studied on how hotels are built, depending upon the distance from the beach, and provide the practices and suggestions to the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism.

Hotels and motels owners need to be concerned about security, and cooperate with relevant authorities for the safety of visitors and local residents. All are urged to assist and cooperate with related state and regional governments to draw up tourism plans.

After the Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism, U Ohn Maung, was introduced to Myanmar hotel business owners, Myanmar Hotelier Association

chairman U Aung Myo Min Din explained the history, setup and work processes of the Myanmar Hotelier Association.

Next, the Hotel Zone chairman explained about their respective zones, followed by Myanmar Hotelier Association vice chairman U Aung Moe Kyi's review of required alcohol (spirit) licenses, wellness and spa licenses, taxes on travel businesses and on the opening of effective hotel

training courses.

Union Minister U Ohn Maung explained further about the discussions and submissions made, and Vice President U Henry Van Thio coordinated and commented on the discussions.

CCDNTI Chairman Vice President U Henry Van Thio then took a commemorative group photo with those attending the meeting.—Myanmar News Agency ■

Union Minister Dr. Pe Myint attends public talk and library opening in Pyapon

UNION Minister for Information Dr. Pe Myint attended a ceremony to celebrate the opening of a library yesterday morning at No. 88 basic education post primary school, Kyone-Kutumyaung Village, Pyapon Township.

To begin the ceremony, the Union Minister, the library donor and headmistress of the school officially opened the library by cutting the ceremonial ribbon and releasing balloons.

Also during the library opening ceremony the Union Minister delivered a speech, and then donated books, journals and sports gear to the school.

Next, the library donor, U Wi Chaing (Kyokya electronic), explained the reasons for donating and transferred documents related to the library to the headmistress.

Afterwards, documents of honor were presented to those who donated to the school, and



Union Minister Dr Pe Myint cuts ribbon to open the library in Pyapon Township. PHOTO: MNA

the headmistress delivered a speech of thanks.

Students then entertained the guests and the Union Min-

ister, and donors gave presents to these students. The 20x15 ft. library is a reinforced concrete building, costing Ks 15.3 million.

Donors provided books and furniture for the library, as well.

The library opening ceremony was attended by Ay-

eyawady Region minister for development affairs U Kyaw Myint and officials, school guardians, donors, local residents, teachers and students.

Later in the afternoon, the Union Minister attended a Public Talk, titled "youth and the library" held in Saya Zaw Gyi Centenary Hall in Pyapon Town, where the Union Minister delivered a speech and donated books and journals for the library. Ayeyawady Region minister for development affairs U Kyaw Myint, writer Maung Zeya, Pho Aung Lay and reporter Ma Thuzar Nwe conducted the Public Talk and responded to suggestions and questions raised by the attendees.

Afterwards, the Union Minister inspected the Pyapon District Information and Public Relations Office and Library, and provided new books, journals and sports gear, as well as advice to the staff.—District IPRD ■

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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.

Ancient religious building in Bago Region needs renovation

SITUATED in Nyaunglebin, a town in Bago Region, a 112-year-old religious building is in need of repair, according to a Buddhist monk residing in the ancient structure.

Buddhist monks are currently living in the old building, located within the compound of the Kuthinayone Monastery on Phayagyi Street in Myoma Ward-1, Nyaunglebin Town.

Commenting on the building, Sayadaw Ashin Vithehta Linkara, an Abbot of the Kuthinayone Monastery, said, "The old building was built by Daw Phaw and families in 1905 for religious purposes. The wide parts of the building are naturally damaged and in need of renovation. Efforts were made to reach the original donors, but we lost contact with them."

"We invite the govern-



Kuthinayone Monastery on Phayagyi Street, Nyaunglebin. **PHOTO: KO HTWE (NYAUNGLEBIN)**

ment and all enthusiasts to visit the 31-foot long, 31-foot wide and 36-foot high brick building decorated with ancient architecture, in an effort to maintain

it as a cultural heritage," the Abbot of the monastery added.

The old building was also damaged by several earthquakes. Large cracks appeared

in the building after an earthquake of 6.0 magnitudes struck 27.3 km west-southwest of Pyu Town in Bago Region last Friday.—Ko Htwe (Nyaunglebin)

Property prices high in Mandalay's Patheingyi Township

REAL estate prices have risen in Patheingyi Township in the Mandalay Region after the government upgraded a few roads, built a bridge and provided power facilities in the area, according to real estate agents.

As part of its plan, the government successfully completed several development projects, including the

construction of Dokehtawaddy (Shwesayan) Bridge, linking Kyaukse and PyinOoLwin; the paving of the new 22-mile Mandalay-PyinOoLwin Road; and the extension of some intersection roads and upgrade of a few others in the township. Electrification projects have also been implemented in the township.

Thanks to improved transport facilities, businessmen are interested in Patheingyi and nearby areas, resulting in an increase in the land prices, especially of plots near the project areas.

According to a local real estate agent, the price of a 40' x 60' land plot on the Shwesayan Pagoda Road and near the Sev-

en-Mile Resort has increased to Ks200 million from Ks20 million in the last seven years.

Land prices are also high in Mekinkong Village and nearby areas because the Urban and Housing Development Department is implementing low-cost housing projects in the village.—Maung Pyi Thu (Mandalay)

693 grams of heroin, 42,000 yaba tablets seized in Myitkyina

A combined investigation team of officers and staff from Myitkyina Township seized 42,000 yaba tablets, worth Ks126 million, and 66 soap boxes of heroin, weighing 693 grams, worth Ks55.44 million, from a Pajero Dgi vehicle at the 21-mile checkpoint in Myitkyina Township, Kachin State, on 18 January.

Acting on a tip, the police intercepted the vehicle en route to Myitkyina from Mogaung Town.

The vehicle, driven by Tu Aung, 22, had two

other passengers: Zaw Baut Aung, 23, and Sai Oo, 44.

The police also found two mobile phones and a motor licence in the name of Augn Sai Jar.

The team has apprehended two men for drug possession and is seeking two other suspects.

The police have filed charges against all the suspects for violating the Anti-Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law.—Win Nang (Kachin Myay)

Annual vehicle registration to go online

THE Yangon Region Road Transport Administration Department is implementing an online booking system for the annual registration of vehicles from 2 January to reduce problems with traffic congestion and to save time.

The department will accept all vehicles in January even if

the owners have not used the online booking system, as they may not be aware of the system or know how to use it. However, the department has announced it will not accept vehicles that are not registered through the online booking system from February 1.—Myanmar News Agency

670 police officers to be deployed during Myanmar-Thailand rice offering ceremony

MORE than 670 police members will be deployed to ensure security and order during a rice offering ceremony to 20,000 Buddhist monks marking Myanmar-Thailand friendship, said police Lt-Col Myo Aung, an official from Mandalay District Police Force.

670 policemen including 99

police officers will be deployed to provide better security, fire safety and mine clearance measures.

Myanmar-Thailand rice offering ceremony to 20,000 Buddhist monks is scheduled to be held at Chanmyathazi Airport in Mandalay at 6 am on 21 January.—Ei Moh Moh Khaing



PHOTO: REUTERS

US dollar exchange rate decreases in local market due to greenback's depreciation

May Thet Hnin

THE dollar is depreciating against the local currency due to the greenback's depreciating against other currencies on the international market, exporters say.

The dollar exchange rate against the local currency has declined in the market since the second week of this month. The US dollar exchange rate in the domestic market was above Ks1,356 prices per dollar. For the time being, the dollar is valued at between Ks1,345 and Ks1,347.

On 19 January, the buying price of a dollar was Ks1,346, while the selling price reached Ks1,347 per dollar in the world market. The Central Bank of Myanmar set the exchange rate at Ks1,346 per dollar. However, the dollar price calculated for export earnings was Ks1,349. At Kanbawza Bank, the selling price per dollar was Ks1,345 and the buying prices was Ks1,339.

Regarding the exchange rate, Daw Toe Nanda Tin, vice-chairperson of Myanmar Fishery Products Processor and Exporter Association (MF-PPEA), said, "The dollar is depreciating against the local currency due to the greenback's depreciation against other currencies in the international market. There will be no huge impact on the export sector due to a two-digit decline. Traders may be at risk if there is a three-digit decline."

U Ye Myint Maung, chairman of Myanmar Food and Exporters Association, noted, "Exporters will be able to enjoy the fruit only when the currency exchange rate is stable."

