

President U Thein Sein sends messages of felicitations to Japanese Emperor, PM

NAY PYI TAW, 23 Dec — On the occasion of the birthday of His Majesty Akihito, Emperor of Japan, which falls on 23 December 2014, U Thein Sein, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, has sent messages of felicitations to His Majesty Akihito, Emperor of Japan and His Excellency Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan.

MNA

Vice President urges traditional medicine practitioners to carry out research constantly

NAY PYI TAW, 22 Dec — Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham urged traditional medicine practitioners to conduct researches constantly to keep up with ever-changing diagnosis methods, applications and treatments amid changing modern lifestyle at the opening ceremony of the 15th Conference of Myanmar Traditional Medicine Practitioners held at the Myanmar International Convention Centre-2 in Nay Pyi Taw on Monday.

The vice president added that successive governments of Myanmar have taken necessary measures to enhance the role of traditional medicine in the public health sector as the people value it as a traditional heritage, for the safety and high effectiveness of its ingredients and for its relationship with Buddhism.

Then, the vice president said that rural residents, who make up 70 per cent of the population, rely



Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham visits booths of traditional medicine at 15th Conference of Myanmar Traditional Medicine Practitioners.—MNA

more on traditional medicine and traditional medicine manufacturers should set up a fund to contribute to philanthropic work in rural areas as the traditional

medicine business is a lucrative one. Being an ASEAN member, Myanmar has been working with other member countries in many sectors including tradition-

al medicine where standardization, research and development with respect to registration, and trade of traditional medicine are needed, he said.

It is the responsibility of traditional medicine practitioners and professionals to preserve and buttress the basic principle (See page 3)

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Peace negotiators meet prior to 7th round of nationwide ceasefire accord meetings

By Ye Myint

YANGON, 22 Dec — Ending a delay of nearly three months in peace talks on drafting a single text document for a nationwide ceasefire, peace negotiators

of the Union Peace-making Work Committee (UPWC) and the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) kicked off a coordination meeting at the Myanmar Peace Centre on Monday, with a focus on

continuation of the agreements for reaching a truce deal.

The UPWC-NCCT meeting, which is due to last two days, is aimed at gearing up for the seventh round of peace meetings in

which the text is expected to be finalized.

“Through this NCA coordination meeting, we are hopeful of seeking compromise on the remaining few points for reaching the nationwide ceasefire accord,” said Union Minister U Aung Min, who led the UPWC side at the meeting.

Highlighting the two main aims of the accord, which are to bring the temporary truces to a durable stage and to begin political dialogues, the Union minister stressed the need to complete the document as soon as possible.

“The most important thing is to hold a political dialogue seeking a federal system for all national races in the country to live in peace and harmony as the truce deals alone cannot bring an end to the country’s armed conflicts”, voiced the

Union minister, who is also the UPWC vice-chairman.

Today’s meeting only focused on the NCA, with both sides holding discussions on all remaining points and reaching agreements on some of them, said U Hla Maung Shwe, MPC senior adviser.

“But a few points need further approval and will be brought to leaders from both sides”, he added.

Regarding the absence of some members from both sides, Pado Saw Kwe Htoo Win, deputy leader of NCCT, asserted that no matter who participates in the meeting, views and decisions of both sides are to represent their own teams.

Dr Salai Lian Hmong Sakhong of the NCCT also said, “The absence of senior military officers from the UPWC did not impact either side as this meeting is

designed for making technical coordination between the two sides.”

“We don’t want to highlight ‘federal army’ at the moment. It’s an ideal of what the country’s army should be when the country is governed in a federal system,” he told the media after the first-day meeting.

According to officials, both sides will have constructive discussions on other issues, including Laiza issue, and on inviting local and international eminent persons to the next round of meetings scheduled tomorrow. The sixth round of UPWC-NCCT meetings, held 22-26 September, concluded with approval of the fourth draft of the ceasefire agreement. Both sides said the seventh round of meetings is expected to start in the second week of January.

GNLM



UPWC and NCCT officials exchange handshakes with each other before the start of NCA coordination meeting prior to the seventh round of peace meetings, which are expected to be held in January. — PHOTO: YE MYINT

Buddhist monks hoist umbrella atop Mya Sein Yaung Pagoda



KYAIKTO, 22 Dec — A golden umbrella, a pennant-shaped vane and a diamond orb were hoisted atop Mya Sein Yaung Pagoda in Kyaikto, Mon State, on Monday.

Kyaikhtihsaung mis-

sionary abbot Agga Maha Saddhamma Jotikadhaja Bhaddanta Nagadipa explained the purpose of building the pagoda.

Responsible persons offered the diamond orb to Kyaikhtihsaung Sayadaw

Bhadanta Pañnadipa and Buddhist monks. Wunna Kyawhtin Dr Khin Shwe donated K30 million at the ceremony.

Kyaikhtihsaung Sayadaw and Dr Khin Shwe hoisted tiers of um-

rella, pennant-shaped vane and diamond orb atop the pagoda.—Yan Soe

Midwifery Training School turns out new generations in Mandalay

MANDALAY, 22 Dec — The Midwifery Training School (Mandalay) under the Department of Medical Science held the first convocation at the hall of University of Nursing (Mandalay) in Chanmyathazi Township, Mandalay, on 20 December.

Principal Daw Molly of the school conferred diploma certificates on 67 trainees and made a speech.

It was also attended

by Rector of University of Nursing (Mandalay) Dr Shwe Toe, Medical Superintendent Dr Maung Win of Mandalay General Hospital and officials.

From 1958 to 2012, the training school has turned out 3,088 midwives. Diploma holders have the opportunity to attend the Bachelor of Nursing Course and a master's course.

Thiha Ko Ko (Mandalay)



Region High Court judge visits jail, police station in Myingyan, Taungtha Tsps



Judge of Mandalay Region High Court Daw Khin Thin Wai meets inmates at Myingyan Jail.

MYINGYAN, 22 Dec — Judge of Mandalay Region High Court Daw Khin Thin Wai inspected Myingyan Jail and police station in Myingyan, Mandalay Region, on 19 December.

The judge visited the jail and asked prisoners

and inmates for their convenience in requirements of basic needs, healthcare services, and rights of inmates under the laws.

On 20 December, she visited Taungtha Township court and instructed township judges and staff

to hear the cases as soon as possible and discharge their duties free from bribery and corruption.

She stressed the need to win the people's trust and to realize a good judicial system.—Zaw Min Nang (Myingyan)

89 Malaysian tourists arrive in Myawady

MYAWADY, 22 Dec — Under the supervision of the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Mother Ayeyawaddy Travels & Tours Co Ltd arranged arrival of 89 Malaysians led by Mr Wong Cheng Choy in Myawady on 22 December.

They arrived there in

28 cars. They tourists were welcomed by Liaison Officer U Kyaw Hsan Lin of Directorate of Hotels and Tourism Development, tour guide of the company U Win Lwin and a cultural troupe of Township Kayin literature and culture committee at the friendship bridge in Myawady.

The Malaysian tourists are scheduled to visit Myawady, Kyaikhtiyoe, Nay Pyi Taw, Inlay, Bagan, Mandalay, Yangon and Kyaikto townships. On 31 December, they will leave Myawady for Mae Sot in Thailand.

Thuzar (Myawady Town)



Under the arrangement of Mother Ayeyawaddy Travels & Tours Co Ltd, Malaysian tourists arrive at entrance to Myanmar in Myawady, border town of Kayin State.

NATIONAL

Vice President urges . . .

(from page 1)

of Myanmar's traditional medicine as there are differences in traditional medicine and people among ASEAN member countries, he added.

The vice president pointed out that Myanmar practitioners have to ensure that the safety, quality, and efficacy of Myanmar traditional medicine meet all the necessary standards to win recognition from other

ASEAN countries.

In conclusion, he urged all responsible personnel to collaborate for systematic development of Myanmar traditional medicine.

After the vice president's speech, a message of President U Thein Sein was read out by Union Minister for Health Dr Than Aung.

In the evening, the vice president hosted a dinner to traditional medicine practitioners at the MICC-2.—MNA

Hluttaw Speaker meets farmers in Bago

BAGO, 22 Dec — Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw Thura U Shwe Mann delivered speech to more than 5,000 farmers in Bago township Monday.

Thura U Aye Myint, on behalf of the speaker, read an opening speech to the farmers, saying that Hluttaw and government are striving for the welfare of people amid many challenges of democra-

tization process of the country.

The speaker pointed out to the public that different views and ideas cannot be avoided during this process, commenting that the cooperation is needed for the welfare of the country and people as diversities cannot be allowed if these different opinions deterred development of the country.

Thura U Shwe Mann

then said he thanked local representatives for presenting problems of land disputes, welfare of rural people and prosperity of the country.

He also said that Union Hluttaw has passed a law, and already urged Union government to protect the rights of farmers.

Government has formed land management committee chaired by vice-president, as well as

local committees at respective areas.

Thura U Shwe Mann promised to tackle land ownership problems when these are submitted to the Hluttaw.

In the evening, the speaker of Hluttaw and U Nyan Win, chief minister of Bago region, visited Shwemawdaw pagoda, donating flower, water, lights and scents to the pagoda.—MNA

NAY PYI TAW, 22 Dec — Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing received chairman of Nippon Foundation Yohei Sasakawa in Yangon on Monday.

During their meeting, the Senior General said Myanmar and Japan have a history of good relations, which have been strengthened by the recent visits of senior military officers including himself.

The Commander-in-Chief said he appreciates the contributions made by Nippon Foundation to the improve relations between the two countries.

He also noted that Tatmadaw is always ready to work together with any party or organization that may not threaten 'Our Three Main Causes', a set of fundamental policies adopted

for unity of the country.

Sasakawa said he understands Tatmadaw's efforts for people and stability of country and acknowledged its cooperation in humanitarian support of his foundation.

He also supported Myanmar's stance of not accepting foreign intervention in the country's internal affairs and promised to persuade ethnic armed groups to embrace this idea.

The Senior General attended a gathering party of veteran musicians co-organized by the Yangon Gallery and the Emperor Music Band at People's Park in Yangon.

At the meeting, he said arts and culture underscore the dignity of a country and urged nurturing of new generation that can conserve traditional culture.

Myawady

I&P Ministry staff get smart cards

NAY PYI TAW, 22 Dec — With the technical assistance of Kyodo Printing Company of Japan, Asia Business Solution Co Ltd donated smart cards to staff of the Ministry of Immigration and Population, here, on 19 December.

Union Minister U Khin

Yi thanked the well-wisher company for its donations.

Director Maekawa Toshio of Kyodo Printing Co Ltd donated 40 smart cards for staff to Director-General U Maung Maung Than of Immigration and National Registration Department.—MNA

Senior General receives chairman of Nippon Foundation



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing poses for documentary photo with Chairman of Nippon Foundation Yohei Sasakawa.

MNA

Union FM sends message of felicitations to Japanese counterpart

NAY PYI TAW, 23 Dec — On the occasion of the birthday of His Majesty Akihito, Emperor of Japan, which falls on 23 December 2014, U Wunna Maung Lwin, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, has sent a message of felicitations to His Excellency Mr. Fumio Kishida, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan.—MNA

Thaton Township observes Kayin New Year Day

THATON, 22 Dec — The Kayin New Year Day festival was observed in David Rain Village in Thaton Township, Mon State, on 21 December.

At 5 am, local authorities hoisted Kayin national

flag. Township Administrator U Tun Tun Naing read the message sent by Mon State Chief Minister U Ohn Myint.

An official explained emergence of Kayin New Year Day in Poe and Sakaw Kayin and Myanmar languages. Brig-Gen Thura Sein Thauang (Rtd) on behalf of the locals spoke words of thanks for organizing the new year day.

Locals paid respects to

26 older persons of above 80 years and gave gifts. Officials presented prizes to the students who passed matriculation examination with flying colour in 2013-14 academic year.

