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Republic of the Union of Myanmar National Reconciliation and Peace Centre

Press Release

14th Waxing of Nattaw 1380 ME
(21 December 2018)

1. The Union Government has been working with deep regard towards not only obtaining a ceasefire but to resolve political problems through discussions using political means and to end the internal armed conflict that had remained rooted for many years.
2. It is also strengthening the ceasefire with 10 Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) that had signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) and was conducting political discussions in stages towards achieving basic principles that are the basic foundation of establishing a Federal Democratic Union. At the same time, it is striving for the participation of eight EAOs that had not signed the NCA in the political discussions.

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President, First Lady, and State Counsellor attend Christmas celebrations in Nay Pyi Taw

PRESIDENT U Win Myint, First Lady Daw Cho Cho, and State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi attended the Christmas Ceremony and thanksgiving at the residence of Vice President U Henry Van Thio in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

Vice President U Henry Van Thio and wife Dr. Shwe Hlwan welcomed President U Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho, and State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Former President U Htin Kyaw and wife Daw Su Su Lwin, Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw U T Khun Myat and wife Daw Yin May, Speaker of Amyotha Hluttaw Mahn Win Khaing Than and wife Daw Nant Kyin Kyi, Chairman of the Constitutional Tribunal of the Union U Myo Nyunt, Chairman of the Union Election Commission U Hla Thein and wife, wife of Deputy Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw,



President U Win Myint, First Lady Daw Cho Cho, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, former President U Htin Kyaw and wife, Vice President U Henry Van Thio and wife, light candles at the pre-Christmas celebration at the residence of Vice President U Henry Van Thio. **PHOTO: MNA**

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Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw concludes its 10th session

By Aung Maw, Aye Aye Thant (MNA)

THE Second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw tenth regular session held its 11th day meeting in the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw meeting hall in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

During the session, Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker U T Khun Myat announced that the Hluttaw had put on record the Bill Amending the Myanmar Accountancy Council Law as it was considered approved by the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. Next Speaker U T Khun Myat announced that the Hluttaw had put on record the appointment of U Sai Pan Saing alias U Sai Tun Sein alias U Kyaw Sein as Mandalay Region government minister for Shan Ethnic Affairs. Next Speaker U T Khun Myat announced that the Hluttaw had put on record the reforming of towns and village tracts in Chin State sent by the Office of the Union Government. **Clarification on 30-month-performance reports**

Vice Chairman of Py-



Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Mahn Win Khaing Than. PHOTO: MNA

idaungsu Hluttaw's Legal Affairs and Special Cases Assessment Commission Dr. Than Win read and clarified a 30-month performance report. Followed this, Speaker U T Khun Myat announced that the Hluttaw had put on record the report. Union Legal Supporting Group Secretary U Khin Zaw made a clarification of the 6-month-work

report and Supreme Court Judge U Thar Htay continued the discussion. Speaker U T Khun Myat announced that the Hluttaw had put on record the report.

Approval of Myanmar Mine Rules

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Joint Bill Committee member U Zaw Win tabled a motion on Myanmar Mine Rules and approved the

rules paragraph-by-paragraph.

Next, Hluttaw representatives discussed Vienna Convention on Road Traffic 1968 and Vienna Convention on Road Signs and Signals 1968, and then U Tin Tun Naing of Seikkyi-Khanaung-to constituency, Dr. Tin Tin Win of Bago Region constituency 5 and U Ye Lwin of Ahlon constituency took part in the discussion.

Then Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw announced that the Hluttaw would obtain the approvals of these motions at 11th regular session of Hluttaw's meeting.

Memorandum of Association (MoA) on the Establishment of BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility

Regarding the Memorandum of Association (MoA) on the Establishment of BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility, Dr. Than Win of Mandalay Region constituency 1, U Bo Bo Oo of Sangyaung constituency and U Saw Tun Mya Aung of Papun constituency took part in the discussion and Deputy Minister

for Education U Win Maw Tun at the Hluttaw explained about it. Then Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw announced the Hluttaw's approval of the motion after obtaining the decision from the Hluttaw.

Union Government's annual debt report for fiscal years 2017-2018 and findings of the Joint Public Accounts Committee Report

The members of Union level organizations discussed the Government's annual debt report for fiscal year 2017-2018 and findings of the Joint Public Accounts Committee Report. Deputy Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation U Hla Kyaw, and officials –concerned from the Ministry of Transport and Communications, Ministry of Electricity and Energy and Ministry of Planning and Finance clarified the reports. The Secretary of the Joint Public Accounts Committee U Khin Maung Than submitted the report and which was approved by the Hluttaw.

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Amyotha Hluttaw

Record of 17th-day of 10th regular session of Second Amyotha Hluttaw

DURING the question and answer session of the 17th-day meeting of the 10th regular session of the Second Amyotha Hluttaw, U Pe Tin of Mon State constituency 6 raised a question asking whether there were plans to overcome the current losses and revitalize Myanmar Railways to bring about public favor, to which Union Minister for Transport and Communications U Thant Sin Maung replied.

The Speaker first called on the Mon State MP to put forward his question.

Restoring Myanmar Railways from verge of collapse

MP U Pe Tin explained that his question intends to salvage the once successful Myanmar Railways (MR) from its current failing standards. He said people used to heavily rely on MR for their day-to-day travels and the railways were outfitted with the most modern locomotives and high-quality tracks. He said as other means of transportation developed over the years, the railway sector fell out of favor. Locomotives regularly break down, railways abound with depressions, carriages leak rainwa-



Union Minister for Transport and Communications U Thant Sin Maung. PHOTO: MNA

ter; lights inside the train cut off, and many other inconveniences have led people to shun the railways, said the MP.

MP U Pe Tin said other facts that have contributed to the desolation of Myanmar Railways include MR staff selling train tickets via illegal methods, improper repairs and maintenance of train carriages, and loading ordinary class passengers onto upper class coaches. He said the Ministry of Transport and Communications is a prominent department of the nation and asked whether officials have any plans to prevent the wobbling pillar of MR from falling, and to restore



U Pe Tin, Mon State constituency 6. PHOTO: MNA

it to its former glory so that it may attract significant revenue and provide people with reliable transportation.

Weakness, threats and opportunities for MR

Union Minister U Thant Sin Maung replied that professionals from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) reconnected with Myanmar in 2012 and reported in their 2014-2015 Rail Sector Assessment Report that all of the railways in the country 'urgently needed for rehabilitation'. He said ADB professionals suggested emphasizing 5 main sectors to tackle. These include rationalizing

tertiary railways, assessing the train schedule, ensure responsible investments for rail tracks, locomotives, carriages and signal lights, utilizing IT technology in administration, reorganizing the chain of command, and amending the financial management.

The Union Minister said he has asked ADB Australia Consultant Dickbullock what steps to take to transform Myanmar Railways into a self-sufficient economic entity, to which the consultant assessed it might take Myanmar more than 20 years to achieve that status. The Union Minister highlighted that MR has lost its market share in the transportation sector as it commanded 44 per cent of the market in 1990 but has fallen to 10 per cent in 2013. He said the private car sector has taken control of the transport market as it currently holds 86 per cent of the market, also resulting in the decline of water and air transportation. He said if the current trend continues uninterrupted till 2020, then MR will drop to 2 per cent in the market by 2025, water transport will be almost non-existent but air travel will pick back up. He said MR held 5 per cent of the

cargo transport market in 2013 but could fall as low as 1.5 per cent by 2030 if left unattended. He said this number can be raised to 7-15 per cent by 2030 if serious efforts are made, according to ADB's analysis.

The Union Minister said a National Transport Master Plan was drawn up with Japanese assistance during the previous administration. The master plan highlighted renovating the Yangon-Mandalay and Mandalay-Myitkyina corridor to improve the railway sector; in addition to motor highways and water routes, as it is the backbone of all the routes.

The Union Minister said they are carrying out projects along the south-north route to the west of Ayeyawady River and also along the eastern route, but ADB has stated that only focusing on railway projects will cost about US\$ 6.9 billion for the ministry. He said his ministry has signed an agreement with JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) in 2015 to upgrade the important Yangon-Mandalay route (386 miles). He said a complete journey will take 8 hours once the project is finished.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

“Myanmar is now on the path to democracy. A nascent democracy can be compared to a toddler learning to walk; we have to be careful not to falter at this stage and need to maintain a proper balance. If we wish democracy to survive, we have to respect the rule of law and existing rules and regulations.”

(Excerpt from the message extended by President U Win Myint on the occasion of the International Day of Democracy which falls on 15th September, 2018.)



Ancient Heritage Yoke Soun Kyaung and Nuns.
PHOTO: ZAW ZAW WEI (SINBYUKYUN)

President, First Lady, and State Counsellor attend Christmas...

FROM PAGE-1

Deputy Speaker of Amyotha Hluttaw U Aye Tha Aung and wife, Chairman of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw's Legal Affairs and Special Cases Assessment Commission Thura U Shwe Mann and wife, Union Ministers and wives, Chairman of the Union Civil Service Board Dr. Win Thein and wife, Chairman of Myanmar National Human Rights Commission U Win Mra and wife, Chairman of Nay Pyi Taw Council Dr. Myo Aung and wife, Kayah State Chief Minister U L Phaung Sho and wife, Deputy Ministers and wives, members of the Constitutional Tribunal of the Union, members of the Union Election Commission, members of Myanmar National Human Rights Commission, members of the Anti-corruption Commission, members of the Nay Pyi Taw Council, chairman of the Hluttaw affairs committees, representatives of the Hluttaw, departmental officials, bishops from Christian Churches and invited guests.

The ceremony was opened by Rev. M.D. Chang Hkaw with his Christmas prayers and Vice President U Henry Van Thio extended greetings.

Afterwards, President U Win Myint extended Christmas greetings, followed by a Christmas song by Jesse Van Bawi.

Next, State Counsellor Daw



President U Win Myint, First Lady Daw Cho Cho, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the attendees enjoy the Christmas dinner at the residence of Vice-President U Henry Van Thio in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. PHOTO: MNA

Aung San Suu Kyi extended Christmas greetings.

Afterwards, Rev. Dr. Toe Toe prayed for the people and the leaders of Myanmar.

On behalf of the churches in Myanmar, Monsignor Basilio Soe Lin Aung extended greetings, which was followed by Christmas songs.

Afterwards, Rev. Dr. Aye Min delivered a Christmas sermon and extended greetings.

President U Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the attendees enjoyed the Christmas dinner together.

During the dinner, vocalists entertained the guests with

Christmas songs.

After the dinner, President U Win Myint, First Lady and State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi sliced the Christmas Cake together.

Afterwards, President U Win Myint, First Lady, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, former President U Htin

Kyaw and wife Daw Su Su Lwin, Vice President U Henry Van Thio and wife Dr. Shwe Hlwan lit the Christmas candles.