"The dollar's depreciation has little effect on us. The reason is because we imported raw materials, with a value of Ks1,360 per dollar, three or four weeks ago, and then exported finished products at around Ks1,345 per dollar. The two-digit decline will

have no big impact on exporters. We are not doing it on purpose. We can do nothing due to the greenback's depreciation in the international market," he continued.

Exporters experienced financial losses in about 2008, as the value of the dollar dropped to some Ks300 per dollar.

Last year's dollar exchange rate was higher than that in previous years, while 2016 saw a record high of Ks1,380 per dollar.

The dollar's depreciation in the international market is linked to factors such as inflation, interest rates, terms of trade, current account and deficits, political stability and economic performance.

International economic websites indicate that the US dollar exchange rate against other currencies has declined slightly. Declining gold prices and falling stock markets are another reason for the greenback's depreciation. ■

Myanmar's imports top \$14.3 billion in current FY

MYANMAR imported products valued at US\$14.347 billion during the first 297 days of this fiscal year (FY), an increase of over \$2 billion against the last FY, according to official statistics released by the commerce ministry.

During this period, the country purchased \$5.1 billion worth of capital goods, \$5.7 billion of intermediate goods, and a wide variety of consumer products worth \$3.5 billion from international countries, including neighbours.

According to the ministry's statistical report, this year's imports of capital goods by the private sector declined to some \$4.6 billion from \$4.7 billion in

the last FY, while the government's imports of intermediate goods saw a slight decrease in value of \$4.8 million. However, imports of consumer goods by the two sectors rose by over \$500 million, in comparison with the last FY.

The country's imports include medicines and hospital equipment, electronic devices, automobiles and accessories, farming machinery, cosmetics, food, plastic materials and products. Its exports included domestically-produced products, such as agricultural crops, freshwater fishes and bamboo.—Khine Khant ■

Export value increases by \$1.9 billion as of mid-January

THE value of exports between Myanmar and overseas traders exceeded US\$10.9 billion in the current fiscal year (FY), according to the latest report issued by the ministry of commerce on Friday.

The total export value included nearly \$3.6 billion from the government sector and \$7.3 billion from the private sector. When compared with the same period last year, this year's export value increased by over \$1.9 billion. The Myanmar government is encouraging the private sector's participating in trading, in anticipation of continued economic development.

Over the first 297 days of this FY, the government exported

mineral, forest products, manufactured goods and other types of products, except agricultural products, animals, and marine products, whereas private exporters sold a wide variety of marketable products. According to the commerce ministry, the country exported \$2.3 billion worth of agro products, \$24.3 million worth of animal products, along with \$516.5 million of marine products from the private sector.

Both sectors exported minerals, forest products, manufactured goods and others, with an estimated value of more than \$8 billion from 1 April of last year through 12 January of this year.—Shwe Khine ■

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Sayamagyi Daw Zin Khine Foundation awards education stipends to 101 students

THE Myanmar-China Friendship Association held a Sayamagyi (great teacher) Daw Zin Khine Foundation education stipend award ceremony yesterday morning at the Sport Hotel in Yangon.

Yangon Region Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U Lin Naing Myint, Embassy of People's Republic of China to Myanmar Cultural Counselor Mr. Tian Shanting, Yangon Region Head of Education Office Deputy Director General Daw Khin Mar Swe and Myanmar-China Friendship Association chairman U Sein Win Aung delivered speeches and presented education stipend awards to representatives of outstanding students attending universities across the country. Maung Hein Htat Lin of Yangon Technological University, Yangon Region



Outstanding and education stipend recipient students and officials pose for a documentary photo. **PHOTO: MNA**

then gave a speech of appreciation.

The Sayamagyi Daw Zin Khine Foundation is providing 101 outstanding and education

stipend recipient students from technological universities, universities of medicine and universities of education with a stipend of Ks300,000 per student

for the year 2018. The foundation has been providing education stipends for five years.

Ninety-year-old Sayamagyi Daw Zin Khine was born in Fu-

jian Province, China and was raised in Myanmar, where she obtained a degree from Yangon University. She also passed the nine-part Abidhamma examination and earned many awards. At the invitation of the Chinese government in 1965, she served as a professor in the China Foreign Language Bureau and Beijing Foreign Studies University. She had been working for more than 40 years to strengthen the relations between Myanmar and China. With the support of her students, the Sayamagyi Daw Zin Khine Foundation was formed on 30 March 2013 and has been providing education stipends ever since.

Sayamagyi Daw Zin Khine still serves as the Chinese national reunion association chairman.—Myanmar News Agency ■

Rice listed as main export to Bangladesh through Maungtaw Trade Zone

RICE exports to Bangladesh reached more than 13,400 tons through the Maungtaw Trade Zone, becoming the largest export to the neighbouring country in the ten months of the 2017-2018 FY.

Up to 14 January 2017-2018 FY, 13420 tons of rice had been exported. The first largest export to Bangladesh is rice, while the second is aquatic products, and the third follows instant foods and other manufacturing products, such as sweets, Thanaka, a yellowish-white cosmetic paste made from ground bark, anti-acne cream, blankets, shoes and coffee mix.

“Rice from Buthidaung is transported by truck to Maungtaw port and exported to Bangladesh. Exports were temporarily stopped in September. There are nearly 100 workers in that port. They can also make a good living when a sea route to Bangladesh returns to normalcy”, a rice trader said.

“There are about 10 traders in Maungtaw Town, including me. Our main export to Bangladesh is rice and palm jam, dried fishes. Ginger and cosmetics are also being ex-



Workers carrying sacks of rice in Maungtaw Trade Zone, Maungtaw. **PHOTO: AUNG YE THWIN/KO MIN**

ported. A round way to the Bangladesh side is by private rental motor boats, which takes three days. The water way is now favorable and, therefore, we are continuously exporting. We transport about 2000 sacks of rice at one time. As the market is also better, we can earn profits”, he added.

Myanmar's main exports to Bangladesh are rice, ginger, silk, cotton, onions, fish, prawns, dried fish, bamboo, cane, and other industrial

goods.

Imports arriving through the Maungtaw Border Trade Zone from Bangladesh have ceased since the violent attacks in October 2016.

The trade zones between Myanmar and Bangladesh mostly rely on the swell and ebb of the river, and the Kanyin Chaung trade zone is being developed to pave way for larger cargo vessels, according to officials.—Aung Ye Thwin/ Ko Min ■

12 hornbills sighted in Chin State

FROM PAGE-1

We have organised committees, appointing four local youths in our camps, for making preservation processes”, said U Thein Lwin.

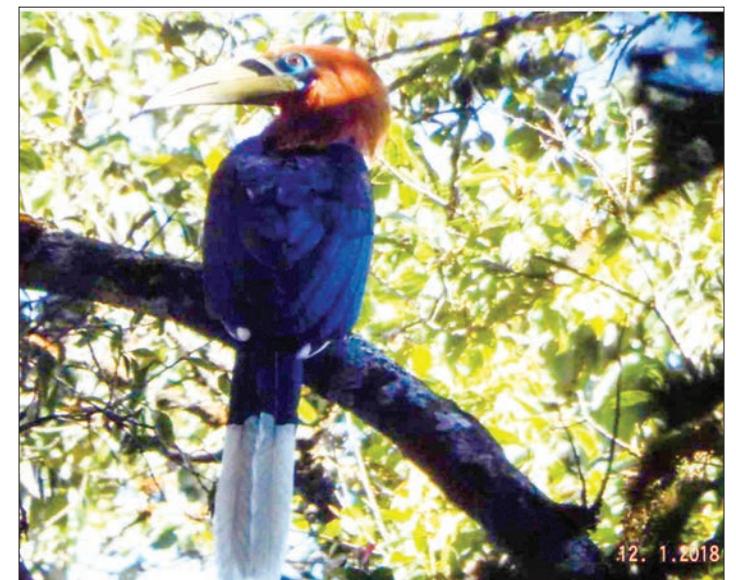
The five-year programmes have already made reports to the Ministry of Natural Resources, Wildlife and Environmental Conservation, an effort suggested by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), departmental officials and local ethnics.

There were approximate-

ly 20 hornbills sighted in last year's report.

“There were many difficulties while making conservation processes for wild animals in their natural environment. We are also facing the result of illegal hunters and poachers”, U Thein Lwin added.

Sign boards have been erected in townships stressing that the hunting and shooting of hornbills is prohibited in Chin State.—Shin Min ■



Rufous-necked hornbill. **PHOTO: SUPPLIED**

Two US airliners missing same landing gear part after landing in Japan

CHIBA, (Japan) — Two US airliners were found to be missing the same landing gear piece after landing this week at Narita airport near Tokyo, according to separate announcements by the airlines.

