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State Counsellor launches Myanmar-Korea Friendship Bridge (Dala) project



State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and Korean Senior Economic Adviser Mr. Kim Hyun Chul open the ceremony to launch construction of the Myanmar-Korea Friendship Bridge in Dala, Yangon Region yesterday. **PHOTO: BO BO/MNA**

STATE Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi attended a groundbreaking ceremony to launch construction of the Myanmar-Korea Friendship Bridge in Dala, Yangon Region yesterday.

At the ceremony, the State Counsellor pressed a button to drive a pile to launch the project.

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi arrived at the project area in Dala by watercraft at 8:10 am and was warmly welcomed by the local people.

At the beginning of the ceremony, Union Minister for Construction U Han Zaw spoke about the Myanmar-Korea Friendship Bridge (Dala) project, the type and the benefits which can be gained from the bridge upon completion.

Afterwards, Mr. Kim Hyun Chul, senior economic adviser of the Republic of Korea and Chairman of the Presidential Committee on New Southern Policy, spoke about Republic of Korea's cooperation efforts in developing economic, so-

Upon its completion, the bridge will provide quicker access between Yangon and Ayeyawady regions and Rakhine State.

cial and infrastructure sectors in Myanmar.

Afterwards, Union Ministers Lt-Gen Kyaw Swe, U Thant

Sin Maung, U Han Zaw, Yangon Region Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein, Chair of the Pyithu Hluttaw Health and Sports Development Committee Dr. Sein Mya Aye, Chairman of the Amyotha Hluttaw Local and Foreign Labour Affairs Committee U Kyaw Htwe and Korean Ambassador Mr. Lee Sang Hwa drove stakes at designated places.

Following that, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and Mr. Kim Hyun Chul participated in a ceremony to drive a pile at the auspicious time and

sprinkled scented water on it.

Afterwards, the State Counsellor, Union Ministers, Yangon Region Chief Minister, chairpersons of the Hluttaw committees, Mr. Kim Hyun Chul, senior economic adviser of the Republic of Korea and Chairman of the Presidential Committee on New Southern Policy, Korean Ambassador Mr. Lee Sang Hwa and workers of the Ministry of Construction posed for documentary photos.

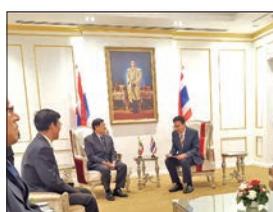
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Myanmar Navy commissions seven vessels to commemorate 71st anniversary

THE Tatmadaw (Navy) commissioned seven new vessels into service yesterday, to commemorate its 71st anniversary.

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing attended the ceremony held at the No. 3 Jetty of the Navy in Yangon.

Speaking at the ceremony, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing appreciated the officers and other ranks of the Naval Dockyard Command Headquarters for their work for construction a 65-meter floating dock which is one of the vessels commissioned into service yesterday.

The commissioning of the floating dock would benefit the Navy as it would provide services to the vessels from far off navy camps, reducing time and minimizing costs and convenience, said the Commander-in-Chief.

He said that he took pride in constructing vessels including frigates by the Myanmar Navy by



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing attends commissioning ceremony of new naval vessels to mark the Myanmar Navy's 71st anniversary. **PHOTO: OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF DEFENCE SERVICES**

itself, calling on it for constructing further vessels which would meet better quality standards.

The Senior General also called on the Tatmadaw (Navy)

to step into the Blue Water Navy, expressing his delight to attend the ceremony which was considered significant to show the construction capability of the navy.

In the evening, the Commander-in-Chief and party went to the Ayeyawady Naval Headquarters on a naval vessel.

At the headquarters, Senior

General Min Aung Hlaing and wife formally opened a booth to mark the 71st Anniversary of Tatmadaw (Navy).

At the Naval Headquarters in Yangon yesterday morning, the Senior General and party viewed the equipment produced by the navy.

Afterwards, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing met with retired chiefs of Myanmar navy, air force and senior military officers, and spoke about construction of naval vessels by the engineers of the Tatmadaw (Navy) and capability of the Navy to protect the territorial waters of Myanmar and upgrading of the Tatmadaw (Navy) to become a modern one.

He also visited the naval dockyard in a motorcade. At the Hydrodynamic Towing Tank, an officer reported on test of naval vessels in the tank, according to the information released by the Office of the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services.—MNA

Lt-Gen Ye Aung inspects human resource development training centres in Sagaing Region, development works in Chin State



Union Minister Lt-Gen Ye Aung and officials inspect the construction of the Khaingkam-Painpi-Twisauk-Dawlwin gravel road in Chin State yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

UNION Minister for Border Affairs, Lt-Gen Ye Aung, and Chin State Minister for Security and Border Affairs, Col. Han Win Aung, arrived at a women vocational training centre in Kalay Township yesterday. The centre's principal explained training matters to the Union Minister. The Union Minister coordinated where necessary and inspected trainees attending the advanced sewing course and basic vocational course, the dorms and dining hall.

Next, they arrived at Border Ethnic Youth Development Training School in Kalay Township where the principal

explained about training matters and the Union Minister coordinated where necessary. The Union Minister said the main objective of the school is to nurture reliable people for the region, state and country, teach trainees to value time and discipline, cultivate good communication skills, become active and healthy persons, and to instil reading habits for lifelong development, and to acquire maturity and critical thinking.

The Union Minister then inspected the dorms and dining hall of the training school and had lunch together with the students.

Next, the Union Minister inspected along the (2/0) mile of the 28-mile Khaingkam-Painpi-Twisauk-Dawlwin gravel road being upgraded into a concrete road. The project is a cooperation between the Department for Development for Border Areas and National Races under the Ministry of Border Affairs, and the State government. The road links Kalay Township and Tiddim Township through Khaingkam, Painpi, Twisauk, and Dawlwin villages and is 8 miles shorter than the old road to save time.—MNA ■

(Translated by Myat Thandar Aung)

Myanmar, Thailand discuss cooperation insurance, securities, exchange sectors

A Myanmar delegation led by Deputy Minister for Planning and Finance U Maung Maung Win held talks with Thailand's insurance and securities body over insurance issues including giving permission to foreign insurance businesses and extending new types of insurance.

The delegation led by Deputy Minister U Maung Maung Win, who is also Chairman of Myanmar Insurance Business Supervisory Board and Chairman of Office of the Securities and Exchange Commission of Myanmar, visited the Thailand from 19 to 22 December at the invitation of Office of Insurance Commission Thailand, Muang Thai Life Insurance and Thai General Insurance Association and studied operations.—MNA ■ (Translated by Myat Thandar Aung)

the trip, the Myanmar delegation met with members of the commission led by Secretary-General Dr. Suthiphon, Office of Insurance Commission Thailand, discussing

The Myanmar delegation also met with members of Securities and Exchange Commission Thailand led by Secretary-General Mr. Rapee, heads from the Stock Exchange of Thailand led by Managing Director Dr. Parkon and they discussed matters related to securities and exchange business and development of the capital market. During the trip, Myanmar delegation visited the Office of Insurance Commission Thailand, Muang Thai Life Insurance and Thai General Insurance Association and studied operations.—MNA ■ (Translated by Myat Thandar Aung)

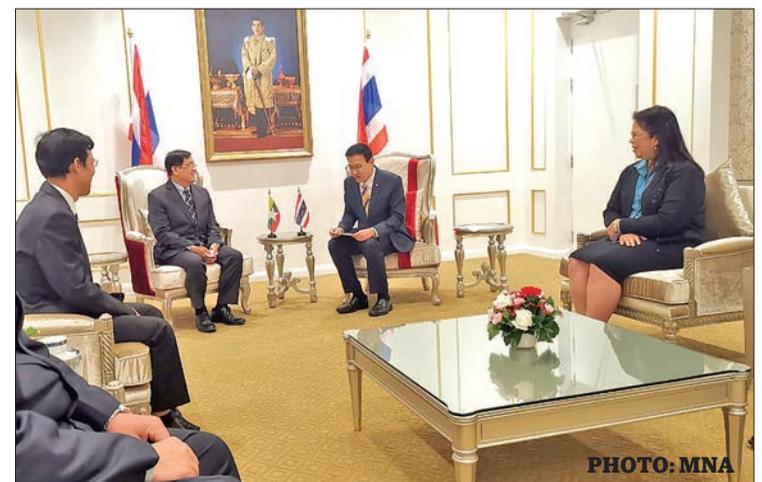


PHOTO: MNA

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

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



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

State Counsellor launches Myanmar-Korea Friendship Bridge (Dala) project



Architectural design of Yangon-Dala friendship bridge. PHOTO: ZAW MIN LATT

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Afterwards, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi cordially greeted those present at the opening ceremony.

The bridge is a type of Cable Stayed Bridge and it will be 6,144 ft long and will have a water clearance of 160 ft height and it can withstand 75 tons of loads upon completion.

The cost of the project is to be over US\$168 million, of which US\$137.833 million will come from a loan from South Korea's Economic Development Cooperation Fund and US\$30.341 million will come from the Union Government of Myanmar.

Upon its completion, the bridge will provide quicker access between Yangon and Ayeyawady regions and Rakhine State.

Besides, the bridge will give a boost to traffic and trade flow between Yangon and several townships including Dala, Twantay, Kawhmu and Kungyangon and it will narrow the development gap in western areas of Yangon Region.

The launching ceremony was attended by Union Ministers Lt-Gen Kyaw Swe, Dr. Pe Myint, U Min Thu, U Thant Sin Maung, U Win Khaing and U Han Zaw, Yangon Region Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein, Yangon Region Hluttaw Speaker, chairmen of the Hluttaw affairs committees, Deputy Minister for Construction U Kyaw Lin, ministers of the Yangon Region Government, MPs of Yangon Region Hluttaw, departmental heads, and officials of the ROK and local people. — MNA ■

New Maungtaw District Court opens in Rakhine State

RAKHINE STATE Chief Minister U Nyi Pu attended the inauguration of the new Maungtaw District Court and delivered a speech at a coordination meeting on the Kanyinchaung Special Economic Zone (SEZ) Construction Project yesterday.

The Chief Minister, Rakhine State Chief Justice U Kyauk, and Rakhine State Finance, Revenue, Planning, and Economic Minister, U Kyaw Aye Thein, cut the ceremonial ribbons and opened the new district court in Maungtaw Township yesterday morning. The Chief Minister and the state Chief Justice also unveiled the court's signboard electronically.