Afterwards, The Most Revd. Stephen Than Myint Oo said Christmas prayers.

The ceremony came to an end with Christmas songs.— MNA ■

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3. As it is important to hold discussions when conducting the peace process to reduce the mutual concerns that exists between the Tatmadaw and EAOs on military matters, the announcement made by Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Office on 21 December 2018 is welcomed.
4. The National Reconciliation and Peace Centre will continue to strive towards strengthening the ceasefire with 10 EAOs that had signed the NCA and to achieve political agreements and it will also strive towards the participation of eight EAOs that have not signed the NCA in the political dialogues of the Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong.

VP U Myint Swe addresses opening ceremony of 8th MSMEs Product Exhibition & Competition

THE Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Work Committee (MSMEDWC) Chairman Vice President U Myint Swe addressed the opening ceremony of the 8th Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) Product Exhibition & Competition (Mawlamyine) at the State Hall in Mawlamyine, Mon State yesterday morning.

The event was attended by MSMEDWC Vice Chairman Union Minister for Industry U Khin Maung Cho, committee members Kayin State Chief Minister Daw Nan Khin Htwe Myint, Mon State Chief Minister Dr. Aye Zan, Taninthayi Region Chief Minister Dr. Daw Lei Lei Maw, Mon State Hluttaw Speaker Daw Tin Ei, Mon State Chief Judge U Khin Maung Gyi, South East Command commander Maj-Gen Myo Moe Aung, Deputy Minister for Commerce U Aung Htoo, Kayin State, Taninthayi Region and Mon State ministers, state/region advocates and auditors, State Hluttaw representatives, heads of departments, organizations, experts and technicians, donors, MSME business owners and officials.

In his address to the event the Vice President said under the leadership of MSMEDWC MSMEs Product Exhibitions & Competitions were conducted in states and regions starting from February 2018. They have been held in Mandalay, Magway, Patheingyi, Taunggyi, Monywa, Bago and Yangon successfully.

This was the eighth such event which was jointly conducted for Kayin and Mon State. Next it would be held in Taninthayi and finally a national level product exhibition and competition with the participation of all states and regions would be held in the Union territory Nay Pyi Taw where National Awards will be presented.

The aim of holding exhibitions and competitions of regional products was to increase import substitution products; connecting local production sector with trading sector; to transform MSMEs from traditional family business to world standard products and services providers with innovation and entrepreneurship; expand markets and participate in the Global Value Chain.



Vice President U Myint Swe and officials cut the ceremonial ribbon to open the 8th MSMEs Product Exhibition & Competition in Mawlamyine, Mon State, yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

This would be a special opportunity for local MSMEs as business persons, bankers, retailers, consumers and departmental officials come to check out the products of MSMEs in this sort of exhibition and competition.

MSMEDWC had arranged for MSMEs to meet and obtain advice and comments from market experts. As this was done in the past events, MSMEs were able to follow the advice and comments of the experts

must be made to value add these products and exporting it in addition to being used locally. Mon State is connected with a long coastline and aquatic products and cold storage works plays an important role.

The important fact that MSMEs need to look into is to use support materials, machineries and modern technologies.

Inputs required for businesses that have potentials and to implement projects are to be collected and prepared. Courses

obtaining the loan.

MSMEs were to grasp the opportunities that were within reach. MSMEs needed to have the ability to show their strengths using strategies while providing products and services that the consumer prefers and requires. They were to accept the responses, information and suggestions from the market and strive toward achieving sustainable development so that they could be in the market for long.

The numerous religious buildings and structures, natural beauty, beaches, waterfalls, traditions of ethnic nationals are the other strengths of Kayin and Mon State that attracts travel and hotel business. Together with travel and hotel business, local foodstuffs, products, services and transport sector will also develop.

When local MSMEs succeed and develop, there'll be more job opportunities for the people creating an environment where skilled labours from the region that were working abroad can return back to the region.

From the success and development of MSMEs resulting in increase in job opportunities, people's socio-economic situation and livelihood will improve. All are urged to continue striving towards the establishment of successful MSMEs that fulfill market requirement, products and services said the Vice President.

When local MSMEs succeed and develop, there'll be more job opportunities for the people creating an environment where skilled labours from the region that were working abroad can return back to the region.

to improve the production and packaging. The result of this was that a total of 93 products of MSMEs, 25 from Shan State, 22 from Sagaing Region, 16 from Bago Region, 30 from Yangon Region were now being sold in well-known departmental stores.

In Kayin and Mon State agriculture products such as rubbers and fruits like durian and coconut were produced while in the mining sector, minerals such as lead and tins as well as slates were produced. Efforts

to produce skilled workers are required. Ministry of Industry is conducting mobile basic electrical courses for four weeks to train 80 skilled workers in Hpa-An town, Kayin State.

To raise capital for MSMEs, the Government was connecting with the government of Japan to conduct JICA Two Step Loan Phase II. JICA and the Ministry of Industry will hold a seminar in Mawlamyine on 18 December to inform the MSMEs about the requirements and processes of

Next, MSMEDWC members Kayin State Chief Minister Daw Nang Khin Htwe Myint and Mon State Chief Minister Dr. Aye Zan about the status of works conducted for the development of MSMEs in the states.

Afterwards Union Minister U Khin Maung Cho, Kayin State Chief Minister Daw Nang Khin Htwe Myint, Mon State Chief Minister Dr. Aye Zan, Taninthayi Region Chief Minister Dr. Daw Lei Lei Maw and Deputy Minister U Aung Htoo accepted donations made by companies and businesses to conduct the exhibition and competition and presented certificates of honor to the donors in return.

Later, officials from CB Bank presented bank loans to MSMEs.

Following this Vice President U Myint Swe and party attended the opening ceremony of 8th MSMEs Product Exhibition & Competition held at Strand Road, Mawlamyine.

At the opening ceremony Vice President U Myint Swe, Union Minister U Khin Maung Cho, Kayin State Chief Minister Daw Nan Khin Htwe Myint, Mon State Chief Minister Dr. Aye Zan, Taninthayi Region Chief Minister Dr. Daw Lei Lei Maw, Deputy Minister U Aung Htoo and Mon State minister for planning, finance, immigration and population U Wunna Kyaw cut the ceremonial ribbon and then posed for commemorative group photo with attendees.

After cutting the ceremonial ribbon Vice President U Myint Swe and party inspected the exhibits in the 8th MSME Product Exhibition & Competition.

After this the Vice President and party attended the opening ceremony of SME Center held at Small & Medium Industrial Development Bank (SMIDB) Mawlamyine branch.

At the event Vice President U Myint Swe, Union Minister U Khin Maung Cho, Mon State Chief Minister Dr. Aye Zan, South East Command commander Maj-Gen Myo Moe Aung, Deputy Minister U Aung Htoo, SMIDB Chief Executive Officer Dr. Zeya Nyunt unveiled the SME Center signboard and posed for commemorative group photo with attendees.

Afterwards they inspected the SMIDB branch. — MNA ■

Commander-in-Chief meets Myanmar Press Council



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing meets with Myanmar Press Council members led by Chairman Hanthawaddy U Ohn Kyaing in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. **PHOTO: KYAW YE SWE**

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing received a delegation of Myanmar Press Council members led by Chairman Hanthawaddy U Ohn Kyaing in the Bayinnaung Guest Hall in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

During the meeting, the Senior General discussed promoting relations between the Tatmadaw and the Myanmar Press Council and said the Tatmadaw was always ready to be on friendly terms with the MPC and any other organization. He had always viewed the media as the fourth pillar of the nation and believed the legislative, executive, judiciary and media sectors all play an important role in strengthening national development, said the Senior General. He said peace and stability within the country was important and one of the

duties of the media was to make sure that national development trod firmly and surely along its intended trajectory. No matter what kind of pressure was exerted, it was the duty of every citizen to ensure the best interest of the country, and likewise as both the Tatmadaw and the MPC were citizens of this country, it was their duty as well, said the Senior General.

Next, an official read a statement from the Office of the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services on achieving ceasefire and lasting peace, on behalf of the Commander-in-Chief.

Afterwards, MPC Chairman Hanthawaddy U Ohn Kyaing said the meeting with the Tatmadaw produced positive agreements, adding that the Commander-in-Chief said he would arrange for private media agencies to be able to gather

news throughout the states and regions by consulting with the relevant ministry of border affairs and security to gather news from their respective state or regional minister. The Chairman said this would create new opportunities for news gathering. He said the Tatmadaw would, except for military operations, impart relevant news concerning their functions. He said the Tatmadaw would insert advertisements relating to it in private newspapers and a workshop on news publishing between the Tatmadaw and news agencies would be held in Yangon next month. The MPC Chairman said the Tatmadaw would routinely hold press conferences and added that yesterday's meeting further strengthened the existing relations between the Tatmadaw and the MPC. —Thura Zaw (Translated by Zaw Htet Oo)

Union Minister Dr. Pe Myint receives Vietnamese information Deputy Minister

UNION Minister for information, Dr. Pe Myint received a delegation led by Vietnamese

Deputy Minister of Information and Communications Mr. Phan Tam at his office in Nay Pyi Taw

yesterday afternoon.



Union Minister Dr. Pe Myint holds talks with Vietnamese Deputy Minister of Information and Communications Mr. Phan Tam.

PHOTO: MNA

During the meeting, the topics on exchanging information between the media organizations from both countries, arranging study tours, exchanging the radio and television programmes, opening Viet Nam's news bureau in Myanmar, streamlining social media and updates on the drafting the media law were cordially discussed.

Also present at the meeting were Deputy Minister for Information, U Aung Hla Tun, and officials.—MNA ■ (Translated by Kyaw Zin Lin)

Announcement on ceasefire and eternal peace

FOLLOWING is an announcement about ceasefire and eternal peace made by the Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Office on 21 December 2018.