Kayin ethnics participated in the chorus dances and Don dances as of 20 December. The local authorities awarded winning chorus dance troupes on 21 December.

Thet Oo (Thaton)



Kayin nationals attend Kayin New Year Day festival in Thaton, Mon State.

University students participate in blood donation ceremony



MANDALAY, 22 Dec —Myat Parami blood donors association organized students of Mandalay University of Computer Studies (Dahattaw) to donate blood at Mandalay General Hospital on 21 December.

In commemoration of the Blood Donors Day, 70 students and donors participated in the blood donation.

The association held blood donations eight times from January to December 21 and presented over 720 blood bags to Mandalay National Blood Bank and Central Women's Hospital.

Thiha Ko Ko (Mandalay)

Film festival marks 60th anniversary of Japan-Myanmar diplomatic relations

MANDALAY, 22 Dec — In commemoration of the 60th anniversary of Japan-Myanmar diplomatic relations, the "Japanese Film Festival 2014" was held at Win Laik cinema in Chanayethazan Township, Mandalay, from 19 to 21 December.

It was attended by officials of the Japanese Embassy and Myanmar Motion Picture Promotion Department (Upper Myanmar branch), students from Japanese major from University of Foreign Languages (Mandalay) and movie-lovers.

The audiences enjoyed the Japanese movies



ies directed by Shinobu Yaguchi, Hiroyasu Doi

and Makoto Shinkai with Myanmar language subti-

tle.—*Thiha Ko Ko (Mandalay)*

Padauk Yanant literary house publishes books of famous authors



MANDALAY, 22 Dec — A ceremony to open Padauk Yanant Literary House and book shop was held in Yanmyolon Ward, Chanayethazan Township, Mandalay, on 21 December, attended by writers, poets, and editors from Yadanabon and Mandalay dailies.

The literary house publishes the books in political, economic, social and education arenas written by famous authors with their biographies and life achievements.

To mark the opening ceremony, the books are sold at special prices.

Thiha Ko Ko (Mandalay)

MYINGYAN, 22 Dec — Myingyan District Fisheries Department of Mandalay Region conducted a fishery course in Htanaunggon Village, Myingyan Township, on 19 December.

Staff of Fisheries Department gave a training course on preparations for fish ponds, basic fish-breeding techniques, the freshwater fish law, breeding of fish in dams and village-owned lakes on a manageable scale.

They disseminated knowledge about animal breeding and the emerald green project.

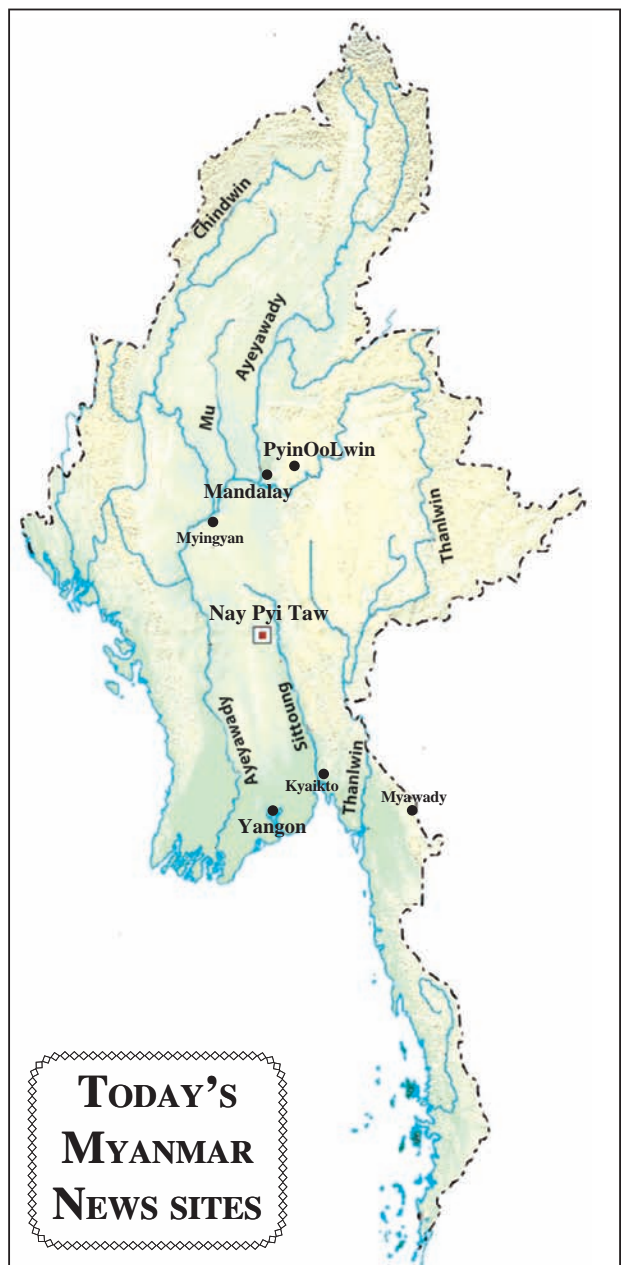
Township level departmental officials and staff gave lectures to 21 trainees

from 19 to 22 December.

Zaw Min Naing (Myangyan)



Departmental officials share knowledge about fish breeding on a manageable scale to villagers.



Buddhist culture course wraps up in Nay Pyi Taw

NAY PYI TAW, 22 Dec — The first basic Buddhist culture course concluded at the Dhammayon in the compound of staff Quarters of Nay Pyi Taw Development Committee on 21 December.

Trainer Daw Thit Thit Shein urged the trainees to try their best to become good and able citizens of the nation. Patron of Nay Pyi Taw Women's Affairs Organization and Maternal and Child Welfare Supervisory Committee Daw Khin Khaing and officials presented prizes to outstanding trainees.

A total of 107 students at middle school level attended the training course from 5 October to 21 December.

Plans are underway to conduct more training courses in summer.—*Shwe Kokko*

Villagers get knowledge about fish breeding on manageable scale

REGIONAL

Joint table top exercise between armies of China, Malaysia kicks off in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, 22 Dec — The opening of the joint table top exercise (TTX), named “Peace and Friendship 2014”, between the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) and Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) was held here on Monday at the Malaysian Armed Forces Joint Warfare Center.

This is the first time for the two sides to host the joint TTX.

During the exercise, the two sides will focus on subjects such as combined joint escort, combined joint search and rescue, combined

joint rescue of hijacked vessel and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), etc.

The two sides will also communicate on the mechanisms and experiences on the involvement of military in the actions of HADR.

The exercise is expected to come to an end on 26 December. During the opening, the two sides agreed that this joint TTX is an important move to materialize the consensus reached by the high-ranks of the two armies and celebrate the 40th anniversary of diplomatic ties between

the two countries. It is also an important milestone for the friendly communication and pragmatic cooperation between the two sides, which is attached great importance by the high-ranks of the two armies.

The joint TTX is believed to further promote the understanding and mutual trust between the two sides, enrich the China-Malaysia all-round strategic partnership, improve the capacity of the two sides in jointly handling challenges and enhance the regional security and stability.—Xinhua

36 flights, 50 trains delayed as dense fog engulfs Indian capital

NEW DELHI, 22 Dec — At least 36 flights and 50 trains were delayed as a thick blanket of fog enveloped New Delhi on Monday.

Dense fog engulfed the city and the visibility at the airport runway is below 50 metres, and the city recorded a maximum temperature of 15 degrees Celsius on Sunday, lowest so far this winter.

At least four people have died due to cold wave in New Delhi.

The meteorological department has forecast moderate to dense fog on



Photo taken on 21 Dec, 2014 shows a bulldozer clearing snow after a heavy snowfall blocked the traffic in the busy Manali highway in Himachal Pradesh, India.—XINHUA

Monday with the maximum temperature likely to hover around 16 degrees Celsius

while the minimum is likely to settle around 5 degrees in the city.—Xinhua



Pakistani activists participate in a rally for the victims of the Peshawar school massacre, in southwest Pakistan’s Quetta on 21 Dec, 2014. At least 141 people, mostly children, were killed by Taleban terrorists who attacked the army-run school in Pakistan’s northwestern provincial capital of Peshawar on 16 December.

XINHUA

Two kidnapped soldiers freed in S Philippines

DAVAO CITY, (Philippines), 22 Dec — Leftist rebels freed on Sunday two soldiers captured in a raid at a Japanese-owned banana plantation in southern Philippines early this month, the military said on Monday.

The New People’s Army (NPA) captors turned over the two soldiers, Benjamin Samano and Alvin Ricarte, to local officials and religious leaders led by Davao City mayor Rodrigo Duterte at a remote village in Mindanao’s Compostela Val-

ley past 1 pm on Sunday, Ezra Balagtey, spokesperson of the military’s Eastern Mindanao Command, said on Monday morning. “They were fetched by a chopper and brought to the Eastern Mindanao Command (regional headquarters) for medical checkup and debriefing,” Balagtey said.

The two soldiers belonging to the army’s 60th Infantry Battalion were snatched during a raid by some 20 NPA guerrillas in a farm owned by Sumitomo Fruits Corporation

Philippines in New Corella town in neighboring Davao del Norte on 2 December.

Aris Francisco, a local NPA spokesperson, said the two were freed on “humanitarian grounds after a rebel court found them not guilty of any crime against the revolutionary movement.”

The 4,000-strong NPA, armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines, has been fighting a leftist insurgency in 60 Philippine provinces since 1969.—Xinhua

Cooking class aims to attract young Japanese women to Philippines

TOKYO, 22 Dec — Thai noodles and Indian curries are well known among young, gourmet-loving women who patronize Japan’s international food scene, but dishes from the Philippines have yet to find their way into the hearts and stomachs of that key demographic.

In an effort to remedy the situation — and in the process draw more visitors to their country — the Philippine Department of Tourism organized in cooperation with major Japanese cooking school operator ABC Cooking Studio Co once-a-month cooking lessons on traditional Filipino cuisine from September to December.

The popularity of the lessons exceeded the organizers’ expectations. Most participants had never tasted Filipino food, and many left the lessons excited to also learn more about other

aspects of the country’s culture.

Kyoko Miyamoto, 37, was one of 23 mostly female students who joined the final Filipino cooking class in early December at the ABC Cooking Studio in the Tokyo Midtown shopping complex in the capital’s Roppongi district.

“I have never visited the Philippines. Being involved with Filipino food in this way does make me want to go there,” Miyamoto said.

In the cooking programme, students were taught to prepare two main dishes — “pork adobo,” which is meat marinated and simmered in vinegar, soy sauce and garlic, “sinigang na hipon,” a soup known for its sour taste and cooked with shrimp and vegetables — and “turon,” a popular Filipino snack made up of a banana in a deep-fried spring roll wrapper and covered with caramel sauce.



Photo taken on 5 Dec, 2014, shows the two main dishes and a snack that were taught during a Filipino cooking class at an ABC Cooking Studio in Minato Ward, Tokyo.—KYODO NEWS

Organizers, who started discussing the cooking class project in 2013, said that up to 24 students could join each cooking lesson and that they were surprised to have no trouble filling up the slots.

Maiko Kosugi, a 28-year-old food blogger who cooked her first Filipi-

no food at the ABC Cooking Studio with her friends, said, “I was not familiar with Filipino food and had no idea of how it tasted, so I was surprised at how there was so much detail in preparing the food. Still, I could easily cook this at home.”

Other students ranging

from their 20s to 30s shared such sentiments and seemed eager to eating Filipino cuisine again, or visit the Philippines for firsthand experience of the local cuisine.

This is good news for the Philippine tourist officials, who have been doubling efforts to boost tourism for the fast-growing Southeast Asian country which is just a four-hour flight from Tokyo. Aside from the cooking classes, they have also been promoting the country’s cuisine at food fairs.

Philippine government data showed the number of Japanese tourists to the Philippines in 2013 totaled 433,705, up 5.15 percent from the previous year. More than 460,000 people are expected to have visited in 2014. “The Department of Tourism in Tokyo has embarked on tourism promotions to ensure the continued growth of Japanese tourists visiting the country,” said

Valentino Cabansag, tourism attache and representative to East Japan of the Philippine Department of Tourism in Tokyo.