On Saturday, a 30-centimeter-long spring was found missing from the landing gear of a United Airlines plane that landed at Narita, the US airline said.

On Tuesday, the same type of spring was missing from an American Airlines aircraft that landed at the airport, according to the airline.

The spring is believed to have come off the United Airlines' plane during the flight of the Boeing 777 aircraft from Houston, United said. —Kyodo News ■



Boy walks on shinkansen track for 4km, disrupts service

OSAKA — A boy appearing to be elementary school age was found walking on tracks of the Sanyo shinkansen line in western Japan on Saturday, disrupting bullet

train services, the train operator said. West Japan Railway Co. said a station worker noticed a person entered the tracks at Okayama station around 4:40 pm, and about

70 minutes later the boy was taken into protective custody at a spot around 4 kilometers east of the station.

JR West suspended high-

speed train operations between Shin-Osaka and Higashi-Hiroshima because of the intrusion, causing up to a 90 minute delay.—

Kyodo News ■

German SPD leaders upbeat as biggest branch backs coalition talks



Kevin Kuehnert, the head of the SPD's youth wing, speaks during an SPD party convention in Berlin, Germany, on 7 December 2017. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

BERLIN — Senior members of Germany's Social Democrats (SPD) said on Saturday they were confident the party would approve the start of formal coalition talks with Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives at a special congress.

The upbeat comments came after the SPD's biggest regional branch in North Rhine-Westphalia recommended its members vote in favour of entering negotiations, on condition that party leader Martin Schulz push for more concessions on labour, health and migration policies.

Around 600 SPD delegates

vote on Sunday on whether their leaders should push ahead with coalition talks on renewing an alliance with the conservatives that has governed Germany since 2013 after striking.

The two groups struck a preliminary deal last week but Schulz is facing a strong backlash from the SPD's left and youth wings, which argue that that blueprint does not bear enough of the party's hallmarks.

They say the SPD would be better off in opposition after scoring its worst election result since Germany became a federal republic in 1949.—Reuters ■

UN warns of 'lost generation' in South Sudan's grinding conflict

JUBA — Seventy percent of South Sudan's children are out of school and the young country risks losing a generation that would make it harder to rebuild after conflict ends, a United Nations official said.

South Sudan, which split off from its northern neighbor Sudan in 2011, has been gripped by a four-year civil war sparked by political rivalry between incumbent leader Salva Kiir and his former deputy Riek Machar.

In an interview with Reuters on Friday, Henrietta H. Fore, UNICEF's executive director, made the warning after visiting some of the areas most devastated by the war.

"70 percent of the children are out of school, that is highest in the world. There is too much violence," she said.

"If we don't help... we are going to lose this generation and that would be tragic for South Sudan because a country cannot build itself without this next generation of young people."

Fore said she had visited towns in the country's north and witnessed widespread



A United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) peacekeeping soldier stands guard as children walk by during a patrol close to the town of Bentiu in Rubkona county, northern South Sudan, on 11 February 2017. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

malnutrition among children and warned: "We are heading into the dry season... we might lose up to a quarter of a million children in South Sudan."

Tens of thousands are estimated to have died in the conflict which has also displaced a quarter of the country's population of 12 million.

The economy, almost entirely dependant on oil exports, has been left in tatters as output has been cut.

Agricultural production,

too, has declined as insecurity has left sometimes entire villages abandoned and crops untended.

A ceasefire deal was signed in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa last month but it has been violated repeatedly with both sides blaming each other.

Attacks have also been directed at humanitarian workers, complicating delivery of relief services on which hundreds of thousands of the displaced depend.—Reuters ■

Be alert and be aware of terrorists!

WE have all already known that events of sudden armed attacks on border security outposts in bordering areas in Maungtaw district, Rakhine State on 9th October 2016 and 25th August 2017 were manipulated by the ARSA extremist terrorists. The extremists who infiltrated into Rakhine State organized the local Muslims, giving training lessons on terrorist attack methods, and making them launch terrorist activities and sudden attacks on border security outposts. These attacks killed security forces, government servicemen and local people, with many others wounded. It also resulted in most of the local residents abandoning their villages to leave for safer places. Similarly, local Muslims were displaced into Bangladesh.

Due to the events of the armed attacks, Myanmar and its people suffered a lot. On the wrong pretext of the victims taking shelter at the refugee camps in Bangladesh, the international community put pressure on Myanmar. As for the affairs of refugees, it is actually complicated. It can be seen that migrants and terrorist attackers mingled with those in the refugee camps.

Accordingly, we need to be alert and be aware of potential dangers of the ARSA extremist terrorists who are likely to infiltrate into the country, in such a time of implementing the process of repatriating displaced people who are going to come from the neighboring country.

Not only Myanmar but also the countries of the world have a great concern regarding the dangers of terrorists. Very recently, a certain level of peace and stability has been achieved in Rakhine. At the same time it has been heard that ARSA terrorists had infiltrated into the country to fight against the security forces. Terrorists actually made conspiracies to launch terrorist attacks hiding under the disguise of refugees in the refugee camps. Accordingly, the Myanmar authorities demanded Bangladesh to extradite the terrorists involved in the armed attacks.

At the 4th Myanmar-Bangladesh Central Level Meeting on Border Security and Law Enforcement Cooperation held in Nay Pyi Taw on 14th November 2017, Myanmar authorities gave a list of over 1300 ARSA terrorist members with their photos attached, to the Authorities, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It has been learnt that the Bangladeshi authorities have been requested to repatriate the ARSA terrorists for arrest in accordance with the agreement of cooperation on the border area signed in 1980.

At the first coordination meeting of the joint working group of repatriation of displaced people from Rakhine State, current activities launched by ARSA extremist terrorist groups had been officially informed and handover of the criminals had been demanded. Accordingly, we need to be alert and be aware of potential dangers of the ARSA extremist terrorists who are likely to infiltrate into the country, in such a time of implementing the process of repatriating displaced people who are going to come from the neighboring country. ■

Beneficial Irrigation in Chin State, the Land of Taungzalal

By Min La Pyae

“NO one can survive without going food for seven days and without water for one morning,” as the Myanmar saying goes. Whatever it is, water is of great vitality for the survival of human beings. The mountainous Chin State is the land rich in water resources—water from rivers, creeks, and that falling from mountains.

Located in the north-western part of the country, Chin State has an area of 89000459 acres, that is, 13906.97 square miles. To the east Sagaing Region is situated, with Bangladesh and India to the west. Rakhine State is located to the south. Chin State touches the border line of India in the north. Being a mountainous region, Chin State has mountain ridges standing in the middle of the area from north to south as watersheds, which are slightly to the west off the vertical towards the center.

Mount Victoria/Nat Ma Taung/Khonuamthung is the highest one of 10500 feet in height, in Chin State. Kaladan is the longest river, with Bwenuu river, Kaladan, Lemyo and Manipur being famous river in Chin State. Bwenuu river starts in Falam township, flowing toward south between Haka and Htantalam townships. At Htantalam it turns into India. Kaladan River flows into Rakhine State through Paletwa township. Manipur river starts in India and it goes through Tunzan, Titein and Phalam townships, emptying into Myittha river at Kalay.

Though being abundant in water resources, Chin State is a mountainous region, hence the need for the effective use of these resources for acquisition of drinking and farming water and production of electricity. With a view to effective utilization of these water resources and avoidance of wastage, the department of irrigation and water management under the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock Breeding and Irrigation is now implementing the tasks of building and renovating dams, embankments, water gates, channels and ditches. Chin State Irrigation and Water Management Department are performing the tasks of making surveys about



A Chin village in the hills. PHOTO: TIN WIN



situations on the ground, building new ones and conservation and renovation works for irrigating farming water in all townships in Chin State, in accord with the regional requirement.

The Office of Chin State Irrigation and Water Management Department started to be opened in Haka on 7th June 1982, initially as the departmental head office, later extended in October 29, 1992 with the Deputy Director taking office. Afterwards, under its control there are opened Haka Office for carrying out irrigation works in Haka and Htantalam, and Falam Office for performing the irrigation works in Falam, Titein and Tungzam townships in 1995-1996.

Mindat Office was opened in 2000-2001 for carrying out irrigation works in Mindat, Matupi, Kanpetlet and Paletwa townships.