The State Minister for Development Affairs, U Win Myint, the State Advocate General, law officers from the state, district, and township levels, officials from the district and township departments, local elders, invited guests, and officials also attended

the opening ceremony. The Chief Minister took a commemorative photograph with the attendees.

In the second part of the ceremony, State Chief Justice U Kyauk spoke about the new district court. Afterwards, the managing director of Pyae Sone Kyaw Co., which constructed the new court, handed over the building's documents to Maungtaw District Judge U Khin Maung Myint.

The Chief Minister, the State Chief Justice, and state ministers then toured the new building.

The new district court was constructed in line with the Union Supreme Court's guidelines to elevate the dignity of courts and to outfit court buildings with proper amenities. The new building houses 4 courtrooms, a meeting room, a record room, three separate lounges for law officers, lawyers, and witnesses, a media room, a news and information counter, a counter for accepting legal cases, and lockups.

After the inauguration of the new court, the Chief Minister attended a coordination meeting on the Kanyinchaung SEZ Construction Project at the Maungtaw District General Administration's office.

The State Chief Justice, state ministers, officials from district and township level departments, and the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and officials of the Maungtaw Border Trade and Merchants Association also took part in the meeting.

Chief Minister U Nyi Pu, who is also the patron of the Kanyinchaung SEZ Management Committee, delivered a speech at the meeting. He said the state government has been investing and collecting funds to successfully implement the SEZ project. He said the government has done its best to provide electricity and good infrastructure.

As the SEZ project is important to the nation and the state,

all stakeholders must keep in mind the goal for sustainable development and carry out project implementation tasks in line with the existing laws, rules, and regulations, and honor the agreements in the contract, said the Chief Minister.

Afterwards, the participants at the meeting discussed the annual import and export figures for the SEZ, losses caused by

violence, the current market status, job opportunities, expected benefits, the Kanyinchaung port's strengths, expectations and objectives for the SEZ, future processes, and investments.

The Chief Minister reviewed the discussions and urged everyone to achieve the best results in their assigned duties. — Mawsi, Ko Min ■

(Translated by Zaw Htet Oo)



Rakhine State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu formally opens the new district court in Maungtaw Township yesterday. PHOTO: THET LWIN SOE

Union Minister Thura U Aung Ko attends cornerstone laying for religious building in Yangon

UNION Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Thura U Aung Ko attended the cornerstone laying ceremony for the building of the Hon Bon Khun Taung Shar Buddhist temple yesterday morning at No. 86, 16th Street, Lanmadaw Township, Yangon.

First, Aungzabu Tawya Monastery Sayadaw Mahasaddhammajotikadhaja Bhandanta Pannavansa, Union Minister Thura U Aung Ko, Patron of a Chinese Buddhist Association U Win Myint and U Kyin Sein,

Vice Chairmen U Kyaw Kyaw and Daw Ho Lwin Shin, Matriarch of Shwe Than Lwin Co. Ltd. Daw Ni Ni, and officials laid the brick for the temple and gave ceremonial blessing to the plot of land and bricks.

Next, Union Minister Thura U Aung Ko placed the inscriptional record of the auspicious event at the designated spot and posed for documentary photographs together. — MNA ■

(Translated by Win Ko Ko Aung)



Aungzabu Tawya Sayadaw, Union Minister Thura U Aung Ko and officials sprinkle scented water on the cornerstones for a religious building in Lanmadaw Township, Yangon. **PHOTO: MNA**

Pyinmana gets new Paradiso Cinema

A ceremony to inaugurate the new Paradiso Cinema was held yesterday in Pyinmana Township, Nay Pyi Taw.

The cinema was formally opened by Deputy Minister U Aung Hla Tun, Nay Pyi Taw Council member U Aung Myin Tun, Nay Pyi Taw development committee member U Min Thu and Permanent Secretary U Myo Myint Maung.

The second part of the inaugural ceremony convened at the new cinema hall, where Deputy Minister for Information U Aung Hla Tun said the Ministry has been striving to develop Myanmar's motion picture industry, and permissions had been granted to produce nine films in 2014, 158 films in 2017 and 129 films in 2018.

He added that there were 19 cinemas equipped with new digital systems, and digital

projection screens in 2013. The numbers of cinemas has now reached 124, together with 140 projection screens in 2018. As for the Ministry of Information, arrangements have been made to launch interview programmes, as well as conduct courses and workshops to develop film production technologies in Myanmar. The state media also reviewed the feature stories of the films, before releasing new films. At the same time, efforts are being made to develop a wide range of film production facilities in Nay Pyi Taw. The Deputy Minister urged the artistes, business personnel and film buffs to cooperate in fostering the development of Myanmar's movie industry.

Also, the director from Paradiso Cinema Co. Ltd, U Thura, alias Zagana, delivered a congratulatory message, fol-

lowed by the playing of film trailers at the cinema.

The 3D cinema has 310 seats and 17 double seats, and cinema times are scheduled to open at 12.30 p.m., 3:30 p.m. and 6 p.m. from Monday to Friday. On Sunday and Gazette holidays, the film times are arranged at 10:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m., 3:30 p.m., 6:30 p.m. and 8:50 p.m. Moreover, film lovers can receive information about new films that are playing at the cinema on Paradiso Cinema Co., Ltd's Facebook Page.

The new cinema is the 16th cinema hall operated by the Paradiso Cinema Co., Ltd, including cinemas in Hmawbi, Monywa, Pyapon, Aungban, Kyaukpadaung, Thaton, Shwebo, Bogale, Maddaya, Mawlamyine, Kalay, Maubin, Ayethayar, Yamethin and Hinthada townships. — Min Min Zaw (MNA)

(Translated by Win Ko Ko Aung)



The opening ceremony of the Paradiso Cinema in Pyinmana is held yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

Mandalay sees two social security clinics open

A SOCIAL security-city general clinic and a social-security-myittarshin general clinic were opened in Mandalay yesterday. The two clinics are opened by the Social Security Board in cooperation with the City Hospital and Myittarshin Hospital.

First, the Union Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population, U Thein Swe, Mandalay City Development Committee Chairman and Mayor Dr. Ye Lwin, representatives of employers and employees, and hospital officials, formally opened the clinics in a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The Union Minister delivered a speech at the opening ceremony held in the City Hospital. He said the Social Security Board (SSB) intends to encompass the Social Security Project across the entire nation. He said it intends to provide better social protection and healthcare to the valuable workers of the nation. To provide social security to its 1.25 million registered workers, the SSB has opened 3 social security hospitals, 4 district centers, 78 township centers, 96 township clinics, 55 department clinics, 1 traditional medical clinic, 4 social security-carewell clinics, 3 clinics for operating trial runs of the PPS (Provider-Purchaser-Split) system, and in mobile medical unit, across 116 townships, said the Union Minister.

He said both clinics are on

a trial run in Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest workforce population. He said the SSB will continue working on ensuring insured workers have easy access to healthcare services. He said they will assess the strengths and weaknesses of the coming contract hospital and clinics and work on bettering them. He added that trial PPS clinics are also coming to Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw soon.

Next, Dr. Ye Lwin, the mayor of Mandalay City, expressed his gratitude to the Social Security Board, Myittarshin Hospital and City Hospital for their cooperation in providing medical services to insured workers.

Afterwards, the Union Minister and officials conferred gifts commemorating the opening ceremony, and Daw Ei Phyu Win, an employee representative from Hotel Mandalay, expressed the words of thanks. The SSB has been cooperating with private hospitals and clinics to provide better medical services for its insured workers.

The SSB has been promoting the PPS system and incorporating capitation arrangements in its clinics. The SSB has also signed contracts with health service companies in a pilot project for paying a set amount per visit and providing medicine free for service. —MNA (Translated by Zaw Htet Oo)

UMFCCI, CTUM, MICS pledge to uphold labour rights, ask EU to continue trade privileges

THE Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI), the Confederation of Trade Unions of Myanmar (CTUM), and the Myanmar Industries Craft and Services (MICS) declared their commitment to uphold human and labour rights and asked the European Union not to roll back trade preferences given to Myanmar, in a joint press release issued by the three bodies.

They expressed appreciation for the EU's participation in Myanmar's democratic transition, by moving to reinstate the Generalized Scheme of Preference (GSP) for the country on 19 July 2013.

Discussions between the government, employers, and employees on labour rights and cases of child labour have been conducted successfully, with all parties agreeing to uphold the three principles enshrined in the conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and to work together to enact labour-related laws and by-laws in line with ILO standards, the press release stated.

This is a constructive result of the multi-party operation, the UMFCCI, CTUM, and MICS stated in the press release.

"We have made note of the EU Trade Commissioner's remarks on possible withdrawal of GSP status to Myanmar on

allegations of violation of human and labour rights. If the EU suspends GSP, our GDP will decrease. Such a move will also hurt foreign investments and the fragile employment market. The country will face a slew of challenges and negative outcomes such as an increase in the unemployment rate. The move will also be detrimental to the socio-economic status of workers," said the statement released by the UMFCCI, CTUM, and MICS.

The three bodies also reaffirmed their commitment towards the creation of a better employment market, the consolidation of fundamental rules and job opportunities, and the

promotion of public participation and sustainable entrepreneurship.

"To implement those plans, EU's trade preference status is of vital importance. This being so, we request the EU to continue extending GSP to Myanmar," they stated.

Under the EBA initiative of the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP), the EU grants exporters from Least Developed Countries (LDCs) access to its market for all products (except arms and ammunition) without imposing any duties or quotas. The trade privileges are extended to help develop their economies and integrate them into global trade.

Myanmar's preferential exports to the EU have risen sharply in recent years to €1.3 billion in 2017 from €535 million in 2015. Out of all of Myanmar's EBA-eligible exports, 95 per cent were made under EBA preferences. In 2017, 72.2 per cent of Myanmar's exports to the EU comprised textiles, creating good job opportunities and leading to the growth of the sector. The EU is the 3rd largest export market of Myanmar, accounting for around 8.8 per cent of Myanmar's total exports in 2017, according to a press release issued by the European Commission on 31 October. —GNLM

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Prices of pulses up as market directly linked with Indian policy changes, demand: merchants

By Nyein Nyein

AS India is the main buyer of Myanmar pulses and beans, Myanmar growers are affected by any change in Indian policy on import of pulses, said U Min Ko Oo, the secretary of the Myanmar Pulses, Beans, and Sesame Seeds Merchants Association. At present, the prices of mung beans and pigeon peas have climbed up on strong demand from India, he added.

