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Catholic Yangon Youth sing Christmas carols at Commander-in-Chief's home



Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and family present the gift to Catholic Yangon Youth as they visit the Senior General's residence. **PHOTO: OFFICE OF THE C-IN-C OF DEFENCE SERVICES**

A GROUP from the Catholic Yangon Youth visited the home of the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, yesterday and sang Christmas carols and wished for peace.

After singing carols and

songs for peace, one member of the youth group, identified as Ko Kaung Pyaw Paing, delivered a message of goodwill.

Afterwards, the group gave Christmas presents to Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and wife Daw

Kyu Kyu Hla, and they, in turn, received presents and a cash donation, musical instruments to be used for singing carols and presents.

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing expressed words of thanks to

the members of the group and then he and his family hosted a dinner for the Catholic Yangon Youth, according to a news release from the Office of the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services. —MNA ■

(Translated by Zaw Htet Oo)

New dispensary opens at Dagon Ayeyar Highway Bus Station

THE MINISTRY of Health and Sports opened a dispensary at a busy highway terminal on the western outskirts of Yangon yesterday to provide early treatment to passengers and to prevent the spread of contagious diseases.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the dispensary at the Dagon Ayeyar Highway Terminal in Hlethaya Township, the Union Minister for Health and Sports, Dr. Myint Htwe, said the bus terminal handles over 220 buses and 30,000 passengers travelling between Yangon and Ayeyawady regions and Rakhine State on a daily basis, and therefore, there is a high risk for the spread of contagious diseases to these regions.

He said the dispensary will allow early identification of diseases and their treatment, deal with medical emergencies before the patients are sent to a hospital, and conduct healthcare education programmes.

The Union Minister said people living near the highway terminal will also get free treatment at the dispensary. Optometrists and otolaryngologists will also visit the dispensary once a month, he said. Afterwards, Yangon Mayor U Maung Maung Soe delivered a speech.

He then joined the Union Minister and other officials to confer honorary certificates to donors for the dispensary. Thereafter, they toured the building and inspected the new ambulance.

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Volume 4, 5, 6 of classics series targeted to hit bookshelves in coming months

WITH the first three volumes of the 100 Myanmar classics series being published by the Ministry of Information receiving a good response, Union Minister for Information Dr. Pe Myint has asked officials to release the next three volumes in coming months.

The minister made the remarks at a meeting on the publication of the classics series in Yangon yesterday. The Union Minister asked officials responsible for the publication of the series to make efforts to release Volumes 4, 5, and 6 in coming months as soon as possible as readers are looking forward to them.

Volume 4 will feature 'Tapinshwe-hti', written by Ledi Pandita U Maung Gyi, and 'Nar Khan

Taw', penned by Shwe Sakkya U Soe Myint, and is expected to come out in January.

At yesterday's meeting, officials reported on the progress of work on the Myanmar classics series and challenges, and the Union minister looked into their requirements.

The ministry is planning to publish at least two volumes from the series every month.

The series, which is being arranged by the Sarpay Beikman of the Printing and Publishing Department of the Ministry of Information, is a compilation of Myanmar literature, starting from the Bagan era.

The publication of the series is also aimed at conserving rare and well-written works and cultivating the habit of reading



Union Minister Dr. Pe Myint addresses the meeting on the publication of the classics series in Yangon yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

among the youth. Meanwhile, finishing touches on the updated

Myanmar Encyclopedia is targeted to be completed in Febru-

ary next year.—MNA ■
(Translated by Kyaw Zin Lin)

Union Attorney-General meets law officers, opens new law office in Maungtaw District

UNION Attorney-General U Tun Tun Oo met with Rakhine State law officers at the State Advocate General's office on 22 December and attended the opening of the new Maungtaw District law office on 23 December.

During his meeting with law officers on 22 December, the Union Attorney-General said it is the duty of law officers to adhere to judicial standards to ensure lawsuits and prosecutions are conducted fairly, and to protect the legal rights of the people. He said law officers must state the complete facts when giving advice before the filing of a lawsuit and they must make sure the evidence presented is both sufficient and relevant enough to open a case. He asked law officers to avoid corruption and act in line with the law officer's code of conduct.

The State Advocate General, directors-general, and law officers and staff from the state advocate general's office and

the Sittway District attended the meeting.

The Union Attorney-General attended the opening ceremony of the new Maungtaw District law office on 23 December. The UAG delivered a speech and then formally opened the law office together with the Rakhine State Chief Minister and officials by cutting the ceremonial ribbons and sprinkling scented water.

In his speech, the UAG said the nation is elevating its pride in its civil servants by constructing new office buildings and expanding staff residences. He thanked the state government and relevant officials for utilizing the Ks 90.005 million in capital allotted by the Rakhine State Government for the 2017-2018 fiscal year to construct the new law office.

The UAG said 24 law offices and 13 staff residences have been constructed as of 2018 and added it is the duty of the staff



Rakhine State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu and officials open the Maungtaw District new law office yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

to maintain the buildings. He also congratulated the law officers in Maungtaw District for collaborating with the Township Administration Office to quickly and efficiently handle lawsuits during the terrorist attacks in

the district.

The Rakhine State Chief Minister, U Nyi Pu, the State's Finance, Taxation, Planning and Economic Minister, U Kyaw Aye Thein, the State Minister for Development Affairs, U Win Myint,

the State Chief Justice and State Advocate General, and law officers from the state, district, and township levels attended the opening ceremony of the new law office.—MNA (Translated by Zaw Htet Oo) ■



Deputy Minister U Aung Hla Tun meets with editorial team in the newsroom of the Global New Light of Myanmar. **PHOTO: MNA**

Deputy Minister for Information visits Global New Light of Myanmar press house

U Aung Hla Tun, Deputy Minister for Information, met with officials and the editorial team of The Global New Light of Myanmar in Yangon yesterday.

At the meeting, he stressed the need to improve the standard of the newspaper.

He said the newspaper is the single English mouthpiece of the nation and it needs to be free from one-sided perspectives and to be beneficial to its readers.

The editorial team then presented the newspaper's

current processes and requirements and the Deputy Minister attended to their needs.

The Deputy Minister then visited the newsroom.—MNA ■

(Translated by Zaw Htet Oo)

“ ‘Race’ is a collective noun applied to those who have lived through good times as well as bad together for long years, and who have accepted that they have a common destiny. It is a name given to a group of people who believe in their distinct, common identity. Although due consideration should be given to race, religion and language, a true patriotic spirit depends on a traditional desire to live together through weal or woe.”

(Excerpt from the speech given by General Aung San on the middle terrace of the Shwedagon Pagoda on 20th August, 1946)



Myanmar traditional Htamane festival in Tabodwe month. PHOTO: HTAY LWIN (AMARAPURA)

Union Minister Lt-Gen Ye Aung inspects development works in Falam, Thantlang, Hakha

UNION MINISTER for Border Affairs Lt-Gen Ye Aung inspected development works in Falam, Thantlang and Hakha townships in Chin State on 21 and 23 December.

During the tour of inspection, the Union Minister was accompanied by Chin State Chief Minister U Salai Lian Luai, Chin State Security and Border Affairs Minister Col. Han Win Aung and officials.

On 21 December, they inspected the construction of a 39-mile long Icon-Ibwarl-Kyaung-hwae-Koesae dirt road project started in the 2016-2017 fiscal year, in Falam Township.

The Union Minister urged the officials concerned to construct the road meeting the set standards.

Along the way to Falam, the

Union minister inspected the road.

On 22 December, the Union Minister visited ThiKi (Kha) Village in Thantlang Township and inspected the completed (6/4) miles road section of (13/4) miles long ThiKi-Thabawa Uyin dirt road constructed with the fund allocated by Ministry of Border Affairs.

The Union Minister and party also inspected the construction works in ThiKi Village, and attended to the needs of the village extension including construction for road, water supply and low-cost housing.

The party also inspected the ThiKi dam constructed by No (3) Construction of Irrigation and Water Utilization Management Department, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation.



Union Minister Lt-Gen Ye Aung inspects a road section in Chin State. PHOTO: MNA

The dam is distributing water to 11 villages in the region.

On 23 December, the Union Minister and party visited Rebula Town via Hakha Town, and met with the town elders there.

Ministry of Border Affairs initiated the construction of (39/0)

miles long Icon-Ibwarl-Kyaung-hwae-Koesae dirt road in 2016-2017 FY and completed (13/0) miles road section in this year, (13/0) miles road section in 2017-2018 FY, and (2/0) miles road section in the first six-month of 2018-2019 FY.

The remaining road sections (5/0) miles and (6/0) miles will be constructed with a completion target in 12 months of 2018-2019 FY. The road will benefit 13 villages in the region. — MNA ■

(Translated by Kyaw Zin Tun)

New dispensary opens at Dagon Ayeyar ...

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The Union Minister, the Yangon Mayor, Pyithu Hluttaw MP Dr. May Win Myint, Amyotha Hluttaw MP U Aye Bo, Regional constituency 2 Hluttaw MP U Myat Min Thu, Permanent Secretary 1 from the MOHSS, Prof. Dr. Thet Khaing Win, and Director-General Dr. Than Tun Aung, opened the dispensary with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The Union Minister and his entourage visited the Hlinethaya General Hospital in the afternoon and toured the facilities.

The Union Minister saw the construction work on the hospital's new four-story extension. There, he met with Chief Physician Dr. Than Lwin Oo, hospital officials, Director-General Daw Khin Tint Yar Mhwae from the Building Special Group 1 of the



Union Minister Dr. Myint Htwe addresses the opening of a new dispensary at Dagon Ayeyar Highway Bus Station. PHOTO: MNA

Ministry of Construction and officials. He asked about the requirements for opening the four-story building as soon as possible, and discussed medical staff matters and the all-round development of the hospital. Afterwards, the Union Minister visited the Kyan

Sitt Min Residence in Hlinethaya Township and inspected the completed 5-story 6-room building and 4-story 2-room building for the hospital's staff, agreed to be purchased from the Ministry of Construction. —MNA (Translated by Zaw Htet Oo)

Union Minister U Thaung Tun meets ROK Trade, Industry, Energy Minister

UNION MINISTER for Investment and Foreign Economic Relations, U Thaung Tun, visited the Republic of Korea from 19 to 22 December at the invitation of the South Korean Minister for Trade, Industry and Energy, Mr. Hyun-Chong Kim.

The Ministers met on 20 December and discussed matters relating to bilateral eco-

nomic cooperation. The Union Minister briefed the Korean Minister on political and economic developments in Myanmar and the changes made in Myanmar to promote ease of doing business in the country. The Union Minister and his ministry delegation returned to Myanmar on 22 December. — MNA ■

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Union Minister U Thant Sin Maung inspects work on Yangon Circular Railway

THE Union Minister for Transport and Communications, U Thant Sin Maung, the Myanmar Railways Managing Director, and other officials inspected the ongoing upgradation of the Yangon Circular Railway, riding an RBE train, on 23 December.

