

President U Thein Sein meets locals in Rakhine State

THANDWE, 25 Dec— The government will expeditiously carry out whatever can be done immediately and will systematically lay the foundations for the next government insofar as measures to be implemented in long term, President U Thein Sein told local people in Rakhine State on Thursday.

The president left Nay Pyi Taw for Thandwe in Rakhine State on Thursday morning and paid homage to Alodawpyae Sayadaw Dr. Ariyavamsa and other monks at Amata Thukha Alodawpyae Tawya Monastery on Maday Hill in Ngapali before visiting Tirlawka Thayanbu Buddha Image there.

He proceeded to Kyaukpyu by helicopter in the afternoon and met with local people before hearing reports on what is being done to ensure stability and development in Rakhine State, as well as on distribution of electricity to 50 percent of households in the whole country including Rakhine State in 2015-16 fiscal year. The reports were presented by the chief minister of the state and Union Minister for Electric



President U Thein Sein being welcomed by Rakhine people on his arrival at Thandwe Airport, Rakhine State.—MNA

Power U Khin Maung Soe.

The president then delivered a speech, saying the government is taking a people-centered approach as it implements tasks that

will contribute to the interests of the citizenry, emphasizing that regional development is a prerequisite for national development.

The government has

placed an emphasis on development of Rakhine State where efforts are being made for better communication and transportation in accordance with the saying

“Build roads to get rich,” he added.

The president pointed out that human resources are essential for capitalizing on natural resources.

National development, he said, must be built on the combination natural resources and human resources such as physical strength, wisdom and perseverance.

The government is implementing Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone to (See page 3)

The Christian community throughout the country has celebrated Christmas, with followers saying prayers in charges here on Thursday, sources said.

Worshippers gathered at the Saint Mary’s Cathedral in Botahtaung Township and the Emmanuel Church in Kyauktada Township to celebrate Christmas mass.

According to reports, Christmas celebrations and prayers were held all over the world.

Aye Ko (MNA)/
Zaw Min Latt

Christians hold X’mas services



YANGON, 25 Dec— Christmas celebrations were held at the Emmanuel Baptist Church here on Thursday, with services held for worshippers in eight languages.

In the evening at the church, a reverend sent prayerful good wishes to all communities in the country and the world as a whole for peace and an end to conflict.

Christmas mass celebrations being held at the Emmanuel Baptist Church in downtown

Yangon.

Aye Ko (MNA)

Union H & T Minister urges industrialists to improve CSR activities in Rakhine

Union Minister meets delegates from regions and states to Grand Military Review Parade

Ten Years After the Indian Ocean Tsunami: Walking the Last Mile Together on Early Warning

Is our new year really new?

China-Myanmar Friendship Association donates sports equipment to Mdy Wushu Subcommittee

Fire at fuel storage compound causes K15 million in damage



PATHEINGYI, 25 Dec — A fire broke out at a fuel storage compound of Min Min, 31, in Thaman-daw Village, Patheingyi Township, Mandalay Region, on 24 December afternoon.

The fire started from sparks at a nozzle of a hose as it was being used to siphon fuel from the

bowser to barrels. The fire engulfed one oil bowser,

two trucks and 44 barrels worth K15.64 million.

About 240 firefighters led by Deputy Director-General U Than Kyaw Kyaw and officials of the Upper Myanmar Fire Services Department put out the fire with the use of 55 fire trucks, three management vehicles and water bowsters.

Two injured people were sent to Mandalay General Hospital.

The Ohnchaw police station in Patheingyi Township filed a lawsuit against Min Min, under Section 285 of the Penal Code, for causing a fire to break out.

Maung Pyi Thu (Mandalay)

IPRD official promotes reading to broaden horizons of rural people

MYANAUNG, 25 Dec — With the aim of raising reading skills, educative talks are being given to rural people in Myanaung Township, Ayeyawady Region on 24 December.

At the opening ceremony of “Phu Pwint Thit” library in Lahapauk Village in Myanaung Township, Head of Township Information and Public Relations Department Daw Soe Sanda Waing disseminated knowledge about the advantages of

reading and reading habits to the students and villagers.

In the afternoon, she met with local people at “Alinyaung” library in Myoma Tegyigon Village and urged them to read.

She also met with library committee members and discussed ways to boost library utilization and displaying of a wall magazine for the public to read.

Win Bo (Township IPRD)

Head of Myanaung Township IPRD

Daw Soe Sanda Waing explains aim of raising reading skills and its advantages.

China-Myanmar Friendship Association donates sports equipment to Mdy Wushu Subcommittee

MANDALAY, 25 Dec — A ceremony to donate equipment for Wushu sport was held at the hall of the Mandalay Region Sports and Physical Education Department in Mandalay on 24 December.

Deputy Consul General Ms Ji Yiling of Chinese Consulate-General in Mandalay explained that China's donation was aimed at enabling the Mandalay Region Wushu team to achieve victory in the 4th National Sports Festival 2015.

Officials of China-Myanmar Friendship Association

presented 100 sticks, 40 swords, 10 spears and four suits for the Sanshou event to Mandalay City Development Committee Secretary U Khin Maung Tin, the chairman of the Mandalay Region Wushu Subcommittee, who returned gifts to the well-wishers.

The ceremony was attended by Head of Mandalay Region Sports and Physical Education U Wai Zin, Chairman of Myanmar-Chin Friendship Association U Po Myint and members.

Tin Maung (Mandalay)



Students join reading session organized by Thaton Township IPRD

THATON, 25 Dec — As a gesture of hailing the 67th Anniversary Independent

ence Day, which falls on 4 January, Thaton District's Information and Public Relations Department held a reading session at the administrator's office in Aukkyin Ward, Thaton, Mon State, on 24 December.

Staff Officer Daw Khin Lay Nwe of the department explained the purpose of holding the reading session.

“Reading makes me happy and I learn a lot from it. Just now, I got knowledge to help my parents after reading a book titled “Benefit of Mother”, Ma La Yang Phu, a 7th-grade student, told her friends at



the reading session.

5th-grade student Ma Yun Myat Wady said, “I enjoy reading comics. I'd like to read more books and comics at the session.”

Bookworms and stu-

dents joined the reading session. The district IPRD donated books and publications to the ward library. A local spoke words of thanks.

Thaton District IPRD

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NATIONAL

President U Thein Sein . . .

(from page 1)

create employment opportunities that are also vital for regional development as jobs provide regular income for the people, the president said, adding that local people must be educated to work as skilled labourers at the SEZ and that the government will build a technical institute in Kyaukpyu to nurture technicians.

According to the president, better transportation and electricity supply are essential for regional development. Electricity should be generated in the state in addition to using electricity from the national grid, he said.

The government has paved the way for all citizens to participate in the political reform while efforts are being exerted to end armed conflicts and to restore peace through dialogues where all participants shake hands one another, the president said, adding that the government has speeded up its efforts to reach the nationwide ceasefire agreement and to hold political dialogues for lasting peace.

As for the economic reform, the president said eight measures for rural development and poverty reduction are being carried out while

foreign investment and technology are invited for national development.

He said stability and the rule of law most pivotal for regional development as national development tasks can be carried out only when stability has been maintained.

The government has adopted the democratic system chosen by the people and has accelerated related reforms phase by phase through its people-centred approach in the political, economic and administrative sectors as the will of the public is for stability, the rule of law and socioeconomic development, said the president, who concluded his speech by urging local people to cooperate with the government.

The president and party then continued to Yanbye and met with Hluttaw representatives, local officials and local people at Yammawady Hall where after hearing report on needs for regional development presented by Chairman U Aung Soe of Township Development Supporting Committee, he attended to the needs for transportation, electricity supply, availability of clean drinking water, education, health and social affairs.

MNA



Worshipper gather at the St Mary's Cathedral on Bo Aung Kyaw Street in Botahtaung Township to celebrate X'mas.
(News on page 1)—ZAW MIN LATT

Union H & T Minister urges industrialists to improve CSR activities in Rakhine

YANGON, 25 Dec — Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism U Htay Aung made an inspection tour of Rakhine State where he met departmental officials, townsenders and entrepreneurs from top tourism attractive towns to discuss development of hospitality and tourism industry.

During the meetings, U Htay Aung urged entrepreneurs to improve their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities on environmental conservation, carry out educative trainings for their staff to be able to systematically manage hotel's waste materials and sewage treatment.

He also pointed out the role of public involvement in the sustainable development of natural resources.

While in the state, the



Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism U Htay Aung hears report on development of tourism industry in Rakhine State presented by an official.—MNA

Union Minister inspected development progress of construction projects alongside the Ngapali beach and Zephyugon dam. He also paid homage to the well-

known religious places—Maha Muni Buddha Image and Shitthaung Stupa in MraukU in the state.

According to the ministry's data, Myanmar sees

huge arrival of tourists year by year. Most travelers choose to visit beautiful places and ancient cities such as MraukU in Rakhine State.—MNA

Union Minister meets delegates from regions and states to Grand Military Review Parade

NAY PYI TAW, 25 Dec — Chairman of the 67th Anniversary Independence Day Grand Military Review Parade Ceremony Invitation, Reception and Entertainment Subcommittee Union Minister for Culture U Aye Myint Kyu on 24 December evening met delegates of regions and states to the Grand Military Review Parade at the sports training centre (Nay Pyi Taw).

The Union Minister visited the mess hall where the delegate had the dinner and attended to the needs.—MNA



Union Minister U Aye Myint Kyu meets delegates to Grand Military Review Parade.—MNA

Baseball match marks 60th anniversary of Myanmar-Japan diplomatic relations

YANGON, 25 Dec — A baseball event in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of Myanmar-Japan diplomatic relations was held at Myanmar Baseball Training Ground in Tamway Township, here, on Thursday.

Deputy Minister for Sports U Thaung Htaik, President of Myanmar

Baseball Federation Dr Naing Win and Superior of Delegation Mr Katsuji Takei of Japan (Tokyo) High School greeted the players of both teams.

After kicking off the match, the deputy minister watched plays of tentatively selected Myanmar baseball team and Japan (Tokyo) High School.
MNA

Service for birth of Christ performed in Nay Pyi Taw Council Area

NAY PYI TAW, 25 Dec — Church service for the birth of Christ was held at Myanmar Baptist Mission Church at Bogoyoke Road in MyoU Ward in Pyinmana, Nay Pyi Taw Council Area, on Friday. U

Lai Deng presided over the service and Revd Timothy Pa Hrang performed the service.

The church service concluded with carols, hymns and funfairs.

Than Oo (Lemyathna)

Senior citizens of above 100 years to get certificates, assistance

NAY PYI TAW, 25 Dec — The President will present certificates of honour as elders and assistance to 169 grandpa and 400 grandma, totalling 569 of above 100 years old residing across the nation on 4 January 2015.

A plan is to continue presentation of the certificates and assistance to the persons who turn 100 years old. So, they are to send evidences to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement through respective region and state governments.

MNA

Thai leader cites China as positive example in year-end message

BANGKOK, 25 Dec — Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha cited China as a good example of economic development in a year-end speech to government officials seven months after he seized power in a military coup.

Prayuth, a former army chief who led the coup, said Thais should “stop bickering” and look to regional superpower China for inspiration.

His speech on Thursday came after a two-day state visit to China aimed at forging closer ties with Beijing following a chill in relations with the US and Europe.

Several Western nations imposed sanctions and downgraded ties with Thailand in response to the coup. Last week the regime used a regional summit in Bangkok as proof of what it called the international community’s renewed confidence in Thailand.