On the back of increasing demand from India in the third week of December, mung bean FAQ (fair and average quality) is currently fetching K815,000 per ton in the market, pigeon peas are priced at K780,000 per ton, and the rate for green gram is K1-1.1 million, depending on their quality, said merchants.

Myanmar's mung beans, pigeon peas, and green grams are primarily exported to India. Although Myanmar pulses and beans have penetrated the markets of Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Malaysia, and Indonesia, the volume of exports to those countries is extremely low.

India's move to restrict importation of pulses in August 2017 severely affected growers in Myanmar. To tackle the resultant slowdown in the Myanmar pulses market, a discussion on



Myanmar pulses are kept on display for sale in a shop at a market. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

methods to boost the production and exports of pulses, beans, and sesame seeds was organized on 8 August 2018 at the UMFCCI office. Participants at the discussion also mulled replacing mung beans with more profitable crops.

"Indian merchants have increasingly purchased mung beans and pigeon peas in the past three months as a result of growing demand. The price of mung beans touched K950,000 to 1 million per ton in November. So, we can see how our pulses market is directly related to demand from India. Indian traders are purchasing pulses if there is a demand in their market. If not, they are restricting imports of pulses," said U Min Ko Oo.

Therefore, a government-to-government (G-to-G)

agreement is required so that our growers and traders do not suffer on account of changes in Indian policy on importation of pulses, he added.

"We import pharmaceuticals and building materials from India and export pulses. When India restricts importation of pulses, it disturbs the trade equilibrium between the countries. Matters related to beans exports were also discussed during the Indian president's recent visit to Myanmar," said U Min Ko Oo.

Myanmar ships over 1 million tons of different varieties of pulses to other counties annually, and mung beans, green grams, and pigeon peas make up a majority of the exports.

(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Exports to Japan exceed \$100 mln in October

THE value of exports to Japan in the first month of the current fiscal year topped US\$113.6 million, while imports stood at \$38.8 million, according to data from the Ministry of Commerce.

The total value of bilateral trade between Myanmar and development partner Japan exceeded \$152.5 million in October.

Myanmar's exports to Japan include garments, marine products, rice, black sesame, green grams, and rubber. The country's imports from Japan include machines and machine equipment, electronic equipment, fertilizers, chemical products, medicines, and automobiles.

Bilateral trade between the countries was pegged at \$1

billion in the last mini-budget period, \$1.92 billion in the 2017-2018 FY, \$2 billion in the 2016-2017 FY, \$1.84 billion in the 2015-16 FY, \$2.3 billion in the 2014-2015 FY, \$1.8 billion in the 2013-2014 FY, \$1.49 billion in the 2012-2013 FY, and \$822 million in the 2011-2012 FY.

Japan accounts for nearly 30 per cent of the total FDI inflows in the Thilawa Special Economic Zone, with an estimated investment value of \$441 million since the establishment of the zone in the 2014-2015 fiscal year.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has been offering loans such as the ODA loan and the two-step loan to help bring about socioeconomic development in Myanmar. —GNLM

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Elephant ride businesses thrive at Ngwe Taung dam during holidays

WITH visitors flocking to the Ngwe Taung Dam in Dimawhso Township of Kayah State during the public and Christmas holidays, elephant ride operators are doing brisk business.

"Visitors from different regions and states are coming here for Christmas and holidays. I earned about K50,000 from the rides and for letting visitors feed elephants. Our income depends on visitors. There are days we do not make any money," said Ko Phoe Thar, who runs an elephant ride business.

"Visitors are interested in riding elephants, feeding them, and taking photos at the dam. An elephant ride costs K3,000 for adults and K2,000 for children," he said.

There are several other tourist destinations in Dimawhso Township, including the Hteepwint Lake, the



Visitors ride on an elephant at the Ngwe Taung Dam in Dimawhso Township, Kayah State, during Christmas holidays. **PHOTO: RIAL (DEMAWHSO)**

Seven Stages Lake, and the Panpat Village. The socio-economic

development of the areas gets a boost as more tourists

visit them. —Rial (Dimawhso) ■
(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

New terminal, resort built near Zalon Mountain in Bamauk

THE Sagaing Region government is currently implementing a project to develop a camp near Khamoe Village in Bamauk Township to promote the region's smokeless industry.

The Khamoe camp will include a terminal and a resort, which are being built on 30.32 acres of land, for the convenience of locals and foreigners travelling to the Zalon Mountain, a popular tourist attraction

and pilgrimage site in the region. Situated 3,090 feet above the sea level, the mountain resembles an elephant.

"In the initial stage, the project will include loading places and car parking lots, restaurants, food shops, a night market, and dormitories. There will be a soft opening of these facilities on 25 December. In the second stage, the project will include healthcare centers, filling stations, and separate

terminals for buses and cars," said U Aung Zaw Latt from the project's implementing body.

Guesthouses, hotels, and bungalows will also be built as part of the project, which was launched in October and is likely to be finished in April next year, he said.

In April and June, saplings will be planted in the area as part of a greening project to conserve the natural environment, he added.

"Last year, roughly 195,000 people visited the Zalon Mountain Pagoda through mountain vehicles," said U Win Naing.

Led by Sagaing Region Chief Minister Dr. Myint Naing, the regional government is accelerating efforts to develop eco-tourism, especially in Monywa, Sagaing, Kalay, Katha, and Khamti townships.—Maung Chit Lynn (Indaw) ■

(Translated by Khaing Thanda Lwin)

CRIME NEWS

Ephedrine powder, home-made gun, heroin seized in Kayah, Shan states

MEMBERS of Anti-Drug Squad Unit 20 based in Loikaw, Kayah State searched a suspected house owned by Ma Khin Soe Myint (a) Mimi (a) Padaungma in northern Kyaukkyi Village, Loikaw Township and discovered ephedrine powder weighing 0.815 kilo on 22 December according to the news released by the Myanmar Police Force.

Interrogation of a suspected Ma Khin Soe Myint (a) Mimi has led the police to discover .22 a home-made gun and its five bullets from a house

owned by Maung Kyaw of Aungthapyae Village. Similarly, a combined team comprising of police members from Mabein Myoma Police Station in Mabein Township, Shan State stopped a motorcycle driven by Aung Min at Pywesarmate Village and seized heroin weighing 1.32 kilo hidden in the 132 soap boxes on 23 December.

Police have filed charges against the suspects under the Anti-Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law.—GNLM ■ (Translated by JT)

Five dead as bus plunges off hill road

A bus heading to Haka from Kalay Town plunged 150 feet down a hill near Lon Kway and Lan Thout villages, Haka Township, Chin State, on 22 December. Five people were killed in the accident, which happened when the driver of the speeding bus, identified as Maung Bwa Hlan, lost control at milepost 41.

The driver and three passengers died on the spot, while another passenger who sustained injuries died on the way to the hospital. The remaining 17 passengers also suffered serious injuries and were rushed to the Haka Township People's hospital.

The police have filed a case against the driver under Sections 304(A), 338, and 337 of the Penal Code.—Myint Naing Soe (Htee Hlaing Myay) ■

(Translated by Hay Mar)

Death toll from volcano-triggered tsunami in Indonesia climbs to 373

PANDEGLANG, (Indonesia) — The death toll of the tsunami triggered by a volcanic eruption in Indonesia rose to 373, with 1,459 others injured, a spokesman of the agency said.

A joint rescue team with heavy machinery equipment has reached more tsunami-affected areas, retrieving more victims of the catastrophe, which struck the coast along Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra islands Saturday night, spokesman of the National Disaster Management Agency Sutopo Purwo Nugroho said.

“The rescue team keeps searching in rattled areas along the coast. With hard works and supported by heavy machinery equipment, the rescuers have been able to arrive in some devastated areas which were previously difficult to reach,” Sutopo told Xinhua. The search and rescue operation for victims of the tsunami, triggered by an underwater landslides after the eruption, was underway in the hardest-hit Pandeglang and Serang districts in Banten province, and Lampung Selatan, Panawaran and Tenggamus



Aerial photo taken on 24 December 2018 shows a farmland damaged by tsunami in Banten Province, in Indonesia, on 24 December 2018. The Indonesian disaster agency on Monday put the death toll of the tsunami triggered by a volcanic eruption at 373 with 1,459 others injured, a spokesman of the agency told Xinhua on Monday. PHOTO: XINHUA

districts in Lampung province, he added. “The absence and failure of early tsunami warning systems have contributed to the huge casualties because people have no opportunity to be evacuated,” Sutopo said.

The impact of the catastro-

phe was also amplified at the tourist destination when the tsunami struck Saturday night during a peak time of holiday.

The tsunami has displaced 5,665 people who were taking shelter in evacuation centers, the spokesman said, adding that

the figure dropped from 11,453 as many of the evacuees had returned home. The tsunami also devastated a total of 681 houses, 69 hotels and villas, as well as 420 ships and boats, the spokesman said. The emergency relief efforts, involving

thousands of soldiers, police and personnel from the search and rescue office, the disaster management office and volunteers, were focused on the search and rescue of the victims, said Sutopo. High waves of 4-5 meters slammed into the shore, Endang Permana, head of emergency department of the disaster management agency in the district, told Xinhua.

The meteorology and geophysics agency has banned activities in the coastal areas after the deadly tsunami, as the assessment of volcanic eruption risk was being taken, said Sutopo.

On 26 December 2004, a massive tsunami triggered by a powerful quake hit countries along the Indian Ocean, killing 226,000 people, including 170,000 in Aceh province of northern tip of Indonesia’s Sumatra island.

Anak Krakatau, or Child of Krakatoa, is one of the 129 active volcanoes in Indonesia, a vast archipelagic nation home to 17,500 islands, sitting on a quake-prone zone of so-called “the Pacific Ring of Fire.”—Xinhua ■

Thousands evacuated after ‘loud crack’ in Sydney tower

SYDNEY— Australian police evacuated thousands of people in west Sydney late Christmas Eve, after residents reported hearing a “loud crack” from a 38-storey building.

About 3,000 people from inside the tower and in nearby buildings were told to leave late Monday, with engineers investigating after the apartment complex moved “one or two millimetres”.

“Police received a call to a loud crack on level 10 of the building located behind us,” New South Wales Fire and Rescue acting superintendent Greg Wright said from outside the Opal Tower complex.

Police “identified there was a crack in the building”, he added, alerting emergency services.