Work to upgrade the Circular Railway is being conducted at the Ahlon, Kyimyindine, Thiri Myine, Thamaing, Myothit, and Insein railway stations. The Union Minister asked railway employees to have sympathy for passengers, to perform duties with cetana (goodwill), and make efforts to ensure smooth transportation for passengers.

The Union Minister inspected the construction of the level crossing at the Insein and Bayintnaung streets' intersection. Afterwards, he visited the Hlinethaya railway station.

The Union Minister said that the Hlinethaya railway sta-



Union Minister U Thant Sin Maung meeting with the officials concerned with Yangon Circular Railway yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

tion serves as a link between the Yangon and Ayeyawady regions, and that railway is important for ensuring smooth transporta-

tion and regional development. The railway also helps develop trade, he said.

The Union Minister gave

guidelines for the upgradation work and left the station around 11 am.—GNLM ■ (Translated by Hay Mar)

Myanmar-Thai Friendship Bicycle Rally flagged off in Kawthoung

THE opening ceremony of the 5th Myanmar-Thai Friendship Bicycle Rally (Kawthoung-Ranong) was held in front of the clock tower in the Annawa ward of Kawthoung Town on 23 December.

The opening ceremony was attended by the deputy district administrators from Kawthoung and Ranong, officials from the Tourism and Sports Affairs Department of both countries, officials from Tourism Entrepreneurs Associations of the two countries, officials from Kawthoung and Ranong Chambers of Commerce, officials from Kawthoung district's related departments, staff from the Grand Andaman Hotel and PTTEP company, cyclists from Ranong Province of Thailand's Bicycle



Bicyclists take part in opening ceremony of the 5th Myanmar-Thai Friendship Bicycle Rally in Kawthoung yesterday.

PHOTO: KYAW SOE (KAWTHOUNG)

Association, cyclists from Myanmar's Myeik and Kawthoung districts, and members of civil society organizations.

Ranong Province's Deputy District Administrator, Mr.

Poltip Poygdri, and Kawthoung District's Deputy District Administrator, U Khin Thein Maung, delivered speeches at the ceremony. Afterwards, Mr. Poltip Poygdri presented five bicycles to U Khin

Thein Maung to promote the sport.

Then, officials from both countries formally opened the rally. A total of 656 cyclists from both the countries participated in the rally, riding 27 kilometers through the Kawthoung Town. The cyclists started the rally in front of the clock tower. On their way back, they visited two Buddhist temples before the Thai cyclists returned home.

This is the fifth tour which aims to strengthen the friendship between the ASEAN countries, promote travel on the borders, and develop border trade. The Friendship Cycling Association also donated two monasteries and an orphanage at the ceremony.—Kyaw Soe (Kawthoung) ■ (Translated by Hay Mar)

Over 1 mln books to be put on sale in Yangon

THE world's largest book sale, the Big Bad Wolf Book Sale, will be held at the Myanmar Event Park in Yangon, from 18 to 28 January. Entry to the sale will be free.

The Big Bad Wolf Book Sale is known for Augmented Reality

(AR) books across Asia, and is the sole agent of Little Hippo AR books.

"We believe that most children who come for the book sale would love to read the famous Little Hippo AR books," said U Myo Aung, the

director of Read 2 Read Myanmar, which is the event's organizer.

The sale will feature over one million new English books, including fiction, nonfiction, business, health, cooking, and comics, with discounts up to 90

per cent.

The Big Bad Wolf Book Sale began in 2009 in Malaysia. It has been held in countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and UAE since then.—GNLM ■ (Translated by Hay Mar)

Sesame processing plant begins operations in Magway Region

A sesame processing plant which can daily produce 7 tons of value-added sesame per hour and 6 tons of purified sesame oil every 8 hours started operations yesterday in Magway Region.

“The plant is making value-added products using good manufacturing practices (GMP) and it is only processing sesame seeds supplied by 600 growers from 30 villages in Minbu and Magway townships. The sesame is being produced in accordance with Good Agriculture Practices (GAP). The value-added sesame products will be placed in the export markets. The sesame oil will be distributed under the Taungthuyadana trademark label,” said an official in charge of the plant.

“The plant was initiated under the Italy-based Progetto Continenti (PC) project, which aims to consolidate the productive base of small-scale sesame



The sesame processing plant daily produces 7 tons of value-added sesame per hour and 6 tons of purified sesame oil every 8 hours in Magway. PHOTO: ZEYATU (MAGWAY)

growers through their training and organization, promotion of sustainable agriculture, and

upgradation of the value chain. When that project's term was nearly due, sesame growers'

groups were set up to help growers who participated in the project to find a market. Now, they

are supplying raw materials to sesame processing plants,” said U Naing Win Lat, project manager for agriculture.

The cost of the new facility is estimated at Ks180 million, including infrastructure costs for electricity and water, and installation of sesame seeds cleaning machine, weighing machine, packaging machine, oil producing machine, storage tank, laboratory, and drainage system, which was carried out with the use of Italian technology.

“Those growers who have linked with the plant have a firm market. Also, they do not have to pay additional charges to brokers,” said U Sein Aung Min, a member of a sesame grower group from Nankan Village in Magway Township.—Zeyatu (Magway)

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon) ■

November inflation up as commodity prices rise

THE average inflation rate, based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), increased to 6.66 per cent in November from 6.34 per cent in October, according to a recent report issued by the Central Statistical Organization (CSO), under the Ministry of Planning and Finance.

China's suspension on importation of some agro products through the border since October has halted some freight forwarding services, hiking up commodity prices and pushing up the inflation rate.

Last month showed an increase in CPI for the food group, non-food group, tobacco and beverages group, household goods and maintenance group, transportation group, other commodities group, clothing, health, education services, recreation and culture, and housing groups, except the telecommu-

nications group.

Additionally, the Myanmar Kyat depreciated against the US dollar in November compared to October. Transportation costs also rose despite the dip in fuel oil prices. Moreover, Myanmar people conduct charitable events and donations during the Tazaung-dine festival. The high demand for goods during the period pushes up commodity prices.

This year, the average inflation rate was the lowest in March at 4.03 per cent. Last month's inflation rate is the highest level this year.

In November, core inflation, which strips out volatile food and energy prices, was up by 0.32 per cent compared to October. In October this year, the year-on-year inflation rate touched a high of 8.33 per cent.

In November, Mandalay City recorded the highest inflation

rate of 11.5 per cent, followed by Rakhine State at 10.78 per cent, and Magway Region at 9.11 per cent. The year-on-year inflation rate fluctuated, with a maximum rate of 12.36 per cent in Magway Region and a minimum rate of 4.82 per cent in Ayeyawady Region.

The inflation rate was earlier evaluated on the basis of a 2006 survey, but the base year was later changed to 2012. The Central Statistical Organization conducted a Household Income and Expenditure Survey in 82 townships in November 2012.

The concerned authorities have made provisions to reduce the inflation rate while laying down policies on finance, currency, trade, and foreign currency control in the second five-year National Development plan. —Htet Myat ■ (Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Agricultural officials work to expand coffee acreage in Thandaunggyi

THE Agriculture Department under the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Irrigation is making efforts to expand the area under coffee plantation in Thandaunggyi Township in Kayah State by 5,000 acres.

The department organized a meeting at its office in Thandaunggyi Township on Saturday morning to discuss its coffee cultivation target with local growers, and officials from the Coffee Cluster and other crop associations.

The meeting mainly focused on the expansion of coffee acreage in the township. Participants also discussed the implementation of an organic zone in the township and cultivation of

villous amomum, a plant in the ginger family grown in South China and Southeast Asia, including Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam, and Laos.

At present, Myanmar's coffee has gained in importance among other agricultural products. The Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Irrigation has said it hopes to increase coffee acreage to 200,000 and export 60,000 tonnes by 2030.

Several tonnes of Myanmar coffee are currently being exported to Switzerland, China, Thailand, the US, South Korea, Japan, Germany, Hong Kong, and other countries.—Khine Khant ■ (Translated by Khaing Thanda Lwin)

Trade with India up over 60% in October

TRADE between Myanmar and India topped US\$153 million in the first month of the 2018-2019 fiscal year, with exports of \$58.5 million and imports worth \$94.9 million, according to monthly statistics issued by the Ministry of Commerce.

When compared with last October, the total bilateral trade increased by \$58.5 million, or 61.6

per cent. Myanmar's imports exceeded exports in external trade with India, the world's second most populous country.

Last October, Myanmar-India trade stood at \$94.8 million, with exports amounting to \$20.5 million and imports totalling \$74.4 million.

Myanmar conducts trade with India through the maritime

routes as well as border checkpoints. The two countries trade goods via the Tamu and Reed border checkpoints.

Myanmar exports areca nuts, ginger, saffron, turmeric, bay leaves, fruits and vegetables, fishery, forest products, and human hair to India. It imports medicines, oil cakes, electronic products, motorbikes, cotton

yarn, non-alloy steel, and other construction materials.

Myanmar's trade with the Republic of India reached its peak of \$1.9 billion in the fiscal year 2016-2017. The figure decreased to \$1.47 billion in the 2017-2018 FY. During the mini-budget period between April and September this year, bilateral trade exceeded \$800 million, with \$292 million in

exports and \$508 million in imports. According to the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA), Indian investment in Myanmar during the mini-budget period stood at \$19.9 million. In October this year, the country saw no new investments from India.—Swe Nyein ■ (Translated by Khaing Thanda Lwin)

Gov't to work with global agencies to prevent spread of diseases from animals

MYANMAR will step up cooperation with international organizations to prevent the spread of infectious diseases from the trans-border trade of livestock, as part of efforts to ensure food safety in the country.

The Union Minister for Agriculture, Livestock, and Irrigation, Dr. Aung Thu, stressed the need for increased cooperation with the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the ASEAN meat industry to control and prevent the spread of diseases from the trans-border livestock trade, as an outbreak can hinder exports and imports of meat and animals.

He made the remarks during a meeting with officials of the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department at the ministry in Nay Pyi Taw on Thursday.

At the meeting, the Union Minister and officials discussed the progress of works in 2018



Union Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation, Dr. Aung Thu, addresses current and future works of the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department at a meeting in Nay Pyi Taw. **PHOTO: MNA**

and future works to be carried out in the 2018-2019 fiscal year.

The Union minister also stressed the importance of conducting a livestock census, the process of collecting and recording statistics of animals that the ministry is trying to

release, accurately and within a fixed period.

A livestock census plays an important role in calculating a country's GDP, drawing up of projects, and laying down of policies, said the Union Minister.