1. With regards to Myanmar's peace process on 12 December 2018 MNTJP, PSLF and ULA announced that they'll stop all military operations and will continue to participate in national reconciliation and peace process without resorting to military means and Republic of the Union of Myanmar Peace Commission also made an announcement on the same day welcoming the announcement made by the three groups and said that it will continue to cooperate and coordinate in reaching a ceasefire agreement and to conduct political discussions
2. With regards to this matter Tatmadaw considered that discussions need to be conducted with each ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) in Northern Command region, North East Command region, Eastern Command region, Middle East Command region and Triangle Command region that had not signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA)
3. In order to conduct these discussions Tatmadaw will cease all its region wise military operations from 21 December 2018 to 30 April 2019. During this period when troops movements are suspended military operation area wise ethnic armed organisations are to coordinate and discuss about ceasefire and peace matters with National Reconciliation and Peace Centre and when required a Negotiation and Discussion Group consisting of Tatmadaw senior officers from Commander-in-Chief (Army) led by Lt-Gen Ya Pyae and Commander of the relevant Command will also hold discussions.
 - (a) Lt-Gen Yar Pyae, Chairman
 - (b) Lt-Gen Tun Tun Naung, Member
 - (c) Lt-Gen Than Tun Oo, Member
 - (d) Lt-Gen Aye Win, Member
 - (e) Lt-Gen Aung Soe, Member
 - (f) Lt-Gen Aung Lin Dwe, Member
 - (g) Relevant Command commander, Member
 - (h) Lt-Gen Tin Maung Win, Secretary
4. At the same time, ten EAOs that had signed NCA are to continue the discussion according to NCA and if required the Negotiation and Discussion Group will hold discussion with each group.
5. While conducting discussions for ceasefire and eternal peace, EAOs are required to follow the four of the six peace policies of Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief.
 - (a) To abide by the agreements
 - (b) Not to take advantage of peace agreements
 - (c) Must not be a burden on the local populace
 - (d) To abide by the laws enacted by the Union
6. In addition to this EAOs must control and take responsibility not to use force to attack one another or intimidate local ethnic nationals.
7. They are also responsibility for the smooth and safe transportation and the lives and properties of the people.
8. If there is any occurrence of matters mentioned in 5, 6 and 7, Tatmadaw will prevent and respond as necessary.
9. At the same time, persons displaced by armed conflicts will be resettled back to their places of origin and Tatmadaw will provide necessary assistance and cooperation.
10. Tatmadaw will do the best it can toward the progress of ceasefire and peace discussions as well as implementing socio-economic development of ethnic national regions.
11. On the third anniversary of signing the NCA, Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief had told both signatories to the NCA and the EAOs that have not yet signed the NCA that **the Tatmadaw is committed to finishing the peace process in 2020 and to achieving eternal peace desired by the people.** This announcement is made to urge all EAOs to make the same commitment and to continue the implementation of the work towards signing the reintegration for security and the Union Accord.

(Unofficially Translation)

'All Who Can Read Should Read' campaign continues its second day in Nay Pyi Taw

UNION Minister for Information Dr. Pe Myint attended the 'All Who Can Read Should Read' campaign on its second day at the Myanmar International Convention Centre-II, Nay Pyi Taw yesterday morning. The aims of the ongoing event were to develop a reading habit to those who can read across the country and to hold the 'All Who Can Read Should Read' campaigns across the country.

The Union Minister for Information Dr. Pe Myint, along with Deputy Minister for Information U Aung Hla Tun and Departmental heads of Ministry of Information, toured through and observed booths of the campaign at 9.15 am.

Afterward, the Union Minister posed for documentary photos with government officials, employees and event officials.

The booths of 'All Who Can Read Should Read' campaigns were teeming with government employees, students and people who love books.

Second day of 'All Who Can Read Should Read' campaign was started in the morning and Deputy Minister for Information



Union Minister Dr. Pe Myint and Deputy Minister U Aung Hla Tun visit a booth on the second day of 'All Who Can Read Should Read' campaign in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. PHOTO: MNA

U Aung Hla Tun, Ministers of the Region and State, parliamentary members, literati, writers, paper readers, librarians, library foundations, stakeholders, book lovers and invited guests were present.

In the paper reading session, Myanmar Library Association

Vice-Chairperson Dr. Sandar Oo chaired and U Ko Lay Win, Director-General of the Basic Education Department presented his paper on the topic "Development of school libraries in the basic education sector and activities to promote reading". Later, Dr.

Hlaing Hlaing Gyi, University of Yangon Library, presented her paper on the topic "Youth and Culture of Library".

Next, a roundtable discussion followed. U Ye Myint Kyaw led the discussion and U Tin Nyunt, Dr. Sandar Oo, Daw Aye

Lae Tun, and U Myo Aung participated in the talk under the title "Development and cultivation of reading habits".

Associate Professor of Department of Libraries and Information Studies Dr. Tun Aung Kyaw chaired the paper reading session in the afternoon and Department of Information and Public Relations Deputy Director U San Win read his paper on the topic "Tasks should be worked for the promotion of reading habit". Discussion led by U Kyi Win (Lawkamon) and followed by U Ohn Myint-Maung Yint Mar (Kyauk Kone), U Win Cho, Dr. Khin Lay Soe, U Aung Than Htut and Ma Thel Nu San was held under the title "Current issues for all who can read to read and ways to overcome".

'All Who Can Read Should Read' campaign has been held from 20 to 21 December and it will be expanded on 22 December from 9 am to 4 pm on the request of public service employees and students who want to visit after their exams. The booths will display on an extra day from 9 am to 4 pm.—MNA (Translated by Myat Thandar Aung)

Presidential spokesperson explains pensions increase and GAD move

A FORTNIGHTLY press conference was held at Presidential Palace press hall yesterday afternoon.

At the press conference, spokesperson from the Office of the President Director General U Zaw Htay first read the news announcement of the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre (NRPC) dated 21 December.

Next, Director General U Zaw Htay responded to questions raised by the media.

Responding first to a question on the reason why pensions have been increased by 10 to 20 percent Director General U Zaw Htay explained that the matter was approved at a Union Government meeting (cabinet) held on 12 December. After the approval of the cabinet a notification was issued by the Ministry of Planning and Finance on 19 December.

In his Myanmar New Year greetings message delivered on 18 April 2018 President U Win Myint said the Government had calculated and arranged to increase the salaries and wages of public servants by 10 to 20 percent to make it in line with the raising of daily minimum wages to Ks 4,800.

As per that speech the sala-

ries and wages of public servants were raised 10 to 20 percent on 1 April 2018 and at the same time, pensions of public servants who became pensioners after 18 April 2018 were also increased 10 to 20 percent.

However, there were more than 810,000 pensioners before 18 April 2018 and the pension rates for them had not yet been increased. That was why an announcement was made on 19 December 2018 to increase the pensions of these pensioners by 10 to 20 percent said the Director General. This was to fulfill a pledge made by the President and there was no other reason beyond this, added the Director General.

On the question of whether the General Administration Department (GAD) has been transferred and if so whether it was conducted due to someone's advice, Director General U Zaw Htay explained that last week when Ko Aung Thuya from BBC raised a similar question asking whether GAD was being transferred to the Office of the President, it was denied because it was not being transferred to that office. GAD was being transferred

from the Ministry of Home Affairs to the Ministry of the Office of the Union Government. Instructions and guidelines have already been made and the transfer was being done according to procedure.

This transfer was due to the appointment of Union Minister U Min Thu to the Ministry of the Office of the Union Government. In his Myanmar New Year speech in 2018, the President had said that arrangements were being made to reduce central control in preparation for a federal union administrative system that would be established in the future.

According to the Constitution the President leads the cabinet in the Union Government. At the Union level, there is a Union Government led by the President. Looking down vertically, there'll be State/Region Chief Ministers and State/Region ministers. According to the Constitution the State/Region Chief Ministers are accountable to the President. State/Region ministers in State/Region Governments are accountable to the President through the Chief Ministers.

In the administrative pillar there was the President and the cabinet. Vertically below were



Director-General U Zaw Htay speaks to journalists in the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. PHOTO: MNA

State/Region/Nay Pyi Taw Council, Chief Ministers. And then the Chief Ministers and the state/region cabinet followed by district and township level administration.

As per the Constitution it would be the President, Chief Minister and administrators. According to this GAD was being transferred to Ministry of the Office of the Union Government.

This was to be in line with the Constitution as well as to be in line structurally as well. This was mentioned in the President's speech as well. So this was being

done to be in accordance with the Constitution and as per the strategic vision of the President's speech. It was not because someone suggested or insisted.

Some were saying that this was done because someone had suggested and we also heard that. So we want to say clearly that this was not the case. This was done according to the basic principle and reform strategy, to strengthen and make the administrative machinery more effective, said the Director General.—Thuya Zaw

(Translated by Zaw Min)

China, Myanmar businesses sign contract for rice, corn trading

IN a bid to legitimize the trade of rice and corn, businesses from Myanmar and China have recently signed a business-to-business contract, according to the Muse depot. Traders from the two countries have signed an agreement for the purchase of 15,000 tons of rice and 10,000 tons of corn produced in Myanmar through the legal trade channel in the border areas, according to the Myanmar Trade Promotion Organization.

In November, the Ministry of Commerce and the Yunnan government signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the purchase of 55,000 tons of Myanmar rice. However, the rice can be exported only after approval from China's food safety inspection mechanism,

the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection, and Quarantine (AQSIQ).

Since the second week of October, trade has been halted at Muse gate on account of China's confiscation of some agro products, including rice and corn.

China has set import quotas on some agro products, including rice. Tax is exorbitantly high for merchants when the import volume exceeds the quota limit, resulting in illegal flow of rice to China. Therefore, China has been confiscating rice in the border areas frequently. Local merchants want the governments of the two countries to mull a legal preferential trade at a cheap tax rate. — Ko Khant ■ *(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)*



The ship carrying containers docks at the port in Yangon. PHOTO: MNA

Price of Myanmar honey spikes as demand from Japan rises

WITH demand from Japan on the rise, the price of Myanmar honey has shot up to US\$1,700 per ton, said beekeepers from Mandalay.

Last year, honey fetched \$1,300-1,500 per ton, while prices have touched \$1,500-1,700 this year.

“Demand for Myanmar honey is high in Japan and Thailand this year, with buyers offering high prices. However, demand from Canada has slowed,” according to the Trade Information and Research division of the Myanmar Trade Promotion Organization.

With Japan offering a good price, other countries have also scaled up their purchase price. If demand from Canada rises, a ton of honey may fetch up to over \$3,000. High demand from

Japan and Thailand has pushed up honey prices in the domestic market, too.

There are around 900 registered beekeepers in Myanmar. The country produces 7,000 tons of honey and exports 2,400 tons every year.

Every year, Myanmar exports honey to the United States, Canada, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, China, and Japan. Beekeeping can help reduce the rate of poverty in rural areas by creating more job opportunities, said officials.

Myanmar produced 10,875.81 metric tons of honey between the 2013-2014 and 2015-2016 financial years, of which 8,471.24 metric tons were shipped to other countries. — Htet Myat ■ *(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)*

Singapore largest investor in the current FY

WITH five Singapore-listed enterprises bringing in a capital of US\$357.8 million over the last two months of the current fiscal year, Singapore has topped the list of countries with the highest foreign direct investment in Myanmar, according to data released by the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration.

Singapore is followed by Chi-

na, with an estimated investment of \$54 million in 16 projects.

During the last mini-budget period from April to September, Singapore made the largest FDI of \$724.4 million in Myanmar.

In the last two months, a total of \$465.9 million in foreign funds, including expansion of capital, flowed into the country and 34 businesses from China,

Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Thailand, Singapore, the Netherlands, Viet Nam, and China (Taipei) entered Myanmar.

