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INVENTORY OF BAGAN PAGODAS UNDERWAY

AN inventory of pagodas in two zones of Bagan has been completed as a prerequisite for listing Bagan as a World Heritage Site, according to the Archaeology and National Museum Department under the Ministry of Culture.

Bagan was previously demarcated into eleven zones in July 2015, after which an inventory of pagodas from each zone was initiated. By the end of December 2015, an inventory had been compiled of two of those zones.

“In one area, there are over three-hundred pagodas. In another, there are over five hundred. There were also some instances whereby pagodas were discovered which had been buried under mounds of earth—we had to comb the forest [in order to locate them]. The inventory includes those pagodas buried under the ground,” explained U Thein Lwin, the department’s deputy director general.

According to the same government department, the inventory of pagodas in Bagan will be completed in February 2016 in order for Bagan to be added to the list of World Heritage Sites.

Skilled staff from the Archaeology Department used a GPS tracking system to locate the unearthed pagodas during the in-



Ancient pagodas in Bagan, one of tourists attractions of Myanmar. PHOTO: AYE MIN SOE

ventory project, which started in July 2015.

U Thein Lwin said there are more pagodas in Bagan than people first thought.

“Many maintenance repairs were made between 1996 and 2005, but they weren’t very comprehensive. There were many pagodas [they didn’t record] that

are now coming to the surface. The quantity of pagodas has increased. The exact number of pagodas is not yet known,” he said.

Bagan boasts of at least 3,000

pagodas in a 42-square-kilometre area, according to the most recent records kept by the aforementioned department.—*Myitmakha News Agency*

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Modern locomotive, coaches launched on Yangon-Mandalay route

MYANMA RAILWAYS has upgraded its rail service along the Yangon-Mandalay route, replacing its old No. 5 Up-train and No. 6 Down-train with its modern locomotive and coaches yesterday.

The new coaches, purchased from Sifang Co Ltd of China Southern Railways (CSR), are equipped with airbags.

At the launching ceremony held at the Yangon Railway

Station, Union Minister for Rail Transportation U Nyan Tun Aung said Myanma Railways is striving to ensure safety and comfort in its public rail services.

He also stressed the need to improve rail transportation

in Myanmar, as transportation plays an important role in development of the country.

The trains will have a top speed of 110 kilometres per hour, according to Myanma Railways.—*GNLM*



A modern train is seen at Mandalay Station when it was on test run. PHOTO: MYANMA RAILWAYS

Hluttaw Round-up

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Round-up

THE Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) continued its session yesterday, discussing the National Planning Bill and the progress of implementing tasks for the 2016-2017 fiscal year.

High-ranking officials from the Union-level institutions clarified the bill and sought the approval of the parliament for the remarks made by the joint-bill committee.

Dr Pwint Hsan, the Deputy Minister for Commerce, said the ministry has adopted a national policy on boosting exports, relaxing rules and regulations for trade, finding foreign market for local products and implementing transit trade.

The parliament also approved the Insecticide Bill, the New Plant Species Protection Bill and the Bill Amending the Penal Code, which were sent back to parliament with the president's remarks.



Pyidaungsu Hluttaw being convened in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA



Dr Pwint Hsan. PHOTO: MNA

Pyithu Hluttaw Round-up

THE Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) discussed the urgent implementation of car parking systems in Yangon and Mandalay and the system to scrutinise car import permits.

MP U Win Oo of Yayphyu constituency urged the government to scrutinise the process of applying for recommendation

letters for car parking spaces when the people buy cars from show rooms in order to prevent corruption from entering the process.

Dr Pwint Hsan, the Deputy Minister for Commerce, invited complaints about corruption along with recommendations for the car parking spaces, promising that the government would take action against those involved in

corruption.

Two bills, including the Former President's Security Bill, were submitted.

Amyotha Hluttaw Round-up

AT the Amyotha Hluttaw meeting yesterday, the Upper House speaker announced that the parliament approved the reports on its own activities dur-

ing the first Amyotha Hluttaw, submitted by the committees on rural development, international relations, peasants and employees, mining, environmental conservation and others.

The speaker also asked MPs to sign up to discuss the report of the mineral resources and environmental conservation committee's report.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Suspected mausoleum of ancient king falling into disrepair

AN ancient building believed to be the mausoleum of King U Aung Zeya, located in the grounds of the Theyettaw Monastery in a village in Bilin Township in the Thaton District of Mon State, is currently in need of conservation works, according to local residents.

The mausoleum receives regular visits by both foreigners and locals, and despite efforts to contain the mausoleum by putting surrounding it with barbed wire, residents say the structures lack of roofing is accelerating its degradation at the hands of the natural elements.

Only one of the mausoleum's two stupas, located on the eastern its edge, remains intact due to previous conservation measures.

Head monk of the Theyettaw Monastery, U Nya Nayda, said the site could become a destination that supports the tourist industry if the state were to systematically conserve it.

"This mausoleum used to be very tall, but it slowly crumbled away. The figures that encircle the mausoleum have also broken



Mausoleum of King U Aung Zeya is seen in the grounds of the Theyettaw Monastery in a village in Bilin Township in the Thaton District of Mon State. PHOTO: MYITMAKHA NEWS AGENCY

because of rain and wind damage. In our capacity as monks, we collect those bits that break off and conserve them as much as possible. We've put a fence around the area. So many people come to study this site. If this site could be conserved with a roof of some kind, it could support the development of the region and the tourist industry," the monk said.

U Soe Soe Kyi, the local administrator of Kin Village, where

the mausoleum is located, cited archaeologists who have studied the site, saying the structure is approximately 36 feet in length and 24 feet in width, surrounded by ceramic male and female figures, and decorated with flowers. He said it is possible that the style of the brick work on the remaining stupa in front of the mausoleum indicates post-Inwa(Ava) era or Konebaung era handiwork.—*Myitmakha News Agency*

Coordination meeting tackles Union Tax Bill

LEGISLATORS and high-ranking officials of various ministries discussed the Union Tax Bill for 2016 in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

The coordination meeting was opened with remarks by Thura U Shwe Mann, the Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw.

Deputy ministers for Home Affairs, Livestock Breeding, Fisheries and Rural Development, Electric Power, Mines and Finance, members of the Nay Pyi Taw Council, vice chairmen of the joint committees of the parliament and MPs attended the meeting.—*Myanmar News Agency*

New military MPs appointed

THE Union Election Commission issued notifications 1/2016, 2/2016 and 3/2016, announcing the appointment of military MPs to the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House), Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) and Region and State hluttaws in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Pyithu Hluttaw Election Law, Amyotha Hluttaw Election Law and Divisional Region or State Hluttaw Election Law, as well with Article 31 of the aforementioned laws.

A total of 110 military MPs have been appointed to the Pyithu Hluttaw, along with 56 to the Amyotha Hluttaw, 13 to the Kachin State Hluttaw, 5 in Kayah State, 6 in Kayin State, 6 in Chin State, 25 in Sagaing Region, 7 in Taninthayi Region, 19 in Bago Region, 17 in Magway Region, 19 in Mandalay Region, 8 in Mon State, 12 in Rakhine State, 31 in Yangon Region, 34 in Shan State and 18 in Ayeyawady Region.—*Myanmar News Agency*

President U Thein Sein receives US Deputy Secretary of State



President U Thein Sein welcomes HE Mr Anthony Blinken, the US Deputy Secretary of State. PHOTO: MNA

PRESIDENT U Thein Sein received a US delegation led by HE Mr Anthony Blinken, the US Deputy Secretary of State, at the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

During the meeting, the president and the deputy secretary discussed the impending transfer of the duties of government,

Myanmar's peace process and the promotion of bilateral relations between the US and Myanmar.

Mr Blinken said the US has acknowledged the political reforms, the Union Peace Conference and success of the election carried out under the government led by President U Thein Sein, pledging that the US would main-

tain its support for Myanmar's development.

Also present at the meeting were Union ministers U Wunna Maung Lwin, U Aung Min and U Ye Htut and other officials.

The US delegation was accompanied by US Ambassador to Myanmar Mr Derek Mitchell.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Deputy C-in-C of Defence Services receives US delegation

ON behalf of the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice-Senior General Soe Win received a US delegation led by HE Mr Anthony Blinken, the US Deputy Secretary of State, in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

During the meeting, the

vice-senior general said the Tatmadaw has fully cooperated with the current government as part of efforts for building foundations for a multi-party democracy system being committed to cooperation with the incoming government.

He also expressed the Tatmadaw's commitment to peace, national unity and development of the country.—*Myawady*

Union Minister for Foreign Affairs receives US Dy Secretary of State

U Wunna Maung Lwin, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, received H E Mr Anthony Blinken, Deputy Secretary of State of the United States at the Ayeyarwaddy Room, Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nay Pyi Taw at

9 am Monday.

At the meeting, they cordially exchanged views on furthering bilateral relations and cooperation and ASEAN-US relations and on matters of mutual interest.—*Myanmar News Agency*



Union Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin meets H E Mr Anthony Blinken, Deputy Secretary of State of the United States. PHOTO: MNA

Myanmar traditional handicrafts pushed aside by plastic substitutes



Lacquerware are displayed at a souvenir shop. PHOTO: NYAN MYINT THAW

THE substitution of lacquerware, ceramic and bamboo handicrafts for households items made of plastic could potentially cause the disappearance of the traditional handicraft industry, say Myanmar craftsmen, who have called on the government take action to

save their industry.

"The Ministry of Culture must provide financial assistance so we don't see the disappearance of [traditional] handicrafts. They should also provide [handicraft] trainings. We conducted a study last year in six regions of the

country that have the most handicraft enterprises in order to find out what difficulties local craftspeople face," said U Aye Ko, the executive director of New Zero Art Space.

The study, conducted by New Zero Art Space, was part of a two-year study on handicraft practices, titled 'From Craft to Art', which was funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the British Council.

"There's not a lot of benefit for us normal craftsmen—only for those who can provide financial investment. We have to work on an order-only basis since we don't have our own avenue to sell our handicrafts," said professional carver Ko Maung Oo.

Local craftsmen and designers from the United Kingdom visited various locations across the country, including Mandalay;

Paung Myo, Mon State; Dawei, Tanintharyi Region; Inle, Shan State, Teddim, Chin State; and Myitkyina, Kachin State, in order to train Myanmar craftspeople in contemporary design, traditional lacquerware, golden tapestry, silverware, pots, and bamboo ware.

Business entrepreneurs are currently independently exporting Myanmar handicraft products to foreign countries, but they have

said an official association or organisation has yet to be formed for collective export activities.

A conference on the enterprise of Myanmar handicrafts was held at the Yangon's Strand Hotel on January 15, during which there was a discussions on the current status of traditional handicraft production and the difficulties is faces.—*Myitmakha News Agency*

ဒေသအလိုက်ကကွယ်ဆေးတိုက်ခိုက်မှုများ (ရန်နာဗိုလီလ၊ ၂၀၁၆)

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Indonesian village protests plans to bury militant — MetroTV

JAKARTA — An Indonesian community is fighting to prevent the family of one of the militants in last week's Jakarta attacks from burying his body in their village, MetroTV said yesterday, quoting residents.

Ahmad Muhazan and three other attackers launched a brazen bomb and gun assault in the heart of Indonesia's capital last week, leading to their deaths and those of four others.

"Our residents here are very tolerant, not radical, let alone kill. What (Muhazan) did has marred Islam," MetroTV quoted Nasrullah, a resident of Kedungwungu in West Java, as saying.

