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# CONSERVATION WINS BIG

## Inle Lake becomes Myanmar's first UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

MYANMAR has opened a new chapter in its commitment to biodiversity and ecosystem conservation by launching the country's first UNESCO Biosphere Reserve at Inle Lake on 4 December.

Inle Lake was designated as Myanmar's first Biosphere Reserve under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme at the 27<sup>th</sup> Session of the MAB International Coordinating Council meetings at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris in June 2015.

UNESCO has worked closely with the Myanmar Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry (MoECAF) to provide technical assistance for the nomination process of Inle Lake in collaboration with UNDP and with generous funding from the Government of Norway under the framework of the Inle lake Conservation and Rehabilitation Project.

In his opening remarks at the ceremony, U Aye Myint Maung, Deputy Union Minister of Environmental Conservation and Forestry said the designation of Inle Lake as UNESCO Biosphere Reserve has "opened a new chapter in our endeavour, determination and commitment to conserve biodiversity and ecosystem services in harmonisation with livelihood development."

H.E. Ann Ollestad, Norway's ambassador to Myanmar, congratulated Inle Lake communities



A fisherman prepares his fishing net while rowing with his leg on Inle Lake, which has been named Myanmar's first UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, in Nyaungshwe Township, Shan State. PHOTO: AYE MIN SOE

and stakeholders on this landmark achievement and stressed the importance of all stakeholders pulling in the same direction with trust, cooperation and coordination for environmental sustainability, a subject which has received much

attention from the government and multiple political parties.

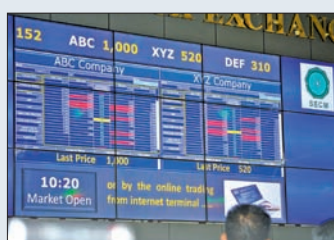
Dr Shahbaz Khan, director of UNESCO's Regional Science Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, noted in his keynote address that the Inle Lake Biosphere Reserve,

endorsed by the 195 member countries of UNESCO, reaffirms Myanmar's strong commitment to environmental conservation, biodiversity preservation and sustainable development. Addressing the future, he highlighted the need for

innovative technical and eco-technological solutions, which are key for preserving the lake, along with education and research activities through an inclusive management framework for the lake.

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## Committee appointed to manage power transfer

PRESIDENT U Thein Sein met National League for Democracy Chairperson Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at his office on 2 December to discuss plans for a smooth transfer of state responsibility and exchange views on setting an example of a systematic handover of power as part of the country's transition to democracy.

The government has formed a support committee to help facilitate the handover, with Union Minister U Hla Tun as chairman and Information Union Minister U Ye Htut, Director General of the President's Office U Hla Tun, Deputy Director General of the Ministry of Construction U Maung Maung Ohn and Director of the

President's Office U Zaw Htay as members.

The NLD has also assigned its Central Executive Committee members U Win Htein and Dr Myo Aung and former rector of Yangon University Dr Aung Thu to help coordinate the transition in conjunction with the government's support committee.—Myanmar News Agency

# Myanmar Parliamentary Union holds meeting



Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann presides over meeting of Myanmar Parliamentary Union. PHOTO: MNA

THE meeting of the Myanmar Parliamentary Union was held at the Hluttaw Building in Nay Pyi Taw on Thursday.

Chairmen of the Myanmar Parliamentary Union and Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw-Thura U Shwe Mann delivered a speech at the meeting.

He said that representatives at the current parliaments have

done as much as they have been able to and hopes that future representatives will be able to ameliorate by taking lessons from the current parliaments.

Vice chairman of the MPU, Speaker of the Amyotha Hluttaw U Khin Aung Myint urged representative to hand over duties to future representative systematically and efficiently.

Present at the meeting were Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Thura U Shwe Mann, Speaker of Amyotha Hluttaw U Khin Aung Myint, speakers of state/region Hluttaws, Chairperson of Pyithu Hluttaw Rule of Law and Tranquility Committee Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and representatives.—*Myanma News Agency*

## Meeting on holding second Hluttaw sessions held

THE Meeting on holding the first sessions of the Second Hluttaw was held at the Hluttaw Building on Thursday.

Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Thura U Shwe Mann spoke on the occasion.

In his speech, he said that the term of the current Hluttaws will expire on 30th January, and

arrangements should be made for the second Hluttaw sessions. Authorities are responsible for the arrangement of the sessions of the second Hluttaws, he added.

Speaker of the Amyotha Hluttaw said at the meeting that current Hluttaw should arrange everything for the second.

Members of the central committee and work committees for the holding of Hluttaw sessions, union ministers and deputy ministers reported on the measures being taken for the sessions.

The meeting concluded with remarks by the Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw.—*Myanma News Agency*

## Bangladesh navy detains 92 Myanmar fishermen

BANGLADESHI naval forces detained 92 fishermen in 12 trawlers from Myanmar for illegal angling within Bangladeshi waters in the Bay of Bengal, according to Reuters.

The arrests were made on

Tuesday night near Saint Martin Island in Cox's Bazar district near the border with Myanmar some 450 km (280 miles) southeast of the capital city Dhaka, according to Reuters.

They have been handed

over to the police, said the report.

The 92 fishermen are refugees from IDP camps near Thaechaung area in Rakhine State, according to Myanmar Navy.—*Myanma News Agency*

## Workshop aims to foster community participation in YCDC decision making processes

YANGON City Development Committee (YCDC) and CESVI will hold a workshop titled 'Citizens and Local Authorities Together' on 15 December at Yangon City Hall, with participation from key stakeholders and citizens.

The event is being organised as part of the EU funded project 'Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning' (SUMP), in partnership with the City of Yangon, the Italian City of Turin and the Italian

NGOs ITHACA (Information Technology for Humanitarian Assistance, Cooperation and Action) and CESVI.

The project aims to build institutional and technical capacity within YCDC by improving its strategic planning capacity through the transfer of good practices and models, as well as to facilitate access to appropriate technologies improving staff capacities. The goal is to boost

efficiency in planning processes and to encourage community participation in its decision-making and to foster dialogue with local authorities, increasing their awareness on mobility issues.

The project targets two pilot townships, Tarmwe and Thingangyun, in Yangon.

The workshop will include a presentation of mobility issues and solutions, together with an action plan for 2016.—*GNLM*

## Myanmar Gazette

NAY PYI TAW, 10 Dec — The President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has transferred the following persons as heads of service organizations shown against each from the date they assume charge of their duties.

Name	Appointment
(a) U Maung Maung Win Director-General Budget Department Ministry of Finance	Director-General Treasury Department Ministry of Finance
(b) Dr Daw Sandar Oo Director-General Monetary Management Department Central Bank of Myanmar	Director-General Financial Regulatory Department Ministry of Finance

The president of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has appointed U Tun Ohn, Prorector (Management) of National Culture and Fine Arts University (Yangon) as a Director-General of the Department of Fine Arts under the Ministry on probation from the date he assumes charge of his duties.

## Pyithu Hluttaw

# Pyithu Hluttaw approves two reports



U Than Win. PHOTO: MNA



MP U Maung Toe. PHOTO: MNA

THE reports of the Pyithu Hluttaw Public Account Committee and two other Hluttaw committees were read out at the Pyithu Hluttaw session on Thursday.

The session approved the re-

ports on the Public Account Committee and the Banks and Financial Development Committee.

The session will continue on 14 December.—*Myanma News Agency*

## 1,750 jade lots auctioned on Thursday

THE Myanmar Jade Fair, which has been held from 7 to 13 December at the Maniyadana Emporium in Nay Pyi Taw, was crowded with merchants who bid tenders on Thursday.

On Wednesday, 75 lots of

jade worth over 1.69 billion Kyats were sold out.

