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President U Win Myint and Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U T Khun Myat are welcomed by Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than and family at his residence in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

President attends Christmas gathering at Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker's residence

AMYOTHA Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than welcomed President U Win Myint to a Christmas gathering at his residence in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than, wife Daw Nant Kyin Kyi and family, welcomed President U Win Myint, former President U Htin Kyaw and wife

Daw Su Su Lwin, Vice President U Myint Swe and wife Daw Khin Thet Htay, Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U T Khun Myat and wife Daw Yin May, U Myo Nyunt, Chairman of the Constitutional Tribunal of the Union, and wife Daw Htay Yi, the Deputy Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw and his wife, the Deputy Speaker of Amyotha Hluttaw and his wife, Union Ministers,

the Chairman of the Union Civil Service Board, Nay Pyi Taw Council Chairman, members of the Constitutional Tribunal of the Union, Deputy Ministers and their wives, the Deputy Attorney-General and his wife, departmental heads, bishops from Christian Churches, and invited guests. Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than and family extended Christmas blessings

on all the guests.

The President and invited guests enjoyed the Christmas meal and then took documentary photographs together.

During the Christmas gathering, bishops in attendance said Christmas prayers, read verses from the Bible, preached sermons, and sang Christmas songs. —MNA ■
(Translated by Zaw Htet Oo)

New flight service from Yangon to Patheingyi operational

A NEW Yangon-Patheingyi-Yangon flight began its maiden trip from Yangon to Patheingyi in Ayeyawady Region yesterday.

The aircraft landed in Patheingyi Airport in the evening where its passengers and crew were welcomed by Ayeyawady Region Chief Minister U Hla Moe Aung, the regional Hluttaw Speaker, regional ministers and department officials.

The Chief Minister said the Yangon-Patheingyi air route supports his region's development. It takes 4 hours from Patheingyi to Yangon by car, therefore a direct flight will get tourists and business persons to their destination in a much shorter time, he said.

The new air route will employ an ATR 72-600 72-seater aircraft from Myanmar National Airlines and it is operated by International Travel Asia Co. Ltd, a subsidiary of Asia World.

Yang Jin, CEO of International Travel Asia Co. Ltd, said there are not many beaches in China and as such, its citizens are attracted to the beautiful beaches of Chaungtha and Ngwehsaung. He said the flow of Chinese tourists will significantly contribute to Myanmar's tourism industry. He also mentioned upgrading Patheingyi Airport and his company's desire to keep providing smoother travel experiences at affordable prices.

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Cash donation ceremony for Eternal Peace Pagoda held in Yangon

THE fourth cash donation ceremony for the Eternal Peace Pagoda which is under construction in Nay Pyi Taw was held at Vijaya Mingalar Dhamma Hall on Thiri Mingalar Kaba-Aye Hillock in Mayangon Township, Yangon yesterday morning.

The cash donation ceremony was attended by Dhammakathika Bahujanahitadhara Maha Saddhamma Jotika Dhaja Shwe Parami Tawya Sayadaw Ashin Sanda Dhika, Union Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Thura U Aung Ko, Yangon Region Social Affairs Minister U Naing Ngan Lin, Director General of Department of the Religious Affairs U Myint Oo and donors.

First Union Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Thura U Aung Ko and the audience received five precepts from Dhammakathika Bahujanahitadhara Maha Saddhamma Jotika Dhaja Shwe Parami Tawya Sayadaw Ashin Sanda Dhika. Union Minister then presented offertories to Shwe Parami Tawya Sayadaw. Following that, the audience shared the merits gained. A total of K 456,871,300 from 71 donors together with jewelry worth K 13,300,000 from four donors was presented for the construction of Eternal Peace Pagoda at the ceremony. — MNA ■

(Translated by Win Ko Ko Aung)



Union Minister Thura U Aung Ko accepts cash donation for the Eternal Peace Pagoda in Nay Pyi Taw. **PHOTO: MNA**

People celebrate Christmas in Yangon



Emmanuel Church in downtown Yangon is crowded with people celebrating Christmas on 25 December, 2018. **PHOTO: PHOE KHWAH**



The lane to Emmanuel Church in downtown Yangon is decorated with lights and is crowded with people celebrating Christmas on 25 December, 2018. **PHOTO: PHOE KHWAH**



Christmas lights in the shape of candy canes and present boxes adorn Bogyoke Aung San Road near the Holy Trinity Cathedral in downtown Yangon. **PHOTO: PHOE KHWAH**

Myanmar-Bangladesh conduct coordinated patrol

A coordinated patrol between Myanmar and Bangladesh was conducted from the border post No. 51 to 51/5 at 10:30 a.m. on 24 December.

The Myanmar patrol was led by Acting Police Major Aung Swe Oo from No.5 Border Police Force sub-division

(Aung Thabyae), Area 1, Maungtau Township, and the Bangladesh patrol was led by Naib Subedar Md. Salim Uddin of No. 11 Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB), according to the Myanmar Police Force. — GNLM ■

(Translated by Win Ko Ko Aung)



Myanmar border guard police forces patrolling along the border fence. **PHOTO: MPF**

Drugs seized in Maungtau Tsp

A COMBINED team, comprising officials of the Border Guard Police Force, seized drugs worth K 931 million from a boat in Magee creek near Paik Seik Village in Maungtau Township on 24 December.

The combined team found 465,500 Yaba tablets and two

mobile phones from the boat and arrested four men, identified as Hsaung Nar Moat, Adu Yar Moat, Nohuta, and Marmat Arryut, under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law.—GNLM ■

(Translated by Hay Mar)

"Let us strive collectively to create such a nation as was envisaged by the architects of our independence: a nation practicing pure principles that guarantee justice and freedom, and equal rights that enable all our people to live in peace."

(Excerpt from the speech by State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at the 2nd Anniversary of the Government on 1st April, 2018.)



Phan Khon game, a Myanmar traditional game.
PHOTO: KYI MYO THET



President U Win Myint, former President U Htin Kyaw and wife Daw Su Su Lwin, Vice President U Myint Swe and wife Daw Khin Thet Htay, Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U T Khun Myat and wife Daw Yin May, Chairman of State Constitutional Tribunal U Myo Nyunt and wife Daw Htay Yi attend Christmas gathering at the residence of Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. PHOTO: MNA

Pilgrims throng Bagan-NyaungU Archaeological zone

FOREIGN and local travellers are flocking to the Bagan-NyaungU Archaeological zone for the Christmas holidays, said U Aung Kyaing, the chairman of the Htilominlo Pagoda's board of trustees.

With large crowds of travellers visiting the region, car parking has become a problem at the Lawkananda pagoda, the Dhammayazika pagoda, the Manuha temple, the Myazedi Pagoda, the Shwezigon Pagoda, the Htilominlo temple, the Bupaya pagoda, the Sulamani temple, the Ananda Pagoda, the Shwehsandaw Pagoda, and oth-

er famous pagodas and temples.

Between the 11th and the 13th centuries, more than 10,000 Buddhist temples, pagodas, and monasteries were constructed in the Bagan plains alone. The remains of over 2,200 temples and pagoda survive today.

Bagan stands out not only for the sheer number of religious edifices, but also the magnificent architecture of the buildings and their contribution to the Burmese temple design. The Bagan Archaeological Zone is a major tourist attraction in Myanmar.

— Ko Htein (Nga Thar Yout) ■
(Translated by Hay Mar)

Tatmadaw refutes TNLA statement claiming gunfire exchanged

THE Tatmadaw has disapproved a statement made by the TNLA (Ta'ang National Liberation Army) saying they fought with Tatmadaw troops on 24 December near Shwemaw Village, Kutkai Township, according to Brig-Gen Zaw Min Tun, Deputy Director of Public Relations and Psychological Warfare of the Office of the Commander-in-Chief (Army).

He said the statement made by the TNLA and coverage by RFA and The Irrawaddy were both false. He said the TNLA claimed the Tatmadaw launched an offensive while the two media outlets reported they interviewed local villagers who said Tatmadaw troops ambushed TNLA troops. Both accusations are false, said the Brig-Gen Zaw Min Tun.

The Office of the Tatmad-

aw Commander-in-Chief has issued an announcement on ceasefire and eternal peace on 21 December. In the announcement, the Tatmadaw declared a unilateral ceasefire in five regional command areas (Northern Command, Northeastern Command, Eastern Command, Central Eastern Command and Triangle Command) from 21 December 2018 to 30 April 2019 in order to facilitate peace talks with ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) that have not signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA).

The National Reconciliation and Peace Centre and various EAOs have welcomed the announcement as a constructive gesture.

Brig-Gen Zaw Min Tun said all five regional commands were given specific directions to observe ceasefire immedi-

ately after the announcement was made. He said there has been no fighting since then.

However, the Tatmadaw has not directed the Western Command in Rakhine State to cease its military operations.

Concerning the Western Command, Brig-Gen Zaw Min Tun said since there are armed terrorist groups active in Rakhine State, they cannot stop military operations as the area is not classified as peaceful or stable region.

The Tatmadaw made the ceasefire announcement after three members of the Northern Alliance; MNTJP/MNDAA (Kokang), PSLF/TNLA (Ta'ang Palaung), and ULA/AA (Rakhine); pledged to seek solutions through political dialogue in a resolution issued on 12 December. —Ye Khaung Nyunt ■
(Translated by Zaw Htet Oo)

New flight service from Yangon to Patheingyi operational

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The new air route will depart from Yangon to Patheingyi at 3:30 pm, and from Patheingyi to Yangon at 4:30 pm, every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. A direct flight will only take 40 minutes.

Flight tickets from Yangon to Patheingyi cost K 55,000 for a local passenger and US\$ 55 for a foreign passenger; while tickets

from Patheingyi to Yangon cost K 53,000 for a local passenger and US\$ 53 for a foreign passenger.

The Ayeyawady Region Government and the Directorate of Hotels and Tourism are also planning to run ferry services for tourists plying into Patheingyi Airport, according to the regional directorate.

—Thi Thi Min ■
(Translated by Zaw Htet Oo)



The maiden flight for the air route of the Yangon-Patheingyi-Yangon landed at Patheingyi Airport yesterday. PHOTO: THI THI MIN

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www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

DEPUTY CHIEF EDITORAye Min Soe
dce@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com**SENIOR EDITORIAL CONSULTANT**

Kyaw Myaing

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

Kyaw Zeya Win @ Phoe Khwar

COMPUTER TEAMTun Zaw, Thein Ngwe,
Zaw Zaw Aung, Ye Naing Soe,
Hnin Pwint, Kay Khaing Win,
Sanda Hnin, Thein Htwe**EDITORIAL SECTION**(+95) (01) 8604529,
Fax - (+95) (01) 8604305**CIRCULATION & DISTRIBUTION**San Lwin, (+95) (01) 8604532,
Hotline - 09 974424114**ADVERTISING & MARKETING**(+95) (01) 8604530,
Hotline - 09 974424848
marketing@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com
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Due to limitation of space we are only able to publish "Letter to the Editor" that do not exceed 500 words. Should you submit a text longer than 500 words please be aware that your letter will be edited.

Rakhine State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu provides cash assistance to displaced people

RAKHINE State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu together with officials visited Taungminkalar village in Kyauktaw Township, Rakhine State yesterday.