An AFP photographer at the scene said following an inspection of Opal Tower by engineers and firefighters, police were allowing residents of the surrounding buildings to return to their homes.

Some residents of Opal Tower were also allowed to return, although not those living in the



Police check the unit numbers of the residents after an inspection of the Opal Tower by firefighters and engineers in Sydney on 25 December 2018. Australian police evacuated thousands of people in west Sydney late Christmas Eve, after residents reported hearing a “loud crack” from a 38-storey building. PHOTO: AFP

section of the building where the crack had been found. It was unclear when those residents would be allowed back into the building, with a temporary shelter set up at a nearby hall. “I have been told by engineers it (the building) has moved one or two millimetres,” detective superintendent Philip Rogerson told reporters, without going into detail.

A police spokesperson said

the building was 38 storeys high.

The apartment tower located in Sydney’s Olympic Park complex was recently built, opening this year with 392 apartments, according to national broadcaster the ABC. “We are aware of the concerns that have arisen with the Opal building and confirm that the builder has been notified,” a spokesman from the development company told the ABC.—AFP ■

Italy’s Mount Etna volcano erupts, prompting airport shutdown

ROME, — Sicily’s Mount Etna volcano erupted on Monday, the National Institute of Geophysics and Vulcanology (INGV) said in a statement.

The eruption that began at noon was preceded by 130 earthquake tremors, the two strongest of which measured 4.0 and 3.9 on the Richter scale, the INGV said.

Air traffic at the airport in the nearby city of Catania was suspended as a result, SKY TG24 private broadcaster reported.

“Earthquake felt by the

population, no injured or damages so far,” the Civil Protection Agency tweeted around 1 pm.

Local media including RAI public broadcaster and La Repubblica newspaper posted photos of a massive cloud of ash spewing from Mt Etna, which is one of the world’s most active volcanoes, according to the US Geological Survey.

Eruptions are fairly frequent occurrences at Mount Etna, with the last large eruption taking place in 2009, according to the INGV. —Xinhua ■

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Keeping Independence Day Objectives in Mind

An objective refers to guidelines for work in the future. To achieve a certain purpose or goal, objectives are usually laid down, but they are often taken for granted.

The five objectives set down for the 71st Independence Day, to be observed on 4 January 2019, reflect the requirements of the current situation in Myanmar; and therefore, they are vital to the future of the country.

The first objective states the need for “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.” All citizens must keep this in mind and work to ensure the perpetuation of the State.

Anti-drug efforts are important for the country as narcotic drugs can easily spoil the morale and health of citizens as well as the younger generation, who will shape the future of the country.

protect against the use of drugs and narcotic substances, which can harm and erode the health and character of all citizens”.

Nowadays, the government is putting all its energy into equitable development of the regions and states. Without liberty, equality, and progress, independence will be meaningless. Thus, all citizens are urged to work in accordance with the fourth objective -“to continuously strive with determined effort for the balanced and equitable development of all states and regions”.

The fifth objective seeks to “assist from all fronts, the Union Government’s efforts for private sector development and the emergence of a fully-developed market economy”. A robust economy will bring prosperity to the country and help raise the socio-economic status of the people.

The Global New Light of Myanmar would like to take this opportunity to urge all Union citizens to assist and support the government and participate in its efforts towards the democratic transition and building a federal union, which are among the objectives set for the 71st anniversary of our Independence.

Let's Protect Myanmar's Independence for Eternity with Collective Strength

Hailing 71st Anniversary Independence Day

By SHWE TAING LWIN

4TH of January is the Independence Day of Myanmar, and we are relieved from the subjugation of the British rule and now celebrating the 71st Anniversary in 2019.

Indeed, the Independence is fragile beauty of a nation that could lose easily, but regaining back was undeniably very difficult. With the collective struggle and fight of our ancestors sacrificing their lives, we got it back with many sacrifices.

First Anglo-Myanmar War broke out on 5 March 1824 during the reign of King Bagyidaw in Myanmar, where we lost the fertile lands of Rakhine and Tanintharyi. Again, we had loss Lower Myanmar up to Myayhtai Township in central region following the Second Anglo-Myanmar War on 5 April 1852 during the reign of King Bagan. The Third Anglo-Myanmar War saw the annexation of the whole of Myanmar on 11 November 1885 during the rule of King Thibaw.

Reorganization

Spearheaded by U Ba Pe, MA U Maung Gyi and Dr. U Ba Yin, the YMBA (The Young Men's Buddhist Association) was formed on 11 February 1906, where the educated young men joined the team, eventually activated in the political activities within the bind of the then existing laws.

Speeding up the movement, the sixth meeting of the YMBA was held in Pyay Township in September 1920 and unanimously adopted the objective “To accelerate and expand the political movements”, and then switched into the formation of GCBA (The General Council of Burmese Association).

Start of Student Strike

Changing into the new system, the British Government had combined the Rangoon College and Judson College and elevated into University of Rangoon by enacting the University of Rangoon Act (Burma Act, 1920), where the affordable students of the well off families were allocated only at the hostel in limited number, sidelining the ordinary and poor students from the university.

With the growing sense of political and national fervor in

the whole country, anti-imperialist sentiments were heightened, leading to the student strike. The boycott ignited on 5 December 1920 (10 Waning Day of Tazaungmone 1282 Myanmar Era), and eventually the day had been designated as National Victory Day of the country.

Struggle of independence had added momentum with the active and strong participation of respected Sayardaw U Ottama and venerable Sayardaw U Wisara.

British Parliament in 1922 approved the Dyarchy Administration (also spelled diarchy), however, the special meeting of GCBA held in Thayet Township demanded for the “Home Rule” system of self administration.

On 17 June, a large meeting was held at the Jubilee Hall in Yangon and decided to boycott in protest on the election of Legislative Council of Burma under the Dyarchy Administration.

On 30 May 1930, the Dobama Asiayone (We Burmese Association), commonly known as the Thakins and had nationalist concept nature, had been formed, and then demanded for total Independence.

Dobama Asiayone made the slogan as follows.

- Total Independence First;
- Total Independence Second;
- Total Independence Third.

During the struggle, the Dobama Asiayone was separated into two due to ideological diversity, one group by Thakin Kodaw Hmine and the other by Thakin Ba Sein and Thakin Tun Oke. The University students under the care of Thakin Aung San joined the Dobama Asiayone of Thakin Kodaw Hmine. At that time, Thakin Aung San shouldered the General Secretary post, and organized the youth and prepared for the fight in the anti-imperialist with nationalist movement. Anti-British movement waves rolled on in many parts of the country.

Formation of Burma Revolution Pary

As the strike of the oilfield workers started to drum up in 1938, (1300 Myanmar Era) the forces at Yen-an-chaung stood on the center stage making the momentum high in Myanmar, and



Clement Atlee (2nd from left) and General Aung San (3rd from left) in January 1947.

that 3 September 1939 ignited the Second World War pushing the British into tight situation.

At that juncture, Thakin Mya and Thakin Aung San had formed the BRP party secretly with the intention to train and nurture the patriotic revolutionary warriors in rooting out the British Government. Next, the political groups were rallied and formed Bama Hwet Yat Group in October 1939.

The Thirty Comrades

On 16 January 1941, the Minami Kikan (Minami Organ) was formed by Colonel Suzuki Keiji under the directive of Imperial General Headquarters of Japan. Dobama Asiayone of Thakin Kodaw Hmine and Dobamar Asiayone of Thakin Ba Sein made contact with the Japanese side to receive military training and warfare, and later dispatched (30) Myanmar youth to Hainan Island. This was the embryo of the Thirty Comrades.

On 10 March 1941, the first batch of four members; the second batch of seven members; the third batch of three members; and the fourth batch of eleven members were dispatched secretly and received the military trainings.

The BIA was formed in Bangkok of Thailand on 26 December 1941, and subsequently the BIA had conquered back Yangon in its hold on 8 March 1942, and that Upper Myanmar was yet to conquer

at that juncture.

Later in July 1942, the BIA was disbanded and formed a smaller Burma Defense Army (BDA), and eventually on 15 September 1943, the Japanese Government handed over the bogus and fake independence of Myanmar to the Burma National Army (also known as the Burma Independence Army).

When the Fascists did not

against the Fascists Japanese. It was the result of the discussion and agreement between Bogoyoke Aung San and General Slim in May 1945 in Meiktila to officially join hand in the attack against the Japanese.

Signing of Aung San - Atlee Agreement

On 20 June 1945, Supreme

the military rule at the earliest; (b) Recognizing the Burma National Army and the guerrilla group, and then integrating into the Myanmar Army; (c) Formation of temporary national government; (d) During the administration period of temporary government, the polling were to be held for the election of lawmakers.

On 27 January 1947, the historical Aung San - Atlee Agreement was signed.

In February 1947, preparations were made to hold Panglong Meeting, and subsequently the national leaders headed by Bogoyoke Aung San and the ethnic leaders from the hilly regions met on 11 February and discussed until late afternoon to demand and acquire the independence as a collective force. Next day on 12 February, Bogoyoke Aung San and ethnic national leaders of Kachin, Chin, and Shan had decided to reside as one in the land with equal opportunities, and signed the Panglong Agreement.

At the Panglong Conference, (23) representatives had signed the agreement.

Option for Independence Day

In the election held on 9 April 1947, the AFPFL won a landslide victory with (95) per cent of votes, followed by the successful drafting of the Constitution during the conference in May 1947 at Yangon Jubilee Hall.

Myanmar's First Parliament began its session on 10 June, 1947, and unanimously approved the Constitution on 24 September the same year. The Constitution came into force on 4 January, 1947.

Future tasks and changes to be implemented in the process of handing over the sovereignty of the nation had been clarified on (15) points program. The auspicious date for declaration of the Independence was chosen as 4 January (9 Waning Day of Pyatho ME), and that the Independence was regained with many difficulties. The author of this article would like to urge that the Independence of the nation must be protected for eternity and build into developed and modern nation with the collective strength and force of the people. ■

Translated by UMT (Ahlon)

President's Office continues announcement of illegal drug arrests, seizures acting on tip-offs

THE Office of the President issued Press Release No. 29/2018 yesterday, publicly announcing the Ministry of Home Affairs' arrests and seizures in the fight against illicit drug trafficking up till 15 December.

The ministry made the arrests, acting on information, sent to the Drug Activity Special Complaint Department of the Office of the President as of 22 December.