“I spoke to Chinese

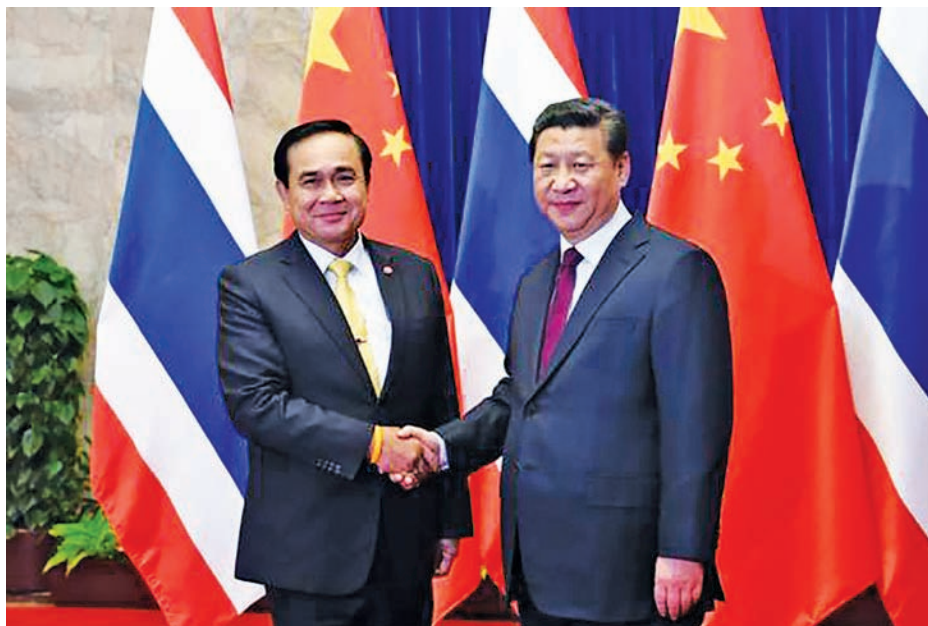
President Xi Jinping and he told me that 60 years ago his country was (one of) the poorest in the world. In 30 years they were able to make their country a world economic superpower,” Prayuth said.

“But we are still bickering amongst ourselves.”

The army seized control of the country in what it said was an attempt to calm more than six months of crisis that left nearly 30 people dead.

Among the many tasks Prayuth faces in 2015 are how to restore an ailing economy and roll out legislative changes aimed at preventing the return of ousted former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his allies.

Thaksin, a populist former telecommunications tycoon, was ousted in a 2006 putsch and faces a two-year jail term for graft. Thailand has been divided for a decade between Thaksin and the Bangkok-based royal-



Thailand's Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha (L) shakes hands with China's President Xi Jinping before a meeting at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on 23 Dec, 2014.—REUTERS

ist military establishment, which sees him as a threat.

Despite some semblance of a return to normal, the Thai economy, Southeast Asia's second-largest, is stagnating.

It grew just 0.2 percent

in the first nine months of this year. The central bank has cut its economic forecasts for 2014 and 2015.

Thailand is still under martial law following the coup, something that has kept visitors away and dent-

ed tourism, which accounts for around 10 percent of the economy.

Earlier this week the US called a plan to delay a Thai general election to February 2016 “unwise and unjustified”.—Reuters

Thailand plans 200-member Senate

BANGKOK, 25 Dec — Thailand's Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) has reached a consensus that a new Senate will comprise 200 members who will be selected from five groups, a CDC spokesman said on Thursday.

The 200 senators should be selected from former members of the executive, judicial and legislative bodies, former high-ranking bureaucrats such as former military commanders, heads of professional organizations, people's organizations and other professions, Khamnoon Sittisaman said.

Senators will be empowered to propose laws, remove the prime minister, ministers and members of parliament, as well as scrutinize the backgrounds of the prime minister and cabinet members before they are royally endorsed, according to Khamnoon.

The CDC earlier resolved to adopt the German-styled mixed member proportional representation (MMP) electoral system, with 250 MPs to be elected from constituencies and 200 others from

the party list.

Voters will have to cast two ballots, one for a constituency MP and the other for a political party.

The number of a party's seats in the House of Representatives will depend on the proportion of party votes it receives from eight electoral clusters across the country, according to CDC spokesman Lertrat Rattananich.

For instance, if a party receives 10 percent of all party votes, it should be allocated 45 seats, 10 percent of the 450 House seats. If in the meantime, it has won 40 seats from the constituency system, it should only get another five seats from the party list, Lertrat said.

But if the party has already won 45 or more seats from the constituency system, it will get no seat from the party list.

It is likely that parties could win constituency seats beyond their proportion and thus cause the total number of MPs to exceed 450, Lertrat noted.

Constituency MP candidates do not have to be members of political parties, he said.—Xinhua

Cambodian PM pleased to see growing ties with Thailand

PHNOM PENH, 25 Dec — Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen said on Thursday that he was pleased to see growing ties and cooperation with neighbouring Thailand, a spokesman said.

The prime minister expressed his satisfaction with Cambodia-Thailand relations during a meeting with visiting Thai Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Min-

ister Prawit Wongsuwan, according to Eang Sophalath, a spokesman for Hun Sen.

“During the meeting, the prime minister hails the current Thai government, saying that the government has brought stability between Thailand and its neighbouring countries,” he said. According to the spokesman, Hun Sen reit-

erated Cambodia's desire to make the border area between Cambodia and Thailand an area of peace, friendship, cooperation and development.

For his part, Prawit agreed that ties and cooperation between the two neighbours have gradually improved and the bad chapter of the relations was over.

Xinhua

Floods displaces 120,000 people in Indonesia's Aceh

JAKARTA, 25 Dec — More than 120,966 people have fled home, as floods are afflicting Indonesia's Aceh Province in the northern tip of Sumatra Island, an official said here on Wednesday.

The waters submerged by up to 400 cm high in the districts of North Aceh and East Aceh, Sutopo Purwo Nugroho, spokesman of national disaster agency told Xinhua via phone.

The evacuation on those being trapped or affected by the floods is underway, involving soldiers, police, and local disaster agency officials, said the spokesman.

The city and other districts being inundated by the waters included the provincial capital of Banda Aceh, the districts of Aceh Tamiang, South Aceh, Pidie, and Lhoksemae, said Sutopo.

Emergency relief aids have been sent to the centers of evacuation, he said.

The evacuees and the affected persons badly require rubber boats, fast food, blankets, food for baby and children, Sutopo said.

On Tuesday, the agency reported that the number of evacuee stood at 28,000 people.

Indonesia is frequently struck by floods and landslides during heavy downpours.—Xinhua



Protesters holding clubs and stones gather outside the opposition United National Party (UNP)'s headquarter in Colombo, capital of Sri Lanka, on 24 Dec, 2014. As a closely fought presidential election approaches in Sri Lanka, government supporters and opposition loyalists clashed outside the opposition's headquarters on Wednesday, an official said.—XINHUA

Police officer kills armed black man near Ferguson, Missouri

ST LOUIS, (Missouri), 25 Dec — A white policeman shot dead a black man brandishing a gun at a suburban St Louis gasoline station overnight, police said on Wednesday, igniting violence reminiscent of riots over the police killing of an unarmed black teenager in nearby Ferguson.

Black officials in Missouri were at pains to distinguish the death of a suspect they said had a gun from cases where unarmed black men were killed by police officers, incidents that led to protests across the United States and bitter debate about how American police forces treat non-white citizens.

The shooting happened late on Tuesday at a Mobil On The Run gas station in Berkeley, Missouri, within walking distance of the Ferguson street on which a white police officer shot dead 18-year-old Michael Brown in August.

"This is not a policeman in the city of Berkeley going out half-cocked," Berkeley Mayor Theodore

Hoskins said at a news conference. "You could not even compare this with Ferguson."

A crowd of 200 to 300 people soon gathered at the site of the shooting, and bricks and three fireworks were thrown, two of them at the roughly 50 officers at the scene, St Louis County Police Chief Jon Belmar said.

Two officers were injured and four people were arrested for assault before calm was restored, Belmar said. The shooting occurred three days after the worst fears of police-reform activists and the direst warnings of police leaders came to pass: on Saturday afternoon, a man summarily shot dead two officers in their patrol car in New York City, targeting them only because of the uniform they were wearing.

The Berkeley encounter unfolded after the officer, a six-year veteran of the town's police department who was responding to a report of a theft, got out of his car to talk to two men



Surveillance video showing an officer-involved shooting during a routine business check at a gas station in Berkeley, Missouri on 23 Dec, 2014 released by the St Louis County Police Department on 24 Dec, 2014.—REUTERS

at the gasoline station.

One of them pointed a loaded 9mm handgun at the officer, Belmar said. Police released a somewhat indistinct, distant surveillance video from the gas station, edited to end just before the shooting.

In the corner of the frame, one of the people at the station can be seen raising one or both arms in what may be a shooter's stance near the police car, although the footage is too dark and grainy to establish that the person is

holding a gun. Two other videos released later by St Louis County Police were similarly ambiguous, recorded by security cameras that appear to have only restricted views of the scene.

Pulling out his own gun, the officer stepped

backward, stumbled, and fired three shots, Belmar said, a sequence captured on one of the three videos. One bullet struck the man with the gun, a second hit a police car tire, and the third cannot be accounted for, he said.—Reuters

Iran warns West to keep expectations realistic on nuclear compromise

DUBAI, 25 Dec — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has warned Western powers to curb their demands on limiting his country's nuclear activities in order to guarantee a landmark settlement, which he said was "within reach".

Iranian newspapers said on Wednesday that Zarif had written separate letters to his Western counterparts explaining Tehran's position ahead of the next round of talks in January.

"I am confident that a comprehensive agreement is within reach," he wrote, according to the *Mehr* news agency. "But we will firmly resist any humiliating illegitimate demands."

Zarif said Iran's goal was "a long-term comprehensive agreement guaranteeing its right to an exclusively peaceful nuclear programme in return for full removal of all sanctions."

Six world powers known as the "P5+1" — the United States, France, Germany, Russia, China and Britain — reached a preliminary agreement with Iran last year for it to suspend its most sensitive



Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif

nuclear activity.

Western countries in return eased some economic sanctions imposed on the Islamic republic over its past defiance in the 12-year nuclear dispute.

Iran says its programme is peaceful but the West fears it may lead to developing nuclear weapons. Iran and the P5+1 failed for the second time last month to meet deadline for ending the stand-off and extended the preliminary accord until 30 June.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said last week Iran had continued to meet commitments under an interim nuclear agreement with six world powers, despite failure to make "any further advances" on activities at

two enrichment facilities and an unfinished heavy water reactor.

France and Britain, however, said around the same time that Iran had not demonstrated sufficient flexibility in the nuclear talks. Western officials say Iran has not compromised on major sticking points, including the size and scope of its future uranium enrichment programme and the speed of ending sanctions.

Under the interim deal's extension, Iran would continue to convert higher-grade uranium oxide into reactor fuel, thereby making it harder and more time-consuming to turn it into the fissile core of a bomb. Tehran denies any such aim.—Reuters

NATO not walking away from Afghanistan: Secretary General

BRUSSELS, 25 Dec — NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg pledged on Wednesday the NATO allies will not walk away from Afghanistan upon the completion of the bloc's international combat mission at the end of 2014.

Though security of Afghanistan will be fully in the hands of the country's 350,000 Afghan soldiers and police, the NATO allies, together with many partner nations, will remain to train, advise and assist them, Stoltenberg wrote in an article to Afghanistan's *Pajhwok Afghan News*.

He said the new

NATO mission of "Resolute Support", which will be launched on 1 January, 2015, will bring together around 12,000 men and women from many parts of the world. The 28 NATO allies will contribute in different ways, joined by 14 partner nations. The United States will be in the lead to train, advise and assist in the south and east of Afghanistan. Germany will be in the lead in the north. Italy in the west. And Turkey in the capital, he said. Stoltenberg added NATO will also finance the Afghan forces. Moreover, NATO and Afghanistan will build

an enduring partnership which reflects joint interests, shapes joint cooperation and contributes to shared security. "Now we are proud to write together a new chapter in our relationship," he said.

The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force is scheduled to end their combat mission in Afghanistan by the end of 2014, after 13 years of military presence in the country.

