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THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

Vol. IV, No. 299, 10th Waning of Tabodwe 1379 ME

www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

Saturday, 10 February 2018



A delegation of diplomats and UN officials led by Union Minister U Kyaw Tin, centre, in blue jacket, visits Nga Khu Ya Camp in Maungtau, which will be used for repatriation. **PHOTO: MNA**

Witnessing repatriation readiness

Diplomats, UN officials urged to share true situation details

Diplomats and UN agencies toured Rakhine State yesterday to observe the readiness for repatriation of returnees from Bangladesh. The delegation headed by U Kyaw Tin, Union Minister for International Cooperation, visit-

ed two repatriation camps and one transit camp in Maungtau, Rakhine State.

The trip's primary aim is disseminating accurate information to international communities on the government's efforts for repa-

triation. At Sittway Airport, Union Minister U Kyaw Tin briefed the delegation on the repatriation process and measures taken by the Union Government and the Rakhine State Government under the bilateral agreement with

Bangladesh.

U Nyi Pu, Chief Minister of Rakhine State, also requested the diplomats and UN officials to cooperate with the government in sharing the true situation in Rakhine with international

communities. He also urged the delegation to assist the Rakhine State government in its repatriation efforts and resettlement for returnees from Bangladesh and development in Rakhine State.

SEE PAGE-3



'BEST BANK IN MYANMAR'

Awarded by FinanceAsia 2017

Pyithu Hluttaw

Pyithu Hluttaw discusses educational sector

By Kyaw Thu Htet,
Hmay Kyu Zin

THE seventh session of the second Pyithu Hluttaw held its 16th-day meeting yesterday morning, where six questions were asked and answered, while a bill was discussed and approved.

At the meeting, U Aung Hlaing Win of Mingaladon constituency raised a question about the plan to permit casinos on islands where only foreigners will be allowed to gamble. Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism U Ohn Maung said casinos on islands where only foreigners are allowed to gamble are not legally permitted. However, the ministries concerned are not averse to legalising this, and there might be a way to carry this process forward. After the gambling law is amended or relaxed, permission can be obtained from the ministries concerned to legalise

gambling in casinos for foreigners, said the Union Minister.

A question by U Sai Ngaung Hsai Hein of Maukmai constituency on the plan to construct a new school building for a basic education primary school in Holoin village tract, Konmatlan Village, in the 2018-19 fiscal year was answered by Deputy Minister for Education U Win Maw Tun, who said a 60x30-square-foot single-storey building will be constructed.

Responding to a question put forth by U Min Thein of Taungdwingyi constituency on the plan to open a technical high school for students from towns such as Aunglan, Sinbaungwe, Taungdwingyi, Myothit and Natmawk, U Win Maw Tun said students from these areas were being permitted to attend technical schools in other areas as hostel students, and thus, there was no immediate plan to open a technical high



Pyithu Hluttaw is being convened in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

school in the area mentioned.

In response to a question by Dr U Aung Khin of Pyin Oo Lwin constituency on the plan to include vocational schools in the national education strategic plan to reduce unemployment in Myanmar, U Win Maw Tun said this was included in the plan and was being carried out. In the future, this will be expanded further, added the Deputy Minister.

The Deputy Minister then responded to a question raised by U Khin Maung Thi of Loilem constituency on the plan to upgrade the Loilem Township Myoma Maipun Basic Education Middle school (sub), and not-

ed that it was only half a mile away from Myoma (Maipun) Basic Education High School, and as students could obtain a middle school education at Myoma (Maipun) Basic Education Middle School (sub), there was no plan to upgrade this school.

Responding to a question posed by U Ar Moe Si of Khaunglanphu constituency on providing sufficient qualified teachers in Khaunglanphu Township schools to raise the township's passing rate in the matriculation examination, U Win Maw Tun said there were two Basic Education High Schools in Khaunglanphu Township, where

headmasters and teachers were conducting special classes and extra classes for the students. The Ministry of Education requires more than 30,000 teachers, and plans are underway to appoint over 10,000 teachers each year for three consecutive years. Based on the number of teachers appointed, they will be allocated to Khaunglanphu Township, said the Deputy Minister.

Proposals to amend the forest bill submitted by the natural resources and environmental protection committee were then discussed and the Hluttaw's decision was taken. ■

Amyotha Hluttaw

Amyotha Hluttaw discusses health sector

By Aye Aye Thant
(MYANMAR NEWS AGENCY)

THE seventh session of the second Amyotha Hluttaw held its 16th-day meeting in the Amyotha Hluttaw meeting hall in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday morning, where asterisk-marked questions were asked and answered. The Hluttaw's approval was also obtained after a report on two bills was read and a bill was tabled.

First, U Chit Htwe of Magway Region constituency (3) raised a question on the plan to build a rural health centre in the Magway Region, Natmawk Township, Htanpinkongyi Village. Union Minister for Health and Sports Dr. Myint Htwe replied that the Magway Region Public Health Department had recommended building a rural health centre in Htanpinkongyi Village. The requisite arrangements will be made to build this in the 2018-2019 fiscal year (FY), but if, for any reason, it is not done due to other priority works, it will be

built in the 2019-2020 FY, said the Union Minister.

Replying to a question raised by U Kyaw Thaung of Sagaing Region constituency (1) on the plan to provide surgical stainless steel rods at affordable prices to treat patients with broken bones, Dr. Myint Htwe said the Department of Medical Services had a profit margin of 10 per cent for high quality medicines, while a budget of Ks43.8 billion had been earmarked for the 2017-2018 FY to purchase medical equipment. Some 2,000 surgical steel rods are being bought for the 2017-2018 FY. A surgical steel rod is sold for between Ks130,000 and Ks160,000 and is bought from China and India. Surgical steel rods from America cost more than Ks500,000 and, therefore, are not used. Surgical steel rods from China and India are of good quality, while Myanmar was receiving assistance from other countries. For example, on 25 December, 2017, the Surgical Implant Generation Network, along with AMFA, donated 912 surgical steel



Union Minister for Health and Sports Dr. Myint Htwe. PHOTO: MNA

rods to nine people hospitals and two military hospitals, explained the Union Minister. A question by Dr. Pyae Phyoe of the Ayeyawady Region constituency (7) on the plan to upgrade the Shwelaung cottage hospital was also answered by Dr. Myint Htwe. Next, a report by the Amyotha Hluttaw bill committee on the findings and recommendations for a bill related to the protection of wildlife and the conservation of natural areas, sent back by the Pyithu Hluttaw with confirmed amendments, was read and explained



Deputy Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation U Hla Kyaw. PHOTO: MNA

by committee member Daw Nan Ni Ni Aye. In her explanation, she said the bill committee had conducted detailed discussions with the Amyotha Hluttaw representatives, relevant ministries, officials from World Wildlife Fund Myanmar, experts from the attorney general's office, Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, and the legal affairs and special cases assessment commission of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw.

She further asked the Amyotha Hluttaw to approve the bill, as it had been amended by the bill committee, along with its latest

amendments (by Pyithu Hluttaw). After the Hluttaw's agreement was obtained, the Amyotha Hluttaw speaker announced the approval of the bill. Later, a report by the bill committee on the findings and recommendations for a 2017 bill to amend the vacant, fallow and virgin lands management law was read by committee member Daw Kyin Ngike Mann. The Amyotha Hluttaw speaker then announced the approval of the bill, after the Hluttaw's agreement was obtained.

A motion related to the bill was tabled by Deputy Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation U Hla Kyaw. The motion was supported by U Maung Maung Latt of Sagaing Region constituency (9). The Hluttaw's agreement to confirm the amendment was obtained, after which Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than announced the confirmation.

The 17th-day meeting of the seventh session of the second Amyotha Hluttaw will be held on 14 February. ■

Explanation of SWRR Ministry's policy and work processes

Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (SWRR) Dr. Win Myat Aye explained his ministry's policy and work processes that directly benefit the people to Hluttaw affairs committee members in the Hluttaw compound's Zabuthiri meeting hall yesterday.

Pyithu Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U T Khun Myat said members of the Hluttaw, as elected representatives of the people, have a duty to pass laws as well as to conduct a check-and-balance function.

"All are urged to put their best efforts in conducting works that directly benefit the people", he said.

The Deputy Speaker added that in the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) meeting that he attended recently, he was able to explain to an international audience the works done by the government for the Rakhine region by emphasising on the works of the SWRR Ministry. For this, he recognises and thanks the officials and staff of the SWRR Ministry.

Union Minister Dr. Win Myat Aye spoke about being able to conduct more works that benefit the people directly when the



Dr. Win Myat Aye addresses the meeting with members of the Hluttaw Affairs Committee. PHOTO: MNA

government and Hluttaw work together. The ministry was able to provide a cash support system to mothers and children from birth to two years old, as well as a monthly social pension payment to elders above 90 years of age. Arrangements are now underway to expand the ministry from two departments to three departments, with the addition of the Department of Rehabilitation.

"As our ministry is responsible for social matters from conception to the old age, it is important to set up policy that allows living a life in dignity and to develop safely. As the requirements of the people are best known by Hluttaw representatives who are always among the people, it is believed that working together with Hluttaw representatives would benefit the people the most. Works will be continued

and implemented to obtain the strength of the people all over the country to free the country of conflict and become developed", said the Union Minister.

Directors general from the three departments under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement then explained their work processes and future work programmes. Hluttaw representatives who are Hluttaw affairs committee members in

attendance then discussed and suggested requirements of the people from their respective constituencies, availability of land for township offices, children's affairs, women's rights, the status of participating in natural disaster preparation works, drug rehabilitation, handicapped rights and old-age pensions, to which the Union Minister and officials provided answers and explanations.—Myanmar News Agency■

Diplomats, UN officials observe Maungtaw repatriation work

FROM PAGE-1

Following the briefing, they flew to Taung Pyo Letwe camp, where displaced people who will return by road will be accepted.

At the camp, U Ye Htut, Maungtaw District Deputy Commissioner, briefed on readiness for providing accommodation, food and security and health care for the returnees.

Ministries concerned also opened offices at the camp to carry out scrutinisation.

The delegation toured Taung Pyo Letwe camp before they flew to Nga Khu Ya camp by helicopter.

Nga Khu Ya camp will be

used for accepting those who return by waterway.

At the camp, 12 ministries opened their branch offices with more than 80 staff to carry out scrutinisation of returnees.