Additionally, Singapore has topped the list of countries with largest FDI inflows in the Thilawa Special Economic Zone, followed by Japan and Thailand. —GNLM ■

Border trade through ITCs exceeds K12 bln

THE value of border trade with the use of Individual Trading Cards (ITCs) totalled over K12 billion between 1 October and 7 December, with exports valued at K2.2 billion and imports valued at K9.9 billion, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

The Myawady border trade camp handled the largest volume of trade, totalling over

K5.81 billion in value.

The trade value via ITCs at border points stood at K1.3 billion at Tamu, K16.9 million at Muse, K24 million at Tachilek, K3,862.2 million at Lwejel, K435 million Kanpikete, K620 million at Kawthoung, K34 million at Reed, K3.8 billion at Mawtaung, and K95 million at Kengtung.

The Trade Department

has issued 1,366 ITCs so far, with 292 cards issued between 21 Nov 2012 and 31 March 2013, 261 cards issued in the 2013-2014 FY, 317 cards in the 2014-2015 FY, 146 cards in the 2015-2016 FY, 248 cards in the 2016-2017 FY, 168 cards in the 2017-2018 FY, 92 cards between 1 April and 30 Sep, and 20 cards between 1 Oct and 7 Dec. — Zwe ■

Myanmar-Bangladesh trade declines by over \$11 mln in Oct

BILATERAL trade between Myanmar and Bangladesh in October fell sharply to over US\$9 million from \$20.3 million during the same month last year, registering a decline of \$11.2 million, according to data released by the Ministry of Commerce.

The trade figure for October, the first month of the cur-

rent fiscal year, includes exports of \$7 million and imports of \$2 million. Last October, exports were valued at \$18.8 million and imports were valued at \$1.5 million.

Myanmar's exports exceed imports in bilateral trade conducted by sea or land. In bilateral border trade, goods move

mainly through the Sittway and Maungtaung trade stations.

The products traded by the two countries include bamboos, ginger, peanuts, saltwater prawns and fish, dried plums, garlic, rice, mung beans, blankets, candy, plum jams, footwear, frozen foods, chemicals, leather, jute products, tobacco,

plastics, wood, knitwear, and beverages.

During the six-month mini-budget period, the country's total trade with Bangladesh reached nearly \$243 million, an increase of more than \$50 million compared with the total value of \$192.3 million in FY2017-2018.

According to the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration, this year saw no new investments from Bangladesh. Last year, Myanmar received \$1.5 million in investments from its neighbour.— Swe Nyein ■

(Translated by Khaing Thanda Lwin)

Sharing the treasures of independence

MYANMAR will celebrate the 71st anniversary of its Independence Day in 2019. The citizens of the country have been living as a free people since 4 January, 1948. As we enter the 71st year of independence, we need to take a step back and assess how freely we have worked and lived over the years.

One way is to take a long, hard look at how the people have enjoyed the fruits of independence, which include people-centered democratic rights. Democracy encompasses freedom of speech, expression, creativity, thought, and the right to work, among other things.

We are trying to achieve the full value of democracy and all of its virtues, including freedom, equality, peace, stability, and development.

Myanmar's journey to democracy can be divided into three parts. In the pre-democracy era, our forefathers sought the wellbeing of the ordinary people while struggling for independence. They wanted a democratic system to be implemented once the country attained independence. However, this was not to be. The parliamentary democracy established in 1948 post independence came to an end more than a decade later in 1962.

Although it was short-lived, people did see some positive effects of the parliamentary system. But, with some regions facing insecurity and distress within their borders, including internal armed conflicts, a divide appeared between political factions, parties, and ethnic organizations, and the people were unable to fully experience the fruits of independence.

After the parliamentary democracy ended in 1962 an era of dictatorship began and the fruits of democracy rotted away, one by one. The people were divided under the new rule. They had their freedom limited and their rights curtailed. The dictatorship lasted a long time and people were driven into poverty.

After a period of 50 years, democracy was once again revived in 2010. The first steps in the transition to a democracy were taken slowly, with a civilian government elected by the people. We are still in the early stages of the transition and have just begun on our path to democracy.

We are trying to achieve the full value of democracy and all of its virtues, including freedom, equality, peace, stability, and development. As we head towards our goal of a full-fledged democratic system, it is important that we adhere to the democratic principles and work to ensure unity.

Selfless sacrifice for Myanmar's Independence and Sovereignty

Hailing (71st) Anniversary of Independence Day

By Maung Maung Kyaw

MYANMAR is situated at South East of Asian region and connecting geographically Central Asia and East Asia, covering 261,228 square miles stretching (575) miles from east to west and sprawling (1300) miles from north to south.

Four mighty rivers are majestically rolling down from north to south with spectacular scenic coastal lines of (1385) miles adding natural walls of mountains demarcating the land borders.

Many nationals with ethnic diversities reside and live in the country for thousands of years in harmony and peace. In the past two to three thousand years, Myanmar evolved into urban city states with grandeur.

Prior to 1824, Myanmar had experienced for just a short while from outside aggression, and that it mostly remained an independent and sovereign nation with own country, own national races, and own Kingdoms and Lords.

When encountered with outside aggression for marginal periods, Myanmar fought back with national fervor and patriotism rooting out the enemy at all time. The chronicle of Myanmar is recorded with overwhelming unity and daring courage.

The glory of Myanmar collapsed and shattered between 1824 and 1826, following the defeat to British at First Anglo-Myanmar War, also known as the First Burma War where the country surrendered and succumbed on 24 February 1826 through the Treaty of Yandabo. The British reaped (10) million silver coins in Kyats and also annexed Rakhine and Tanintharyi areas.

The defeated war was the outcome of poor arms and weaponry compounded with the lack of technology. The ill-fated period was



during the reign of King Bagyidaw who thought that as Britain is a polite society so that the British might one day realized on ethical reasons and returned back the annexed regions, and therefore, the King dispatched Myanmar diplomatic mission for peace initiative.

At that time, the British annexed Kabaw Valley, while Myanmar King and the people were burning with bitter feeling, but inevitably approached with diplomatic maneuver.

Myanmar diplomatic mission waited with high expectation and patience from December 1830 to June 1833 for two years and six months in India where British Governor resided, but yielded nothing.

This regretful episode has brought to the light that a nation

and the people without defending prowess, nation's wealth and modern technology could yield nothing through begging.

Again in December 1852, the British intruded and annexed the Lower Myanmar and occupied the Bago Region. At that juncture, King Mindon in 1855 sent Myanmar Diplomatic Mission as peace mission to India to call on Lord Dalhousie, the British Governor.

While negotiating for the return of Bago Region, the British Governor responded with arrogant manner that the British, the empire on which the sun never sets, would never relinquish the occupied land. This was another lesson taken with hard feeling.

At a time when the British dig in and ruled the Lower Myanmar, the Kone Baung Dynasty in Upper Myanmar started to feel the end of the era. The imperialism was nothing to do with contentment and satisfaction, but ruled as the master of insatiability and greed, and prepared war to annex Upper Myanmar.

Minor issues with Myanmar were exaggerated and the trivial border problems were blown out of proportion. Before the annexation of Lower Myanmar, the British Diplomats paid due courtesy and respect to the King, however, after the Union Jack was flown in Lower Myanmar the manners

were aggressive and even asked for carrying swords during the King's audience.

Despite King Thibaw was deemed as weak ruler, the affairs of the Palace was handled in the sense of a sovereign country, and responded strongly in line with Buddha Sassana and the security of the state.

ically fought back the aggressors.

The battles were being paid with flesh, bone and blood. The history saw heroic fights, stream of bloods, guerilla warfare, and scorched-earth battles, where British embraced the suffering.

Myanmar started to talk about peace when there was no alternative but to yield. Of course,

Towards the close of the 19th century, after the year 1881, Britain and France were vying to gain an edge in controlling the trade and economy of the South East Asian countries.

The British always acted in malice by finding loopholes to annex the whole country. They behaved in a particular way of banyan tree and its root when they took hold of structures and buildings, slowly swallowing the whole. They started the foothold before the 19 century, and within (60) years the British took possession of the whole country.

In fact while Myanmar had deployed the method of peace initiative and diplomatic maneuver, and on the other hand the patriotic nationals courageously and hero-

that the Myanmar people were not to be given the slightest opportunity to overtake.

Despite the fact that Myanmar fought back valiantly and heroically for the people and the country, the year 1882 saw the conspiracy and intrigue of British and France in colonizing countries of South East Asia.

Although having abundant bravery, courage and valor in the bloods of Myanmar people, the apprehension and understanding the ground reality of the country and the world was far too late.

Since the First Anglo-Myanmar War, Myanmar started to realize the expansionism policy and sinister scheme, but the environment was marred with the British intervention, the disunity of Myanmar people, and the looming scheme made it impossible to carryout timely reform in the country.

At that time, the European Continent was stepping into Industrial Revolution and changing the feudal system into capitalism. The capitalists in Britain and France were competing for more possession and dashed into the countries in Asian Continent, first in the prototype of trading and later changed the approach into aggressive war.

The British waged three aggressive wars against Myanmar and ruled the country for the exclusive aim of capitalist interest.

The motley assortment of interventions was applied and the blatant hostility was functional and normal in the country, while the failed and futile patriotic fights against the rulers remained the intangible images. The old memories are to be taken as lessons.

Towards the close of the 19th century, after the year 1881, Britain and France were vying to gain an edge in controlling the trade and economy of the South East Asian countries.

In the war theatre, there came Myanmar falling in its own proverb such as "Getting one extra laborer free, while buying slaves".

Whatever the backdrops and events may be, the courageous, dauntless and heroic battles of Myanmar for regaining independent and sovereignty remained as clear evidence in the chronicle of Myanmar.

Translated by UMT (Ahlon)



Myanmar Daily Weather Report (Issued on Friday 21 December 2018)

SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS RECORDED AT 09:30 hrs MST: During the past (24) hours, rain or thundershowers has been scattered in Bago Region, isolated in Yangon Region and Mon State and weather has been partly cloudy in the remaining regions and states. Night temperatures were (2°C) above December average temperatures in Lower Sagaing, Mandalay, Magway and Taninthayi regions, (3°C) to (4°C) above December average temperatures in Upper Sagaing Region, Kachin and Rakhine states, (5°C) to (6°C) above December average temperatures in Bago and Ayeyawady regions, Eastern Shan, Kayah, Kayin and Mon states and about December average temperature in the remaining regions and states. The significant night temperatures were (3°C) in Haka, (5°C) each in Heho and Ramthlo and (6°C) in Loilin. The noteworthy amounts of rainfall recorded were Cocogyun (1.58)inches, Paung (0.32) inch and Pyu (0.23)inch.