The village chief was mediating in talks between the family and villagers, it said.—*Reuters*

Heavy snow blankets eastern, northeastern Japan, 120 injured



People walk in front of JR Sendai Station in northeastern Japan, on 18 January, 2016. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS



A snow plow removes snow in front of the parliamentary building in Tokyo, on 18 January. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

TOKYO — Heavy snow fell in parts of eastern and northeastern Japan early yesterday, with snowfall reaching 6 centimetres in downtown Tokyo, resulting in injuries to more than 100 people and disruptions to transport.

Snowfall caused around 120 injuries, according to a Kyodo News tally. In Tokyo alone, over 40 people were taken to hospitals.

The snow temporarily brought bullet train services on the Tokaido Shinkansen Line to a crawl and caused suspensions of limited express trains connecting Tokyo and Nagano, and cancellations of more than 160 domestic flights.

The Chuo Expressway was closed in some areas of Nagano and Yamanashi prefectures.

Many commuters were forced to line up at rail stations in windy conditions in Tokyo as some operations significantly reduced the number of trains and restricted entry to stations due to overcrowding.

Over the 24 hours through 6am Tuesday, up to 80 cm of snow is forecast to fall in the Tohoku region, 60 cm in Hokkaido, Hokuriku and Tokai areas, and 40 cm in the Kanto-Koshin region, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency.—*Kyodo News*

China urges US to be cautious on Taiwan issue

BEIJING — China urged the United States yesterday to speak and act cautiously on the Taiwan issue and not to intervene in China's internal affairs in any way.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said at a regular press briefing that China has al-

ready expressed concern over the planned Taiwan visit by US former Deputy Secretary of State William Burns, who is to meet with senior officials of Taiwan.

Hong reiterated that Taiwan is an inseparable part of Chinese

territory and Taiwan affairs are China's internal affairs.

He urged the United States to firmly abide by the one-China policy and the principles in the three Sino-US joint communiques, and live up to its commitment to opposing "Taiwan

independence".

"We urge the US side to do more things that are conducive to the stable development of China-US relations and peaceful development of relations across the Taiwan Strait, not vice versa," Hong said.—*Xinhua*

British rights activist faces defamation trial in Thailand

BANGKOK — A Thai court yesterday charged a British human rights activist with defaming a Thai fruit company, a case which could see him jailed for up to seven years if found guilty.

Natural Fruit, Thailand's biggest producer of canned pineapples, accused Hall of defamation and computer crimes over a report published in 2013 that he helped author for Finnwatch, a Finland-based watchdog group.

The report, "Cheap Has a High Price", alleged ill-treatment of migrant workers at a factory owned by the firm. Natural Fruit denied the allegations.

The indictment means Hall will face a second trial over the report after a previous lawsuit was thrown out by a Thai court on a technicality in 2014.

Natural Fruit filed four lawsuits against him, and is appealing the dismissal of the first.

Rights activists have criticised Thailand's defamation and computer crimes legislation, which they say politicians and corporations have used to muzzle critics.

Hall on Wednesday denied the charges against him.

"I only collected raw data and took no part in analysing the data.

Finnwatch officials were responsible for that," said Hall after the indictment. "They also put the report on the website,

not me."

The case will begin in mid-May and is expected to conclude in late July.

Hall is on bail and has had his passport confiscated. He said yesterday he had been given permission to leave Thailand at the end of January for a week.

In the two other pending cases, Natural Fruit has demanded 400 million baht (\$11 million) in compensation for damages.—*Reuters*

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HK book publisher surrenders in China: China's state media

HONG KONG — A Hong Kong book publisher whose mysterious disappearance raised concerns about alleged operations by Chinese agents outside mainland China has voluntarily turned himself in to Chinese authorities, Chinese state media reported Sunday.

Gui Minhai, 51, owner of Hong Kong publishing house Mighty Current who reportedly vanished when holidaying in Thailand in October, surrendered to Chinese authorities over a drink-driving conviction in 2004, according to the reports.

Gui, who obtained Swedish citizenship in 1996, also asked the Swedish government to stop interfering in his case, according to the reports.

"It is my own, voluntary choice to return to (China) and turn myself in," Gui said in a clip shown by state broadcaster CCTV.

"This is a responsibility I should take up. I hope no one or no organisation will interfere with

my returning to (China) or make malicious speculations," he said according to the clip.

"Although I have Swedish citizenship, I truly feel that I am still a Chinese, my roots are in China. So, I hope Sweden can respect my personal choice, my right and privacy, and let me solve my own problems."

Gui fled China after being sentenced to a suspended two-year jail term over a drunk-driving case in 2003 in which a young woman died, according to the reports.

Feeling increasing remorse, Gui decided to turn himself following the death of his father in June last year so that he can visit his ailing mother, the reports said.

"I want to take up my legal responsibility, I am willing to accept any punishment," Gui was quoted as saying.

The reports, however, did not explain the circumstances of how he turned himself in after last being seen in Thailand.

Four other men in business



Books on China politics and senior leaders are displayed inside a bookstore in Hong Kong, China on 8 January 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

relationship with Gui also subsequently disappeared.

Lee Bo, owner of Causeway Bay Books, which is owned by Gui's publishing house and sells books critical of Chinese leaders, went missing on 30 December after last being seen in a Hong Kong warehouse.

He later said in a faxed letter that he crossed the border to the mainland using his "own method" and is helping mainland au-

thorities in an investigation. His disappearance stoked fears that mainland Chinese agents had abducted him.

Lee, who holds British citizenship, was also portrayed as having returned to China voluntarily and pleaded against foreign interference.

Three other business associates — bookstore manager Lam Wing-kei, general manager of the publishing house Lui Bo and

business manager Cheung Jiping — have reportedly vanished in mainland China following Gui's disappearance.

Earlier in the day, Hong Kong leader Leung Chun-ying said the authorities have received no reply from mainland officials over the five cases, but reiterated that no foreign law enforcement agencies are allowed to operate in the territory. —Kyodo News

Pakistan 1999 coup leader Musharraf acquitted of murder, but other cases remain

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan General Pervez Musharraf, who came to power in 1999 in a bloodless coup against current Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, was acquitted yesterday of the murder of a separatist leader in 2006, removing one of several cases against him.

Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti led a tribal campaign to win political autonomy for Baluchistan, Pakistan's biggest province and the richest in mineral resources. He was killed in a battle between tribal militants and government forces in the restive province in 2006.

Musharraf, who also faces treason charges, was charged with the murder in January last year on the grounds he ordered the killing. But on Monday, an anti-terrorism court in the provincial capital, Quetta, acquitted him.

"We aren't satisfied with the judgment and will challenge it in court," Sohail Rajput, the lawyer for Bugti's family, told

reporters outside the court.

For decades, Baluchistan nationalists have accused Punjab, Pakistan's most populated province, of exploiting their natural resources. Militants have targeted government installations, security forces, gas pipelines, railway tracks and electricity pylons.

Musharraf ordered a military crackdown in Baluchistan in late 2005 after being targeted by a rocket attack while visiting the province.

In late 2006, Pakistani forces killed Bugti and dozens of other rebels at a hideout in Baluchistan's rugged mountains.

Musharraf has also been charged in connection with the 2007 assassination of prime minister Benazir Bhutto and the murder of a prominent cleric since returning to Pakistan from exile in 2013. Musharraf was granted bail in the Bhutto assassination and treason cases and remains free, mostly living in Pakistan. —Reuters

North Korea sending numerous anti-South Korea leaflets across Korean border

SEOUL — North Korea has sent an estimated million anti-South Korea leaflets using balloons across the inter-Korean border since last week, South Korea's Defence Ministry spokesman said yesterday.

North Korea "has flown (them) almost every day and an estimated one million have been dispersed so far," Kim Min Seok said at a press briefing.

The leaflets from the North began arriving in the South last

Wednesday as tensions escalated after South Korea resumed anti-Pyongyang propaganda broadcasts using loudspeakers in the border area on 8 January in retaliation against North Korea's latest nuclear test conducted two days earlier.

North Korea also restarted blasting anti-South Korea propaganda broadcasts.

The North's leaflets have been found in Seoul and areas close to the inter-Korean border, Kim said.

For decades, the two Kore-

as have bombarded each other's soldiers at the demilitarized zone and people in nearby villages with propaganda, but the broadcasts were halted in 2004 amid easing tensions.

They resumed again for a short time last August after a landmine explosion injured two South Korean soldiers in the DMZ, resulting in heightened tensions that raised fears of a military confrontation between the two Koreas. —Kyodo News

Five Bangladesh militants jailed for 10 years for bombings

DHAKA — A court in Bangladesh on Monday jailed five militants of a banned Islamist group for 10 years over bombings in 2005 that formed part of a series of blasts across the Muslim-majority nation.

The Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen group set off nearly 500 bombs almost simultaneously on a single day in 2005, including the capital Dhaka. Subsequent suicide attacks on courthouses by its militants killed 25 people and injured hundreds.

Five members of the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen group were convicted and sentenced for the explosions in the southeastern dis-

trict of Rangamati, court inspector Mominul Islam said.

"Six militants were charged with the bombings," he told Reuters by telephone. "And five of them were convicted and sentenced to 10 years in jail, while one was acquitted."

The group, thought to have been lying low since six of its top leaders were hanged in 2007, is blamed for a spate of recent attacks, including the bombings of a Shi'ite shrine and the shooting of three foreigners, two of whom died.

Last year, four bloggers and a publisher were killed in Bang-

ladesh, amid a rise in Islamist violence in which liberal activists, members of minority Muslim sects and other religious groups have been targeted.

Islamic State has claimed responsibility for some of the attacks, but the government has denied that the militant group has a presence in Bangladesh.

At least five militants of Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen have been killed in shootouts since November, as security forces stepped up a crackdown on Islamist militants seeking to make the moderate Muslim nation of 160 million a sharia-based state. —Reuters

US prisoners leave Iran, arrive in Germany, as Obama hails win for diplomacy

WASHINGTON/ANKARA — Three Iranian-Americans arrived in Germany after leaving Tehran on Sunday in a prisoner swap that followed the lifting of most international sanctions on Iran under a deal US President Barack Obama said cut off Tehran's path to a nuclear bomb.

In a sign of sustained readiness to track Iranian compliance with remaining United Nations curbs, the United States imposed fresh sanctions on 11 companies and individuals for supplying Iran's ballistic missile programme.

The Obama administration had delayed the step for more than two weeks during tense negotiations to free five American prisoners, according to people familiar with the matter. Iran conducted a precision-guided ballistic missile test last October, violating a UN ban.

Speaking after the released Americans had left Iran, Obama said Iran now would not "get its hands on a nuclear bomb" and the planet would be more secure.

"This is a good day because once again we are seeing what's possible through strong American diplomacy," Obama said at the White House. "These things are a reminder of what we can achieve when we lead with strength and with wisdom."

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani hailed the nuclear deal as a "golden page" in Iran's history and said the agreement could be used as a model to resolve other regional issues.

The lifting of sanctions and the prisoner deal considerably reduce the hostility between Tehran and Washington that has shaped the Middle East since Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979.

A Swiss plane took Jason Rezaian, the *Washington Post's* Tehran bureau chief; Saeed Abedini, a pastor from Idaho; and Amir Hekmati, a former US Marine from Flint, Michigan, as well as some family members, from Tehran to Geneva, Switzerland. Shortly afterward, the three left for a US military base in Germany, arriving there later on Sunday, a US State Department official said.