The full text of the press release will be reported in the 26 December issue of The Global New Light of Myanmar.—GNLM

MYANMAR GAZETTE

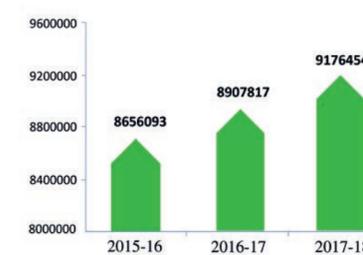
Heads of Service Organizations transferred and confirmed

1. The President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has transferred U Soe Thein, Director-General, Directorate of Communications under the Ministry of Transport and Communications as Director-General of the Office of the Union Minister from the date he assumes charge of his duties.
2. The President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has confirmed the appointment of U Thein Zaw as Director-General of the Building Department, Ministry of Construction, on expiry of the one year probation period.

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.

Total Number of Students in Myanmar by Academic Year



Source: Ministry of Education
Information Unit: Central Statistical Organization

Asia stocks mixed after Mnuchin's weekend of triage

HONG KONG (China) — Asian stocks were mixed on Monday after a weekend call by Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin to top US banking executives aimed at stemming the market panic which resulted in Wall Street experiencing its worst week in a decade.

The Dow and the Nasdaq ended on Friday with their biggest weekly drop since the start of the global financial crisis as investors took fright over a government shutdown in Washington, President Donald Trump's public feuding with the Federal Reserve and the US-China trade war returning to the forefront.

Tokyo was closed for a public holiday on Monday but Hong Kong dropped 0.40 per cent in a pre-Christmas half day of trading while Sydney closed up 0.48 per cent. Shanghai was trading up in afternoon trade while Seoul slipped.

The mixed regional bag came after Mnuchin spent much of the weekend in damage control mode following multiple media outlets reporting that Trump had privately asked cabinet members if he has the authority to fire Fed Chairman Jerome Powell.

Last week, the central bank hiked rates, infuriating Trump who has ignored the traditional

respect for the Fed's independence, calling it "crazy", "out of control" and a greater economic threat than China.

Mnuchin denied the reports of Trump seeking Powell's scalp, tweeting on Saturday that the president told him: "I never suggested firing Chairman Jay Powell, nor do I believe I have the right to do so."

The following day, Mnuchin announced he had called senior executives from six of the largest American banks to discuss the market turmoil and received assurances.

"The banks all confirmed ample liquidity is available for lending to consumer and business markets," the Treasury said in a statement attached to a tweet from Mnuchin announcing the calls. "We continue to see strong economic growth in the US economy with robust activity from consumers and business," Mnuchin was quoted in the statement as saying, adding that he would convene a call with the President's Working Group on financial markets later Monday.

'More panic and fear'

Analysts expressed both surprise and alarm at Mnuchin's Sunday statement, saying it might do the opposite of calming



US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin spent the weekend trying to allay market jitters. PHOTO: AFP

current jitters.

"Nothing says don't panic like saying 'I'm calling the plunge protection team tomorrow'," Michael O'Rourke, JonesTrading's chief market strategist, told Bloomberg News.

"I honestly think that's the type of event that's going to startle markets and create more panic and fear when it's meant to create confidence."

Last week's turmoil in Washington — which included a government shutdown that appears likely to last until at least Thursday and the abrupt resignation of

Defence Secretary Jim Mattis — has spooked markets worldwide.

Japan's Nikkei hit a fresh 15-month low on Friday with its fourth consecutive day of losses, joining the tech-rich Nasdaq in bear territory. European bourses were flat or rising slightly.

Oil inched higher in Asian trade after crude-producing nations said they expect prices will arrest their recent slide and rebalance early next year, when a deal on new production cuts takes effect. However, analysts said prospects for a global economic slowdown in the coming

year — which would weaken crude demand — and rising US shale output are dampening sentiment and limiting any rebound from the current 15-month lows.

Prices have plunged by around 40 per cent from four-year peaks reached in early October on concerns about oversupply and weaker demand.

In foreign exchange markets, the yen rose 0.1 per cent to 111.10 per dollar; the euro was up 0.2 per cent at \$1.1390 and the pound was at \$1.2662, a 0.1 per cent rise.

Key figures around 0500 GMT

Tokyo — CLOSED
 Hong Kong — Hang Seng: DOWN 0.4 per cent at 25,651.38
 Shanghai — Composite: UP 0.27 per cent at 2,522.96
 Euro/dollar: UP at 1.1390 from \$1.1378
 Dollar/yen: UP at 111.00 yen from 111.03
 Pound/dollar: UP at \$1.2662 from \$1.2658
 Oil — West Texas Intermediate: UP 43 cents at \$46.02 per barrel
 Oil — Brent Crude: UP 55 cents at \$54.37 per barrel
 New York - Dow: DOWN 1.81 per cent at 22,445.37 (close)
 London - FTSE 100: UP 0.1 per cent at 6,721.17 (close)
 — AFP ■

Oil market likely to rebalance early 2019: OPEC ministers

KUWAIT CITY, (Kuwait) — Oil ministers from leading OPEC nations said on Sunday they expect prices will arrest their recent slide and rebalance early next year, when a deal on new production cuts takes effect.

Oil prices have shed more than 36 per cent since early October to trade at \$54 (47 euros) per barrel, due to fears of oversupply and weak global demand.

But president of OPEC and

UAE Energy Minister Suhail al-Mazrouei said that the surplus in the oil market was small compared to 2017 and expected it to vanish in one or two months.

"Based on available figures, we have around 26 million barrels of surplus ... compared to 340 million barrels in early 2017," Mazrouei told a press conference in Kuwait City.

"I think that we can easily do with this surplus and reach

market rebalance in one or two months... in the first quarter of next year," he said.

OPEC — a cartel of producer countries that has long manipulated output of the commodity, to influence global prices in members' favour - and non-OPEC members agreed in early December to trim production by 1.2 million barrels a day from 1 January, in a bid to shore up sagging prices.

Mazrouei said that there has been higher than anticipated supply on the market in recent months, as US sanctions on Iran have had a less pronounced effect on the country's oil exports than had been expected.

Iraq's Oil Minister Thamer al-Ghadhban said that there is a consensus among OPEC and non-OPEC producers to comply with the new agreement to trim output in a bid to stabilise the market.

He said the new agreement is valid for six months and the ministers will meet in April to assess the impact of the cuts.

Ghadhban said he believes that the new measures taken by producers will "stop the slide in oil prices."

Mazrouei said that producers are ready to renew the agreement or increase cuts in case the market does not balance. "If the production cuts of 1.2 million barrels a day is not enough, we will meet again to see what is enough and apply it," he said. — AFP ■

China and US 'make progress' after trade call

BEIJING (China) — China and the US "made new progress" on the issues of trade balance and intellectual property during a phone call between officials from the two countries, China's commerce ministry said on Sunday.

Both sides are engaged in a bruising trade war but relations have thawed since Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Donald Trump agreed to a 90-day truce earlier this month.

"On 21 December, China and the US conducted a phone conversation at a vice ministerial level, exchanging views on issues such as trade balance and strengthening intellectual property protection, and made new progress," the Ministry of Commerce said in a short statement. This is the second such phone call announced by the commerce ministry this week — on Wednesday, Beijing and Washington discussed "economic and trade issues". — AFP ■



PHOTO: PTI



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and US President Donald Trump. PHOTO: AFP

Order signed for US military's controversial Syria exit

WASHINGTON (United States) — The order to withdraw American troops from Syria has been signed, the US military said on Sunday, after President Donald Trump and his Turkish counterpart agreed to prevent a power vacuum in the wake of the controversial move.

The announcement that US troops would leave the civil war-racked country — where they have been deployed to assist in the multinational fight against the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group — shocked global partners and American politicians alike.

“The execute order for Syria has been signed,” a US military spokesperson told AFP when asked about the withdrawal order, without providing further details.

Turkey was a rare ally that lauded Trump's momentous decision on Syria, a country where it will now have a freer rein to target US-allied Kurdish fighters who have played a major role in the war against IS but are deemed terrorists by Ankara.

Trump and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke by telephone on Sunday and “agreed to ensure coordination between their countries' military, diplomatic and other officials to avoid a power vacuum which could result following any abuse of the withdrawal and transition phase in Syria,” the Turkish presidency said in a statement.

Late Sunday, Trump tweeted that Erdogan had assured him that any remaining IS fighters in Syria will be eliminated.

“President @RT_Erdogan of Turkey has very strongly informed me that he will eradicate whatever is left of ISIS in Syria,”

Trump said in a Tweet around midnight Sunday, using another acronym for the jihadist group.

Repeating a pattern of admiring comments towards global strongmen, Trump added that Erdogan “is a man who can do it.”

The US president concluded: “Our troops are coming home!”

Hours earlier, Trump had tweeted that he and Erdogan “discussed (IS), our mutual involvement in Syria, & the slow & highly coordinated pullout of US troops from the area.”

US politicians — including those from his own Republican party — and international allies fear the withdrawal of the roughly 2,000 US troops is premature and would further destabilize the already devastated region.

A US withdrawal, said Mutlu Civiroglu, a Kurdish affairs analyst, will open the way “for Turkey to start its operations against the Kurds, and a bloody war will begin.”

French President Emmanuel Macron on Sunday said he “deeply regretted” Trump's decision, and that “an ally must be reliable.”

New Pentagon chief

US troops will leave under the auspices of a new Pentagon chief set to start next month, after Jim Mattis resigned from the post citing key differences, including on Syria, with the often-impulsive Trump. Several US politicians from both parties rejected Trump's claim that IS had been defeated, and the decision also caused alarm and dismay in the US military over the prospect of suddenly abandoning Washington's Kurdish partners.

Trump's sudden decision sparked turmoil within his administration, prompting the resignation of Brett McGurk, the special envoy to the anti-IS coalition, as well as Mattis. Plans for the troop withdrawal will now be overseen by Deputy Secretary of Defence Patrick Shanahan, who Trump on Sunday said would replace Mattis starting on 1 January.

Mattis, 68, had said he would leave at the end of February to allow a smooth transition for the next chief of the world's top military power — but a reportedly angry Trump accelerated his departure by two months.

Defence spokeswoman Dana White tweeted that Mattis would still assist in the handover, working with Shanahan to ensure the department “remains focused on the defense of our nation during this transition.”

According to US media, Trump voiced resentment over news coverage of Mattis' stinging resignation letter that laid bare his fundamental disagreements with the president.