At the end of every two-hour cooking class, the department gave participants souvenir bags containing tourism pamphlets and dried mangoes.

The ABC Cooking Studio also offered cooking classes on “washoku” traditional Japanese cuisine — which was added to UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2013 — in the Philippines in 2014.

ABC Cooking Studio’s projects in Japan and the Philippines reflect hopes that interest in cooking will boost tourism for both countries.

Miyamoto, who liked her first taste of Filipino food, said, “I think it would be hard for me to travel to a country if I do not enjoy the local cuisine.”

Kyodo News

China condemns cyberattacks

BEIJING / WASHINGTON, 22 Dec — China has said it opposes all forms of cyberattacks, but it stopped short of directly condemning the hacking of Sony Pictures, or of responding to US calls for action against North Korea, blamed by Washington for the assault.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi “reaffirmed China’s relevant position, emphasizing China opposes all forms of cyberattacks and cyber terrorism” in a conversation with US Secretary of State John Kerry on Sunday, the foreign ministry in Beijing said in a statement.

“(China) opposes any country or individual using other countries’ domestic facilities to conduct cyberattacks on third-party nations,” it said. The statement made no direct mention of North

Korea.

China is North Korea’s only major ally, and would be central to any US efforts to crack down on the isolated state. But the United States has also accused China of cyber spying in the past and a US official has said the attack on Sony could have used Chinese servers to mask its origin.

South Korea, which is still technically at war with North Korea, said on Monday that computer systems at its nuclear plant operator had been hacked and non-critical data stolen, but there was no risk to nuclear installations or reactors.

“It’s our judgment that the control system itself is designed in such a way and there is no risk whatsoever,” Chung Yang-ho, deputy energy minister, told



US Secretary of State John Kerry (R) delivers remarks as China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi (L) looks on, before their meeting at the State Department in Washington on 1 Oct, 2014.—REUTERS

Reuters by phone. He made no mention of North Korea and could not verify messages posted by a Twitter user claiming responsibility for the attacks and demanding the shutdown of three aging nuclear reactors

by Thursday.

US President Barack Obama and his advisers are weighing how to punish North Korea after the FBI concluded on Friday that Pyongyang was responsible for the attack on Sony.

It was the first time the United States had directly accused another country of a cyberattack of such magnitude on American soil and set up the possibility of a new confrontation between Washington and Pyongyang.

North Korea has denied it was to blame and has vowed to hit back against any US retaliation.

“We do not know who or where they (the hackers) are but we can surely say that they are supporters and sympathizers with the DPRK,” said a commentary on KCNA, the North’s state news agency. DPRK, or the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, is the official name for the North.

“Our toughest counteraction will be boldly taken against the White House, the

Pentagon and the whole US mainland, the cesspool of terrorism, by far surpassing the ‘symmetric counteraction’ declared by Obama,” it said. Japan, one of Washington’s closest allies in Asia, said it strongly condemned the attack on Sony Pictures, but also stopped short of blaming North Korea.

“Japan is maintaining close contact with the United States and supporting their handling of this case,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a regular news conference. He did not answer when asked if Japan was convinced North Korea was behind the cyber attack, but repeated that he saw no effect on talks with North Korea over the fate of Japanese citizens abducted by Pyongyang agents decades ago.—Reuters

Education panel calls for introduction of new university entrance tests

TOKYO, 22 Dec — A Japanese government advisory body on education on Monday proposed the introduction of new “academic skill evaluation tests” for university entrance exams, calling on universities to pay more importance to essays and interviews with applicants in addition to the paper tests.

The Central Council for Education proposes the new mechanism start on 1 April, 2020, after the current “national centre test” for university exams is abolished.

If the proposal is accepted, the revision would be the first major change

in Japan’s university entrance test mechanism since 1979.

The council filed the proposal with Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Minister Hakubun Shimomura.

The “evaluation” tests would be conducted multiple times a year so that the applicants can use the best results for their university entrance exams.

The advisory body also called for the separate introduction of new tests to assess high school students’ basic academic skills in the 2019 academic year starting on 1 April, 2019.—Kyodo News



Photo taken on 22 Dec, 2014, at Japan’s education ministry in Tokyo shows a general meeting of the Central Council for Education. The panel proposed a new university entrance test system, under which “evaluation” tests would be conducted multiple times a year so applicants can use the best results for their college entrance.—KYODO NEWS

Court orders partner of Sydney hostage-taker jailed

SYDNEY, 22 Dec — An Australian court on Monday ordered bail revoked for the partner of a self-styled Sheikh who last week stormed a Sydney cafe at gunpoint, sparking a 16-hour hostage crisis that left three people dead, including the gunman.

Amirah Droudis, on bail after being charged with the murder of hostage-taker Man Haron Monis’ wife, was ordered by a Sydney court returned

to jail to await trial.

Monis, who had been charged as an accessory to the murder, had also been free on bail.

The perceived failure of the justice system to prevent Monis, a convicted felon well known to authorities, from seizing a cafe in the city’s financial district in broad daylight, has sparked calls for a tightening of the bail system.

Reuters



Three unidentified relatives (3rd R-R) of Sydney cafe siege victim, lawyer Katrina Dawson, gather after laying a floral tribute to her in Martin Place on 18 Dec, 2014.—REUTERS

S Korea nuclear plant operator says hacked, but no risk to reactors

SEOUL, 22 Dec — Computer systems at South Korea’s nuclear plant operator have been hacked, but only non-critical data has been lost and there is no risk to the safety of nuclear installations including the country’s 23 atomic reactors, the company and the government said on Monday.

The attacks come amid concerns that North Korea may mount cyberattacks against industrial and social targets after accusations by the United States that Pyongyang was responsible for a devastating hacking assault on Sony Pictures.

South Korea is still

technically at war with the North.

South Korea’s energy ministry said it was confident that its nuclear plants could block any infiltration by cyber attackers that could compromise the safety of the reactors.

“It’s our judgement that the control system itself is designed in such a way and there is no risk whatsoever,” Chung Yang-ho, deputy energy minister, told Reuters by phone.

An official at Korea Hydro and Nuclear Power Co Ltd (KHNP), the nuclear plant operator that is part of state-run Korea Electric Power Corp, told

Reuters that the hacking appeared to be the handiwork of “elements who want to cause social unrest”.

“It is 100 percent impossible that a hacker can stop nuclear power plants by attacking them because the control monitoring system is totally independent and closed,” the official said.

Neither Chung nor the KHNP official made any mention of North Korea.

They also said they could not verify messages posted by a Twitter user claiming responsibility for the attacks and demanding the shutdown of three ageing nuclear reactors by Thursday.

The user who was described in the posting as chairman of an anti-nuclear group based in Hawaii said more documents from the nuclear operator will be posted if the reactors are not closed.

Seoul prosecutors are conducting a criminal probe into the leak of data from KHNP, including blueprints of some nuclear reactors, electricity flow charges and radiation exposure estimates.

They have traced the IP used for a blog carrying the stolen documents to an online user in a southern city who has denied knowledge about the postings and claimed his user ID has been stolen.

Reuters

Obama to name Sally Yates as pick for deputy attorney general

HONOLULU, 22 Dec — US President Barack Obama is expected to announce on Monday that US Attorney Sally Yates will be his nominee for deputy attorney general, the No 2 position at the Justice Department, a US official said.

Yates, 54, currently serves as US Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia where she is known as a close ally of outgoing US Attorney Eric Holder's Justice Department.

She is a vocal proponent of Holder's policies on lowering incarceration rates by cutting jail time for low-level drug offenders.

During her time as a federal prosecutor in Georgia, Yates led several high-profile cases, including the successful prosecution of Eric Rudolph, who bombed a building in Atlanta during the 1996 Olympics.

Some Republicans, including Senators Ted Cruz,

Mike Lee and David Vitter, have threatened to hold up confirmation of the new attorney general, who would oversee Yates, over disagreements with Obama's new immigration policy.

If confirmed, Yates will replace outgoing Deputy Attorney General James Cole, who is leaving in January and has not announced future plans.

The choice of Yates signals that little may change at the Justice Department after Holder

leaves the post.

Yates currently serves on Holder's advisory committee of US attorneys under the leadership of Loretta Lynch, Obama's pick to be the next attorney general.

"Their very effective partnership leading the US attorney community will be taken to a whole new level," said US Attorney for New Jersey Paul Fishman, who previously led the committee.

Reuters



Sally Yates

Lavrov to discuss situation around Mideast settlement with head of Palestinian delegation

MOSCOW, 22 Dec — Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will on Monday hold a meeting with head of the Palestinian delegation at the Middle East talks Saeb Erekat.

The meeting between Lavrov and Erekat will be held against the backdrop of submission to the UN Security Council by Jordan of a draft resolution that gives 12 months to the comprehensive settlement



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov

of the Palestino-Israeli conflict, which should result in the establishment of a sovereign and vital state of Palestine.

The document also says that all Israeli forces should leave occupied territories not later than in 2017.

Answering on Friday a question on Russia's position regarding the document, Lavrov said: "For us, there's no question from

the viewpoint of recognizing the Palestinian statehood proposed in the UN Security Council draft resolution."

"There's a question on how the peace process will develop in the future. We are currently holding intensive contacts with both Palestinians and participants of the Quartet of international mediators to understand how all this situation may affect efforts to

get the peace process out of the deadlock it was driven to this year," he said.

The US said it would not back the draft resolution. Israel's attitude toward the resolution was negative.

Meanwhile, Erekat said that if the document is not adopted, the State of Palestine will file documents to join the International Criminal Court.

Itar-Tass

Spain's Princess Cristina to be tried on tax fraud charges



Spain's Princess Cristina de Borbon

MADRID, 22 Dec — Cristina de Borbon, sister of Spain's King Felipe VI, has been ordered to stand trial on charges of tax fraud, the High Court of the Balearic Islands said on Monday, prolonging the embarrassment of the royal family which has sought to distance itself from a corruption probe.

The charges were brought as part of an investigation into the business dealings of Cristina's husband, former Olympic handball player Inaki Urdangarin, accused of embezzling millions in public funds through his non-profit Noos Foundation. It will be the first time a member of the Spanish royal family sits in the dock. Princess Cristina and her husband have both denied wrongdoing.—Reuters

Essebsi declares win in Tunisia election, rival contests

TUNIS, 22 Dec — Veteran politician Beji Caid Essebsi declared victory in Sunday's presidential run-off vote, seen as the last step in Tunisia's shift to full democracy four years after an uprising ousted autocrat Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali.

Official results are not due until Monday and his rival, the incumbent president, Moncef Marzouki, refused to concede defeat.

But soon after polls closed, Essebsi, an 88-year-old former parliament speaker under Ben Ali, announced that he had won by a clear margin and jubilant supporters took to the streets of the capital in celebration, chanting "Beji President!"

Victory for Essebsi would enable him to consolidate power, with his new secular party, Nidaa Tounes (Call for Tunisia) already controlling parliament after defeating the main Islamist party in legislative elections in October.

With a new progressive constitution and a string of votes successfully completed, Tunisia is hailed as an example of democratic change in a region that is struggling to cope with the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Spring revolts.

"I dedicate my victory to the martyrs of Tunisia. I thank Marzouki, and now we should work together without excluding anyone," Essebsi told local television.

However his rival Marzouki, a 69-year-old former rights activist, rejected the victory claim and suggested that he would emerge the winner when the official results were released.

"Tunisia has won today, democracy has won, we need to stay

united. Despite the claims of our adversary, all indications are positive for us, we look ahead," he told cheering supporters from the balcony of his Tunis campaign headquarters.

Police fired tear gas to disperse a few hundred protesters in a southern city who took to the streets to denounce Essebsi's victory speech, the state news agency TAP reported.