A total of 1750 jade lots and 1576 jade lots will be sold through tender system on 12 and 13 December.—*Myanma News Agency*



Merchants evaluate jade stones at Myanmar Jade Fair at the Maniyadana Emporium in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA



Union Minister U Ye Htut being interviewed by journalists at media conference. PHOTO: MNA

## Myanmar's media reform praised at media conference

THE Myanmar government has succeeded in transforming the media sector as part of its democratic reform, said Kavi Chongkittavorn, a media expert at the Southeast Asian Press Alliance, in his opening speech at the 4th Media Development Conference at Chatrium Hotel in Yangon Region yesterday.

The conference was organised under the theme "New Dynamics in Myanmar Media", with Kavi saying the country's media have overcome huge challenges and that the government has realised media reform by enabling ethnic minorities to enjoy easy access to news sources over the past four years.

He suggested that local media should enhance their coverage to earn greater respect from

the future government and greater editorial freedom.

Information Union Minister U Ye Htut said the government worked together with international organisations to ensure media development in the country from 2012 to 2013. The government's initiatives for media development included efforts to improve journalistic skills, reinforce journalistic ethics and encourage ethnic diversity in media, he said.

The previous conferences took place in September 2014, with the union minister saying the fourth conference would be held in December with the aim of enabling the incoming government to hear the views and opinions of the international community.

The agenda focused on the

emergence of democratic media, a review of the press's role in the 2015 election, prospects for the expansion of broadcast media, gender inequality in local media and the dynamic surge of social media.

The conference will continue on 11 December at the same venue with an agenda that will include rights to news coverage, the emergence of community-based media, the safety of media personnel, the emerging ethnic media landscape and its challenges and local media development through international support.

The third Media Development Conference took place on 18 and 19 September last year, under the title "Moving toward a Sustainable Media Environment".—Myanma News Agency

## Oxfam report exposes poor working conditions in garments industry

Ye Myint

MANY of Myanmar's garment workers are working 11 hour shifts and doing six day weeks, while remaining trapped in a cycle of poverty of debt despite the introduction of a minimum wage, according to a new report by Oxfam.

The report was published on Wednesday and is based on research carried out in June and July at 22 factories in Yangon Region.

The report suggests that the national minimum wage of K3, 600 per day (the equivalent of US\$83 a month) which was introduced this September, is inad-

equate to meet the basic needs of workers and their families.

Almost half of all workers surveyed are caught in a cycle of poverty and debt – even when overtime earnings raise monthly wages to an average of US\$98. Most workers interviewed said that they regularly borrow money in order to pay for basic items.

Oxfam also cited safety as an issue of concern, with one in three workers reporting being injured onsite. Others expressed fear about what would happen in the event of a fire, as exits are often blocked or even locked.

Working conditions were found to be poor, with one in four

workers being forced to do overtime and some not being compensated for overtime work. Workers also reported being subjected to verbal abuse by factory supervisors.

Oxfam has issued an urgent call to international companies buying garments from Myanmar, as well as their supplier factories, to improve transparency and monitoring across the industry.

UK-based Oxfam is a global confederation of 17 organisations and works in more than 90 countries to address issues such as poverty alleviation. Its report was produced in cooperation with labour groups in Myanmar.



Garment factory workers in an industrial zone in Yangon. PHOTO: AYE MIN SOE

## Conservation wins big



Environmentalists pose for photo at Inle Lake Biosphere Reserve in Nyaungshwe Township. PHOTO SUPPLIED BY MOECAF

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Following the ceremony, a panel discussion consisting of senior officials and representatives from the Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division of MoECAF, the Inle Lake Wildlife Sanctuary, the irrigation department, agriculture department, United Nations Development Programme and the Inntha Literature, Culture and Regional Development Association discussed strategies for preserving Inle Lake's biodiversity.

The panel recognized the need for promoting a variety of solutions to preserve the lake, including responsible waste management, practicing sustainable agriculture methodologies such as organic model-farms, dredging for regular removal of unwanted sediments in the lake, effective

management of check-dams, addressing relevant issues in the up-stream areas in the long-term and ensuring sustainable fishing and transportation activities on the lake.