One more Iranian-American released under the same swap, Nosratollah Khosravi-Roodsari, was not aboard the aircraft. A fifth prisoner, American student Matthew Trevithick, was released separately on Saturday, a US official said.

Several Iranian-Americans held in US prisons after being charged or convicted for sanctions violations have also been released, their lawyers told Reuters on Sunday. Rezaian told two *Post* senior editors in a phone call on Sunday night that he was doing "a hell of a lot better than I



A bus and a van are parked in front of a plane carrying three Iranian-Americans, who left Tehran under a prisoner swap, after it landed at Cointrin airport in Geneva, Switzerland on 17 January. PHOTO: REUTERS

was 48 hours ago."

The newspaper, which released details of the conversation with Rezaian, said he "found escape in the fiction he was allowed to read, and today he was avidly reading whatever he wanted."

Rezaian, 39, was arrested in July 2014 and sentenced in November to a prison term. Iranian prosecutors had accused him of espionage, charges the *Post* had dismissed as "absurd."

Obama called family members of the released prisoners on Sunday, including Rezaian's brother Ali, and Naghmeh Abedini, the wife of the Idaho pastor.

"I am thankful for our president and all of the hard work by the White House and State Department in making this happen," said Abedini, who has appeared with US Republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz, a US senator and a harsh critic of the Iran nuclear deal.

The American Iranian Council, which promotes better relationships between the United States and Iran, said in a statement on Sunday: "The prisoner exchange, Iran's dutiful implementation of its nuclear obligations, and the lifting of nuclear-related sanctions all herald a new era of US-Iran relations."

But the US thaw with Iran is viewed with deep suspicion by US Republicans as well as allies of Washington in the Middle East, including Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Cruz and fellow Republican presidential candidate Senator Marco Rubio praised Iran's release of five detained Americans on Sunday, but said the deal the White House made to win their freedom would lead to more Americans being taken "hostage."

The prisoner deal was the culmination of months of contacts, secret talks and legal maneuvering that came close to falling apart on at least one occasion.

Speaking to parliament on Sunday, Rouhani, a pragmatic cleric elected in 2013 on promis-

es to end Iran's years of sanctions and isolation, said he looked forward to an economic future less dependent on oil exports.

The exports are nevertheless likely to jump now that the United States, European Union and United Nations have scrapped the sanctions in return for Tehran complying with the deal to curb its nuclear ambitions, which Tehran says were peaceful.

But Rouhani noted bitter opposition to the lifting of economic curbs from Israel, some members of the US Congress and what he called "warmongers" in the region — an apparent reference to some of Iran's Gulf Arab adversaries, not least Saudi Arabia.

Presenting the draft budget for the next Iranian fiscal year, which begins in March, Rouhani told parliament the deal was a "turning point" for the economy of Iran, a major oil producer virtually shut out of international markets for the past five years.

He said later he expected 5 per cent economic growth in the next Iranian fiscal year and assured foreign investors of political and economic stability.

"The nuclear negotiations which succeeded by the guidance of the Supreme Leader and support of our nation, were truly a golden page in Iran's history," he said. Tens of billions of dollars' worth of Iranian assets will now be unfrozen and global companies that have been barred from doing business there will be able to exploit a market hungry for everything from automobiles to airplane parts.

After the prisoners were freed, it was announced that the United States and Iran settled a long-standing claim, releasing to Tehran \$400 million in funds frozen since 1981 plus \$1.3 billion in interest, the State Department said. The funds were part of a trust fund once used by Iran to purchase military equipment from the United States, which was tied up for decades in litigation at the Iran-US Claims Tribunal in The Hague.—Reuters

NEWS IN BRIEF

Ukraine warns of more malware attacks after Kiev airport hit

KIEV — Ukraine's Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-UA) warned yesterday of the threat of possible further virus attacks after malware was found in the IT system of Kiev's main airport over the weekend.

"Attention to all system administrators ... We recommend a check of log-files and information traffic," CERT-UA said.

A virus, similar to one which attacked three Ukrainian power firms in late December, was detected in a computer workstation of the IT network of Kiev's main airport Boryspil, according to the airport's press service.—Reuters

Duda says Nord Stream 2 pipeline undermines EU solidarity

BRUSSELS — Polish President Andrzej Duda said on Monday plans to build a new pipeline to pump Russian gas to Germany by-passing Ukraine is dictated by politics rather than economics and undermines the European Union's solidarity.

"We disagree with this investment. It has nothing to do with economics," Duda said, speaking at a joint briefing in Brussels with European Council President Donald Tusk. "It is an investment of a political nature."

The Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which opponents say will deepen dependence on Russian gas supplies from Gazprom, would undermine solidarity within the EU's push for an energy union, Duda said.

Earlier Tusk told reporters he and Duda held a similar stance on the Nord Stream 2 project.—Reuters

1 killed, 22 injured in Indonesia from Sunday's quake

JAKARTA — At least one person was killed and 22 others injured, three of them seriously, from an earthquake that shook eastern Indonesia on Sunday, the National Disaster Mitigation Agency said Monday.

The agency said that about 240 houses were damaged, around half of them severely, due to the magnitude-5.5 quake that hit Buru Island in Indonesia's Maluku Province.

The quake was centred off the south coast of the island at a depth of 46 km.—Kyodo News

Serbia heading for third general elections

BELGRADE — Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic has decided that the country will go to early parliamentary elections - procedurally, his next step is to table a substantiated proposal to dissolve the parliament, or resign, enabling President Tomislav Nikolic to call the elections. The polls will be the eleventh parliamentary elections, the eighth early elections and the third simultaneous parliamentary, provincial and local elections since the reintroduction of the multi-party system in Serbia.

Under the Serbian Constitution, the government's term may end prematurely through a vote of no confidence, dissolution of the parliament and resignation of the prime minister, as well as in other cases set forth in the Constitution.

The dissolution of the parliament and the resignation of the prime minister have been the most frequent scenarios leading up to early parliamentary elections in the past.

A government whose term has ended can only handle affairs set forth by law until a new government is elected.

The previous early parliamentary elections were held in March 2014.—Tanjung

One killed, one wounded as rocket from Syria hits school in Turkey

ISTANBUL — A female school employee was killed and a female student wounded yesterday after a rocket believed to have come from Syria struck a school in Turkey's southeastern border province of Kilis, a statement from the provincial governor's office said.

The wounded student was taken into surgery, the governor's office said, adding that two other rockets also thought to have been fired from neighbouring Syria had landed in an empty field next to the school.—Reuters

Iran says new US sanctions illegitimate

DUBAI — Iran yesterday said new US curbs on the Islamic Republic's ballistic missile pro-

gramme were illegitimate, vowing to continue developing its conventional military deterrent.

The United States imposed sanctions on 11 companies and individuals on Sunday for sup-

plying Iran's ballistic missile programme in a move delayed by over two weeks so as not to endanger this weekend's release of US prisoners.

The new measures also came after the lifting of far more comprehensive nuclear sanctions.

"The Islamic Republic will respond to these aggravating and propagandistic measures by pursuing its legal missile programme stronger than before and developing its defensive capabilities," a foreign ministry statement said.

Iran conducted a ballistic missile test in October, which the United Nations called a breach of a resolution prohibiting the Islamic Republic from developing missiles capable of delivering nuclear warheads. Iran insists the missile was designed to carry a conventional payload.

Foreign ministry spokesman Hossein Jaber Ansari said

Washington's sales of weaponry to allies in the Middle East, worth tens of billions of dollars each year, was used to commit "war crimes against Palestinian, Lebanese and most recently Yemeni citizens".

"The US sanctions against Iran's ballistic missile programme ... have no legal or moral legitimacy," he said.

Hardline newspapers *Kayhan* and *Vatan-e-Emrooz* splashed the news on their front pages, crowding out a triumphal speech by President Hassan Rouhani, who on Sunday hailed the lifting of the nuclear sanctions.

"Sanctions are back!" ran the *Kayhan* headline. The article pointed out that Tehran's top authority, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, had said new sanctions under any pretext would constitute a breach of the nuclear deal.—*Reuters*



An Iranian woman walks past a revolutionary mural in Tehran, Iran, on 17 January. PHOTO: REUTERS

Greek president accuses Turkish port officials of helping people smugglers

BERLIN — Greek President Prokopis Pavlopoulos said Turkey was not doing enough to reduce the number of migrants arriving in Europe and accused Turkish port officials of helping people smugglers.

Turkey reached a deal with EU officials late last year to keep more refugees inside its borders and stop them travelling on. Thousands fleeing civil war in Syria have made the perilous journey from Turkey, across the Aegean Sea to Ankara's long-term regional rival Greece, many of them dying on the way.

"I greatly fear that Turkish

people smugglers are getting support from the authorities," Pavlopoulos said in an interview with the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* published yesterday.

"In particular, the port authorities act as if they don't notice anything. There are cases in which smugglers have supposedly been helped. We have evidence for this," he said.

Turkish officials were not immediately available to comment. Turkey says it is doing what it can to contain the movement of migrants and curb criminal smuggling gangs while accommodating more than 2 mil-

lion Syrian refugees. Pavlopoulos said Greece was still prepared to contribute towards the 3 billion euros (\$3.27 billion) pledged by the EU to Turkey to help care for Syrian refugees as long as Ankara fulfilled its obligations.

"Up to now Turkey has not delivered," Pavlopoulos, who is due to meet with German Chancellor Angela Merkel later yesterday, told the paper.

The European Commission said earlier this month it was far from satisfied with Turkey's containment of migrants as the number of new arrivals to Europe remained far too high.—*Reuters*

Zuma's office admits Africa isn't biggest continent

JOHANNESBURG — South Africa's presidency issued an embarrassing correction yesterday to rectify an erroneous reference last month by President Jacob Zuma to Africa being the "largest continent".

Speaking at a business dinner on 9 December, Zuma, who has no formal education, also described Africa as so big that "all continents put together will

fit into Africa".

The comments were seized upon by Zuma's opponents, who argue that his lack of schooling makes him unfit to lead a sophisticated emerging economy.

It was unclear why the presidency decided to issue the correction after a delay of nearly six weeks.

"Africa is in fact the second biggest continent in terms of

population size, and the biggest continent in this regard is Asia. The President regrets the error," the statement said.

Zuma's comments about Africa's size came hours before he fired respected finance minister Nhlanhla Nene in favour of a relative unknown, triggering financial turmoil that sent the rand, bonds and stocks plummeting.—*Reuters*

Iraqi police confirm three US citizens missing in Baghdad

BAGHDAD — Iraqi police confirmed yesterday that three US nationals had been reported missing in Baghdad, and that it was investigating reports they were kidnapped.

Iraqi security forces set up checkpoints early yesterday in the Dora neighbourhood south-east of Baghdad, where media reports have said three US nationals were abducted on Friday,

witnesses said. "We have no clear indication about the circumstances of their disappearance," a senior police officer said on condition of anonymity.

Two Iraqi army helicopters were seen hovering over the district while police SUVs patrolled the streets.

The US State Department said on Sunday it was working with Iraqi authorities to locate

Americans reported missing, without confirming that they had been kidnapped.

Dubai-based news channel Al Arabiya reported on Sunday that three US nationals had been kidnapped in Dora on Friday. Citing its own sources, it said the Americans were "contractors or trainers" employed by US companies at the Baghdad airport.—*Reuters*

German defence minister raises prospect of Libya mission



Germany's Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen takes part in a welcoming ceremony with military honours at the headquarters of Pakistan's army in Islamabad, Pakistan, in 9 December, 2015.