The delegation observed the steps for the scrutinisation process and the issuing of National Verification cards to the returnees.

In the evening, the delegation visited the Muslim community in Pantawpyin Village and viewed completion of houses by the Yangon Region Government.

In the visit to Pantawpyin Village, diplomats and UN officials asked the villagers about



Diplomats and UN officials visit the Friendship Bridge at the border with Bangladesh. PHOTO: MNA

their security, education, health, economic and social situation.

The delegation includes Dato Paduka Haji Abdu'r Rahmani bin Dato Paduka Besir, Patron of the Diplomatic Corps in

Myanmar, Mr. Bob Robert Rae, Former Ontario Premier of Canada, ambassadors and diplomats from Canada, Brunei, the Czech Republic, the EU, Turkey, Indonesia, Australia, France, Japan,

Nepal, the Philippines, Timor Leste, Russia, US, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the Republic of Korea and representatives from UNHCR, World Bank, FAO and WFP.—Myanmar News Agency■

GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

ACTING CHIEF EDITORAye Min Soe,
ce@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com
dce@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com**EXPATRIATE CONSULTANT EDITOR**Mark Angeles,
markangeles@gmail.com**SENIOR EDITORIAL CONSULTANT**

Kyaw Myaing

SENIOR TRANSLATORSZaw Min,
zawmin.gnlm@gmail.com
Win Ko Ko Aung,
kowink2aung@gmail.com**INTERNATIONAL NEWS EDITOR**Ye Htut Tin,
editor1@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com**LOCAL NEWS EDITORS**Tun Tun Naing (Editor),
intlnews@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com
Nwe Nwe Tun (Sub-editor),
nwenwe9131@gmail.com**TRANSLATORS**Khaing Thanda Lwin,
Hay Mar Tin Win,
Ei Myat Mon
Zaw Htet Oo
Kyaw Zin Lin
Kyaw Zin Tun**REPORTER**May Thet Hnin,
reporter1@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com
mayreporter.mm@gmail.com**PHOTOGRAPHER**

Kyaw Zeya Win @ Phoe Khwar

COMPUTER TEAMTun Zaw ,
Thein Ngwe, Zaw Zaw Aung,
Ye Naing Soe, Nyi Zaw Moe,
Hnin Pwint, Kay Khaing Win,
Sanda Hnin, Zu Zin Hnin**EDITORIAL SECTION**(+95) (01) 8604529,
Fax — (+95) (01) 8604305**CIRCULATION & DISTRIBUTION**San Lwin, (+95) (01) 8604532,
Hotline - 09 974424114**ADVERTISING & MARKETING**(+95) (01) 8604530,
Hotline - 09 974424848
marketing@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com
subscription@globalnewlightofmyanmar.comPrinted 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.gnlmdaily@gmail.com
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Fisheries Department, WCS to conduct research on Ayeyawady dolphins

THE Fisheries Department and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) of Myanmar will conduct a survey and research on the activities of Ayeyawady dolphins from Mandalay to Bhamo in Ayeyawady river on 6 February. The trip is scheduled to take place over 10 days.

During the trip, the Fisheries Department and the WCS will provide awareness on dolphin conservation, as well as convince local villagers not to catch fish using electric-shock methods. They will also set up signboards to warn and increase awareness among people," said U Han Win, who is in charge of Ayeyawady dolphin conservation under the Fisheries Department.

"We will know the exact number of dolphins only after conducting the survey. Currently, we cannot say that the number of dol-

Two dolphins jump in Ayeyawady River. **PHOTO: SUPPLIED**

phins has reduced because of the mortality rate of dolphins. However, reproduction has occurred among the dolphins. Normally, conservation and research trips are held in February every year, he added.

Data on the dolphins will be collected with the use of a

small boat and a ship. To locate the dolphins, we will use the GPS system, 7x50mm lens, a depth meter, a sounder and cameras. "Ayeyawady dolphins come to the water surface every 30 to 60 seconds and do not jump like sea dolphins, but only swim slowly," he added.

According to data collected in February 2017, there were 25 dolphins living in a 72-kilometre stretch between Mingun and Kyaukmyaung, 43 dolphins living in a 117-kilometre stretch in the Bhamo area and 68 dolphins living between Mandalay and Bhamo. —Khine Set Wai ■

Fish maws sell well in Pyapon

FISH maws are emerging popular in the Pyapon market since January because of the high demand abroad, according to a report in City News yesterday.

"Fish maws are selling well in Pyapon these days. Earlier, we sent fish maws to Yangon. However, since Jan-

uary 2018, we are exporting fish maws abroad.

The price of fish maw has not changed, and yet, the demand is high abroad," said Daw Kyu Khine, a fish maw trader from Pyapon town.

"Since the demand is high abroad, we dry the fish maw of sea fish," he said.

Fish maws are exported to China, Thailand, Japan and Singapore through border trade camps.

Fish maws are mostly used in hotels and restaurants in curries.

The price of dry fish maw varies depending on the type of fish.

Fish maw from gold fish costs Ks110,000 per viss, while fish maw from Natkataw fish costs Ks550,000 per viss.

The price of fish maw from Yaung is between Ks18,000 and Ks21,000 per viss, while the price of fish maw from soldier croaker fish is Ks165,000 per viss. — GNLM ■

Over 150 tonnes of illegal timber seized in Sagaing's Pale Township this FY

THE police seized more than 150 tonnes of smuggled wood and 15 vehicles in Pale Township, Yinmabin District, Sagaing Region, in the current fiscal year (FY), and arrested 14 people involved in the cases, according to statistics provided by the township Forestry Department.

The Forestry Department, the police and the township administrative committee are collaborating to make effective plans to combat unlawful extraction, smuggling and transport of forest products in the region. As a military operation,

the combined team will continue to fight against smuggling of forest products in the region.

Between last April and this January, the authorities seized some 152.286 tonnes of illegal wood and timber, including 3.03 tonnes of teak logs, 13.33 tonnes of teak timbers, more than 120 tonnes of hardwoods and other varieties of wood.

The forest authorities are accelerating efforts to eliminate the illegal trading of wood by raising awareness among the rural community through educational talks and seminars. —Township IPRD ■



Illegally transported wood seen in Pale Township Sagaing.

Myanmar-Korea Investment Promotion Seminar held at Lotte Hotel

May Thet Hnin

THE Myanmar-Korea Investment Promotion Seminar, coordinated by the Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC) and the ASEAN-Korea Centre, was held at Lotte Hotel on Thursday.

Officials from MIC explained the existing Myanmar Investment Law and Myanmar Companies Act, as well as the relief and tax incentives under the law. Similarly, officials from the transport, power, electricity and construction sectors detailed the current projects being executed in their respective sectors and the investment opportunities available.

Dr. Myo Nyein Aye, Deputy General Manager from the ministry of transport and communications, discussed matters concerning the condition of the transport sector, and railway, road, air and ports projects.

The transport sector offers

investment opportunities in the river ports establishment (Ayeyawady/Chindwin) project; new Mandalay-Muse railway development project; new Tamu railway development project; new Yangon-Hantharwaddy railway development project; new Yangon-Thilawa railway development project; multi-modal logistics hubs in Yangon, Mandalay and Bago; container switching stations in Myawady; as well as in three pagoda passes and city truck terminals in Yangon, Magway, Pyay, Mawlamyine, Dawei, Thandwe and Heho, said Dr. Myo Nyein Aye.

The telecommunications sector offers investment opportunities in postal services, telecommunication services, the production and distribution of satellite communication items, production and distribution of radar communication items and related equipments, production and distribution of radio commu-

nication items, and the production and domestic marketing of mobile handsets and telephones, he stated.

“Myanmar’s transport sector lags behind ASEAN. Sixty per cent of its highways and most of its rail lines are in a poor condition. Some 20 million people do not have basic road access. Up to US\$45 to \$60 billion in investments are required by 2030,” he added.

U Kyaw Kaung Cho, Chief Engineer, Department of Bridge, operating under the Ministry of Construction, gave a report on the bridge and road projects and their estimate costs. The projects that will be executed are the Watalone Tunnel in Shan State; Ponetaung-Poneya Tunnel linking Sagaing and Magway regions; Hinthada (Ayeyawady) Bridge; Thayat-Aunglan (Ayeyawady) Bridge; Dala Bridge; an elevated highway (Yangon); and six package projects: Yan-

gon-Mandalay Expressway, Yangon-Pathein-Ngayokekaung Expressway, Thilawa-Thanatpink-Kyaikhto Road, Minbu-An-Kyaukpyu Expressway, Mandalay-Myitkyina Expressway and Pathein-Monywa-Shwebo Road.

U Min Min Oo, Assistant Secretary of the Ministry of Electricity and Energy, noted that there are investment opportunities in the field of generation, transmission and distribution of power and upstream, and new energy activities in the petroleum sector. Korean companies can participate in the international competitive bidding, he said.

“Currently, only 39 per cent of households have access to electricity. There are many opportunities to invest in the renewable energy sector. Hydro energy and clean energy of liquefied natural gas plans are targeted to be implemented by

2030,” said U Min Min Oo.

A one-on-one business matching session is also included in this seminar, which will bring together 17 domestic companies and 12 Korean companies.

The Korean business mission is interested in the infrastructure and manufacturing sectors, and so, they have sought a business network with their Myanmar counterparts.

South Korea was ranked sixth in the investment lineup of 49 countries and brought \$3.8 billion into Myanmar. The figure constitutes 5 per cent of Myanmar’s total foreign direct investments.

Nearly 600 Korean companies have registered in Myanmar, of which 400 enterprises have invested in the service sector. The remaining enterprises are engaged in industry, trading, construction, hotel and tourism, and banking sectors.



Photo: Phoe Khwar

Yangon government to reduce electricity bills for factories operating at night

THE Yangon Region government will reduce electricity bills for factories and workshops that operate at night, according to a report in Myawady Daily yesterday.

“Electricity consumption is low at night, because only a small number of factories and workshops operate at night.

So, we can reduce the electricity bills if more electricity is used at night,” said an official from the regional

government.

Currently, households pay Ks35 per unit for up to 100 units and Ks40 per unit for up to 200 units. Anything above 200 units costs Ks50 per unit.