The Rakhine State Chief Minister and party met with displaced people residing at the Taungmin and the Kan Saut Monasteries in Taungminkalar and Kansaut villages, Kyauktaw Township.

The Chief Minister and party then gave words of encouragement to the displaced people who took shelter at the monasteries due to security reasons and provided them with cash assistance.

During the meeting, Rakhine State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu said that people had to abandon their homes and business places mainly for the security reasons, and the Rakhine State government made efforts to restore tranquility and peace in the region while striving to return to normalcy.

As for the Rakhine State government, we were fulfilling the requirements of food and shelters in the all possible ways. In case of need, we would supply more assistance such as doctors, nurses and medical aids. Besides, Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and the Red Cross Society were supporting the requirements of basic needs.



Rakhine State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu talks with displaced people in Taungminkalar Village. **PHOTO: MNA**

Thus it was needed to discuss openly if they needed any help, he added. Next, the State Chief Minister and officials coordinated with the basic requirements of the displaced people at the meeting.

There are a total of 693 displaced persons from 168 households residing at the Taungmin Monastery, Taungminkalar Village, Kyauktaw Township.

There are a total of 430 displaced persons from 144 house-

holds staying at the Kansauk Monastery, Kansauk village, Kyauktaw Township.

Following that, Rakhine State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu handed over cash assistance to 168 households and each household would receive K 50,000.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement provided rice, longgyis for men and women wears, towels and T-shirts to the displaced persons.

Moreover Myanmar Red

Cross Society had handed over raincoats, blankets, mosquito nets, longvis for men and women wears, school uniforms, pants, trousers, skirts, nylon ropes, hammers, kitchen utensils, plastic buckets, tooth brushes, tooth pastes, towels, soaps, toilet papers, detergents, cups, combs and paper containers to them.

—Maw Si, Ko Min

(Translated by
Win Ko Ko Aung)

Maungtaw Tsp security officers seize illegal drugs from runaway suspects

SECURITY forces conducting an undercover surveillance operation near Maungtaw Tsp Area 4 discovered 5 suspects approaching the border fence 100 yards away from their hiding place

yesterday. The officers called out the suspects to halt, but the suspects ran away, prompting officers to fire 3 warning shots. The suspects ran into a nearby field and vanished, leaving behind

22 packets containing a total of 209,000 stimulant tablets (worth K 418 million at a rate of K 2,000 per tablet).

The officers have opened a case with Kyein Chaung Area

Police Station Drug Case (Pa) 7/2018 under Section 19 (a) of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law and are continuing investigations. —GNLM ■

(Translated by Zaw Htet Oo)

Fake 10,000-Kyat notes confiscated in Tamway, North Okkalapa townships

TAMWAY police officers arrested a man in possession of 19 fake 10,000-Kyat notes at a local festival on Kyauk Myaung Street at 8:45 pm on 24 December. The man, identified as Nyunt Hlaing from Minthar Taung Village in Kyauktaw Tsp, admitted to having purchased 800 fake 10000-kyat notes in Mae

Sot, Thailand together with his roommate Aung Min Soe from Minthar Seik Village, Kyauktaw Tsp.

Police entered their house on Aung Theikdi Lane 6, Ward 12 in North Okkalapa Tsp, where they confiscated 336 fake kyat notes and arrested Aung Min Soe.

Investigations revealed the two men were jobless and had purchased the fake kyat notes from Mae Sot for their own use. Tamway Police Station has opened a case against the two men and are continuing investigations into related cases. —GNLM ■ (Translated by Zaw Htet Oo)



Nyunt Hlaing, Aung Min Soe arrested with fake notes. **PHOTO: MPF**

Domestic investments top K18,000 bln as of Nov-end; real estate sees largest fund inflows

By Nyein Nyein

DOMESTIC investments in Myanmar for the period between the 1994-1995 fiscal year and the end of November this year have exceeded K18,000 billion, according to the Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC). As of November-end, a total of 1,502 enterprises have been allowed to invest in 11 sectors in Myanmar, with an estimated capital of over K18,063 billion. According to figures from the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration, the real estate sector has accounted for 23 per cent of the total fund inflows, with K4,166

billion in investment from 77 enterprises. The manufacturing sector has attracted investments of K3,264 billion from 835 enterprises. The service sector has seen investments of K2,834 billion from 50 businesses, the hotels and tourism sector received over K1,863 billion from 156 enterprises, and the construction sector has pulled in K1,075 billion from 68 projects. The industrial estate sector has received K862 billion from 11 projects, the energy sector has obtained K652 billion from 18 businesses, the mining sector has pulled in K189 billion from 69 enterprises, the livestock and fisheries sector has raked in

K153 billion from 83 businesses, while the agriculture sector has seen investments worth K51.8 billion through 11 projects. Other service sectors have attracted investments of K2,948 billion from 124 enterprises. “Domestic investments have increased this year compared with recent years,” said U Kyaw Win Tun, the director of the DICA. Under the incumbent government, 51 enterprises have invested K1,572 billion in the 2016-2017 fiscal year, 119 enterprises have put in K3,978 billion in the 2017-2018 FY, 105 enterprises have invested Ks995 million in the mini-budget period

from April to September 2018, and 36 projects have brought in K266 million in the last two months of the 2018-2019 fiscal year, according to data from the DICA. Under the Myanmar Investment Law, region and state investment committees are authorized to endorse investment proposals with a capital of not more than \$5 million (K6,000 million), in order to simplify the verification of investment projects. While some projects no longer need MIC’s approval, businesses that are strategic to the government require an MIC permit. Businesses with large

capital investments exceeding \$5 million and projects which can impact the environment and the local community need to get a nod from the DICA proposal assessment team. Such projects usually involve State-owned land, or are designated by the Government. In order to fast-track setting up of businesses in Myanmar, the government is now allowing investors to apply to the MIC or the State and Regional investment committees for endorsing their investment proposals, depending on the business type. *(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)*

Myanmar Investment Commission’s work in October and November 2018

MYANMAR Investment Commission is permitting local and foreign investments, according to Myanmar Investment Law. Myanmar Investment Commission had permitted in October 2018 total foreign investment, including increased investment, valued at US\$37.492 million, and in November 2018 total foreign investment, including increased investment, valued at US\$428.408 million. Foreign investments permitted during October and November of 2018 are as follows:

Sr.	Sector	October		November	
		No. of investments	Capital US\$ million	No. of investments	Capital US\$ million
1	Transportation and communications sector	-	-	1	171.790
2	Industrial sector	4	13.567*	16	86.497*
3	Hotel and tourism sector	-	-	1	4.370*
4	Animal husbandry and fishery sector	1	3.182	2	16.379*
5	Other service sector	2	10.340	4	138.951
6	Agricultural sector	1	0.199	2	10.421
7	Oil and natural gas sector	-	10.204*	-	-
Total		8	37.492	26	428.408

*Increase in the investment was included in the investment amount.

Myanmar Investment Commission had permitted in October 2018 a total Myanmar national investment totals K42,189.624 million and in November 2018 a total Myanmar national investment totals K224,432.440 million. Myanmar national investment permitted during October and November of 2018 are as follow:

Sr.	Sector	October		November	
		No. of investments	Capital Kyat million	No. of investments	Capital Kyat million
1	Housing sector	-	-	1	2,107.531
2	Industrial sector	7	7,916.943	6	171,831.068

3	Hotel and tourism sector	6	21,687.481	2	800.000
4	Mining sector	-	-	3	16,096.395
5	Electricity sector	-	-	1	5,900.000
6	Other service sector	5	12,585.200	5	27,697.446
Total		18	42,189.624	18	224,432.440

Increased number of jobs created by foreign investment during October and November of 2018 are as follow:

Sr.	Sector	No. of jobs created for local workers	
		In October 2018	In November 2018
1	Agricultural sector	111	644
2	Animal husbandry and fishery sector	16	139
3	Industrial sector	3,264*	10,072
4	Transport and communications sector	-	225
5	Hotel and tourism sector	-	12
6	Oil and natural gas sector	102*	-
7	Other service sector	73	186
Total		3,566	11,278

*Increase number of jobs created was included in the increase jobs.

Increased number of jobs created by Myanmar national investment during October and November of 2018 are as follow:

Sr.	Sector	No. of jobs created for local workers	
		In October 2018	In November 2018
1	Electricity sector	-	46
2	Mining sector	-	545
3	Industrial sector	791	1,160
4	Hotel and tourism sector	308	31
5	Housing and building construction sector	-	10
6	Other service sector	400	382
Total		1,499	2,174

Regional trade rises to \$1 bln in first month of current fiscal year

MYANMAR’S regional trade with the ASEAN countries in the first month of the current fiscal year is estimated to be over US\$1 billion, according to the Ministry of Commerce. Imports surpassed

exports, with imports valued at \$662.8 million and exports pegged at over \$350.9 million. Since April, Thailand has ranked as Myanmar’s top trade partner among the ASEAN countries with the largest trade

value totalling \$478.2 million, followed by Singapore with \$328.04 million, Indonesia with \$91.4 million, Viet Nam with an estimated \$57.5 million, and Malaysia with \$50.5 million. The value of bilateral trade with

the Philippines stood at \$7.95 million, trade with Cambodia reached \$2.4 million, while trade with Laos and Brunei was less than \$1 million. Myanmar mainly exports agricultural and fishery products, and

minerals, and imports food and beverages, electronic tools, motor vehicles, and consumer goods. Apart from its main trade partner China, Myanmar mostly conducts external trade via

the sea and border with its regional partners. Trade with countries in the European Union remains non-competitive compared with regional trade partners.—GNLM *(Translated by Ei Myat Mon)*

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Additional statistical bulletin on drug seizures, acting on information

1. In order to prevent and eradicate the dangers of narcotic drugs and psychotropic drugs, the Office of the President has formed the **Drug Activity Special Complaint Department** on 26 June 2018 to systematically accept and respond to reports on drug abuses and other related cases from the general public.
2. With orders from the Office of the President, the Drug Activity Special Complaint Department relayed information on reports on drug-related offenses up to 22 December 2018 to the Ministry of Home Affairs to take action, as displayed below:

No	Nature of report	Details on seizure and legal action taken
1	Information received of Tun Wai from Tapaw Village, Indaw Township, Sagaing Region, selling illegal drugs.	On 16-12-2018, police arrested Tun Wai, 54, Chattee, 46, Myo Lwin, 34, Kyaw Soe, 42, and Min Thu, 36, near cemetery in Tapaw Village, Indaw Township. Police discovered the suspects together with opium. A case has been opened against five suspects with MaMaSa (Indaw) MaYa(Pa) 144/2018 under Section 16-C/21 of the Anti-Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law.
2	Information received of Ko Naing from Paypin Village, Indaw Township, Sagaing Region, selling illegal drugs.	On 21-12-2018, while police were patrolling near farm of the Thitkone Village, Indaw Township. Police discovered Ko Naing, 29, and Min Min Oo, 24, together with heroin. A case has been opened with MaMaSa (Indaw) MaYa(Pa) 146/2018 under Section 19-A/21 of the Anti-Narcotic Drug and Psychotropic Substances Law.
3	Information received of Thiha Soe (a) Noe Noe living in Shweminwon (8) street, Padaukshwewah Ward, Kawthoung Township, Taninthayi Region, selling illegal drugs.	On 16-12-2018, Thiha Soe (a) Noe Noe's motorcycle was stopped for investigation on a street Nagaryone Pagoda, Kawthoung Township. Police discovered Thiha Soe (a) Noe Noe, 20, and Aung Naing Phyo (a) Shanpote, 18, together with WY psychotropic tablets. A case has been opened with MaMaSa (Kawthoung) MaYa(Pa) 141/2018 under Section 19-A/21 of the Anti-Narcotic Drug and Psychotropic Substances Law.
4	Information received of Tun Tun from Kokkogone Village Thabeikkyin Tsp, Mandalay Region, selling illegal drugs.	On 19-12-2018, police searched Tun Tun (a) Ko Tun's house at No (148), Kokkogone Village, Thabeikkyin Tsp. Police discovered Tun Tun (a) Ko Tun, 37, and his elder sister, Khin Win (a) Daw Win, 56, together with WY psychotropic tablets. A case has been opened against two suspects with NaMaSa (Takaung) MaYa(Pa) 13/2018 under Section 19-A/20-A/21 of the Anti-Narcotic Drug and Psychotropic Substances Law.
5	Information received of selling illegal drugs on the hill in Group (10), Ward 4, Kutkai Tsp, Shan State (North).	So far 29 cases have been opened as of last weeks, 26 men and 3 women have been arrested, together with heroin and stimulant tablets. On 18-12-2018, further investigation led to patrol in Ward 7, Kutkai Tsp and a motorcycle driven by Khun Aung, 37, from Kaung Lan Village was stopped for investigation then police discovered him, together with heroin and '88/1' psychotropic tablets. A case has been opened with MaMaSa (Kutkai) MaYa (Pa) 138/2018 under Section 19-A of the Anti-Narcotic Drug and Psychotropic Substances Law.
6	Information received of selling illegal drugs near Agricultural Science School in No (1) Ward, Kyaukme Township, Shan State (North).	On 18-12-2018, police were patrolling near Agricultural Science School in No (1) Ward, Kyaukme Township then police discovered Htoo Myat Aung (a) Aike Htoo (a) Kalar, 23, from Area (3), together with WY psychotropic tablets. A case has been opened with MaMaSa (Kyaukme) MaYa (Pa) 37/2018 under Section 16-C of the Anti-Narcotic Drug and Psychotropic Substances Law.

3. Out of the information sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs, so far 438 cases have been opened as of 22-12-2018, and 576 men and 110 women have been arrested with seizures of 5,628.37 g of heroin, 25.01 g of ICE, 38,573.84 g of opium, 329.6 g of low-quality opium, 12,263.28 g of opium powder, 7,273.99 g of speciosa, 205,309 stimulant tablets, 3701.03 g of marijuana, 0.1 liters of opium tincture, 227.4 g of opium blocks, 60 g of poppy seeds, 1.65 g of crushed stimulant tablet powder, 0.001 g of crushed ecstasy powder, 13 firearms, 194 different bullets, and 1 grenade. Efforts for fighting the drug trafficking has been stepped up and the ministry will report on further exposed cases.
4. In addition to the investigations and arrests conducted on drug related complaints mentioned above, the Tatmadaw and Myanmar Police Force have also carried out separate investigations on drug complaints, search and arrests at border gates, and searches of vehicles acting upon given information.
- During the previous week, multiple arrests were made in the border regions and joint-surveillance gates. In Nyaungpinaine Village, Lewe Tsp, Nay Pyi Taw, one motorcycle was stopped for investigation then one man was arrested with 198 stimulant tablets and one motorcycle. At Nantsiaung Checkpoint, Mohnyin Tsp, Kachin State, one motorcycle was stopped for investigation then two men were arrested with 29,250 stimulant tablets and one motorcycle. At Municipal market, Myoma (West) Ward, Maungtaw Tsp, Rakhine State, 1,140,000 stimulant tablets were found in the noodle carton boxes at No (1A-7) shop which was locked. In Pikethel

Village, Kyauktaw Tsp, one woman was arrested with 21 stimulant tablets. On the road to Kalaw Tsp, Shan State, a Mark II car was stopped for investigation then four men were arrested with 13,917 stimulant tablets and one car. On the road of Muse-Mandalay, near (80/4) milepost, Nawngkhio Tsp, one motorcycle was stopped for investigation then two men were arrested with 7,800 stimulant tablets and one motorcycle. At Oriental Toll Gate, on the road of Kutkai-Hsenwi, Hsenwi Tsp, one Mark II car was stopped for investigation then one man and one woman were arrested with 18,000 stimulant tablets and one car. Police searched at a house in Swensaw Ward, Muse Tsp, one man and one woman ran away and 4,000 stimulant tablets were found from the house. Near Sintphe Creek, Mabein Tsp, two men were arrested with 4,200 stimulant tablets and 35 g of heroin. Near Lawah Village, while police were clearing the area, one motorcycle was stopped for investigation then one man was arrested with one motorcycle and further investigation led to the seizure of 868,000 stimulant tablets and 5,280 g of heroin at a hut where no one lives near Kyauklonegyi Village. On the road of Lashio-Hsipaw, near Malhan Village, Lashio Tsp, two men were arrested with 2,875 stimulant tablets and one motorcycle. Further investigation led to the arrest of two men and one motorcycle. In Hopate Village, near Toll Gate, one Canter car was stopped for investigation then one man was arrested with 9,680 g of heroin and one car. At milepost (144/3), near Lwewowtote Village, Hopong Tsp, one motorcycle was stopped for investigation then one man was arrested with 4,000 stimulant tablets, 5 g of heroin and one motorcycle. At the junction of Pankaytu Village, Mongkai Tsp, one motorcycle was stopped for investigation then one man was arrested with 9,360 stimulant tablets and one motorcycle. In Shwethewa Village, Mongmit Tsp, eight men and one woman were arrested with 6,274 g of heroin and 8,250 stimulant tablets. On Myainghaywon road, Kangong Ward, Myeik Tsp, Taninthayi Region, one motorcycle was stopped for investigation then three men were arrested with 20 stimulant tablets and one motorcycle. Further investigation led to the arrest of one man with 1,553 stimulant tablets. In Sakhanthit Village, Kyunsu Tsp, one woman was arrested with 4,085 g of opium powder. In Shwezinyaw Ward, Kawthoung Tsp, one man was arrested with 90 stimulant tablets. Further investigation led to the arrest of one man with 30,000 stimulant tablets. In No (5) Ward, Indakaw Tsp, Bago Region, 966 stimulant tablets were seized without owner. In (8) Ward, Hlinethaya Tsp, Yangon Region, three men were arrested with 2,000 stimulant tablets. In Thanthumar road, (24) Ward, Thingangyun Tsp, one Fielder car was stopped for investigation then two men and one woman were arrested with 700 stimulant tablets and one car. At (5) mile junction, Myaungmya Tsp, Ayeyawady Region, one man was arrested with 1,000 stimulant tablets from express bus. In (13) Ward, Pathein Tsp, one motorcycle was stopped for investigation then one man was arrested with 13 stimulant tablets. Further investigation led to the arrest of one woman with 530 stimulant tablets and 2.1 g of marijuana in (14) Ward. There has been one arrest case of shooting. In Kawtyatkha Village, Hpa-an Township, Kayin State, one man resisted with one sharpened knife then the suspects ran away and arrested by a warning shot, together with 45 stimulant tablets, one sharpened knife and one motorcycle. There has been one seizure of ammunitions. At Kyaukkyi (North) Village, Loikaw Tsp, Kayah State, one woman was arrested with 815 g of ephedrine and further investigation led to the arrest of one man with one gun (.22) and five bullets.

There have been 203 cases being opened between 16-12-2018 and 22-12-2018, and 236 men and 30 women have been arrested. Seizures were made of 22,210.412 g of heroin, 1.5 g of ICE, 95.3 g of opium, 4,166.65 g of speciosa powder, 132 g of speciose, 2,157,705 stimulant tablets, 9 g of crushed stimulant tablet powder, 2589.49 g of marijuana, 15 g of opium blocks, 815 g of ephedrine, one gun (.22) and five bullets.

5. To seize further drugs and to arrest drugs dealers, people are urged to inform the Ministry of Home Affairs, region and state governments and to inform huge cases of drug trafficking and other suspicious cases directly to the Drug Activity Special Complaint Department of the Office of the President via following contact numbers:

Contacts
Auto telephone No. — 067-590200
Fax Phone No. — 067-590233
Email Address — antinarcotics@presidentoffice.gov.mm

Pope urges peace, 'fraternity' as millions celebrate Christmas

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis called for peace and “fraternity” among peoples, as millions across the world celebrated Christmas on Tuesday while US President Donald Trump caused a festive furore by asking a child whether he still believed in Santa Claus.

Some 50,000 worshippers gathered at the Vatican to hear the pontiff’s sixth “Urbi et Orbi” (To the City and the World) message appealing for peace in conflict zones such as Syria and Yemen, whose populations face some of the world’s most desperate humanitarian crises.

“My wish for a happy Christmas is a wish for fraternity,” he told pilgrims in Saint Peter’s Square on Tuesday, when Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

“Fraternity among individuals of every nation and culture. Fraternity among people with different ideas... Fraternity among persons of different religions.”

Francis, the head of the world’s 1.3 billion Catholics, had earlier used his mass on Monday night to urge people to curb “insatiable greed”.

The pontiff said he hoped a



This handout picture released by the Vatican press office on 25 December 2018 at St Peter's square in Vatican shows Pope Francis delivering the “Urbi et Orbi” message from the balcony of St Peter's basilica during the traditional “Urbi et Orbi” Christmas message to the city and the world. **PHOTO: AFP**

truce in conflict-ravaged Yemen would end a devastating war that has killed around 10,000 people since 2015 and pushed 14 million Yemenis to the brink of famine.

“My thoughts turn to Yemen, in the hope that the truce brokered by the international com-

munity may finally bring relief to all those children and people exhausted by war and famine,” he said.

The pope also spoke of the war in Syria, which has forced millions from their homes and reduced swathes of the country

to rubble.

He called for a “political solution” to the conflict “so that the Syrian people, especially all those who were forced to leave their own lands and seek refuge elsewhere, can return to live in peace in their own country”.

Francis also said he hoped for renewed peace talks between the Israelis and Palestinians “that can put an end to a conflict that for over 70 years has rent the land chosen by the Lord to show his face of love.”

- ‘Little town’ celebrations -

Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank, located near Jerusalem but cut off from the city by Israel’s separation barrier, has seen an increase in visitors this season after several down years because of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Palestinian tourism officials and hotel operators have reported their strongest season in years.

“This year is much more calm, much better than last year,” said Abeer Nasser, a Palestinian from the nearby town of Beit Sahour celebrating in Bethlehem with her son and daughter.

“Every year I feel more in the mood to celebrate despite the political situation,” the 37-year-old added, referring to the Israeli occupation.

Beyond Bethlehem, Christians worldwide were marking Christmas, with services held from Indonesia to Iraq. — AFP ■

5% more Japanese firms operating in India in 2018

NEW DELHI — The number of Japanese companies registered in India increased 5.2 percent in 2018 from the previous year as they continue to tap business opportunities in Asia’s third largest economy.