BAY INFERENCE: Weather is partly cloudy over the Andaman Sea and North Bay and partly cloudy to cloudy elsewhere in the Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL AFTERNOON OF 22 December 2018: Rain or thundershowers will be isolated in Bago, Yangon, Ayeyawady and Taninthayi regions, Kayin and Mon states. Degree of certainty is (80%). Weather will be partly cloudy in the remaining regions and states.

STATE OF THE SEA: Sea will be slight to moderate in Myanmar waters. Wave height will be about (3-5) feet off and along Myanmar Coasts.

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Slight decrease of night temperatures in Upper Myanmar areas.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 22 December 2018: Partly cloudy.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 22 December 2018: Isolated rain or thundershowers. Degree of certainty is (80%).

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 22 December 2018: Partly cloudy.

WEATHER OUTLOOK FOR WEEKEND: Weather will be partly cloudy in Nay Pyi Taw and Mandalay Region and rain or thundershowers will be isolated in Yangon Region.

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Invitation to young writers for Sunday Special

The Global New Light of Myanmar is accepting submissions of poetry, opinion, articles, essays and short stories from young people for its weekly Sunday Next Generation Platform. Interested candidates can send their work to the **Global New Light of Myanmar** at No. 150, Nga Htat Kyee Pagoda Road, Bahan Township, Yangon, in person, or by email to ce@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com with the following information: (1) Sector you wish to be included in (poetry, opinion, etc.), (2) Own name and (if different) your penname, (3) Your level of education, (4) Name of your School/College/University, (5) A written note of declaration that the submitted piece is your original work and has not been submitted to any other news or magazine publishing houses, (6) A color photo of the submitter, (7) Copy of your NRC card, (8) Contact information (email address, mobile number, etc.). - Editorial Department, The Global New Light of Myanmar

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Despite EASA approval, no takers for MNA's aircraft maintenance service yet: official

By Nyein Nyein

WHILE the Myanmar National Airlines has obtained approval from the European Aviation Safety Agency for its maintenance workshop for ATR aircraft, local airlines are yet to make use of the facility, said U Aye Tun, engineer, MNA.

"We plan to provide maintenance services for local aircrafts at our workshop, but so far, we have only received queries from local airlines. None have signed up for our maintenance services," he said.

MNA recently obtained EASA's Part 145-0801 Maintenance

Organization certificate for servicing ATR 72-100/200 series and ATR 42-400/500/72-212A aircraft.

The MNA signed an agreement with France's ATR to set up a maintenance workshop on 16 July, 2014. Local airlines can save costs by using the maintenance service for ATR aircraft which is being provided within the country, he said.

"We are still estimating the cost of maintenance facilities. When we have customers, we will be in a better position to calculate costs. Then, we can set the maintenance costs for respective parts. We will

also be able to point out how much customers will save if they use the local maintenance service," said U Aye Tun.

"We are also exploring other markets for our maintenance services. There has been no query from neighbouring countries so far," he added.

"Local airlines such as Air KBZ, Golden Myanmar, and Asian Wings primarily use ATR aircrafts. While we are using aircrafts from three manufacturers, 90 per cent of local airlines are using only ATR aircrafts," said U Aye Tun.

At present, MNA flies to

28 domestic airports and international destinations, including Singapore, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Chiang Mai, and Bodh Gaya. It will expand its service to Chengdu from 28 December.

The Myanmar National Airlines was established on 15 September, 1948, as the Union of Burma Airways (UBA). After a period in isolation, along with much of Myanmar's industry, the airline was recently rebranded as Myanmar National Airlines. It completed its 70th year of operation this year. ■

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Kayin ethnic people to hold first harvest feast in Einme

A Kayin Ethnic Harvest Feast will be held, for the first time, in Taung Su Village, Ywar Thit Gyi village-tract, at the Einme Township of the Ayeyawady Region on 6 January 2019.

The feast will be held the same day as the Kayin New Year Festival. Several entertainment programs including, Myanmar traditional boxing, a stage show, a Kayin literature and poetry competition, and a Kayin traditional don dance performance will be organized

prior to the New Year Festival and the feast.

A flag-raising ceremony will be held at 6 am on 6 January to mark the Kayin New Year, while the harvest feast will be held at 9 am.

The purpose for celebrating the Kayin New Year and the harvest feast is preservation of Kayin language, literature and culture, and Kayin national unity and development.—Township IPRD ■ (Translated by Hay Mar)



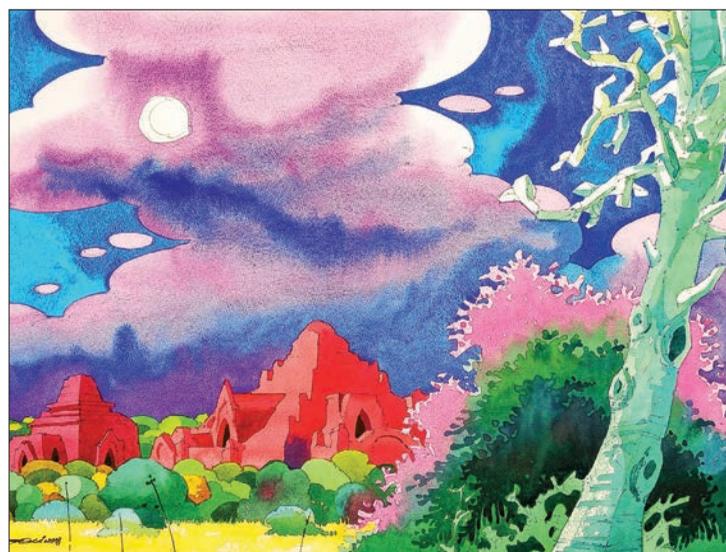
PHOTO: TOWNSHIP IPRD

Artist Zarni to hold 2nd solo show at Gallery 65 from 22-24 Dec

ARTIST Zarni, an artist from Mandalay, will present select watercolor paintings at a solo exhibition in Yangon this weekend, according to the event's organizer.

The exhibition entitled 'Ultramarine Blue' will be held from 22 to 24 December at Gallery 65, a contemporary art gallery situated on the Yawmngyi Road in Dagon Township, Yangon.

Artist Zarni said that a total of 36 watercolour paintings will be displayed at the three-day exhibition and each 15" x 22" painting will be priced at US\$350. The subject matter of the paintings will include beautiful landscapes, ancient buildings, and other historic structures, especially from the Sagaing Region and the Bagan



Watercolor works of Artist Zarni. PHOTO SUPPLIED BY ARTIST

ancient cultural zone in the Mandalay Region. The artist will also include two paintings depicting Yangon's well-known structures, including the Bogy-

oke Market downtown.

The exhibition will be open to the public between 10 am and 6 pm daily.

This will be Zarni's second

solo event. He held his first solo show in October 2017 and plans to hold a third solo event in February 2019 in his hometown Mandalay, where he will exhibit only paintings with an outdoor theme. The artist said he plans to hold solo exhibitions every year.

The 32-year-old artist studied at the State School of Fine Arts in Mandalay eight years ago. Since entering the art scene, Zarni has participated in several art exhibitions and his works can mostly be found at collective art shows. Artist Zarni said that he has participated in 50-60 group art shows and is planning to take part in a group exhibition next month.—Junior Lwin ■

(Translated by Khaing Thanda Lwin)

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw concludes its 10th session

FROM PAGE-2

Annual report on national plans for FY 2017-2018

Hluttaw representatives discussed the annual report on national plans for FY 2017-2018 and following this, Deputy Minister for Electricity and Energy Dr. Tun Naing and officials from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation and Ministry of Planning and Finance clarified the report. Member of the Joint Public Accounts Committee Daw Shwe Shwe Sein Lat tabled a motion on this report and which was approved by The Hluttaw.

Union Financial report and the Joint Public Accounts Committee report (14/2018)

Then Hluttaw representa-

tives discussed the Union Financial report and the Joint Public Accounts Committee report (14/2018) and which was discussed by Daw Cho Cho of Oattwin constituency, U Khin Cho of Hlaingbwe constituency, U Bo Gyi of Chauk constituency, Daw Khin San Hlaing of Pale constituency and Daw Wint Wah Htun of Shartaw constituency. Next Deputy Minister for Planning and Finance U Sett Aung replied the queries raised by the Hluttaw representatives. Member of the Joint Public Accounts Committee Daw Cho Cho Win tabled a motion on the Joint Public Accounts Committee report (14/2018) and which was approved by the Hluttaw.

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker U T Khun Myat summarizes the 10th reg-

ular session of the Hluttaw's meetings

After this, Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker U T Khun Myat delivered a conclusion speech. He said that a total of four laws, including the second Law Amending the Protection of the Farmers' Rights and Enhancement of their Benefits Law had been enacted, and another two bills approved by the Hluttaw had been submitted to the President to make into laws. The by-law of the Mining Law was also approved by the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw yesterday.

He added that 11 days of Hluttaw meetings, the Hluttaw had approved to set up a new ministry, to appoint a Union Minister and a Judge of the Union Supreme Court besides putting records on three matters on foreign loans, signing five interna-

tional treaties, three matters concerning foreign loans required to obtain approval from the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, five matters to be signed in the international treaties, annual report on the Government's debt for FY 2017-2018, an interim report on taxation, annual report on national planning, annual report on Union Financing, and interim report on Union Legal Affairs and Special Cases Assessment Commission.

Regarding the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Development Funds in 2018-2019 FY, instructions were made to submit proposals, at the latest on 31 December 2019, to use Pyidaungsu Hluttaw development funds and, to date, 212 townships had submitted proposals, out of which permission was granted to 89 townships. The remaining townships have been

notified to submit their proposals on time.

A total of 30 bills left to be carried out

While the Hluttaw was in session, a total of 30 bills, including four bills at the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, 18 bills at the Pyithu Hluttaw, eight bills at the Amyotha Hluttaw, left to be enacted at the Hluttaw.

The Hluttaws will turn to three years soon, and Hluttaw representatives were urged to perform their duties in accordance with the rules and regulations, said the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker.

The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker then announced the successful completion of the second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw's tenth regular session. ■(Translated by Win Ko Ko Aung)

MNA adds new ATR plane to its fleet

MYANMAR National Airlines inducted an ATR 72-600 XY-AMM aircraft to its fleet yesterday. The airlines took the delivery of the 72-seater aircraft at the Yangon International Airport yesterday.

The new plane is the 8th aircraft of the ATR 72-600 series to be used by the airlines. The new aircraft will make its maiden flight from Yangon to Patheingyi in Ayeyawady Region

on 25 December.

The night flight between Yangon and NyaungU is also scheduled to be operated with the new aircraft, according to the MNA.

The MNA is expanding its routes to local and foreign destinations and it will extend its service to Chengdu, China, thrice a week, starting 28 December.