Industrial users pay Ks75 per unit, Ks100 and Ks150. From April, the Ministry of Electricity and Energy has planned to change the meter system, depending on the usage of electricity. — GNLM

Chinese merchants buy medicinal vines in bulk from Ngathayauk, Mandalay

CHINESE merchants have been buying medicinal herbs, locally called Sintonemanwe, from Ngathayauk Township, Mandalay Region, accruing good profits for local vine collectors.

The merchants, sent by Chinese businessmen, have been buying as many vines as the local collectors can

supply. These vines grow naturally in Ngathayauk Township.

“However, we do not know how they will utilise these vines.

The vines are in demand throughout the year. We are vine brokers for the Chinese merchants.

There are three or four

brokers here. We purchase dried Sintonemanwe. A viss (1.6 kg) of Sintonemanwe fetches some Ks400,” said a vine collector.

These vines grow naturally in the forest, attaching themselves to big and small trees. “We can earn extra money for our families,” said the vine collector.—Htet Myat

THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

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Myanmar National Symphony Orchestra 2018 performs in Yangon

THE national band of the Ministry of Information's Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV) and artists, led by Japan's Yunosuke Yamamoto, the conductor and composer, jointly conducted Myanmar National

Symphony Orchestra 2018 at the National Theatre in Yangon yesterday afternoon.

The performance was attended by Yangon Region Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein and wife Daw Khin Mi Mi Kywe,



Yangon Region Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein presents Mr. Yunosuke Yamamoto gift at the Myanmar National Symphony Orchestra 2018. **PHOTO: MNA**



The concert of Myanmar National Symphony Orchestra 2018 at the National Theatre in Yangon on 9 February 2018. **PHOTO: MNA**

Yangon Region Advocate U Han Htoo, Yangon Region ministers, Ambassador of Japan to Myanmar Tateshi Higuchi, officials, invited guests and the public.

During the performance, musicians from MRTV and the Japanese musicians jointly played Bizet's Carmen Suite No. 1 Lest Toreadors, Beethoven's Symphony No. 4, Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 (excerpt), Brahms' Hungarian dance No. 5 and No. 1,

Mozart's Ave Verum Corpus, Myanma sate yin Myanma shukhin (Myanmar's original thought and Myanmar's scenery), Maha (majestic), Beauty and the Beast, Despacito and Mahn Taung Yeik Kho (Taking refuge beneath Shwe Mahn Mountain).

Later, U Phyo Min Thein, Tateshi Higuchi, U Han Htoo, Yangon Region Minister for Planning and Finance U Myint Thaung, Yangon Mayor U

Maung Maung Soe and Yangon Region Minister for Rakhine Ethnic Affairs U Zaw Aye Maung presented bouquets and flower baskets to Japanese troupe leader Yunosuke Yamamoto, Japanese pianist Kyoko Koyama, the MRTV national band, singers, the Japanese cultural group and the Myanmar cultural group. They also took commemorative group photographs with the artists.— Myanmar News Agency ■

Tamu television station tests digital signal

MYANMAR Radio and Television is planning to shift from its current analogue system to a digital system, and has completed the installation of a DVB-T2 transmitter and antenna, which took place from 1 to 4 February.

It is now test the trans-

mission of digital television signals that are being received in Tamu Town and the nearby villages of Yan Nyein Aung, Hezin, Chaungnetkyi, Kyuntaung Ywathit, Htantabin, Manmaw and Pantha.—Myanmar News Agency ■

Information session on Australia Awards Scholarship 2019 Intake



The information session on Australia Awards Scholarship 2019 Intake is being held at the Lake Garden Hotel in Nay Pyi Taw on 9 February 2018. **PHOTO: MNA**

AN information session on Australia Awards Scholarship 2019 Intake, a scholarship program directly provided by the Australia government, was held yesterday morning in Lake Garden Hotel in Nay Pyi Taw Hotel Zone.

At the information session, Anna Greble, Scholarship Consultant and Ma Zar Ni Win, Senior Program Officer

of Australia Embassy, Yangon explained about the scholarship award. Selected persons will be permitted to attend the courses in Australia starting from 2018 December, 2019 January and February. Interested person can contact Australia Embassy in Yangon or visit the embassy's website <http://myanmar.embassy.gov.au> for online application.

Those attending the talk then raised questions. Applications for Australia Awards Scholarships are accepted since 1 February and will be accepted until 30 April. Similar information sessions will be held in Hotel Mandalay on 11 February and Royal Taunggyi Hotel in Taunggyi on 12 February it is learnt. —Myanmar News Agency ■




WORLD WATER DAY 2018

ကမ္ဘာ့ရေနေ့ ၂၀၁၈

“Nature for Water”
“Water for Nation Building”

‘ရေ အတွက် သဘာဝပတ်ဝန်းကျင်’
‘နိုင်ငံတော်ဖွံ့ဖြိုးရေးအတွက် ရေ’

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MICC(II)၊ နေပြည်တော်

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အမျိုးသားအဆင့်ရေအရင်းအမြစ်ကော်မတီ

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw joint bill committee holds meeting

A joint bill committee to discuss the plan for April through September 2018, the national planning bill and the 2018 Union Budget Bill, was held yesterday morning in the second-floor meeting hall of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw building D.

The meeting was attended by the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw deputy speaker, Joint Bill Committee and Public Account Joint Committee chairman U

Aye Tha Aung, the joint bill committee and public account joint committee deputy chairmen, secretaries, joint secretaries and committee members, legal affairs and special cases assessment commission members, and officials from the ministry of planning and finance, union attorney general's office and the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw office.—Myanmar News Agency



Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U Aye Tha Aung addresses the meeting of joint bill committee. **PHOTO: MNA**

Foreign investment increases two-fold this fiscal year in Mandalay

FOREIGN direct investments (FDIs) in Mandalay has increased some two-fold in the first nine months of this fiscal year (FY), according to the Mandalay Region Directorate of Investment and Company Administration.

Between April and December of this FY, the inflow of FDIs into Mandalay reached more than US\$1.1 billion, while investments by citizens were valued at more than Ks1.8 billion, which was a significant increase in the value of investment, compared with last FY.

Daw Nwe Ni Oo, director of Mandalay Region Directorate of Investment and Company Administration, said, "Both local and foreign investments continue to flow into the region, creating more employment opportunities for residents. When compared with last FY, foreign investments in the nine months increased by \$370 million from 19 projects, while citizens' investments went up by Ks860

million from 12 projects."

Last financial year, the authorities allowed 11 citizens' investment projects, worth more than Ks940 million, and seven foreign investment projects, valued at \$730 million.

Commenting on investments, U Thike Tun, assistant director of the department, said: "The newly founded regional investment committee has the right to grant approvals to both local and foreign investments. The committee has granted approvals to five investment projects, including three foreign projects last month. Efforts are being made to give the green light to the remaining applicants after a review process."

According to official statistics from the department, foreign investments in Myanmar, as of this December, reached more than \$3.2 billion from 56 projects, whereas citizens' investments reached more than Ks3.750 billion from 141 projects.—Khine Hsat Wai



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing visits the port control centre in Singapore yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief visits Singapore port

TATMADAW Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who was in Singapore at the invitation of Chief of the Defence force of the Singaporean Armed Forces, visited Singapore port yesterday morning.

The Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief and party viewed the port from the PSA Building. Next, they went to port control centre and observed the loading and

discharging of containers in the port by remote control system and then toured inside the port.

Singapore port was constructed in 1964 and it is the top deep sea port in the world, where containers ships from around the world come to berth and conduct the highest volume of global trade. In 2017 the PSA International company handled containers amounting to 33.25 millions

TEU. The port had more than 200 cranes of which about 140 cranes were in operation every day. The port handled nearly 6 per cent of the container trade volume in the world.

The Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief also met with families of the Myanmar military attaché (army, navy, air) and officers attending trainings.—Myanmar News Agency

Chief Scouts Commissioner meets MoP trainees, Chair of Asia-Pacific Scout Region

CHIEF Scouts Commissioner Dr. Tin Nyo met with Mr. Paul Parkinson, the Regional Chair of the Asia-Pacific Regional Scout Committee, at the Diamond Jubilee Hall of the Yangon University yesterday.

At the meeting, Dr. Tin Nyo spoke about how joining the scouts can have a positive impact on a person's life and that scouts generally help their community and also on topics related to sanitation. He also expressed his gratitude towards the Asia-Pacific Regional Scout Committee for providing training to Myanmar scouts about critical thinking involved in the peace process.

Mr. Parkinson also expressed his delight that Myanmar managed to become a member of the World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM) in such a short time. He said their Committee will do their best to provide training similar to the



Myanmar scouts participate in Messengers of Peace training. **PHOTO: MNA**

recent Peacemaker workshops and for scouts in Myanmar to be able to join in on the World Scout Jamboree.

Earlier in the day, Dr. Tin Nyo met with the participating scouts and their instructors at the training for coordinators of Messengers of Peace and gave words of encouragement.

Later in the afternoon, members of the Asia-Pacific Scout

Committee and members of the Myanmar Scout Association discussed the strengths and weaknesses of Myanmar's scouts and possible expansion of the Scout Association's processes. This was followed by Mr. Parkinson explaining the mission of WOSM and how the Asia-Pacific Committee can provide support to Myanmar's scouts.—Myanmar News Agency

Solve the armed conflicts through negotiations

MEMBERS of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) abducted civilians and sabotaged two bridges in Sumprabum Township in Kachin State on 28th January, and the destruction has stopped the flow of life-saving commodities to the towns and villages of Putao in Kachin State.

With road transportation halted, commodity prices have skyrocketed, resulting in a shortage of household goods and medicines. The sabotage was a severe blow to the local people.

On the same day, the armed group abducted 21 Lisu ethnic people on Myitkyina-Putao-Sumprabum Road near Kawapan Village.

Despite armed conflicts in Kachin State, the Putao District is usually a place of peace and stability. Ethnic people including Jinhaw, Lisu and Rawan love to live in peace. The local people welcomed with delight the recent inauguration

of road infrastructures by the government, as it shortened the travel time between Putao and Myitkyina. Previously, it took several days to make the same trip.

Today, the delight is gone. The sabotage was a massive blow to the hopes of innocent civilians in Putao District. They took to the street demanding for the recovery of the road transportation and for releasing abducted civilians. Meanwhile, the Kachin State Government has pledged to return the situation into normalcy, with an assurance of safe travel.

We would like to urge the KIA to release the abducted civilians, because all displaced people are civilians.