The figure totaled 1,441 as of October, 72 more than a year earlier, with manufacturing firms accounting for half the total, according to the latest joint survey by the Embassy of Japan in India and the Japan External Trade Organization known as JETRO.

The number of Japanese business establishments in India grew 5.5 percent this year to 5,102 from 2017, the survey released last week also showed.

They include liaison and branch offices in India as well as local subsidiaries. “There was a significant increase in the number of companies in such sectors as metal manufacturing as well as services this year,” the survey said.

It also found that some companies in India became

non-Japanese due to corporate restructuring and change of ownership, among other reasons. By region, the western state of Maharashtra and the southern state of Tamil Nadu have emerged as the top destinations for both Japanese companies and establishments, numbering 810 and 620, respectively, according to the report.

The survey showed, however, that despite a target agreed four years ago between India and Japan to double both Japan’s foreign direct investment and the number of Japanese companies in the South Asian country by 2019, there are only about 25 percent more firms now than there were in 2014. Although the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry in India, or JCCII, has engaged in promoting economic cooperation between the two countries, several issues remain to be addressed to improve both investment and business environments in India. — Kyodo News ■

Iran presents budget to counter ‘cruel’ US sanctions

TEHRAN, Iran — President Hassan Rouhani on Tuesday unveiled Iran’s first annual budget since the return of US sanctions, saying it had been adjusted to take account of Washington’s “cruel” measures.

The president announced a 20 percent increase in public sector wages in a sign of the economic challenges the Islamic republic has faced since the United States pulled out of the 2015 nuclear deal earlier this year.

The speech gave only a few general points of the budget -- which will now be scrutinised and voted on by parliament -- but acknowledged the pressure Iran was under.

“Last year we faced some problems,” Rouhani told parliament in a televised speech, referring to the widespread protests that hit the country almost exactly a year ago, sparked by anger over economic and political conditions.

“Those events caused the

Americans to change their position regarding the Islamic republic and the nuclear deal,” he said.

“The real objective of the US in all of this conspiracy and sanction and pressure... is to bring the powerful Islamic republic of Iran to its knees,” he said, vowing that the US “will definitely be defeated.”

The renewed US sanctions include an embargo on Iran’s crucial oil sector.

The new budget did not say how many barrels of oil Iran hopes to sell in the next financial year, which starts in late March, but analysts believe it will be considerably less than the approximately 2.5 million it sold per day prior to Trump’s withdrawal.

The US granted waivers to eight key buyers of Iranian oil -- including China, India and Turkey -- though this has been a double-edged sword for Iran since it also helped push down the global price.

Forex ‘practically zero’

Rouhani came to power in 2013 representing the more moderate side of Iran’s ruling elite, hoping a compromise on the country’s nuclear programme would reduce tensions with the West and allow foreign investment to boost the stunted private sector.

The return of sanctions has ended that hope, and forced Rouhani more towards the self-sufficient “resistance economy” preferred by supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Concern over the economy pushed many Iranians to secure their savings in dollars and gold, triggering a run on the Iranian rial, which has lost around half its value since Trump announced the pullout.

“At one point early this year our foreign exchange cash reserve was practically zero, forcing the government to take hard decisions to save the country,” Rouhani told parliament. — AFP ■

Building a democracy which guarantees rights for all citizens

MYANMAR is an independent and sovereign nation. Just before Myanmar became free, the architect of our independence, Bogyoke Aung San, said our people would have to make strenuous efforts for 10 to 20 years after independence to carry out the task of rebuilding and developing the country.

As part of rebuilding efforts, he held talks with traders and merchants at the Sorrento Villa one year before independence and drew plans that were to be implemented as soon as the country achieved freedom. However, the plans could not be realized.

As soon as Myanmar gained independence, the country was besieged by rifts among political parties, sectarianism, and armed conflicts. The country had to struggle once again for peace and stability, rather than focusing on rebuilding efforts.

Since the time we gained independence, we have lost much to armed conflicts. As there was no peace, there was no stability, and we lagged behind in many areas of development.

As a result, our country became one of the least developed countries. The world of today will not wait for our country.

For more than seventy years, peace, stability, and development in Myanmar have been a casualty to conflict. Even today, Myanmar is struggling to escape from

the trap of poverty and conflict, and great efforts will be needed if we are to catch up with the rest of the world. We, the people of Myanmar, have been waiting for almost 71 years for a better future and we believe that only peace can help make our dreams come true.

Now is the time to decide to leave to our future generations a unified and strong country, without armed conflicts. We cannot move towards development without peace. While its neighbouring countries are enjoying the fruits of development, Myanmar has not had an opportunity to get on the road to progress. However, we can take lessons from our neighbours and turn them to our advantage.

But first, it is important that we cultivate a mindset and culture worthy of a democracy. In fact, building a democracy means building a culture. Without changing our ideology, concepts, and stance, we cannot make use of democracy. Democracy comes from the people and we must establish a culture that deserves democracy.

Today, Myanmar is transitioning to a democracy to bring about mutual respect, mutual understanding, freedom, peace, and equality to the people, which are essential to an independent nation.

To achieve these goals, our people must participate in the democratic reforms and commit to building a federal democratic nation, which can guarantee democratic rights to all its people, on the occasion of the 71st anniversary of our Independence Day.

Independence - our national heritage

By Maung Khine Mar (Athet Min Hla)

TIME flies by for a span of (71) year on 4 January 2019 since we regained our independence from the British imperialists, where independence and sovereignty intertwined together at all time.

Sovereignty is permanent, exclusive, comprehensive, inalienable, absolute and unified. In order to be a sovereign nation people need independence.

Golden Palace turns into fire-wood

The chronicle of Myanmar had recorded that Beikthano Pyu City State, Thuwunna Bonmi (Ramanya) City State, Tharay Kit-tarar Pyu City State, Hanlin Pyu City State, Waytarlee Kingdom, Bagan (Pagan) Dynasty, Pinya Dynasty, Sagaing Dynasty, Innwa Dynasty, Bago / Hantharwaddy Dynasty, Kone Baung Dynasty or Alaungpaya Dynasty, and Kone Baung Dynasty that had past glories of own Kings and golden palaces with high and impressed cultures with people enjoying life with prosperity.

During different time and era when the nation fallen apart and shattered, the First Burmese Empire, the Second Burmese Empire, and the Third Burmese Empire were rebuilt into strong nation with well-built defence by King Anawrahta, King Bayint Naung, and King Alaungphaya.

However, at some stage in the reign of 11th Kone Baung Dynasty, the strong tide of British imperialism overwhelmed the country through three aggressive wars namely the First Anglo-Myanmar War (1824-1826), the Second Anglo-Myanmar War (April 1852- December 1852), and the Third Anglo-Myanmar War (1885).

The First Anglo-Myanmar War broke out during the reign of King Bagyidaw, and conceded Rakhine, Tanintharyi and Assam through the Treaty of Yandabo (24-2-1826).

During the reign of King Pagan Min, the Second Anglo-Myanmar War broke out and that Bago and Mottama regions of lower Myanmar up to Myay Htai (Aung-glan Township) were conceded.

Ugly and worst episode was seen at the Third Anglo-Myanmar War (29-11-1885), when King Thibaw Min was dethroned, and

the whole of Myanmar was annexed.

Governor-General of India Lord Dufferin on 1 January 1886 announced that Upper Myanmar was the land of British Empire, and therefore, it was resulted that the golden palace had been turned into firewood.

National Movements

Dethroning the Myanmar King was easy; however, confronting and fighting back the resistance of all nationalities from flat landscapes to hilly regions were not smooth. It took ten years in calming down the flat lands and plains, while it took fifteen years in pacifying hilly regions.

The British could grip the whole country around 1900, but, 10 May 1906 saw the emergence of YMBA, a form of anti-imperialist association. In 1920, the association transformed into GCBA (General Council of Burmese Association), and the year saw the first student strike.

On 12 June 1922, the Burma Reform Bills was approved and the Dyarchy Administration was put into force on 1 July 1922. At that juncture, the GCBA had split into two due to differing idea whether to merge or remain separate with India. Whatever it may be, the people remained united.

1930 witnessed the farmers' revolt spearheaded by Sayar San, leader of the anti-British rebellion, and in the same year the Dobama Asiayone had been formed.

1937 ushered in with the (91) Departments Administration, and curved out of India. The 1938 strikes, also known by its Burma era year as the 1300 people's upheaval saw the merger of oilfield workers and the farmers. Thakin Aung San left the country on 8 August 1940, followed by the Thirty Comrades being trained with warfare in Japan.

Myanmar saw many episodes such as that of the fight and revolt against the British by the combined forces of Japan and BIA; that of the Japanese handing over bogus and fake independence to Myanmar on 1 August 1943; that of the ill treatment and cruelty of Japanese troops to the people; that of the formation of anti-fascists groups and revolts; that of the resistance



At different places and different times, Bogyoke unveiled his views in strongly worded statements for the country.

against Japanese on 27 March 1945; that of the Nay Thu Rein Conference and the formation of AFPFL; that of the people's support to the leadership of AFPFL.

Preparation for Independence

On 8 November 1946, the AFPFL demanded certain agreements from the British Government, and therefore, Bogyoke Aung San was invited to Britain in November 1946 for negotiation. Later, Sir Gilbert Laithwaite was sent to Myanmar and arranged talks with AFPFL leaders.

With the assistance of Governor of British Burma Sir Hubert Rance, Myanmar delegation headed by Bogyoke Aung San left for London, and arrived London on 9 January, and that meetings were held for many days from 13 to 26 of January 1947.

Subsequently on 27 January 1947, the historic Aung San - Atlee Agreement was signed.

Following the signing of the agreement, the Burma Communist Party Politburo member Comrade Ba Tin (a) H.N. Goshal heavily criticized Bogyoke Aung San in an open letter in the Communist mouthpiece magazine, by name calling and condemning for kneeling down to right wing camp. Moreover, Politburo Member Thakin Than Mya on 3 February 1947 strongly criticized the London negotiations.

In fact, the Aung San - Atlee Agreement had guaranteed for impendence as well as the holding of election, and that the AFPFL had reaped with land-

slide victory with (95.3) per cent in the election.

Following the election, the AFPFL Conference was held at the Yangon Jubilee Hall from 19-23 May 1947, where (14) point terms had been agreed to be incorporated in the draft Constitution, and that it also covered the agenda on the handing over of state power. Moreover, Thakin Nu

29 August 1947 signed the 1947 Let Ya - Freeman Agreement in the context and framework of the Aung San - Atlee Agreement.

The Third Conference of the Parliament was convened from 15 to 24 September 1947 and approved the Constitution, and Speaker of the Chamber of Nationalities Nyaungshwe Saw Bwa Shan Chief Sao Shwe Thaik

It is our duty to protect and preserve the nation for posterity, which is our historical duty and obligation.

and team were sent to Britain on 23 June 1947 for detailed informal discussion.

In the backdrop of messy and complicated situation, Bogyoke Aung San and his colleagues were assassinated on 19 July 1947 and that was a great loss to the nation.

However, the AFPFL Government headed by Thakin Nu continued the work plan in drafting the Constitution in order to declare Independence. The second conference of the Parliament was convened from 16 to 29 August 1947, and subsequently on

the attendance of temporary President Sao Shwe Thaik, temporary Prime Minister Thakin Nu, Ministers, temporary Hluttaw Speaker Pyaw Bwe U Mya, foreign diplomats, AFPFL representatives, departmental heads and specially invited guests.