Although Tunisia has large-

ly avoided the bitter post-revolt divisions that trouble Egypt and neighbouring Libya, tensions nevertheless flared between Islamists and secularists after the 2011 rebellion in one of the Arab world's most secular nations.

Islamist militants who emerged in the wake of the uprising remain a risk. One gunman was killed overnight and three arrested after they opened fire on a polling station in the central Kairouan governorate.

Accepting former regime officials — known as the "Remnants" by their critics — back into politics was one of the steps that initially helped restore calm and keep Tunisia's often unsteady transition to democracy on track.

Essebsi took 39 percent of votes in the first round ballot in November with Marzouki winning 33 percent.

As front runner, Essebsi dismissed critics who said victory for him would mark a return of the old regime stalwarts. He argued that he was the technocrat Tunisia needed following three messy years of an Islamist-led coalition government.

Reuters



Beji Caid Essebsi (C), Nidaa Tounes party leader, gestures outside the party headquarters in Tunis on 21 Dec, 2014. — REUTERS

PERSPECTIVES

Tuesday, 23 December, 2014

If no one has respect for law

By Myint Win Thein

Every human being is born free and equal and no one has authority over others, according to Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Being born free and equal, men alienate their natural liberty to society only for their own advantage, hoping that society will in return provide them with what they need and will protect them by law. On the other hand, they should abide by the laws of the society, which are the only conditions of civil association. When a society fails to do so, men regain their natural liberty for their survival, breaching the laws of the society.

Recently, about 300 unidentified men armed

with swords rampaged through a squatter in Hlinethaya Township in the former capital Yangon, injuring some of its residents and damaging a number of their shelters that could hardly be termed as any forms of human dwellings by any standards. The purpose of the attack was to regain the land by getting rid of the alleged squatters from the land said to be owned by a company. This undesirable rampage continued without any intervention for some time, forcing the residents to defend themselves by wielding whatever weapons they could lay their hands on. Later, the company that claims to own the land said it had to hire those men with swords as it was impossible to solve the problem at the court of law. It can be said that all of them have regained their natural liberty, which means just survival or preservation for oneself.

The society has still failed to provide the residents what they basically need as human beings and as a result, they settled on the vacant land plot said to be owned by the company. In Myanmar, it is also not clear whether those who are

said to own land have also acquired it in accordance with the law. Therefore, the government and the Hluttaw have had to set up commissions to tackle land disputes across the country in accordance with the law and to provide land or low-rent apartments to the landless.

Everyone needs to respect laws that bind them together as a society or a country. If no one has respect for the law and regains their natural liberty, the ties that bind them together as a society will collapse.

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Due to limitation of space we are only able to publish "Letter to the Editor" that do not exceed 500 words. Should you submit a text longer than 500 words please be aware that your letter will be edited.

Making Myanmar a memorable trip for tourists

By Myo Myint

The tourism industry has been dubbed as smokeless industry because as S.N. Mishra (2009) explained in Basic of Tourism Management, it requires no plants, chimneys, or machineries, or actual product. Others say it is so called because as a service industry, it has no obvious effects on the local area, but like other industries, it supports the economy and creates job opportunities. What is most significant about the tourism industry is that it is not a stand-alone industry. It is interlinked with, and benefits many other sectors. It contributes to regional development, poverty alleviation and raising the living standard of local communities. It generates more income for local governments through taxes. It creates job opportunities for people with a variety of levels of education. It draws foreign and local investments. It develops local and foreign trade. It improves the image of the country abroad. It attracts regional and international events like conferences, forums, exhibitions and competitions. It develops other sectors of the economy such as construction, transportation, entertainment, furniture, handicraft and souvenir production, the hospitality industry, etc. It encourages the establishment of human resource development institutions and programmes related to hospitality industry,

tourism and recreation. It also enhances better management and conservation of heritage sites, regeneration of run-down urban areas, promotion of cleanliness, neatness and sanitation, taking pride in one's cultural assets and popularization of traditional and regional food, crafts and products within the country, as well as abroad.

There is no doubt that because of its long history, unique geographical features and warm-hearted people, Myanmar can be said to possess all the attributes of a perfect tourist destination. The country is well located, being neighbours of two of the world's largest and most densely populated countries in the world, China and India, and serving as a land bridge between South and Southeast Asia. Area wise, Myanmar is the second largest country in Southeast Asia with the top two highest mountains, the second, third and fourth longest rivers and the tenth largest lake in the region. As a country of over 1930 km from north to south, it straddles the Tropic of Cancer, and is geographically diverse with snow capped mountains, cool hills, deep valleys, fertile plains crisscrossed with mighty rivers, arid regions, enchanting islands, beautifully shaped lakes, fierce waterfalls, unspoiled hot springs, long coastline, pristine beaches, and dense forests with an abundance of wildlife and rare species of plants. Above all,

Myanmar is home to over 100 national races and has a rich history dating back to more than one thousand years. The country is dotted with many important heritage sites and unique architecture, as many kingdoms rose during its history to be succeeded by another, such as the Pyu kingdoms which are acknowledged as the first Buddhist kingdoms in Southeast Asia, the Mon kingdoms, the Rakhine kingdoms, the powerful Bagan kingdom and its successive kingdoms. They had made Myanmar one of the most powerful nations in the region since the 11th century. In addition, the languages, cultures, costumes, architecture, music, song, dance, art, craft, and food, all contribute charm and variety to a country that few can compete with in terms of diversity and uniqueness.

Myanmar is also well-known for its good-natured, friendly, generous, hospitable, helpful, sincere, unpretentious and well-mannered people as commended by foreigners who have visited Myanmar. 70 percent of the population live in rural areas, and they can be even more warm-hearted than those living in urban areas, and are ready to give a hearty welcome to whoever that visits them, offering them hospitality which is simple but warm.

There is no doubt that Myanmar as a country with its unique history, culture and traditions, scenic places

and wealth of natural resources, flora and fauna is worth visiting, whether it is simply for sightseeing and recreation, to enjoy its rich heritage, or to study its ecological diversity.

Since it is a multi-sectoral enterprise that has the potential to play a huge role in the economy benefiting many sectors and having many positive as well as negative dimensions to it, it is important that all relevant government ministries, local governments, development committees, the private sector and social organizations cooperate in promoting the tourism industry as well as in minimizing harmful fallouts.

In the past, lack of serious interest in and financial means for the development of hotel and tourism infrastructure, and other reasons, have caused a dearth of hotels in the country which the government is trying to redress with investments from both local and foreign entrepreneurs. Since tourists come from a variety of countries including those from neighbouring countries as well as from within the country, it is important to set up different types of hotels, including budget accommodations, to suit the variety of pockets and preferences. There is also the urgent need to train the required number of human resource with the necessary quality and skills and to expand training programmes for persons with different levels of skills, in already established higher

education institutions of regions popular with tourists.

The definition of a tourist according to Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary is "someone who visits a place for pleasure and interest usually while on a holiday". Hence, it is important to show tourists not just places of religious and historical interest, but also take them to places of entertainment. One does not need to conduct a large scale research on this matter, as a study of a few of our more experienced neighbours such as China, India, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Cambodia will suffice to tell us what kind of entertainments to develop. It is my opinion that the majority of tourists will be quite happy to watch traditional dances, marionette shows, performances of short scenes from traditional plays, and brief demonstration of traditional games and sports, listen to local music

and songs, take part in traditional ceremonies and celebrations, and go on a cruise along the river, which are all good clean fun. Care must be taken not to make the performances too long, as lengthy performances of something in a different language and from a different culture can be a boring experience. Hence, it is essential for those in the entertainment field, to be familiar with the taste of foreigners, what to choose to present, how to involve their participation and how to adapt local music, songs, dances and plays to suit their preferences.

It is also necessary to make cities and towns visited by tourists more attractive and interesting. The first requirement is to keep the places as clean, tidy and beautiful as possible using landscaping and brightening them with local trees and flowering plants to bring out the best of the places.

(See page 9)

GOLD PRICE,
FE RATE (22-12-2014)

Yangon Gold Price

Buying K668,500 per tical: Selling K669,500

Mandalay Gold Price

Buying K668,500 per tical: Selling K669,500

FE RATE

USD Buying K 1035: Selling K----

SGD Buying K 787: Selling K794

Euro Buying K1,260: Selling K1,280

5 foreigners arrested for stealing cash from ATMs



British citizen Mr Niranjan Rasalingam who took out money from ATMs of private banks on 22-11-2014.—MNA

NAY PYI TAW, 22 Dec— Police have arrested five foreigners on suspicion of stealing money from automatic teller machines at Yangon banks since last month in two separate cases.

The first suspect, identified as British citizen Niranjan Rasalingam, was arrested on 22 November

while he was trying to withdraw money from an ATM using a fake bankcard. He confessed to committing the thefts together with four other suspects. Among them, three suspects— Indian nationals Mathiyalagan Rajkumar, Pandian Balu and Muthaya Dinsh Kumar—have since been arrested, while an

unidentified suspect of the same nationality is absconding. Police further investigated the cases and found that these four suspects stole money from the six private banks 58 times. They were arrested with 35 fake bankcards, two memory cards, an iPad, a laptop and more than 2.53 million kyat.

The investigation has revealed that the stolen money was not from the accounts of local customers, shareholders or private banks, but from Visa company and accounts of foreigners.

Visa is the second such financial service to enter Myanmar, after MasterCard made the country's first multinational card ATM transaction. The world's largest payment network has signed licensing agreements in Myanmar with CB, KBZ and Myanmar Oriental Banks.

Authorities said the thefts happened not because

of faults of the local banks, but because of the weakness of ATMs set up by foreign financial institutions.

All these suspects have been charged with criminal theft and offenses under the electronic act and immigration act. In the second case, a foreigner identified as Bulgarian citizen Dimo Velinov Ivanov, was arrested as he was trying to steal money from an ATM at a bank in Yangon. Two electric circuits with memory cards, two small batteries, and two metal foils, as well as one MasterCard and one Visa card, both with his name of them, were seized from him. He was also charged with a criminal theft and offenses under the electronic act and immigration act.

Further investigation has revealed that a second Bulgarian suspect in the same case, identified as Shmandurov Andan Ivinov, is now absconding.—MNA

Indian citizen fugitive Mr Sajagan Mohamed Arif in case of taking out money from ATM of private banks on 22-11-2014.



MNA



Fake ATM cards used in taking out money from ATMs.—MNA



Indian citizens Mr Mathiyalagan Rajkumar, Mr Pandian Balu and Mr Muthaya Dinsh Kumar who got involved in withdrawing money from ATMs on 22-11-2014.—MNA



Bulgarian Mr. Dimo Velinov Ivanov (L) who attempted to draw money from ATM on 14 December 2014 seen with tools, and Bulgarian Mr Shmandurov Andan Ivinov (R) who escaped from the scene.—MNA

Making Myanmar ...

(from page 8)

It is especially important to landscape scenic spots like waterfronts carefully as too many plants, or unsuitable ones can block beautiful views. It should be made compulsory for cities and towns that draw tourists to conserve its heritage buildings, because these are the distinguished features of a place and not the modern buildings which can be seen in every country. Similarly, it is necessary to establish museums, and exhibition centres to showcase local products and crafts. Many Myanmar museums have more artifacts than they can exhibit at the same time, and they are kept in storage. Special exhibitions on specific themes should be held to be able to rotate all their collections and draw more visitors. Visit to unique factories

and cottage industries where demonstrations of how a product is made can enliven the visits of tourists, but again these places must be interesting, clean and tidy. Myanmar has the advantage of having a festival in every month of the year and participation in them can make the visit more memorable and enjoyable for tourists.

For many tourists, food is as important as accommodation, and it is important to have restaurants and eateries with a wide range of food. While it is necessary to have restaurants that specialize in international food, there should also be clean and inexpensive restaurants and food stalls serving local food including dishes of national races for those tourists who are adventurous and would like to have

a taste of the huge diversity of dishes available in the country, and who can popularize it in their home countries, as it happened with lephet and mohinga for which foreigners have acquired a taste.