The welcoming ceremo-

ny for the new ATR aircraft from France was held at the Yangon International Airport.

At the ceremony, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Transport and Communications, U Win Khant, and the CEO of Myanmar National Airlines, Captain U Than Htun, delivered the welcoming speeches.—Aye Min Thu (Translated by JT)



Officials, pilots and crews Myanmar National Airlines pose for photo at the ceremony to welcome the new ATR aircraft. PHOTO: AYE MIN THU

Five arrested for drug use in Katha District

POLICE raided a home in Katha Town, Katha District, Sagaing Region, on Thursday night and found five men with 0.5 grams of opium powder and drug-related equipment.

The five men, identified as Aye Min Tun, Tun Naung, Thurain Tun, Myo Htike Min, and Win Min Thu, were charged with drug use under

the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law.

The men were detained after the township police received a tip and raided the home of Ma Yamin Tun in Mahase new ward in Area-5, Katha Town, around 11:40 pm on 20 December. While Ma Yamin Tun was not at home, the five men were found with the drugs

and equipment.

Meanwhile, in two separate cases, police arrested two men and seized 8 grams of opium powder, 150 WY brand yaba tablets, and over Ks880,000 cash from them in Kawlin and Pinlebu townships the same day.—Lu Aung (Katha)

(Translated by Khaing Thanda Lwin)

Innwa Bank celebrates opening new branch



Yangon Command Commander Maj-Gen Thet Pon opens the new branch's of Innwa Bank in Mingaladon Township, Yangon. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

OPENING ceremony of Mingaladon (Wireless) branch of Innwa Bank in commemoration of 71st Independence Day was held in the bank branch's compound yesterday morning. U Thant Swe, Administrative Director of Myanmar Economic Corporation, Director of Projects U Khin Maung Soe and Managing Director of Innwa Bank Limited U Aung Ngwe Oo conducted ribbon cutting ceremony and officially open the new branch's signboard by pressing of a button by Yangon Command Commander Maj-Gen Thet Pon.

Innwa Bank Limited Mingaladon (Wireless) is the 55th branch of Innwa Bank and it is

situated in Tatmadaw Garment Factory's compound, Mingaladon Township, Yangon. Banking services such as accepting deposit, saving, advancing of loans, payment order, bank guarantee and debt cards will be available and Innwa Bank Limited is offering an easy and convenient banking service for people across the country.

Beside of remittance of funds service, 9 per cent interest rate on saving accounts, up to 10 per cent on fixed deposit depending on the period of saving as the wish of savers and also offering loans to needy borrowers.—GNLM

(Translated by Myat Thandar Aung)

‘Under the table’: Cambodia’s surrogate mothers risk jail for Chinese couples

PHNOM PENH (Cambodia) — Pregnant and scared, Yin hides in a house on the outskirts of Phnom Penh — one of an untold number of Cambodian surrogate mothers risking jail time for lucrative payouts from Chinese clients.

The end of China’s one-child policy has driven desperate couples too old to bring a baby to term to poorer countries in the Mekong region, where a “womb-for-rent” industry is brushing up against legal barriers.

Cambodia banned commercial surrogacy in 2016 but still has brokers — and eligible young women — skirting the ban for a price.

Yin, 24, was offered \$9,000 by a Cambodian intermediary to carry a Chinese couple’s baby, a

fortune for her rice-farming family in rural Kampong Thom province, three hours from the capital.

“I hesitated at first because I was afraid of how the girls in my village would look at me,” Yin, who did not want to give her real name for fear of being discovered, told AFP.

With money scarce, she agreed and was moved to a house in Phnom Penh to live with other women who underwent the same process.

China — with more than 90 million women eligible for a second offspring after the one-child policy was eased — forbids commercial surrogacy, driving couples yearning for a biological child to Southeast Asian countries where the practice is poorly reg-

ulated. But a string of high-profile controversies in Thailand, including custody tussles and a case of a couple accused of abandoning their baby after it was born with Down Syndrome, prompted the country’s junta to ban it in 2015.

Parents immediately looked across the border to Cambodia, but the government swiftly banned it a year later, worried that women in financial straits could face exploitation.

‘Complete Strangers’

Industry watchers eagerly wait for legislation in Cambodia that could eventually regulate surrogacy and protect the women and children from becoming victims of trafficking.

Meanwhile, a network of



This year, more than 40 surrogate mothers in two different cases were arrested in Phnom Penh and charged with human trafficking.

PHOTO: AFP

Cambodian and international intermediaries persists in the shadows, with raids and arrests revealing the scale of the demand.

Experts say couples are willing to pay between \$40,000 and \$100,000 to have a child, while the surrogate mother typically gets

\$10,000 to \$15,000.

Mariam Kukunashvili had a surrogacy agency in Cambodia before the ban, and said there are more than 100 Chinese or other Asian agencies still operating.

She said more regulation, not outright bans, is needed. —AFP ■

US defense chief quits as Trump announces Syria withdrawal

WASHINGTON — US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis quit Thursday as President Donald Trump weathered an escalating backlash at home and abroad over his sudden decision to pull all troops from Syria.

Trump steadfastly defended the withdrawal of the 2,000-strong force from Syria, vowing that the United States would no longer be the “policeman of the Middle East” and insisting that the Islamic State movement had been defeated.

Mattis, a retired general seen as a moderating force on the often impulsive president, made little attempt to hide his disagreements with Trump.

“Because you have the right to have a Secretary of Defense whose views are better aligned with yours,” Mattis said in a letter to Trump, “I believe it is right for me to step down from my position.”

Mattis hailed the coalition to defeat the Islamic State and also defended NATO, the military alliance between North America and Europe whose cost-effectiveness has been questioned by the businessman turned president.

“My views on treating allies with respect and also being clear-eyed about both malign actors and strategic competitors are strongly held and informed by over four decades of immersion in these issues,” Mattis wrote.



US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis made little attempt to hide his disagreements with President Donald Trump. PHOTO: AFP

The resignation came as The Wall Street Journal reported that Trump was also considering a substantial drawdown in a much larger US operation — Afghanistan. Trump, who has surrounded himself with former military men and was said to have been impressed by the scholarly and calm 68-year-old Mattis, was diplomatic as he announced the departure, writing on Twitter that the defense secretary achieved “tremendous progress.”

Mattis will serve until the end of February, giving Trump a short window to name a successor who can be confirmed by the Senate.

Just hours earlier, Trump took to Twitter to bash a frequent ally known to covet the job, Sen-

ator Lindsey Graham, after the lawmaker also questioned the wisdom of exiting Syria.

‘Policeman’ no more

Doubling down on his declaration on Twitter of victory over the Islamic State group a day earlier, Trump boasted of commanding the world’s most powerful military and said that others should lead the fighting. “Does the USA want to be the Policeman of the Middle East, getting NOTHING but spending precious lives and trillions of dollars protecting others who, in almost all cases, do not appreciate what we are doing? Do we want to be there forever? Time for others to finally fight,” he tweeted. —AFP ■

French National Assembly approves ‘yellow vest’ tax cuts

PARIS (France) — The French National Assembly on Friday approved a package of emergency concessions first announced by President Emmanuel Macron in a bid to end the violent “yellow vest” protests.

The tax cuts for low-income workers were put forward by Macron in a televised address earlier this month to help cool weeks of protests that brought major disruption to the country.

The measures provide a “quick, strong and concrete response” to the crisis, said the labour minister Muriel Penicaud in a debate which lasted into the early hours of Friday morning.

The measures include the removal of a planned tax increase for a majority of pensioners and tax-free overtime pay for all workers. Economists estimate the cuts will cost up to 15 billion euros (\$17 billion).

The concessions will now move to the Senate for approval.

Tens of thousands of people joined rallies across France on consecutive Saturdays in a movement which sprung up over fuel tax hikes but snowballed into broader opposition to Macron.

Police this week said they would start removing barricades at roundabouts and on motorways after the demonstrations

began to run out of steam.

The protests, which at times spiralled into violence, took a toll on the economy, with businesses counting the cost of supply disruptions, smashed property and a dearth of shoppers and tourists who stayed away from city centres.

On Thursday the president told critics of the fuel tax hikes “you’re right” after 1.15 million people signed a petition suggesting several other ways to fight fossil fuel pollution. Macron called the petition a “citizens’ act”.

“Your message, I heard it. I am responding to you directly, you are right,” Macron wrote on the website Change.org.

He reminded the petition signers that his government has cancelled the planned increase in fuel tax and that no hikes in gas and electricity prices would be made during the winter.

While restating that reducing fossil fuels which contribute to climate change was a necessary action, Macron added that it “must not put the problems of the end of the world in opposition to the problems at the end of the month” — alluding to the anger of the “yellow vest” protest movement about the cost of living in France and the difficulty in making ends meet.—AFP ■

Sydney pummelled by hail the size of tennis balls

SYDNEY(Australia) — Australia's largest city was picking up the pieces Friday after a series of lightning and hailstorms pummelled cars with ice blocks the size of tennis balls.

The authorities issued a severe storm warning, but that was not enough to prevent damage that is already running into the tens of millions of dollars.

"As of 6:30 am we are at 15,000 claims and AUS\$80 million (US\$57 million) in damages," the Insurance Council of Australia told AFP.

When the storms hit, Sydneysiders looked on in

desperation as cauliflower-shaped hail smashed through car windshields and turned the Harbour into a bubbling and splashing cauldron.

Many drivers sought refuge under roofed petrol stations and a few brave surfers in the water at the city's famed Bondi Beach hid under their boards.

Hailstorms are fairly common in the state of New South Wales in the antipodean summer, although one on this scale has not been seen since 1999, when hailstones caused an estimated AUS\$1.7 billion in damage.—AFP ■



A series of lightning and hailstorms in Sydney has caused damage that is already running into the tens of millions of dollars. PHOTO: AFP

Costa Rica hits renewable energy mark for fourth year in a row

SAN JOSÉ(Costa Rica) — Costa Rica has generated more than 98 per cent of its power through renewable sources for the fourth year in a row, the state energy body said Thursday.

In 2018, just 1.44 per cent of the central American country's electricity came from fossil fuel plants, the Costa Rican Electricity Institute (ICE) said in a statement.

ICE power director Luis Pacheco said Costa Rica's electricity generation system had made it "an example for the region

and the world." River water is the main source of energy, providing 73.87 per cent of the country's needs, followed by wind (15.6 per cent) and geothermal energy from its volcanos (8.38 per cent).

Costa Rica avoided using its fossil fuels plants in 300 days during 2018; the last instance came on 17 May.