Exactly at 4:20 am, the British warship HMS Birmingham at Yangon jetty released shots of cannon balls as celebration, and the Union Jack flag was lowered at the Parliament Building and the flag of the Union of Myanmar was raised on the pennant pole.

Programs such as that of the acceptance of Presidential post, that of the adoption of the Constitution, that of the silent mourning memory to the fallen leaders for independence, that of the declaration on the independence, that of the singing of state independence song, that of the acceptance of post by the Prime Minister; that of the delivery of Independence speech of the Prime Minister; that of the swearing in of the ministers, and that of the successful closing down of the event.

For perpetuity of national heritage

The writer of this article has taken time in elaborating the detailed events of independence for the benefit of the upcoming young generation in sharing the valuable lessons that of the significance of independence struggle, that of the significance of the patriots who scarified their lives for independence, that of the desire to impart the patriotic spirit to the young generation in preserving and protecting the independence. Moreover, the writer is desirous to convey the notion that the independence is indeed very hard to achieve, but losing the liberty is a matter of disunity and lack of patriotism for which the new generation is to draw lessons from history.

In wrapping up the piece, the author of this article would like to draw the attention that the image of Myanmar on the world map is adorable which is the outcome and result that stand out as national heritage through the sacrifices with flesh, blood and bone of our ancestors.

It is our duty to protect and preserve the nation for posterity, which is our historical duty and obligation.

Declaration of Independence

Declaration of Independence was conducted in grandeur with

Translated by UMT (Ahlon)

U Kyaw Zeya concurrently accredited as Ambassador of Myanmar to the Kingdom of Spain

THE President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has appointed U Kyaw Zeya, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to the French Republic, concurrently as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to the Kingdom of Spain.—MNA

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.



Myanmar Daily Weather Report (Issued on Tuesday 25 December 2018)

SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS RECORDED AT 09:30 hrs MST: During the past (24) hours, weather has been partly cloudy in Upper Sagaing, Bago and Taninthayi regions, Rakhine and Mon states and generally fair in the remaining regions and states. Night temperatures were (2°C) below December average temperatures in Yangon Region, Northern Shan and Chin states, (2°C) above December average temperature in Mon State and about December average temperature in the remaining regions and states. The significant night temperatures were (-1°C) in Haka, (3°C) each in Pinlaung and Heho, (4°C) each in Loilin and Ramthlo, (5°C) each in Putao, Falam and Pyin Oo Lwin.

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

FORECAST VALID UNTIL AFTERNOON OF 26 December 2018: Light rain will be isolated in Taninthayi Region. Degree of certainty is (80%). Weather will be partly cloudy in Bago, Yangon and Ayeyawady regions, Kayin and Mon states and generally fair in the remaining regions and states.

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

OUTLOOK FOR SUBSEQUENT TWO DAYS: Slight decrease of night temperatures in the whole country.

Japan approves steps to help make life easier for foreign workers

TOKYO — Japan approved on Tuesday a set of measures to ensure that foreign workers entering the country under its new visa system enjoy proper working conditions and access to broad support in their daily lives.

The government came up with a 126-point policy package aimed at facilitating the daily lives of foreigners who may not be used to Japanese culture and customs, earmarking 22.4 billion yen (\$201 million) through the current and next fiscal year starting April.

The programmes include a plan to set up around 100 consultation service centres across Japan that will provide information and advice on a range of issues such as on employment, medical services, child-raising and education.

The so-called one-stop consultation centres will offer services in 11 languages, including English, Chinese, Vietnamese and Indonesian.

The endorsement of the government's basic policy on the new visa system and the support package came as Japan prepares for the entry of more foreign workers from April to tackle serious labor shortages in the country.

Under the basic policy, the government pledges to offer "proper" working conditions for foreign workers in terms of pay, working hours and safety.

Amid some criticism that the government is moving too quickly and has not sufficiently prepared for an influx of foreign

workers, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe instructed at a meeting attended by Cabinet ministers that the assistance programs be implemented properly.

"I'd like you to make utmost efforts for the system to operate in a way that will make foreign people want to work and live (in Japan)," Abe said.

Those applying for the new visas are mainly expected from nine Asian countries — Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand, the Philippines and Viet Nam — and they will be able to work in 14 industrial sectors, including construction, the restaurant business, farming and nursing care.

The government aims to work with the nine Asian countries to shut out unscrupulous brokers from collecting fees from foreign workers on the pretext of assisting them to come to Japan and find jobs.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said in a press conference that Tokyo plans to reach bilateral agreements with the Asian countries to that end.

Calls have been growing to tackle the activities of such brokers, seen as one of the possible reasons why some foreigners already working in Japan under the so-called technical internship programme are saddled with debts and end up being exploited.

With Japan expecting up to 345,150 foreigners to acquire the new residency statuses in the first five years, the government said it will take steps to avoid



Photo from December 2010 shows the foreign resident registration counter at a ward office in Osaka. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

having foreign workers settle "excessively" in large city areas, where wages are typically higher compared with regional cities.

Suga, the top government spokesman, said the Justice Ministry will regularly make public the number of foreign workers by sector and region once the new scheme begins.

In industry-specific guidelines approved the same day, the government stipulated the estimated number of workers to be accepted in each of the 14 sectors over the five-year period, such as 60,000 in the nursing assistant sector and 53,000 in the restau-

rant business.

The figures will be used as a ceiling and will not be altered unless there is a major change in the economic situation, according to the government.

Under the 126-point package, Japan will also enhance multilingual services at hospitals and other existing public facilities, such as job-placement offices, as well as making emergency advisories about natural disasters from the government's warning system available in different languages.

Foreign workers will be encouraged to enroll in Japan's public health insurance programmes,

which cover a portion of medical expenses, but the government noted that it will also take steps to prevent abuse of the programmes.

The new visa system allows foreign workers aged 18 or older to apply for two new resident statuses — the "No 1" type for people who will engage in work that requires a certain level of knowledge and experience, and the "No 2" type for work that requires higher skill levels.

Those with status No 1, which is valid for up to five years, will not be allowed to bring family members to Japan. But the entrants granted No 2 status will be allowed to do so and there will be no limit on the number of times they can renew their visa.

Foreign workers seeking to apply for the No 1 visa will be required to have an understanding of basic Japanese conversation and a language test is to be created for eligible applicants to take.

By creating the new visa statuses, Japan will formally open its doors to foreign blue-collar workers for the first time. In the past, the country has granted working visas only to people with professional knowledge and high skills such as doctors, lawyers and teachers. Workers will be allowed to switch jobs if certain conditions are met. They will be employed basically on a full-time and direct basis, but the farming and fishery sectors that are influenced by seasonal factors can employ foreign workers on a temporary basis.—Kyodo News■

Tokyo stocks plunge in Christmas rout

TOKYO (Japan) — Tokyo stocks plunged on Tuesday as the few Asian markets open on Christmas suffered a holiday rout on fears about the US economy and a government shutdown in Washington.

Tokyo markets, which were closed on Monday for a national holiday, plummeted at the open on Tuesday, with the Nikkei closing down more than five percent — over 1,000 points.

It was the worst finish since April 2017 and followed a brutal holiday-shortened session on Wall Street that saw US stocks sink for a fourth straight session.

In Asia, many markets were closed for Christmas, including in Australia, Hong Kong and South Korea.

US and European markets are also closed for the holiday.

But the downturn affected those bourses that remained open, with China's benchmark Shanghai Composite Index tumbling over two percent during the morning session, though it recovered slightly by afternoon.

Markets have been roiled by ongoing uncertainty in the United States, with Treasury Secretary Stephen Mnuchin widely panned for holding a call with the six biggest US banks and then reporting on Twitter that the six CEOs have "ample liquidity" available.

Investors were also unnerved by weekend news reports that US President Donald Trump had asked about the

possibility of firing Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell, accounts that Mnuchin said Trump had denied.

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.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average slumped nearly three percent by the close on Monday, with the broad-based S&P 500 down 2.7 per cent and the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index down more than two per cent.

The declines brought the S&P 500 to the brink of a "bear market," considered a drop of 20 per cent from its peak.—AFP ■

China cuts market access barriers nationwide

BEIJING — China took further steps in opening up its market to domestic and overseas investors on Tuesday by rolling out nationwide a shorter negative list for market access.

The latest version of the negative list for market access consists 151 items and 581 specific rules, down by 177 and 288 respectively compared with the previous version.

The negative list outlines sectors, fields and businesses off-limits for investors. Indus-

tries not on the list are open for investment to all market players.

China started to pilot the negative-list approach in 2016 in the country's four provincial regions with free trade zones. The pilot practice was extended to another 11 provincial regions in 2017. The country's top economic planner said the negative-list approach will help the market play the decisive role in allocating resources and enable a level playing field for all market players.—Xinhua ■

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“I am all alone in WH”, says Trump as partial govt shutdown enters third day

WASHINGTON — Bored at the White House on Christmas Eve, a lone Donald Trump spent the day slamming his critics, as the government entered its third day of partial shutdown initiated by a rift with Democrats over the President's long-promised wall along the US-Mexico border.

President Trump, who has cancelled his trip to his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida on Monday, said he was “all alone” in the White House waiting for the Democrats to come to the negotiating table to end the partial government shutdown.

Through a series of tweets and pictures, Trump showed he was working hard while the opposition Democratic lawmakers were in their homes celebrating Christmas.

“I am all alone (poor me) in the White House waiting for the Democrats to come back and make a deal on desperately needed Border Security,” Trump tweeted on Monday.

Trump wants the Democrats to fund for a border wall to stop illegal immigrants from entering the US. Democrats have refused his demands for USD 5 billion in funding for his border wall in a standoff that resulted in a partial government at midnight on



US President Donald Trump. PHOTO: AFP

Friday.

“At some point the Democrats not wanting to make a deal will cost our country more money than the border wall we are all talking about. Crazy!” Trump said. Several hours later, Trump said in a tweet that he was in the Oval Office and working on border security.

“I am in the Oval Office and just gave out a 115-mile-long contract for another large section of the Wall in Texas. We are already building and renovating many miles of Wall, some complete. Democrats must end Shutdown and finish funding. Billions of dol-

lars, and lives, will be saved!” he said. He also tweeted a picture of him with senior administration officials for a briefing on North Korea.

“Christmas Eve briefing with my team working on North Korea Progress being made. Looking forward to my next summit with Chairman Kim!” Trump said.

Later in the evening, he and the First lady Melania helped children across the country to track Santa. “Nothing new on the shutdown. We need more security,” he told reporters during this phone call with children.

Santa Tracker is a 63-year

tradition of tracking Santa's sleigh from the North Pole to children all over the world.

Despite the shutdown, military personnel were on the operation, as were reportedly some 1,500 people who volunteer each year. Trump told a kid named Coleman, “Hello, is this Coleman? Merry Christmas. How are you? How old are you? ... Are you doing well in school? Are you still a believer in Santa Claus?”

“How are you? Are you tracking Santa? ...I want to wish you a Merry Christmas. Thank you. Nice talking to you,” Melania told an unidentified child.

“What's Santa going to get you for Christmas? Who's with you....Have a great Christmas., and I'll talk to you again, OK?” Trump told another kid, possibly from Indiana.