Laiva Reservoir in Falam in Chin State is located at 6300 ft above the sea level, to be exact, on the Laiva Creek nearby the village of Talangzarr. Being the type of earth embankment, it has 75 feet height and 20 feet in width. It has 1881 acres of full capacity of holding water. With a view to storing more water at the present year, water gate which can be lifted up and down through hydraulic system had been installed. So, this year more water can be stored more than ever. And, it has been producing up to 600 kilo

watts annually, that is, equivalent to approximately producing 2.8 million kilo watt hours every year. So, these reservoir and dams are actually beneficial to the region not only for irrigating water to farming lands and producing hydro powers.

The State Government started the project in 1990-1991, finishing it 1994-1995. At present, daily water supply for the 50000 of Falam populace is underway. Moreover, plans for village irrigation which will be beneficial for rural residents are being laid down

and implemented. Arrangements are being made to irrigate 11100 acres of farming lands by carrying through pipes, water falling from mountains. There had 99 plans altogether been implemented including Laiva dam project—37 in Haka district, 43 in Falam district and 18 in Mindat district.

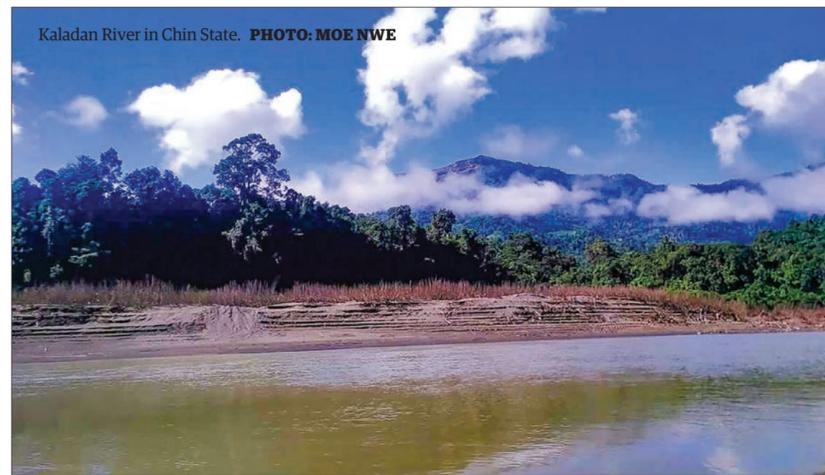
With a view to greening Mt Rone in Haka the tasks of re-digging the revolution lake, decorating it with gravels, digging channels, embankments and installing water gates had been completed in 2017. The department of irri-

gation and water management no 3 construction team is implementing construction of ground reservoir of 500 ft in length and 75 ft in height for the acquisition of drinking and farming water for the local people in the village of Thek-ee in Htantalam township, expecting to be finished at the end of the FY 2017-2018. Upon completion of it, practices of high land farming will be systematically replaced from the practice of farming land rotation system.

Due to the torrential rains in 2015, many villagers in Chin State suffered a lot. So, the construction of embankment along Kwi and Hsan Nwei Creeks in Khaingkam, Titein township. Chin State government is sharing knowledge to local residents, concerning emergence of terrace farming and yearly planning.

To sum it up, the Department of Irrigation and Water Management, Chin State has been making concerted efforts to implement the acquisition of water for drinking and crop cultivation and for distribution of power supply in the region by performing the tasks of maintenance dams and reservoirs, building new irrigation channels and carrying out regional development, for the benefit of the local residents under the guidance of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation and coordination of Chin State Cabinet and Chin State Parliament. ■

Translated by
Khin Maung Oo



Kaladan River in Chin State. PHOTO: MOENWE

Positive growth forecasts, but access to credit and skills gaps a concern, results reveal

THE latest edition of the Business Barometer: Myanmar Survey by the global research and consultancy firm Oxford Business Group (OBG) suggests that decision-makers remain both broadly upbeat about the country's economic outlook and aware of the challenges ahead.

As part of its survey, OBG asked dozens of high-level executives from across the country's industries a wide-ranging series of questions on a face-to-face basis aimed at gauging business sentiment. The results of what represents the Group's second country survey are now available to view on OBG's Editors' Blog at: <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/blog/patrick-cooke-obg-business-barometer/ceos%E2%80%99-mixed-scorecard-myanmar-during-nld%E2%80%99s-second-year>.

In a sign of the growing role that the private sector is playing in Myanmar's development, more than half (58%) of participants said they believed that less than 20% of business in their sector came from public spending.

However, OBG's survey also highlighted the challenges that businesses face when looking to borrow, with three-quarters of respondents describing access to credit as difficult or very difficult. The results reflect sentiments that were also expressed in the Group's first survey, published at the end of 2016, in which a considerable number of interviewees cited credit terms offered by local banks as onerous and restrictive.

Asked which skills they felt were most in need within the workplace, 30% of executives surveyed in 2017 cited leadership, followed by engineering (14%), business administration (8%), and research and development (8%). Respondents noted a link between the lack of leadership skills among employees and the country's education system, which many described as underfunded and failing to prioritise critical thinking.

OBG also asked executives which external event they felt would have the greatest impact on Myanmar's short-to-medium-term growth. In response, almost 40% felt that a multiple Fed rate hike would have the biggest effect on economic expansion, largely because of fluctuations this could cause in the value of the Kyat.

Respondents were upbeat about Myanmar's prospects for economic expansion, with 63% saying they expected GDP growth for the next 12 months to fall somewhere between 5% and 7%. However, while noting the country's advantages and potential, they also highlighted the need for improvements to be made to its business climate.

Commenting on the results in his blog, Patrick Cooke, OBG's regional editor for Asia, said that while plenty of goodwill and optimism had been evident following Myanmar's landmark general elections in 2015, ongoing violence in Rakhine State and a confusing regulatory framework risked weighing on investor confidence.

“While investors undoubtedly recognise the innate potential of a 54m-person market with significant natural resources strategically situated between China and India, some are delaying investment decisions until there is more regulatory clarity,” he said. “The need for further improvements to be made to the business climate is backed up by the fact that 59% of respondents characterised transparency for conducting business as low or very low in comparison to the wider region.”

Cooke noted that concerns raised among respondents in OBG's first survey almost one year ago about access to affordable credit and skilled labour were once again to the fore, despite the passing of a new Financial Institutions Law in 2016 and the launch of a National Education Strategic Plan.

He added, however, that Myanmar's “significant inherent advantages” meant the country was still on track to be the fastest-growing economy in ASEAN in the coming years.

“The keys to success lie in the creation of a clear and transparent regulatory environment for attracting investment and financing the real economy, while also ensuring the country capitalises on its position between the emerging superpowers of China and India without becoming beholden to either,” he said.—Oxford Business Group ■

Egypt's Sisi to run for second term in March election

CAIRO — Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said on Friday he will run for a second term in office in an election in March, which the former military commander is widely expected to win.

Sisi's rule has brought some stability to the country, but critics say his popularity has been eroded by tough economic reforms that have hit people's livelihoods hard and by a crackdown on dissidents.

His supporters on the other hand say measures are needed to keep the country stable as it faces security challenges including attacks by Islamic State militants in the North Sinai region.

"Today ... I tell you frankly and transparently that I hope you would allow and accept my candidacy for the president's post," Sisi told a cheering crowd.

The vote will be held on 26-28 March, with a run-off vote on 24-26 April if no candidate wins

more than 50 per cent in the first round. Candidates will register from 20 to 29 January.

In the televised announcement, Sisi listed Egypt's achievements during his first term, including a nascent financial recovery after years of political turmoil and economic instability.

"Building the state takes 16 to 20 years, I am trying to finish it in 8 years, God willing," Sisi said.

Sisi came to prominence when he led the army's ouster of President Mohamed Mursi of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013 - Egypt's first freely elected leader - two years after the downfall of longtime ruler President Hosni Mubarak in the "Arab Spring" uprisings that swept the Middle East.

The former general became president himself in 2014, winning 96.91 per cent of the vote, although turnout was only about 47 per cent of the 54 million voters, after voting was extended

for a day.

Sisi's critics say his popularity has been hurt by austerity reforms, security problems, a crackdown on dissidents and his decision to hand two Red Sea islands to Saudi Arabia, which showered Egypt with billions of dollars of aid, touching a nationalistic nerve.

Rights groups say he has led an unprecedented crackdown on political opponents, activists and critical media.

"I pledge that the upcoming presidential election will be free and transparent .. and be characterized by equal opportunities between candidates," Sisi said.