PHOTO: REUTERS

BERLIN — Advances by Islamist militants in Libya pose a new threat to Europe and could unleash a new wave of refugees, Germany's defence minister said yesterday, adding she did not rule out deploying German troops in the north African country.

"Germany will not be able to evade responsibility for contributing its share," Ursula von der Leyen told *Bild* newspaper when asked about whether she plans to deploy troops in Libya, which has been racked by conflict since the 2011 fall of Muammar Gaddafi.

She didn't give further details on the nature of involvement but said that implementing law and order was the most important goal in Libya, which has seen advances by the extremist group

Islamic State.

Germany, which took in 1.1 million refugees last year, is keen to promote stability in Europe's neighbours in order to reduce the number of people streaming across the Mediterranean.

Deploying troops in foreign conflicts is still controversial in Germany, which since the end of World War II has tried to steer clear of direct foreign military involvement. But over the last two decades it has departed from its strictly pacifist course.

Since its first foreign combat mission as part of NATO's joint intervention in Kosovo in 1999, the army has been involved in fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan and last November joined the military campaign against Islamic State in Syria.—*Reuters*

— OPINION —

The mixed blessing of late marriages

Khin Maung Aye

Myanmar, like other Asian nations, has undergone changes in its marriage patterns over the last few decades. In Myanmar, these changes include the rising prevalence of delayed marriage among both men and women and the practice of permanent celibacy among women in particular.

One factor that drives later marriage is the rising level of education among women. A related factor is the growing trend of women pursuing professional careers. Years of schooling and climbing the professional ladder motivate women to put off marriage. This trend, combined

with the rising use of contraceptive pills and greater awareness of contraceptive methods, is slowing the growth of Myanmar's population; it is expected to reach replacement level soon. A shrinking population poses the threat of labour shortages and aging populations.

It is worth noting here that the rising age of first marriage has implications for adolescent reproductive health. It is true that Myanmar has birth spacing programmes. However, they only serve married couples. With the average age of first marriage rising, more adolescents who remain single are out of reach of these programmes and services. As Myanmar culture does not accept the practice of single parenthood, unwanted pregnancies usually end in induced abortions, which is a major cause of maternal mortality.

On the other hand, the positive side of late marriage is that women can be empowered with more active roles in the community and in the development of their nation. Nevertheless, it also means that women are generally having children at a later age. The bright side is that there will be fewer adolescent pregnancies, which can be dan-

gerous. On the other hand, more women will be giving birth at later ages, which also presents significant health risks for both mothers and children.

In view of these trends, The Global New Light of Myanmar would like to urge the relevant authorities to conduct the appropriate interventions by formulating population policies in order to ensure safe delivery of children, freedom from unwanted pregnancies, alternatives to induced abortions and an equitable place for women in the workplace.

Write for us

We appreciate your feedback and contributions. If you have any comments or would like to submit editorials, analyses or reports please email khinmaungaye@hotmail@gmail.com with your name and title.

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.

Are We Really Polite ?

Khin Maung Myint

Are we really polite as some claimed? Frankly I don't think so. May be that statement could be true many decades ago, when we were young. Nowadays if you happen to go about in your neighbourhood, and if you happen to live in an overcrowded place like mine, you are bound to hear some people abusing at the top of their voices, using all sorts of foul languages you had ever heard. You can also hear the youths of today talking to one another in the filthiest languages. Go to a soccer match and you will find out the mannerisms of our people. Such behaviors do not stop there, they continued to the teashops, where they lure the customers with foreign soccer match live shows.

A few months back, I sold off my car. Not because I need money or I cannot drive anymore due to my old age, but because I cannot tolerate the traffic jams and the undisciplined, rude and reckless drivers without any driving etiquette out there on the roads, these days. Those disciplined, polite and cautious drivers who are well familiar with driving etiquettes would agree with me. By the word rude, I meant not only by not observing the driving etiquettes, but they are verbally abusive too. In this article, I chose to sound pessimistic. I am usually not a pessimist by nature, but the prevailing situations must have turned me into one.

When I bought my first and ever car in 1994, there were not

many cars on the roads and naturally no traffic jams at all. You didn't need to give allowance for the driving time to reach your destinations, unlike today. As everybody is in a rush today, its no wonder the traffic rules and etiquettes are ignored. Some undisciplined drivers do not observe the right of ways. They will thrust their cars, headfirst, in front of the car which has the right of way, blocking its movement. This is one of the causes of unnecessary congestions, that can be avoided if every driver observes the traffic rules.

Once, I was in such a situation while stuck in the traffic jam. A high-end model car driven by a middle aged man decently dressed in expansive looking dresses, cut in to the front of my car. He was coming out of a side road and I was on the main road. So, who had the right of way ? I couldn't tolerate such insolence, so I told him that he shouldn't drive like that. He retorted rudely. He said "Go and tell in the countryside", a very rude and low down expression people these days readily used.

By his bad manners I judged him to be a nouveau riche, so I chose not to have a quarrel with him and remained silent. However, when the cars in front started to move and as an opportunity arose, I cut across him to get back my rightful place. I know I shouldn't have done that, because that was a very dangerous move in such a crowded situation, but I wanted to let him know how it felt to be cut in.

Another frustrating thing is not using the indicator lights when turning or going straight

ahead at road junctions or to indicate the intention to park. I'll not be burdening the readers with details of all the different ways of disregards for traffic regulations and bad driving habits. However, the worst are the inconsiderate and unnecessary use of horns. Some drivers, especially the drivers of school ferries, as they are always in a hurry to be in time for schools, use the horns inconsiderably and unnecessarily. They used it as a medium to express their anger or displeasure to the cars blocking their way. Sometimes there was a standstill and nobody wanted to give way to others, entirely closing down the road even for those on foot inside our block, where no sidewalk exits. At such times the sounds of the horns were unbearable. In the West and even in most countries in our region, the drivers rarely use the horns unless it was unavoidably necessary to avert accidents. Unnecessary honking is deemed as cursing or abusing in many civilized countries.

After selling my car, I traveled around the city occasionally by taxi or passenger buses. When taking a bus, one will definitely realize how rude our people can be. Those who have never ridden those buses or don't need to use them, may not have seen the ugly sides of our peoples' natures. I don't blame them for their ignorance of this matter, because I, myself, knew it only when I started using buses. Here, I will cite a few of my experiences, where I was rudely insulted by a conductor or spare.

One time, while taking a bus, I requested the conductor to

tell the driver to keep the bus stopped a little bit longer while I get off, as my knees are not good and I have difficulty stepping down. He listened to what I said, but didn't respond. I thought he didn't understand me, so I repeated my words. This time he responded arrogantly, saying that it will be done when the time comes, adding, "Are you satisfied?". I was very embarrassed to get such a tongue lashing from the conductor who looked much younger than my son. However, I remained silent not wanting to create a scene as I knew the mentality of such individuals.

The worst insult I received from that young conductor was when the time came for me to get off. I noticed I was the only one to get off at that stop, so I walked, with difficulty to the exit, while the bus was still moving at high speed, to be able to get off as quickly as possible, lest the driver take off impatiently. At the exit I reminded the conductor, as I had not heard him tell the driver as requested. Can anyone imagine what he shouted out to the driver: "One youth from the Japanese era is getting off". It may be their code word for "the old man". Please note, I didn't use the word "senior citizen", as we are not recognized as such in our country.

In another instance, which a contemporary of mine told me, was even more insulting. His story and mine were almost the same, so I will skip the details and mention only the end part. When he was standing at the exit to get off quickly, lest he would be pushed down or scolded by

the conductor if he was slow in getting off, he heard the conductor shouting to the driver that one pregnant lady will get off. At first, as he was taking care not to fall off the bus, he didn't realize the remarks were meant for him. However, only when he was safely on the ground, he noticed, there was no pregnant lady among those who just got off the bus.

Before going on any further, I would like to share one of their popular jargons with those fortunate ones, who do not have to rely on the buses to get around like us. That is, when a bus from the same or a different line as theirs' took-over them, the conductors would prod on his driver to "Chase and fight". I presume this jargon is exclusive to our country and exists no where else in the world.

There are many more instances of such impolite and insulting behaviours, not only among the people in the bus service, but also in many other services and private places. I can go on listing, without end, all the different misbehaviors and rudeness of our people who are supposed to be very polite, but I am convinced the above examples suffice my outlooks. Some may say that those sort of people are only a few in number and I was being too pessimistic. They may be right and I don't mean to contradict anyone, but a saying goes thus: "One rotten fish spoils the whole boatload". Because of such persons, we should not pride ourselves of being polite. In my opinion, one rude person is more noticeable or visible than many polite ones, because the rude persons are mostly extroverts and polite persons tend to be introverts. We need to change the attitudes, manners, mentalities, and above all, the mind sets.

Illegal gold mining leads to environmental degradation



Workers of a legal mining company are digging stones in a canal at a depth of 250ft in 2014. PHOTO: MAUNG CHIT LINN

BANMAUK Township in Sagaing Region is facing deforestation and water pollution due to illegal gold mining, locals say.

Illegal gold miners have been known to mine on farms and in forest reserves, which creates environmental problems, including deforestation and the extinction of lakes and

reservoirs.

"Our company dug a mine to a depth of 250 feet. We have 40 night-shift and day-shift workers," said a worker from a mining company which carried out the business legally.

Some people have even bought farms along the creek specifically to mine them. Gold mining with the use of heavy

machinery is a major contributor to environmental degradation.

Banmauk – a resource-rich town in Sagaing Region – is connected by road to Pinlebu, which leads to Phaungbyin and Kawlin. Mount Santlon is a well-known attraction among domestic and foreign tourists in the area.—Maung Chit Linn

Journalists conduct environmental conservation campaign in Sagaing

MEDIA personnel recently cultivated plants along the road in front of a school in Sagiang Region with the aim of conserving the regional environment.

Reporters from Banmouk and Indaw townships in cooperation with members of the Sagaing Region Journalists

Association planted 20 saplings on both sides of the road in the front of the basic education high school in Myananda Ward.

Altogether, 58 media professionals participated in the campaign, one of the reporters said.—*Than Maung Lay*

Authorities destroy unsafe food, expired drugs

LOCAL authorities destroyed food that have been declared unfit for consumption and expired drugs in Mandalay on 16 January.

At the ceremony held at the Ayeyeknayein Cemetery, drugs worth more than K177 million and a cache of food items were incinerated. The ceremony was

attended by Mandalay Mayor U Aung Maung, Deputy Mayor U Nyunt Maung, members of the Mandalay City Development Committee, personnel from the companies that handed over expired drugs to the authorities and officials from the Mandalay Region Food and Drugs Administration.—*Maung Pyi Thu*



Authorities destroys unsafe food and expired drugs. PHOTO: MAUNG PYI THU

Crime News

Forged licence-plate maker arrested



A MAN who is suspected of manufacturing forged licence plates for illegal vehicles in Kayin State was arrested by police yesterday.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of police officers searched for evidence of drug-related materials and weapons in a house belonging to Yan Naing in Hpa-an Township, Kayin State, on 12 January. The team found none

of the evidence they sought, but they discovered 42 forged licence plates and related materials in the house.

According to an investigation, police also searched the suspect's workshop in the forest, located behind the Government Technological College, and found 400 unprocessed forget motor plates and related equipment.—*Myanmar Police Force*

Elderly cyclist killed in head-on collision

A MOTORBIKE collided head-on with a bicycle on the Katha-Bahmo Highway in Katha Township, Sagaing Region, on 16 January, killing an old man. The collision killed U

Kon htet naw long, 75. The unidentified motorcyclist fled the scene.