“Are you tracking Santa? Do you know where he is?... I hope your dreams come true,” said Melania to another child.

Trump also could be heard asking kids where they were from and then thanking a general, possibly from NORAD or the North American Aerospace Command.

Trump and the First Lady attended a Christmas Service at Washington National Cathedral Monday night.—PTI ■

Netanyahu says wants similar right-wing coalition after elections

JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday he hoped for a similar right-wing coalition after early elections that his government agreed to hold in April.

Netanyahu, speaking to journalists after the polls were announced, laid out what he sees as his achievements and said he hoped the current coalition, seen as the most right-wing in Israel's history, serves as the “core” for the next one. “The current coalition is, in my eyes, the core of the next coalition,” Netanyahu said.

“We ask for a clear mandate from the voter to continue to lead the state of Israel in our own way.”

Elections were not due until November, but there had long been speculation that the coalition would not last that long, especially in recent weeks.

Netanyahu has been clinging to a one-seat majority in parliament since defence minister Avigdor Lieberman resigned over a controversial Gaza ceasefire in November.

He is also under pressure after police recommended his indictment in three different corruption probes.— AFP ■

At least 43 killed in Kabul govt compound attack

KABUL (Afghanistan) — An hours-long gun and suicide attack on a Kabul government compound killed at least 43 people, the health ministry said on Tuesday, making it one of the deadliest assaults on the Afghan capital this year.

No militant group has claimed responsibility for the raid, which caps a bloody year for Afghanistan as long-suffering civilians and security forces are slaughtered in record numbers.

Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid told AFP the attack had “nothing to do with the militants”.

Another 25 people were wounded in Monday's massacre on a site where the Ministry of Public Works and an office that handles pensions and benefits for war veterans are located, spokesman Waheed Majroh said.

Gunmen stormed the compound mid-afternoon after detonating a car bomb at the main entrance — opposite residential apartment buildings — sending terrified people running for their lives. Some jumped from windows several floors high to escape the militants.

The suicide blast appears to have been a decoy, according to witnesses who told AFP they saw several militants enter the compound through a back gate.

Hundreds were trapped inside the compound for hours as heavily armed security forces swarmed the area, engaging the attackers in a fierce gun battle punctuated by multiple explosions.

At least four militants, including the bomber, were killed and more than 350 people freed, officials said. Most of the dead



Aghan policemen stand guards at the entrance gate of the Ministry of Public Works a day after a deadly militant attack in Kabul on 25 December, 2018. PHOTO: AFP

and wounded were civilians, who have borne the brunt of the 17-year war.

It was the deadliest assault in the Afghan capital since a suicide bomber blew himself up in the middle of a religious gathering last month, killing at least 55 people. President Ashraf Ghani, whose government has

been skewered over its security failures, said “terrorists attack civilian targets to hide their defeat on the battleground”.

Afghanistan's de facto prime minister Abdullah Abdullah also sounded a defiant note as he blamed the Taliban for the attack.

“Every attack they carry out against our people, our resolve is

further strengthened to eliminate them,” he said.

But their statements belie the grim reality on the battlefield where the Taliban have the upper hand. Afghanistan's largest militant group has made significant territorial gains this year as its fighters inflict record casualties on government forces.— AFP ■

N Korea blasts UN resolution on rights abuse

SEOUL (South Korea) — North Korea on Tuesday hit back at a latest UN resolution that condemned Pyongyang's rights abuses, calling it a "serious... provocation" that would undermine peace efforts on the Korean peninsula.

The UN General Assembly adopted last week a resolution — which passed by consensus without a vote — condemning the "systematic, widespread and gross" human rights violations in the isolated North.

The impoverished but nuclear-armed nation, ruled by the Kim family through three generations, has been accused of state-sanctioned abuses including torture, rape and extrajudicial killings.

It marked the 14th consecutive year the UN has passed such a document.

The North has constantly denied any rights abuses in the country and labelled the UN criticisms as smear campaigns aimed at undermining its leadership.

The North's state-run Rodong newspaper slammed the latest resolution as a "serious political provocation against the (North) and a vicious move to tarnish its international image".

"The wicked intention of the US... in getting vocal about



Pyongyang residents bow before the statues of late North Korean leaders Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il during National Memorial Day on Mansu Hill in Pyongyang on 17 December, 2018. **PHOTO: AFP**

the non-existent 'human rights issue' of the DPRK is to broaden the scope of the sanctions and pressure and escalate them," it said in an editorial, using the North's official name.

The editorial also lashed out at a "thoughtless" South Korea for backing the UN bill — a move that would be "tarnishing the atmosphere of improving the north-south ties".

Washington had separately

sought to organize a Security Council meeting on human rights in the North but gave up on the option earlier this month because it was unsure of the support it would get from partners.

But the US hopes to hold the meeting next month with the arrival of new non-permanent council members that could be more favourable to doing so.

The South's President

Moon Jae-in has advocated dialogue with the North to nudge it to denuclearization negotiations and has met with its leader Kim Jong Un three times this year.

Kim also met with US President Donald Trump in a historic summit in June but progress has stalled with both sides accusing each other of dragging their feet and acting in bad faith.—AFP ■

Thai prisoner electrocuted during botched jailbreak

BANGKOK (Thailand) — A Thai prisoner died early Tuesday after being electrocuted by high-voltage barbed wire as he attempted to escape, police said.

Wiwat Aksorsom, 32, broke free from his cell just after midnight along with two other prisoners and tried to scale the six-metre (20-ft) walls of his prison in southern Surat Thani province.

But he accidentally touched the electrified barbed wire cresting the prison walls killing him instantly, Colonel Wanchai Palawan, superintendent of Chaiya district police, told AFP.

"Prison officials found his body on the wall after he was electrocuted," he said.

Wiwat had been arrested in possession of 38 methamphetamine tablets, and was remanded in custody while pending police investigation. The two other prisoners — also jailed for drug offences — made it through without making contact with the fatal wiring. But one was promptly re-arrested after breaking his arm as he landed on the other side of the wall, while the other was found hours later in a police search around the perimeter.

"They said they are homesick," Wanchai added.

Thai prisons are all equipped with high-voltage electrical fencing to serve as a deterrent to escaping prisoners. Most facilities are also massively overcrowded in a country which has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world due to harsh penalties for drug offences. Those push small-time drug dealers and users, including women, behind bars for long periods. Authorities are mulling ways to ease overcrowding including the widespread use of electronic ankle tags. Thailand was criticised in June for putting a 26-year-old convicted murderer to death by lethal injection — its first execution since 2009.—AFP ■

High-speed railway starts operation in China's coldest region

HARBIN — A high-speed railway line officially went into operation on Tuesday, linking

cities in China's northernmost province of Heilongjiang, where the temperatures dip

as low as minus 40 degrees Celsius.

The 300-km line designed

to allow trains running at 250 km per hour cuts the travel time between the provincial capital of Harbin and Mudanjiang, known as "snow city," from over four hours to one hour and 28 minutes, according to the China Railway Harbin Group.

The line is China's northernmost high-speed railway. Construction of the railway started in December 2014, as one of the key projects in China's high-speed rail network scheme.

At its destination of Mudanjiang, the railway with 11 stops connects with an existing rail line between Mudanjiang and Suifenhe, which is China's major border city with Russia.

China's railway network is expected to hit 175,000 km in length by 2025, compared with 127,000 km of operating tracks by the end of last year.—Xinhua ■



The first bullet train D9551 for Hangzhou-Huangshan railway waits to leave Hangzhou East Railway Station in east China's Zhejiang Province on 25 December, 2018. A high-speed railway linking the scenic cities of Hangzhou and Huangshan in east China was put into operation on Tuesday. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

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Attackers hit Libya foreign ministry in Tripoli, one dead

TRIPOLI (Libya) — Gunfire and explosions rocked Libya's foreign ministry on Tuesday as attackers stormed the building in the capital Tripoli, killing at least one person, witnesses and a security source said.

A car bomb exploded in front of the ministry, after which "three or four assailants" entered, the source told AFP from the scene.

A suicide bomber then struck inside and gunfire broke out, according to the source, who said the victim was a civil servant.

Plumes of smoke were seen rising from the building as ambulances, paramedics and security forces gathered outside.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

Torn apart by power struggles and undermined by chronic insecurity, Libya has become a haven for jihadists since the ouster and killing of Moamer Kadhafi in 2011.

Two competing administrations, rival militias, tribes and jihadists have been competing for control of territory and the country's vast oil wealth.

The Islamic State jihadist group (IS) took advantage of the chaos to gain a foothold in the coastal city of Sirte in



A picture taken on December 25, 2018 shows a firetruck and security officers at the scene of an attack outside the Libyan foreign ministry headquarters in the capital Tripoli. At least one person was killed on December 25 as attackers stormed Libya's foreign ministry after a car bomb exploded in front of the building and a suicide bomber then struck inside, a security source at the scene told AFP. **PHOTO: AFP**

2015.

Forces loyal to the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) regained control of the city in December 2016 after eight months of deadly fighting.

Since then, some jihadists have returned to the desert in an attempt to regroup and reorganise.

In September, IS claimed responsibility for a suicide attack on the headquarters of Libya's National Oil Company in the heart of Tripoli which left two dead and 10 wounded. Four months earlier, it claimed an at-

tack on the electoral commission's headquarters which left 14 dead.

In April, the GNA launched an operation to track down IS fighters operating in areas of western Libya under its control.

Last month IS claimed responsibility for an attack on militia forces in southeastern Libya in which at least nine people were killed.

The US military has regularly carried out strikes on jihadists in Libya, particularly south of Sirte.

The GNA was set up under a 2015 UN-bro-

kered deal, but a rival administration based in the country's east aligned with military strongman Khalifa Haftar refuses to recognise its authority.

Rival Libyan leaders had agreed to a Paris-brokered deal in May to hold a nationwide election by the end of the year.

But instability, territorial disputes and divisions have delayed plans for elections.

Two days of meetings last month in Italy laid bare deep divisions between key players in the crisis with some delegates refusing to sit side by side.—AFP ■

Five killed in China as hijacked bus crashes into pedestrians

BEIJING (China) — At least five people were killed and 21 injured after a hijacked bus crashed into pedestrians in east China's Fujian province on Tuesday afternoon, state media reported.

A hijacker carrying a knife had been detained and was being investigated by local police, state television CGTN reported.

The incident happened at about 3:20 pm in the city of Longyan, the local Minxi Ribao newspaper reported. A policeman was among the five confirmed dead.

A video posted by Duowei news, a Chinese media outlet based in the US, showed several injured people lying on the street near a crashed bus. It also showed police wrestling a person to the ground.

The Longyan public

security bureau declined to comment when contacted by AFP. China has suffered several similar incidents this year.

In late November a car rammed into a group of children crossing a street in front of an elementary school in northeast China's Liaoning province, killing five people and injuring another 18. Earlier that month, about 15 people died when a bus plunged off a bridge in southwest Chongqing municipality, after the driver got into a fist fight with a passenger who had missed her bus stop.

In February, a van packed with pressurised gas tanks and petrol-filled bottles caught fire and ploughed into pedestrians in Shanghai, leaving at least 18 people injured.