In fact, in the history of the region, the people in the hilly areas in Kachin State joined in the fight against the colonialists and to regain our independence. After independence, they undertook armed struggle against the then government due to divergent opinions. If we look back at our country's history, soon after the 20th Century Panglong Agreement and our Independence, we succumbed to the fires of internal conflict. For nearly seventy years, peace, stability and development in Myanmar have fallen victim to conflict.

We should understand that armed conflicts cause loss of lives on both sides, and civilians are victims of the conflicts. The regions where armed conflicts happen cannot enjoy development. The best way to solve the armed conflicts is negotiations at the table. The Union Government has opened its peace door to all armed groups.

Hence, only cessation of armed conflicts and peace can bring safe and security to the livelihood of the people. Peace and stability will enable our nation to realise its potential as a strong, prosperous Democratic Federal Republic, a Union that will be the refuge and the pride of all our peoples. ■

Some hidden truths behind the scene

By An Editor

ACCORDING to the bilateral agreement made by Myanmar and the Bangladesh governments, the Myanmar government declared that the repatriation and resettlement programmes will be resumed. But, after signing an agreement with the UNHCR on January 22, Bangladesh postponed the repatriation plan.

It is evident that the Myanmar government is ready for repatriation to accept the displaced people who fled to other places following the terrorist attacks in Rakhine State.

The Myanmar government has taken measures to ensure safe and sustainable returns of the displaced people who will return by sea or by road.

But the Bangladesh government held up the repatriation process and said that the repatriation had been postponed on the grounds that the list of people to be sent back is yet to be prepared, their verification and setting up of transit camps is remaining.

The international community tries to mount pressure on Myanmar to agree what they are demanding regarding the displaced people from Rakhine State.

A few weeks ago, The New York Times journalist Hannah Beech wrote some articles highlighting made-up stories at the refugee camp in Bangladesh and “Blurring fact and fiction in at refugee camps risks undermining their case” which can reveal the truth behind the lies of the some media.

According to her articles, “She was reporting on children who had arrived in the camps without their families. An international charity, which had given financial support to their uncle, brought me to meet the girls. Within an hour, she had a notebook filled with the kind of quotes that pull at heartstrings. Little of it was true.

After three days of reporting, the truth began to emerge. Soyud Hossain, the supposed uncle who had taken the girls in, was actually their father. He had three wives, two in Bangladesh and one in Myanmar, he admitted. The children were from his youngest wife, the one in Myanmar.

In any refugee camp, tragedy is commoditised. Aid groups want to help the neediest cases, and people quickly realise that the story of four orphaned sisters holds more value than that of an intact family that merely lost all its possessions.

And such embellished tales only buttress the Myanmar gov-

“For four days, I interviewed a nine-year-old boy named Noorshad, and his story had it all. In my notebook, he drew pictures of his house – and the tree from which his parents were hanged by Myanmar soldiers. Then he drew the jerry-can he clung to as he crossed the river into Bangladesh. He tied his flip-flops to his waist, he said, with a bit of vine. The sandals were from his dead mother. He glanced at them and sobbed,”

Inconsistent accounts

But there were inconsistencies. Noorshad said he liked cricket, a sport popular in Bang-

ladesh, he said, began when he was briefly back in Myanmar and saw a 12-year-old girl with fair skin and delicate features. “She was so beautiful,” Hossain said. “I needed to marry her.”

Child marriage is distressingly common among the Muslim people, and soon, Hossain began shuttling among his three wives. Not every wife knew about the other, but Hossain didn't think three wives were too many. His own father, he said, had six wives and 42 children.

Yet Hossain admitted that he was not adept at balancing family relations. When his four daughters sought shelter in

people believe the foreign media reports on the Rakhine issue are biased.

Due to selective international media, the attacks by terrorists faded out in favour of the view that the Myanmar army and Buddhists are bullies. Activists and societies connected with the Muslims in Rakhine lobbied international communities many years ago. When conflicts happened in Rakhine State, international communities put pressure on Myanmar, which is in the transition to democracy.

But the terrorist attacks and the fleeing of people from conflict areas are just the tip of the iceberg.

The huge and unseen part of the Rakhine issue is under the water. We need energetic efforts with strong desire to explore the groups that are masterminding the Rakhine issue.

Hannah Beech, in her article, pointed out the majority of the media for their failure to seek the truth and ensure accuracy in their reports.

No one can deny the fact that she had seen the displaced people quoted in foreign news media telling stories that she knew lacked consistency and were totally groundless.

The credibility of the media is lost when they fail to seek the truth and ensure accuracy in their reporting.

The truth emerges too much later

The article by Hannah Beech appeared too late. She produced the article due to her curiosity and doubts about the international media. It also shows that an issue can be approached from different views.

Our country, which upholds the motto “We will prove with our work”, are continuing to work without caring praise and despite being denounced and pressured. We will face down everything with the unity of our people. ■

Translated by
Win Ko Ko Aung

such embellished tales only buttress the Myanmar government's contention that what is happening in Rakhine State is not ethnic cleansing, as the international community suggests, but trickery by foreign invaders.

ernment's contention that what is happening in Rakhine state is not ethnic cleansing, as the international community suggests, but trickery by foreign invaders.

She said in her article that she had seen the Muslim people quoted in the foreign news media telling stories that I know are not true. Their accounts, in some cases, are too compelling, like a perfect storm of suffering. That is not to discount the collective trauma that has compelled nearly 700,000 residents in Myanmar to flee for Bangladesh over the past five months. Some estimates that 6,700 Muslim people met violent deaths in a single month last year. Even that number, the medical aid group says, is too low,”

ladesh but not in Myanmar. His grandparents were killed by the military, he told me, but then he admitted they had died of natural causes. I found locals from the village I believed he was from. It turned out that no one had been killed there, much less hanged from a tree.

So where did Noorshad come from? He had been found crying in the market in the Kutupalong refugee camp. Other refugees took him to a school where a pair of women offered hugs and bowls of curry.

Obviously, something bad had happened to him, but to this day, no one has figured out his real story.

I have a better sense of the life of Hossain, the four girls' father.

Holding NCA signing in Nay Pyi Taw

By Arakan Sein

THIS news report would bring delight not only to the people of Mon and Lahu but also to the entire people of Myanmar. The signing ceremony will be the first of its kind for the incumbent government and non-signatories are also invited to come forward and participate in the peace process. The New Mon State Party and the Lahu Democratic Union will sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in the ceremony highly valued and decorated under the government sponsorship. Eight ethnic armed groups signed the NCA in October, 2015; the New Mon State Party and Lahu Democratic Union from five member groups of United Nationalities Federal Council will sign the NCA in Nay Pyi Taw on 13 January, 2018. In addition, the government has made an offer to the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) for discussions to sign the NCA. KNPP is one of the five member groups of the United Nationalities Council in which Arakan National Council (ANC) and Wa National Organisation are also included.

Achieving peace and stability What we really need now is to achieve peace and stability in the country. The Panglong Agreement was signed at Panglong, Shan State on 12 February, 1947. During the Conference in February, 1947 on the agenda was the united struggle for independence from Britain and the future of our country after independence as a unified republic.

Unfortunately, many ethnic nationals disagreed with the Central Government and went underground. Frankly speaking, the Central Government and the ethnic armed groups in Myanmar have been virtually at war since independence from the British in 1948. That is why one of the four objectives of 71st Anniversary Union Day is to build a Federal Democratic Union through the Union Peace Conference—21st Century Panglong.

United we stand, divided we fall This phrase is often used to inspire unity and collaboration. After all, national unity is the first and foremost necessity of a peaceful and prosperous country. There are a lot of examples in the history of the world when due to lack of national unity, there have been internal and external dangers to the security and survival of countries. Two examples from Aesop's fables are well known and we should put them into practice in our daily life.

The Four Oxen and the Lion A lion used to prowl about a field in which four oxen used to dwell.

Many a time he tried to attack them; but whenever he came near they turned their tails to warn one another so that whichever way he approached them, he was met by the horns of one of them.

At last however, they fell quarrelling among themselves, and each went off to pasture

country after independence as a unified republic.

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Maritime patrol aircraft seen as key in Asia, but buyers elusive

SINGAPORE — When Boeing's P-8A Poseidon first arrived at the Singapore Airshow two years ago, it caused a stir. Defence buyers around the region were intrigued by the new aircraft, which was touted as reliable, capable and absolutely necessary in a region abundant with naval tension, both above and below the water.

In 2018, the need has grown. China has spent the last few years building up military installations around the South China Sea and its submarines are prowling farther afield, stoking Asian interest in planes that can sweep large swathes of ocean. The number of offerings on the market has grown too, but the cost of such specialised aircraft has kept the purchases relatively small for now. "Special-mission aircraft are a strategic asset," said Avishai Izhakian, Israel Aerospace Industry's (IAI) deputy general manager for airborne systems and radars, explaining why sales of such planes have remained elusive. "As such, the procurement



A member of the US Navy stands next to the Boeing P-8A Poseidon plane at a military air base in Bahia Blanca, Argentina on 22 November 2017. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

process is very lengthy." Among those joining Boeing in trying to address the market are Saab (SAABb.ST)'s Swordfish Maritime Patrol Aircraft, based on the Bombardier (BDBb.TO) Global 6000 business jet; the Kawasaki (7012.T) P-1; the Airbus (AIR.PA) C295 MPA and proposed maritime patrol variant of its A320neo; Leonardo's (LDOF.MI)

ATR 72MP; and IAI's ELI-3360 Maritime Patrol Aircraft, based on the Bombardier Global 5000 business jet. The Swordfish is not yet in production, however, and the Japanese Self-Defense Force is the sole customer for the P-1. India and Australia are so far the only Asia-region buyers of the \$175 million P-8.

No big sales of maritime pa-

trol aircraft were announced at this week's Singapore Airshow, the biggest regional aerospace and defence event. Still, plane-makers at the airshow said that Asia remained a promising market. "There is a requirement need out here in the Asian region for P-8s," Matt Carreon of Boeing said at a media briefing on Tuesday. He cited the large volume

of shipping traffic, the amount of piracy and the "current political climate" as reasons why maritime patrol would be important to Asian militaries. Two P-8s were on display at the airshow, one flown by the US Navy - the aircraft's biggest customer by far, with 98 ordered and 64 delivered - and the other by the Royal Australian Air Force, which has ordered 12. Britain and Norway are the only other two announced buyers. Gene Cunningham, Boeing's vice president of global sales for defence, space and security, said the company was in advanced discussions with South Korea over a P-8 sale. There might be a decision by the end of 2018, he added. On Thursday, South Korea's defence procurement agency confirmed it would buy a maritime patrol aircraft from a foreign company. The Yonhap news agency, citing an unnamed military source, said the decision would be between the P-8 and Saab's Swordfish for a deal expected to be worth about \$1.75 billion. —Reuters ■

France urges halt to air strikes, aid corridors in Syria

PARIS — French Defence Minister Florence Parly on Friday called for an end to air strikes in Syria and the opening of humanitarian corridors, saying it was unacceptable that civilians were being targeted.