The US and NATO-led troops will switch from combat to support role. The NATO-led Resolute Support Mission will focus on training, advising and assisting Afghan forces.—Xinhua

Pakistan to set up special courts to try terrorists

ISLAMABAD, 25 Dec — Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif announced on Thursday that special trial courts headed by military officers would be set up all over Pakistan to speedily prosecute people accused in terrorism-related cases. Sharif made the announcement in a televised address early morning, which followed a marathon ten-hour meeting of major political parties on Wednesday where participants approved an action

plan to combat and uproot terrorism from Pakistan. The special court initiative and the anti-terrorism action plan came after an attack on an army-run school in Peshawar on 16 December that killed 150 people including 134 children.

"The lot to lead the war against terror has fallen on me and I will fully discharge this responsibility at any cost," Sharif said. "I want to tell the terrorists that their days are numbered."

In speaking about the need for the special courts, Sharif noted that in the past, those accused in terrorism cases "had managed to delay the dispensation of justice." Sharif said that a constitutional amendment and legislation should be carried out for the establishment of the special courts that would run for two years. An amendment in the Constitution requires approval by two-third majority in both houses of parliament.—Kyodo News

90-year-old A-bomb survivor set on attending 2015 NPT confab

HANAMAKI, (Japan), 25 Dec — In rooms throughout his home, Masakazu Saito, 90, has dozens of old clocks indicating 8:15 am, the time of the atomic bombing that flattened Hiroshima and nearly killed him seven decades ago.

“This keeps me remembering the event that should never happen again,” Saito says. Although Saito, who was stationed in Hiroshima as an army lieutenant at that time, survived injuries from the bombing, he is still suffering from the after-effects.

Next spring, Saito will travel to New York to attend an international conference on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a member of the delegation of the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations.

The confederation, which brings together survivors of the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the closing days of World War II, works to realize a world free of nuclear weapons.

“I will keep crying for the abolition of nuclear weapons until my death,” Saito said. He will be the oldest atomic-bomb survivor in the delegation.

Signatory countries of the NPT, which came into force in 1970, have held a review conference every

five years to assess the performance of the pact. The next gathering is scheduled for 27 April to 22 May at the United Nations headquarters in New York with participants from some 190 countries. The Japanese confederation plans to send about 50 participants to the meeting. When the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on the morning of 6 August, 1945, Saito, then 21, was in a barracks located around 1.8 kilometres from the center of the blast.

As he was talking with a senior officer, Saito said, he casually looked through the window and recognized three US warplanes flying overhead, with one of them dropping something. Soon after a powerful flash of light and a heat wave struck the barracks, instantly evaporating the water in

a goldfish bowl in the room and causing the ceiling to collapse.

About 90 percent of the 400-strong corps at the camp were killed immediately. Saito suffered severe burns on his back and arms. He struggled out of the barracks, to be confronted with hellish scenes, such as girls crying for help as they lay with their eyeballs pulled out of the sockets and intestines protruding from their bodies. He attended to victims but lost consciousness himself during the relief activity. When he regained consciousness, Saito said, he found himself laid together with the remains of bombing victims in a large hole dug in a schoolyard for mass incineration. He shouted and was taken out of the hole just in time.

When Saito returned to his hometown in Iwate Prefecture after the war, he was met with discrimination prompted by fear of radiation. He was driven to despair over the future and was obsessed with suicidal thoughts.

However, he regained hope as he started to communicate with other atomic-bomb survivors. He established a group of survivors in his hometown and launched activities to raise the alarm about the horrors of nuclear weapons.

Kyodo News



Masakazu Saito

Region's stability is important for both Serbia and Bosnia



BELGRADE, 25 Dec — Serbia's Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic met with head of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Presidency Mladen Ivanic on Wednesday

and stressed that stability of the region was of crucial importance for both Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Vucic also supported Bosnia-Herzegovina's EU

integration and respect for the rights of all three of its peoples, the Serbian, Bosnian and Croatian.

The two officials discussed also ways of improving the relations between the two countries and the implementation of the Dayton Agreement, the Serbian government office for media relations has stated.

They also talked about the political situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as the new EU initiative for Bosnia-Herzegovina, according to the statement.

Tanjug

Israeli army, Hamas militants clash near Gaza border



A wounded Israeli soldier is carried into Soroka hospital in southern Israeli city of Beer Sheva, on 24 Dec, 2014. A Hamas militant was killed on Wednesday during an exchange of fire between Israeli forces and a Hamas surveillance unit near the southeastern Gaza border, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and medics said. — XINHUA

JERUSALEM / GAZA, 25 Dec — An Israeli army routine patrol was attacked on the Israeli side of the Gaza border on Wednesday morning, Israel Defence Forces (IDF) said.

Initial reports said a group of Palestinians opened fire on an IDF patrol near the southern Gaza Strip border. The forces then returned fire.

An Islamic Hamas militant was killed during the exchange of fire near the fence of the borders between southeastern Gaza Strip and Israel, medics and witnesses said. — Xinhua

Russia says NATO turning Ukraine into 'frontline of confrontation'

MOSCOW, 25 Dec — Russia said on Wednesday NATO was turning Ukraine into a “frontline of confrontation” and threatened to sever remaining ties with the Atlantic military alliance if Ukraine's hopes of joining it were realised.

The Kiev parliament's renunciation of Ukraine's neutral status on Tuesday in pursuit of NATO membership has outraged Moscow and deepened the worst confrontation between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War. “NATO countries pushed Kiev to this counterproductive decision, trying to turn Ukraine into a front line of confrontation with Russia,” Deputy Defence Minister Anatoly Antonov told the Russian news agency Interfax.

“If this decision in

the future takes on a military character (accession to NATO), then we will respond appropriately. Then there will be a complete severing of ties with NATO, which will be practically impossible to repair,” Antonov said.

It is likely to take years for Ukraine to meet the technical criteria for accession to NATO and, even then, there is no certainty that the alliance is ready to take on such a political hot potato.

Yet Russia has made clear it would see the NATO membership of such a strategic former Soviet republic with a long common border as a direct military threat.

A NATO official, who asked not to be named, said it was solely up to Kiev to decide on its foreign policy.

“Should Ukraine de-



An Ukrainian serviceman guards at a checkpoint near the eastern Ukrainian town of Debaltseve in Donetsk region, on 24 Dec, 2014. — REUTERS

cide to apply for NATO membership, NATO will assess its readiness to join the alliance in the same

way as with any candidate. This is an issue between NATO and the individual countries aspir-

ing to membership,” the official said.

NATO has already boosted its military pres-

ence in eastern Europe this year, saying it has evidence that Russia orchestrated and armed a pro-Russian rebellion in eastern Ukraine that followed the overthrow of a Kremlin-backed president in Kiev.

Moscow denies supporting the rebellion, and is currently trying, along with Kiev and the rebels, to renew efforts to find a political solution to the crisis in eastern Ukraine.

A so-called “contact group” is expected to meet in Minsk on Wednesday to try to reinforce a shaky ceasefire and de-escalate the conflict, in which more than 4,700 people have been killed.

A truce agreed in September has been regularly flouted by both sides, but violence has lessened significantly in December.

Reuters

Baghdad's Christians gather defiantly for Christmas Eve mass

BAGHDAD, 25 Dec — Baghdad's embattled Christian community worshipped defiantly on Wednesday night at Christmas Eve mass.

The pews filled at Baghdad's Sacred Heart church, as people remembered the darkest year in memory.

Blast walls shielded the church and seven policeman flanked the outside of the house of worship, in an indication of the government's fear of an attack on the religious groups by jihadists who consider them non-believers.

The congregation sang in unison: "Praise Jesus, our Lord. Oh praise him" as incense burnt in the darkened church.

The worshippers paid tribute to the thousands of Christians displaced this summer in northern Iraq

when Islamic State seized the city of Mosul in June and in August pushed on towards Iraqi Kurdistan, over-running Christian towns on the Nineveh plain.

"The recent conditions have left us with a bit of sadness for our brethren, be they Christian or non-Christian, those who were displaced and harmed," Father Thair Abdul Masih told *Reuters*.

"Christianity is the religion of peace and we pray for these people to return to their homes. We pray for all evil to vanish," he said.

Some had personal stories of those displaced this summer in northern Iraq, who have scattered to Iraqi Kurdistan, Turkey and Lebanon.

"They live in misery... yet we still exchange blessings and congratulations



Iraqi Christians pray during a mass on Christmas eve at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Baghdad on 24 Dec, 2014. — REUTERS

of Christmas and the New Year," said Fadi Rafaat, 27, an assistant to the priest. "We celebrate the happiness of Christmas, but deep

inside we carry the sadness of Iraq."

The holiday season weighed heavily on some. Earlier in the day, a moth-

er and daughter on a busy street in the neighbourhood of Karrada, argued about whether they should stay in Iraq or give up on the

country.

The mother insisted she would die in Iraq unafraid, but her daughter longed to escape. Last year her son was robbed at gun-point working in a jewellery shop.

"I wish to leave this country as soon as possible because we, Christians, have been hunted down by extremists and reduced into a very small minority," the woman said, who declined to give her name. "Life is not very kind to us these days."

Iraq's Christians once numbered about 1.5 million. There are now believed to be less than 500,000 out of a population estimated at 32 million, according to the US State Department's 2013 International Religious Freedom Report.

Reuters

Russian initiative "serious step" to solve Syrian crisis

DAMASCUS, 25 Dec — Russia's recent efforts to hold a dialogue bringing together representatives of the Syrian government and opposition parties have been deemed positive towards figuring out a political solution to the country's long-running conflict, according to Syrian politicians. "The Russian initiative or ideas that have been put forward recently are good for discussions and even for implementation and thus Syria hasn't closed the door before them," Sharif Shehadeh, a Syrian legislator, told *Xinhua* on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, the state news agency *SANA*

cited official Russian media as stating that a four-day meeting is scheduled to be held between representatives of the Syrian government and opposition parties in Moscow by the end of January.

Earlier this month, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told *ITAR-TASS* that the opportunities to resume dialogue on the crisis in Syria were being improved, expressing optimism to launch a dialogue between the Syrians.

"I think that we must welcome any initiative that could eventually serve the interest of the Syrian people and help uproot terrorism," Shehadeh said, noting that

such dialogue would expose the real intentions of the opposition.

However, he lashed out at the western-backed opposition parties in exile, who emerged single-minded on changing the regime in Syria as a prelude to any solution to the crisis.

The Syrian government regards the stubbornness of the exiled opposition as the major hindrance to reach a political solution in previous internationally-backed conferences and meetings, namely the Geneva meetings which were held earlier this year. Meanwhile, Anas Joudeh, deputy head of the oppositional Building Syria State Party, told *Xinhua*

that the Russian initiative reflects the seriousness of Moscow towards reaching a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

"The Russian leadership seems serious about building a political solution to the Syrian crisis and this seemed obvious during the several meetings held with the Syrian opposition parties by Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov who had also held meetings with the Syrian government," Joudeh said. Bogdanov made a visit to Damascus this month, where he met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and a number of Foreign Ministry officials as well as

opposition figures.

During his meeting with Bogdanov, Assad said his administration was dealing positively with the Russian efforts to find solutions to the crisis engulfing his country. Assad stressed his country's support for any Russian-backed diplomatic effort, agreeing with Bogdanov that any initiative to solve the Syrian crisis demands "serious" efforts to counter terrorism and radicalism in the region by exercising real pressures from the international community against the countries that support terrorism.

After meeting Assad, Bogdanov was quoted as saying that he "was in con-

tact with our American partners" regarding Russia's fresh efforts to hold Syrian dialogue. "If Syrians want to meet in Moscow, then we will discuss this issue with the US side and others," Bogdanov was quoted as saying by the Russian news agency *Ria Novosti* earlier this month.

"We have proposed that the Syrians come to Moscow to discuss political possibilities to resolve the crisis," he added.

Syrian Minister of National Reconciliation Ali Haidar also pointed out the need for an international consensus in order for the Russian initiative to be successful.—*Xinhua*

Jordan vows to combat terrorism as pilot arrested by IS group

AMMAN, 25 Dec — Jordan on Wednesday said it will continue its war on terrorism and terrorist groups to defend Islam.