October was the month in which it generated the most renewable electricity, some 976.78 gigawatts an hour, the ICE said.—AFP ■

Spanish court confirms 1.5 bln euro Prestige spill compensation

MADRID (Spain) — Spain's Supreme Court on Thursday handed down a definitive ruling that the Spanish state be paid over 1.5 billion euros (\$1.9 billion) in damages over the 2002 Prestige oil spill, one of Europe's worst environmental disasters.

It confirmed an earlier ruling handed down in November 2017 by a lower court in the north-western city of La Coruna, in Galicia off whose coast the Prestige tanker broke in two.

Neighbouring France, which was also affected, was awarded 61 million euros.

The Bahama-flagged Liberian tanker went down after sailing for six days damaged and adrift, spilling 63,000 tonnes of oil into the sea and coating 2,980 kilometres (1,852 miles) of shoreline in Spain, France and Portugal with black sludge.

The spill caused huge damage to wildlife and the environment, as well as to the region's fishing industry, leading to an international cleanup effort.

The court said the final ruling on civil liability "fixes compensation at above 1.5 billion euros" to be paid by the vessel's insurance company and its skipper.

The vast majority of the compensation will go to the Spanish state. The remainder will be split be-



Dozens of beaches across northwestern Spain were polluted after the Prestige tanker sank, leading the Spanish Supreme Court to rule, 16 years on, that more than 1.5 billion euros compensation must be paid, mainly to the Spanish state. PHOTO: AFP

tween the Galician authorities and local authorities, including in French areas. Firms, particularly in the fishing industry, which was badly hit, will also receive a small cut.

The ruling ends a legal marathon after Spain's worst ecological disaster.

More than 300,000 volunteers from across Europe descended on the region to help with the clean-up.

Spain's Supreme Court in 2016 found the Prestige's Greek captain, Apostolos Mangouras, and its British insurer, The London P&I Club, as well as its owner Mare Shipping Inc, liable for the disaster.

It also sentenced Mangouras, who was 67

when the Prestige went down, to two years in jail.

The court said at the time that two major energy companies — Spain's Repsol and Britain's BP — had advised against using the Prestige tanker, a 26-year-old vessel with a carrying capacity of 81,000 tonnes.

It also cited in its ruling notes from the Prestige's former captain, Stratos Kostazos, who had complained that the tanker was in bad shape and had refused to sail in it.

Mangouras blamed the spill on the Spanish authorities which ordered the ship out to sea after it sent out a distress call due to a crack in its hull.

The total cost of the damage had been estimated by Spanish courts in 2012 at 4.1 billion euros, of which 3.8 billion should be given to the Spanish state.

The French government in 2013 estimated the cost of the spill for French victims stood at 109 million euros.—AFP ■

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CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

M.V CAPE FLORES VOY. NO. (109 N/S)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V CAPE FLORES VOY. NO. (109 N/S) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 22-12-2018 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 LINES

Phone No: 2301185

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Consignees of cargo carried on M.V AS FIONA VOY. NO. (003 W/E) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 22-12-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T./A.I.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 REGIONAL CONTAINER LINES

Phone No: 2301185

Day 2 of 'All Who Can Read Should Read' campaign in Nay Pyi Taw



Union Minister Dr. Pe Myint and Deputy Minister U Aung Hla Tun visit a book stall yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**



Union Minister Dr. Pe Myint and attendees pose for a documentary photo. **PHOTO: MNA**



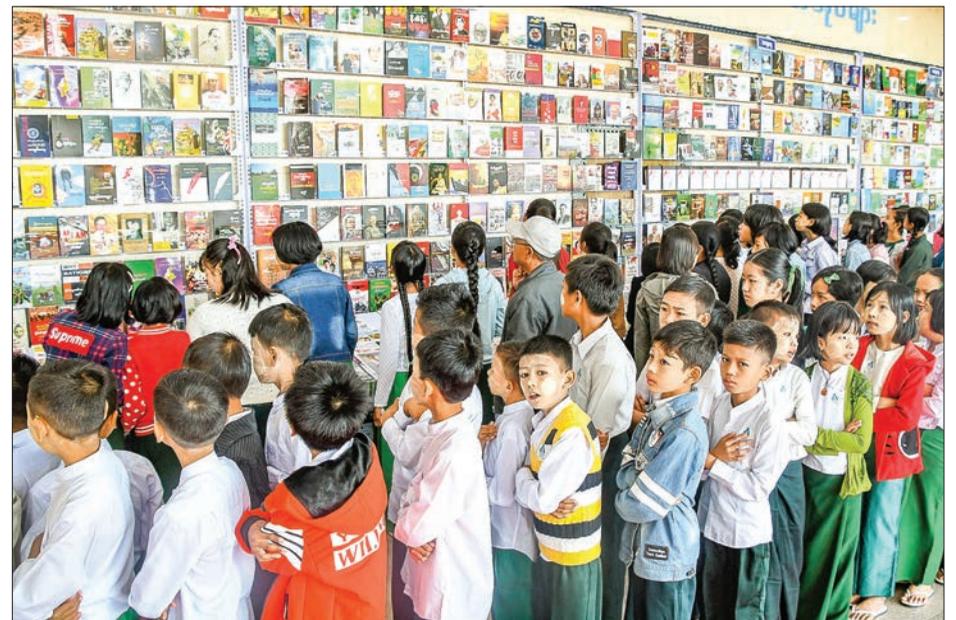
Union Minister Dr. Pe Myint observes a film roll machine. **PHOTO: MNA**



Books published in 2018 on display. **PHOTO: MNA**



Young men hand out pamphlets for 'All Who Can Read Should Read' campaign. **PHOTO: MNA**



Students line up to observe a display of books published in 2018. **PHOTO: MNA**



An official explains about a radio receiver to students. **PHOTO: MNA**



Clay tablets with inscriptions on display. **PHOTO: MNA**



Students looking up in a dictionary on display. **PHOTO: MNA**

Cell-by-cell DNA science is 'Breakthrough of 2018'

TAMPA (United States) —The US journal Science on Thursday coined as "Breakthrough of the Year" for 2018 new technologies that reveal how DNA cues individual cells to grow through time.

Experts say these methods will transform science over the coming decades, allowing an ever-clearer picture of the processes behind aging, healing and disease. "Just as a music score indicates when strings, brass, percussion, and woodwinds chime in to create a symphony, a combination of technologies is revealing when genes in individual cells switch on, cueing the cells to play their specialized parts," said the report.

"The result is the ability to track development of organisms and organs in stunning detail, cell by cell and through time."—Modern methods build on the 2002 Nobel Prize-winning work of John Sulston and colleagues, "who mapped the development of the roundworm *Caenorhab-*

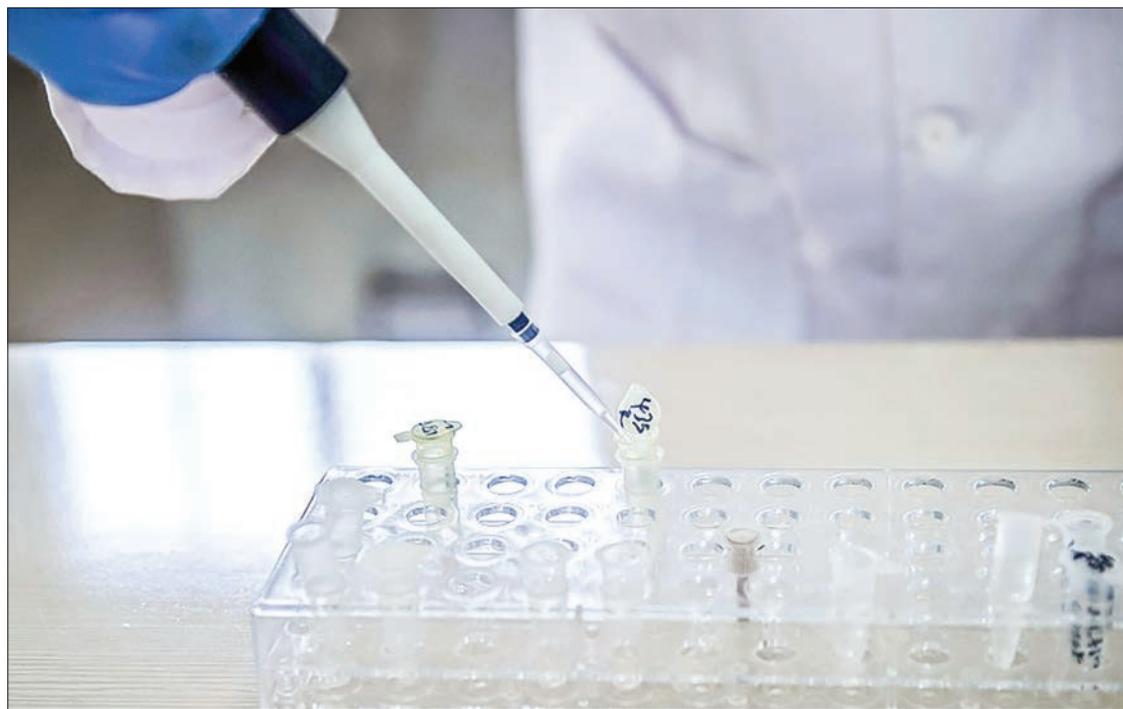
ditis elegans by painstakingly watching larvae mature cell by cell through microscopes," said Jeremy Berg, editor-in-chief of the Science family of journals.

"With today's technologies, especially massively parallel DNA sequencing and advanced fluorescence microscopy, the cells that comprise *C. elegans* have been mapped again using tag-analyze-assemble methods based on gene expression patterns within each cell."

'Revolution is just starting'

Scientific papers have been published this year on how a flatworm, a fish, a frog, and other organisms begin to make organs and appendages. International researchers are hard at work, looking for ways to apply these techniques to human cells—how they mature, regenerate, and what goes wrong when cancer, diabetes or even physical malformations occur.