A census is important when

it comes to efforts to develop the meat industry, ensure food safety, standardize livestock products, and set labor standards for livestock industry, he added.

The minister then discussed research methods, practical application of research

findings, and annual upgrade of research laboratories.

Dr. Ye Tun Win, the Director-General of the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department, reported the work conducted in each fiscal year and future tasks to be carried out by his department. After hearing the reports, the Union Minister looked into the requirements.

To prevent a decline in population of beef cattle due to exports, the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department is implementing projects for breeding livestock, including dairy cattle and buffalo, and taking a one-health approach, which includes vaccinating cattle, to prevent the spread of diseases from animals.

Awareness programmes, through educative programmes and the media, on the prevention of diseases transmitted by animals are also being conducted regularly.—MNA ■
(Translated by Kyaw Zin Tun)

Rakhine State Chief Minister visits Hla Pho Khaung Reception Centre, Kanyinchaung SEZ construction site

RAKHINE State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu visited Hla Pho Khaung Reception Centre, inspected the construction progress of Kanyinchaung Special Economic Zone (SEZ), and met with residents of Kyein Chaung Village yesterday.

The Chief Minister was accompanied by State Chief Justice U Kyauk, and state ministers U Kyaw Aye Thein and U Win Myint at Hla Pho Khaung Reception Centre in the morning. They inspected the completion of housing units and roads and access to electricity and drinking water in the centre.

They listened to a presentation by the centre's administrator, U Soe Shwe Aung, concerning the centre's processes, completion of infrastructure construction, access to electricity and drinking water, storage of rations, preventive measures for fire emergencies, and health-care services.

Next, the Chief Minister and entourage traveled to Kanyinchaung SEZ. They inspected the complete construction of warehouses, other buildings and roads, and the completion status of project implementations.



Rakhine State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu meets with residents of Kyein Chaung Village yesterday.

PHOTO: THET LWIN SOE

They received an explanation from U Aung Min Thein, Vice Chairman of the Kanyinchaung SEZ Construction Project Committee, concerning project statistics, funding status, project period, ongoing, complete and future processes.

Afterwards, the Chief Minister and entourage arrived in Kyein Chuang Village and met with local residents. He asked the villagers to openly discuss their livelihood, social aspects, busi-

nesses, education, and health-care so that the government can address their needs. The villagers talked about their difficulties concerning their businesses, transportation, healthcare, education, and social aspects, and the Chief Minister and officials discussed on these and offered solutions.

Later in the evening, the Chief Minister and entourage visited Mingyi Village, met with local residents, and inspected

their livelihoods, the completed school building, and the land for constructing a monastery. He then talked with the villagers and made necessary recommendations. Afterwards, the Chief Minister and entourage paid obeisance to Mingyi Sayadaw U Nanda Bhadda and Weik Kyein Taw Sayadaw U Dhamma Thayna, and visited the historic Weik Kyein Dattaw Pagoda.—Mawsi, Ko Min ■ (Translated by Zaw Htet Oo)

MHMF to elect new members for its executive committee

Myanmar Hiking and Mountaineering Federation announced yesterday that it will elect for new members for the executive committee at Reno Hotel on Kaba Aye Pagoda Road in Yangon on 27th December.

The federation has invited its members across the country to attend the election.

The Myanmar Hiking and Mountaineering Federation was established in 1960.

The members of the MHMF scaled the Hsin Montaing which is over 6000 ft high near Kalaw in southern Shan State.

They are preparing to scale the Mt. Khaw Nu M'cong in Chin State in February, 2019, and Mt. Phonkanrazi in Kachin State in April, 2019.—MNA (Translated by Zaw Zin Lin)

Death toll from Somali bombing rises to 20

MOGADISHU (Somalia) — The death toll from a double car-bomb attack near the presidential palace in Somalia rose to 20 on Sunday, police said.

Police on Saturday had said seven people were killed following the two blasts in Mogadishu, which were claimed by the jihadist Shabaab group.

“The number of victims who were killed in the blasts increased to 20 and more than 40 others have been wounded,” said a Somali police official, Ibrahim Mohamed.

He said the toll had risen after some of those wounded on Saturday died in hospital.

Both civilians and members from the security forces were among the casualties, the official said.

Somalia’s London-based Universal TV said on Saturday

that three of its staff were among the fatalities, naming one as Somali and British dual national Awil Dahir.

Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed condemned the “cowardly attacks”.

“We will continue defeating terrorists in order to lead the Somali people to stability and prosperity,” he said in a statement.

Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire visited the wounded in hospital. The first explosion happened at a checkpoint outside the national theatre, some 500 metres (yards) from the palace on Saturday morning.

The second blast, more powerful according to witnesses, came minutes later at a nearby crossroads.

Mohamed Abdullahi, a senior local official who was slightly



People stand next to debris at the scene of a car bombing attack in Mogadishu, Somalia, on 22 December 2018. PHOTO: AFP

wounded in the first blast, said members of his security team were among the dead.

“Seven of my security escort and a driver were among those killed in the blast, but such attacks will encourage our efforts to redouble the war against terrorists”, he said in a statement.

A Shabaab statement on

Saturday said the Islamist group’s “martyrdom operation” had targeted “a security checkpoint that used to protect the presidential palace.”

The group was largely driven out of the capital in 2011 and has lost many of its strongholds. But it retains control of large rural swathes of the country and

continues to wage a guerrilla war against the authorities.

The group has vowed to topple the internationally-backed government. The worst carnage to date in Somalia occurred on October 14 last year when 512 people were killed in Hodan, a busy commercial district in the capital. — AFP ■

Pair freed without charge in London airport drones probe



Gatwick said its runway was open and it aimed to run a full schedule over the weekend. PHOTO: AFP

LONDON (United Kingdom) — A man and a woman arrested over the drone disruption that brought Christmas getaway flights to a standstill at London’s Gatwick Airport were released without charge on Sunday, police said.

A 47-year-old man and a 54-year-old woman from the town of Crawley, near Britain’s second-busiest airport, were arrested on Saturday.

The police swooped after three days of disruption from Wednesday to Friday, affecting 140,000 passengers.

“Both people have fully co-operated with our enquiries and I am satisfied that they are

no longer suspects in the drone incidents at Gatwick,” Sussex Police detective chief superintendent Jason Tingley said in a statement.

A damaged drone has been found near the airfield perimeter, he added.

Drones were sighted buzzing around the airfield more than 50 times, forcing the government to bring in specialist military resources to help counter the threat.

The dangers posed by drones include the possibility of a device smashing into a passenger plane or being sucked up into an engine where its highly flammable lithium battery could

cause a catastrophe.

“Our inquiry continues at a pace to locate those responsible for the drone incursions, and we continue to actively follow lines of investigation,” said Tingley.

“We ask for the public’s continued support by reporting anything suspicious, contacting us with any information in relation to the drone incidents at Gatwick.”

The airport has offered a £50,000 (\$63,000, 56,000 euro) reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for the disruption.

Damaged drone recovered

Tingley said a damaged drone was found on Saturday close to the airport perimeter.

“That is, of course, a significant line of inquiry,” he told the BBC.

“We are not back to square one. Whilst these two people have been in custody, we have a number of lines of inquiry and persons of interest.

“We are still progressing those lines of inquiry, including house-to-house inquiries around the sightings of the drone.”

Under recently-introduced

laws in Britain, drones cannot be flown near aircraft or within a kilometre (about half a mile) of an airport, or at an altitude of over 400 feet (122 metres).

Violators face up to five years in prison for endangering an aircraft. Gatwick, around 30 miles (50 kilometres) south of the British capital, is the eighth-busiest airport in Europe.

On its website, Gatwick said its runway was open and it aimed to run a full schedule over the weekend. Passengers were warned to expect some delays and cancellations as their airport tried to recover its operations.

“Safety is Gatwick’s top priority and we are grateful for passengers’ continued patience as we work to get them to their final destination in time for Christmas,” the airport said.

The main opposition Labour Party has called for an independent inquiry after accusing the government of failing to act on the risks posed by drones.

But a Department for Transport spokesman dismissed claims of missed opportunities to prevent the Gatwick incident as “a combination of nonsense and gross misrepresentation”.

— AFP ■

8 confirmed dead in Russian mine fire, 1 still missing

MOSCOW — Rescuers have found eight bodies of nine workers trapped in a fire-stricken potassium mine in the Russian city of Solikamsk, TASS news agency reported Sunday.

On Saturday, a fire broke out at the depth of 340 meters in the mine in Russia’s Perm Territory near the Ural Mountains. Eight of the 17 people working underground were evacuated.

The rescuers are trying to find the last worker trapped in the mine, but his chance of survival is little, TASS said, citing the on-site rescue command.

Relatives of the deceased have arrived at the site and the local government promised to provide all necessary aid.

The company Uralkali that owns the mine said the fire could have been caused by the construction works in the mine. Russian President Vladimir Putin has listened to reports of the accident and demanded all necessary measures to assist the families of the victims. — Xinhua ■

Independence and Eternal Peace

GENERALLY speaking, independence means regaining lost sovereignty, territorial integrity, and liberty. Independence is peace and vice versa. No one can deny the fact that Myanmar is an independent and sovereign country. But peace still eludes the nation.

Without peace, the taste of independence, the fruits of independence, liberty, and living in harmony are dreams for citizens. During the WW II, people across the globe suffered the brunt of violent battles. As a consequence of the war, people had to live in dire poverty.

In the wake of the war, many nations became independent. At that time, independence was not always complete. While there were some countries enjoying full independence, there were also countries enjoying only quasi-independence. This situation can be seen even in this day and age. Wherever it is so, independence cannot be said to be full-fledged.

There are several countries in the present such as Iraq, Libya, Syria, Afghanistan and Yemen which face a constant threat of war and terrorist attacks, and therefore, these non-peaceful countries cannot be said to be enjoying full independence. In such countries, instability prevails and national security is threatened. The IS still poses a threat to Syria and Libya, the Al Qaeda to West Algeria, and extremists to Afghanistan. Due to the terrorist threat and regional instability, countries in the Middle East and northern Africa are unable to enjoy the taste of peace. Foreign investors are reluctant to invest in these countries, and as a result, their economies are suffering and their people are feeling hopeless.

Although Myanmar has not enjoyed peace fully, it is fortunate that conditions here are better than in some other countries. But, the loss in terms of development is the same. Remote and far flung areas in the country are far behind the urban areas when it comes to development as well as security. The sound of gun fire, a product of armed conflict, still threatens lives in these areas.

There are 18 armed groups in Myanmar acknowledged by the government. Of them, 10 have agreed to a ceasefire. Now, efforts are being made to ensure ceasefire with the remaining groups. Recently, the Tatmadaw announced the suspension of military operations in the respective operation areas for four months and ten days. The move was welcomed by the ethnic armed groups, as well as international community. It was good news for the people, too.