In an interview at the state-run Jordan Television, Minister of State for Media Affairs Mohammad Momani said the government voiced solidarity with the family and tribe of the pilot captured by IS early on Wednesday.

"When we entered the US-led coalition against the Islamic State, we knew there will be losses such as some taken hostages or even martyrs. We will continue our war on terror and to defend the homeland," Momani said.



Relatives of the Jordanian pilot who was captured by the forces of the Islamic State after his plane came down near Raqqa in Syria, congregate in front of his family's home in the city of Karak on 24 Dec, 2014. — REUTERS

Early on Wednesday, the Jordan Armed Forces said the Islamic State (IS) downed a Jordanian plane and arrested its pilot in Syria. The pilot was part of a group of Jordanian fighter jets conducting a military mission against the IS terrorist organization.

"Jordan holds the Islamic State accountable for the safety of the pilot and preserving his life," the army said. Relatives of the captured pilot, Mouath Kasasbeh, called on the authorities to take efforts to secure his release.

Earlier, the Syrian Observatory for Human

Rights reported that the IS militants have downed a war jet that is believed to belong to the international anti-terror coalition near Syria's northern al-Raqqa province. The pilot's fate remains unknown.

The pan-Arab al-Mayadeen TV cited IS reports as saying that they downed the plane over al-Raqqa and captured its Jordanian pilot.

The US-led anti-terror coalition has been striking IS positions in Syria since September, in which many Arab countries, including Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have participated.

Xinhua

PERSPECTIVES

Friday, 26 December, 2014

Is our new year really new?

By Myint Win Thein

A new year is approaching us again but we are sure to miss another new year as we have been doing for decades. Having passed through so many new years with old problems, new years have not been really new

for us for decades.

Every one of us will remember how we have entered year after year until 2014, which is plagued by chronic problems like the inconclusive peace process, religious conflicts, battles in border areas, land disputes, labour disputes, rising prices, unemployment, housing shortages, rampant crime, inefficient public transportation systems and so on.

Now, at the very end of 2014, we are still struggling with these problems with no solutions on sight and we are sure to enter a new year again with old problems.

Although the State is trying its best, it is clear that it alone is not able to solve these problems as

they are deep-rooted ones resulting from mismanagement of successive governments. It is time for all the political forces and all people in Myanmar to play an active role in tackling these problems to prove that our country deserves genuine new years in the future.

Write for us

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

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

Ten Years After the Indian Ocean Tsunami: Walking the Last Mile Together on Early Warning

Joint Op-Ed Submitted for Publication by Dr Shamshad Akhtar

With Ministers from India, Indonesia, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

On 26 December 2004, the world experienced one of the deadliest natural disasters ever recorded. A 9.1 magnitude earthquake off the west coast of Sumatra, Indonesia, triggered a massive tsunami that directly affected fourteen countries in Asia and Africa. The tectonic shifting of plates and the widespread impact of the resulting waves, led to 230,000 deaths and massive human suffering.

Ten years later, we come together as a community to commemorate the loss of those who fell victims to the wrath of nature and to recognize the suffering due to the natural disasters that have hit our region. This month, several affected countries in the region will host remembrance ceremonies for the Indian Ocean Tsunami. This is an opportunity to raise public awareness in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond on the importance of building greater resilience to natural disasters, and how we can collectively work to maintain this momentum enhancing our capacities to deal with such catastrophic events.

The 2004 Tsunami led to an unprecedented global outpouring of support, and a key lesson from the human tragedy was the importance of early warning. When the wave struck, early warning systems were inadequate. As a result, many received no warning except the sight of the wall of water rushing towards them. Our region must never again be caught so unprepared.

In the aftermath, the Asia-Pacific region embarked on a collective effort to develop approaches and mechanisms for better early warning systems to reduce the impact of future disasters. These efforts have intensified over the intervening years in Asia and the Pacific, the most disaster-prone region in the world. Building resilience in this region is not an option but an imperative to safeguard and promote sustainable development, lives and livelihoods.

The Indian Ocean Tsunami fundamentally changed how we deal with natural disasters, making a profound impact on policies and budgets as well as operational and technical work. Importantly, the experience of the Tsunami shaped the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), which was adopted in Kobe, Japan, weeks after the disaster.

Real progress has been made in implementing the HFA and building Asia-Pacific resilience. Governance has been strengthened, with more than half of Asia-Pacific countries having enacted legislation and created institutions dealing specifically with disaster risk management. The budgetary allocations for disaster risk and mitigation works have been improved - although this varies across countries. Institutional capacities for early warning, preparedness and response have also been

strengthened, but more must be done. The countries of Asia and the Pacific are redoubling efforts to reinforce implementation capacities, educate vulnerable communities and address underlying risks.

The regional commitment to early warning is reflected in the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation Systems (IOTWS), which became operational in 2011, with Australia, Indonesia and India in charge of issuing regional tsunami bulletins. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) projects that this new system will save an average of 1,000 lives each year for the next 100 years.

On 11 April 2012, an earthquake of magnitude 8.6 off the coast of Indonesia provided a useful test of the IOTWS. Within 10 minutes of the quake, the countries at risk had received bulletins with tsunami warning information from the three regional service providers. In turn, millions of people received warnings and moved rapidly to higher ground. Fortunately no tsunami was triggered that day, but the experience suggests that real progress has been made since 2004.

At the national level, several countries have also made major investments in early warning systems, including setting up state-of-the-art warning centers, which have contributed to the Asia-Pacific region increasingly being considered a global hub for excellence in this field.

The tsunami also led to the creation of innovative funding mechanisms. Thanks to the Royal Thai Government's contribution of US\$ 10 Million, the ESCAP Trust Fund for Tsunami, Disaster and Climate Preparedness was launched in 2005. Pooling resources from multiple donors to strengthen multi-hazard early warning systems, the Trust Fund has supported 26 projects benefitting 19 Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian countries. The Fund supported the establishment of the IOTWS, and has provided targeted support to countries facing high risks, but with limited national capacity.

Despite this progress we must not forget the importance of local level, community-based risk reduction. This "last mile" of early warning systems - the vulnerable communities at risk - remains a critical gap in need of additional attention and resources. It must be a high priority to ensure that the most vulnerable communities receive timely and understandable warnings that they know how to act upon in times of crisis.

So ten years on, how much better prepared is the Asia-Pacific region for a major tsunami? Considerably better than we were in 2004, but the full answer will only be known one day in the future, during the first few hours after a strong earthquake has caused a new tsunami. To prepare for that day, regional cooperation is essential, es-

pecially in early warning, as natural hazards know no borders.

Working together to reduce disaster risk and build resilience is comparable to pushing a big rock uphill together -- if we do not constantly move forward, we risk sliding backwards. It involves developing a culture of preparedness and cooperation across the region, and shifting from a focus on response to a greater emphasis on prevention.

In June this year, the Royal Thai Government hosted the 6th Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction to consolidate the regional voice for a successor HFA agreement. As countries from around the world prepare to meet in Sendai, Japan in March 2015, the Asia-Pacific region will bring our essential lessons and experiences to help shape this new global framework.

Note about the authors.

- Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP). She is also the UN's Sherpa for the G20 and previously served as Governor of the Central Bank of Pakistan and Vice President of the MENA Region of the World Bank.
- General Tanasak Patimapragorn, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand
- Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister for Ministry of Science & Technology and Ministry of Earth Sciences, Republic of India
- Mr. Mahinda Amaraweera, Minister of Disaster Management, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
- Mr. Mohamed Zuhair, Minister of State, Ministry of Defence and National Security, National Disaster Management Centre, Republic of the Maldives
- Dr. Syamsul Maarif, Minister/Chief, National Agency for Disaster Management, Republic of Indonesia

GOLD PRICE, FE RATE (25-12-2014)

Yangon Gold Price

Buying K658,500 per tical: Selling K659,500

Mandalay Gold Price

Buying K658,300 per tical: Selling K659,300

FE RATE

USD Buying K 1035: Selling K----

SGD Buying K 783: Selling K793

Euro Buying K 1,260: Selling K1,280

Dredged drain to benefit 12,000 acres of farmlands



EINME, 25 Dec — Ayeyawady Region Irrigation Department dredged a drain in Einme Township in Ayeyawady Region with the use of two excavators.

Amyotha Hluttaw representative Dr Htay Naing, Pyithu Hluttaw representative U Saw James and Region Hluttaw representative U Mya Than inspected the progress of the works.

The 16-mile-long drain passes through Nyaungwaing, Kangyi, Kalagon and Theekwin villages. Upon completion, the drain will benefit about 12,000 acres of farmlands in cultivation of summer paddy.

Thanks to dredging the drain, its bund can be used by local people as a road.

Aung Min (IPRD)

Aung Min (IPRD)

Trainees under Social Welfare Department participate in dancing entertainment

YANGON, 25 Dec—The dancing entertainment of trainees from training schools under Department of Social Welfare was held at the School for the Girls (Htaukkyant) in Mingaladon Township here on 24 December.

The school's principal, Daw Thein Thein Htwe, explained that the entertainment is aimed at enabling the trainees to have experiences of good relations and cooperation.

Trainees from 11 training schools presented dances at the event. School for the Girls (Htaukkyant) donated stationery to the School for the Deaf.

Daw Aye Aye Yi,
wife of Yangon Region



Trainees of training schools under Department of Social Welfare perform dancing entertainment at the concert.

Minister for Social Affairs
Dr Myint Thein, officials
and family members were

in attendance. The entertainment is being presented at schools in the region from 24 to 31 December.

Min Ye Man
(*Nay Pyi Taw*)

Min Ye Mann
(*Nay Pyi Taw*)

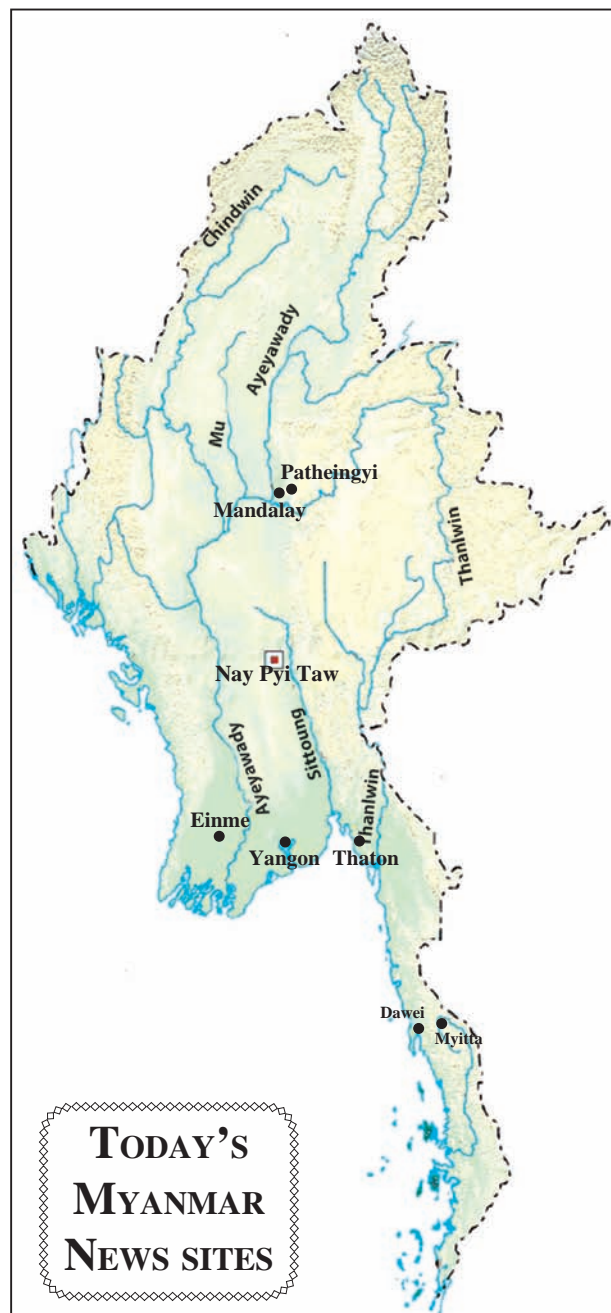
Associations of MFF to hold meetings

YANGON, 25 Dec — Three members of the Myanmar Fisheries Federation – the Myanmar Fish Farmers Association, the Myanmar Freshwater Farmers Association and the Myanmar Aquafeed Association – will

hold their annual general meetings at the hall of the MFF on Bayintnaung Road in Yangon on 28 December.