They panel also highlighted the need for greater coordination among all stakeholders, including local communities, through a sustainable and inclusive financial and managerial framework. Under the UNESCO's MAB program, Inle Lake has now joined the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, which includes over 651 biosphere reserves in 120 countries.

Biosphere Reserves are experimental sites which aim to reconcile biodiversity and sustainable resource utilisation by promoting local solutions to global challenges. As such, the

designation of Inle Lake as Myanmar's first Biosphere Reserve will further encourage and enhance environmental conservation initiatives to safeguard biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihood development in the region.

Established in 1971, UNESCO's MAB Programme aims to safeguard natural and managed ecosystems and promote innovative approaches to economic development that are socially and culturally appropriate, as well as environmentally sustainable.

Also present at the opening ceremony of Myanmar's first UNESCO Biosphere Reserve were Dr Nyi Nyi Kyaw, director-general of the Forestry Department, and Mr Sardar Umar Alam, the head of office of UNESCO Myanmar.—GNLM

# Stock regulator warns of bogus share trading courses

Ye Myint

MYANMAR'S stock market regulator has urged potential traders to be wary about enrolling in courses that purportedly teach stock exchange trading tips, as none have yet been officially approved.

The country's first stock exchange opened on Wednesday in Yangon, generating a flurry of excitement among business-minded individuals.

"We have heard reports about bogus training providers trying to deceive people into believing that investments can be made in foreign stock exchanges or gold markets," said Dr Maung Maung Thein, chair of Securities and Exchange Commission of Myanmar (SECM).

In a message aimed at first-time investors, the top regulator suggested that advice be sought from the Ministry of Finance or the SECM before making any undertaking.

Stock exchange course providers will be scrutinised by SECM to ensure they adhere to a set of prescribed



Yangon Stock Exchange opened on Wednesday at the corner of Merchant Street and Sule Pagoda Road in downtown Yangon. PHOTO: YE MYINT

regulations standards.

During a public address last month, Dr Maung Maung Thein welcomed the dissemination of information about stock trading, but expressed concern that "a little knowledge is a

dangerous thing."

Plans are underway to host a series of educative talks on the stock market and certified trading training courses will be encouraged to offer the public a foundation of investment knowl-

edge, he added.

The Yangon Stock Exchange is backed by Japanese firms and has six listed companies to date; however trading will not commence until February next year.

## Germany grants 1,380,000 Euros to humanitarian relief in conflict areas

GERMANY announced yesterday that it has granted 1,380,000 Euros to humanitarian aid in Myanmar.

The press release of the German Embassy stated that "The attribution is meant to support the project 'Strengthening the resilience of conflict affected people in Kachin State and northern Shan State in Myanmar'" In the framework of this project, the Welthungerhilfe and Metta Development Foundation assists the local population in improving the living conditions of refugees in the conflict affected regions - Kachin State and northern Shan State, by assisting them to have an independent, self-determined life, to live securely and safely and to prepare for a return to home communities.

The award of this grant proves the tight cooperation between the government of the Federal Republic of Germany, Welthungerhilfe and the Metta Foundation of Myanmar in the area of humanitarian aid, said the press release.—GNLM

## Crime News

### Yabba caches seized in Shan State, Yangon Region



Yabba pills seized by police in Lashio on 6 December. PHOTO: MNA

POLICE have recently seized Yabba pills (synthetic amphetamine based stimulants) and cash in Lashio and Loilin in Shan State and Thakayta Township in Yangon Region.

Acting on a tip-off a combined team including members of No. 24 Anti-Drug Squad (Lashio) searched the house of Aik Tun, alias ET and found K7.9 million (US\$6157.68) and seized 21,451 pills last Sunday.

The authorities found 200 pills on a suspect named Aye Min Thu, alias Sakalay while he walking along Yadana Street

in Thakayta Township on Tuesday.

Police arrested Ye Myint Aung, alias Chin Ma Kite, who organised the selling of those tablets through Aye Min Thu.

The police also seized 1,090 pills that were founded on a Shwemyintmo high way bus driven by U Win Tin heading to Taunggyi from Nantsan on Tuesday.