U Kon htet naw long, who came from Htincar Village in the Chaungwa Village-tract,

was riding his bicycle south-bound along the highway road.

Police are still investigating the case and searching for the unidentified motorcyclist.—*U Ye*

Men arrested for drug possession

A LOCAL anti-drug squad based in Mabein Township seized a cache of heroin and yabba pills in Mabein and Muse townships in Shan State.

According to the investigation, police searched a hut owned by Hla Ai near Natpaw Creek in Lawa Village and found 0.8235 kilos of heroin and 43,600 yabba pills on 14 January.

Police also discovered two grams of heroin and 172 yabba pills in a house owned by Kyaw Soe Naing in Meiyu Village in Muse Township that same day.

They also arrested a man who was found in possession of a cache of 4.5 kilos of marijuana,



K50,000 (US\$38) and two mobile handsets. All of the suspects have been charged under the

Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law by police.—*Kyemon*

Asian shares drop to 2011 levels as oil slump intensifies

TOKYO — Asian shares slid to their lowest levels since 2011 yesterday after weak US economic data and a massive fall in oil prices stoked further worries about a global economic downturn.

Spreadbetters expected a subdued open for European shares, forecasting London's FTSE 100 to open modestly higher while seeing Germany's DAX 30, France's CAC 40 and Japan's Nikkei 225 to start flat-to-slightly-weaker.

Crude prices faced fresh pressure after international sanctions against Iran were lifted over the weekend, allowing Tehran to return to an already over-supplied oil market.

Brent oil futures LCOc1 fell below \$28 per barrel LCOc1, touching their lowest level since 2003.

"Iran is now free to sell as much oil as it wants to whomever it likes at whatever price it can get," said Richard Nephew, programme director for Economic Statecraft, Sanctions and Energy Markets at Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy.

MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan

.MIAPJ0000PUS fell to its lowest since October 2011 and was last down 0.5 per cent.

Japan's Nikkei 225 tumbled as much as 2.8 per cent to a one-year low. It has lost 20 per cent from its peak hit in June, meeting a common definition of a bear market.

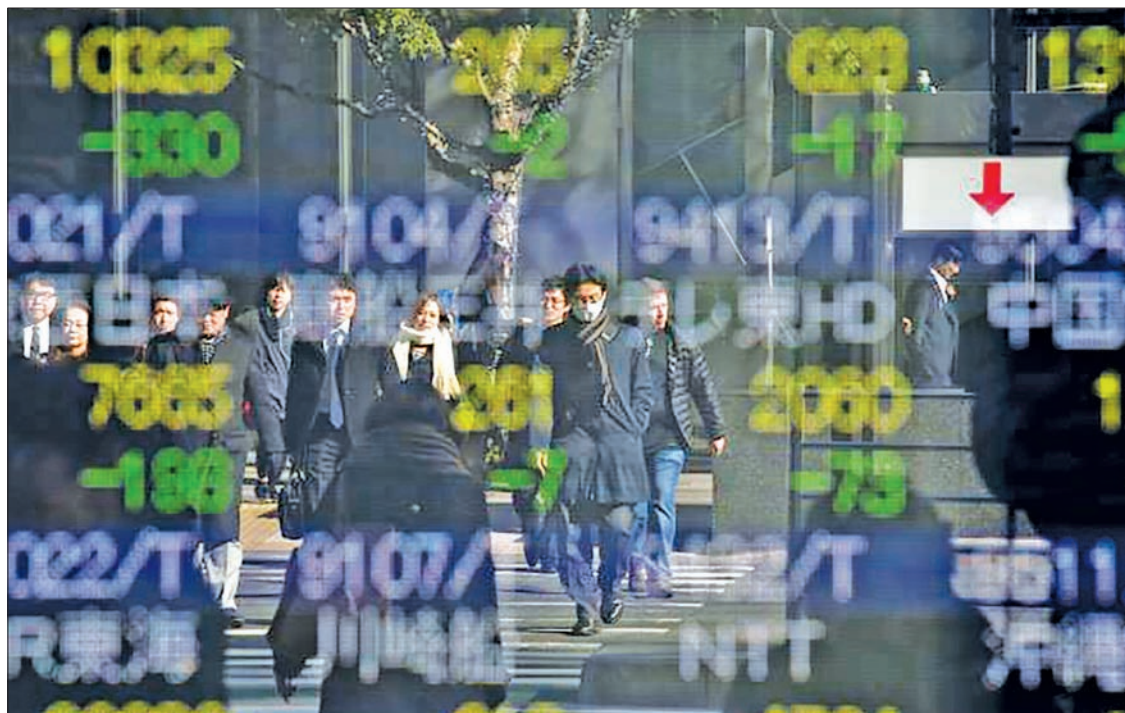
The volatile Shanghai Composite index .SSEC initially pierced through intraday lows last seen in August before paring the losses and was last up 1 per cent. It was still down 17 per cent this month.

On Wall Street, S&P 500 .SPX hit a 15-month low on Friday, ahead of Monday's market holiday.

"The fact that US and European shares fell below their August lows, failing to sustain their rebound, is significant," said Chotaro Morita, chief fixed income strategist at SMBC Nikko Securities.

"We are coming to a stage where we need to consider the risk of recession in the global economy," he said.

An unexpected drop in retail sales and the third consecutive



People are reflected in a stock quotation board outside a brokerage in Tokyo, Japan on 14 January.

PHOTO: REUTERS

monthly fall in industrial output in December added to the latest indication that US economic growth braked sharply in the fourth quarter.

Following that data, the Atlanta Federal Reserve's closely-watched GDPNow forecast model showed the US economy is on track to grow 0.6 per cent in the fourth quarter, slowing sharply from 2.0 per cent growth in the third quarter.

Investors further cut back their Fed rate hike expectations, with short-term interest rate futures <0#FF:> pricing in only one rate hike by the end of year, com-

pared with two hikes priced in at the start of year.

Outside the United States, the economic outlook appeared even bleaker, with the energy and raw material sector hit the hardest as China's massive investment-led economy slows down.

MSCI's emerging stock index .MSCIEF has dropped to 6-1/2-year lows.

"The biggest focus is oil prices. Oil producing countries have to sell their assets to finance their budget gaps. They are selling shares around the world," said Norihiro Fujito, senior investment strategist at Mitsubishi UFJ Mor-

gan Stanley Securities. In currency markets, commodity-linked units were hit hard, with the Canadian dollar CAD= hitting its lowest in nearly 13 years.

The safe-haven yen gave up some of its gains after having risen to a five-month high of 116.51 to the dollar JPY= on Friday. It last stood at 117.21. The euro also edged down against the dollar to \$1.0893 EUR=.

The Chinese yuan rose 0.6 per cent CNH= in the offshore trade to 6.5808 to the dollar, however, as Chinese authorities continued to stamp down speculative yuan selling. —Reuters

Renault targets sales growth in all regions after record 2015

PARIS — Renault said yesterday its global sales rose 3.3 per cent in 2015 as new models helped the French carmaker grab a bigger share of rebounding European demand and hold its own in troubled emerging markets.

Deliveries increased to 2.8 million cars and vans last year, a new record for the group, at a rate that was more than double the global auto market's 1.6 per cent

advance. The group said it aimed to increase sales in all regions this year as the global market expands a forecast 1-2 per cent — with European and French demand growth at the upper end of that range.

"Our growth will accelerate in 2016 and we will improve our positions in all our regions," sales chief Thierry Koskas said in a statement.

Boosted by recent launches including the Kadjar and Captur SUVs, Renault's European sales rose 10.2 per cent in 2015, outpacing the market's 9.4 per cent expansion.

But deliveries dropped 14.8 percent in South America and 8.6 per cent in Renault's Eurasia region — mainly Russia — broadly in line with collapsing demand in those markets. —Reuters

Qualcomm unveils \$280m joint venture with Chinese province

NEW YORK — Qualcomm Inc and the provincial government of Guizhou in southwest China unveiled on Sunday a \$280 million joint venture for the design, development and sale of advanced server technology, as the US chipmaker deepens its Chinese relations.

Qualcomm officials in Beijing signed a strategic cooperation agreement with the government of Guizhou Province and announced the Guizhou Huaxin-

tong Semi-Conductor Technology Co Ltd, a joint venture with initial capital of 1.85 billion renminbi. Qualcomm also will establish an investment company in Guizhou that will serve as a vehicle for future investments in China, the company and the provincial government said in a statement.

The joint venture, cooperation agreement and formation of an investment company are important steps for Qualcomm as it

deepens its cooperation and investment in China, said Derek Aberle, president of Qualcomm Inc. Aberle said that in addition to its capital investment, Qualcomm was licensing its server technology to the joint venture, assisting with research and development and would supply expertise to implement the project.

"This underscores our commitment as a strategic partner in China," Aberle said in the statement. —Reuters

Robots, new working ways to cost five million jobs by 2020: Davos study

DAVOS — Disruptive labour market changes, including the rise of robots and artificial intelligence, will result in a net loss of 5.1 million jobs over the next five years in 15 leading countries, according to an analysis published in Davos yesterday.

The projection by the World Economic Forum (WEF), which is holding its annual meeting in the Swiss ski resort this week, assumes a total loss of 7.1 million jobs, offset by a gain of 2 million new positions.

The 15 economies covered by the survey account for approximately 65 per cent of the world's total workforce.

The assessment highlights the challenges posed by modern technologies that are automating and making redundant multiple human tasks, from manufacturing to healthcare.

With the International Labor Organisation, part of the United Nations, already forecasting an increase in global unemployment of 11 million by

2020, the size of the additional job losses is sobering.

Two-thirds of the projected losses are expected to fall in the office and administrative sectors as smart machines take over more routine tasks, according to latest findings, which are based on a global survey of personnel and strategy executives. The WEF has made "the fourth industrial revolution" — a topic covering robotics, nanotechnology, 3D printing and biotechnology — the official theme of this year's Davos meeting, which runs from 20 to 23 January. The "Future of Jobs" report concluded that jobs would be displaced in every industry, although the impact would vary considerably, with the biggest negative losses likely to be in healthcare, reflecting the rise of telemedicine, followed by energy and financial services. At the same time, however, there will be a growing demand for certain skilled workers, including data analysts and specialist sales representatives. —Reuters

SpaceX launches climate satellite but botches ocean landing

VANDENBERG AIR FORCE BASE (California) — A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket blasted off from California on Sunday and put a climate-monitoring satellite into orbit, but botched an attempted return landing on a platform at sea, officials said.

The first stage of the rocket made it back to the platform, which was floating in the Pacific Ocean, but one of the rocket's landing legs failed to latch into position, SpaceX founder and Chief Executive Elon Musk wrote on Twitter.

"It tipped over after landing," the technology entrepreneur said.

The 22-story tall rocket lifted off through thick fog from Vandenberg Air Force Base on the central California coast at 10:42am PST (1842 GMT).

A successful ocean landing would have marked a second milestone for SpaceX a month after it nailed a spaceflight first with a successful ground landing in Florida, a key step in Musk's quest to develop a cheap, reusable rocket. The company's two previous ocean-landing attempts in 2015 were also unsuccessful. Being able to land at sea would give the company flexibility to



A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket with the Jason-3 spacecraft onboard is shown at Vandenberg Air Force Base Space Launch Complex 4 East in Vandenberg Air Force Base, California, on 16 January. PHOTO: REUTERS

recover rockets used on more demanding missions, such as launching heavy satellites, when boosters do not have enough fuel left to reach land.