Those challenging Sisi describe a sweeping effort to kill off their campaigns before they have begun, with media attacks on candidates, intimidation of supporters, and a nomination process stacked in favour of the former general.

"There are people I know



Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi speaks during a news conference after the talks with Russia's President Vladimir Putin in Cairo, Egypt on 11 December, 2017. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

who are corrupt, I will not allow them to come near this chair," Sisi said earlier in the ceremony without elaborating.

Earlier this month, Prime Minister Ahmed Shafik, seen as the most serious potential challenger to date, said he was no longer considering a bid following a firestorm of criticism from

state-aligned media and speculation that he was being held by authorities in a Cairo hotel.

His most high-profile challengers are former army chief of staff Sami Anan and human rights lawyer Khaled Ali, but neither is expected to garner enough votes to oust him. —Reuters ■

South Africa's ANC to force Zuma to quit as president: eNCA TV

JOHANNESBURG — South Africa's ruling African National Congress (ANC) declined on Saturday to comment on a report its executive plans to force Jacob Zuma to quit as president, as its leaders gather to outline the party's programme for the coming year.

National broadcaster eNCA said on Saturday that the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC) had resolved on Friday to ask Zuma to resign and that, if he refused, he would be forced to step down by the party's six-strong leadership group. The station did not name its sources.

An anonymous NEC member quoted by online news site News24 said that decision had been reached unanimously.

Zuma's second presidential term is due to run until 2019. The newly elected NEC made no mention of his possible early exit in a statement it issued after meeting for the first time on Thursday and Friday under the party's new leader, Cyril Ramaphosa.

Asked about the reports that Zuma would be asked to resign, an ANC spokeswoman said: "We can't confirm rumors of things



South Africa's President Jacob Zuma attends the 37th Ordinary SADC Summit of Heads of State and Government in the capital, Pretoria, South Africa, on 19 August, 2017. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

that we don't know. The NEC has issued a statement on the totality of discussions yesterday."

Zuma's presidency has been tainted by a series of corruption allegations, all of which he denies.

He retains the support of one part of the ANC leadership, but many others in the party argue that he has tarnished the image of Africa's oldest liberation movement. While he has been in office, the economy has also slowed to a near-standstill.

Ramaphosa succeeded Zuma as ANC head last month, making him likely to replace

Zuma as the country's next president.

The party's Secretary-General Ace Magashule said on Thursday that Zuma's early removal as head of state was not on the agenda of the NEC meeting, which runs until Sunday.

But in recent days Ramaphosa has gone on the offensive against companies controlled by the Gupta family, businessmen friends of Zuma accused of unduly using political connections to win work with the state. They deny all wrongdoing. —Reuters ■

Turkey shells Syria's Afrin region, minister says operation has begun

SUGEDIGI, (Turkey) — Turkish artillery fired into Syria's Afrin region on Friday in what Ankara said was the start of a military campaign against the Kurdish-controlled area.

The cross-border bombardment took place after days of threats from Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan to crush the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia in Afrin in response to growing Kurdish strength across a wide stretch of north Syria.

Direct military action against territory held by Kurdish militia would open a new front in Syria's civil war and would see Ankara confronting Kurds allied to the United States at a time when Turkey's relations with Washington are reaching breaking point.

"The operation has actually de facto started with cross-border shelling," Turkish Defence Minister Nurettin Canikli said, adding that no troops had crossed into Afrin.

A US State Department official said such moves would undermine regional stability and

would not help protect Turkey's border security.

"We do not believe that a military operation serves the cause of regional stability, Syrian stability or indeed Turkish concerns about the security of their border," the official told reporters, stressing he had limited information about Turkey's reported military moves.

"The kind of threats or activities which these initial reports may be referring to, we don't think advance any of these issues. They are destabilizing."

The United States has instead called on Turkey to focus on the fight against Islamic State militants and not take military action in Afrin.

Reuters TV filmed Turkish artillery at the border village of Sugedigi firing on Friday morning into Afrin region, and the YPG militia said Turkish forces fired 70 shells at Kurdish villages between midnight and Friday morning. Shelling continued in the late afternoon, said Rojhat Roj, a YPG spokesman in Afrin. —Reuters ■

Merkel and Macron play up euro zone reform plans

PARIS — Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Emmanuel Macron talked up the prospect of agreeing reforms to the euro zone on Friday, saying they were committed to strengthening the single currency bloc and Europe as a whole.

Merkel is in Paris for an evening of talks with Macron, after the two agreed at a European Union summit last month to draw up joint plans for the euro area by March.

Macron has talked in the past about the need for a standalone budget and a single finance minister for the currency bloc, but he played down any technical discussions on Friday, saying the priority was to agree on the end-goal first.

“If you begin by discussing the instruments without knowing what you want to do with them, there’s little chance of success,” he said. “That’s not how we in France have historically drawn up our budgets.”

The prospect of France and Germany, the economic and political drivers of Europe, agreeing reforms has risen on expectations Merkel will soon clinch another grand coalition with the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD).

“Germany and France can and should take the lead on many questions (related to Europe) and therefore I understand that France is waiting that we have a new government,” said Merkel.

Without agreement between the two, whose nations account for 50 per cent of euro zone out-



French President Emmanuel Macron (L) greets German Chancellor Angela Merkel upon her arrival at the Elysee Palace in Paris, France, on 19 January 2018. PHOTO: REUTERS

put, any ambition to upgrade Europe’s economic and monetary union and help the bloc withstand future crises is unlikely to get off the ground.

This year is seen as a critical but narrow window, with the European Parliament holding elections and Britain’s exit from the European Union reaching its deadline in 2019.

Yet while Macron and Merkel have met and spoken by phone repeatedly in recent weeks, there is some way to go before

a common position on the core issues can be reached.

French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire held talks with his German counterpart Peter Altmaier in Paris on Thursday, and said afterwards that an agreement may be difficult by March. “We have ... an immediate priority, which is the completion of the banking union, the completion of the capital markets union and tax convergence with Germany,” Le Maire said.

“On these three issues, our

goal is to reach a final joint position between March and June.”

Germany and France often put on a show of political unity when it comes to the euro zone, but the devil is in the detail.

Macron, elected in May on an avowedly pro-Europe platform, has set out grand plans, including suggesting at one point that the zone should have its own budget worth hundreds of billions of euros, an idea that does not sit well with Germany. —Reuters ■

WORLD BRIEFS

Iran to dominate many Tillerson conversations in Europe next week

WASHINGTON — Iran will dominate many of US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson’s conversations in Europe next week, when he is visiting London, Paris, Warsaw and Davos, Switzerland, a senior US State Department official said on Friday. “Inevitably, Iran will dominate a lot of the conversations that the secretary has with our NATO allies and partners in Europe,” the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told reporters. “We really emphasize close coordination with the British, in particular, and the French in our efforts to close the gaps (in the Iran nuclear deal) and in next steps on how we curtail Iranian malign influence in the (Middle East) region, so I think that will be a very high priority of his conversation.” —Reuters ■

India develops 800 km range BrahMos missile

NEW DELHI — India, along with Russia, is developing a BrahMos supersonic cruise missile with a strike range of 800 km, defence sources said Saturday. “The missile range was increased from 290 km to 450 km last year and now it is being raised to 800 km. The test-firing of the missile is likely to take place by this yearend only,” sources said. The land and sea variants of BrahMos missile are already operational with the Indian Army and the Indian Navy. In November last year, India successfully test-fired the air version. —Xinhua ■

11 killed, 44 injured in bus crash in Eskisehir, Turkey

ANKARA — At least 11 people were killed and 44 others injured in a bus accident in Turkey’s north-western Eskisehir province.

The accident took place early Saturday when the bus carrying a tour group from capital Ankara to northwestern Bursa province, the state-run Anadolu news agency reported. The driver lost control of the vehicle and crashed against trees along the roadside. —Xinhua ■

Iran nuclear deal cannot survive if US pulls out: Russia’s Lavrov

UNITED NATIONS — Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Friday the Iran nuclear deal cannot survive if the United States pulls out of the agreement.

US President Donald Trump said a week ago that European allies and Congress have to work with him to fix “the disastrous flaws” in the nuclear pact or face a US exit. Trump wants it strengthened with a separate agreement within 120 days.

“This agreement cannot be implemented if one of the participants unilaterally steps out of it. It will fall apart, there will be no deal then,” Lavrov told reporters at the United Nations in New York.

Lavrov said he believed the United States was “going to try to convince the European states



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov speaks during a security council meeting on building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia at the United Nations in New York, US, on 19 January 2018. PHOTO: REUTERS

to take the same position that Washington has taken.”