Days later, special envoy McGurk made a similar move, saying he could not support Trump's Syria decision that, he said, “left our coalition partners confused and our fighting partners bewildered.”

Unlike Mattis, Shanahan has never served in the military and has spent most of his career in the private sector. He spent over three decades working for aircraft giant Boeing, including as vice president and general manager of Boeing Missile Defence Systems, before moving to the Pentagon as deputy in 2017. — AFP ■

Macron calls for order after ‘yellow vest’ attack on police

PARIS (France) — French President Emmanuel Macron called for “order” on Sunday after a sixth weekend of “yellow vest” anti-government protests marked by dwindling participation and a violent attack on police in Paris.

Speaking during a visit to the central African state of Chad where he was visiting French troops serving in a counter-terrorism force Macron said: “There must be order now, calm and harmony. Our country needs it.”

“It needs harmony, unity, sincere commitment to strong collective causes and we must heal the divisions,” said the 41-year-old centrist, who has struggled to tamp down the anger of the working poor in small-town and rural France over falling spending power and policies seen as tilted towards the rich.

A total of 38,600 people took part in a sixth round of nationwide protests on Saturday, according to the interior ministry — around half the number that demonstrated a week earlier.

In Paris, the scene of fierce clashes and widespread destruction in previous weeks, the protests were mainly peaceful.

But as evening fell, violence broke out again on the iconic Champs-Elysees avenue.

In one incident that caused widespread outrage, a group of three police officers on motorbike were forced to make a hasty escape after coming under attack near the Champs-Elysees from a group of demonstrators, who threw electric scooters, paving stones and other objects at them.

A video of the incident,

which was widely shared on social media, showed one officer pulling his gun and pointing it at the advancing protesters.

He and his two colleagues — one of whom had his motorbike knocked to the ground — then made their getaway.

The video showed that, seconds before the attack, the police had lobbed stun grenades at a group of protesters, who were some distance away.

Speaking to BFMTV channel Macron said those responsible for the violence would face “the most severe” legal punishment. Prime Minister Edouard Philippe for his part denounced the “incredible violence towards the police”.

He also took aim at protesters who sang a song by controversial comedian Dieudonne M'Bala M'Bala, a convicted anti-Semite, outside Sacre-Coeur church in Paris as well as those who decapitated an effigy of Macron in the western Charente region — two other incidents seen as evidence of growing radicalisation and the presence of extremists within the movement.

“There can be no trivialising of such gestures which must draw unanimous condemnation and be punished by the law,” Philippe tweeted.

The number of demonstrators has been trending downwards since 282,000 people turned out for the first Saturday protest against planned fuel tax hikes on 17 November.

From there the protests quickly morphed into a full-scale revolt against Macron's policies, aloof, top-down governing style, and the political class as a whole. — AFP ■



Yellow vests protesters and magistrates demonstrate in front of riot police outside Limoges' city hall, as French Prime Minister holds a meeting with “Yellow vests” movement representatives. PHOTO: AFP

IN Picture**600,000-square-meter Ice-Snow World opens in Harbin**

Tourists visit the Ice-Snow World in Harbin, capital of northeast China's Heilongjiang Province on 23 December, 2018. The Ice-Snow World opened on Sunday in Harbin. Covering an area of 600,000 square metres, the park used 110,000 cubic metres of ice and 120,000 cubic metres of snow this year. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

**S Korea sends officials to DPRK for preparation for rail, road connecting ceremony**

SEOUL — South Korea sent an advance team on Monday to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to prepare for a groundbreaking ceremony later this week to connect railways and roads across the border, according to Seoul's unification ministry.

The advance team, composed of 31 officials from unifi-

cation and transport ministries, left early in the morning for the DPRK's border town of Kaesong. Among them, 27 officials would stay there for the ceremony preparations.

Seoul and Pyongyang agreed to hold the groundbreaking ceremony at Panmun Station in Kaesong on Wednesday.

On Sunday, South Korea dispatched 14 officials to the Panmun Station for the ceremony preparations. They returned home late Sunday.

Following their first summit in April at the border village of Panmunjom, South Korean President Moon Jae-in and top DPRK leader Kim Jong Un agreed to

modernize and eventually re-connect railways and roads along the western and eastern Korean Peninsula.

Moon and Kim agreed during their Pyongyang summit in September to hold the groundbreaking ceremony before the end of this year for the rail and road connections.—Xinhua ■

Man eater leopard killed in JK's Reasi district

JAMMU — A leopard, believed to be a man-eater after it killed two boys recently, was shot dead in a village in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district, officials said on Monday.

The fully-grown leopard had killed eight-year-old Rehmat Ali and Wasim Akram (3) in the district's Mahore belt on 8 and 17 December, respectively.

The authorities had declared the leopard a man-eater and constituted teams to capture or kill the big cat, they said. "The leopard had ventured into the Sarh village in Mahore area on Sunday evening to look for prey and one of the teams, comprising of local hunters and wildlife officials, spotted it," the officials said. They said an attempt was made to capture the leopard, but it attacked the team, prompting them to open fire. It was shot dead, the officials said. "We are sure that this is the same animal (leopard), which killed the two boys recently," they said. The officials said all attempts were made to capture the leopard alive. But these failed as the animal was able to avoid traps laid at various places.—PTI ■

Army deployed ahead of Bangladesh's general elections

DHAKA — With five days ahead of Bangladesh's general election, Army troops have been deployed in most parts of the country to assist the civil administration in ensuring security.

The troops, deployed in 389 out of about 500 sub-districts on Monday morning, will stay until 2

January to help maintain law and order during the election slated for 30 December.

According to the Inter Service Public Relations (ISPR) of the Bangladesh Army, members of the Bangladesh Navy were also posted in 18 coastal sub-districts.

Election Commission Secre-

tary Helal Uddin Ahmed earlier told journalists that army personnel would be deployed as a striking force from Monday and they will remain in the field until 2 January.

A total of 1,016 platoons (35 members in each platoon) of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB)

have already been deployed at different border sub-districts of the country to thwart any incident.

The commission postponed the polling date for the country's national election to 30 December from 23 December after the major opposition alliance led by ex-Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) urged the commission to defer the election date by a month.

As many as 1,841 candidates are contesting in the country's upcoming general election for 300 constituencies.—Xinhua ■

Thousands evacuated after 5.8-magnitude quake hits Tibet

LHASA — More than 2,100 people have been evacuated after a 5.8-magnitude earthquake jolted Xaitongmoin County in the city of Xigaze, southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region, on Monday, local authorities said.

No casualties have been reported.

Investigators found cracks in some rural houses and damage on some live-stock sheds in the county, according to the

county's publicity department. The local governments have prepared tents, quilts, coats, and medical supplies for the affected people.

Traffic and telecommunications in the region have remained undisturbed. The 5.8-magnitude earthquake hit Xaitongmoin County at 3:32 am on Monday. The epicenter was measured at 30.32 degrees north latitude and 87.64 degrees east longitude.—Xinhua ■

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

M.V OLYMPIA VOY. NO. (1831-1832)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V OLYMPIA VOY. NO. (1831-1832) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 25-12-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T.T/MIP where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S MCC TRANSPORT(S'PORE)
PTELTD

Phone No: 2301185

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

M.V SAN GIORGIO VOY. NO. (1837/1838)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V SAN GIORGIO VOY. NO. (1837/1838) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 25-12-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T.T/ MIP where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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Phone No: 2301185

Another tsunami could hit Indonesia, experts warn

PARIS (France) — Another tsunami could strike Indonesia, experts warned on Sunday, a day after more than 200 people were killed by a wave triggered by a volcanic eruption.

What caused the tsunami?

The tsunami “appears to have been caused by an underwater collapse” of part of the Anak (or “child of”) Krakatoa volcano, said David Rothry of The Open University in Britain.

Anak Krakatoa is a new island that emerged around 1928 in the crater left by Krakatoa, whose massive 1883 eruption killed at least 36,000 people.

The volcano has been particularly active since June, noted Jacques-Marie Bardintzeff at the University of Paris-South.

The tsunami that struck on Saturday was the third to hit Indonesia in six

months. Indonesia has 127 active volcanoes and lies on the Pacific Ocean’s “Ring of Fire” where earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are frequent.

Why was it so deadly?

Anak Krakatoa, located in the Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra islands, is close to densely populated zones.

And while the tsunami was relatively small, Richard Teeuw of the University of Portsmouth in England said: “Such waves — laden with debris — can be deadly for coastal communities, especially if there is no warning.”

Simon Boxall of Southampton University added that the region was also in spring tide, “and it would appear that the wave hit some of the coastal areas at the highest point of this high tide, exacerbating the damage done.”

It also struck at night, further catching people by surprise.

Why were people not warned?

“We were helpless given how sudden” the event took place, Bardintzeff said. “The time between cause and effect was a few dozen minutes, which was too short to warn the population”. “Tsunami warning buoys are positioned to warn of tsunamis originated by earthquakes at underwater tectonic plate boundaries,” Rothry said.

“Even if there had been such a buoy right next to Anak Krakatoa, this is so close to the affected shorelines that warning time would have been minimal given the high speeds at which tsunami waves travel.”

Could more tsunamis be coming?



This aerial picture taken on 23 December, 2018 by Bisnis Indonesia shows the Anak (Child) Krakatoa volcano erupting in the Sunda Straits off the coast of southern Sumatra and the western tip of Java. PHOTO: AFP

“The likelihood of further tsunamis in the Sunda Strait will remain high while Anak Krakatoa volcano is going through its current active phase because that might trigger further submarine landslides,” Teeuw said. Bardintzeff

also warned that “we must be wary now that the volcano has been destabilised”.

Teeuw said that sonar surveys would now be needed to map the seafloor around the volcano, but “unfortunately submarine surveys typically take

many months to organise and carry out,” he added.

But “devastating tsunami caused by volcanic eruptions are rare; one of the most famous (and deadly) was caused by the eruption of Krakatoa in 1883.” —AFP ■

Pollution level severe for third consecutive day in Delhi

NEW DELHI — Pollution in Delhi remained in the ‘severe’ level for the third consecutive day as wind speed and other meteorological factors remained “highly unfavourable” for dispersion of pollutants on Monday, according to authorities.

People have been advised by the authorities to minimise outdoor activities and avoid use of private vehicles. While the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data showed the overall air quality index (AQI) at ‘severe’ level of

445, the Centre-run System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting (SAFAR) showed a higher AQI of 477.