The associations have invited their members to attend the meetings.

Aung Thura



Officials incinerate expired foods and medical products

MANDALAY, 25 Dec — Mandalay City Development Committee and the Mandalay Region Health Department jointly con-

At the ceremony, officials incinerated expired medical products worth over K13 million, inappropriate personal goods worth over K1 million, ex-

Head of Region Health Department Dr. Than Win, Director of Food and Drug Administration Dr. Tun Zaw and officials of Mandalay City Development Committee and companies reported on preparations for destroying the food-

stuffs and personal goods to Mandalay Region Minister for Development Affairs and Mayor U Aung Moun.

At the ceremony, officials incinerated expired medical products worth over K13 million, inappropriate personal goods worth over K1 million, expired Nestle baby formula worth over K3 million, expired foodstuffs worth over K45 million and inappropriate foods from Nyaungbin, Mingala and Nanshae markets.

Tin Maung
(Mandalay)



BAE wins US Army contract worth up to \$1.2 billion for new armoured vehicle



A union flag flies over the entrance to the naval dockyards, where BAE Systems are also located, in Portsmouth, southern England on 6 Nov, 2013.

REUTERS

WASHINGTON, 25 Dec — BAE Systems (BAES.L) has won a contract worth up to \$1.2 billion (1 billion pounds) to build a new type of armoured vehicle for the US Army, the company and Army officials said on Tuesday.

The British-based defence contractor said in a statement the programme aims to engineer and produce a limited initial number of the vehicles, called the Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicle (AMPV), to replace the Vietnam War-era M113.

The initial 52-month term of the contract, worth about \$383 million, calls for 29 vehicles to be produced among five variants, with an option to follow with 289 more, for a total contract value of \$1.2 billion, BAE said in a statement.

“The AMPV capitalizes on proven Bradley and M109A7 designs, meeting the Army’s force protection and all-terrain mobility requirements while enabling the AMPV to manoeuvre with the rest of the Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT),” the statement said.

Work is expected to start immediately, mainly at the company’s facilities in York, Pennsylvania, and Sterling Heights, Michigan, it said.

The programme was aimed at ultimately replacing 2,897 M113 vehicles, at the brigade and below level, the US Army said in a statement announcing the contract award. It said replacements for another 1,922 M113s supporting Echelons Above Brigade may have different requirements, which had yet to be decided.—Reuters

Tenth Egyptian dies of H5N1 bird flu

CAIRO, 25 Dec — A five-year-old Egyptian child died from bird flu on Wednesday, the tenth death from the virus in the country out of 22 identified cases this year, the Health Ministry said.

Ministry spokesman Dr Hossam Abdel Ghaffar said the boy came to a hospital in the southern province of Aswan on Monday with “fever, sore throat and respiratory distress”.

He was transferred to another hospital, and later put on a ventilator in a third hospital where he died.

His mother said he had contact with sick birds, the spokesman added. Out of the 12 other surviving infected patients, eight have been discharged and four others are still sick in hospital, Abdel Ghaffar said. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), from 2003 to 2 October, 2014, 668 laboratory-confirmed human cases of H5N1 infection have been officially reported by 16 countries. Of these cases, 393 have died.

The WHO has warned that whenever bird flu viruses are circulating in poultry, there is a risk of sporadic infections or small clusters of human cases, especially in people exposed to infected birds or contaminated environments.—Reuters

US minimum wage hikes to affect 1,400-plus Walmart stores

CHICAGO, 25 Dec — Minimum wage increases across the United States will prompt Wal-Mart Stores Inc (WMT.N) to adjust base salaries at 1,434 stores, impacting about a third of its US locations, according to an internal memo reviewed by Reuters. The memo, which was sent to store managers earlier this month, offers insight into the impact of minimum wage hikes in 21 states due to come into effect on or around 1 January, 2015.

These are adjustments that Wal-Mart and other employers have to make each year, but growing attention to the issue has expanded the scope of the change. Thirteen US states lifted the minimum wage in 2014, up from 10 in 2013 and 8 in 2012.

Wal-Mart spokeswoman Brooke Buchanan said the company was making the changes to “ensure our stores in the 21 states comply with the law.”

For Wal-Mart, the biggest private employer in the United States with 1.3 million workers, minimum wage legislation is not a small thing. Its operating model is built on keeping costs under close control as it attracts consumers with low prices and operates on tight margins.

In recent years, it has been struggling to grow sales after many lower-income Americans lost jobs or income in the financial crisis. The Wal-Mart memo shows that there will

be changes to its pay structure, including a narrowing of the gap in the minimum premium paid to those in higher skilled positions, such as deli associates and department supervisors, over lower grade jobs.

Wal-Mart will also combine its lowest three pay grades, which include cashiers, cart pushers and maintenance, into one base rate. The changes appear in part to be an effort to offset the anticipated upswing in labour costs, according to a manager who was implementing the changes at his store.

“Essentially that wage compression at the upper level of the hourly associate is going to help absorb that cost of the wage increase at the lower level,” said the manager, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Wal-Mart’s critics — including a group of its workers backed by labour unions — say the retailer pays its hourly workers too little, forcing some to seek government assistance that effectively provides the company with an indirect taxpayer subsidy. Labour groups have been calling for Wal-Mart, other retailers and fast-food chains to pay at least \$15 an hour.

Wal-Mart has indicated it may make more changes to its compensation structure in 2015. Chief Executive Doug McMillon recently said the company would improve opportunities for workers, including getting the



Customers walk outside a Walmart store in the Porter Ranch section of Los Angeles on 26 Nov, 2013. —REUTERS

roughly 6,000 people who make the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour at its stores off that rate.

“In the world there is a debate over inequity, and sometimes we get caught up in that,” he told TV presenter Charlie Rose in an interview this month. McMillon said he would take

steps to ensure the company is “a meritocracy, an opportunity for people to do more.”

The state minimum wage changes range from a 17 percent increase in South Dakota to \$8.50 to a modest rise of 2 percent to \$8.05 in Arizona. They will also impact many of

Wal-Mart’s big retail rivals, such as Target Corp (TGT.N), and fast-food chains like McDonald’s Corp (MCD.N).

A Target spokeswoman said she could not provide details on how many employees might be impacted by the changes on 1 January. McDonald’s

could not be immediately reached for comment.

Wal-Mart estimates its average full-time hourly wage is \$12.92, and says that it pays competitive wages and offers its employees ample opportunity for advancement.

Edward Jones analyst Brian Yarbrough said it is tough to estimate the cost impact of the minimum wage changes without knowing the number of Wal-Mart employees affected. While many employees might start out at the minimum rate, they advance to higher pay rates over time, he noted.

Wal-Mart said last month that investment in wages and higher health care costs drove a 3.5 percent increase in operating expenses in its most recent quarter. Wal-Mart is unlikely to cut staff or reduce hours to keep those costs in check, given that it has made a renewed push to improve service in its stores, Yarbrough said.

Reuters

CDC worker monitored for possible Ebola exposure in lab error

LOS ANGELES, 25 Dec — A laboratory technician for the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention has been placed under observation for possible exposure to the deadly Ebola virus due to an apparent mix-up in lab specimens, the Atlanta-based agency said on Wednesday.

The technician, who was working on Monday with Ebola specimens that were supposed to have been inactivated but which may instead have contained live virus, will be monitored for signs of infection for 21 days, the disease’s incubation period, CDC officials said.

The error follows two high-profile cases of mis-handled samples of anthrax and avian influenza at the CDC earlier this year that called into question safety practices at the highly respected research institute and drew criticism from Capitol Hill.

CDC spokeswoman

Barbara Reynolds told Reuters the technician’s risk of exposure to Ebola, even if the virus were active, was believed to be low and that the worker was not being quarantined while under observation.

She said a small number of other CDC employees who entered the lab where the samples in question were handled also “were assessed and none require monitoring.”

Reuters

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Scientists one step closer to creating human egg, sperm

WASHINGTON, 25 Dec — Israeli and British researchers said on Wednesday they have successfully used human cells to create primordial germ cells that develop into egg and sperm for the first time.

The study, published in the US journal *Cell*, could help yield insight into fertility problems and early stages of embryonic development and potentially, in the future, enable the development of new kinds of reproductive technology. “Researchers have been attempting to create human primordial germ cells (PGCs) in the petri dish for years,” said Jacob Hanna of Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel, who led the study.

“PGCs arise within the early weeks of embryonic growth, as the embryonic stem cells in the fertilized egg begin to differentiate into the very basic cell types. Once these primordial cells become ‘specified,’ they continue developing toward precursor sperm cells or ova “pretty much on autopilot,” said Hanna.

The idea of creating these cells took off with the 2006 invention of induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells — adult cells that are “reprogrammed” to look and act like embryonic stem cells, which can then differentiate into any cell type.

Several years ago, researchers in Japan successfully got mouse iPS cells to differen-

tiate into PGCs, but efforts to replicate the achievement in human cells have failed.

The researchers found that the mouse embryonic cells are easily kept in their stem cell state in the lab, while human iPS cells have a strong drive to differentiate. In the new study, Hanna’s team created a method to tune down the genetic pathway for this differentiation, thus creating a new type of iPS cell that they dubbed “naive cells.”

These naive cells appeared to rejuvenate iPS cells one step further, closer to the original embryonic state from which they can truly differentiate into any cell type, Hanna said. Together with the lab group of Professor Azim Surani of Cambridge University, the researchers found using this method they were able to convert up to 40 percent of the iPS cells into PGC cells.

Hanna noted that PGCs are only the first step in creating human sperm and ova, but he is confident that it will one day be possible to use the findings to help enable women who have undergone chemotherapy or premature menopause to conceive.

In the meantime, the study has already yielded some interesting results, including a gene known as Sox17 that is critical for directing the iPS cells to become primordial germ cells in humans, but not in mice.

Xinhua

Huawei’s smartphone sales shoot up after copying Xiaomi’s online strategy

BEIJING, 25 Dec — China’s Huawei Technologies Co Ltd [HWT.UL] has taken sales of its low-price Honor brand of smartphones to 20 million from 1 million in just one year, hitting pay dirt with the disruptive online-only strategy it copied from smaller upstart Xiaomi Inc [XTC.UL]. Given the early signs, Huawei executives hope to emulate the phenomenal growth of Xiaomi, which broke into the global top five in just a few years — a success not likely to go unnoticed by the growing ranks of low-cost Chinese smartphone makers.

But analysts say the low-cost strategy has fanned the price wars and thin profit margins prevalent in China, and that its spread could affect margins at all makers.

Honor brand president Jeff Liu said industry transition to an online sales



Journalists attend the presentation of the Huawei’s smartphone, the Ascend P7, launched by China’s Huawei Technologies in Paris on 7 May, 2014. — REUTERS

strategy was inevitable given the competitive pricing, afforded by reduced distribution expenses that would otherwise make up 30 percent of handset costs.

“E-commerce is massively changing the traditional channels for the smartphone industry, and we needed to go in that direction too,” Liu said in an interview in Beijing, where he unveiled the Honor 6

Plus smartphone last week.

Honor handsets dropped the Huawei name last December and have since been marketed and distributed independently of Huawei-branded phones. They are sold in countries ranging from Belgium to Brazil, primarily via marketplaces such as those of JD.com Inc in China and Flipkart Online Services Pvt Ltd in India.—Reuters

German researchers in search of origin of human brain

BERLIN, 25 Dec — Biologists at Heidelberg University announced on Tuesday that nerve cell centralisation does begin in multicellular animals.