Most UN and Western sanctions on Iran were lifted two years ago under the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and key world powers, which is enshrined in a United Nations Security Council resolution.

“It cannot keep alive in a re-negotiated form, especially regarding the demands by the United States. It would not be acceptable for Iran and it is clear now, I believe, that the Europeans do understand this danger right now,” Lavrov said.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said the deal was not renegotiable. —Reuters ■

Protect the Amazon from big business and greed, Pope Francis urges

PUERTO MALDONADO, (Peru) — Pope Francis issued a ringing defence of the people and the environment of the Amazon on Friday, saying big business and “consumerist greed” could not be allowed to destroy a natural habitat vital for the entire planet.

Francis, who has made the environment and climate change a focus of his nearly five-year-old pontificate, made his appeal while visiting a corner of the Amazon in Peru where pristine rainforest and biodiversity is being blighted by mining and logging, much of it illegal.

“The native Amazonian peoples have probably never been so threatened on their own lands as they are at present,” the pope told a crowd of indigenous people from more than 20 groups including the Harakbut, Esse-ejas, Shipibos, Ashaninkas and Juni Kuin.

Thousands of representative of the groups from across Peru walked before him, dressed in traditional regional costumes and feather headdresses and speaking in their native languages, as traditional wind instruments



Pope Francis (R) greets members of an indigenous group from the Amazon region, at the Coliseum Madre de Dios, in Puerto Maldonado, Peru, on 19 January 2018. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

sounded mournfully in a small stadium built to look like a hut in the city of Puerto Maldonado.

Francis decried the “pressure being exerted by big business interests” seeking petro-

leum, gas, lumber, and gold and plundering “supplies for other countries without concern for its inhabitants.”

The pope, whose speech was punctuated by repeated applause

and beating of drums, spoke after listening to rainforest residents decry what they called the rape of their land.

“They enter our territories without consulting us and we

will suffer a lot when foreigners drill the earth... and destroy our rivers turning them into black waters of death,” Hector Sueyo, an indigenous Harakbut, told the pope forcefully.

The southeastern region of Peru known as “Madre de Dios,” Spanish for “Mother of God,” has been badly blighted in recent years by unregulated gold mining, with one effect being dangerous levels of mercury in rivers. Illegal loggers and drug traffickers in other parts of the Peruvian Amazon have killed activists and attacked indigenous tribes that shun contact with outsiders.

While more regulated, foreign companies have eagerly eyed the Camisea gas reserves in the neighbouring region of Cusco. In northern Peru more than a dozen oil spills from a state-operated pipeline have polluted native lands. “We cannot use goods meant for all as consumerist greed dictates. Limits have to be set that can help preserve us from all plans for a massive destruction of the habitat that makes us who we are,” the pope said.—Reuters ■

UN to set up panel to reduce ocean plastic waste

TOKYO — The United Nations will form a panel to discuss measures to reduce plastic waste in the oceans, a source close to the matter said Saturday.

Members of the panel, to be recommended by UN member countries, will study what options are available, what alternatives to plastic there can be and how effectively they could help remove around 10 million tons of such waste flowing in the oceans every year, the source said.

The panel will discuss policies that would include a potential legally binding international treaty and give guidance about what steps could be introduced in developing nations in particular where the situation has become grave. The panel will meet once or twice a year and report their discussions at the fourth session of the UN Environmental Assembly to be held in Nairobi in March 2019, according to the source. Some 8 million to 12 million tons of plastic waste are estimated to flow into the oceans every year, greatly affecting marine ecosystems and environment. There will be more plastic than fish in the oceans by 2050, according to an



Photo taken in September 2017 shows plastic waste washed ashore in Guinea. According to the United Nations, some 8 million to 12 million tons of plastic waste are estimated to flow into oceans every year, greatly affecting marine ecosystems and environment. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

estimate by the United Nations. The European Commission has adopted a policy of ensuring that all plastic packaging is recyclable by 2030. Among developing countries, Kenya and Rwanda have banned the use of plastic shopping bags, but some are still lagging behind in adopting such measures. Pollution from microplastics — created from plastics that break into small pieces with a diameter of less than 5

millimeters while floating in the sea — is also becoming a serious issue. As microplastics absorb hazardous chemicals, they pose a danger to sea birds and fishes that take them in accidentally.

Hideshige Takada, professor at Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology, said the need to strengthen such measures is increasing and it is important for societies to reassess their reliance on plastic.—Kyodo News ■

Cuba, US hold talks on law enforcement despite tensions

HAVANA — Cuban and US officials concluded on Friday a week of talks on law enforcement cooperation in Washington with a meeting on the combat against illicit drug trafficking, at a time of heightened tensions between the old Cold War foes.

The talks show the countries continue to cooperate in some areas despite Republican US President Donald Trump having a tougher stance on the Communist-run island than his Democratic predecessor Barack Obama, as well as an ongoing crisis over alleged health attacks on US diplomats in Havana.

“The meeting took place in an ambiance of respect and professionalism,” the Cuban foreign ministry said in a statement. “Both parties shared the view on the usefulness of the meeting and agreed to maintain the talks in the future.”

This was the fourth tech-

nical exchange on the fight against drug trafficking since Cuban and US authorities established the law enforcement dialogue framework in November 2015.

Over the past week, Cuban and US officials have also held talks in Washington on cybersecurity and preventing terrorism, according to the Cuban foreign ministry.

Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro declared a historic detente after five decades of hostility on 17 December 2014.

The two countries opened embassies, restored commercial flights and negotiated agreements on issues including the environment, law enforcement, the postal service and communications. Those measures remain in place, although Trump last June announced a partial rollback of the detente, ordering tighter trade and travel restrictions.—Reuters ■

Park visitors rescued from bushfire as heatwave strikes Australia

SYDNEY — Holidaymakers trapped by bushfire had to be rescued by boat from a national park south of Australia's largest city of Sydney and 200 people were evacuated by firefighters as a heatwave struck the eastern seaboard on Saturday.

Firefighters in the state of New South Wales said on Facebook they were escorting 200 people to safety from the Wattamolla area to Bundena as two fires raged south of Sydney on Saturday evening.

The Rural Fire Service had earlier issued an emergency warning to visitors in the Royal National Park as the blaze threatened the main access road to a popular tourist spot called Wedding Cake Rock where people posted

pictures of the billowing smoke to social media.

"Beaches may offer safety," the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) said in a Facebook post as aircraft water-bombers attempted to slow the fire and emergency warnings were sent to the mobile phones of all people in the area. "Firefighters, police, surf lifesavers and National Parks personnel are working with people at beaches in the Royal National Park to help manage their relocation as it's safe to do so - including by boat and road escort," The RFS wrote on Facebook.

The park was crowded with visitors and had closed shortly before noon because the carparks were full to capacity, local media outlet news.com reported.—Reuters ■

US gov't shuts down as Senate fails to pass spending bill

WASHINGTON — The US government is shutting down as the Senate failed to pass a stopgap spending bill. Negotiations between congressional lawmakers continue.

Last-minute negotiations fell apart as Senate Democrats blocked a four-week short-term spending bill in a late night vote. It led to the fourth government shutdown over the past 25 years. The White House blamed the Democrats for the shutdown, which occurred on the first anniversary of Donald Trump's presidency. On Friday, Trump spent much of the day in the Oval Office, trying to strike a deal with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer to keep the government open.

"Senate Democrats own the Schumer Shut-

down. Tonight, they put politics above our national security, military families, vulnerable children, and our country's ability to serve all Americans," White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders in a statement before Friday midnight. Sanders said in the statement that the White House will not negotiate the status of young immigrants known as "Dreamers" brought to United States as children "while Democrats hold our lawful citizens hostage over their reckless demands."

Federal agencies, such as public safety and military ones, which are considered as "essential" will remain open, while others will be closed until the Congress passed a spending bill to fund the government.—Xinhua ■



The US Capitol is seen through traffic during rush hour in Washington, on 19 January 2018. PHOTO: XINHUA

Intermediate-sized near-Earth asteroid to fly safely past Earth next month

LOS ANGELES — An intermediate-sized near-Earth asteroid will make a close approach to the Earth on 4 February, but it will have no chance of colliding with our planet, the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) said Friday.