Tourists do not just like to take back photographs and videos of places they have visited. They also like to take back souvenirs. Again, Myanmar has a large variety of art and crafts made of silver, bronze, wood, cane, bamboo, straw, cloth, leather, seashells, rocks, etc., and a wide range of jewellery and textiles from which tourists can choose. But it must be reminded that for these souvenirs to be saleable, craftsmen and sellers must be aware, firstly, that the products have to be of the quality, shape, colour, design, packaging and price that foreigners like and secondly, that they

need to be of the size, weight and shape convenient for them to carry back home. Hence to popularize Myanmar souvenirs, opinions and advice of foreign specialists need to be sought.

There are many guide books produced abroad on Myanmar tourist attractions. While some are up-to-date, others contain a lot of outdated and wrong information. With the growth in the tourist industry, it is important that tourists are provided with up-to-date and correct information, and Myanmar people with the necessary knowledge should fill this gap for guidebooks, brochures, pamphlets and maps with local insight and Myanmar point of view.

Another area that has room for improvement to make it convenient for tourists to travel in Myanmar is transportation.

Again, there should be a wide variety of choices, but they should all be safe, punctual, clean and up to international standard. So also airports, railway and bus stations and ports should provide necessary information and have adequate facilities for the convenience of passengers.

The 2013-14 target of Myanmar for foreign tourists is 2 million and up to the beginning of December, 1.9 million tourists have visited Myanmar. The coming year's target of welcoming 3 million tourists cannot be said to be too ambitious, because Laos received 3.8 million tourists, and Cambodia received 4.2 million tourists in 2013.

Many travel agencies see Myanmar as one of the promising new destinations for tourists which could rival its neighbours. To maintain the momen-

tum of increase in tourists, we need to make the effort to learn from the experience of other neighbouring countries, and develop new products and better facilities. We also need to ensure that all the service providers involved in tourism are fair to their customers and do not overcharge, or cheat them, so that we can maintain our competitiveness, attraction and good name. It is also crucial to educate those involved in tourism on how to improve their services, so that their earnings can be raised. Lastly, it needs to be repeated that the close collaboration of many ministries, local government authorities, the private sector and stakeholders is indispensable in making tourism one of the top contributing sectors to our country's economy in the near future.

Libya's official government targets rival forces trying to seize ports

BENGHAZI, 22 Dec — Military planes loyal to Libya's recognized government attacked on Sunday an opposing force that is seeking to seize the country's two biggest oil ports, officials said.

The advancing force, which is allied to a rival government based in Tripoli, moved east a week ago to try take the Es Sider and Ras Lanuf ports. The adjacent terminals have since closed, halting exports of an estimated 300,000 barrels a day of oil.

The recognized government of Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thinni was forced to relocate to the east after losing control of Tripoli in August to a group called Libya Dawn, which installed a new administration in the capital city.

On Sunday, pro-Thinni forces sent aircraft to bomb the advancing fighters some 40 km (25 miles) west of Es Sider and also inside Sirte, a large city further along the coast, said a military spokesman in Es Sider.

He said the planes had bombed military targets, but Ismail al-Shukri, a spokesman for the rival force said civilian targets had been hit in Sirte.

There was no immediate word of any casualties.

The fighting is part of a wider struggle for control of the North African country which sits on Africa's largest oil reserves. Former rebel groups which helped topple Muammar Gaddafi in a 2011, NATO-backed uprising now fight each other.

Western powers fear the conflict could lead to the break-up of the OPEC producer. The United Nations had planned to launch a new round of talks to defuse the crisis last week, but the latest fighting delayed the negotiations. The UN said on Wednesday the venue and date for the meeting were still unclear.

A Reuters reporter visiting Es Sider saw Thinni's forces building up a defensive line with tanks and anti-aircraft gun mounted on trucks some 10 km (6 miles) west of the terminal. "We are in contact with the airforce and the coastal guards to coordinate," said a commander. The reporter saw a helicopter and MiG jet standing ready at an airport at Ras Lanuf, which is normally used by oil firms. —Reuters

US-led forces launch 13 air strikes in Iraq, three in Syria

WASHINGTON, 22 Dec — US-led forces attacked Islamic State targets on Sunday with 13 air strikes in Iraq and three in Syria, using fighter, bomber and other aircraft, the US military said.

Four of the Iraq strikes were near Sinjar in the north of the country, which destroyed Islamic State buildings, tactical units and vehicles, while other Iraqi cities targeted included Tal Afar, Ramadi, Mosul and Baiji, according to the Combined Joint

Task Force.

The strikes in Syria over the weekend were focused around the contested city of Kobani near the Turkish border, it said in a statement.

There were five air strikes near Kobani on Saturday followed by the three on Sunday.

In Iraq, US and partner nations conducted eight air strikes on Saturday, including near Tal Afar, Ar Rutba, Mosul and Baiji, the task force said.

Reuters



Afghan security forces transfer a destroyed military vehicle following a blast in east Afghanistan on 21 Dec, 2014. Earlier on Sunday, one soldier and a civilian were killed and five people wounded in two separate IED blasts in Jalalabad city, the provincial capital of Nangarhar Province, police said.—XINHUA

Iraqi Kurds, Yazidis fight Islamic State for strategic town of Sinjar

MOUNT SINJAR, 22 Dec — Kurdish and Yazidi fighters battled to take the strategic northern Iraqi town of Sinjar back from Islamic State on Sunday after breaking a months-long siege of the mountain above it.

Seizing the town would restore the majority of territory Iraq's Kurds lost in the jihadist group's surprise August offensive.

It would also give a huge strategic victory to both the Iraqi Kurds and the central government in Baghdad, as the Kurdish fighters could then cut the highway from Syria to Mosul, a vital supply line for Islamic State.

Backed by US warplanes, Iraqi Kurdish and Yazidi fighters, also joined by Kurdish guerrillas from Syria and Turkey, pushed into Sinjar from the western border post of Rabia and from Sinjar mountain to the north, to which Iraqi Kurdish fighters opened a corridor on

Thursday. The Iraqi Kurdish region's president, Masoud Barzani, visited Sinjar mountain and vowed that all of the town of Sinjar would be retaken. "Most of Sinjar is under our control now. With the help of God we will free all of it. The help of the coalition forces was noteworthy and their support was very effective," Barzani said on the mountain's summit.

Wounded peshmerga, as Iraqi Kurdish fighters are known, were raced by vehicle to the mountain summit for treatment. Planes and helicopters rumbled overhead, while from time to time the boom of an airstrike reverberated. The US military said it had carried out four air strikes around Sinjar on Sunday. Pick-up trucks full of peshmerga fighters hurtled down to Sinjar town, which was blanketed in smoke. The military campaign also promised relief for Iraq's Yazidi religious mi-

nority. When Islamic State pushed into the Sinjar area in August, killing or capturing thousands of Yazidis, some took refuge on the Sinjar mountain. President Barack Obama cited the plight of the Yazidis when he first ordered air strikes against Islamic State this summer.

Returning from the town of Sinjar late on Saturday, Yazidi fighter Qassem Sheshou, head of the Sinjar Protection Forces, said the area was heavily mined, but bragged that the militants had not put up much of a fight. "They fled like rats," he said. Fahd Hamid, a Yazidi fighter from Sinjar, said there were 1,700 Yazidi families on the mountain.

Hamid sought refuge there at the beginning of Islamic State's blitz in August, enduring both near starvation and the fear that the Sunni Arab jihadists would storm the area. "Our faith in God and this mountain was strong," Hamid said. "Our fathers and grandfathers used to talk about past genocides and we didn't really believe them, but it happened again." Asked why he and other Yazidis were not leaving the mountain now that a safe passage had been opened to the north, he said "this mountain is the safest and best place."

Others longed to return home immediately. "Islamic State has been at our throats for a long time. We want to go back to our village,"

said a woman named Gule who was baking bread at an encampment. She said her brother and son had been killed three weeks earlier when they tried to sneak back to their village near Sinjar to try to retrieve some belongings. The battle for Sinjar is being conducted by a range of groups.

Fighters from Turkey's outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its sister organization, the Syrian Kurdish armed faction known as the YPG, claimed to have about 500 men present on Sinjar mountain, including those from affiliated armed groups.

The YPG's supporters said they had opened a new route from Syria to Sinjar on Saturday, and the group's flag was visible at intervals along the road leading from the mountain to the Rabia border crossing. The two factions said that they had initiated the offensive on Sinjar town. "The YPG came to Sinjar before the peshmerga," said one YPG guerrilla. Despite such internal rivalry, some were simply elated to see the Islamic State on the backfoot. A Yazidi volunteer named Kheder, who had made his way to Sinjar mountain from a refugee camp in the north, exulted in the fight and the spectacle of US air power.

"I came to kill the terrorists," Kheder said. "I like going to war with the Americans."—Reuters



Members of Kurdish security forces ride in a vehicle at Mount Sinjar, in the town of Sinjar, on 21 Dec, 2014.

REUTERS

US firm finds malware targeting visitors to Afghan government websites

WASHINGTON, 22 Dec — Malicious software likely linked to China was used to infect visitors to a wide range of official Afghan government websites, US cybersecurity researchers say.

ThreatConnect, a Virginia-based cybersecurity firm, said its researchers last week found a corrupted JavaScript file that was used to host content on “gov.af” websites, and there are no known antivirus protections available for the malware.

Rich Barger, chief intelligence officer of ThreatConnect, told *Reuters* his company was confident the new campaign, “Operation Poisoned Helmand,” was linked to the “Poisoned

Hurricane” campaign detected this summer by another security firm, FireEye, that linked it to Chinese intelligence.

He said the latest attack was very recent and one timestamp associated with the Java file was from 16 December, the same day Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang met with Afghanistan’s chief executive officer, Abdullah Abdullah in Kazakhstan.

China is seeking to take a more active role in Afghanistan as the United States and NATO reduce their military presence.

“We found continued activity from Chinese specific actors that have used the Afghan government



A magnifying glass is held in front of a computer screen in this picture illustration taken in Berlin on 21 May, 2013.—REUTERS

infrastructure as an attack platform,” Barger said, adding that Chinese intelligence could use the malware to gain access to computer users who had checked the

Afghan government sites for information.

Barger said the attack was a variant of what he called a typical “watering-hole” attack in which

the attackers infect a large number of victims, and then follow up with the most “promising” hits to extract data.

He said researchers this summer saw a malicious Java file on the website of the Greek Embassy in Beijing while a high-level delegation led by Keqiang was visiting Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras in Athens.

The two events were not directly related, Barger said, and additional research was needed into the status of ministerial and official government websites on or around the dates of notable Chinese delegations and or bilateral meetings.

In this case, the mal-

ware was created on 13 December, just days before the high-level meeting, Barger said.

The malware was found on numerous Afghan government websites, including the ministries of justice, foreign affairs, education, commerce and industry, finance and women’s affairs, and the Afghan Embassy in Canberra, Australia, according to ThreatConnect, which was formerly known as Cyber Squared.

By late Sunday, Barger said it appeared that the malicious Java file had either been inactivated by the attackers or “cleaned up” by the Afghan government.

Reuters

Xiaomi raising over \$1 bln from investors including GIC

SINGAPORE / SHANGHAI, 22 Dec — China’s Xiaomi is raising over \$1 billion from investors including Singapore sovereign wealth fund GIC that would value the smartphone maker at over \$45 billion, a person familiar with the deal said.

The fund raising was first reported by the *Wall Street Journal*, which also said this round was led by tech fund All-Stars Investment and included Russian tech fund DST Global and Yunfeng Capital, a private-equity firm affiliated

with Alibaba Group Holding Ltd Executive Chairman Jack Ma.

All-Stars Investment is led by former Morgan Stanley analyst Richard Ji.

GIC’s investment in Xiaomi comes after Singapore state investor Temasek Holdings Pte Ltd bought a small stake in the smartphone maker during an earlier funding exercise, a second person said.