The move paves the way for peace, which has eluded Myanmar for more than seventy years. This is a good sign moving forward. We firmly believe that a peaceful dialogue, instead of armed conflict, will surely bring peace to the country, making its independence complete. ■

Genuine Peace, Loving Kindness and Democracy

Hailing 71st Anniversary Independence Day

By INNYATRA

WELL experienced political pundits have defined and expounded that exchanging and sharing loving kindness between two sides could be termed and expressed as genuine principles of democracy.

When this definition is correct and true, then the genuine principles of democracy is about sharing and entrusting loving kindness, friendship and ties of closer relations, and in other words, the loving kindness is tantamount to peace.

Today, the road to democracy in Myanmar is based and founded on loving kindness. Agreeing to disagree with independent mind and having the guts to embrace the harsh criticism are the genuine principles of democracy. Tolerance, forbearance and endurance are in fact the genuine loving kindness.

Greed, anger and ignorance usually skirt the spirit and soul of all human beings in this mundane world. When these three bad elements are broaden and enlarged, things move into the harm's way and wreak havoc.

Ongoing civil wars in many countries are the job of the three negative elements, resulting with deaths and destructions, and forcing people into war torn misery. These three appalling elements also bring deadly arms and ammunitions.

Deaths and Destructions

For regaining independence, Myanmar fought against imperialists and Fascists, and that 27 March 1945 was the day on which the country revolt against Fascists. Following the fight against the Fascists for about six months, the Second World War had ended, with alarming death tolls from both sides compounded with damages.

During the revolution, many of our patriots made a sacrifice of their own life for the goal and died in the war by fighting against the aggressors and enemies for whom we had neither regret nor remorse.

We observed the situation as the consequence and result of the war.

Bad and worse intangible inheritances were left behind after the war in Myanmar such as that of killing each other; that of holding deadly arms and ammunitions,



A special meeting between the Union Government and NCA Signatory EAOs in Nay Pyi Taw on October 16, 2018. PHOTO: MNA

that of antagonistic mindsets and immoral mentality.

During the height of heavy war, killing the enemies and aggressors was the usual and typical occurrence, and that was apathetic and indifferent feeling to people. The cruelty and ugliness of war was to be considered as remorse and repentance.

Regret and remorse

Just three months after regaining the independence in the nation, the brethren who fought the enemies together as band of brothers turned their weapons against each other and killed, leaving behind death, destruction and untold miseries, adding with misery and remorse.

In the age old tradition and culture of Myanmar community and society, the argument and fight among the brethren usually is temporary, and they soon catch as close and intimate brothers. Such pattern and prototype is gone into thin air in the country, and the hostility persisted for over (70) years.

Breach of trust

The inheritance of mistrust is dangerous and hazardous, and that the anger and the ignorance should be viewed as lessons and stopped it.

The Republic of the Union Myanmar is a nation where our diverse nationalities reside together on the same land, drinking the

same source of water and holding each other in arms as if same offspring.

Traditionally in Myanmar, quarrel and enmity occurred only for a few while, and returning into normal close relation is the way of life of the past. The changing pattern and paradigm of hostility after the rule of colonialism and in the post-independence era should be reviewed and analyzed

The three ethnic armed groups, MNTJP, PSLF, and ULA, announced on 12 December that they will stop all armed operations and will continue to participate in the national reconciliation and peace process without resorting to violence.

with seriousness. Now is the time that we are implementing genuine democracy.

If we are aspiring for genuine democracy, we must abandon and discard the egotism and cancelled the notion "I am right". We must initiate the approach of loving kindness, as the essence of democracy.

Building Peace

Democracy means tolerance, forbearance, sharing and paying

back, and that it could be summed up as loving kindness.

The ego and the self-image should be washed out, and think the events from the angle of both sides.

The stage has been set to reflect from both sides, and the animosity has to be pushed away to the backyard, pointing the way to the road of genuine democracy. Moreover, the gateway to the

Following the statement, an announcement about ceasefire and eternal peace was made by the Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Office on 21 December 2018 which stated that in order to conduct these discussions Tatmadaw will cease all its region wise military operations from 21 December 2018 to 30 April 2019. The artillery fires and gun shots would be silent in the ethnic areas for four months and ten days.

Democratic transition is to be implemented along with the peace building. In other words, it is to build peace while implementing democracy.

Democracy accompanies peace through loving kindness. It is to be noted that 21 December 2018 brings in the auspiciousness to the country and the people of Myanmar.

Ceasefire

Stopping the war and making ceasefire could only be realized through loving kindness, compassion and empathy, which in turn save lives and put away death and destruction in the country. The auspicious and promising news has emerged.

The three ethnic armed groups, MNTJP, PSLF, and ULA, announced on 12 December that they will stop all armed operations and will continue to participate in the national reconciliation and peace process without resorting to violence.

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Genuine Loving Kindness and Democracy

Over the years, eight ethnic armed groups came forward and signed the NCA, followed by two ethnic armed groups. And now, three ethnic armed groups have pledged in working out to make the guns silent, for which the whole country is sure to utter the tradi-

tional term "well done".

Loving kindness, compassion and empathy would create an atmosphere of love, peace and joy; however, we have to wait and see whether the calm ambience is temporary or eternal. Hopefully, the peace is forever.

The time is auspicious as it coincides with the 71st Anniversary of Independence Day. When the guns fell silent with the celebrations of Independence, it is an omen of peace in the first step depicting the essence of independence. Independence means the crafting of democracy; and that democracy means spreading loving kindness; and that the loving kindness generates peace.

These days, we often hear the utterance and expression of "Stop War". Conflicts and wars popped up through two armed groups or more, and that they have to stop by themselves. It is not the task of one group only.

Now, we are witnessing the start of ceasefire in pragmatic approach.

The writer of this article is optimistic that the people would be calm and serene as the loving kindness is being enveloped over them, and that the Union of Myanmar may have peace and prosperity.

Translated by UMT (Ahlon)

71st Anniversary Independence Day National Objectives

1. All National Ethnic Races to defend and protect with "collective strength" to ensure Non-disintegration of the Union, Non-disintegration of the Unity of National Ethnic Races and Perpetuation of National Sovereignty.
2. For the emergence of a Democratic Federal Union, to strive towards creating a suitable Constitution for the State in accordance with democratic standards.
3. To effectively combat and protect against the use of drugs and narcotic substances which can harm and erode the health and character of all citizens.
4. To continuously strive with determined effort for the balanced and equitable development of all states and regions.
5. To assist from all fronts the Union Government's efforts for private sector development and the emergence of a fully-developed market economy.

H.E. U Soe Lynn Han Presents Credentials to King of the Netherlands

U Soe Lynn Han, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, presented his Credentials to His Majesty King Willem-Alexander, King of the Netherlands, on 19 December 2018 in the Hague. — MNA



Myanmar Daily Weather Report (Issued at 7:00 pm Sunday 23rd December, 2018)

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

FORECAST VALID UNTIL AFTERNOON OF THE 24th December, 2018: Rain or thundershowers will be isolated in Taninthayi Region and Mon State. Degree of certainty is (80%). Weather will be partly cloudy in Upper Sagaing, Yangon and Ayeyarwady Regions, Kachin, Shan, Chin and Kayin States and generally fair 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: Likelihood of isolated light rain in Taninthayi Region.

FORECAST FOR NAY PYI TAW AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 24th December, 2018: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR YANGON AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 24th December, 2018: Generally fair weather.

FORECAST FOR MANDALAY AND NEIGHBOURING AREA FOR 24th December, 2018: Generally fair weather.

India's no-frills hotel giant eyes European markets

MUMBAI (India)—An Indian startup is turning its attention towards usurping the West's largest hotel chains after establishing itself as India's biggest player and shaking up the Chinese market.

Oyo Rooms, which specialises in no-frills accommodation, was only formed in 2013 but is already worth an estimated \$5 billion after receiving funding from international venture capitalists.

The app-based company has quickly become India's largest hotel firm by number of rooms and one of the biggest in China as it pursues an aggressive expansion abroad.

Oyo, as it is commonly called, entered the British market in September and is eyeing other European countries, fuelled by money from Japanese group SoftBank and America's Sequoia Capital.

"We are seeing great results in all our global markets and are growing aggressively in London," Oyo's founder, 25-year-old Ritesh Agarwal, told AFP. "We will definitely consider expanding into the broader European region," he added in the telephone interview.

Oyo teams up with owners of budget hotels to help connect them with tourists looking for cheap but clean accommodation that meets certain hygiene standards. Oyo staff carry out inspections of hotels. If they are deemed to be up to scratch then they are made available for booking on Oyo's website and mobile app.

Many offer hot water, free wifi and regular laundry services for as little as 1,800 rupees (\$25) a night, well below what mid and high-range hotels charge. The startup takes a commission for facilitating bookings while the hotels—often small, independent ventures—are



Ritesh Agarwal's startup helps connect budget hotels with tourists looking for cheap but clean accommodation. PHOTO: AFP

re-branded as an "Oyo hotel".

The company's distinctive red and white logo has been put up outside thousands of Indian hotels across the vast Asian country over the past five years. Those signs could soon become omnipresent across Europe's main cities, unsettling major hotel chains like Marriott International if Agarwal has his way.

"We want to bring quality affordable spaces for travellers and help neighbourhood hotels beat the big hotel chains," he said. "Small asset owners are finding it hard to survive while the big hotel companies are continuing to win in every neighbourhood. "We want to lead and empower those small franchise owners and make sure that they thrive," Agarwal added.

Growth

The entrepreneur, now one of India's youngest billionaires, founded Oyo when he was just 19 years old.

He had seen enough dingy hotels promising services that they didn't offer to know that

there was a gap in the market for a company that would give accommodation a stamp of approval.

It started with a tie-up in New Delhi and now vouches for 164,000 hotel rooms in India and 180,000 in China.

Oyo claims it has broken into China's top 10 hotel chains since entering in October 2017 and announced last month that it was investing \$600 million there to bolster operations further. Oyo received \$1 billion in funding from a consortium of investors led by SoftBank in September this year, increasing its valuation five-fold and making it one of India's wealthiest startups.

Oyo also operates in Nepal, Malaysia, Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates and could feasibly stake a claim to be the world's fastest-growing hotel chain.

The company has been on a hiring spree and recently appointed the former chief of budget Indian airline IndiGo Aditya Ghosh as its new CEO to lead its forays into new markets.

It is also tying up with more upmarket properties through its Oyo Townhouse project.

Analysts warn that Oyo could be in danger of overstretching itself if it continues to grow at the same pace.