Parly highlighted the fighting in rebel-held areas of Idlib province and eastern Damascus, where waves of Syrian government and Russian strikes have killed dozens of civilians in recent days. "We are very worried. The air strikes need to end," Parly said on France Inter radio. "Civilians are the targets, in Idlib and in the east of Damascus. This fighting is absolutely unacceptable," she added. The Syrian civil war, now entering its eighth year, has killed hundreds of thousands of people and driven more than 11 million from their homes, while drawing in regional countries and global powers supporting client factions on the ground. Parly did not specify who was carrying out the strikes. Her comments came after the United Nations on Tuesday called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Syria of at least a month. UN war crimes



A man is seen running after an air raid in the besieged town of Douma in eastern Ghouta in Damascus, Syria on 6 February 2018. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

experts have also said they are investigating several reports of bombs allegedly containing chlorine gas being used against civilians. Russia, an ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad whose military support has helped government forces claw back territory, on Thursday said a ceasefire was unrealistic.

Standing beside Russian President Vladimir Putin last summer, French leader Emmanuel Macron said any failure to open humanitarian corridors in

Syria represented a "red line", as did the use of chemical weapons.

France and the United Nations have repeatedly called in past months for the opening of aid corridors to alleviate the humanitarian crisis. The Paris government has also urged Moscow in private to consider ways to alleviate the crisis, but those efforts have not materialized into results on the ground.

France's foreign minister is due in Russia before the end of February. —Reuters ■

Oil slides towards steep weekly loss as supply fears mount

LONDON — Oil prices fell for a sixth day on Friday, and were on track for their biggest weekly losses in 10 months, as record-high US crude output added to concerns about a sharp rise in global supplies.

The drop came amid a rout in global equity markets sparked by inflation fears.

Brent futures LCOc1 were down 30 cents at \$64.51 a barrel by 0925 GMT. On Thursday, Brent fell 1.1 per cent to its lowest close since 20 Decem-

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude CLc1 was down 42 cents at \$60.73 a barrel, having settled down 1 per cent in the previous session, its lowest close since 2 January.

Both contracts have fallen more than 9 per cent from this year's high point in late January. Brent was heading for a weekly loss of nearly 6 per cent, its biggest since April, while WTI's weekly decline of more than 7 per cent is the steepest since March.

"It has now become painfully clear for beleaguered oil bulls that the early-year rally was not justified," PVM Oil Associates' Stephen Brennock said in a note. "In its place is a deepening price rout that has quashed any lingering pockets of optimism."

US domestic crude production hit a record of 10.25 million barrels per day (bpd) for the most recent week, according to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA), while an outage on a key oil pipeline in the North Sea proved short-lived.

OPEC member Iran also announced plans on Thursday to increase production within the next four years by at least 700,000 barrels a day, which Brennock said marked "a hat-trick of heartaches" for oil bulls.

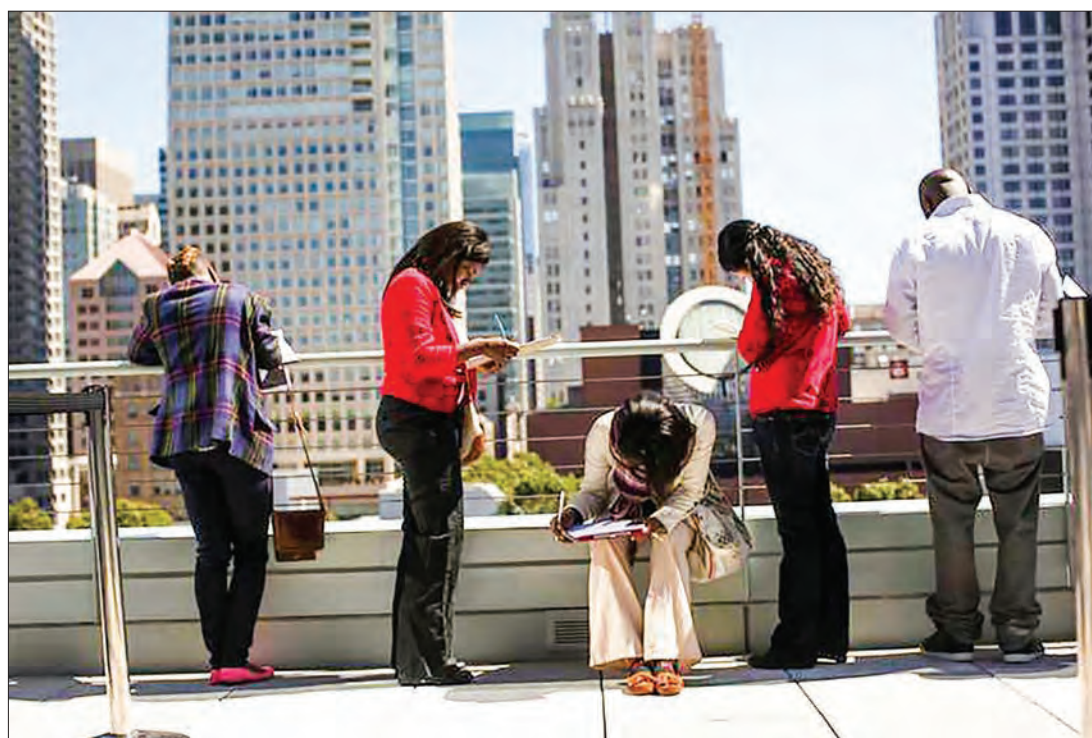
"This will be a tall order as the spectre of fresh US sanctions looms but nevertheless exacerbated the sell-off," Brennock said. —Reuters ■

US jobless claims drop to near 45-year low

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans filing for unemployment benefits unexpectedly fell last week, dropping to its lowest level in nearly 45 years as the labor market tightened further, bolstering expectations of faster wage growth this year.

The second straight weekly decline in claims reported by the Labor Department on Thursday also pointed to strong job growth momentum, which could further drive the unemployment rate lower. “The extremely low level of claims is a sign of tightness in the labor market and suggests that February is shaping up to be another solid month for job creation,” said John Ryding, chief economist at RDQ Economics in New York. Initial claims for state unemployment benefits decreased 9,000 to a seasonally adjusted 221,000 for the week ended 3 February, the Labor Department said. Claims fell to 216,000 in mid-January, which was the lowest level since January 1973. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast claims rising to 232,000 in the latest week. Last week marked the 153rd straight week that claims remained below the 300,000 threshold, which is associated with a strong labor market. That is the longest such stretch since 1970, when the labor market was much smaller.

The labor market is near full employment, with the jobless rate at a 17-year low of 4.1 per cent. The tighter labor market is starting to exert upward pres-



Job seekers apply for the 300 available positions at a new Target retail store in San Francisco, California on 9 August 2012. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

sure on wage growth.

The Labor Department reported last week that average hourly earnings jumped 2.9 per cent year-on-year in January, the largest gain since June 2009, after advancing 2.7 per cent in December. Employers added 200,000 jobs to their payrolls last month. Strong wage growth supports optimism among Federal Reserve officials that inflation will increase toward the US central bank's 2 per cent target this year. US financial markets expect the Fed will raise interest rates in March. The Fed has forecast three rate increases for this year after lifting borrowing costs three times in 2017.

ECONOMY LIKELY OVERHEATING

Prices for US Treasuries fell, with the yield on the benchmark 10-year note rising to a near four-year high also as the Bank of England said interest rates probably need to rise sooner. The dollar was little changed against a basket of currencies. Stocks on Wall Street were trading lower.

“For Fed officials it is damn the torpedoes and plunging stock prices and keep with the game plan to raise rates gradually as the economy is showing increasing signs of overheating,” said Chris Rupkey, chief economist at

MUFG in New York. “The Fed may be out of step with current economic conditions and behind the curve.”

Last week, the four-week moving average of initial claims, considered a better measure of labor market trends as it irons out week-to-week volatility, declined 10,000 to 224,500, the lowest level since March 1973.

The claims report also showed the number of people receiving benefits after an initial week of aid fell 33,000 to 1.92 million in the week ended Jan. 27. The four-week moving average of the so-called continuing claims rose 12,500 to 1.95 million. —Reuters ■

WORLD BRIEFS

China's J-20 stealth jet put into air force combat service: spokesman

BEIJING — China's latest J-20 stealth fighter has been commissioned into the air force's combat service, a spokesperson confirmed Friday.

The J-20 is China's fourth-generation medium and long-range fighter jet. It made its maiden flight in 2011 and was first shown to the public at the 11th Airshow China in Zhuhai, Guangdong Province, in November 2016. —Xinhua ■

China to launch crude oil futures on 26 March

BEIJING — China will launch the long-awaited crude oil futures contract on March 26 at the Shanghai International Energy Exchange (INE), the country's top securities regulator said on Friday.

Preparations for the launch of the oil futures have almost been completed, Chang Depeng, a spokesman with the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC), told a press conference. —Xinhua ■

Explosion at mosque in Libyan city of Benghazi, residents say

BENGHAZI — An explosion took place at a mosque in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi on Friday, residents said.

There was no immediate word on casualties.

Two weeks ago, around 35 people were killed by a twin bombing at a mosque in the same city.

Benghazi, Libya's second-largest city, is controlled by the Libyan National Army (LNA), led by eastern-based commander Khalifa Haftar.