—AFP ■

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

M.V HAN FENG VOY. NO. (H1828E)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V HAN FENG VOY. NO. (H1828E) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 26-12-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of A.I.P.T2 where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

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AGENT FOR: M/S HANSSY SHIPPING PTE LTD
Phone No: 2301928

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M.V PACAO VOY. NO. (041N/S)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V PACAO VOY. NO. (041N/S) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 26-12-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of H.P.T where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

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CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

M.V ALS SUZURAN VOY. NO. (024N/S)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V ALS SUZURAN VOY. NO. (024N/S) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 26-12-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of A.W.P.T where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S INTERSIA LINE
Phone No: 2301185

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

M.V RAINBOW IVY VOY. NO. (-)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V RAINBOW IVY VOY. NO. (-) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 26-12-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T.T5 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 KING STAR SHIPPING
Phone No: 2301928

Emerald Bay project to launch in 2019



PHOTO: SUPPLIED

THE Emerald Bay housing project, jointly conducted by a Singapore company and Tet Lann company in Yangon, will launch in 2019 on 70 acres in Thakayta Township, according to a statement released by the consortium group.

The modern city and eco-smart project is lo-

cated on the point where three rivers, the Yangon, Bago and Pazuntaung, meet.

The project includes a 32-story, 40 condominium high rise to be built in the first phase. Also, five 32-story buildings will be built among the remaining housing, to be completed in five years, ac-

cording to the statement released by the Yangon Golden Paragon.

The showroom for the project is expected to be completed soon, with the permission of the Yangon City Development Committee. Plans call for the showroom to be open to the public in February, 2019.—GNLM

IKBZ promotes road safety with dash cams

AS part of a campaign to promote road safety in the New Year, IKBZ insurance is providing free dashboard cameras on every fresh motor policy or renewal from December 24, for a limited period of time.

The purpose of the campaign, launched in Yangon, is to reduce chances of death or injury due to road accidents and to create a safe environment for motor insurance customers and others, the insurance company stated in an announcement.

According to a WHO study, Myanmar ranks second in terms of the number of road fatalities in Southeast Asia. High-speed and reckless driving and consumption of alcohol and drugs are the primary causes for the increasing number of deaths in road accidents.

With the new campaign, car owners can use dash cams to monitor drivers, the company stated adding, the dash cams can also serve as a reminder to drivers to follow traffic rules.

Mr. Anil Mancham, the Deputy Managing Director of IKBZ Insurance, said that a dash cam would make a thoughtful New Year gift for new or loyal customers as it would help make

the roads safer for them and their loved ones. "It will give them peace of mind when employing professional drivers. This program fits in with our brand values of providing reliability and peace of mind to our customers," he said.

"Dashboard cameras record videos of the road and are motion sensitive. They can capture shocks even when turned off, as in the case of a parked vehicle. They help settle claims better and are being used around the world to improve road safety," he said.

"Drivers using dash cams have been found to improve their driving etiquette. Research shows that people who know they're being watched are less likely to act rudely or selfishly – which, on the road, can be the difference between a near miss and a crash," he said.

"Helping drivers think twice about their own behavior is a positive step towards reducing irresponsible conduct on the road. Dash cams can act as a deterrent to thoughtless actions that may end up in tragedies," he added.

The free New Year dash cam campaign started from 24 December.—Thura Lwin (Eco) ■

HK says Taiwan metal band leader denied visa lacks 'special skills'

HONG KONG (China) — The frontman of a popular Taiwanese metal band which advocates independence for the island was denied a visa to Hong Kong because he lacked "special skills", a music festival organizer said on Monday.

ChthoniC, one of Asia's most successful black metal bands, slammed the decision as "ridiculous" after they were forced to pull out of a music festival in the southern Chinese city over the weekend because band members were unable to get a visa from Hong Kong's immigration department.

Frontman Freddy Lim is also a pro-independence lawmaker in Taiwan and the cancellation fuelled fears about eroding artistic freedoms in Hong Kong as authorities clamp down on pro-democracy sentiment at the behest of Beijing.

Hong Kong's immigration authorities have yet to say why the visas were refused.

But on Monday Denise Ho, a pro-democracy canto-pop star who had invited ChthoniC to perform at a festival, posted a letter from the immigration department setting out the reasons for

Lim's refusal.

"A person seeking to enter into Hong Kong ... for employment should amongst other things, possess a special skill, knowledge or experience of value to and not readily available in the (city)," the letter stated.

"Having considered the information made available and all circumstances of the case, we are not satisfied that this case meets the aforesaid criteria," it added.

Lim called the government's reason "ridiculous" but added he remained hopeful.

"I have many friends in Hong Kong, friends from the music scene, friends who are involved in Hong Kong's social movement, and everyone is trying so hard to change things," Lim told AFP.

The immigration department did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment.

ChthoniC was founded in 1995 by Lim and has gone on to become one of the region's most successful metal bands.

Lim became a lawmaker in 2016 and his New Power Party calls for Taiwan to be recognized

internationally as a country. He was denied a travel visa to Hong Kong later that year.

Netizens in Hong Kong, where authorities have been steadily clamping down on the city's pro-independence sentiments, ridiculed the government's apparent excuse.

"That means Madonna wouldn't be qualified to do a concert in Hong Kong either,"

wrote one Facebook user.

"The song he sings, only he can sing it. How is that not a special skill?" commented another.

Beijing still sees Taiwan as part of its territory to be reunified, despite the two sides being ruled separately since the end of a civil war on the mainland in 1949.

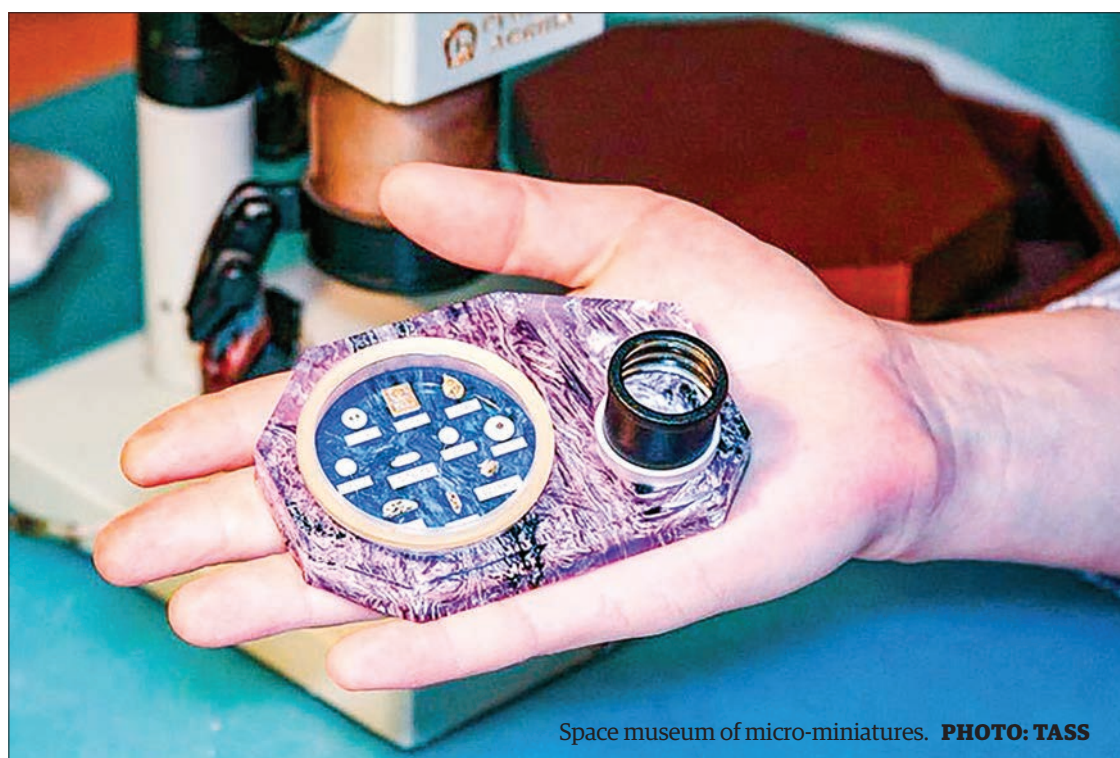
In recent years, concern has also grown in Hong Kong

about its freedoms disappearing as China tightens its grip on the semi-autonomous city.

A senior Financial Times journalist's visa renewal was rejected earlier this year after he hosted a speech at Hong Kong's press club by Andy Chan, the leader of a tiny pro-independence political party. Authorities did not provide an explanation for the rejection.—AFP ■



Freddy Lim (R with other members of ChthoniC) founded the band in 1995 and they have gone on to become one of the region's most successful metal bands. PHOTO: AFP



Space museum of micro-miniatures. PHOTO: TASS

Tiny museum with big names gets back to Earth after half-year tour on ISS

NOVOSIBIRSK — A space museum of micro-miniatures designed by a craftsman from Siberia's Novosibirsk city, Vladimir Aniskin, wrapped up its half-year tour on board the International Space Station before getting back home last week.

"At last my dream has come true - the space museum visited the ISS. It was the first museum outside the Earth," Aniskin said. "The space museum arrived on board the ISS on 23 March, 2018, spending 196 days there," the craftsman told TASS on Monday.

The museum fits in the palm of your hand and is a piece of charoite, on which exhibits and a magnifying glass are installed. It consists of ten exhibits, among them Yuri Gagarin's portrait made of gold made on a poppy seed, a watercolour portrait of rocket engineer Sergey Korolyov, pictures of Soviet space dogs Belka and Strelka made on an apple kernel, the Buran

spacecraft on a wheat grain, astronauts' autograph notes on rice grains, a satellite and a spacecraft on a strand of hair, a miniature post card with a formula by Soviet rocket scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, and an icon of St Nicholas the Wonderworker.

"The museum weighs 234 grams, including the magnifier, which had to be dismantled due to being overweight. They used a hand glass on board the ISS," Aniskin said.

He designed the micro-museum back in May 2014 and had repeatedly tried to send it to space. Cosmonaut Alexander Lazutkin helped him promote the project, asking his fellow cosmonaut Oleg Artemyev to get it on board the ISS.

Artemyev returned back on Earth in October, and last week met with the craftsman to hand over the tiny museum. It will be shortly exhibited in Novosi-

birsk and then will move on to the Russian Lefty Museum in St Petersburg.

The museum was named in honor of 'the cross-eyed lefty from Tula', the main character of a folk tale by Nikolai Leskov, a craftsman from Tula who outdid English craftsmen by shoeing a steel flea they had made.

The Russian craftsman has been making micro-miniatures since 1998. His collection includes unique exhibits and classical works, such as the 'shod flea' and 'a camelcade in a needle hole'. He also created the world's smallest book, 67 times tinier than the one in the Russian Guinness Book of Records and 88 times smaller than the book entered into the Guinness Book of Records.

Aniskin is an engineer, designing and making micro-sensors for aerodynamic research and other domains of science. —Tass ■

Investigators question Russian cosmonaut about hole in Soyuz MS-09 hull

STAR CITY — Investigators have put several questions to Russian cosmonaut Oleg Artemiev after his return from the ISS concerning the case opened over a hole in the Soyuz MS-09 hull.

"There's been no questioning in the usual sense of the term yet. Everything is ahead. I answered questions about how we acted in that situation put to us not only by investigators, but also by flight specialists," he said.