At the time of closest approach, the asteroid will be no closer than 10 times the distance between Earth and the Moon, said a press release from NASA. Known as 2002 AJ129, the asteroid is categorized as a

Potentially Hazardous Asteroid (PHA), which is defined by NASA as Near-Earth Asteroids "with an Earth Minimum Orbit Intersection Distance (MOID) of 0.05 astronomical units or less and an absolute magnitude of 22.0 or less."

But 2002 AJ129 does not pose an actual threat of colliding with our planet for the foreseeable future. It is one of over 1,000 asteroids and comets scientists currently know about that falls under the PHA category.—Xinhua ■

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

M.V CAPE FLORES VOY. NO. ()

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V CAPE FLORES VOY. NO. () are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 21-1-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of H.P.T where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S NEW GOLDEN SEA LINES
Phone No: 2301185

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

M.V MAENAM-1 VOY. NO. (004)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V MAENAM-1 VOY. NO. (004) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 21-1-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of HPT where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S INTERASIA LINES
Phone No: 2301185

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

M.V MCC SHANGHAI VOY. NO. ()

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V MCC SHANGHAI VOY. NO. () are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 21-1-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T./M.I.P where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S MCC TRANSPORT
(S'PORE) PTE LTD
Phone No: 2301185

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

M.V MALACCA STAR VOY. NO. ()

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V MALACCA STAR VOY. NO. () are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 21-1-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T./M.I.P where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S MCC TRANSPORT
(S'PORE) PTE LTD
Phone No: 2301185



Yangon Sailing Club Annual General Meeting

All members of Yangon Sailing Club are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting to be held as follows:

Date : 28th January 2018
Place : Yangon Sailing Club
Time : 10:30 a.m

Hon. Secretary
Yangon Sailing Club

May says honoured by French loan of Bayeux Tapestry

SANDHURST, (England) — British Prime Minister Theresa May said on Thursday she was honoured that France will lend Britain the Bayeux Tapestry, an 11th century treasure that tells the story of William the Conqueror's invasion of England in 1066.

"Our shared history is reflected in the loan of the Bayeux Tapestry to the UK in 2022, the first time it will be on British soil in more than 900 years," May said in a statement as she welcomed French President Emmanuel Macron on a visit to Britain.

"I am honoured at the loan of such a precious piece of our shared history which yet again underscores the closeness of the UK-France relationship," May said.

The loan would be part of a wider cultural exchange between Britain and France over

the next four years, she said.

The 70-metre long work, the precise origins of which are obscure and which has not left France in its nearly 950-year known history, is currently on display in the town of Bayeux, in the northwestern French region of Normandy.

Macron told reporters that the France and Britain were now fighting wars together, a reference to cooperation between the two former European adversaries against armed Islamist movements including in countries Mali.

"We are in a way making a new tapestry together," he said.

A French official said on Wednesday the loan would not take place immediately because work needed to be done on the tapestry to ensure it was safe to move it. —Reuters ■



View shows the Bayeux Tapestry, an 11th century treasure that tells the tale of how William the Conqueror came to invade England in 1066, in this undated photo provide by the Bayeux Museum on 18 January, 2018. PHOTO: REUTERS

'Fast & Furious' star Diesel brings high-octane live show to London

LONDON — The roaring engines and burning rubber of "The Fast & The Furious" films - one of cinema's highest-grossing franchises - are skidding off the screen and into the real world, as a live stunt show based on the movies opens in London on Thursday.

"Fast & Furious Live," held in London's O2 arena, aims to recreate the elaborate stunts for which the films are known.

"We talked about a live show, but we'd never imagined it in the way that Rowland (creative director, Rowland French) imagined it," actor Vin Diesel, one of the films' main stars, told Reuters. The show features around 40 vehicles, including tanks, trucks, a submarine and

dozens of fire-spitting, customized muscle cars. It uses 3D projection technology to help give the illusion that car chases are taking place over distances much greater than the inside of an arena.

"Fast and The Furious," about a gang of illegal street racers, has spawned eight films since 2001, with two more in development, a forthcoming spin-off film, video games and theme park rides. The franchise survived the death of one of its main stars, Paul Walker, killed in a car crash in 2013. "I think he would totally get a kick out of, out of seeing our little movie turn into this show at the O2 arena," Diesel said. "He'd get a kick out of that." —Reuters ■



Actor Vin Diesel reacts as he poses during a photocall to promote his film "Fast & Furious 8" in Madrid, Spain 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Hollywood speculates on top Academy Award nominees

LOS ANGELES — Speculation is running high on who will nab Oscar nods when the Academy of Motion Pictures releases their 2018 nominees for the 90th Academy Award on 4 March.

With a host of well-received films this year, the list of possible contenders for the coveted Best Picture nomination is wide-ranging in scope and subject matter.

The leaders of the pack are "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri," "The Shape of Water," "Dunkirk," "Call Me By Your Name," and so on.

Fox Searchlight's "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri," which is about an angrily grieving mother, who uses three prominent billboards to publicly hold the police accountable when they fail to catch her daughter's rapist-murderer, has already nabbed the Golden Globe for Best Motion Picture - Drama, which is a strong indicator of Oscar appeal to follow.

Fox Searchlight's "The Shape of Water," which tells the tale of a mute cleaning lady who falls in love with a godlike sea creature who faces certain death by soulless government inquisitors, raked in seven Golden Globe nominations and

won two.

All above as well as Warner Brothers' "Dunkirk," and Sony Picture's "Call Me By Your Name," have received nominations from the Hollywood Foreign Press Association's Golden Globes and Australia's Academy Cinema Television Arts International Awards (AACTAI) and the British Academy of Film and Television Awards (BAFTA).

Since the Oscars favor period pieces, some consider Steven Spielberg's 20th Century Fox 1970's political drama "The Post" will still be in the running even after losing out on its six Golden Globe nominations and being cold-shouldered by BAFTA as well. "I, Tonya" has received a lot of press attention and performed well at the Golden Globes. Other long-shots include 20th Century Fox's rollicking "The Greatest Showman," A24's Lala Land inverse "The Disaster Artist" and Focus Features' "The Darkest Hour." In this scandal-rocked year of female empowerment, it is worth noting that with the exception of "Dunkirk" and "Call Me By Your Name," the other five reigning Oscar favorites are female-centric stories, depicting powerful and interest-

ing female characters.

Frontrunners in the Best Actress category are Sally Hawkins in "The Shape of Water," Francis McDormand in "Three Billboards Outside Ebbings, Missouri," Saoirse Ronan from "Lady Bird," Meryl Streep in "The Post," and Michelle Williams in "All the Money in the World."

Also in contention are: Margot Robbie in "I, Tonya," and Jessica Chastain in "Molly's Game." Gal Godot is a long-shot for her heroic "Wonder Woman," as well as Emma Stone in "Battle of the Sexes," and Judi Dench in "Victoria and Abdul." Annette Bening, who has lost out on her previous Oscar nominations, may be a long overdue contender. The supporting actors cueing up as Oscar nomination hopefuls are Sam Rockwell and Woody Harrelson in "Three Bills," Willem Dafoe in "The Florida Project," Richard Jenkins in "The Shape of Water," and Christopher Plummer in "All the Money in the World."

Supporting Actress front-runners are Mary J. Blige in "Mudbound," Allison Janney in "I, Tonya," Hong Chau in "Downsizing" and Laurie Metcalf in "Lady Bird." —Xinhua ■



Performance of Myanmar variety shows staged at the National Landmark in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

Myanmar Cultural Variety Show opened

THE Myanmar Cultural Variety Show, organised by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, was held yesterday in Nay Pyi Taw.

In the morning session, there were dance presentations from performers such as Kaung Che Thein Kha Yein, Kyan Daing Aung Yein, Ka Myo Koe Lee Nawaratsie Yein, and Ma Gite Lay Yein.

There were also displays of Kachin ethnic dancing, Kayah ethnic dancing, Pan Che Yein dancing, Bagan Yein dancing, and Mon Hintha Yein dancing, as well as Myanmar puppet shows. The performances involved horses, monkeys, ogres, alchemists and elephants.

In the afternoon, spectators enjoyed Chin traditional bamboo dancing, Thu Nge Taw Myanmar dancing, U Shwe Yoe and Daw Moe Myanmar puppet shows, Khit Byaw Myanmar dual dancing, Pyi Htaung Su



Dance presentations performed by dancers at the National Landmark in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

Yein dancing, Kayin ethnic dancing, Rakhine ethnic dancing, Shan ethnic dancing, and Myanmar Ah-nyeint shows.