The people were not authorized to speak to media on the matter and so declined to be identified.

Xiaomi and GIC declined to comment. Ji could not be reached for comment.

Xiaomi brands itself as an Internet company that eschews traditional marketing and sells hardware at low prices as a distribution channel for its real money maker, software and services.

It has been investing heavily in other manufacturers with the aim of building an ecosystem of Internet-connected devices and appliances to extend its reach beyond smartphones.

Nomura analysts said in a report earlier this month that Xiaomi and founder Lei Jun had invested in 43 companies across China’s mobile Internet eco-system, including smart device makers, network infrastructure firms, smartphone platform developers, and providers of various mobile internet services.

Xiaomi’s investment partners include Shunwei VC, Temasek and Kingsoft, the Nomura analysts said.

Reuters



People stand near a logo of Xiaomi ahead of the launching ceremony of Xiaomi Phone 4, in Beijing, on 22 July, 2014.—REUTERS

India tests its heaviest space launch vehicle, eyes global market

NEW DELHI, 22 Dec — India’s space agency successfully tested on Thursday its most powerful satellite launch vehicle that can put heavier payloads into space, and, it hopes, win India a bigger slice of the \$300 billion global space industry.

The Indian Space Re-

search Organization (ISRO) also checked the working of an unmanned crew module on the vehicle, which could give the agency the option of manned missions.

Once operational, the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) Mark III will be able to put satellites weighing about

4 tonnes into orbit, almost doubling India’s current capability.

“The powerful launch vehicle ... will change our destiny in placing various spacecraft into communication orbits,” said S Somnath, project director of the new GSLV vehicle.

Reuters

Songbirds fly coop long before tornadoes arrive in Tennessee

WASHINGTON, 22 Dec — You might want to be careful about who you call a birdbrain. Some of our feathered friends exhibit powers of perception that put humans to shame.

Scientists said on Thursday that little songbirds known as golden-winged warblers fled their nesting grounds in Tennessee up to two days before the arrival of a fierce storm system that unleashed 84 tornadoes in southern US states in April. The researchers said the birds were apparently alerted to the danger by sounds at frequencies below the range of human hearing.

The storm killed 35 people, wrecked many homes, toppled trees and tossed vehicles around like toys, but the warblers were already long gone, flying up to 930 miles (1,500 km) to avoid the storm and reaching points as far away as Florida and Cuba, the researchers said.

Local weather conditions were normal when the birds took flight from their breeding ground in the Cumberland Mountains of eastern Tennessee, with no significant changes in factors like barometric pressure, temperature or wind speeds. And the storm, already spawning tornadoes, was still hundreds of miles away.

“This suggests that these birds can detect severe weather at great distances,” said wildlife biologist David Andersen of the US Geological Survey and



Henry Streby holds a male golden-winged warbler and the geolocator that the bird carried for more than twelve months including during the evacuation migration, in the Cumberland Mountains of Tennessee, in this undated handout photo provided by Gunnar Kramer. Scientists said on 18 Dec, 2014 a population of this bird fled its nesting grounds in Tennessee up to two days before the arrival of a fierce storm system that unleashed 84 tornadoes in southern US states in April, apparently alerted to the danger by sounds at frequencies below the range of human hearing.

REUTERS

the University of Minnesota, one of the researchers in the study published in the journal *Current Biology*.

“We hypothesize that the birds were detecting infrasound from tornadoes that were already occurring when the storm was still quite distant from our study site,” Andersen added.

Infrasound is below the normal limits of human hearing, but some animals can hear it.

The warblers came right back home after the storm passed, said fellow researcher Henry Streby, an ecologist from the University of California, Berkeley.

The researchers, who were already studying the

migratory patterns of the warblers, tracked their evacuation using transmitters that had been placed on a small number of the birds.

Golden-winged warblers boast gray plumage marked by patches of yellow on the head and wings. They weigh about 0.30 ounces (9 grams) and have a wingspan of about 7.5 inches (19 cm).

The warblers spend winters in Central America and northern South America before migrating back to the Appalachian Mountain region of the southern United States and the Great Lakes region of the United States and Canada to breed.

Reuters

Sanctions against Russia should be canceled if Minsk agreements observed — German lawmaker

BERLIN, 22 Dec — Sanctions against Russia should gradually be lifted if the ceasefire regime in eastern Ukraine is observed, deputy chairman of the faction of the Social Democratic Party of Germany in parliament Rolf Muetzenich said.

“If the next few weeks see the regime of ceasefire established in eastern Ukraine, the Minsk agreements implemented and the atmosphere become reliable from the viewpoint of politics and security, sanctions should be gradually revised and canceled,” Muetzenich was quoted by the Berliner Zeitung daily



The sanctions are not an end in itself, deputy chairman of the faction of the Social Democratic Party of Germany in parliament Rolf Muetzenich says.—ITAR-TASS

as saying.

He stated that the sanctions are not an end in itself. On 19 December, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier spoke against toughening the EU sanctions against Russia.

In mid-September, the EU Official Journal announced sanctions against some Russian companies.

Russian officials and companies came under the first batch of Western sanctions, including visa bans and asset freezes, after Russia incorporated Crimea in mid-March after a coup rocked Ukraine in February.

The West announced new, sectoral, restrictions against Russia in late July, in particular, for what the West claimed was Moscow's alleged involvement in protests in Ukraine's south-east.

In response, Russia imposed on 6 August a one-year ban on imports of beef, pork, poultry, fish, cheeses, fruit, vegetables and dairy products from Australia, Canada, the EU, the United States and Norway. Russia has constantly dismissed Western allegations that it could in any way be involved in hostilities in the southeast of Ukraine.—*Itar-Tass*

Australian house where eight children killed to be demolished

SYDNEY, 22 Dec — The house where an Australian mother allegedly killed eight children, most of them her own, will likely be demolished in keeping with indigenous culture to make way for a memorial, a government official said on Monday. The fate of the house in the tropical northern city of Cairns was being discussed while a judge denied a request to transfer the murder case against 37-year-old Raina Mersane Ina Thaiday to Queensland state's Mental Health Court. Thaiday is the mother of the four boys and three of the girls who were slain. The eighth child was her niece. The Queensland government agreed to the demolition of the home because of the horrific nature of the killings and in keeping with indigenous cultural beliefs, Queensland MP Gavin King said. “After extensive consultation we will remove the house behind me,” King said as he spoke to the media in a park where the dead children used to play.

King said the government

would liaise with the community on what form a memorial would take. Thaiday was charged on Sunday with eight counts of murder over the deaths of the children, aged between two and 14 years.

Magistrate Alan Comans declined a request from Thaiday's lawyer, Steven MacFarlane, to have the case moved to the Mental Health Court. Comans said during a brief hearing at the Cairns Magistrates Court on Monday it was too soon for such a request.

No plea was entered at the hearing on behalf of Thaiday, who remains under police guard in hospital. She is being treated for stab wounds. MacFarlane said he was not sure how long his client would remain in hospital, where she is also awaiting psychiatric assessment. Police have asked that media abide by the cultural protocols of the indigenous Torres Strait Islander community, to which the family belongs, and withhold the names and photos of the dead children.—*Reuters*

Kyocera to build 13.4-megawatt floating solar power plant near Tokyo

OSAKA, 22 Dec — Japanese photovoltaic cell maker Kyocera Corp said on Monday it will build a 13.4-megawatt floating solar power plant in a joint venture at a dam in Chiba Prefecture near Tokyo. The joint venture with Century Tokyo Leasing Corp plans to start operation of the plant in March 2016 with about 50,000 solar power generation modules installed on the water surface of the Yamakura Dam in Ichihara.

All the electricity generated at the plant will be sold to Tokyo

Electric Power Co for an estimated 450 million yen a year.

The plant is expected to generate about 15,635 megawatts of electricity annually, which is equivalent to the amount consumed by 4,700 households each year, Kyocera said.

Kyocera said the facility will be one of the world's largest floating solar power plants. It plans to start operation of 30 floating solar power plants nationwide during fiscal 2015, which ends March 2016.

Kyodo News

Republicans weigh big changes at US budget referee agency

US Rep Paul Ryan (R-WI) speaks during a session on “The Business of Taxes” at the Wall Street Journal’s CEO Council meeting in Washington on 2 Dec, 2014.—REUTERS



WASHINGTON, 22 Dec — When Republicans take full control of Congress on 6 January, they will face decisions on major changes at the Congressional Budget Office, including possibly naming a new head and changing the rules used to assess the cost of legislation. Conservative groups have been calling for the replacement of CBO Director Doug Elmendorf, who was appointed by Democrats in 2009 and whose term expires next month. They argue that a Republican-leaning economist would more readily adopt a cost analysis known as “dynamic scoring” that incorporates expectations of higher economic growth associated with legislation.

Analyses by the CBO, a non-partisan office, show how much a bill would increase or decrease the federal budget deficit over a 10-year period.

The budget math used under dynamic scoring has long been a goal for Republican lawmakers, including the incoming chairman of the House Budget Committee, Representative Tom Price, and the current chairman, Paul Ryan, who next month will take over the tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee.

Under current congressional analysis rules, if a bill cuts tax rates, government revenues fall. Dynamic scoring assumes that lower tax rates would boost growth and income, helping to offset at least some of the lost revenues. Some economists say this approach could make it easier to sell tax reforms or balance the budget while avoiding painful cuts in military spending.

“What we’re simply striving for is accuracy in score keeping,” Ryan told *Reuters* in a recent interview. “We know for a fact that it is not accurate or prudent to ignore the effects of economic growth on policies we make in Congress.”

With a Republican-controlled Congress, Ryan and new Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch will be able to impose similar changes on calculating economic impact on staff at the Joint Committee on Taxation, which analyzes tax bills.

Some scoring changes at the CBO may require revisions to the 1974 law that created the agency, Price said. He intends to pursue such a revamp but said Republicans were still discussing their plans in this area and whether to keep Elmendorf after his term expires in January. “I’ve always said

that Doug Elmendorf has done an extremely good job at CBO,” Price said. “My complaint, my concern about CBO is not about the individual at the lead of CBO, my concern is the rules under which they operate.” Several conservative political groups are calling for Elmendorf to be replaced. Americans for Tax Reform, which is run by anti-tax activist Grover Norquist, said the CBO under Elmendorf's watch “pushes failed Keynesian economic analysis.”

It also criticized CBO for failing to reject analyses of President Barack Obama's healthcare reform law produced by controversial White House consultant Jonathan Gruber, who has come under fire for videotaped remarks saying the law was written to hide new taxes and that voter “stupidity” aided its passage.

But several prominent conservative economists have backed Elmendorf, arguing that Republicans would gain more credibility by keeping the former Clinton administration economist. They note that CBO's work under Elmendorf has been evenhanded, and on some occasions where it has supplied dynamic scoring analysis for informational purposes, Democrats have been hurt. For example, CBO estimated that Obama's minimum-wage hike plan would eliminate around 500,000 jobs in the near term. “If you’re going to go with dynamic scoring, Elmendorf is a great guy to implement that,” said Michael Strain, deputy director of economic policy studies at the conservative American Enterprise Institute. “It would be harder to accuse Republicans of putting their thumb on the scale” if he stays.—*Reuters*

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Consignees of cargo carried on MV THAI BINH BAY VOY NO (08/14) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 22.12.2014 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of A.W.P.T(2) 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 Claims 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 Claims 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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WEATHER REPORT

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

FORECAST VALID UNTIL EVENING OF THE 23rd December, 2014: Weather will be partly cloudy in Bago, Yangon, Ayeyawady and Taninthayi Regions, Kayah, Kayin and Mon States and generally fair in the remaining Regions and States.