"(Their) key challenge is to ensure level of services and maintaining quality over a period of time, especially during the fast growth stage with a lean team," Bhairav Dalal, a partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers, told AFP. Their expansion hasn't been welcomed by everyone in India. Gurbaxish Singh Kohli, president of the Hotel and Restaurant Association of Western India, claimed to AFP that Oyo was involved in "predatory pricing" while plenty of users have left negative comments about some of the hotels online. Agarwal insists he always welcomes criticism and feedback.

"We have had many good and bad days and in time we have been able to learn and improve and not just improve incrementally but become a market leader," he said.—AFP ■

Oil prices dive amid fears of economic slowdown

HOUSTON—Oil prices decreased sharply during the week ending 21 December amid weak world stock market and the fear of slow global economic growth. The price of West Texas Intermediate (WTI) for February delivery decreased 11.0 per cent, and Brent crude for February delivery decreased 10.7 per cent. In the previous week ending 14 December, WTI decreased 2.7 per cent, and Brent crude decreased 2.3 per cent. At the end of the week, WTI settled at 51.2 US dollars a barrel, while Brent crude closed at 60.28 dollars a barrel. On Monday, oil prices slumped as rising US shale output and Cushing inventories deepened concerns over a global supply glut. WTI fell 1.32 dollars to settle at 49.88 dollars a barrel, while Brent crude was down 0.67 dollar to close at 59.61 dollars a barrel.

Moreover, oil output from seven major US shale basins is projected to surge 134,000 barrels per day to 8.166 million barrels per day in January next year. Adding to the worrying impact, oil stockpiles at Cushing, US state of Oklahoma, a delivery hub for US crude futures, rose over 1 million barrels between 11 December and 14 December, exceeding investors' expectation. Analysts said that the increased inventories have pulled the crude into a deeper bearish market.

On Tuesday, oil prices dived as mounting anxieties over supply surplus cast a pall over investors across the board. WTI plunged 3.64 dollars to settle at 46.24 dollars a barrel, while Brent crude slumped 3.35 dollars to close at 56.26 dollars a barrel. Oil prices plunged more than 7 per cent to the lowest level since August 2017, as global supply continued piling up amid sagging demand due to signs of slowing global growth. Worsening the situation, investors' confidence was further retreating amid broad sell-off in US stock markets. On Wednesday, oil prices recovered wiping off some of the sharp losses on Tuesday, as US stockpiles fell last week and Federal Reserves announced an interest rates hike for the fourth time this year. WTI rose 0.96 dollar to settle at 47.2 dollars a barrel, while Brent crude jumped up 0.98 dollar to close at 57.24 dollars a barrel.—Xinhua ■

China's rubber industry reports strong profits

BEIJING—China's rubber industry saw strong growth in profits in the first 10 months of this year, according to new data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

In the January-October period, the total profits of 373 tracked companies rose 31.14 per cent year on year to 13.07

billion yuan (about 1.9 billion US dollars), the ministry said in a statement.

"The industry's profitability was better than the same period of last year," the statement said.

Total output of the industry rose 6.31 per cent to 283.13 billion yuan, while sales revenue rose 6.12 per cent to 281.62 billion

yuan. In the same period, major tyre manufacturers saw output rise 1.83 percent and profits grow by 41.9 per cent, the statement noted.

Since the latter half of 2017, many tyre makers have announced price hikes, citing higher costs due to rises in raw material prices.—Xinhua ■

Turkey, Israel in new war of words

ANKARA (Turkey)—Turkey on Sunday hit out at Israel’s “lawless occupation” of Palestinian territory after the Israeli prime minister accused Turkey of “massacres” against Kurds in a new war of words.

Relations between Turkey and Israel have been tense this year over multiple issues including a controversial law passed by the Israeli parliament in July which defined the country as the nation state of the Jewish people.

Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu said President Recep Tayyip Erdogan “should not preach to Israel” after the Turkish leader warned young Turks on Saturday: “Do not kick the enemy you have brought down

to the ground. You are not a Jew in Israel.”

Netanyahu said Erdogan was “the occupier of northern Cyprus, whose army massacres women and children in Kurdish villages, inside and outside Turkey” in a tweet late on Saturday.

Erdogan’s spokesman and chief advisor Ibrahim Kalin lambasted Netanyahu, who he said “should end the lawless occupation of Palestinian lands and the brutal oppression of Palestinian people” instead of “begging President Erdogan not to speak out the truth”.

Kalin added in the tweet on Sunday: “Bashing Erdogan or using Kurds as a political chip will not save him from his do-

mestic troubles.”

On 14 December, Erdogan also said Palestinians were subjected to “pressures, violence and intimidation policies no less grave than the oppression done to the Jews during the Second World War”, referring to the Holocaust.

Turkey-Israel ties have been strained since Ankara ordered the Israeli ambassador to leave Turkey in May over the killing of protesters along the border with the Gaza Strip.

Erdogan, who regards himself as a champion of the Palestinians, has bitterly criticised Israel previously, calling it in July “the world’s most fascist and racist state”.—AFP ■

UK police arrest ‘stowaways’ who threatened cargo ship crew

LONDON (United Kingdom)—Four stowaways who reportedly threatened the crew of a cargo ship coming from Nigeria with iron bars were held on Saturday after British police boarded the vessel and arrested them. The Grande Tema, a 71,000-tonne ship which set off from Lagos on December 10, was boarded and secured by police late on Friday and brought into its destination port of Tilbury in Essex, east of London, on Saturday.

“Four men have been detained under the Immigration Act,” the local Essex Police force said.

The police intervention followed reports of “concerns for the safety of crew after a number of people were found

on board.

“No one on board the vessel has been injured.”

Paul Kyprianou, a spokesman for the ship’s owner Grimaldi Lines, said the four stowaways were discovered after the vessel set sail from Lagos.

They had been detained but managed to free themselves on Friday and the 27 crew members locked themselves in the bridge, he said.

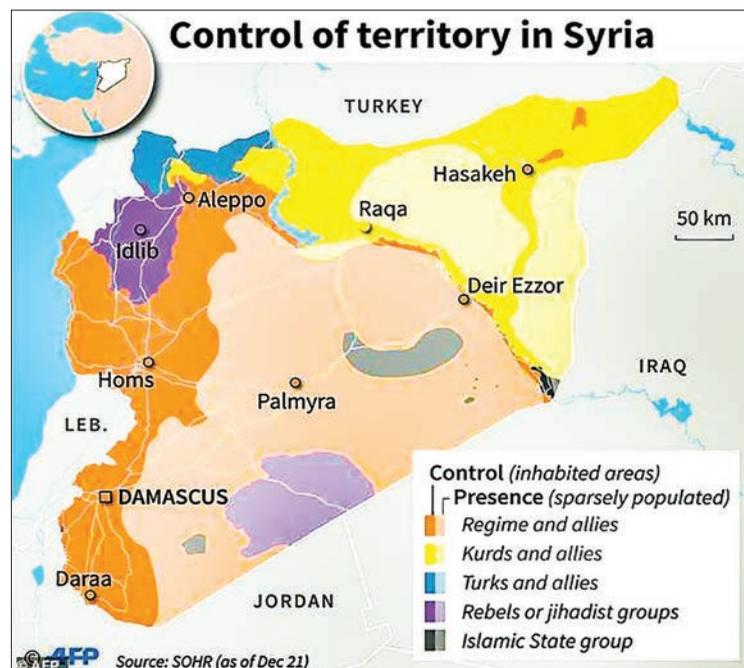
“They have been threatening the crew” with iron tubes, said Kyprianou, adding that the stowaways had wanted the ship to be directed very close to the British coast.

The Italian-flagged ship was carrying containers and machinery.—AFP ■

Turkey sends more troops to Syrian Kurdish area as US pulls out — monitor

BEIRUT (Lebanon) — Turkey on Saturday sent military reinforcements to northern Syria near an area controlled by Kurdish forces as Ankara threatens to carry out a fresh offensive to wipe them out, a war monitor said. The move comes after US President Donald Trump’s surprise announcement on Wednesday of the withdrawal of American troops stationed in northeastern Syria alongside Kurdish fighters, a long-time enemy of Turkey. Washington has for years supported the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the fight against the Islamic State group in Syria, as part of an international anti-jihadist coalition dominated by the People’s Protection Units (YPG). But on Wednesday Trump said he was ordering a withdrawal of the estimated 2,000 US troops in Syria because IS had been defeated, an assessment criticized by many.

“Around 35 tanks and other heavy weapons, carried aboard tank carriers, crossed the Jarablos border crossing in the early evening,” Rami Abdel Rahman, the head of the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, told AFP. “They headed for an area near the Sajour River, between Jarablos and Manbij, not far from the front lines where Kurdish fighters of the Manbij Military Council are stationed,” he added. Turkey accuses the YPG of being a “terrorist offshoot” of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) which has been waging an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984.—AFP ■



Territory control in Syria. PHOTO: AFP



In a historic first, in October the European Commission rejected Italy’s big-spending budget, which promised a universal basic income and scrapped pension reform. PHOTO: AFP

Italy Senate passes revised budget after EU standoff

ROME (Italy)—The Italian Senate on Sunday passed a revised 2019 budget agreed after a tense standoff with Brussels which saw the populist government water down key measures.

Senators passed the budget put forward by the governing coalition of the anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) and the anti-immigration League by 167 votes to 78, with three abstentions.

It was passed by a vote of confidence after midnight that avoided debate of around 700 amendments, provoking acrimonious scenes in the Senate with the opposition complaining about the lack of debate.

The budget is expected

to go to the lower house after Christmas and before a New Year deadline. In a historic first, in October the European Commission rejected Italy’s big-spending budget, which promised a universal basic income and scrapped pension reform. In a deal reached on Wednesday, Italy agreed to reduce the cost of both of its landmark measures, and is now committed to not adding to its colossal two-trillion euro debt load next year.

The EU and Italy negotiated intensely with both sides worried that a protracted feud would alarm the markets and ignite a debt crisis in the eurozone’s third biggest economy. Without the compromise, Italy would have

ultimately faced a fine of up to 0.2 per cent of the nation’s GDP after a long and rancorous process with its eurozone partners. The talks centred on the so-called structural deficit, which includes all public spending minus debt payments. Italy’s first budget was set to blow through commitments made by the previous government, and require Rome raising even more debt. Last week’s deal anticipates that this will now be balanced, with the overall deficit target lowered to 2.04 per cent of GDP. Italy’s public debt is a big problem and now sits at a huge 2.3 trillion euros (\$2.6 trillion), or 131 per cent of Italy’s GDP—way above the 60 per cent EU ceiling.—AFP ■

Abe, Trump to meet in Davos in late January to discuss trade, N Korea

TOKYO—Japan and the United States are making arrangements for a leaders' summit around 22 January on the fringes of the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Japanese government sources said on Sunday.