Sunday's SpaceX launch succeeded in its primary goal to put the US- and European-owned Jason-3 satellite into orbit 830 miles (1,336 km) above the plan-

et. The 1,200-pound (550 kg) spacecraft is the fourth in a series of ocean-monitoring satellites taking center stage in monitoring Earth's climate.

"More than 90 per cent of all the heat being trapped in the Earth's system ... is actually going into the ocean," said Laury Miller, Jason-3 lead scientist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. "This makes the ocean perhaps the biggest player in the climate change story."

NOAA is one of five agencies partnering on the \$180 million, five-year Jason-3 programme.

Jason-3 is designed to bounce radio waves off the ocean and time how long it takes the reflected signals to return. Scientists can use the information to figure out ocean heights to within 0.2 inches (0.5 cm), said Josh Willis, with NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California.

"This is one of the most important yardsticks we have for human-caused climate change," Willis said, adding that heat, plus runoff water from melting ice sheets, causes ocean levels to climb. Jason-3 can also chart ocean currents, which impact weather phenomena such as this year's powerful El Nino system, monitor tsunamis and track oil spills.—Reuters

Singapore researchers develop cellular imaging platform for testing kidney toxicity

SINGAPORE — Researchers in Singapore have developed a highly efficient and accurate cellular imaging platform for predicting toxicity of compounds to the kidney, the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR) said yesterday.

The approach, which combines cell culture, imaging and computational methods, could prove invaluable to companies from food, nutrition, cosmetics, consumer care, chemical and pharmaceutical industries by enabling them to predict the safety of their products while in development, the agency said in a statement.

Chemical compounds could

injure the kidney and impair its function of eliminating waste from the body. About 20 per cent of hospital or community acquired cases of acute kidney injury can be attributed to nephrotoxic drugs. Currently, there is no accurate method for screening large numbers of potentially nephrotoxic compounds with diverse chemical structures.

Over the past three years, researchers from A*STAR's Bioinformatics Institute (BII) and the Institute of Bioengineering and Nanotechnology (IBN) have worked together to develop cell-based screening methods to address the need, particularly as ani-

mal testing bans for cosmetics have been implemented in the EU, Norway, India and Israel, with many more countries expected to follow suit.

The researchers were able to develop the first and only cell-based renal screening platforms that can predict nephrotoxicity with high accuracy. Improving on this, the researchers have now developed an imaging-based method that can be used to test much larger numbers of compounds. "By automatically analyzing more than 25,000 microscopy images of cells treated with different compounds, we were able to identify phenotypic signatures of kidney cells that

can be used to predict the in vivo toxicity of compounds with diverse structures and mechanisms, with a validated accuracy of 80-90 per cent," said Principal Investigator from BII who co-authored the study Lit-Hsin Loo.

In this study, more than 2 million individual cells were screened for their reactions to over 40 different chemical compounds, including industrial chemicals, antibiotics, antivirals, chemotherapy drugs and agricultural chemicals. The analysis was performed using an automated image analysis software called "cellXpress" that was developed by Dr Loo's team at BII.—Xinhua

Georgia reports first death from swine flu this year

TBILISI — A 39-year-old man was confirmed as the first case dying of complications after being infected with swine flu, Georgian authorities announced Sunday.

The man was transferred from western Georgia to the capital city when he was in a very critical condition, but died soon last week, according to Paata Imnadze, head of the Georgian National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC).

He confirmed that the cause of the death was the infection of the swine flu, also known as the H1N1 virus.

However, Imnadze said there is no threat of major outbreaks in Georgia.

"We expect some increase since last December but not outbreak," he said, adding that the situation is under control.

The first case of H1N1 infection in Georgia was registered in 2009.

During the flu season between 2010 and 2011, the virus claimed 33 lives and infected 1,800 people in the country.—Xinhua

Lack of drug testing on indigenous Aussies putting population at risk

CANBERRA — The health of indigenous Australians could be at risk due to insufficient test data detailing the effects of certain medicines on the regenerating population, experts say.

Doctor Tilenka Thynne, from Flinders Medical Center, and Doctor Genevieve Gabb, from Royal Adelaide Hospital, made the assessment in a study published in the *Medical Journal of Australia (MJA)* yesterday.

The two experts believe inadequate testing on the side effects of drugs on indigenous people is fraught with danger, and could possibly lead to death in extreme cases.

It is a commonly cited fact that the ethnicity of an individual impacts the effectiveness and potential harm of certain types of medication. At present, certain vulnerable groups in society — such as the elderly, children, preg-

nant and breastfeeding women — are targeted for testing purposes — but no mechanism to test aboriginal Australians is in place.

"A younger group of people are exposed to drugs when starting cardiovascular screening and primary preventive treatment, leading to potentially longer cumulative lifetime exposure," the two experts wrote in the *MJA* yesterday.

Thynne and Gabb noted most

indigenous Australians started to take therapeutic drugs at a younger age and remained on the medication for longer.

According to the latest data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, indigenous Australians' average life-span is 67.2 years — 11.5 years less than the general population. The median age of indigenous Australians (21.8 years) is also 15.8 years less than white Australians (37.6).—Xinhua

Obama declares emergency in Michigan over bad water: White House

WASHINGTON — US President Barack Obama declared a state of emergency in Michigan on Saturday and ordered federal aid for state and local response efforts in the county where the city of Flint has been contending with lead-contaminated drinking water.

Michigan Governor Rick Snyder had asked the president to declare both an emergency and an expedited major disaster in Genesee County to protect the safety of Flint residents.

Obama is authorising the Federal Emergency Management Agency to coordinate disaster relief efforts there, the White House said in a statement.

The action is being taken to "lessen or avert

the threat of a catastrophe in Genesee County," it said.

Snyder sent the Michigan National Guard to distribute bottled water and other supplies in the area earlier this week.

A financially struggling city, Flint was under control of a state-appointed emergency manager when it switched its source of tap water from Detroit's system to the nearby Flint River in April 2014 to save money.

Flint, which is about 60 miles (100 km) northwest of Detroit, returned to using that city's water in October after tests found elevated levels of lead in the water and in the blood of some children.—*Reuters*

Political impasse in Spain to last at least several months



Spain's acting prime minister Mariano Rajoy votes during the first session of parliament following a general election in Madrid, Spain, on 13 January. PHOTO: REUTERS

MADRID — A political logjam in Spain expected to last at least several months is set to slow the pace of economic reforms sharply, storing up obstacles for growth in a country seeking to extend a recovery from deep crisis.

With the 2016 budget already passed and a strong economic tailwind from record low oil prices and interest rates, Spanish politicians have little or no pressure to reach a deal on a coalition government following inconclusive elections.

Just shy of a month on from the vote, the euro zone's fourth largest economy has no settled government nor any sign of getting one soon.

In the meantime, the pile of reforms many see as essential to furthering the turnaround — including changing the way regions are financed, overhauling the social security system and further fixes for the job market — is building up fast.

Some analysts believe that at best, a return to political stability in the months ahead, including via fresh elections, could allow for more policy adjustments,

but only in 2017. This would come after economic legislation already took a backseat last year in the run-up to the 20 December election.

The centre-right People's Party of acting Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy — which passed landmark bills, including a reduction of firing costs in 2012 that was lauded by many economists but contested by progressive parties — steered clear of divisive reforms at the end of the year after the spending cuts it imposed during the recession alienated many voters.

"The momentum for reforms is not there even if there were a stable government," said Yvan Mamalet, a senior economist at Societe Generale. "We do not see any significant reforms in 2016."

Yet economic measures to help companies get back on their feet after insolvency or to launch start-ups more easily, coupled with an education overhaul to kick-start Spain's perennially weak productivity levels, could make a difference.

More reforms could

push Spain's potential long-term growth prospects to an annual rate of 2 percent, rather than the 1 percent projected by Societe Generale, Mamalet said.

A redesign of Spain's lopsided system of financing its autonomous communities, meanwhile, would allay some of the country's difficulties in meeting spending targets. It was put off by Rajoy's party until 2016 but could now be kicked even further down the road.

"(Regional financing) is an urgent matter, the system is faulty and needs to be addressed," said Angel de la Fuente, an economist at Madrid-based think tank Fedea.

It is not all bleak. Without further changes this year, Spain's economy is still expected to get through 2016 in resilient form. But that may further reduce any incentive for reforms in the short term.

Improving tax revenues, for instance, have taken some of the heat off the regional financing dilemma, which revolves around how such income is distributed, Fedea's De la Fuente said.

Meanwhile solid consumer spending should push firms to hire, chipping away at an eye-wateringly high unemployment rate of over 20 per cent. A weak euro is drawing more tourists than ever to Spain's beaches, and a stimulus plan from the European Central Bank is keeping borrowing costs in check.

"There are a number of factors that for now can offset any slowdown in investment growth or any in-

stability," said Miguel Cardoso, Chief Economist for Spain at BBVA, which sees output expanding by 2.7 per cent in 2016, slightly less than in 2015.

"The economic reforms that were brought in over recent years that can sustain growth in the coming quarters, and there is also the ECB's bond buying programme," he added.

But the political deadlock could end up taking its toll, especially if it remains unclear for a prolonged period which way economic policy is going.

Some in business circles fear a reversal of the most recent labour legislation as promised by the Socialist party or leftist newcomer Podemos.

At the same time Spain is still under scrutiny from the European Commission over how it can go further on the jobs front and reduce employers' abuse of temporary contracts, a problem that is also dragging on productivity.

Even a quicker resolution to the political impasse than expected by most may not advance the economic agenda.

The demands of parties trying to partner up could likely take precedence, Fedea's De la Fuente said. An independence drive in Catalonia, where a separatist local government is promoting a roadmap to secession, will also be high on the list of issues to tackle. "The most likely reforms now are more political than economic — we're talking about measures against corruption, the reform of the Constitution or of the electoral law," he said.—*Reuters*

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV NINOS VOY NO (1045W)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV NINOS VOY NO (1045W) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 18.1.2016 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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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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CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV E.R TURKU VOY NO (091W)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV E.R TURKU VOY NO (091W) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 18.1.2016 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.

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US commander to visit Japan following North Korean nuclear test

TOKYO — The commander of US forces in the Pacific is planning to visit Japan next month and is likely to discuss with Japanese leaders China's growing maritime assertiveness as well as North Korea's nuclear test earlier this month, diplomatic sources said Sunday.

Adm. Harry Harris is expected to meet with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Defence Minister Gen Nakatani during the visit. Harris has been invited to attend a ceremony of Japan's Defence Ministry on 17 February.

The two sides are likely to confirm close co-operation in responding to North Korea's fourth nuclear test. Japan is looking to step up its sanctions against Pyongyang, while also participating in international moves for UN sanctions.

After the 6 January

nuclear test, the US Pacific Command dispatched a B-52 bomber on a flight over South Korea, in an apparent show of force to North Korea.

The United States also sent a destroyer in October to an area close to one of China's man-made islands in the Spratly archipelago, challenging Beijing's land reclamation work in the South China Sea, where its territorial claims overlap with those of some other countries.

Harris and Japanese leaders are expected to underscore a stronger Japan-US alliance, as Tokyo plans to expand overseas missions by the Self-Defence Forces after recent security reforms, the sources said.

Harris, who assumed his post last May, visited Japan the following month and held talks with Abe and Nakatani.—*Kyodo News*

Operator ran crashed ski-tour bus without proper paperwork

TOKYO — The transport ministry has found that the operator of a chartered ski-tour bus that crashed in central Japan last week, killing 14 people, ran the vehicle without providing its drivers with instruction paperwork required by law, ministry officials said yesterday.