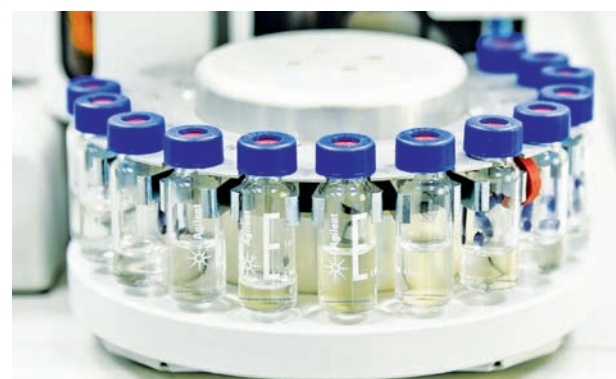
Major Russian pharmaceutical companies stop production of life-saving drugs

Moscow, 22 Dec — Some 16 major Russian pharmaceutical companies have stopped the production of “the cheapest and the most essential drugs,” including antibiotics and fluids, the chairman of the State Duma health committee Sergey Kalashnikov said on Monday. “This comes due to a sharp increase in the dollar price for the substances

which are bought abroad,” Kalashnikov said, adding that the prime cost of medicines is now some three or four times higher than the actual price amid weakened ruble. The members of the State Duma health committee as well as representatives of the Russian Health Ministry, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Federal Anti-Monopoly Service and

the Federal Tariff Service are due to focus on the situation at an urgent meeting later on Monday. “The main goal is to develop a concept for work in emergency conditions to ensure uninterrupted access to medicines,” Kalashnikov said, explaining that the idea is to adjust prices for foreign-made life-saving drugs and resume the production of pharmaceutical substances in

Russia. The lawmaker in particular proposes that Russia should follow the example of India and Brazil and introduce a mechanism of mandatory licensing when “it is allowed to manufacture medicines, generics if a patent has not expired.” This concerns the “most expensive medicines” which are used to treat such diseases as cancer and AIDS, he said.—Itar-Tass



According to the chairman of the State Duma health committee Sergey Kalashnikov, this comes due to a sharp increase in the dollar price for the substances which are bought abroad.—ITAR-TASS

TV talent show winner Ben Haenow lands Britain's Christmas No 1

LONDON, 22 Dec — The winner of Britain's "X-factor" TV talent show, 29-year-old Ben Haenow, claimed the coveted Christmas number one spot in the British singles chart on Sunday, the Official Charts Company said.

Haenow's "Something I Need" became the second fastest-selling single of the year, shifting 214,000 copies to knock last week's chart topper "Uptown Funk" by Mark Ronson and Bruno Mars into second place.

Haenow is the seventh X-Factor winner to claim a Christmas number one in the past 10 years.

Ed Sheeran took third place in the chart with "Thinking Out Loud", while "Up" by Olly Murs rose to number four. Fifth spot was taken by the Wealdstone Raider with "Got no Fans", a charity single that benefited from an Internet campaign to break the dominance of X-Factor winners in the Christmas charts battle.

Ed Sheeran's album "X" racked up its 11th week at the top of the album charts, coming in ahead of Sam Smith's "In the Lonely Hour". Olly Murs charted in third place with "Never Been Better" as the top three remained unchanged from the previous week.

"Wanted on Voyage" by George Ezra was in fourth spot, with pop veterans Take That rising one place to fifth with "III".

Reuters

Christmas is like family get together

LOS ANGELES, 22 Dec — Scarlett Johansson is looking forward to Christmas as the actress says this is the only time the whole family assembles together at one place.

The 30-year-old new mother said she generally stays away from her family whole year because of her work commitments, reported *People* magazine. "Getting to see my family all in one place. I travel so frequently for work, it's one of the only times we all get together," she said.

The actress even dished out that she catches her favourite film during the occasion. "I like to watch old movies, read and bake. My favourite holiday movie is 'Home Alone 2', believe it or not!", she added.—PTI



Scarlett Johansson

India's 'Liar's Dice' out of Oscars race

LOS ANGELES, 22 Dec — India's official entry 'Liar's Dice' is out of Oscars race after it failed to make the cut in the Academy's shortlist in the best foreign film category. Nine films advanced to the next round of voting in the category for the 87th Academy Awards out of 83 movies that had qualified in the category.

'Liar's Dice', a road drama about a tribal woman's journey to find her missing husband, is the debut film of Geetu Mohandas. It stars Geetanjali Thapa and Nawazuddin Siddiqui in lead roles. The shortlist will

be winnowed down to five by specially invited committees in New York, Los Angeles and, for the first time, London from 9-11 January, viewing three films each day and then casting their ballots.

India has never won an Oscar in the best foreign film category. The last Indian film that made it to the final five nominees was Ashutosh Gowariker's 'Lagaan' for the 74th Academy awards in 2003. 'Mother India' and 'Salaam Bombay' are the other two Indian films to have made it to the top five.

The 87th Academy awards will take place on

22 February. The films that have made it to the shortlist this year include 'Wild Tales', an Argentinean film by director Damian Szifron.

One of the strongest contenders is the entry from Estonia, 'Tangerines', a film on civil war within the former Soviet countries, is in the list along with Georgia's entry 'Corn Island' by George Ovashvili.

Sweden's entry 'Force Majeure' by Ruben Ostlund is in the list so is Netherlands' 'Accused', based on a true story of Lucia de Berk, which generated a lot of buzz at many international festivals. Mauritania's 'Timbuktu' and the quintessential Russian tragedy 'Leviathan' by Andrey Zvyagintsev are also in the shortlist.

Pawel Pawlikowski's black-and-white Polish drama 'Ida', which won the Best European Film prize at the European Film Awards in Riga, is in the list while the Academy selected 'The Libertine' from Venezuela by Alberto Arvelo.—PTI



India's official entry 'Liar's Dice' is out of Oscars race after it failed to make the cut in the Academy's shortlist in the best foreign film category.—PTI

I've no patience to cook Christmas Dinner: Angelina Jolie



LONDON, 22 Dec — Superstar Angelina Jolie forces her husband Brad Pitt to cook the Christmas Dinner as she has no patience.

The 39-year-old mother of six said she gets too easily distracted to be in charge of such a huge and important meal. Speaking on Good Morning Britain, Jolie said, "Nobody in my house wants me to do any cooking on Christmas Day. I have no patience! I start things and then I get distracted and I go and I'll start reading over there, or start playing outside with the kids."

"I think you have to be very patient to cook, I'd be designated to the chopping board! Brad would be re-

ally good at the timing and organization."

Admitting that they hadn't really thought much about what to get each other for Christmas, the Pitt-Jolie family are to concentrate on making sure their six children have an amazing time.

"We travel a lot so I think it's more what to do, what's going to be the experience, where we're going to go, or what we're going to do, who we're going to see, and I think they [the children] know."

"Mummy loves a stocking and I love a gift, we try our best not to spoil them so we try to be very balanced and calculating to not go too far."—PTI

Final 'Hobbit' film draws holiday season crowds at box office

LOS ANGELES, 22 Dec — The last movie of Peter Jackson's three "Hobbit" films rode to the top of US and Canadian weekend box office charts, selling an estimated \$56.2 million worth of tickets and boosting the holiday movie season that is crucial to Hollywood.

"The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies" grabbed another \$34.4 million from Wednesday and Thursday screenings for a combined debut of \$90.6 million over its first five days, distributor Warner Bros said on Sunday.

"Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb," featur-

ing the final on-screen performance by the late Robin Williams, finished second at domestic theaters with \$17.3 million from Friday through Sunday, according to tracking firm Rentrak's estimates.

Third place for the weekend before Christmas went to the musical remake "Annie", which had been stolen by hackers who attacked the Sony movie studio's computer network and placed on online piracy sites three weeks ago. "Annie" earned \$16.3 million at domestic theaters.

"The Hobbit" stars Martin Freeman in the story based on the classic fantasy

novel by JRR Tolkien.

"Night at the Museum", the third in the series about exhibits that come to life, features Ben Stiller as a nighttime security guard and Williams as Teddy Roosevelt.

"This is an incredible result, and a nice distraction from everything that's been going on for the past couple of weeks, to have this enormous success going into the holiday season," said Jeff Goldstein, executive vice president of domestic distribution for Warner Bros., a unit of Time Warner Inc.

Warner Bros' New Line Cinema and MGM pro-

duced the film, which Goldstein said took in about \$10 million more over five days than the studio had expected.

"Night at the Museum" added \$10.8 from foreign showings.

Quvenzhané Wallis plays the title character in "Annie", a contemporary remake of the 1977 Broadway musical about an orphaned girl.

Rory Bruer, president of worldwide distribution for Sony's movie studio, said the hackers' release of the film "certainly doesn't seem like it hurt (box office performance), as we did so well."



Writer, producer and director Peter Jackson poses at the premiere of "The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies" at Dolby theatre in Hollywood, California on 9 Dec, 2014. The movie opens in the US on 17 December. REUTERS

Biblical epic "Exodus: Gods and Kings" finished fourth for the weekend with \$8.1 million. "The Hunger Games: Mockingjay — Part 1" took the No 5 spot with \$7.8 million.

"Night at the Museum" and "Exodus" were released by 20th Century Fox, a unit of 21st Century Fox. Lions Gate Entertainment Corp distributed "Mockingjay".

Reuters

Aguirre to explain himself at press conference

TOKYO, 22 Dec — Embattled Japan manager Javier Aguirre will hold a press conference to offer an explanation regarding match-fixing charges that have been leveled at him in Spain, the Japan Football Association revealed on Sunday when its board of trustees met.

Arrangements are being made so the press conference can be held before Aguirre's squad is to begin training for next month's Asian Cup on 29 December. The Mexican coach has not appeared in public since Spanish prosecutors named him among 41 individuals last week in a report into the alleged rigging of a Liga clash between Levante and his former club Zaragoza in May 2011.

Aguirre was manager of Zaragoza and the team won the match 2-1, avoiding relegation to the second tier as a result. He could be asked to appear in Spain if the complaint is accepted by a Valencia court and a full-scale investigation is



Hiromi Hara, secretary general of the Japan Football Association, speaks at a news conference in Tokyo on 21 Dec, 2014, after a meeting of its board of trustees. The association revealed at the meeting that Japan manager Javier Aguirre will hold a press conference to offer an explanation regarding match-fixing charges that have been leveled at him in Spain. — KYODO NEWS

opened. The JFA on Thursday decided that Aguirre would remain in charge for the 9-31 January Asian Cup

despite his alleged involvement in the scandal.

"We already know what he is going to say, but we should hold it anyway," Hiromi Hara, the JFA's secretary general, said of the plan to reduce the distractions at the team's training camp.

JFA president Kuniya Daini met to explain the situation to representatives of Japan's prefectural associations. Although no one criticized the JFA leadership or asked questions, one executive attending the meeting said, "The association executive itself doesn't know how this is going to turn out, so what's the point of asking questions?"

One trustee from the Kansai region said he expected Hara — who had selected Aguirre — to say something, "but he didn't even apologize."

"After the (group-stage exit from the) Brazil World Cup, nobody accepted responsibility. It makes it look as if we are an organization that is very

lenient towards the inner circle. If so, what can we do."

Spanish prosecutors alleged that the Levante players were paid a total of 965,000 euros to deliberately lose the game, according to reports.

Zaragoza first made bank transfers to Aguirre and its players and officials, who then took the money from their accounts and passed it on to the Levante players, reports said citing the prosecutors. Former Zaragoza president Agapito Iglesias and players from both teams are cited as defendants in the complaint.

Aguirre, who has also coached the Mexican national team and had spells as manager at Atletico Madrid and Espanyol in Spain, was appointed as Japan coach in late August.

He replaced Italian coach Alberto Zaccheroni, who stepped down after Japan was eliminated in the first round of this year's World Cup finals in Brazil.

Kyodo News

Rangers manager McCoist leaves club

GLASGOW, 22 Dec — Manager Ally McCoist, who guided Rangers through the most turbulent period in their history, has gone on "gardening leave" for the rest of his contract. "Rangers would like to announce that Ally McCoist is relinquishing his duties as manager and will serve out the remainder of his 12-month notice period on gardening leave," the club said in a statement on Sunday. "We would like to thank Ally for all his hard work and dedication over the last few years but we feel it is now in the best interests of all parties to move on. Assistant manager Kenny McDowall will take over his duties until the end of the season."