While searching for the origin of human brain, Heidelberg researchers gained new insights into the evolution of the central nervous system (CNS) and its highly developed biological structures.

Using certain genes and signal factors, the team led by Prof. Thomas Holstein of the Centre for Organismal Studies demonstrated how the origin of nerve cell cen-

tralisation can be traced back to the diffuse nerve net of simple and original lower animals like the sea anemone.

“This can be considered as the birth of centralisation of the neuronal network on the path to the complex brains of vertebrates,” said Holstein.

The research results also indicate that the origin of a central nervous system is closely linked to the evolution of the body axes, said Holstein.

The results of the research will be published in the journal “*Nature Communications*”.

Xinhua

Facebook must face lawsuit over scanning of users’ messages — judge



People are silhouetted as they pose with laptops in front of a screen projected with a Facebook logo, in this picture illustration taken in Zenica on 29 Oct, 2014. —REUTERS

NEW YORK, 25 Dec — Facebook Inc must face a class action lawsuit accusing it of violating its users’ privacy by scanning the content of messages they send to other users for advertising purposes, a US judge has ruled.

US District Judge

Phyllis Hamilton in Oakland, California, on Tuesday dismissed some state-law claims against the social media company but largely denied Facebook’s bid to dismiss the lawsuit.

Facebook had argued that the alleged scanning of its users’ messages was

covered by an exception under the federal Electronic Communications Privacy Act for interceptions by service providers occurring in the ordinary course of business. But Hamilton said Facebook had “not offered a sufficient explanation of how the challenged practice falls within the ordinary course of its business.” Neither Facebook nor a lawyer for the plaintiffs responded to a request for comment on Wednesday.

The lawsuit, filed in 2013, alleged that Facebook scanned the content of private messages sent between users for links to websites and would then count any links in a tally of “likes” of the pages. Those “likes” were then used

to compile user profiles, which were then used for delivering targeted advertising to its users, the lawsuit said.

The complaint alleged that the scanning of the private messages violated the federal and California state law. According to Tuesday’s ruling, Facebook ceased the practice at issue in October 2012. But the company said it still does some analysis of messages to protect against viruses and spam, the ruling said. The lawsuit was filed by Facebook user Matthew Campbell and seeks class action status on behalf of US users who sent or received private messages that included website addresses in their content.

Reuters

Greek telecoms firm OTE agrees new labour deal that secures jobs



A man walks past a Hellenic Telecom (OTE) branch in central Athens on 6 June, 2011. — REUTERS

ATHENS, 25 Dec — Greece’s largest telecoms operator Hellenic Telecoms (OTE) has signed a new three-year contract with its main labour union, securing 7,000 jobs for the next three years.

OTE, 40 percent-owned and managed by Germany’s Deutsche Telekom, said on Wednesday it had committed not to lay off any employees

at its fixed-line operations before the end of 2017.

The agreement keeps wages unchanged at 2012 levels until the end of 2017 and maintains a reduced working week.

As part of a previous labour deal in 2011, OTE introduced a 35-hour working week, which meant an average 11 percent wage cut, to avoid layoffs.

Greece’s debt crisis, and the austerity imposed by EU/IMF lenders following a bailout, wiped out about a quarter of the economy, driving the jobless rate to record highs.

The new 2015-2017 labour deal also introduces a 755 euro (\$920) a month entry salary for new hirings, much higher than the average minimum wage in the Greek private sector.

OTE, which has been facing tough competition from smaller rivals, said the new deal would help it to become more flexible and continue its investments.

The company is saving more than 160 million euros annually after more than 3,000 people took up two voluntary departure schemes since 2012.

Reuters

Greek government keeps eye on elections as crucial vote nears



Greece's Prime Minister Antonis Samaras looks on during the second of three rounds of a presidential vote at the Greek parliament in Athens on 23 Dec, 2014.

REUTERS

ATHENS, 25 Dec — Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras may have expressed hopes that parliament will elect a new president next Monday and avert the threat of snap elections, but politicians on all sides are already preparing for a possible campaign next month.

In the second round of voting on Tuesday, the government's candidate Stavros Dimas got with-

in 12 votes of the 180 he will need to be elected next Monday, an improvement on his disappointing first round score.

But the numbers remain tight and if Dimas falls short, new elections will have to be held by early February, potentially bringing in the leftwing Syriza party and throwing the future of talks to wind up Greece's international bailout into doubt.

"There's a last chance for parties and lawmakers to be convinced a president must be elected, but it's difficult," said Deputy Development Minister Odysseas Konstantinopoulos.

Already parties are preparing for an election campaign which would start the moment it became clear on Monday that the three-fifths majority Dimas needs to be elected was out of reach.

Syriza says it wants elections as soon as possible and is ready for power. It still holds a lead in opinion polls but its advantage has narrowed steadily in recent months. A Public Issue poll last week gave the party a 7-point lead, down from 11 points in September.

Dimitris Mavros, head of Athens polling institute MRB, said a high-stakes game of chess was underway. "The government is mathematically forced to target both the King and the Queen: to elect a pres-

ident or get elected itself," he said.

Officials say the government will play up the risks of Syriza derailing the bailout that Greece still needs to keep afloat, with an eye on both Monday's vote and a possible election campaign.

Both Samaras' centre-right New Democracy Party and junior coalition partner PASOK said initial election preparations had started although they still aimed to win the presidential vote.

"New Democracy has been preparing for elections for the past 48 hours but our main target is first of all to elect a president," said the deputy, who declined to be named. Samaras, who appeared more optimistic after the second round ballot, aims to win over the 12 votes he needs from independents and two small parties considered unlikely to re-enter parliament after any snap election.—Reuters

NUNS: 22 attacks on journalists in Serbia this year

BELGRADE, 25 Dec — Over the course of 2014, there have been 22 attacks on journalists in Serbia, 12 of which were physical assaults, which indicates a deterioration in media workers' position, shows the annual report by the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS).

At a Press conference during which the report was presented, NUNS representatives noted that the authorities are not working enough to ensure conditions for journalists' normal work.

They underscored that journalists are exposed to numerous economic and political pressures, and warned of a rise in self-censorship because those who carry out attacks on media professionals are not punished. NUNS President Vukasin Obradovic said that, besides the assaults, journalists are also faced with other pressures: lawsuits, removal of certain content from the Internet, certain websites have been downed, shows put off air as it was the case with "Im-

pression of the Week" that previously ran on TV B92. Noting that six lawsuits have been filed against journalists in 2014, Obradovic said that three lawsuits were lodged by the people "with a large criminal dossier", including Luka Bojovic (sentenced to 18 years in prison in Spain).

Obradovic noted that in the period from 2008 to 2013, a total of 348 attacks on media professionals happened in Serbia, and signaled that the NUNS will continue to caution against possible attacks, inform the public how many of those accountable have been brought to justice, and whose is responsible for a halt in certain cases.

The presentation of the NUNS report brought together Ombudsman Sasa-Jankovic, Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection Rodoljub Sabic, former Supreme Court judge Zorana Ivosevic and Assistant Minister of Culture and Information Sasa Mirkovic.

Tanjug

Selected works of former Vietnamese party chief published in Chinese language

HANOI, 25 Dec — Selected works of former General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) Le Kha Phieu was published in Chinese language by the publishing houses from China and Vietnam on Wednesday in capital Hanoi.

Speaking at the launching of his works, Le Kha Phieu said currently, there are many Chinese books translated into Vietnamese language and published in Vietnam, however, the number of Vietnamese books translated into Chinese language is still small.

Phieu expressed his hope that there will be more Vietnamese works to be translated into Chinese language in the future, which is expected to contribute to promote bilateral relations between the two countries.

Summarizing the history and tradition of the friendship between the two communist parties and the two countries, Phieu believed the bilateral ties will

sail through the difficulties emerging recently, while calling attention to the stirring and sabotaging activities from "some external forces". Liu Sanzhen, Cultural Counselor of Chinese Embassy in Vietnam said Le Kha Phieu acted as the CPV's General Secretary during Vietnam's reform and opening up period and his experience in governing and revolution is valuable spiritual wealth. China and Vietnam have the same social system and are both developing countries in the period of modernization with many experiences that can learn from each other.

Based on this consensus, with the efforts of both Chinese and Vietnamese sides, the Selected works of Le Kha Phieu was finally submitted to publication, Liu said.

The Selected works of Le Kha Phieu is published in Vietnamese and Chinese, comprising Le Kha Phieu's 26 articles.

Xinhua

More than 160 villagers infected with HIV in northwest Cambodia

PHNOM PENH, 25 Dec — The number of villagers tested positive for HIV in a remote Roka commune in northwest Cambodia's Battambang Province has exceeded 160, a local official confirmed on Thursday.

Roka commune's deputy chief Soeun Chhom said three villages in the commune have been hit by the outbreak, which officials have pinned blame on an unlicensed doctor, Yem Chrin, who allegedly used unsterilized needles and reused syringes on patients. "In Roka village, 143 peo-

ple tested positive for HIV, in Ambeng Thnge village, more than 20 tested positive, and in Taken Muoy village, two children tested positive," he told Xinhua over telephone.

Soeun Chhom, who has been collecting signatures and thumbprints from those who tested positive for a compilation of an official data, said all the victims used to receive medical injections from the suspected doctor.

The Battambang Provincial Court on Monday charged 56-year-old Yem

Chrin, who was arrested last week, with "murder with cruel act", which could face life imprisonment if convicted. "We accused him of intentionally spreading HIV, conducting murder with cruel act, and doing medical business without a license from the Ministry of Health," a court's prosecutor Nuon San said on Monday. Residents in the commune have flocked to a commune health center to have their blood tested since 8 December after a 74-year-old man, who tested positive for HIV in

November, alerted others who used to receive medical injections from the suspected doctor to get tested. Cambodia launched a full probe into the mass HIV infections last Thursday. So far, no any information has been released by the investigation team, which comprises the experts of the Cambodian Health Ministry, the World Health Organization, the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, UNAIDS, and Pasteur Institute in Cambodia.

Xinhua

Methane hydrate extracted in Sea of Japan off northern Japan

TOKYO, 25 Dec — The Japanese government has succeeded in extracting samples of a next-generation resource called methane hydrate from the seabed in the Sea of Japan off northern Japan, the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy said on Thursday.

Researchers conducted drilling surveys and were able to obtain samples of the "fiery ice" under the ocean floor off Niigata Pre-

fecture north of Tokyo as well as the two northern Japan prefectures of Akita and Yamagata. The samples collected were up to 1 meter thick.

The agency, an arm of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, will continue its three-year survey through fiscal 2015 on methane hydrate — an ice-like substance consisting of methane and water — and aims to assess the amount

of reserves in the Sea of Japan. The agency also said geological structures suggesting possible reserves of the natural gas were found at 746 locations in Japanese coastal waters as a result of the latest sonic survey covering some 20,000 square kilometres. That comes on top of the 225 locations found during the last fiscal year that ended in March.

It is estimated that methane hydrate worth

100 years of supply of natural gas exists in Japanese coastal waters, and resource-poor Japan has been keen on exploring the reserves. But technology to extract methane hydrate has yet to be fully developed. There are also concerns about environmental damage that could be caused by the process of extraction, partially because methane is a greenhouse gas.

Kyodo News

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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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A tourist stands in front of the Tsunami memorial in Pereliya on 20 Dec, 2014.—REUTERS

Out of tragedy, fortune for Sri Lankan tsunami village

SEENIGAMA, (Sri Lanka), 25 Dec — As towering waves came crashing into the southern coast of Sri Lanka on 26 December, 2004, Kushil Gunasekera gathered up his children and they ran for their lives to a nearby temple, the highest point they could find.