Operating the bus without the paperwork required by the ministry would constitute a violation of the Road Transportation Law.

Tokyo-based ESP provided its drivers with an instruction document together with a basic itinerary given by Keyth Tour, the travel company that organised the tour, but the ministry judged the document and itinerary did not meet standards under the law, saying they were insufficient to ensure proper and safe bus operations, according to the officials.



A tour bus veered off a road in the central Japanese town of Karuizawa earlier 15 January. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

According to the officials.

A bus operator is required to compile and provide its drivers with detailed instructions on places of departure and arrival, the route to be taken, break times and areas of caution.

But a special inspection by the ministry showed that the instruction document provided by ESP only specified the places of departure and arrival.

"We thought that there would be no problem if we simply attached an itinerary," an ESP official said.

The itinerary provided was essentially a document created by a travel agency to inform customers about their tour in line with the Travel Agency Act. As it did not include information such as locations where a driver should hand over driving, the ministry has determined it was not a sufficient replacement for an instruction document.

The ministry is now investigating what appear to be routine violations of regulations by ESP and is looking into additional inspections.

In the accident early Friday, two drivers and 12 university students were killed when the bus carrying 39 passengers from Tokyo to a ski resort in Nagano Prefecture veered off a mountain road and rolled over in the resort town of Karuizawa, Nagano, northwest of Tokyo.

In its probe conducted through Sunday, the ministry found that other tours were also operated by ESP without the necessary instruction documents.

Meanwhile, the ministry corrected late Sunday its earlier explanation that last year, the bus operator falsely reported to the ministry that it had conducted health checks on its bus drivers, and that one of the two drivers on the bus may have been among them.

The ministry said that in its special inspection following the crash, it found documents showing that ESP did conduct health checks.—*Kyodo News*



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Mexican director Gonzalez Inarritu defends Penn for 'Chapo' interview

MEXICO CITY — Oscar-winning Mexican film director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu has stood by US actor Sean Penn for his interview with drug lord Joaquin "Chapo" Guzman, saying in an article published on Sunday that Penn wrote a "fantastic" story.

Speaking with Spanish newspaper *El Pais*, Gonzalez Inarritu said that the news value of Penn's interview with Guzman was limited, but said the star had every right to go looking for the kingpin, delivering a great story on his quest to find him.

"I understand Sean Penn," the director was quoted as saying. "He has every right to look for El Chapo."

Guzman, the legendary boss of the Sinaloa drugs cartel, was arrested earlier this month in northwest Mexico. He had been on the run for six months after he broke out of a high-security jail through a tunnel that led right into his cell.

Mexico's Attorney General, Arely Gomez, has since said Penn's meeting with Guzman in



Director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu poses during a photo call for the movie "The Revenant" in Rome, Italy on 16 January. PHOTO: REUTERS

October last year was "essential" in leading to the arrest of the fugitive drug lord.

Gonzalez Inarritu won the Oscar for Best Director last year for his movie "Birdman." He was nominated again this year for

his new movie, "The Revenant," starring Leonardo DiCaprio.

"The Revenant" won three Golden Globes last week, and is one of the favorites at this year's Oscars, with 12 nominations.—*Reuters*

Box Office: 'Ride Along 2,' 'The Revenant' push 'Star Wars' from first place

LOS ANGELES — After four weeks atop box office charts, Disney's "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" has ceded first place to Universal's "Ride Along 2."

The comedy sequel picked up a leading \$34 million across 3,175 venues and \$39.5 million over the four-day Martin Luther King weekend. The space opera slid to third place with \$25.1 million for the three days and roughly \$30 million for the four-day period. It has earned \$851 million stateside and \$1.86 billion globally.

Universal spent \$40 million re-teaming Ice Cube and Kevin Hart. "Ride Along 2" finds the bickering police officers trying to bring a Miami drug ring to justice.

Fox's "The Revenant" was bolstered by its strong showing at the Oscar nominations on Thursday when the wilderness epic picked up a leading 12 nods, including ones for Best Picture and for the performances of stars Leonardo DiCaprio and Tom Hardy. The story of a fur trapper seeking revenge racked up \$29.5 million over the three days.

Its domestic total stands at \$87.7 million and it should pull in \$34 million over the holiday. New Regency financed the ambitious film, which battled production delays, crew defections, and a budget that ballooned from \$90 million to \$135 million, to emerge as an awards season winner.

Paramount's "13 Hours: The Secret Soldiers of Benghazi" flirted with political controversy, drawing a rebuke from a CIA spokesman, will pulling off a solid \$16 million opening over the three days.

The \$50 million production will do an estimated \$19 million over the holiday. It screened at 2,389 locations. The 2012 attack on the American diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya resulted in the killing of US Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens.

Critics in the Republican Party have faulted the Obama administration for its response to the attack and for not being forthcoming about warnings it received that the compound might have been in danger.

Lionsgate's "Norm Of The North" pulled in \$6.7 million from 2,411 locations. The animated film about a polar bear who is displaced from his Arctic home and makes his way to New York City, should do \$8.8 million worth of business over the four-day span.

"The Revenant" wasn't the only Oscar nominee to enjoy a bump. Fox Searchlight's "Brooklyn" saw its receipts climb 51% to \$2 million from 687 theaters, bringing its total to \$25 million. Fellow Best Picture nominee "Room" saw its revenue spike up over 500%, topping out at \$893,357 for the weekend from 293 locations. The A24 release has earned \$6.2 million.—*Reuters*

Olivia Munn trained six hours a day for 'X-men: Apocalypse'

LOS ANGELES — Actress Olivia Munn trained for six hours a day for her role in the new "X-men" movie. The "Mortdecai" star, who plays Psylocke in "X-Men: Apocalypse", said she did not like the idea of having to work out for the film, reported Contactmusic.

"The beginning of the movie I do look different. If you watch

the movie from the beginning to my fight scene, I lost, like, 12 pounds, because when I started I was like, 'I'm the relatable actress, I can eat whatever...'

"But then I started training for, like, six or seven hours a day — martial arts and sword training — so that I could become as lethal as I could, and I needed to feel as

confident as Psylocke as I could. So six or seven hours a day for, like, two months (I trained) and then I lost 12 pounds."

Munn, 35, who is dating buff sportsman Aaron Rodgers, admits she likes the way she feels now she has a toned physique: "I feel very strong and it's an awesome feeling." —*PTI*



Angelina Jolie. PHOTO: REUTERS

My kids think what I do is easy

LOS ANGELES — Hollywood star Angelina Jolie says her children think her job is "ridiculously easy" after working with her on new movie "Kung Fu Panda 3".

Four of the actress' six kids — Pax, 12, Zahara, 10, nine-year-old Shiloh and seven-year-old Knox — voice characters in her new movie "Kung Fu Panda 3", reported Extra TV.

After working on the project, Jolie, 40, says her brood have an entirely different perception of

her profession.

"It's been, 'If you want to, you can jump in, and here's a crazy idea' ... and some of them were shy, but this one they all really wanted to and they all came together and did their recording together and took it very seriously — it was cute," Jolie said. "Now that they've had a taste, they think Mommy's job is ridiculously easy." —*PTI*

Miley Cyrus trying to be more conservative off stage

LONDON — Pop star Miley Cyrus has reportedly promised Liam Hemsworth she will curb her outrageous image.

The 23-year-old "Wrecking Ball" singer — who is known for her provocative and flamboyant stage wear — has allegedly reconciled with her former fiancé and has vowed to dress more con-

servatively when she's not working, reported *Grazia* magazine.

"When they split, Miley went into overdrive partying and being provocative. Liam is quite conservative so it felt like she was reclaiming her own identity," a source said.

"Now she feels she has nothing left to prove. While she's still

going to push the envelope when it comes to videos and touring, she's been explaining to Liam that it's not necessarily who she is behind the scenes. "She's grown her pixie crop out and let her natural brunette roots show, and started wearing slightly more reserved outfits." —*PTI*



PHOTO: REUTERS

I want to play Vladimir Putin: Leonardo DiCaprio

LOS ANGELES — Actor Leonardo DiCaprio is interested in portraying Russian President Vladimir Putin on the big screen.

The "Wolf of Wall Street" star is receiving high praise for his Oscar-nominated role as frontiersman Hugh Glass in "The Revenant", but the 41 year old is already looking forward to his next role and would consider playing the controversial leader, reported *Vulture* online.

"Putin would be very, very, very interesting. I would love to play him," he said.

DiCaprio previously worked with Putin in 2010 and met him during a conference staged to raise awareness about the endangered Siberian tiger.

"My foundation has provided financial support for several projects for the protection of these big cats. Putin and I talked only about the protection of these magnificent animals, not politics." —*PTI*

Richest 62 people own same as half world's population

LONDON — The wealthiest 62 people now own as much as half the world's population, some 3.5 billion people, as the super-rich have grown richer and the poor poorer, an international charity said yesterday.

The wealth of the richest 62 people has risen by 44 per cent since 2010, while the wealth of the poorest 3.5 billion fell 41 per cent, Oxfam said in a report released ahead of the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland. Almost half the super-rich individuals are from the United States, 17 from Europe, and the rest from countries including China, Brazil, Mexico, Japan and Saudi Arabia.

"World leaders' concern about the escalating inequality crisis has so far not translated into concrete action — the world has become a much more unequal

place and the trend is accelerating," Oxfam International's executive director, Winnie Byanima, said in a statement accompanying the report.

"We cannot continue to allow hundreds of millions of people to go hungry while resources that could be used to help them are sucked up by those at the top," Byanima added.

About \$7.6 trillion of individuals' wealth sits in offshore tax havens, and if tax were paid on the income that this wealth generates, an extra \$190 billion would be available to governments every year, Gabriel Zucman, assistant professor at University of California, Berkeley, has estimated.

As much as 30 per cent of all African financial wealth is held offshore, costing about \$14 billion in lost tax revenues every year, Oxfam said, referring to Zucman's work.—*Reuters*

South Korean woman aims for more 'Deaflympics' badminton gold

SAPPORO — Jeong Seon Hwa, a South Korean woman living in Japan, is ready to return to the podium at the next "Deaflympics", an international sports event for hearing impaired people.

The 31-year-old badminton player, who has been unable to hear since birth, has a Japanese husband and currently works at the "Hohoemi (Smile) Cafe" in Sapporo in the northernmost Japanese prefecture of Hokkaido. The business is operated by a Sapporo association for people with hearing disabilities.

"Badminton has always given me the power to live and made me happy," Jeong said.

Her goal for the near future is to win gold medals for South Korea at the Summer Deaflympics scheduled to take place in Turkey in July 2017.

Jeong has won seven

gold, four silver and one bronze medal in singles, doubles, mixed doubles and team events at four Deaflympics between 2001 and 2013, but failed to pick up a title in the most recent event held in Bulgaria.

"I was planning to retire if I won gold that year," Jeong said.

A native of Seoul, Jeong has shown great sporting talent since childhood and started playing badminton at age 11, encouraged by a gym teacher at her special school for disabled children based in the capital.

She played so remarkably well that a badminton instructor from a competitive junior high school team invited her to enroll in the school.

At age 17, she won her first spot on a Deaflympics team. Although an old knee injury from junior high school recurred

shortly before she was to play, she still took part and brought home three medals.

She collected gold in the women's doubles and mixed team event and silver in the women's singles and mixed doubles.

Jeong said despite the injury she played because "I hate to lose." She then underwent knee surgery at the end of the Games.