All these performances will be staged monthly, according to the official of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

The shows can be attended free of charge. For the conveni-

ence of spectators and visitors, transportation will be provided under the management of Nay Pyi Taw Council Committee.

The entrance fee to the National Landmark Park for schoolchildren and students is Ks500 and Ks1000 for an adult, respectively. Discount prices will be occasionally offered.

—Myanmar News Agency ■

Japan's ports bustling with foreign cruise passengers

YOKOHAMA — Japanese ports have been bustling with an increasing number of foreign cruise passengers amid robust demand for ship tours that has led to the development of new services combining a voyage with rail or air travel.

In 2016, 1.99 million foreigners arrived in Japan on cruise ships, up 78.5 per cent from the previous year, and the government aims to raise the number to 5 million in 2020, according to the transport ministry. The southwestern main island of Kyushu is the most popular stop-off point for cruise ships from abroad. In 2016, cruise ships made 715 port calls in the region, a six-fold increase from 2013, according to the local bureau of the transport ministry.

Around 1.94 million foreign tourists entered Japan through Kyushu ports in the year, surpassing the number of arrivals at airports, the ministry's Kyushu Regional Development Bureau said. The majority of cruise ship passengers were from China, thanks to the region's geographical proximity.

An official of the bureau expressed bewilderment, saying, "How come there was such a sharp rise?" In a bid to accommodate the soaring number of cruise ship pas-

sengers, Kyushu ports have made such efforts as expanding quays and building new terminals.

Another popular cruise ship destination is Yokohama, which had ranked top in Japan in the number of port calls for more than 10 years until 2014 and saw the figure rise to a new record high in 2017. In 2015 and 2016, Hakata port secured first place. The city government attributed the port's popularity to a service dubbed as "Fly & Cruise," in which tourists fly to nearby Haneda airport and then board a cruise ship from Yokohama. Yokohama port, which opened in 1859 as Japan's first modern international trading port, boasts of having the largest number of port calls by domestic ships.

"The port has a long history and is a cruise destination representing Japan," a city government official said. A new service launched in 2016 featuring "inter-porting," which offers a regular cruise to ports along the Sea of Japan coast, has also proved popular.

The tour connects the ports of Hakata in Fukuoka Prefecture, Maizuru in Kyoto and Kanazawa in Ishikawa Prefecture with South Korea's Busan and allows passengers to board and disembark at each port.

—Kyodo News ■

'Upside down' artist Baselitz celebrated in retrospective

RIEHEN, (Switzerland) — Georg Baselitz, a provocative German artist who inspired a generation with challenging depictions of the Nazi era and the post-war division of Germany, is being honored by a retrospective to mark his 80th birthday.

Born Hans-Georg Kern in the German town of Deutschbaselitz in 1938, Baselitz gained worldwide fame in the 1970s with his portraits - often bizarrely showing his subjects upside down - which he painted in a neo-expressionist style.

"Seeing 60 years of one own's pictures is a difficult

undertaking," Baselitz said at a news conference marking the opening of the exhibition at the Swiss Fondation Beyeler in Riehen, near Basel.

"But I don't recognize it (the art) any more'. And it's almost as if I were to re-encounter myself now as a baby, I would not recognize myself."

In a manifesto in 1961 when he was 23, he said he was "swollen and bloated" with memories of the Nazi era — his father had been a party member — and the aftermath of a divided Germany and the socialist East, which he fled in 1957.

His early paintings in the

1960s, he said, were "aggressive, wholly malicious", referring to works which at the time German prosecutors seized as lewd.

In later years the uneasy portraits of the 1960s and 1970s evolved into sprawling works in dark and pastel tones, and he became famous for his 'upside down' paintings — a quirk of presentation he has pursued to the present day.

Bringing together some 90 paintings and 12 sculptures spanning from 1959 through the present day, the exhibit is open to the public from Jan. 21 through April 29. —Reuters ■



People stand in front of the paintings 'Elke, 2012' and 'On the Mountain, Pointed, 2010' (L) of German artist Georg Baselitz during a media preview of the exhibition 'Baselitz' at the Fondation Beyeler in Riehen near Basel, Switzerland, on 19 January 2018. PHOTO: REUTERS

Late goals give Yangon United win over Zwegapin

Kyaw Zin Lin

TWO goals scored late in the match were enough to give Yangon United the win over Zwegapin in a Week 2 MPT Myanmar National League match played at Yangon United Sports Complex in Yangon yesterday.

Yangon FC lined up with goalkeeper Kyaw Zin Htet, David Htan, Moukailou, Pyae Phyaw Zaw, Min Kyaw Khant, Kosuke, Captain Yan Aung Kyaw, Maung Maung Lwin, Kyi Lin, Suam Lam Mang and Sekou Sylla.

Star player Nyein Chan Aung, Thurein Soe and expatriate player Ikechukwu Emmanuel were on the list of substitutes.

Yangon United is considered one of the favourites to seize the MPT MNL 2018 Cup, and the team has entered each



Yangon's football star Kyi Lin carries the ball by passing his opponent in yesterday's match at Yangon United Sport Complex. **PHOTO: MNL**

match so far this season with smart, effective lineups.

In yesterday's contest, the

teams matched up equally in the first half, which ended in a scoreless tie.

The Yangon strikers showed they were strong in tactics and tackling, and the

Zwegapin defenders demonstrated they were able to blur every opportunity Yangon created.

The even play continued in the second half, even though Yangon made some changes in positioning and strategy.

Zwegapin showed better defensive line play than in their previous matches.

But the evenness of play ended late in the match.

At the 87-minute mark, Yangon United scored the first goal of the game with a strange kick from Yangon's Sekou Sylla, who drove the ball into the net despite being in a crowd of Zwegapin United defenders.

Soon after the icebreaking goal, Yangon ensured their win with a second goal just before the final whistle by Myanmar National Team player Kyi Lin. ■

Township Football Federation created to promote sport nationwide

THE Township Football Federation, under the supervision of the Myanmar Football Federation (MFF), will be organised soon, as working committee meetings were held yesterday in Kyonepyaw, Ayeyawady Region.

The organisation is intended to promote Myanmar football

across the country and to instill pride for the sport not only in the ASEAN region but also eventually on the world level, officials said.

U Ko Ko Thein, the secretary of the Working Committee of the Township Football Federation, and past members of the

Myanmar National Team such as U Ye Nyunt, departmental officials, and Region and Township elders attended the meeting.

The Township Football Federation will organise efforts in almost all Regions and States of Myanmar, according to the MFF.

The MFF is a non-profit or-

ganisation and the lead agency for football in Myanmar. The MFF oversees Myanmar men's national team, the women's national team, and youth national teams as well as the national football championships and professional club competitions.—

KyawZin Lin ■

Woods to face Rahm, Matsuyama, Rose and Fowler at Torrey Pines

CARY, (North Carolina) — Tiger Woods will face a strong field that includes four of the world's top seven players at next week's Farmers Insurance Open in southern California. Spanish world number three Jon Rahm, Japanese world number five Hideki Matsuyama, Englishman Justin Rose and Rickie Fowler head the stellar lineup for the PGA Tour event starting at Torrey Pines on Thursday.

Former world number one Jason Day and five-times major champion Phil Mickelson also entered before Friday's deadline. But they will all have to play supporting roles to Woods, who is certain to be the centre of attention in his first official tournament since a spinal fusion last April. The groupings for the first two rounds have not been announced, though Woods is expected to play alongside two big names, with Rahm and Fowler prominent candidates. —Reuters ■

Kerber thrashes Sharapova to reach fourth round

MELBOURNE—Maria Sharapova's hopes of a title-winning return to the Australian Open were unceremoniously crushed by Angelique Kerber as the battle of the former champions ended 6-1, 6-3 in the German's favour on Saturday. The Rod Laver Arena evening clash between the only two grand slam winners left in the women's draw had the feel of a showpiece final rather than a third-round clash but it was Kerber who rose to the occasion. Sharapova, back in Melbourne after testing positive for a banned substance here in 2016 resulting in a 15-month ban, had looked

menacing in the opening two rounds. But Kerber, who plummeted down the rankings last year after finishing the year before at number one, broke her serve in the first game of the match and that set the tone for what followed. She streaked away with the first set and although 2008 champion Sharapova briefly threatened a fight-back after falling behind in the second, it was not to be the Russian's night. A fluffed drop shot attempt at 3-4 followed by an unforced error gave 2016 champion Kerber breathing space and she finished the contest in the next game. —Reuters ■



Maria Sharapova. **PHOTO: REUTERS**