Returning later to his village in Seenigama district, he found a heart-breaking scene of death and devastation: one in four had been killed by the Boxing Day tsunami that swept across the Indian Ocean.

A decade on, Seenigama has risen from the ashes and is now a model of prosperity, thanks in large part to the efforts of Gunasekera who led a relief drive from the ruins of his ancestral home and later gave up his lucrative sugar business to devote himself to a charity he had founded in 1999.

Seenigama is an outlier, however, along the ravaged coastline. Tourists have returned to the palm-fringed beaches but livelihoods still hang by a thread

in many villages that got scant assistance from the state.

In nearby Pereliya village — where more than 1,500 people perished, most of them passengers on a train that was hurled off its tracks as the waves rolled in — many feel abandoned and angry.

“Nothing has changed in our lives,” said G Premalal, a fisherman at Pereliya beach where the government has erected a granite monument to the tsunami dead. “We have low quality houses. A lot of money was donated for us, but it was not distributed equally. Some got richer and richer because of the tsunami money, while others simply became poorer.”

More than 250,000 people died in the tsunami, which was triggered by a 9.0-magnitude earthquake off the coast of Indonesia's Sumatra island.

Indonesia bore the brunt, but Sri Lanka was the next worst-affected country with a death toll of about 40,000.

Seenigama, about 110 km (70 miles) south of the island nation's capital, Colombo, was hit particularly hard by the tsunami because reefs that might have shielded it had been destroyed by years of coral mining.

Years before the disaster, Gunasekera had started his Foundation of Goodness non-governmental organization to generate alternative livelihoods for the coral miners. But the tsunami, which wrecked thousands of houses and schools, presented him with a much bigger challenge.

“Waves of compassion”

Seven photographs are propped up on a table in the front hall of D Karunawathi's house, a reminder of the family members she lost in the tsunami, including her mother, sister, daughter-in-law and grand-daughter. None of their bodies were found.

“Yes, we lost lives,” says 60-year-old Karunawathi from her robust two-storey house. “But we

got a permanent home.”

But Gunasekera's project went far beyond bricks and mortar.

Leaning on his own charisma and connections, including some of Sri Lanka's best-known cricketers, Gunasekera brought together villagers, volunteers and donors, ploughing financial assistance into long-term projects to build a comprehensive and sustainable model of community development.

The project now provides free services for more than 25,000 people, ranging from healthcare to vocational training and a sports academy for the young that has already produced two national-level cricketers.

On the day of the disaster, Pulina Tharanga had set out for a school cricket match with a pair of shoes that his mother had bought for 2,000 rupees (\$15), money she had earned selling rice noodles over several months. When he returned she was dead.

“She had asked me

not to play cricket because she couldn't afford it,” said Tharanga, who played for Sri Lanka's junior national team in the 2012 World Cup in Brisbane, Australia.

The Foundation of Goodness village project, which costs about \$1 a year, depends heavily on foreign donors. The academy's cricket ground was financed by England's

Surrey Cricket Club and a swimming pool was funded by Canadian rock singer Bryan Adams.

“We harness waves of compassion to overcome waves of destruction and rebuild better,” Gunasekera told *Reuters*. “When a tragedy like that happens, you can't reverse it. You need to look ahead and stay positive.”—*Reuters*

WEATHER REPORT

BAY INFERENCE: Weather is cloudy in the South Bay and partly cloudy in the Andaman Sea and elsewhere in the Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL EVENING OF THE 26th December, 2014: Weather will be partly cloudy in Taninthayi Region and Mon State and generally fair in the remaining Regions and States.

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Lea Michele's version of 'Let It Go' for 'Glee' to release

glee

LOS ANGELES, 25 Dec — Actress-singer Lea Michele's version of 'Let It Go' will be released during the upcoming sixth and final season of musical TV series 'Glee'. The original 'Let It Go' peaked at No 5 on Billboard Hot 100 and won the Best Original Song Award at the Oscars earlier this year, reported *Ace Showbiz*.

It's performed by Broadway star Idina Menzel, who happens to play the estranged mother of Michele's character on the FOX dramedy.

Many have said before that Michele and Menzel have very similar vocal styles. The 28-year-old actress' cover of the now-classic tune is just another proof.

The new season of 'Glee' will premiere on 9 January.

PTI

Jackie Chan says feels ashamed of son's drug abuse



Hong Kong actor Jaycee Chan

BEIJING, 25 Dec — Hong Kong kung fu movie star Jackie Chan feels ashamed of his son's drug abuse and hopes that one day he will speak out about the dangers of taking drugs, state news agency *Xinhua* reported.

Jaycee Chan was formally charged with a drugs offense this week, meaning he is almost certain to face trial.

The younger Chan, a 32-year-old actor and singer, was arrested in Beijing this year after testing positive for marijuana, with police saying they found 100 grams of the drug at his home.

"I hope that in the future, he could become an anti-drug spokesman and tell his experiences to young people," Jackie Chan told *Xinhua*, in comments released late on Wednesday. Chan also said that he never used any of his connections to help his son out, the report added.

In August, his father offered the public a "deep bow of apology" for his son's arrest.

Action and comedy star Jackie Chan, 60, served as a goodwill spokesman for the China National Anti-Drug Committee in 2009, state media reported, promoting anti-drug education.

China has detained a string of other mostly B-list celebrities in recent months on drug-related charges, cases that have been publicized widely in both state and social media. They have included movie and television stars, film directors and a prominent screenwriter.

Drug crimes carry harsh penalties in China including death or life imprisonment in serious cases.

Illegal drugs, especially synthetic substances like methamphetamine, ketamine and ecstasy, have grown in popularity in China in tandem with the rise of a new urban class with greater disposable income.—*Reuters*

Taylor Swift's '1989' reclaims top of US Billboard 200 chart



Singer Taylor Swift performs at Z100's Jingle Ball 2014 at Madison Square Garden in New York on 12 Dec, 2014.—*REUTERS*

LOS ANGELES, 25 Dec — Taylor Swift's album "1989" reclaimed the top spot on the US Billboard 200 chart on Wednesday, besting rapper Nicki Minaj's new release "The Pinkprint."

"1989" has been atop the chart for six of its eight weeks in release. It sold 331,000 album copies, 433,000 songs and no streams, totalling 375,000 sales units, according to figures from Nielsen SoundScan.

Swift, 25, is one of a handful of top artists currently protesting some streaming sites like the popular Spotify.

The revamped Billboard 200 now counts 10 songs as equal to one album unit, while 1,500 online streams equals one album unit.

The new formula unveiled this month is an effort to better represent cur-

rent music consumption, Billboard said. Album sales have been in steady decline with the rise of individual song downloads and Internet streaming. Backed by No 1 hit "Shake It Off," "1989" has so far sold a total of 3.4 million copies, making it the second-best selling album of this year.

Minaj's "The Pinkprint" debuted at No 2 with 244,000 total sales units while D'Angelo and the Vanguard's "Black Messiah", the R&B singer's first album in 14 years, entered the chart at No 5 with 117,000 total sales units.

Last week's top album, J Cole's "2014 Forest Hills Drive" dropped to No 4 with 135,000 total sales units.

A cappella quintet Pentatonix held at No 3 with "That's Christmas to Me" registering 214,000 total sales units.

Reuters

Bradley Cooper sets high targets in new film 'American Sniper'

NEW YORK, 25 Dec — Actor Bradley Cooper is quick to say that "American Sniper," his film about Navy Seal sharpshooter Chris Kyle, is not about the Iraq conflict but an intimate character study of the harrowing impact of war on a soldier and his family. The dual Academy Award nominee, who is also a producer of the film, directed by Clint Eastwood, had planned to collaborate with Kyle to bring his story to the big screen.

But Kyle, a former rodeo rider, survivor of four tours in Iraq and the most lethal sniper in Navy history, was murdered near his Texas home by a disgruntled veteran before the two had a chance to meet.

"It is a movie about what someone like Chris,

a soldier, has to go through and the dilemma and the horror of it and the battle internally and with the family," Cooper said about the film that opens on limited release on Christmas day and nationwide on 16 January.

Although Cooper never met Kyle, his wife gave the actor access to personal emails the couple had exchanged during his tours in Iraq and family videos that he found invaluable in finding the essence of the man.

"She opened up her life. We didn't have to create anything with our imagination, literally nothing. All we had to do was soak in what she gave us," Cooper, a best actor nominee for "American Hustle" and "Silver Linings Playbook," told a news conference.—*Reuters*

Lupita Nyong'o writes poem to honour her Oscar-winning year

LOS ANGELES, 25 Dec — Actress Lupita Nyong'o has penned a poem to remember the year gone by as she won her first Oscar for a supporting role in '12 Years a Slave'.

The 31-year-old actress recognized her journey in an Instagram post early this week, reported *Us* magazine.

"This year was one of a kind, she began. And a kind one to me. There was lots to be done. And a whole lot to see. I had family and friends, and colleagues galore, now I have fans, plus a million and four!

"You tweet and you post. And you instagram too. You chat, comment, draw. You just do what you do. And though I don't answer 'Cause time is a-tickin', Know that you matter. By the posts that I'm pickin'. I keep posting 'Cause I know that you care, And I care to post. When I know that you're there," she writes.

During 2014, the actress landed on nearly countless magazine covers, was named a Woman of the Year by *Glamour*, was nominated for a bevy of awards including the Golden Globe, and booked ad campaigns with Miu Miu and Lancome.—*PTI*



Lupita Nyong'o

GENERAL

Divac hits from half-court, donates USD 90,000 winnings

LOS ANGELES, 25 Dec — Famous Serbian basketball player Vlade Divac showed at a recent game between his former team the Los Angeles Lakers and the Golden State Warriors that he still has great skill, despite retiring 9 years ago.

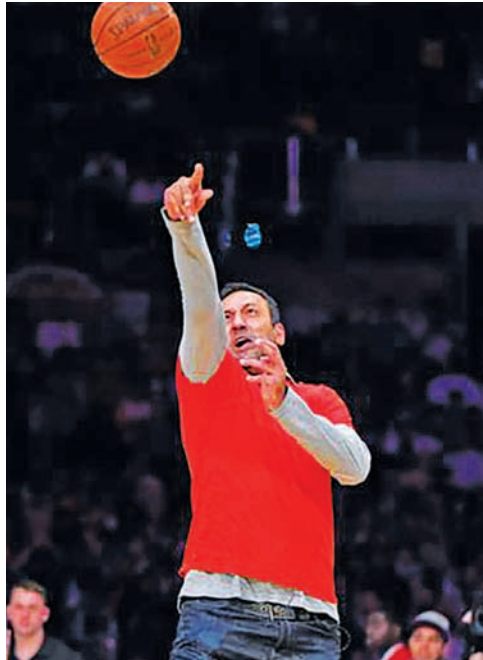
He was welcomed by cheers from the crowd at the Staples Center and took part in a charity competition during the 3rd quarter intermission, when he hit a half-court shot.

This won him USD 90,000, which he donated to charity. After scoring the shot, Divac went to where Hollywood star Jack Nickolson was seated.

Divac, who is currently the head of the Serbian Olympic Committee, is one of the most famous Europeans to play in the NBA.

He started his career in the LA Lakers, for whom he played from 1989 to 19996 and again in the 2004-2005 season.

Tanjung



Tokyo to train 35,000 language aides for visitors by 2020 Olympics

TOKYO, 25 Dec — The Tokyo metropolitan government said on Thursday it will appoint 35,000 foreign language volunteers by March 2020 to help foreign visitors get around the capital as part of its preparations for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics.

The plan is part of Tokyo's long-term vision goals through 2024, aimed at successfully staging the

Summer Games in 2020 and enhancing development into the future.

From fiscal 2015, which starts in April, Tokyo will offer practical English training to prospective volunteers, awarding the role to those who pass a test after four or five lessons, each two to three hours long.

On language education, the long-term vision calls for the establishment of

an "English village" providing a full immersion environment for students from elementary to high school level. Through these efforts, Tokyo authorities hope to secure a base of 10,000 people who can be involved in helping visitors with transport and tourism during the Olympics.