The talks between Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and President Donald Trump are expected to focus on bilateral trade negotiations starting around March and North Korean nuclear disarmament, the sources said.

It would be their 10th summit. Abe will likely travel from Russia to Switzerland as Tokyo and Moscow are arranging a summit between Abe and Russian President Vladimir Putin on 21 January, they said.

The Office of the US Trade Representative said Friday the United States would "ensure that Japan avoids manipulating exchange rates" and seek



US President Donald Trump (l) and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, along with other Group of 20 leaders, gather for a group photo in Buenos Aires on 30 November, 2018, during the opening day of their two-day summit. **PHOTO: YODO NEWS**

the inclusion of trade in services, including the telecommunications and financial sectors, in any agreement.

But Japanese officials have said they have no plans to include a currency provision in a Japan-US trade deal, partly

because it could affect monetary policy set by the Bank of Japan. Tokyo wants to focus on goods trade.—Kyodo News ■

99 ancient tombs found in Inner Mongolia

HOHHOT—A cluster of 99 ancient tombs dating back more than 2,000 years have been found in northern China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, according to local authorities.

An archaeological team from the regional institute of cultural relics and archaeology discovered a complex of tombs in Jungar Banner, including 99 tombs and a sacrificial pit dat-

ing between the late Warring States Period (475-221 BC) and the early Western Han Dynasty (202 BC-8 AD).

Most of the tomb owners were found without coffins in tombs that vary in size. The biggest measured about five meters in length, three meters in width and three meters in height, and the smallest was barely larger than a human body.

Animal offerings, including skeletons of goats, cattle and dogs, were found in nearly one-third of the tombs.

Animal sacrifice was a common burial ritual among residents living along the Great Wall during the Warring States Period, according to archaeologists. The Great Wall wound through part of northern China at that time.

Cooking utensils that dated back to the late Warring States Period, such as ceramic kettles, were unearthed, as well as 10 bronze government seals from the Western Han Dynasty.

"This shows the area of the tombs that was under the control of the central government during the early Western Han Dynasty," said Hu Chunbai, head of the archaeological team.—Xinhua ■

S Korean destroyer locked radar on MSDF plane for a few minutes

TOKYO—A South Korean destroyer that allegedly directed fire-control radar at a Maritime Self-Defence Force patrol plane earlier in the week locked it for a few minutes, Japanese government sources said on Saturday.

Given such a duration of radar lock, Japanese government officials believe the South Korean ship aimed its radar at the MSDF P-1 aircraft on purpose, despite Seoul's explanation it was not used to track the plane.

The Defence Ministry on Saturday called the incident, which occurred Thursday, "extremely regrettable" and urged South

Korea to prevent a recurrence of such a "dangerous act" that could have led to a contingency.

The ministry said, following its "careful and detailed" analysis, it judged that fire-control radar—designed to accurately measure the direction and distance of a targeted object before launching an attack—was used by the South Korean Navy.

The South Korean destroyer equipped with anti-aircraft and anti-ship missiles was running within Japan's exclusive economic zone outside its territorial waters off the coast of Ishikawa Prefecture, central Japan, at the time

of the incident, according to the ministry. South Korean media reports say the South Korean Navy vessel was in operation to help a North Korean ship drifting near a sea border. One Japanese government source rejected South Korea's explanation, saying, "Had it been done by chance, the directing of radar on the MSDF aircraft should have ended instantly. It was done intentionally."

The Japanese government will likely demand detailed explanations from South Korea before deciding whether to take further action. The incident came amid chilling diplomatic ties between

Tokyo and Seoul due to recent court rulings in South Korea that ordered major Japanese companies to pay compensation for wartime forced labor. Japan has maintained that the issue of compensation has been settled "completely and finally" when the basic bilateral relations treaty was signed in 1965.

Kenji Kanasugi, director general of the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau at the Foreign Ministry, is expected to meet with South Korean Foreign Ministry officials and raise the radar issue when he visits Seoul from Sunday to Tuesday.—Kyodo News ■

Over 100,000 people advise on China's draft civil code

BEIJING—More than 100,000 people made suggestions on China's draft civil code during a two-month public opinion collection on the website of the country's top legislature.

The National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee received 437,986 pieces of opinions by 3 November when the collection was ended, the Legislative Affairs Commission under the NPC Standing Committee announced on Saturday.

The draft civil code was submitted to the top legislature for review at a bimonthly session of the NPC Standing Committee that ended on 31 August, beginning the second phase of formulating the country's long-expected civil code, which is expected to run until 2020.

It has six sections, namely provisions on property, contract, personality rights, marriage and family, inheritance, and torts, consisting of 1,034 articles in total.

According to the Legislative Affairs Commission, 3,000 pieces of opinions regarding the draft of provisions on contract were collected. Many called for regulations to deal with people occupying others' reserved seats and passengers grabbing the steering wheel from the drivers, both recent high-profile incidents.

The public raised nearly 1,100 pieces of opinions concerning the draft of provisions on tort.

The two sections of provisions on contract and tort are set to be reviewed by the lawmakers during a bimonthly session of the NPC scheduled from 23 to 29 December.—Xinhua ■

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222 dead as volcano-triggered tsunami hits Indonesia

JAKARTA — A volcano-triggered tsunami has left at least 222 people dead and hundreds more injured after slamming without warning into beaches around Indonesia's Sunda Strait, officials said Sunday, voicing fears that the toll would rise further.

Hundreds of buildings were destroyed by the wave, which hit the coast of southern Sumatra and the western tip of Java about 9:30 pm (1430 GMT) on Saturday after a volcano known as the "child" of Krakatoa erupted, national disaster agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho said.

Dramatic video posted on social media showed a wall of water suddenly

crashing into a concert by pop group "Seventeen" -- hurling band members off the stage and then flooding into the audience.

In a tearful Instagram post, frontman Riefian Fajarsyah said the band's bassist and road manager had been killed and his wife was missing.

Search and rescue teams were scouring rubble for survivors, with 222 people confirmed dead, 843 people injured and 28 missing, Nugroho said.

Tsunamis triggered by volcanic eruptions are relatively rare, caused by the sudden displacement of water or "slope failure", according to the International Tsunami Information Centre.

Unlike those caused by earthquakes, which trigger alert systems, they give authorities very little time to warn residents of the impending threat.

The destructive wave left a trail of uprooted trees and debris strewn across beaches. A tangled mess of corrugated steel roofing, timber and rubble was dragged inland at Carita beach, a popular spot for day-trippers on the west coast of Java.

Photographer Oystein Andersen described how he was caught up in the disaster while on the beach taking photos of Anak Krakatoa.

"I suddenly saw a big wave," he wrote on his Facebook page.



Rescuers and residents look for survivors along the coast in South Lampung on South Sumatra on 23 December 2018, after the area was hit by a tsunami on 22 December following an eruption of the Anak Krakatoa volcano. **PHOTO: AFP**

"I had to run, as the wave passed the beach and landed 15-20m inland. (The) next wave entered the hotel area where I was staying and downed cars on the road behind it."

The International Fed-

eration of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said the "powerful waves" reached a height of 30-90 centimetres (1-3 feet).

Asep Perangkat said he was with his family when the wave surged through

Carita, carving a swathe of destruction, dragging cars and shipping containers.

"Buildings on the edge of the beach were destroyed. Trees and electric poles fell to the ground," he told AFP.—AFP ■

Protected Chilean sea lions are the 'enemy' of fishermen

VALPARAÍSO (Chile)—Off the coast of Chile, fishermen face competition from a cunning carnivorous hunter that has decimated their industry due to its voracious appetite.

For Chile's fishermen, sea lions are a "plague."

"They're an enemy!" complained Mario Rojas to AFP. "We try to make them go away but it's impossible!"

Part of the wider seal family that was once hunted mercilessly all over the world, leaving some populations close to extinction, the South American

sea lion in Chile has been protected for the last 28 years.

Hunting them for their richly prized fur is illegal. Liberated from their

most dangerous predator—they are still prey for sharks and orcas—the sea



Sea lions hang around on the beach or under the wharf at San Antonio port waiting for fishermen to discard the scraps and entrails from their catches. **PHOTO: AFP**

mammal's population has been on the rise, helped in no small part by the abundant fodder they manage to steal from fisherman.

They have learnt to distinguish the sound of the fishing boats' motors, allowing them to follow the vessels as they head out to sea.

"The sea lions don't hunt anymore. They hear the noise of a boat and they know that the food is there," said Rojas.

With their sharp teeth and the enormous power in bodies that can weigh around 650 pounds (300

kilograms), they manage to destroy the fishing nets and gobble up the treats inside.

And they have some appetite, consuming 90 pounds of fish each a day.

Rojas says more than 80 per cent of the boats working in his area, around the port of Valparaiso, return from a day's work empty, with their nets shredded.

There, sea lions hang around on the beach or beneath the wharf, waiting for the scraps and entrails thrown back into the water by fishermen.—AFP ■

China strengthens pangolin protection

HEFEI—Chen Shengyou once had great skills when it came to poaching pangolin. A glimpse in a pangolin's cave, and Chen, a 73-year-old farmer from central China's Hunan Province, could identify the animal's gender, size and age.

However, Chen's unique skills are, thankfully, sure to be lost in the future as China has strengthened protection of wild animals in recent years. Instead of worrying, Chen feels gratified. "We used to hunt pangolin to make a living. But now, we lead such a good life that we do not hunt pangolin but protect the increasingly rare animal," he said.

Hailed as "forests guards," pangolins prey on ants and termites, which protects forests, dykes and dams. Pangolins are the world's most heavily trafficked mammal. They are under second-class state protection in China and the highest level of protection under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, which prohibits international trade of all eight pangolin species.

Pangolins are often involved in illegal trading because their meat is considered a delicacy and their scales believed to have medicinal qualities.

One million pangolins were illegally sold worldwide over the past 10 years. The number of pangolins involved in illegal trading has surpassed that of elephants and rhinoceros, leaving the species heavily endangered. China has strengthened protection of pangolins in recent years. A series of campaigns against pangolin trafficking have been launched by Chinese customs and public security departments. A total of 209 pangolin smuggling cases were busted from 2007 to 2016. However, this failed to put an end to illegal trading.—Xinhua ■

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

M.V UNI AMPLE VOY. NO. (0154-467 N/S)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V UNI AMPLE VOY. NO. (0154-467 N/S) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 24-12-2018 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.

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Japan's Emperor Akihito (3rd) waves during his birthday public appearance with other members of the Imperial family including Crown Princess Masako (1), Crown Prince Naruhito (2nd), (4th l to r) Empress Michiko, Prince Akishino, Princess Kiko, Princess Mako and Princess Kako at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo on 23 December, 2018. PHOTO: AFP

Japanese emperor stresses his peaceful reign ahead of abdication

TOKYO (Japan)—In a rare emotional address ahead of his abdication next year, Japanese Emperor Akihito said he took “deep comfort” that his long reign had been one of peace as he remembered the “countless lives” lost in World War II.