Among the projects under-

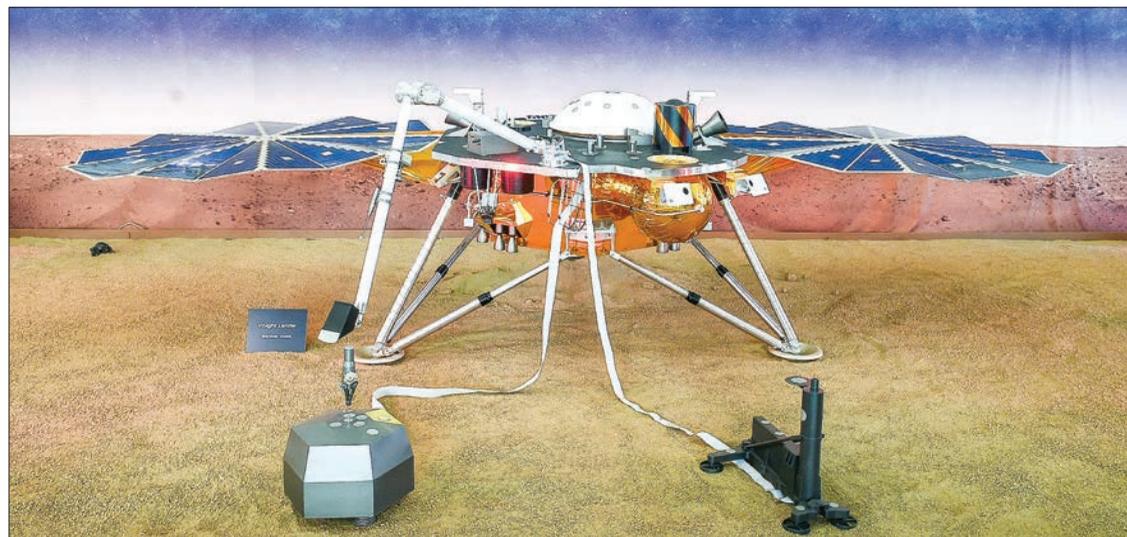


Experts say new DNA research will transform science over the coming decades, allowing an ever-clearer picture of the process behind aging, healing and disease. PHOTO: AFP

way is an international consortium called the Human Cell Atlas, which is identifying "every human cell type, where each type is located in the body, and how the cells work together to form

tissues and organs," said the report. Other scientists are studying kidney cell types, including ones that become cancerous, as well as the interplay between maternal and fetal cells in preg-

nancy. A group of 53 institutions and 60 companies across Europe, called the LifeTime consortium, is studying cell by cell how tissues develop cancer, diabetes, and other diseases.— AFP ■



A replica of the InSight Mars Lander is on display at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Pasadena, California on 26 November 2018. PHOTO: AFP

Mars InSight deploys French-made quake sensor on Red Planet

WASHINGTON (United States)—The US space agency's unmanned Mars InSight lander, which touched down on the Red Planet last month, has successfully deployed its key, quake-sensing instrument on the alien world's surface, NASA said Thursday. The seismometer, known as the Seismic Experiment for Interior Structure, or SEIS, was made by the French space agency, CNES.

"Seismometer deployment is as important as landing InSight on Mars," said InSight principal investigator Bruce Banerdt of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

"The seismometer is the highest-priority instrument on InSight: We need it in order to complete about three-quarters of our science objectives."

The spacecraft used its robotic arm to place the seismometer on the ground in front of the lander, 5.4 feet (1.64 meters) away, on Wednesday,

NASA said.

The tool aims to help scientists better understand the interior of Earth's neighboring planet by studying ground motion, also known as marsquakes.

The goal of the two-year mission is to create the first three-dimensional map of Mars' interior to better understand how rocky planets, like Mars and Earth, took shape billions of years ago.

"Having the seismometer on the ground is like holding a phone up to your ear," said Philippe Lognonne, principal investigator of SEIS from Institut de Physique du Globe de Paris (IPGP) and Paris Diderot University.

"We're thrilled that we're now in the best position to listen to all the seismic waves from below Mars' surface and from its deep interior."

The \$993 million Mars InSight landed on Mars 26 November.— AFP ■

Gatekeeper at Japan's 'Suicide Forest' hopes music can save lives

NARUSAWA (Japan)—From his hut on the edge of Japan's "Suicide Forest", Kyochi Watanabe blasts John Lennon's "Imagine" into the night — hoping that music can lift people from their despair before it's too late. The 60-year-old musician has been waging an eight-year battle to banish the vast forest's morbid reputation by reaching out to those who come to end their lives. But now he fears his work is being undone. The forest, known as Aokigahara, made global headlines last year when YouTube star Logan Paul filmed an episode of his online series there, showing a suicide victim at the site.

The footage sparked outrage and infuriated Watanabe, who was born nearby and has spent most of his life in and around the forest. "It's a forest of nature. It's a forest of religion. It's not that kind of place," he said. "Do people want to make this forest a hell?" he said, calling it "so painful" to see the woods depicted in such a grim fashion. Watanabe now lives in a hut on the edge of Aokigahara, which means "a field of blue trees". As night falls, he flips on speakers outside his secluded

home and blasts rock and hip-hop into the darkness, breaking the thick silence of the ocean of trees.

He believes music is a way to reach people engulfed in inner turmoil, and describes seeing people turn around and leave the forest when they hear the blasting tunes. Sometimes he plays guitar and sings his favourite songs into a microphone to break the silence. He has even intervened directly, convincing one man who had travelled from the western city of Osaka to go home.

"He returned home, and he still sends me messages on Facebook," he said.

Highest suicide rate in the G7

Aokigahara's long history dates back to the middle of the ninth century, when Mount Fuji erupted and lava covered wide areas that have since transformed into a 30 square-kilometre (12 square-mile) forest. Local people have long worshipped the woods and its surroundings as a sacred place that reputedly enshrines a dragon. It is a foreboding place, thickly planted with tall trees that block out the sun, and carpeted with moss and gnarled roots.— AFP ■

Aung La N Sang honored with his statue in Myitkyina

ONE Championship's two-division World Champion, Aung La N Sang, has been honored with a bronze statue, unveiled recently through the efforts of locals, at the Kachin National Manaw Park in his hometown, Myitkyina, in Kachin State.

The statue shows Aung La N Sang with his world championship belts resting on his shoulders. Aung La N Sang reacted to news about the statue on his social media page.

"When I heard the news about this statue being built, I was shocked and was totally against it. I am just reaching the prime of my career and don't want any more added pressure. I was also worried about discontent from people who disagree with the building of this statue," he said.

"But this is not about me. It is a reminder for all the boys and girls born in Dukatawng or anywhere else in Myanmar; that they too can become World Champi-



The statue of Aung La N Sang seen at Kachin National Manaw Park in Myitkyina. **PHOTO: AUNG LA N SANG'S FACEBOOK PAGE**

ons, or whatever they set their hearts and minds on. I know I have a lot of faults and may let many people down in the future. So don't look up to me, just let this be a reminder that even if our upbringing is humble, with grit and God's grace, our hard work will be blessed," he added.

Aung La N Sang became the two-division world champion

after capturing the ONE Light Heavyweight World Championship as well as successfully defending his ONE Middleweight World Championship twice.

Aung La also won the Male Athlete of the Year and the Bout of the Year awards at the 2018 Global Martial Arts Awards ceremony, held in Singapore on 8 November.—Lynn Thit(Tgi) ■

Disgraced Smith admits failures, is desperate to return

SYDNEY (Australia)—Disgraced Steve Smith admitted Friday he failed as a captain by turning a blind eye to the ball-tampering scandal and said it has been hard watching Australia struggle from the sidelines.

The former skipper is still serving a one-year ban from the international and domestic game for his part in the incident that rocked the cricket world, in which sandpaper was used to try and rough up the ball in South Africa.

Asked what went on in the changing rooms before Cameron Bancroft and David Warner went out and attempted to cheat, he said: "I had the opportunity to stop it at that point rather than say, 'I don't want to know anything about it'."

"And that was my failure of leadership. And, you know, I've taken responsibility for that."—Speaking to the media in Australia for the first time since he broke down in tears at a press conference following the scandal in March, Smith said it was the

only incident of ball-tampering that he knows about.

The scandal had far-reaching consequences with a clean-out of top executives from Cricket Australia after a scathing review blamed its "arrogant and controlling" culture was partly to blame for players bending the rules. But while it initially unleashed a torrent of vitriol against the players, Smith's tearful apology on arrival home tugged at the heartstrings.

Widely considered among the finest batsmen in the world today, Smith admitted there had been "dark days" since as he grappled with his fall from grace.

But with his suspension running out at the end of March, Smith now can see light at the end of the tunnel and is desperate to return, with the World Cup and the Ashes next year in his sights.

"I'm just moving forward day to day, and doing what I need to do to prepare to hopefully get another opportunity to play for Australia," he said.

"And if that's World Cup and Ashes, so be it. And no doubt the English crowd will be incredibly hostile. I'm ready for that, if that happens."

He has spent the time away playing for his grade cricket club Sutherland, which he captained to the New South Wales Premier T20 championship on Sunday at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Smith has also had stints in Canada's Global T20 competition and in the Caribbean Premier League.

But he suffered a setback this week when he was barred from the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League T20 tournament on a technicality. Some of the hardest times during his ban came when the diminished Australian team struggled in his absence.

"It's been tough at times, particularly when the boys haven't played their best in a couple of games, it's been hard watching and knowing that I can't go out and help them," he said.—AFP ■

Myanmar bicyclists take part in China event

A CYCLING team from Myanmar named the Bicycle Network Myanmar (BNM), together with members of the Ruili Cycling Association (RCA) and the Mangshi Bicycle Association (MBA) of China, took part in an event in China from 16 December to 20 December, according to the BNM.

A total of 26 cyclists from Myanmar participated in the five-day tour for China and Myanmar riders. The cycling tour from Yunnan to Mangshi included well-known places such as Central Dehong, the Dawn City,

the Hulusi Town, the Vientiane Ancient City, the Mongol Songs Township, and the Border Area Special Zone.

Teams from Yunnan's Dehong and Ruili also rode with the Myanmar bicyclists to the China-Myanmar Friendship Center in Mangshi, in a display of friendship between the two countries.

"During the event, the Chinese and Myanmar riders got a chance to explore Dehong and take part in mountain biking," said a source with the BNM.—Lynn Thit(Tgi) ■

Tokyo 2020 unveils new budget, spending unchanged at \$12bn



The bill for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics is set to be around \$12 billion. **PHOTO: AFP**

TOKYO (Japan)—Tokyo 2020 organisers unveiled the latest version of the Games budget on Friday, keeping their estimate unchanged as they face intense pressure to keep costs down. The latest budget for the Games stands at 1.35 trillion yen (\$12.1 billion), unchanged in yen terms from the version announced this time last year. Organisers have pledged the bill will not increase amid concerns that ballooning costs are putting off potential Olympic host cities. "As many aspects of the Games have become more detailed, Tokyo 2020 has seen increases in some areas but has successfully reduced expenditures in other areas," Tokyo 2020 CEO Toshiro Muto said in a statement. "There is still a lot of work to be done to control expenditures, but with the cooperation of the IOC, Tokyo 2020 will continue to make

best efforts to maximise revenues, contain costs and keep its budget within 600 billion yen" for the organisers, he said. The city government will provide a further 600 billion yen and the national government 150 billion yen, both unchanged from the previous version.

Muto has previously said that measures to tackle the expected hot weather during the Tokyo summer—such as water sprinklers and special heat-absorbing paint on roads—could push up the bill. Friday's latest estimate came after a dispute over what exactly counts as Olympic spending.

A report from government auditors made headlines in October when it revealed that a budget-busting 800 billion yen had been allocated by government ministries and agencies.—AFP ■