In February 2014, Jeong married a Japanese man and moved to Japan. She started working at the cafe alongside other people with hearing disabilities last May.

Despite being worried about whether she could bake the cafe's regular menu items, her manager said, "she now makes cakes and cookies all alone."

Noting that the working environment in South Korea is not as friendly to hearing impaired

people as it is in Japan, Jeong said she hopes to stay in Japan for a long time.—*Kyodo News*



Jeong Seon Hwa communicating with a customer at the checkout counter of a cafe in Sapporo, Hokkaido, using sign language. The South Korean is a member of the national women's team aiming to claim medals at the next "Deaflympics" international sports event for deaf people.

PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

PICTURE OF THE DAY



Folk artist Wang Runxin makes clay sculptures of Monkey King at his studio in Luoyang, central China's Henan Province, 17 January 2016. The Chinese Lunar New Year of Monkey falls on 8 February this year. PHOTO: XINHUA

MRTV News Channel in Brief

(19-1-2016, Tuesday)

- | | |
|--|---|
| 6:00 am | 3:35 pm |
| • Paritta By Venerable Mingun Sayadaw | • Socio Economic Scenes |
| 7:35 am | 4:35 pm |
| • Socio Economic Scenes | • Football Magazine |
| 8:35 am | 5:35 pm |
| • Documentary | • Money Talk Myanmar |
| 9:35 am | 6:35 pm |
| • MRTV's Youth Programme | • People's Talks |
| 11:35 am | 7:15 pm |
| • Documentary | • TV Drama Series |
| 12:50 pm | 8:00 pm |
| • Teleplay (Part-2) | • News / International News/ Weather Report |
| 1:10 pm | 9:00 pm |
| • TV Drama Series | • News |
| 2:00 pm | • TV Drama Series |
| • Sing & Enjoy | • Yes or No Talk Show (Male or Female) (Part-2) |
| Note/ Hourly News Bulletins (Local + International) | |

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Today Fresh

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|-------|----|---|
| 07:03 | Am | News |
| 07:25 | Am | Atuladhipati Mahamunisacca Koe Htat Kyee Pagoda |
| 07:41 | Am | A bike ride in pursuit of Mural Art (Episode-1) |
| 08:03 | Am | News |
| 08:26 | Am | Reflected Glory |
| 08:49 | Am | Farming: Duck Breeder |
| 09:03 | Am | News |
| 09:26 | Am | Life In NightArt In Life (Ep-2) (Part-2) |
| 09:52 | Am | Graffiti: Portraiture |
| 10:03 | Am | News |
| 10:26 | Am | Travelogue: A Tour in Korea (Ep-2) |

- | | | |
|-------|----|--|
| 10:40 | Am | Kindhearted Pet Lovers |
| 10:49 | Am | Today Myanmar: Auto Market Amid The Policy Changes |

(11:00 Am ~ 03:00 Pm) - Monday Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(03:00 Pm ~ 07:00 Pm) - Today Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)

Prime Time

- | | | |
|-------|----|--------------------------------|
| 07:03 | Pm | News |
| 07:26 | Pm | A Day Out With Sarah (EP-5) |
| 07:52 | Pm | Myanmar Puppet |
| 08:03 | Pm | News |
| 08:26 | Pm | A Glance At A Naga Family Life |
| 08:45 | Pm | Diary of a Fisherman |

(09:00 Pm ~ 11:00 Pm) - Today Repeat (09:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(11:00 Pm ~ 03:00 Am) - Monday Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(03:00 Am ~ 07:00 Am) - Today Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)

(For Detailed Schedule – www.myanmaritv.com/schedule)

MRTV Entertainment Channel

(19-1-2016, Tuesday)

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 6:00 pm | 7:50 pm |
| • Nice and Sweet Song | • TV Drama Series |
| 6:10 pm | 8:35 pm |
| • Pyi Thu Ni Ti | • Musical Programme |
| 6:30 pm | 8:55 pm |
| • Fashion Show | • Radio Drama |
| 6:40 pm | 9:45 pm |
| • Kyae Pwint Myaye Yin Khone Than | • ASEAN Cultural Fair-2014 |
| 7:00 pm | 10:05 pm |
| • TV Drama Series | • Myanmar Video |

From 19.1.2016 (Tuesday) 06:00 Pm
To 20.1.2016 (Wednesday) 06:00 Pm

This schedule will be repeated four times in 24 hours.

Djokovic, Williams begin Australian Open title defence with easy wins

MELBOURNE — Novak Djokovic and Serena Williams started their Australian Open title defence in flawless fashion, securing straight sets wins on the opening day.

Taking centre stage on Rod Laver Arena (RLA), the world's two best players and the two pre-tournament favourites, shined in typical Melbourne heat.

Confronted by one of the ATP tour's biggest up-and-comers, South Korea's Hyeon Chung, Djokovic barely broke out of first gear in his 6-3, 6-2, 6-4 first-round win.

The 10-time Grand Slam-winner, who unquestionably had his best year on tour in 2015, dominated in his first best-of-five sets match of 2016, seemingly breaking Chung's serve at will.

It was a quick kill for Djokovic, finishing off the 52-ranked South Korean in a touch under two hours (115 minutes).

The Serbian showed why rivals such as Rafael Nadal and Australian Bernard Tomic have suggested only injury or a divine intervention can prevent the 28-year-old from capturing his sixth Australian crown.

Djokovic said it was great to be back in Melbourne, where he has snared half of his Grand Slam titles to date.

In his on-court interview on Monday, the Serbian star described 2015 as the "best season" of his career, and put last year's incredible form down to the birth of his first child.

Williams, the only player on

earth to have had an equally dominant season, also sent a strong message to those in the women's draw.

Going into her eighth Australian Open, the 34-year-old quickly dispelled concerns that a nagging knee injury might impact her title defence.

Williams moved well around the court in her 6-4, 7-5 victory over Italian Camila Giorgi, who gave the six-time tournament winner a good work out in 35-degree Celsius heat.

Williams, who is aiming to become only the third female tennis player to collect 20 major championships, a feat only accomplished by Margaret Court and Steffi Graf, with another win in Melbourne, said her knee was fine.

"It's great. It was an hour

and 43 minutes and I didn't feel it at all," Williams told reporters yesterday.

Earlier on RLA, two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitová made light work of Thailand's highest ranked female Luksika Kumkhun, who caused a shock upset against her more fancied opponent at the same event in 2014.

There would be no repeat of Kvitová's untimely exit two years ago, as she cruised to a 6-3, 6-1 victory in an hour and 10 minutes.

The sixth-seed from Belarus showed no signs of the glandular fever that forced her to retire in the first round of the Shenzhen Open a fortnight ago.

Elsewhere, Australian Daria Gavrilova became the first local player to progress to the second

round with a 7-6 (7-3), 6-4 win over Czech player Lucie Hradecká.

Recently, Gavrilova teamed up with fellow Australian Nick Kyrgios to clinch Australia's first Hopman Cup win in 19 years.

"I was as nervous today as I was at (the) Hopman Cup," Gavrilova told reporters yesterday. "All these matches mean a lot to me ... it was hard serving it out in the end. I got a bit nervous."

It was the 21-year-old's first Grand Slam win on Australian soil since she secured citizenship in 2013.

The Russian-born world Number 39 said the home town support played a major part in her first win at the Australian Open.

"It was amazing. Someone yelled out 'break here' and I actually did break the same game," she said. "I was like 'oh, thanks'."

Gavrilova will face Kvitová in the second round.

On Hisense Arena, Japan's Kei Nishikori easily accounted German Philipp Kohlschreiber 6-4, 6-3, 6-3, in what many considered a danger game for Asia's highest ranked player.

Other top players to steamroll into the second round with straight sets wins included: Ag-

nieszka Radwanska (6-2, 6-3), Tomas Berdych (6-4, 6-3, 6-3) and Carla Suárez Navarro (7-5, 6-4).

Overall, Chinese players turned out mixed performances on Day 1.

Chinese qualifier Wang Qiang pulled off one of the biggest heists of the opening day, defeating 2013 semi-finalist Sloane Stephens 6-3, 6-3.

Despite winning the second set, compatriot Wang Yafan crashed out 6-4, 1-6, 6-3.

Meanwhile, China's only player in the men's draw, 24-year-old Wu Di, failed to progress to the second round in his third appearance at the Australian Open, losing in straight sets.—Xinhua



Serbia's Novak Djokovic runs and jumps to hit a shot during his first round match against South Korea's Hyeon Chung at the Australian Open tennis tournament at Melbourne Park, Australia, on 18 January. PHOTO: REUTERS



Serena Williams. PHOTO: REUTERS

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Arsenal draw to go top, United win at Liverpool

ARSENAL ended Leicester City's brief stay at the top of the Premier League on Sunday despite being held to a 0-0 draw at Stoke City after Manchester United's Wayne Rooney struck late for a 1-0 win at Liverpool.

Arsenal, despite a raft of injuries, moved ahead of Leicester, who drew 1-1 at Aston Villa on Saturday. Both teams have 44 points from 22 matches but the London side's goal difference is three better than the Foxes.

Manchester City are a point behind the leading pair after they beat Crystal Palace 4-0 on Saturday, while Tottenham Hotspur complete the top four with 39 points following their 4-1 home win over Sunderland also on Saturday.

Manchester United are next on 37 points, moving up one

place after Rooney's 78th minute volley gave them victory at arch-rivals Liverpool in a drab north-west derby which improved slightly after the break following a poor first half.

Rooney struck after a header by Marouane Fellaini rebounded straight to him off the bar with the United skipper giving keeper Simon Mignolet no chance with his ferocious strike.

Arsenal, ravaged by injuries and without in-form playmaker Mesut Ozil, their latest casualty with a slight foot problem, on Sunday, have not won at Stoke for six years but came close to ending that run with three excellent attempts.

However, they could not find a way past young England international keeper Jack Butland who made important saves from Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain

and Olivier Giroud, twice.

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger, who has seen his side beaten three times at Stoke in the last five seasons, said he was pleased with a point after dropping two to a last-minute equaliser in a 3-3 draw at Liverpool on Wednesday.

"We have had two very physical games in four days away from home. Stoke wanted to surprise us and made it very physical from the start and we had to fight," he told Sky Sports.

Arsenal keeper Petr Cech, the Man of the Match, was far busier in the second half, denying Marko Arnautovic twice, Bojan Krkic and Joselu as Stoke poured forward looking for a third successive home league win over the Gunners.

Stoke remain seventh with 33 points.

Most of the build-up on Sunday was focussed on the Liverpool versus United clash, hailed by the media as the biggest rivalry in English football between two clubs who have won 38 domestic league titles between them.

In reality, though, it lacked all the intensity of games in the past when both were challenging for the title or top four places with the defeat leaving Liverpool trailing in ninth place, eight points behind the Champions League spots.

"I didn't see too many chances for Manchester United and we didn't take ours. Of course it is frustrating," Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp told the BBC.

"We lost in a derby against Manchester United so I can't be very positive at this moment so

soon after the game."

United manager Louis van Gaal added: "We have made a good start in 2016, to beat Liverpool for the second time in a row is marvellous, it gives a big boost for the players and the fans so I hope we shall continue with winning."

"That is why we are here, to win our games and at the end of the season to be in the first three positions in the league."

Rooney's winner was his 176th league goal for United, a record for a player for one club in the Premier League era, following his 15 league goals for Everton at the start of his career.

His United total has eclipsed the previous record of 175 set by Thierry Henry for Arsenal in his two spells in north London between 1999 and 2012.—Reuters