Akihito, in a pre-recorded speech to mark his 85th birthday on Sunday, also paid tribute to the Japanese people and Empress Michiko, the first commoner to join the tradition-bound imperial family who has been at his side for 60 years.

His voice trembling as he discussed the legacy of World War II, the emperor pointed to the “countless lives” lost in the conflict, which was fought under the name of his father Hirohito, who died in 1989.

Akihito also reiterated the importance of “accurately” teaching history to young people.

“I have believed it is important not to forget that countless lives were lost in World War II and that the peace and prosperity of post-war Japan was built upon the numerous sacrifices and tireless efforts made by the Japanese people, and to pass on this history accurately to those born after the war,” he said.

“It gives me deep comfort that the Heisei Era (his reign) is coming to an end, free of war in Japan,” he said.

During his reign, the soft-spoken Akihito has used his speeches and travels to express his strong pacifist views, which are sharply at odds with the aggressive expansionism Japan

pursued under his father’s rule.

His insistence on remembering history is in sharp contrast with conservative ideologues who have attempted to gloss over Japan’s wartime record. The widely adored emperor will next year become the first Japanese royal to abdicate in more than two centuries.

His eldest son Crown Prince Naruhito will ascend the Chrysanthemum throne on 1 May.

Akihito said his reign had been a quest to determine the role of the emperor as a “symbol of the state” under Japan’s pacifist post-war constitution, in contrast to his father Hirohito who was regarded as semi-divine.

And he thanked Empress Michiko for standing by his side. —AFP ■

Jon Bernthal opted out of major movie due to daughter’s coma

LOS ANGELES—Actor Jon Bernthal has revealed that he had to drop out of a major Hollywood project after his daughter suffered a seizure and went into coma.

In a profile published in *Men’s Health*, the actor said that he was set to play Dave Scott in the Ryan Gosling-starrer space drama “First Man” but after he dropped out the part went to Christopher Abbott.

He said his daughter Adeline was diagnosed with encephalitis, a potentially fatal viral infection that causes inflammation of the brain, when she was two.

Adeline was in a coma for three days, and when she

awoke she did not recognise her family.

His credited his wife, Erin Angle, a trauma nurse, for helping Adeline by staying calm and “pouring love into our daughter every step of the way”.

“People talk about bravery like fake macho bravery, but my wife didn’t flinch. What I saw in my wife was courage and beauty unlike I’d ever seen,” he added.

The actor said that Adeline, now three, has since made a full recovery.

Bernthal and Angle got married in September, 2010. The couple are also parents to sons seven-year-old Henry and five-year-old Billy.—PTI ■

Idris Elba says film version of ‘Luther’ is in works

LONDON—Actor Idris Elba has revealed that a movie version of his hit series “Luther” is being planned. The actor confirmed that writer-creator Neil Cross is working on the script for the film.

“We are really advancing on getting a movie version (of the show) up on the screen. Neil is beaver away on writing this thing, and I think the remit for the film is to scale it up,” Elba said.

According to *Indiewire*, the actor was speaking at the launch of the fifth season of the series.

Elba, 46, believes “Luther” has “all the ingredients to echo”

films such as David Fincher’s 1995 neo-noir crime thriller, “Seven”. “‘Luther’ has all the ingredients to echo those classic films of the 90s like ‘Seven’ and ‘Along Came a Spider’ and I think what we would like to do is use that blueprint to create ‘Luther’ the film,” he said. “I think what we would like to do is use that blueprint to create Luther: the film. It will be more murder, more Volvos, more frowning Luther.. Essentially we just want to try to take it to a much bigger audience and scale, and perhaps international as well,” he added. —PTI ■

“Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse” hits Chinese screens

BEIJING—Animated superhero film “Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse” hit Chinese screens on Friday.

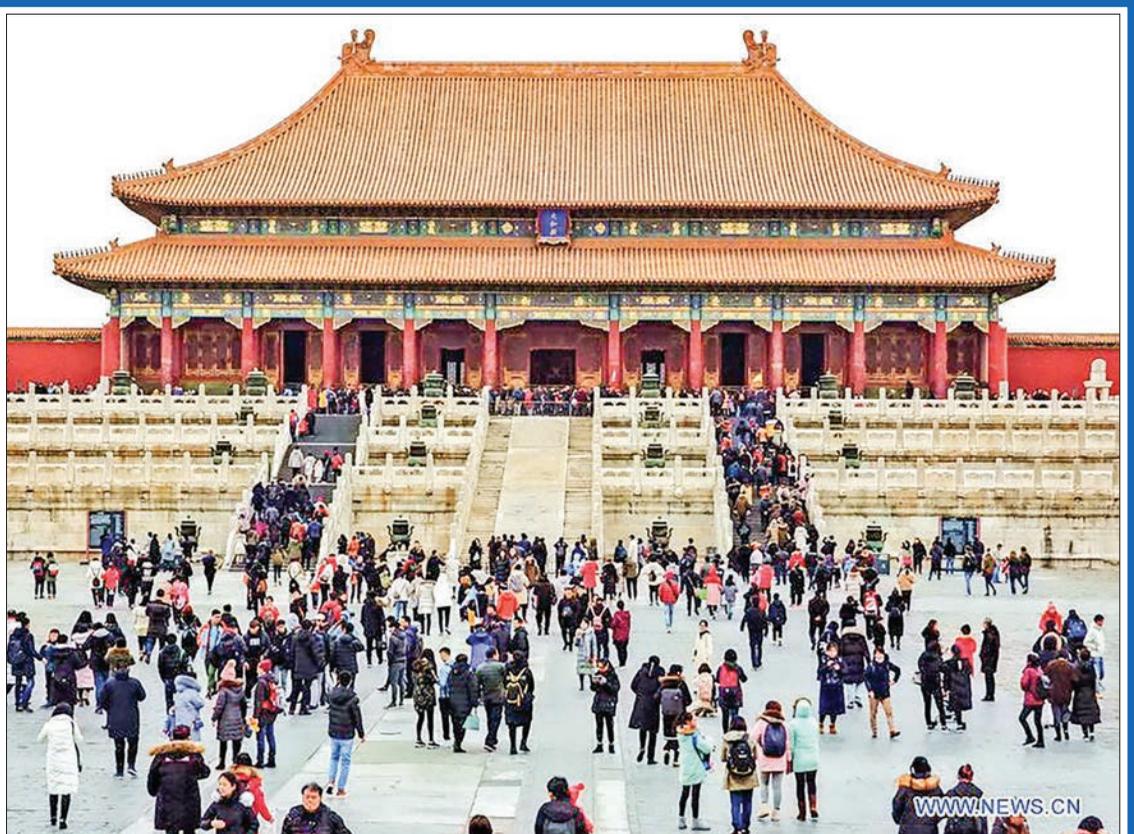
Based on the Marvel Comics character Miles Morales, the action-packed animation was directed by the trio of Bob Persichetti, Peter Ramsey and Rodney Rothman.

Set in a shared multiverse called “Spider-Verse,” the film sees Peter Parker make way for teen Morales as Spider-Man, who joins forces with Spideys from parallel realities to stop a threat menacing them all.—Xinhua ■

IN Picture

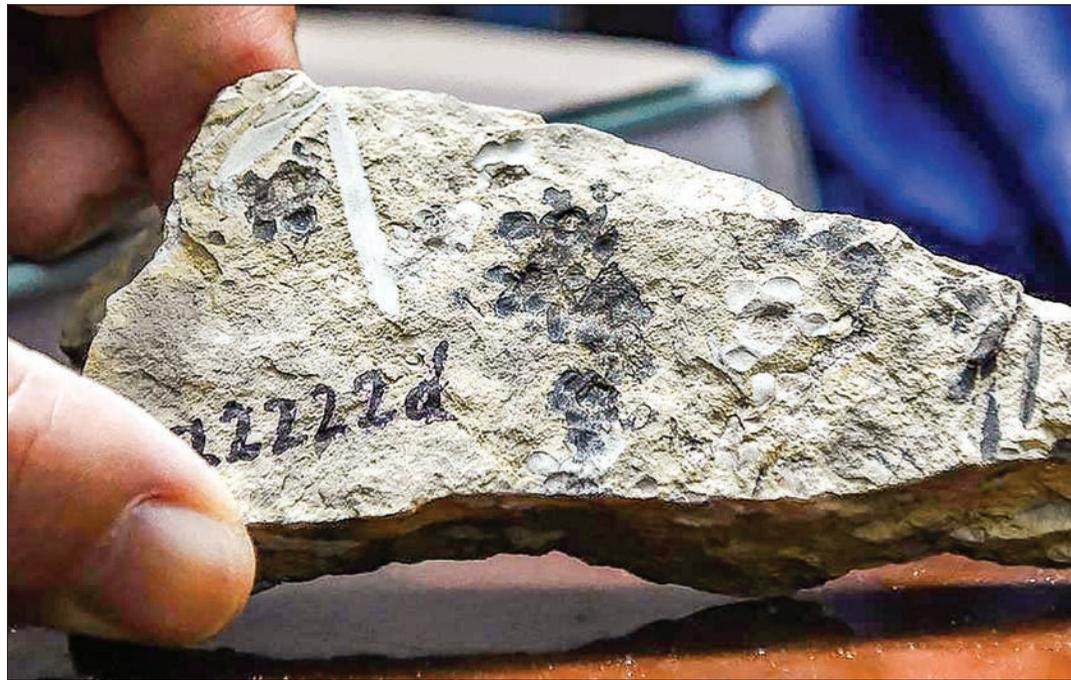
Palace Museum welcomes 17 millionth visitors in 2018

People visit the Palace Museum in Beijing, capital of China on 22 December, 2018. The Palace Museum, also known as the Forbidden City, welcomed its 17 millionth visitors of this year recently. It’s the first time that the number of its annual visitors has reached 17 million. PHOTO: XINHUA



IN Picture

World's earliest fossil flower unearthed in E China's Nanjing



A researcher shows the flower fossils at Nanjing Institute of Geology and Palaeontology in Nanjing, east China's Jiangsu Province on 18 December, 2018. Scientists have found new evidence of the world's earliest fossil flower from specimens unearthed in the eastern China city of Nanjing, dating the origin of flowering plants to 174 million years ago, or the Early Jurassic. An international research team led by scientists from the Nanjing Institute of Geology and Palaeontology has made an observation of the specimens, which contain 198 individual flowers preserved on 34 slabs. They named the flower, which has four to five petals and looks like modern plum blossom, *Nanjinganthus*. The research pushed the origin of flowering plants 50 million years earlier than the record of previously available fossils, which suggested flowering plants appeared about 125 million years ago in the Cretaceous, an era during which many insects such as bees appeared. The Early Jurassic is known as the period that saw dinosaurs dominating the planet. The discovery reshapes the current understanding of the evolution of flowers. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

Chinese scientists map Himalayan marmots genome

WASHINGTON—Chinese scientists mapped the first complete genome of Himalayan marmots who can survive at altitudes up to 5,000 metres in the Himalayan regions with extreme coldness and scarce oxygen and resources.