The LNA was battling Islamists, including some linked to Islamic State and al Qaeda, as well as other opponents until late last year in the Mediterranean port city. —Reuters ■

Syrian government warplanes kill 59, injure 139 in Eastern Ghouta: monitor

BEIRUT — Syrian government air strikes killed 59 civilians, including 15 children, and injured 139 others on Thursday, the fourth day of attacks against a rebel-held region, a war monitor reported. Warplanes pounded various parts of eastern Ghouta, a besieged pocket of satellite towns and farms near the Syrian capital of Damascus, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitoring group. There was no immediate comment from the Syrian army. The death toll rose after the bombing of a market in the village of Arbin, where air strikes killed 21, including nine children and three women, the



A woman gestures as she walks on rubble of damaged buildings after an airstrike in the besieged town of Douma in eastern Ghouta in Damascus, Syria on 7 February 2018. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

monitor said. The International Committee of the Red Cross in Syria expressed distress at the deteriorating security and humanitarian conditions in the area. “Thousands are struggling to survive without aid, or a safe place from the line of fire” in eastern Ghouta, it said in a tweet. The Syrian government has repeatedly said it only targets militants. In Damascus, shelling of the old city quarter by rebel factions in eastern Ghouta killed two civilians and damaged houses and properties. The United Nations called on Tuesday for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Syria of at least a month. —Reuters ■

Trump signs deal to end brief government shutdown, increase US spending

WASHINGTON — The US Congress ended a brief government shutdown on Friday by reaching a wide-ranging deal that is expected to push budget deficits into the \$1 trillion-a-year zone.

The bill passed by a wide margin in the Senate and survived a rebellion of 67 conservative Republicans in the House of Representatives thanks to the support of some Democrats. Those conservatives were mainly angry about non-military spending increases.

President Donald Trump signed the measure into law on Friday morning, ending a government shutdown that began just after midnight, when Congress was still debating the budget deal.

It was the second shutdown this year under the Republi-

can-controlled Congress and Trump, who played little role in attempts by party leaders this week to end months of fiscal squabbling.

The deal is the fifth temporary government funding measure for the fiscal year that began 1 October and replenishes federal coffers until 23 March, giving lawmakers more time to write a full-year budget.

It also extends the US government's borrowing authority until March 2019, sparing Washington politicians difficult votes on debt and deficits until after mid-term congressional elections in November.

Once known as the party of fiscal conservatives, the Republicans and Trump are now quickly expanding the US budget deficit



US President Donald Trump delivers remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, US, on 8 February 2018. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

and its \$20 trillion national debt. Their sweeping tax overhaul bill approved in December will add an estimated \$1.5 trillion to the national debt over 10 years.

Nearly \$300 billion in new spending included in the bill approved on Friday will ensure the annual budget deficit will exceed \$1 trillion in 2019, said the Com-

mittee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a private fiscal policy watchdog group in Washington.

Friday's budget deal allows for \$165 billion in additional defence spending over two years that will help Trump deliver on his promise to rebuild the military. That won over many Republicans but some were still furious over the \$131 billion extra made available for non-military spending, including health and infrastructure.

None of the added spending will be offset by budget savings elsewhere or revenue increases, relying instead on government borrowing. There also is no offset reduction for nearly \$90 billion in new disaster aid for US states and territories ravaged by hurricanes or wildfires. —Reuters ■

North Korean leader's sister arrives in South Korea

SEOUL — North Korea's high-level delegation to the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics including leader Kim Jong Un's younger sister, Kim Yo Jong, arrived in South Korea by plane on Friday afternoon.

Considered one of the closest aides to her brother, Kim Yo Jong has become the first immediate family member of North Korea's founder Kim Il Sung to ever set foot in South Korea.

At a reception dinner prior to the Olympics' opening ceremony in the evening, North Korea's ceremonial leader Kim Yong Nam, who leads the delegation, shook hands with South Korean President Moon Jae In, local TV footage showed. They exchanged a few words. The delegation and Moon are scheduled to hold a meeting on Saturday, the South Korean government said. It is very rare for a South Korean president to hold formal talks with North Korea's high-ranking officials, as the two countries remain technically at war after the 1950-53 Korean War ended in a ceasefire. CNN reported Friday that during the luncheon meeting between the delegates and Moon, Kim Yo Jong may invite the president to visit Pyongyang sometime this year, citing several diplomatic sources with deep knowledge

of the North's intentions.

The report said one potential date for such a visit is 15 August, the anniversary of Japan's surrender in World War II and liberation of the Korean Peninsula from decades of Japanese colonial rule. South Korean media have meanwhile floated the possibility that the delegation may deliver to Moon a personal letter or message from Kim Jong Un.

Observers say that by sending Kim's younger sister, the North is trying to underscore the recent rapprochement with the South, while testing the unity among South Korea, the United States and Japan over sanctions imposed on the North over its nuclear and missile programs.

A jetliner carrying the high-level delegation flew into Incheon International Airport, near Seoul, shortly before 2 p.m. South Korean TV later showed footage of the delegation catching a high-speed train to Pyeongchang, the main Olympic venue in eastern South Korea. North Korean airline Air Koryo is subject to sanctions imposed by the United States and South Korea. But an official of the South's Unification Ministry indicated that the plane used by the delegation would not be subject to the sanctions. —Kyodo News ■

Lanzhou police seize 15 kg heroin in drug case

LANZHOU — Police of Lanzhou City, northwest China's Gansu Province, have caught a man suspected of transporting drugs and seized 15 kg of heroin.

Last month, Lanzhou police were informed that a man surnamed Ma frequently contacted people at the border area

of the southwestern Yunnan Province, and he was suspected of transporting a large quantity of drugs from Yunnan to Gansu.

With the support of Yunnan police, Lanzhou police caught Ma in Kunming, capital of Yunnan, on 2 February and captured a vehicle carrying 15 kg of heroin. The police escorted

Ma back to Lanzhou Thursday.

The case is under further investigation.

Under the country's Criminal Law, smuggling, trafficking, transporting or making 50 grams of heroin or more is punishable by 15 years in jail, life imprisonment or the death penalty. —Xinhua ■

China catching up in neuroscience research: scientist

BEIJING — China is intensifying research on neuroscience and the China Brain Project (CBP) will be one of the world's biggest, according to a neuroscientist.

Muming Poo, Director of the Institute of Neuroscience and Center for Excellence in Brain Science and Intelligence Technology (CEBSIT) of Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), has played a key role in planning the CBP.

The goals of CBP were to advance basic understanding of the brain, to address some urgent health needs through neuroscience to develop new technology, Poo said in a recent interview published in the National Science Review, a CAS

journal. CBP will build on the work of the EU human brain project, the US BRAIN initiative and Japan's brain/MIND project, with some distinctive features of its own.

"CBP puts research on brain disorders and brain-inspired artificial intelligence (AI) as a high priority, rather than a remote goal. Indeed, neuroscience already provides useful input into these areas," he said.

"China has the largest patient populations in the world for all brain disorders, making research on prevention, early diagnosis and early intervention particularly urgent and offering the largest data base for researchers to work with," Poo added. The current interna-

tional neuroscience community mostly uses rodents (mice and rats) as animal models for studying the neural mechanisms. Poo believes that non-human primates are more appropriate experimental animal models as their brains are more similar to those of humans.

"China has large macaque monkey resources, and research on developing human disease models using macaques is advancing at a rapid rate. This is an opportunity for China to lead the study of higher cognitive functions, such as empathy, consciousness and language, as well as pathogenic mechanisms and intervention approaches for brain disorders," Poo said. —Xinhua ■

Quake-hit Taiwan city winds down rescue efforts, five still missing

HUALIEN, (Taiwan) — Rescue operations in Taiwan started to wind down on Friday after a devastating 6.4-magnitude earthquake rocked the tourist area of Hualien this week, taking a toll of 12 dead and five missing.

More than 270 people were injured when Tuesday's quake hit the eastern coastal city just before midnight, toppling four buildings, ripping large fissures in roads and unleashing panic among the roughly 100,000 residents.

More than 200 aftershocks followed, hampering a round-the-clock rescue effort in which emergency personnel battled rain and cold to comb rubble in a search for survivors.

Efforts on Friday nar-



Rescue personnel work at a collapsed building after an earthquake hit Hualien, Taiwan, on 9 February 2018. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

rowed to finding five Chinese nationals still missing after rescuers pulled two bodies, identified as Canadian citizens from Hong

Kong, out of a 12-storey residential building that had been left tilting at a 45-degree angle.

Authorities said they

would focus their search on the single building where the five missing were believed to be.

"The military will con-

tinue to prioritise today rescuing the missing people in the Yun Men Tsui Ti residential building," it said in a statement.

The building's extreme displacement made the search tough, the government said in a statement, adding, "The space for our operations is small, so the progress of search and rescue can be slow."

Power was restored to all affected areas in Hualien, although 8,500 homes are still without water.

The military will work with local government officials to develop a plan to demolish a hotel, a residential building and other dangerous buildings, it said in its statement. —Reuters ■

Taking train-track selfie turns fatal in Bangkok

BANGKOK — A woman was killed while trying to take a selfie with a friend on a train track at a station in Bangkok, local police said. The 28-year-old had been drinking with a group of friends near the Samsen train station in Bangkok's Phaya Thai district. At around 4 am local time on Thursday, they came to the station and tried to take a selfie with a train in it.

The tragedy happened when she and a male friend attempted to take a photo with an outgoing train in the background, failing to see an oncoming train. Taking selfies, especially in dangerous locations, is a new popular culture in Thailand and India. In January, a man died in a similar accident in India.—Xinhua ■

Philippines eyes 2 mln Chinese tourists this year

MANILA — The Philippines is aiming to attract 2 million Chinese tourists to visit this archipelagic Southeast Asian country this year, an official of the Department of Tourism (DOT) said on Friday.

Niel Ballesteros, chief of DOT Market Development Group, told Xinhua that the Philippine government is expecting an estimated 2 million Chinese tourists to visit the Philippines this year, almost twice the number of Chinese tourists who visited the country in 2017.

Ballesteros said the Philippines is on target to reach the 2 million target given the booming economic and diplomatic relations between Manila and Beijing.

"To meet the target, the Philippine government will increase the connectivity between two countries. Now, we are luring more direct flights

between China and the Philippines," Ballesteros said.

Most of the Chinese tourists who visited the Philippines last year spent their holidays in the world-renowned beach island resorts of Boracay and Bohol, DOT records showed. This year, Ballesteros said DOT is endorsing other destinations in the Philippines, like tourists spots in Dumaguete on Negros island in the central Philippines.