An AQI between 100 to 200 comes under the ‘moderate’ category, 201 and 300 is considered ‘poor’, 301 and 400 ‘very poor’, while that between 401 and 500 is ‘severe’.

On Monday, 32 areas of the national capital recorded ‘severe’ air quality while five areas recorded very poor air quality, according to the CPCB.

In NCR, Noida recorded the worst air quality with

an AQI of 464. Faridabad and Ghaziabad also recorded ‘severe’ air quality, the CPCB said. The overall PM2.5 level — fine particulate matter in the air with a diameter of less than 2.5 micrometer — was recorded at 369 and the PM10 level at 533 here, the CPCB said. Delhi’s air quality turned severe on Saturday. On Sunday, the year’s second highest pollution was recorded at an AQI of 450. According to the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, the air quality is likely to improve on Tues-

day, but will remain in the upper end of the ‘very poor to severe’ category.

“The wind speed and ventilation index are highly unfavourable for dispersion of pollutants,” it said. Ventilation index is the speed at which pollutants can get dispersed. The ventilation index lower than 6000 sqm/second with average wind speed less than 10 kmph is unfavourable for dispersion of pollutants.

The index was 4500 sqm/second on Monday, it said. A CPCB-led task force has directed authorities to intensify ground actions to enforce measures already in place, particularly to control emissions from vehicles and burning of biomass.

The other directions are: agencies concerned to increase surveillance to find industrial waste dumping or burning especially in hotspots that are vulnerable to high pollution level, water sprinkling and mechanised sweeping to be intensified and traffic police to ensure smooth flow of traffic, including during long holidays.— PTI ■

Warmer years in northern ecosystem associated with lower carbon uptake: study

BELJING — Chinese scientists have found the summer carbon uptake of the terrestrial ecosystem in the northern hemisphere has been significantly weakened by ongoing climate warming.

In other words, warmer years were associated with lower ecosystem carbon uptake — the process of removing and capturing carbon from the atmosphere.

Observations of atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration from atmospheric monitoring stations at high latitudes provide complementary monitoring of the dynamics of carbon exchange in northern ecosystems. Most studies of the northern hemisphere carbon cycle based on atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration have focused on spring and autumn, but the climate change impact on summer carbon cycle remains unclear.

Summer has the highest vegetation productivity,

actively contributes to year-to-year variations in terrestrial carbon uptake and generally has the most favorable climatic conditions for carbon dioxide uptake, said the study published in Nature Communications.

Scientists from the Institute of Tibetan Plateau Research of Chinese Academy of Sciences used the record of atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations to calculate the summer carbon dioxide drawdown, an indicator of summer carbon uptake, between July and August.

They found that the summer carbon uptake is significantly negatively correlated with terrestrial temperature within 50 degrees north latitude year-to-year from 1979 to 2012.

A refined analysis at the decadal scale reveals strong differences between the earlier (1979-1995) and later (1996-2012) periods, with the significant negative correlation only in the later period.—Xinhua ■



Vehicles drive past India Gate amidst a dense fog in New Delhi on 24 December, 2018. PHOTO:AFP



The parade kicked off from the St Nicholas Russian Orthodox Cathedral on 97th street. PHOTO: TASS

Russian Santas parade through Manhattan

NEW YORK — More than 100 Russians dressed as Ded Moroz (or Father Frost) and Snegurochka (or Snow Maiden) have paraded through New York City's Manhattan borough, Igor Kochan, the head of the Russian Youth of America organization that arranged the event, told TASS.

The parade kicked off from the St Nicholas Russian Orthodox Cathedral on 97th street. Parade participants took a short subway ride, made a stop at Bryant Park and eventually arrived

in Times Square.

All along the way, the event's members wished happy holidays to passersby, gave them Russian souvenirs and explained why Russia's Ded Moroz is different from Santa Claus.

"When Americans see our Ded Moroz, most of them mistake him for Santa, only a more handsome and glamorous one," Kochan pointed out. "We explain that his costume and appearance are different, as well as the legend behind him. People willingly take photos with us and

even learn Russian phrases," he added.

Russian culture in New York City

"On the whole, we believe that our parade is not only a holiday season event, but also a social and cultural one," Kochan went on to say. "We seek to promote Russian culture and introduce New Yorkers to our traditions and songs, so the parade's participants sing and dance, stirring great interest," he said.—Tass ■

'Aquaman' makes a big splash to top N American box office

LOS ANGELES (United States) — New Warner Bros release "Aquaman" made the biggest waves in North American theaters over the weekend with \$67.4 million in ticket sales, industry tracker Exhibitor Relations estimated on Sunday.

That put it well ahead of two other new holiday-timed releases, as Disney's "Mary Poppins Returns" took in \$22.2 million for the three-day weekend, flying slightly higher than Paramount's "Bumblebee" at \$21 million.

Together, the three helped boost the year's domestic box-office revenue toward a record \$11.8 billion, Hollywood Reporter said.

"Aquaman" stars Jason Momoa in a title role infused with new swagger by director James Wan, with Variety calling Momoa's Aquaman "a bare-chested Hawaiian super-stud with long, shaggy surfer hair and all-over tribal tattoos."

The look seems to work: The film has already taken in some \$410 million outside North America. "Mary Poppins," while lacking truly boffo opening numbers, is expected to follow past musicals in enjoying a long box-office run.

The sequel to the 1964 movie stars Emily Blunt as the stern but kind-hearted nanny (Julie Andrews in the original),

backed by Lin-Manuel Miranda of "Hamilton" fame. Dick Van Dyke, Mary Poppins' Cockney-accented friend in the original film, makes a cameo.

"Bumblebee," a prequel to the "Transformers" movies, stars Hailee Steinfeld and John Cena. It drew a lofty 94 per cent rating from Rotten Tomatoes as all three of the top grossing new movies earned strong A- ratings from CinemaScores.

In fourth was Sony's "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse," taking in \$16.7 million. It has Peter Parker making way for Miles Morales as a black, Latino Spider-Man. And fifth spot went to "The Mule" from Warner Bros., at \$9.3 million.

Clint Eastwood, who at 88 says this will be his last acting part, directs and takes the lead role as a destitute 90-year-old who turns to transporting cocaine for a Mexican drug cartel.

Rounding out the weekend's top 10 were:

"Dr Seuss's The Grinch" (\$8.2 million)

"Second Act" (\$6.5 million)

"Ralph Breaks the Internet" (\$4.6 million)

"Welcome to Marwen" (\$2.4 million)

"Mary Queen of Scots" (\$2.2 million)—AFP ■



Jason Momoa, whose new film 'Aquaman' is leading the North American box office in its opening weekend, is seen here at the film's Hollywood premiere earlier in December 2018. PHOTO: AFP

Tom Hanks surprises fans at burger joint, buys them lunch



Hollywood veteran Tom Hanks. PHOTO: PTI

LOS ANGELES — Hollywood veteran Tom Hanks lived up to his reputation of a nice and friendly guy as he surprised cus-

tomers at an In-N-Out Burger chain in California.

The 62-year-old Oscar-winning actor, who was at the joint with his actor wife Rita Wilson, bought lunch for several customers waiting in the drive-thru, reported E! online.

Hanks and Wilson dined inside the restaurant.

A fan posted on Instagram a couple of photographs showing Hanks and Wilson eating burgers at the branch, and the actor chatting with an employee at the counter and taking a selfie with

a customer.

"Tom sighed In-N-Out hats and took pictures with everyone," she told the publication.

"He was genuinely nice, laughing, talking with everyone and taking selfies," she added. "He wished us a Merry Christmas on his way out."

"Tom Hanks and his wife, Rita Wilson made a surprise stop in Fontana on Friday," read a message posted on the city's Facebook page. "Welcome to Fontana @tomhanks! Please visit us again.—PTI ■

Autotuned autocrat: Turkmen leader croons Christmas song

ASHGABAT (Turkmenistan) — Turkmenistan's President, accused by rights groups of heading one of the world's most repressive regimes, encouraged citizens to "play the tune of love" in a self-penned Christmas song performed on state television.

Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov sat behind a white piano for the Eurovision-style clip while his 14-year-old grandson accompanied him on synths in the video also released online.

"With its beautiful melody and heartfelt words, the song

penetrated deep into the soul of all listeners, leaving strong impressions," an announcer on the Turkmen Owazy channel said on Saturday.

The song, "Dream" was performed in English, Turkmen and German, and contained the line,

"let our hearts play the tune of love," as well as references to the "circle of life".

Berdimukhamedov, wearing a brown suit, smiled to the camera as cartoon snowflakes fell on a screen behind him.

The president's relatives are

rarely shown on state television, despite Berdimukhamedov's son Serdar serving as a lawmaker and deputy foreign minister.

Favourite grandson Kerimguly, who is the son of the president's daughter, is a notable exception.—AFP ■

NASA spacecraft hurtles toward historic New Year's flyby

TAMPA (United States) — A NASA spacecraft is hurtling toward a historic New Year's Day flyby of the most distant planetary object ever studied, a frozen relic of the early solar system called Ultima Thule.

Four billion miles (6.4 billion kilometres) away, the unmanned spaceship, New Horizons, is poised to zoom by at 12:33 am (0533 GMT) on 1 January, at a distance of just 2,200 miles (3,500 kilometres) from Ultima Thule.

That's more than three times closer than New Horizons came to Pluto when it zipped by the dwarf planet in 2015.

So what is this strange object, which is named after a mythical, far-northern island in medieval literature and has its own rock anthem performed by Queen guitarist Brian May?

"This is truly the most primitive object ever encountered by a spacecraft," said Hal Weaver, project scientist at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory.

Relatively small, scientists aren't sure about its exact size.

But they believe it is about 100 times tinier than Pluto which measures almost 1,500 miles (2,414 kilometres) in diameter.

Ultima Thule is also in a freezing area of space, suggesting it may remain well preserved.

"Really, it is a relic from the formation of the solar system," said Weaver.

'Attic' of the solar system

Ultima Thule (pronounced TOO-lee) lies in the Kuiper Belt, a vast cosmic disc left over from the days when planets first formed.

Astronomers sometimes call

it the "attic" of the solar system.

Scientists didn't even know the Kuiper Belt existed until the 1990s.

The Kuiper Belt begins some three billion miles (4.8 billion kilometres) beyond the Sun, past the orbit of Neptune which is the furthest planet from the Sun.