Former Rangers striker McCoist, 52, has been in charge at Ibrox since 2011 and steered the Scottish giants back to the second tier after their demotion to the fourth division for financial irregularities in 2012. McCoist resigned on Monday following a poor run of results but said he would stay on until the end of his contract. He was in charge for Saturday's 2-0 home victory over Livingston. Sunday's decision ended the uncertainty surrounding the future of the club's all-time record goalscorer. Rangers, who were founded in 1873, had never played outside the top division from the formation of the Scottish League in 1890 until 2012, a year after winning their 54th title. They are nine points behind leaders Hearts in the Championship (second tier) as they chase a third successive promotion and a return to the top flight. — *Reuters*

Vonn will have to wait until 2015 for record

VAL D'ISERE, (France), 22 Dec — Lindsey Vonn will have to wait until the New Year for a record-equaling women's World Cup victory after she crashed in a Super-G won by Austria's Elisabeth Goergl on Sunday.

The race in Val d'Isere was the American's first chance of matching the record of 62 wins set by Austrian Annemarie Moser-Proell in 1980.

She had dominated Saturday's downhill on the same course but on Sunday took a turn wide, crashed into a gate and was unable to complete her last race of 2014. "Yesterday was a

great day, but a very long day," she said. "I missed a little bit of elevation (today) and I wasn't able to make the gate."

"The positive thing is that my knees are good and I'm still going home for Christmas with a big smile," added the American, who returned this month from a year out of action after two knee operations.

The four-times World Cup champion will return in Bad Kleinkirchheim, Austria, on 10 and 11 January while races scheduled for Semmering on 28 and 29 December were moved to Innsbruck for lack of snow.

Former world champion Goergl mastered the tricky Val d'Isere course to clinch her seventh World Cup win in one minute and 25.42 seconds. Super-G Olympic champion Anna Fenninger secured an Austrian one-two 0.05 seconds behind, while Slovenia's Tina Maze was third, 0.13 off the pace. "It was a tricky course and I kind of like it when it's tricky," said Goergl, second to Vonn on Saturday. "I spent a long time for the inspection and then my coaches told me there were weird turns and what to do and it worked out fine."

Second-placed Fen-

ninger has been below par this winter but said she could celebrate Christmas on a high note: "Things didn't work out as well as I would have wanted so far. I had to fight and it was really important to have a good result before the break." The 2014 overall World Cup winner currently trails Maze by 249 points.

Austria's Marcel Hirscher won the men's giant slalom in Alta Badia for the second successive season, beating world and Olympic champion Ted Ligety by a huge 1.45 seconds. France's Thomas Fanara was third, 0.03 adrift. — *Reuters*

FIFA official says England had best bid for 2018 World Cup



Chief FIFA inspector Harold Mayne-Nicholls

LONDON, 22 Dec — England's failed bid to host the 2018 World Cup "was by far the strongest contender", FIFA official Harold Mayne-Nicholls was quoted

as saying on Sunday.

"How could England have only got two votes? It was a big surprise," Mayne-Nicholls was quoted as saying in *The Sunday Times*.

The 53-year-old, a former Chilean football federation president, was chairman of a FIFA group tasked with assessing the strength and feasibility of the various bids for the 2018 and 2022 World Cup finals. Having visited all 11 countries bidding, Mayne-Nicholls concluded that England had the best infrastructure and public involvement, crucial facets of any successful bid.

The bid, however, received just two votes from a possible 22 with Russia winning the right to host the

2018 tournament. Qatar secured the 2022 Cup.

"England were on the top. They had the best concept, the best infrastructure and the people were very much involved," said Mayne-Nicholls.

"I was there and I saw the faces of Prince William and (David) Beckham, and they were shocked. It's like when you are a first division team and you play a third division team and you lose by five goals."

Mayne-Nicholls has previously raised concerns

about Qatar, whose bid was the only one labelled as high risk by the evaluation committee due to the searing heat.

He again questioned the logistical issues raised by hosting the tournament in one city and said the transport and infrastructure would not be able to cope with the deluge of fans flocking to the tournament.

"It is a real possibility that lots of people cannot get to the games," Mayne-Nicholls.

On Friday, FIFA

president Sepp Blatter announced the world body would publish, "in an appropriate form", a 430-page report compiled by former ethics investigator Michael Garcia which explored claims of bribery in the bidding process.

Mayne-Nicholls said last month he would decide in the New Year whether to stand for FIFA presidency against Blatter. FIFA rules prevent campaigning before 29 January with the election set for 29 May.

Reuters

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Skrtel rescues Liverpool, Sunderland win derby

Liverpool's Martin Skrtel (2nd L) scores a goal against Arsenal during their English Premier League football match at Anfield in Liverpool, northern England on 21 Dec, 2014.
REUTERS



Sunderland's Sebastian Larsson (L) challenges Newcastle United's Sammy Ameobi during their English Premier League soccer match at St James' Park in Newcastle, northern England on 21 Dec, 2014.
REUTERS



LONDON, 22 Dec — Liverpool's heavily-banded Martin Skrtel headed a goal deep in stoppage time to spare them another deflating Premier League defeat as they snatched a 2-2 home draw with Arsenal on Sunday.

Inferior for most of the match, Arsenal still led with goals from French duo Mathieu Debuchy and Olivier Giroud after Philippe Coutinho had put the hosts deservedly ahead.

But Slovakian Skrtel, who required six minutes of treatment on a gashed head after being kicked by Giroud, thundered in a late header from Steven Gerrard's corner to deny Arsenal and at least give the Anfield faithful some pre-Christmas cheer.

Despite failing to earn all three points, Arsenal moved back into sixth spot on goal difference above London rivals Tottenham Hotspur with 27 points from 17 games, four behind fourth-placed West Ham United who hold the last Champions League spot. Leaders Chelsea can restore their three-point advantage over Manchester City by beating Stoke City away on Monday.

While Arsenal have now lost just once in their last seven meetings with Liverpool, Sunderland have won four in a row against north east rivals Newcastle United after Adam Johnson's late goal gave them a 1-0 win in the day's other fixture.

A riveting Tyne-Wear

derby at St James Park featured more than 30 goal attempts but Newcastle-born Johnson was the only one to find the net a minute from time to give Sunderland their third win of the season and lift them away from danger. "There are different ways to win a game and to win a derby and I think a winning goal in the last minute is a special way to do it," Sunderland manager Gus Poyet said.

Liverpool, languishing in mid-table, lost 3-0 at Manchester United the previous weekend when they created chances at will. A lack of killer instinct seemed about to haunt them again on Sunday as they enjoyed 65 percent possession and had four times as many goal attempts as the visitors.

With each failure to find the net thoughts inevitably drifted back to last season when, with Daniel Sturridge and Luis Suarez in harness, they blew Arsenal away 5-1.

In the end they needed a defender to salvage something from all their hard graft. Even Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger admitted three points for his side, had Skrtel not equalised, would have been fortunate.

"We regret to concede on a set piece in the last minute, but overall maybe a fair result," Wenger told Sky Sports.

"Last year was a bit in our mind and our flow was not there. We are playing a bit with the handbrake on."

Liverpool completely dominated the opening half

but had to wait until the 45th minute before Coutinho punished Arsenal for conceding possession, switching the ball to his right foot and drilling past Wojciech Szczesny via the post.

The defensive gremlins that have also undermined Liverpool's season returned immediately as Debuchy headed an unlikely equaliser in first-half stoppage time.

Giroud struck what looked like being the winner after a slick Arsenal counter-attack, converting from close range in the 64th minute from Santi Cazorla's cut back.

Liverpool had substitute Fabio Borini sent off late on but Skrtel's last-gasp intervention earned them a point to move them above Merseyside rivals Everton

into 10th place on 22 points.

"They (Arsenal) had three shots on target today and we had 23 efforts on goal," Liverpool boss Brendan Rodgers told Sky Sports. "Performance wise we are moving back to where we have been over the last couple of years."

Sunderland won for the first time in 10 league matches and it could not have been better timed.

Johnson, who has now scored on his last three visits to Newcastle, slammed in the winner after 89 minutes — shortly after Moussa Sissoko almost won it for hosts Newcastle.

"We've won three years in a row now, they must hate me here, three wins, three clean sheets," said Johnson.—Reuters

Kagawa dodges questions over Aguirre as he arrives back in Japan

TOKYO, 22 Dec — Borussia Dortmund midfielder Shinji Kagawa refused to comment on the match-fixing scandal engulfing Japan coach Javier Aguirre as he arrived back in Japan on Monday to prepare for the Asian Cup.

Kagawa signed autographs for fans at Tokyo's Haneda airport but would not respond to questions about Aguirre from waiting reporters. Schalke defender Atsuto Uchida also arrived home on the same flight.

Mexican coach Aguirre has not appeared in public since Spanish prosecutors named him among 41 individuals last week in a report into the alleged rigging of a La Liga clash between Levante and his former club Zaragoza in May 2011.

Aguirre was manager of Zaragoza and the team won the match 2-1, avoid-



Borussia Dortmund midfielder Shinji Kagawa signs autographs for fans after arriving at Tokyo's Haneda airport on 22 Dec, 2014. Kagawa refused to comment on the match-fixing scandal engulfing Japan coach Javier Aguirre when he was asked to do so by waiting reporters after arriving back in Japan to prepare for the Asian Cup.—KYODO NEWS

ing relegation to the second tier as a result. He could be asked to appear in Spain if the complaint is accepted by a Valencia court and a full-scale investigation is opened. The Japan Football Association has decided that Aguirre will remain in charge for the 9-31 January. Asian Cup despite his alleged involvement in the scandal. The association said on Sunday that Aguirre will hold a press conference to offer an explanation regarding the charges that have been leveled at him.

Arrangements are being made so the press conference can be held before Aguirre's squad begin training on 29 December for the Asian Cup.

Japan will be looking to defend the Asian Cup the Blue Samurai won for a record fourth time in 2011 in Doha.—Kyodo News

Marseille head into break as leaders after beating Lille

PARIS, 22 Dec — Olympique de Marseille will lead Ligue 1 into the two-week break thanks to Michy Batshuayi's half-volleyed winner in a 2-1 home victory over Lille on Sunday.

Belgian striker Batshuayi, starting after coach Marcelo Bielsa dropped Dimitri Payet following the France international's poor training performances, scored the 69th minute winner to put OM on 41 points from 19 games.

The goal came eight minutes after Lille's Idrissa Gueye had cancelled out team mate Nolan Roux's first-half own goal to level the scores at the Velodrome.

Marseille lead second-placed Paris St Germain by three points after the French champions drew 0-0 at home against Montpellier on Saturday.

Third-placed Olym-



Olympique Marseille's Michy Batshuayi celebrates after scoring against Lille during their French Ligue 1 soccer match at the Velodrome stadium in Marseille, on 21 Dec, 2014.
REUTERS

pique Lyonnais can go second, two points adrift, if they prevail at Girondins de Bordeaux later on Sunday (2000 GMT/4 PM ET).

Marseille imposed their possessive pattern on the game against a Lille side who are now 13th in the standings on 21 points, two

points above the drop zone.

Eleven minutes from the break, Florian Thauvin's horribly low corner kick was deflected into his own net by Roux as the hosts took a deserved lead.

Lille hit back but Marko Basa's header from a Florent Balmont free kick was blocked by Steve Mandanda.

In the 61st minute, Djibril Sidibe set up Gueye in the box for the midfielder to beat Mandanda with a low shot. Batshuayi, who started as a loose forward behind Andre-Pierre Gignac, then controlled Thauvin's cross from the left and sent a half-volley on the turn into the top corner to put OM in front again. Batshuayi had another chance in the dying seconds but wasted it as he tried to set up Gignac instead of playing it selfishly.

Reuters