A total of 968,447 Chinese tourists visited the Philippines from January to December 2017, or an increase of 43.33 per cent from 2016, making China the second largest source of tourists last year. The Philippine government announced in January that it is increasing the number of flights between the Philippines and China to lure more Chinese tourists.—Xinhua ■

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

M.V GSS YANGON VOY. NO. (1080)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V GSS YANGON VOY. NO. (1080) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 10-2-2018 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
SHIPPING**

Phone No: 2301185

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 10-2-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of A.W.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
SHIPPING LINES**

Phone No: 2301185

THE REPUBLIC OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR MINISTRY OF ELECTRICITY AND ENERGY MYANMA OIL AND GAS ENTERPRISE (INVITATION FOR OPEN TENDER)

(3/ 2018)

Open tenders are invited for supply of the following respective items in Myanmar Kyats.

Sr.No	Tender No	Description	Remark
(1)	DMP/L-094(17-18)	Chrome Lignite (200) MT	Ks
(2)	DMP/L-095(17-18)	Spares for K 700 A Rig Pump Ex National 55 Series Drilling Rigs (15) Items	Ks
(3)	DMP/L-096(17-18)	M.S Plate and Angle Iron (2) Groups	Ks
(4)	DMP/L-097(17-18)	Assorted Sizes of Tyres (1) Lot	Ks
(5)	DMP/L-098(17-18)	Assorted Sizes of Batteries (1) Lot	Ks
(6)	DMP/L-099(17-18)	3" ERW Steel line Pipe API 5L Grade A (PSL1) (10000) Meter	Ks

Tender Closing Date & Time- 8-3-2018, 16:30 pm

Tender Document shall be available during office hours commencing from 8 February 2018 at the Finance Department, Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise, No (44) Complex, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar.

Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise
Ph. +95 67 - 411206

INVITATION TO OPEN TENDER

Sealed tenders are invited by Department of Medical Services, Ministry of Health and Sports for the supply of 29 seater Bus and Forensic DNA Laboratory Equipment.

Tender documents are available during office hours at the Procurement and Supply Division, Department of Medical Services, office No (4), Ministry of Health and Sports Commencing from (13.2.2018).

Sealed bids are to be submitted to the office, not later than (28.2. 2018)15:00 hour, after which no bid will be accepted. No telegraph/telex proposal will be accepted.

For detail information please contact the Phone No.067-3411510, 067-3411544, Procurement and Supply Division Office, Department of Medical Services, Ministry of Health and Sports.

Procurement and Supply Division
Ministry of Health and Sports

Real life heroes star in Clint Eastwood French attack movie

LOS ANGELES — In 2015 they were hailed as heroes by US President Barack Obama and given France's highest honors.

This week, the three American childhood friends who overpowered a man wielding an assault rifle and a box cutter on a passenger train to Paris are starring in a Clint Eastwood movie about the attack, and it's feeling a little surreal.

Spencer Stone, Anthony Sadler and Alek Skarlatos from Sacramento, California, play themselves in the movie "The 15:17 to Paris," opening in US movie theaters on Friday.

After meeting the three men in their 20s at an awards show, Eastwood decided to make a film, but rather than casting actors, the Oscar-winning director called on the friends themselves.

"Three weeks before shooting, he's like 'Do you guys want to do it yourselves?' and we were like 'What? The movie starts in three weeks and we never took acting classes,'" Sadler said.

"(Eastwood) was like 'Don't



Director Clint Eastwood (2nd R) poses with cast members (L-R) Jenna Fischer, Alek Skarlatos, Spencer Stone and Anthony Sadler at a premiere for "The 15:17 to Paris" in Burbank, California, US on 5 February 2018. PHOTO: REUTERS

worry about it. We're just going to go and do it.' So he just kept it simple and said 'Be yourself and we're just going to capture it,' he added.

The trio were on a train from Amsterdam to Paris on a European vacation on 21 August, 2015 when a suspected Islamist militant opened fire on passengers.

They helped overpower the man, and Stone plugged the wounds of another passenger with his fingers after being struck himself by the attacker.

Two other passengers were wounded and the attacker was arrested when the train stopped.

Stone is glad the film also honors the other people who sprang into action. In the film, many of the passengers are the same people who were on the train in 2015.

A lot of the times the story is depicted that we were the only ones who did anything," he said. "For them to be honored for what they did in such a big way is awesome because it's something we've always wanted but we just didn't know how we could do that.

"We just wanted to get it right and I think we did," Stone added. Skarlatos said shooting the movie "helped us close a chapter in our lives and move on." But the trio is also hoping it opens other doors. "Hopefully this launches movie careers for all three of us," said Sadler. "We're all trying to pursue acting. We've kind of caught the acting bug and he (Eastwood) gave us the confidence to do it." — Reuters ■

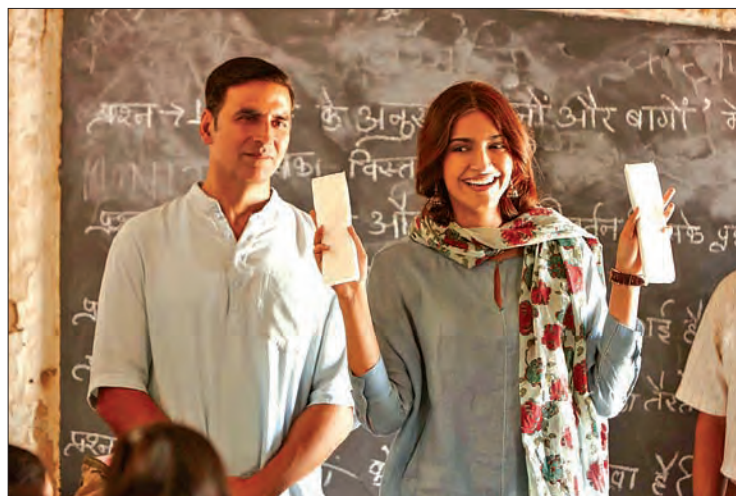
Movie Review: Padman

The best thing about "Padman" is the person the film is based on.

Arunachalam Muruganantham, a school drop-out from a small village in Tamil Nadu, invented a machine to manufacture sanitary pads at a fraction of the cost of branded ones. This allowed thousands of women in rural India, where menstrual hygiene is abysmally low, access to a safe and healthy option.

Which also means it was only a matter of time before Bollywood, recently acquainted to the power of real-life stories, decided to turn Muruganantham's tale into another weekend blockbuster. Director R. Balki sets his film in Madhya Pradesh to appeal to a Hindi-speaking audience, sprinkles a few songs and inserts a love triangle of sorts to give it a Bollywood make-over. Akshay Kumar plays 'Padman' aka Lakshmikanth Chauhan, who lives with his wife, widowed mother and two sisters in a small village.

Appalled to see his new bride using grimy rags during



Handout photo of Padman Movie. PHOTO: REUTERS

her menstrual cycle, Chauhan decides he must find a way to make life easier for her. Sanitary napkins are expensive so he starts making his own by using cotton, plastic sheets and soft cloth.

But his experiments don't go down too well with his wife and family, for whom talking about menstruation is taboo. In a society where women prioritise their family over themselves, hygiene and safety are subjects that are never spoken about by women,

let alone by men. But Chauhan is dogged in his pursuit and blind to the horror that the women of the family feel about his endeavour.

It is to Kumar's credit that he makes Chauhan seem docile and mild, yet strong-willed enough to go where no Indian man has dared to venture. He is in every scene, and the honesty and sincerity with which he plays this character shines through, thus rubbing out some of the contrivances that are inherent in the script.—Reuters ■

I don't go searching for a film: Shah Rukh Khan

NEW DELHI — Supertar Shah Rukh Khan says taking up a project is an organic process for him and he does not go looking for a film.

The 52-year-old actor said every artiste has their own method of selecting a film but believes it is the movies that choose him, not the other way around. When asked whether he would also like to work in a film promoting campaigns like Akshay Kumar in the case of "Toilet: Ek Prem Katha", Shah Rukh said, "Everybody has their own system of doing a film, why they do, how they do. I feel a film.

"I don't go searching for a film. I have been a producer for 15 years, I have never produced a film that I think I should do. I think films choose me."

The actor was speaking at a select media roundtable at the ongoing Auto Expo 2018 here yesterday.

Shah Rukh believes even if

the content was message driven, the film has to be entertaining to strike a chord with the audience.

"Sometimes they (films) go wonderfully right, sometimes they go fantastically bad and I am ok with it. If I don't keep that part of my life fluid, whatever level of artistic, I can't wake up every morning and keep on acting. "I can't do it (acting) as a job, I am not saying others are doing it. Different strokes for different folks," he added.

The actor recalled the time when people were apprehensive about "Chak De! India".

Shah Rukh said he trusted his gut and the rest, as they say, is history. "My father used to play hockey. No one knew I played hockey. Someone offered me a film on hockey, everyone said it was the worst film being made. There is no heroine, the girls are unknown, the songs are bad and I look awful with a beard.—PTI ■

Indian cyclist spreads Gandhi's message of peace on world tour

TOKYO — When Dnyaneshwar Yeotkar was meandering down the streets of a village in Hakone, south of Tokyo, he was simply hoping to find somewhere to escape the cold and lay his head down for the night.

The 27-year-old Indian man, who is on a solo journey to cycle the world spreading Mahatma Gandhi's message of peace and friendship, depends on the good graces of locals for shelter — hence his relief when an elderly Japanese man made him welcome.

"All the doors were closed. I was thinking where to stay because it was so cold that my tent would not be enough. I knocked on the door of the only house that had its lights on. A grandfatherly figure opened it. Using Google Translate, I told him that I want to stay for a night. 'Come, come,' he said in Japanese."

Not only did the older man assist Yeotkar with unloading his luggage but made food for him as well. When Yeotkar departed the next day, the older man was in tears, he said as he recalled his stay in the mountain resort in early January. "I was so moved."

Japan is one of 75 countries he plans to cycle through by Oct. 2, 2019, the 150th birth anniversary of Gandhi.

Yeotkar, who started the "Vishwa Maitra Yatra" ("World Peace and Friendship Tour") in November 2016, has been met with acts of kindness such as he encountered in Hakone, but has also faced trouble along the way.