Another Russian cosmonaut, Sergei Prokoviev, said he had not been questioned yet.

"It's all ahead," he replied.

Taking part in the news conference at the space training center on Monday were cosmonauts Artemiev and Prokoviev, who had patched the hole in the Soyuz MS-09 spacecraft at the end of last August.

A drop in air pressure oc-

curred on the International Space Station last August. Soon it turned out that air was leaking through a hole in the hull of the Soyuz MS-09 spacecraft attached to the ISS. Several days later specialists on Earth arrived at the conclusion the hull had been drilled from inside. Prokoviev and Artemiev patched the hole with two layers of epoxy resin.

On 12 December Prokoviev and another Russian cosmonaut, Oleg Kononenko, who remains on board the ISS, performed a spacewalk to examine the hole in the Soyuz spacecraft from outside. They ripped through the thermal and meteorite protection shields to examine and photograph the hole and take scrapings from the surface for analysis. It was the first-ever instance of meteorite protection screens being ripped through in outer space.—Tass ■

Archaeologists find 2,000-yr-old tombs in Inner Mongolia

HOHHOT — Archaeologists announced that they discovered a 2,000-year-old tomb complex on the Xilin Gol Prairie, northern China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

The site consists of 13 tombs of Xianbei ethnic group, nomadic minorities that used to dominate northern China, according to the regional institute of cultural relics and archaeology.

Most of the tombs contained wooden coffins, and colored drawing can be found on the exterior of some coffins.

Eleven tombs date back to

the late Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), and the remaining were from the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-557). Archaeologists found most of the tombs had been raided. More than 80 burial objects were also excavated such as pottery, gold, jewelry, bronze mirrors, coins and iron weapons.

"It's rare to discover a tomb complex in the vast Xilin Gol Prairie. The new discovery is significant for future studies on the burial customs of Xianbei ethnic group," said Dong Xinlin, who heads the archaeological team.

—Xinhua ■

British army's bomb disposal team take delivery of life saving robots

LONDON — The British Army has taken delivery of the first of its fleet of cutting edge bomb disposal units, replacing wheelbarrow-type devices troops have used for more than 45 years.

The unmanned ground vehicles (UGVs), equipped with high-definition cameras, an adjustable manipulation arm and tough all-terrain treads, will become a familiar sight on the streets of Britain as well as on battlefields.

The robots will allow army

bomb disposal teams to neutralize a wide range of explosive threats. The delivery of the four robots are part of a 70-million-US dollars contract for 56 robots.

The game-changing platforms endured a variety of tests during an eight-week acceptance trials period at sites in Britain and the US specifically chosen to put the robots through their paces.

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) said the robots were pushed to their limits by trials

including multi-terrain driving, a series of battlefield missions, weightlifting and dexterity tasks, climatic and vibration testing, high stress capabilities, live-firings, maximum traversing angles and interoperability assessments.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said: "These robots will go on to be an essential piece of kit, preventing harm to innocent civilians and the brave operators who make explosives safe.

"The robots will provide the army with the latest bomb-disposal technology and will prove to be trusted companions both on UK streets and in deadly conflict zones."

Col Zac Scott, who heads the military bomb disposal branch, said: "Remote Control Vehicles are critical to the safe conduct of Explosive Ordnance Disposal tasks."

He said the new Harris T7 robots harness cutting-edge technology to provide EOD

operators with unprecedented levels of mobility and dexterity. It represents a step-change in capability for our service personnel and it will save lives."

The programme is designed to replace the army's fleet of Wheelbarrow Mk8B remote-controlled EOD robots which have been used across the world by UK Armed Forces since 1972.

All 56 robots are due to be delivered to the British military, and be in service by December 2020.—Xinhua ■

Guardiola in new territory with English title fight

MANCHESTER (United Kingdom) — Pep Guardiola ends the calendar year with his Manchester City side embroiled in what has suddenly become a thrilling title race for the first time in his Premier League managerial career.

The former Barcelona and Bayern Munich boss, seven times a league champion in the three countries in which he has managed, takes City to Leicester on Boxing Day trailing leaders Liverpool by four points.

There is also now unexpected pressure beneath him, with Tottenham's superb 6-2 win at Everton having hauled Mauricio Pochettino's talented side to within two points of City.

It is a far cry from last season when, after 18 games, City held a commanding 11-point lead over second-placed Manchester United and were already, in the eyes of most pundits, as good as champions.

Twelve months earlier, in Guardiola's first season in English football, City were seven points behind leaders Chelsea at the corresponding stage but in the middle of a run of poor form which would eventually see them end the season in third place, 15 points behind Antonio Conte's title-winners.

City's shock 3-2 home defeat

by struggling Crystal Palace on Saturday has certainly put a new perspective on the league table heading into the busy holiday period which culminates with current leaders Liverpool visiting the Etihad to face City a week on Thursday (January 3).

For the first time since his days at Barcelona, Guardiola currently finds himself caught up in a potentially tense and exciting title race, with all that entails.

Former Liverpool manager Roy Hodgson, whose Palace side inflicted such an unexpected blow on City at the weekend, believes, however, that Guardiola will have all the necessary perspective to cope with a rare setback.

'Long way to go yet'

"Pep Guardiola is a very intelligent guy, it means that they haven't caught up those four points but he knows there are 20 matches left to play and one of those is going to be against Liverpool," said Hodgson.

"I don't think he will be concerned about that and he'll know that no matter how Liverpool play they will come up against a game like this. They will go somewhere and someone will beat them against the odds. There is a long way to go yet."

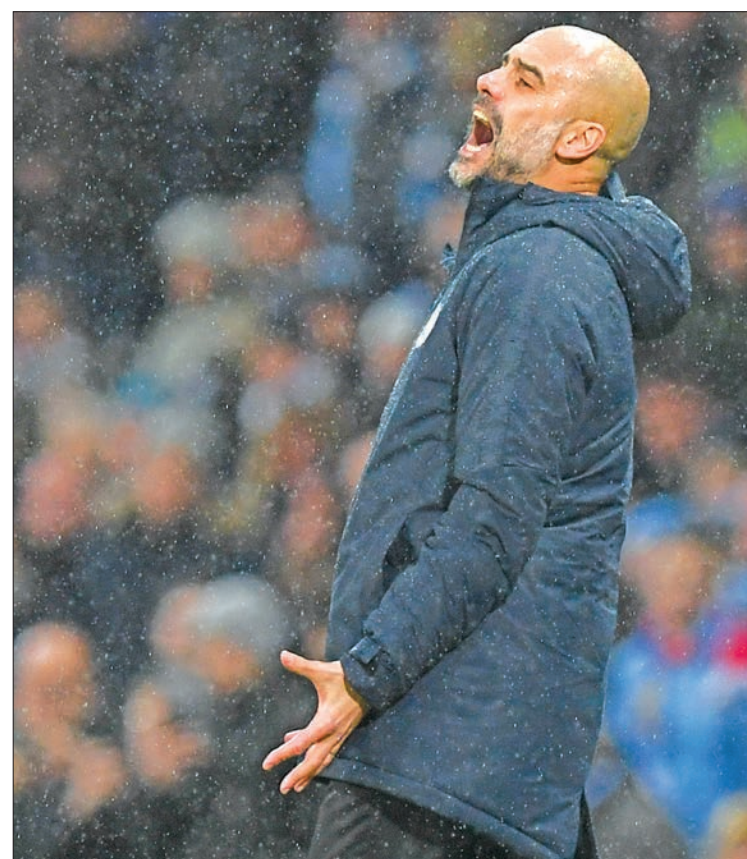
Certainly, Guardiola's three

seasons in Germany offered him little in terms of preparation for a close, down to the wire title race, with Bayern winning the league by at least double digits in points in each of his three seasons — including 2014 when Munich beat now Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp's Borussia Dortmund into second place by a staggering 19 points.

But his four seasons in charge of Barcelona were more competitive, given Barca's intense rivalry with Real Madrid, although in his first and last seasons he won and lost the league, respectively, by nine points.

In 2009/10, however, Barca pipped Real by just three points — Guardiola's closest title race to date — and retained their crown 12 months later, this time by only four. Now Guardiola faces several selection dilemmas over a holiday period which also includes a trip to a suddenly resurgent Southampton before the show-down with Klopp.

Holding midfielder Fernandinho missed the Palace defeat with a slight injury concern and proved a major miss, while Guardiola opted to start Kevin De Bruyne and Sergio Aguero — two key attacking players who are returning from injury lay-offs — on the bench. The pair are likely



Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola reacts on the touchline during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Crystal Palace at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England on 22 December, 2018. **PHOTO: AFP**

starters at Leicester, although their manager will clearly also be looking ahead to the Liverpool game in which victory has now taken on added importance for his side. Perhaps more alarming for Guardiola was the performance of England right-back

Kyle Walker against Palace, with the City defender badly at fault for two of the opposition's three goals.

The City manager may opt to play John Stones in that position to take Walker out of the firing line.—AFP ■

Benitez says Newcastle need 'another miracle' to stay up

LONDON (United Kingdom) — Rafael Benitez believes it will be "another miracle" if his Newcastle side retain their Premier League status.

The Spanish manager said finishing 10th last season was an extraordinary performance but added that would be matched simply by beating the drop this term give the fact that the Magpies' relegation rivals had all outspent the north-east side in pre-season.

Newcastle's position has also been complicated by owner Mike Ashley being frustrated in his wish to sell the club.

"We have to be realistic and understand that we will be in the bottom half during the whole season," said Benitez ahead of the Boxing Day clash away to his former side Liverpool who are looking to cement their lead at the top of the table.

"For me, it is almost clear

and if we can be better than three teams, it will be another miracle.

"It was a miracle last year. People were thinking, 'Oh, you finished 10th...', but with a couple fewer wins, we could have been in the bottom five, so it was a

miracle.

"If we do the same this year with teams spending even more money than last year, it will be a miracle."

He added: "I know what is coming now and I know where we are. You can see the team



Rafael Benitez. **PHOTO: AFP**

— the team is trying a lot of things, but still it's not enough sometimes to get the points, and it will be like that.

"If we are under pressure and we feel this pressure, we will not be better, we can make more mistakes," explained Benitez.

Newcastle are currently five points above the bottom three heading into the busy holiday period after last weekend's goalless draw with Fulham.

"I'm trying to tell everyone, realise where we are, realize what we have to do and if we do well, fine, we can finish 10th or whatever.

"But if we think we have to beat these teams which have spent £100 million (\$126 million), every one of them, during the summer, if we think we can beat them easily every game, no chance. We are wrong, 100 per cent."—AFP ■

Colombia midfielder Cardona joins Mexico's Pachuca

MEXICO CITY — Colombia international midfielder Edwin Cardona has joined Pachuca on loan after parting ways with Boca Juniors, the Mexican club said on Monday.

"Welcome to the the cradle of Mexican football, Edwin Cardona," Pachuca said in a social media post, without providing details of the move. Cardona, who is contracted with Pachuca's Liga MX rivals Monterrey until December 2020, struggled for regular first-team opportunities during an 18-month loan spell at Boca. He was left out of the matchday squad for both legs of the club's Copa Libertadores final defeat to rivals River Plate in November and December. Boca subsequently declined to take up an option of securing the 26-year-old on a permanent deal.—Xinhua ■