Other projects in the 10-year vision include the establishment within fiscal

2015 of an "air hyper rescue" unit within the Tokyo Fire Department's helicopter division, equipped to rescue large numbers of people in the event of high-rise building fires or a direct-hit earthquake beneath the capital. The vision also includes numerical targets for hydrogen stations for fuel cell vehicles, childcare and facilities for the elderly.—Kyodo News

S Korean online bookstore honours Japanese writer Keigo Higashino

SEOUL, 25 Dec — South Korea's major online bookstore Interpark has selected Japan's Keigo Higashino as this year's top writer based on volume of books sold and votes by readers choosing from authors both in and out of the country.

The bookstore describes him as "brilliant storyteller who picks up unexpected story subjects and flavours them at will," naming "Namiya Zakkaten-no Kiseki"

(The miracle of Namiya general store) as representative of his work.

His "The Hovering Blade" and "The Devotion of Suspect X" have been made into movies in South Korea. The Golden Book award, also picked by sales and votes, went to "The 100-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared" by Sweden's Jonas Jonasson.

Kyodo News

MYANMAR TV

(26-12-2014, Friday)

- 6:00 am**
- * Paritta by Venerable Mingun Sayadaw
- 6:40 am**
- * Song & Dance of National Races
- 7:00 am**
- * News / Weather Report
- 7:20 am**
- * Hyper Sports
- 8:35 am**
- * TV Drama Series
- 9:00 am**
- * News International News
- 10:20 am**
- * Documentary (Road to Academy 2013) (Part- 5 & 6)
- 12:00 noon**
- * News/ International News / Weather Report
- 2:30 pm**
- * Documentary
- 4:40 pm**
- * University of Distance Education (TV Lectures) — Third Year (Chemistry)
- 5:15 pm**
- * TV Drama Series
- 6:40 pm**
- * Amazing World
- 8:00 pm**
- * News International News / Weather Report
- 8:35 pm**
- * People Talks
- 9:00 pm**
- * News
- 9:30 pm**
- * Documentary Socio Economic Scenes

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MYANMAR INTERNATIONAL

(26-12-14 07:00 am~ 27-12-14 07:00 am) MST

- * Local News
- * MUUN (Episode - II)
- * World News
- * Temple Stalls
- * Local News
- * The Richly Blessed Gem Land
- * World News
- * My Life & My Art
- * Local News
- * Myanmar Traditional Wedding Dress
- * World News
- * Kyauk Phyu "Special Economic Zone"
- * Local News
- * Herbal Medicine by Thurein (Aloe Vera)
- * World News
- * In the Studio: Ja Som (The Myth)
- * Local News
- * History and Mystery Behind the Caves
- * World News
- * Myanmar Chef (Japanese)
- * Local News
- * Making of Nawarat Rings
- * World News
- * Modifying Natural Thanakha Bark into Ready-Made Skin Care Product
- * Local News
- * Myanmar Maga Factory (Ep - 4)
- * World News
- * Sagaing Guitar
- * Local News
- * Natural Lake: Fish Breeding Business
- * World News
- * The Photographer (Portiature) "Aung Kyaw Moe"

Cambodian peacekeepers return home after one-year mission in Lebanon

PHNOM PENH, 25 Dec — The 4th batch of 184 Cambodian troops arrived home safely on Thursday after completing their one-year United Nations' peacekeeping mission in Lebanon.

The group was welcomed by Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Tea Banh and Wan-Hea Lee, representative of the United Nations Development Programme to Cambodia, as well as their family members at the Military Airbase. Tea Banh said the humanitarian mission in Lebanon had built reputation and prestige not only for the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces, but also for the Cambodian people. "This time is the same as the previous ones — the number of the returnees is the

same as the number of goers, it is a successful mission," he said.

Wan-Hea Lee said their work shone a light on Cambodia's commitment to peace, security and friendship.

"These are the very values at the core of the United Nations, which was set up to save future generations from the scourge of war," she said. "Your sharing of skills and experience with countries enduring conflict and instability is a source of pride and inspiration."

During the mission in Lebanon, the peacekeepers had cleared landmines, constructed roads, bridges, barracks and military shelters, and provided medical treatment to Lebanese civilians.

Xinhua

Zola named coach for Italy Serie A side Cagliari, replacing Zemen

ROME, 25 Dec — Gianfranco Zola will be the new coach of Serie A side Cagliari, replacing Dzenek Zemen, who was sacked this week after two wins in 16 matches left them in the relegation zone, the club said on Wednesday.

"Welcome back, Gianfranco," the club said on its website announcing the appointment of Zola, who previously played for the Italian club as well as English Premier League side Chelsea.

The 67-year-old Zemen, a Czech, took charge of Cagliari in July but the Sardinians have not won a home league game in this campaign and sit 18th, with only Cesena and Parma below them. Zeman was fired by AS Roma last February following a disastrous



nine months in charge that saw the club lose nine times in 23 games, leaving them languishing mid-table.—Reuters

Gianfranco Zola (R) at Wembley Stadium in London on 27 May, 2013. —REUTERS

Martinez will not waver from purist style

LONDON, 25 Dec — Everton manager Roberto Martinez's deeply-ingrained belief in how his teams should play football has earned the Spaniard many plaudits since starting out on his managerial journey in England.

A fifth-placed finish in the Premier League last season, when many believed Everton deserved a place in the Champions League, had many suggesting he would land one of the biggest jobs in England or Spain in the not too distant future.

Yet, as the Christmas programme looms, the goodwill he enjoyed at Goodison Park last season is in short supply.

Eleventh in the Premier League and 13 points worse off than they were this time last year, Everton have regressed and their fans were angry after last Saturday's 3-0 loss at



Everton manager Roberto Martinez watches before their English Premier League soccer match against Tottenham Hotspur at White Hart Lane in London on 30 Nov, 2014. —REUTERS

Southampton.

If they expect the 41-year-old Catalan to rip up his philosophy of intelligent, passing football and opt for a more direct approach, however, they will be disappointed.

After all, he never wavered while establishing the blueprint for Swansea City's rise up the leagues,

nor while fighting against top flight relegation with modest Wigan Athletic.

"It's not about styles, that doesn't guarantee you results," Martinez, whose side have reached the last 32 of the Europa League, said on Wednesday.

"But our style is very clear here at Everton, we are a football club that

enjoy playing in a certain manner and we need to master it. That's where the work is."

Martinez's faith in what he is doing appears as strong as ever and despite an inconsistent season, he is confident Everton can challenge for a top four place in the New Year.

"We haven't been able to be consistent with our results in the league," he said. "It was the first time in the aspect of our performance at Southampton that we let ourselves down.

"I'm not concerned in terms of the performance. We are better this season in many aspects. It is a really exciting season because playing in Europe and other competitions gives you an extra dimension. "We can look to the second half of the season and see how we can bridge that gap. I don't think the fourth place is gone."—Reuters

Redknapp confident QPR can stay up and keep Austin



Queens Park Rangers' Charlie Austin reacts after missing a chance to score during their English Premier League soccer match against Manchester City at Loftus Road in London on 8 Nov, 2014. —REUTERS

LONDON, 25 Dec — Queens Park Rangers' leading scorer Charlie Austin will not be sold in the January transfer window but his future depends on the club staying in the Premier League, manager Harry Redknapp said on Wednesday. The 25-year-old Austin, whose 11 goals so far this season make him the league's top English scorer, has 18 months to run on his contract. "He's not going anywhere in January. He's here and it's up to Charlie and everyone else. I'm sure we want to keep him long term," Redknapp told reporters ahead of Friday's Arsenal trip.

"But it's like everything, we've got to stay in the division this year, which I'm confident we will do, and Charlie's proved that he's a Premier League player.

"He wants to play in the Premier League for the rest of his career if he can. He's got to keep scoring goals, that's all he's got to do." Rangers have yet to earn a point away this term but 17 home points have lifted them out of the drop zone into 16th place.

They will be without South Korean left-back Yun Suk-Young, a stalwart this season who has been ruled out until the New Year with an ankle injury, for the match at sixth-placed Arsenal.

Redknapp has said QPR are more likely to seek loan deals in the window than to buy players, despite former England striker Jermain Defoe reportedly being eager to link up again with the ex-West Ham United, Portsmouth and Tottenham Hotspur manager.—Reuters

Former world number two Steve Stricker has back surgery

NEW YORK, 25 Dec — Steve Stricker, a 12-time winner on the PGA Tour, has undergone back surgery the American golfer said in a statement on Wednesday.

Stricker had the procedure at a Wisconsin hospital on Tuesday after being hampered by a compressed nerve in his lower back that has caused problems in his hips and legs.

"I'm very excited to

get back to practising and competing in 2015 and expect to be 100 percent physically which really excites me," said Stricker said in a statement.

The 47-year-old does not have a specific target date for a return to competition.

Stricker, who reached as high as second in the world rankings, currently is ranked 41st.

Reuters



Steve Stricker of the US hits off the second tee during the third round of the 2014 PGA Championship at Valhalla Golf Club in Louisville, Kentucky on 9 Aug, 2014. —REUTERS

Khedira would be happy to extend Real Madrid contract



Real Madrid's Sami Khedira (L) and Toni Kroos attend a training session at Valdebebas training grounds, outside Madrid on 5 Aug, 2014. —REUTERS

MADRID, 25 Dec — Germany midfielder Sami Khedira has indicated he would be happy to extend his contract with Real Madrid beyond June 2015 if an agreement can be reached.

Khedira, whose season has been disrupted by injuries, is not a first-choice starter under coach Carlo Ancelotti, with Germany team mate Toni Kroos, Croatia international Luka

Modric and Spain playmaker Isco all ahead in the pecking order.

Media reports have speculated Khedira could move to Bayern Munich and that several English clubs including Arsenal, where his close friend Mesut Ozil plays, are also interested in securing his services.

Khedira, who joined Real from VfB Stuttgart in 2010, told Germany's Stuttgarter Nachrichten he was back to a good level of fitness and hopeful he would see more playing time.

"If we can find a solution I am happy," he said about his contract situation.

"I am a friend of strong competition. He (Kroos) is doing things outstandingly well and after six months is already a focal point of our play."—Reuters

Balotelli not suited to Liverpool's style, says Rodgers

LIVERPOOL, 25 Dec — Mario Balotelli will return to Liverpool's squad for the festive programme but manager Brendan Rodgers was hardly effusive in his praise of the Italy's striker's credentials on Wednesday.

The 24-year-old Balotelli has struggled to make an impact at Anfield since his 16 million pounds move from AC Milan in August, managing two goals in 15 games.

His off-field antics have also made the headlines and he was fined 25,000 pounds and banned for last weekend's 2-2 draw with Arsenal after posting an offensive message on social media.

At his pre-match news conference Rodgers welcomed mercurial Balotelli's return for a busy holiday programme, starting with a trip to lowly Burn-

ley on Friday, but suggested the former Manchester City player is not suited to Liverpool's style.

"We've seen that it is not really his game, Rodgers said, referring to the high-pressing approach that worked so well with Luis Suarez and Daniel Sturridge in tandem last season.

"Working with Mario, we've seen that he is someone who is better in and around the box. That level of pressing and intensity is not part of his game.

"But you try to make the best out of the players you have, and the qualities that they have. That's something we will focus on.

"The most important thing is that he's now available after his ban. It adds another player to our squad, which is impor-

tant especially with Fabio Borini now suspended."

Liverpool are 10th and though they got one point in their last two games — a defeat at Manchester United and a home draw with Arsenal — they are starting to recapture the verve of last season when

they were pipped to the title by Manchester City.

Holiday fixtures against Burnley, Rodgers' former club Swansea City and struggling Leicester City, offer Liverpool the chance to start making up lost ground.

Reuters



Liverpool's Mario Balotelli reacts during their English Premier League soccer match against Hull City at Anfield in Liverpool, northern England on 25 Oct, 2014. —REUTERS