He will often go hungry or be without shelter for two to three days. In Thailand, Yeotkar was bitten by dogs. He had a bag stolen in Indonesia and experienced his first typhoon in Taiwan, where he tied himself and his bike to a

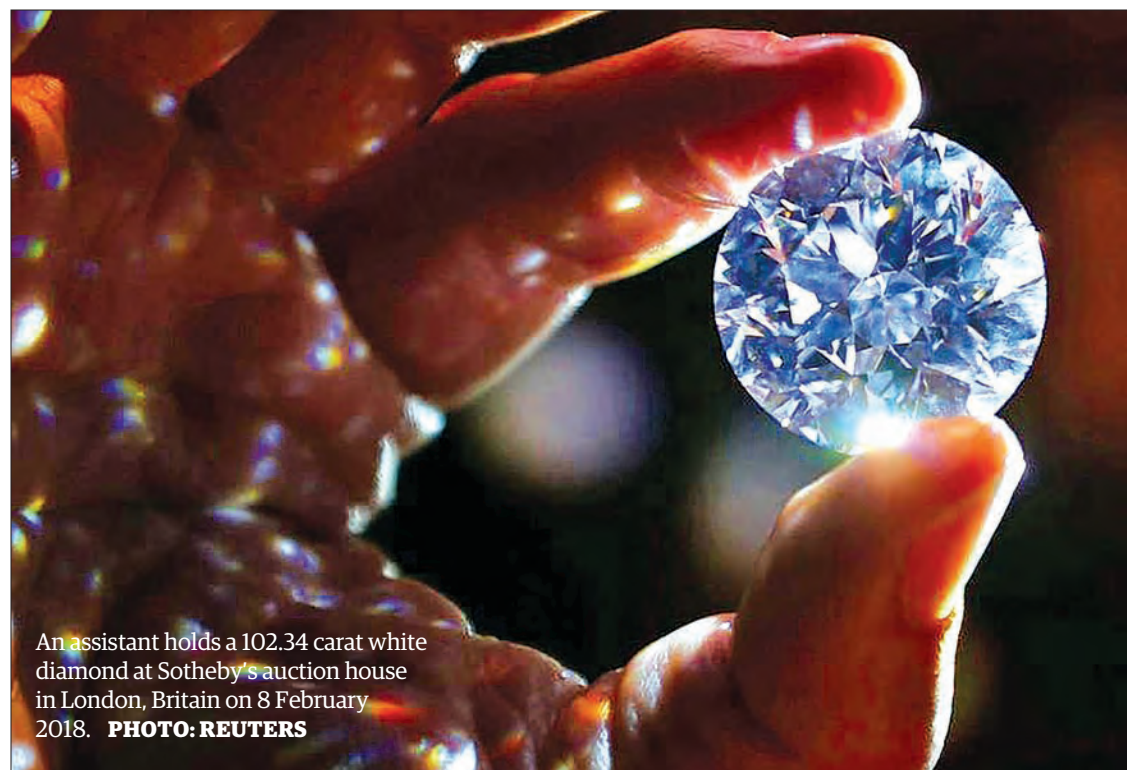
tree and spent two full days being buffeted by strong winds. In Laos, he awoke to snakes wrapping themselves around his feet.

Yeotkar started his journey from India, traveling to Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Taiwan, China, and Japan. He departed for Mexico, his next destination, in early February.

"I am enjoying it. The biggest thing is that these are experiences and I believe that experiences are not bad or wrong, they are teachings to nurture one's life," he said. Yeotkar cycles around 70 kilometers a day and carries 75 kilograms of luggage, including a camping gas burner, cooking pots and spices. Since he is a vegetarian, he is happy to survive on white rice when no other supplies are available, while getting his hands on lentils is a treat. —Kyodo News ■



Indian cyclist Dnyaneshwar Yeotkar stands in front of the Atomic Bomb Dome in Hiroshima on 4 February 2018. Yeotkar plans to cycle through 75 countries to spread Mahatma Gandhi's message of peace and friendship by 2 October 2019, the 150th anniversary of Gandhi's birth. **PHOTO: KYODO**



An assistant holds a 102.34 carat white diamond at Sotheby's auction house in London, Britain on 8 February 2018. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

'Rarest white diamond ever' to be sold in London

LONDON — A flawless diamond, the size of a large strawberry, is expected to fetch a world record price when it comes to market at Sotheby's in London this month.

Weighing just over 102 carats, the round, brilliant white stone is smaller than a 118-carat oval diamond sold in Hong Kong in 2013, which currently holds the record price per carat.

But Sotheby's, which also handled that Hong Kong sale, expects the smaller stone's rarity and high quality will see it attract an even higher price. "That (stone sold in Hong Kong) fetched \$260,000 a carat, currently the world record for any colorless diamond. This one being a round brilliant cut - the asking price will be north of that," Pat-

ti Wong, chairman of Sotheby's Diamonds told Reuters. The diamond is the only stone over 100 carats to have been given the highest grades in every criteria by the Gemological Institute of America, which judges a precious stone's quality, Sotheby's said. It has not disclosed the asking price for the stone, which will be sold in a private sale. —Reuters ■

New York's Met can keep Picasso sold during Nazi flight: judge

NEW YORK — A US judge on Wednesday dismissed a lawsuit seeking the return by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Manhattan of a Pablo Picasso masterpiece that a German Jewish businessman was allegedly forced to sell at a low price, to fund an escape from the Nazis and fascism.

US District Judge Loretta Preska in Manhattan said the great-grandniece of Paul Leffmann, who once owned Picasso's "The Actor," could not show under New York law that he sold the painting under "duress," justifying its return to her family.

The great-grandniece, Laurel Zuckerman, who oversees the estate of Leffmann's wife Alice, had alternatively sought more than \$100 million of damages over "The Actor," from Picasso's Rose Period in 1904 and 1905.

"Our client is very disappointed with the decision and intends to appeal," Zuckerman's lawyer, Lawrence Kaye, said in an email.

In a statement, the museum said the decision confirmed it is the Picasso's "rightful owner." It also said it "considers all Nazi-era claims thoroughly and responsibly," and has returned objects that appeared to have been misappropriated.

Many lawsuits seek to reclaim art taken or sold after Adolf Hitler took power in Germany in 1933.

Zuckerman said the Leffmanns fled Germany for Italy in 1937, and Paul Leffmann sold "The Actor" the next year to two art dealers for \$12,000 to fund an escape to Switzerland from the Fascist regime of Benito Mussolini, a Hitler ally.

The Met acquired "The Actor" in a 1952 donation, but did not acknowledge Leffmann's ownership until 2011, after decades of incorrect cataloguing, the lawsuit said.

Zuckerman said the circumstances of the 1938 sale meant her family never lost title. The Met disagreed, while expressing sympathy for the Leffmanns' plight. —Reuters ■

Yangon stay perfect in MPT MNL 2018 match

YANGON United defeated Rakhine United by a score of 3-1 yesterday on Yangon's home field.

Yangon United dominated the match, with the opening goal was scored by Sekou Sylla at 9 minutes. Yangon gained their second goal just before the end of the first half when Sylla touched the ball into the net after Min Kyaw Khant made a crossing pass in from of the goal.

Both teams changed game tactics in the second half.

Exploiting some mistakes

by Rakhine United's defence line, Maung Maung Lwin scored Yangon's third goal with an assist by Yamazaki Kosuke at the 64-minute mark. Rakhine averted a shutout when they were awarded a foul ball and Matthew Sunday Idoko made a goal for Rakhine.

Yangon United has garnered 13 points in 5 games so far this season. With four wins and one draw, they stand in second place, with Yadanabon in first place.—KyawZin Lin ■



Yangon's star player Maung Maung Lwin carries the ball at yesterday's MNL match. **PHOTO:MNL**

Ks5 million to winner of MFF Futsal Open Cup 2018

THE winner of the MFF Futsal Open Cup 2018, which will be hosted on 1 March in Yangon, will receive Ks5 million, it was announced yesterday.

The second runner up will get Ks3 million, while the bronze medalist will be awarded Ks 2 million.

The fourth-place futsal team will get Ks1 million, according to an official from the Myanmar Football Federation.

In an effort to promote honest play, the cleanest-playing futsal player award will be Ks300,000 and Ks500,000 will go to the cleanest-playing team.

Additionally, Ks300,000 will go to the best goalkeeper.

The MFF is currently receiving tournament applications from futsal teams, and all submissions should be received no later than 15 February.

For further information, call MFF officials U Kyi Min Thein at 09-250650952 and U Aung Maw Thein at 09-5019347.—KyawZin Lin ■

Olympics: Bitter cold greets athletes as Pyeongchang Games open

PYEONGCHANG, (South Korea) — A ray of light shone and a bell rang out to pronounce the start of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics opening ceremony on Friday.

All eyes settled on the rival Koreas, who marched together under a "Korean Unification" flag a day after the North staged a military parade to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the founding of the Korean People's Army.

It was the first time the Koreas marched together at an Olympic opening ceremony since the 2006 Turin Games. North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un's younger sister, Kim Yo Jong, was among the high-level delegation attending the opening ceremony, along with the North's ceremonial leader Kim Yong Nam, both putting a face to the heavy political tensions looming over the winter sports festival. Others dignitaries in attendance included Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and US Vice President Mike Pence. The march under the unified Korean flag was the outcome of a landmark deal between the two rivals following a year of growing concerns over the North's nuclear weapons ambitions. The North has sent 22 athletes, more than half of whom are playing for the unified Korean women's ice hockey team. Those in attendance at



Netherlands-based sports statistics firm Gracenote projects a record 15 medals for Japan, nearly double the outcome from Sochi, where the athletes brought ... A strong showing by Japanese athletes in Pyeongchang could also go a long way to making a reality Sapporo's bid to host the 2026 Winter Games. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

the open-air Pyeongchang Olympic Stadium had to brace for the elements and were provided with windbreakers, lap blankets and even heated seat cushions for the sub-zero temperatures in the mountain town of Hoenggye.

The protagonists for the opening extravaganza were five child actors from Gangwon Province, representing the five Olympic rings and the five elements

— fire, water, wood, metal and earth — on a journey that connects past, present and future.

Approximately 2,500 athletes from over 90 countries and territories are taking part in the February 9-25 Games, competing in 102 medal events across seven sports and 15 disciplines. Four new events — big air snowboarding, mass-start speed skating, team Alpine skiing, and mixed

doubles curling — are on the 2018 Winter Olympic program. Team Japan has been tipped to have its largest medal haul ever at a Winter Olympics. Netherlands-based sports statistics firm Gracenote projects a record 15 medals for Japan, nearly double the outcome from Sochi, where the athletes brought home one gold, four silver and three bronze medals.—Kyodo News ■