The findings, published in this week's issue of journal *iScience*, revealed the genetic mechanisms underlying high-altitude adaptation and hibernation, which might help researchers to study evolution, highland disease, and cold adaptation.

"As one of the highest-altitude-dwelling mammals, the Himalayan marmot is chronically

exposed to cold temperature, hypoxia, and intense UV radiation," said Liu Enqi with Xi'an Jiaotong University Health Science Centre in China. "They also hibernate for more than six months during the wintertime."

The researchers sequenced and assembled a complete draft genome of a male Himalayan marmot and re-sequenced 20 other Himalayan marmots, including individuals living at high and low altitudes, and four other marmot species.

The findings showed that the Himalayan marmot diverged from the Mongolian marmot

about two million years ago.

The researchers identified two genes which are related to survival in high-altitude populations under conditions of extremely low oxygen. One of them may have neural protective role and the other helps prevent the excess growth of new blood vessels under extremely low-oxygen conditions, according to the study.

They also compared gene-expression differences between marmots in a state of torpor and those awake marmots. It showed that gene-expression changes occurred in the liver and brain during hibernation. —Xinhua ■

China's Baidu, Paramount Pictures unveil AR-featured Transformers' Bumblebee emoji in mobile phone apps

SAN FRANCISCO—China's top Internet search engine firm Baidu Inc. and Paramount Pictures said Friday that they are rolling out new emoji features in Baidu's IME keyboard apps that are built from the theme of Bumblebee, the latest film of the "Transformers" series. The Bumblebee Augmented Reality (AR) Emoji is modeled on Baidu's sophisticated face-tracking AI, the hyper-realistic AR rendering of everyone's favorite Autobot that

mirrors the user's expressions and enables them to take selfies or create one-of-a-kind GIFs. These Bumblebee-themed offerings for mobile phone apps are the latest additions to Baidu's extensive libraries of emoji, customizable themes and skins for Baidu IME keyboards that deliver diversified, colorful and innovative funs in their conversations while texting emoji-themed messages such as "High Five!" and "Bee right there," said the two companies. —Xinhua ■

Study links two Type 2 diabetes drugs to higher risk of heart disease

CHICAGO—Two drugs commonly prescribed to treat Type 2 diabetes carry a high risk of cardiovascular events such as heart attack, stroke, heart failure or amputation, according to a Northwestern Medicine (NU) study. The two drugs, sulfonylureas and basal insulin, are commonly prescribed to patients after they have taken metformin, a widely accepted initial Type 2 diabetes treatment. The observational study used data from 132,737 patients with Type 2 diabetes who were starting second-line treatment.

Some 60 per cent of the patients nationwide who need a second-line drug are prescribed one of these two drugs, the study found. Yet, patients who take one of these two drugs, 36 per cent more for sulfonylureas and twice as likely for basal insulin, are more likely to experience cardiovascular harm than those taking a newer class of diabetes drugs known as DPP-4 inhibitors.

"According to our findings, we only have to prescribe basal insulin to 37 people over two years to observe one cardiovascular event, such as a heart attack, stroke, heart failure or amputa-

tion," said lead author Matthew O'Brien, assistant professor of general internal medicine and geriatrics at NU Feinberg School of Medicine and a Northwestern Medicine physician. "For sulfonylureas, that number was a bit higher, 103 people. But when you apply these numbers to 30 million Americans with diabetes, this has staggering implications for how we may be harming many patients."

Physicians should consider prescribing newer classes of antidiabetic medications, such as GLP-1 agonists or liraglutide, SGLT-2 inhibitors or empagliflozin, and DPP-4 inhibitors or sitagliptin, more routinely after metformin, rather than sulfonylureas or basal insulin, the researchers suggest.

These drugs, however, are more expensive than the sulfonylureas. This is the first study to compare how each of the six major second-line drugs impact cardiovascular outcomes in Type 2 diabetes patients taking a second diabetes medication.

The study was published on 21 December in *JAMA Network Open*. —Xinhua ■

Researchers uncover genetic causes of eye disease through blind mice

LOS ANGELES—Hundreds of new genes linked to blindness and other vision disorders have been identified in a screen of mouse strains, according to a new research of University of California, Davis. Many of these genes are likely important in human vision and the results could help identify new causes of hereditary blindness in patients, said a release of the university on Saturday.

The research is published on Friday in *Nature Communications Biology*.

"This is extremely valuable for people with hereditary eye disease," said Ala Moshiri, associate professor of ophthalmology and vision science in UC Davis, School of Medicine and Eye Centre. "The whole ophthalmic community is going to start using these data."

The results are the latest to come from the International Mouse Phenotyping Consortium, of which UC Davis' Mouse Bi-

ology Programme is a founding member.

The research team combed the consortium database for genes linked to eye and vision defects and identified 261 new genes linked to blindness.

"Now eye centres that do DNA sequencing can call back patients and screen them for these new genes," Moshiri said.

While the mouse and human genomes clearly differ, most human genes have an analogous counterpart in mice, Moshiri said. The UC Davis team is collaborating with eye centres at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston and the University of Iowa, to check the newly identified mouse genes against their human equivalents. The new genetic information could also enable new therapies for hereditary eye disease. "We expect that more and more of these genetic diseases will be treatable," Moshiri said. —Xinhua ■

Aung La N Sang to face Ken Hasegawa in Japan

MYANMAR'S ONE Middleweight and Light Heavyweight World Champion, Aung La N Sang, will defend his Middleweight title at the 'ONE: A New Era' bout against Japan's Ken Hasegawa at the Ryogoku Kokugikan sports hall in Tokyo, Japan, on 31 March, 2019.

The two fighters earlier faced each other in a bout headlined 'ONE: Spirit of a Warrior' at the Thuwunna Stadium in Yangon on 29 June.

In the thrilling fifth round at that meeting, Aung La N Sang, an all-round mixed martial arts fighter, had knocked out Ken Hasegawa.

The action-packed June bout, where Aung La N Sang made quite a long and thrilling exhibition to entertain his fans,



Japanese fighter Ken Hasegawa (left) and ONE Middleweight and Light Heavyweight World Champion, Aung La N Sang (right). **PHOTO: SUPPLIED**

was nominated as the Bout of the Year at the 2018 Global Martial Arts Awards. The 'ONE: New

Era' bout will be the first ONE Championship event in Japan.

It will also be the first time

that Aung La defends his title outside Myanmar.—Lynn Thit(Tgi) ■

Charity Cup 2019 to kick off in Yangon on 6 Jan

CHARITY Cup 2019, the opening football competition by the previous season's champions of the Myanmar National League, will be held at the Aung San Stadium in Yangon on 6 January, according to a statement issued by the Myanmar National League

(MNL). The proceeds from the match will go to orphanages, said an official with the MNL.

MNL defending champions Yangon United will play against runners up Shan United at the Cup. The match will begin at 3.30 p.m. on 6 January.

Tickets for the match are priced at Ks2,000 for the grand stand and Ks1,000 for the ordinary stand.

An entertainment programme for football fans is also planned before the match, said a source with the MNL.

The 2019 MFF Charity Cup is the 8th Charity Cup. In the previous Cup held on 7 January 2018, Yangon United beat Shan United by 4-2 in the penalty shootout as the teams had tied 2-2 even after 90 minutes of play.—Lynn Thit(Tgi) ■

Harrison tops Charlo in shocker for WBC super welterweight title

NEW YORK (United States)—Tony Harrison dethroned World Boxing Council super welterweight world champion Jermell Charlo with a controversial unanimous decision Saturday that brought jeers from the Barclays Center crowd in Brooklyn.

Previously unbeaten Charlo was the aggressor throughout, but neither fighter landed any devastating blows and the judges gave the all-American showdown to Harrison by scores of 116-112, 115-113 and 115-113.

"You know they took that fight from me," said Charlo, who fell to 31-1 with 15 knockouts. "I was there, pushing the action the whole time. He was moving around just going to the jab, one or two punches. He didn't win that fight."

But the new champion, who improved to 28-2 with 21 wins inside the distance, insisted there should be no doubt about the outcome. "I grinded. I grinded, I grinded and I grinded," he said. "I showed championship com-



Tony Harrison punches Jermell Charlo on the way to a 12-round unanimous decision for the WBC super welterweight world title. **PHOTO: AFP**

posure. I didn't have to do much. I used my jab. I used my ring generalship. I kept him at bay."

Harrison was offering a rematch when the disbelieving

Charlo muscled into his ring interview. "He knows I won that fight," Charlo said. The fight was the first of a twin bill that featured Charlo's twin brother,

Jermell Charlo, who retained his WBC interim middleweight title with a unanimous decision over late substitute Matt Kobrov.—AFP ■

Messi, Dembele keep Barca three points clear in La Liga

MADRID—Barcelona held off Atletico Madrid to ensure they will be three points clear at the top of La Liga going into the winter break after beating a spirited Espanyol 2-0 at the Camp Nou on Saturday.

First-half goals from Ousmane Dembele and Lionel Messi were enough to move Ernesto Valverde's side up to 37 points and keep them one step ahead of Atletico, who earlier drew level with Barca with a 1-0 win over Espanyol thanks to an Antoine Griezmann penalty.

Dembele put the hosts into the lead after just nine minutes when he lashed home on the rebound after Messi's first-time shot was pushed into his path by Celta keeper Ruben Blanco.

Messi doubled his side's advantage just before half-time, bursting through completely unmarked to meet the excellent Jordi Alba's through ball and wrong-foot Blanco as he slotted in his 15th league goal of the season.

Luis Suarez missed a great opportunity to put the result beyond any doubt on the hour mark when he flashed wide after being found by Alba with another fine pass, but despite frequently testing Barca keeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen, Celta couldn't find the goal that would have put the Catalans under real pressure.

Griezmann on target

Earlier, Griezmann smashed home from the spot 10 minutes after the break to give Diego Simeone's side three points from a hard-fought match with mid-table Espanyol that extended Atletico's unbeaten league run to 14 matches. "It was important to win regardless of how we did it," said Atletico captain Diego Godin. "We go into the (two-week) winter break happy with the three points."

The 27-year-old Griezmann, who missed out on a Ballon d'Or despite winning the Europa League with Atletico last season and the World Cup with France in the summer, is on a fine run of form after having saved his side with a late winner at Real Valladolid last week.—AFP ■