"It is teeming with literally billions of comets, millions of objects like Ultima which are called planetesimals, the building blocks out of which planets were formed, and a smattering — a handful of dwarf planets the size of continents, like Pluto," said Alan Stern, principal investigator on New Horizons.

"It is important to us in planetary science because this region of the solar system, being so far from the Sun, preserves the original conditions from four and a half billion years ago," Stern added.

"So when we fly by Ultima, we are going to be able to see the way things were back at the beginning."

High-speed, close encounter

The New Horizons spacecraft is speeding through space at 32,000 miles (51,500 kilometres) per hour, traveling almost a million miles per day.

At that pace, if it strikes a piece of debris as small as a rice pellet, the spacecraft could be destroyed instantly.

"We don't want that to happen," said Stern.

If New Horizon survives this flyby, it will do so while furiously snapping hundreds of pictures of Ultima Thule, in the hopes of revealing its shape and geology for the first time.

New Horizons sent back stunning images of Pluto — including a never before seen heart shape on its surface — in 2015.

This time, "at closest approach we are going to try to image Ultima at three times the resolution we had for Pluto," Stern said.

But the flyby "requires extremely precise navigation. Much more precise than we have ever tried before. We might get it, and we might not," Stern added.

Answers to come?

Ultima Thule was first discovered by the Hubble Space Telescope in 2014.

Scientists figured out in 2017 that Ultima Thule is not spherical but possibly elongated in shape. It may even be two objects.

It does not project the repeated, pulsing light scientists expect to see from a rotating cosmic object, raising puzzling questions. Could it be surrounded by cosmic dust? Enveloped by many tiny moons? Oriented in such a way that its pole is facing the approaching spacecraft?

NASA hopes the flyby will reveal the answers.

The first images are expected by the evening of 1 January, with release planned for 2 January. More, higher resolution shots should follow.

Though no live images are possible at this distance, NASA plans to broadcast online during the flyby, featuring an animated video and music by Queen guitarist Brian May, who holds a degree in astrophysics and is releasing a musical tribute to accompany the event.— AFP ■



Australia's Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) plans to roll out new drone monitoring equipment at major airports across the country next month. PHOTO: AFP

Australia to beef up technology for drone 'crackdown'

SYDNEY (Australia) — Australia will introduce new surveillance technology for a "crackdown" on drones next year, aviation authorities said on Monday, as concerns mount over their increasing prevalence in public areas.

Australia's Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) plans to roll out new monitoring equipment at major airports across the country next month.

The technology has the ability to identify a drone, its serial number and the location of the controller while in flight, CASA communications manager Peter Gibson told AFP.

"We can identify therefore who is flying it," he said.

The technology, coupled with new registration requirements, will "dramatically" change the way rules relating to drones are enforced, Gibson added.

"2019 will be a drone safety crackdown," he said.

While the new equipment has been in planning for some

time, the incident last week at London's Gatwick airport — which saw nearly 140,000 passengers affected by three days of disruption after reports of drone sightings — "highlights the importance of having this capability", Gibson said.

Officials will also roll out a drone registration scheme in mid-2019, so that authorities can better track who is flying them and advise of proper safety precautions.

The new mobile tracking technology will be used in "known drone hotspots" like the Sydney Harbour Bridge, which has seen a concerning rise of drones operating in a restricted area, Gibson said. Authorities will have greater powers to conduct safety checks, he said, and increased ability to issue fines of up to Aud\$10,000 (USD\$7,000) for those in breach of the rules. "In 2019 it could be very expensive doing the wrong thing with your drone," Gibson said.— AFP ■



Illustration of Nasa's New Horizons spacecraft encountering 2014 MU69 — nicknamed "Ultima Thule" — a Kuiper Belt object that orbits one billion miles beyond Pluto. PHOTO: NASA

SpaceX blasts off powerful GPS satellite for US military

TAMPA (United States) — A SpaceX rocket on Sunday blasted off a powerful GPS satellite for the US Air Force, marking its 21st and final launch for the year 2018.

"Three, two, one, zero. Ignition and liftoff," said a SpaceX mission control operator as the white Falcon 9 rocket took off under sunny, blue skies at 8:51 am (1351 GMT) from Cape Canaveral, Florida.

The launch sent the Global Positioning System III space vehicle (SV) satellite into space to join the Air Force's constellation

of 31 operational GPS satellites.

It promises "three times better accuracy," and an extended, 15-year operational life, said a SpaceX statement.

Billions of people worldwide depend on GPS to support financial, transportation, and agricultural infrastructure.

SpaceX said the rocket was a "rare, expendable" version of the Falcon 9 since it would not attempt to re-land the booster after launch, needing to reserve all the rocket fuel to propel the satellite to its distant orbit.— AFP ■

Myanmar wins gold medals in Lion Cup events of Southeast Asian Amateur Golf Team Championship 2018

PYAI PHYO THU clinched a gold medal in the Lion Cup men's individual competition, which concluded at City Golf Course in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

Myanmar hosted the 2018 Southeast Asian Amateur Golf Team Championship in Nay Pyi Taw.

He returned a total of 290 strokes in four days, seven strokes ahead of first run-

ner-up Denwit David Boripoon-sub from Thailand and 10 strokes ahead of Anctive Chong from Singapore.

In the Lion Cup Team competition, Myanmar won the gold medal with a total of 590 strokes in four days, two strokes ahead of Thailand and eight strokes ahead of Indonesia. — MNA ■

(Translated by
Win Ko Ko Aung)

Leeds go top after stunning fightback at Aston Villa

LONDON (United Kingdom) — Kemar Roofe struck in the fifth minute of stoppage time to complete a dramatic comeback and send Leeds back to the top of the Championship with a 3-2 win at Aston Villa on Sunday.

Roofe's goal crowned a second-half fightback from two goals down by the visitors, who moved a point ahead of Norwich at the top of the table.

Villa, who remain in 11th, had got off to a flying start when Tammy Abraham scored his ninth goal in his last seven games after five minutes and Conor Hourihane added a brilliant second 12 minutes later.

The hosts should even have added to their lead in the first half, but were stunned in the second as quick-fire goals from Jack Clarke and Pontus Jansson brought Leeds level before Roofe's slick finish at the death sealed a thrilling victory.

Marcelo Bielsa's league leaders had only conceded one goal in winning their previous five games, but were soon on the back foot at Villa Park.

The in-form Abraham collected a short pass from John McGinn and slipped the ball past Bailey Peacock-Farrell from close range to finish. —AFP ■

Tottenham crush Everton 6-2 to close in on Manchester City



Tottenham Hotspur's South Korean striker Son Heung-Min (C) scores their fifth goal during the English Premier League football match between Everton and Tottenham Hotspur at Goodison Park in Liverpool, north west England on 23 December, 2018. PHOTO: AFP

LONDON — Tottenham Hotspur cruised to a 6-2 victory away to Everton in the English Premier League on Sunday. Son Heung-Min scored a brace, Dele Alli hammered home and Christian Eriksen struck a beautiful goal shortly after half-time, before Harry Kane completed a fourth double against the Toffees.

Theo Walcott had given the hosts an early lead in the 21st minute when Dominic Calvert-Lewin withstood Kieran Trippier's advances and laid the ball across for Walcott to side-foot it into the net.

Six minutes later, Kane played the ball forward and Everton defender Kurt Zouma and goalkeeper Jordan Pickford

had a mix-up just outside their own box and Son burst away from them before producing a pinpoint curling finish into the empty net.

Tottenham went ahead in the 36th minute when Alli slotted home from 10 yards after Son's shot was parried by Pickford. Kane scored his first goal four minutes later after Trippier's free-kick beat the wall but came back off the base of the post.

Eriksen made it 4-1 three minutes into the second half, fizzing a delightful shot into the bottom corner after Seamus Coleman stooped to head Kane's cross into his path.

Gylfi Sigurdsson fired past Hugo Lloris for a consolation

goal against his former club before Son and Kane both scored their second goals. Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino, who has been reportedly linked with Manchester United, was thrilled with the victory.

"It was an amazing performance. We feel very proud about the performance and the players and the effort after Wednesday (2-0 League Cup win at Arsenal). We're flying on the pitch. It's amazing... that performance, the result and the three points to be in a very good position in the table," Pochettino said. Tottenham are now third with 42 points, six points behind leaders Liverpool and two behind Manchester City.—Xinhua ■

Gerrard concerned despite Rangers late show to beat St Johnstone

GLASGOW (United Kingdom) — Steven Gerrard believes his players didn't do the Rangers shirt "any justice" in a laboured first-half performance before bouncing back thanks to two Alfredo Morelos goals to beat St Johnstone 2-1 on Sunday.

The Colombian took his tally for the season to 19 with the winner two minutes from time as Rangers closed to within a point behind Scottish Premiership leaders Celtic, who have a game in hand.

Gerrard's men had won just one of their previous four games to fall four points behind their Glasgow rivals with the two sides set to meet at Ibrox on 29 December.

Another tough afternoon looked on the cards for the vis-



Steven Gerrard. PHOTO: AFP

itors at McDiarmid Park when Matty Kennedy's rising drive gave St Johnstone the lead on the stroke of half-time.

"The first 45 minutes I wasn't happy, far from it. It was a poor performance, we were awful," Gerrard told BT Sport.

"We didn't have one player out there that was doing the shirt any justice, so I certainly wasn't happy."

Gerrard introduced Glenn Middleton for Eros Grezda at half-time and the change helped turn the game as Rangers improved dramatically in the second period. "I made my feelings clear at half-time, made some changes to the 11 and to be fair to the players they played with more bravery, belief and character and gone out there and performed like Rangers players in the second-half," added Gerrard.

"But we shouldn't have to work that hard to win at places like this with all due respect."

Middleton's measured cross picked out Morelos to head home the equaliser 25 minutes from

time. Only Zander Clark in the St Johnstone goal then kept the hosts level as he denied Daniel Candéias and Kyle Lafferty twice with stunning saves.

However, Clark was helpless when Morelos met James Tavernier's cross to score to spark wild scenes of celebration from the players and fans, but not their manager who remained stoney faced on the sidelines.

"I'm still thinking about the first-half," said Gerrard when asked why he didn't celebrate.

"I'm thinking big picture where we can take this squad and players. To be fair we are quite bare today in terms of numbers, but that first-half concerned me because what we asked of them before the game just clearly wasn't there."—AFP ■