Action was taken against all suspects involved in those cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law.—Myanma News Agency

### Traffic accident in Mandalay, none injured

A COLLISION occurred between a car and a train in Yamethin Township, Mandalay Region on Monday. The crash did not personal injury or death, according to the authorities.

A Toyota Mark II car-

heading to Yangon from Mandalay driven by U Soe Lin, 22, of Mogok, lost control and collided with a Yangon-Mandalay train near milepost No. 276/20 between Ingyinkan and Yamethin railway stations.

The railway gate and the

left-hand side of locomotive were damaged.

The driver is being charged for his reckless driving under the Public Property Protection Act by the Yamethin Myoma Police Station.—Police IPRD

### Illegal logs seized in Sagaing

AUTHORITIES seized a cache of illegal logs weighting 0.5186 tons in Sagaing Region on Monday, police reported yesterday.

Acting on a tip-off, a combined investigation team comprising staff from the Ministry of Environmental Conserva-

tion and Forestry and members of the Sagaing District Police Forces searched a vehicle heading to Mandalay from Kawlin.

Discovered were eight Tanmalan logs worth K440,180 (US\$ 343).

The vehicle was being driven by U Lin Ko, 24, of Zegone

Village in Kanbalu Township, together with U Aung Tun, 44, of Kaiwin Village in Kawlin Township.

The two suspects have been charged under Section 6 (1) of the Public Property Protection Act by the Sagaing Myoma Police Station.—Police IPRD

### Four men arrested under suspicion of murder

FOUR Suspects who are believed to be involved in the murder of a man in Bago Region have been arrested by police.

The incident occurred on Monday night, police report that Ko Myo, 29, of Yedashe Township, became drunk and unruly before getting into a confron-

tation with U Hla Myint, 49, of the same township. The suspect was together with Aung Naing, Poe Phyu, and Pyaw Gyi at his house.

Ko Myo died on Tuesday morning from serious injuries made by U Hla Myint and three others, according to Ma Thida

Phyo, wife of Ko Myo.

Police said Ko Myo quarrelled with Ma Cho, 44, wife of U Hla Myint before he was killed. The Yedashe Township Police Force has filed charges against the four suspects under Section 302 of the Criminal Case.—Police IPRD

# Scandal-hit Malaysian PM insists 'I am a gentleman'

KUALA LUMPUR — Malaysia's embattled Prime Minister Najib Razak defiantly vowed on Thursday he "will not surrender" to critics who have assailed him over a festering funding scandal, and said his government's economic stewardship was not to blame for a sliding currency.

Addressing the annual meeting of his long-ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), Najib appealed for unity after a fractious week in which the party's deputy leader has called for him to stand aside.

Najib's government has been buffeted by allegations of graft and mismanagement at state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) [TERRN.UL], and the revelation that more than \$600 million (395 million pounds) was deposited in his own bank account in what he says was a political donation.

"What's important is that I am on the side of right, and the truth will prevail," said the prime minister, who was interviewed by Malaysia's Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) at the weekend.

Switching briefly into English during a 90-minute Malay-language speech that drew frequent

shouts of support and bursts of applause from his audience, the British-educated Najib declared: "I am a gentleman!"

*The Wall Street Journal* said in July that 2.6 billion ringgit (\$610.8 million) had been discovered in Najib's personal accounts by investigators probing accusations of financial irregularities at 1MDB.

Najib, who chairs 1MDB's advisory board, has denied the money came from 1MDB, which is being investigated by Malaysian and foreign agencies.

The MACC has backed Najib's explanation that the money

**"What's important is that I am on the side of right, and the truth will prevail."**

**Najib Razak**  
Malaysian prime minister

came from an unidentified donor in the Middle East.

The scandals have shaken investors in Southeast Asia's third-biggest economy and rocked public confidence in the coalition



Malaysia's Prime Minister Najib. PHOTO: REUTERS

led by UMNO, which has held power since independence in 1957 but looks vulnerable at the next election in 2018.

The uncertainty created has also hit an economy reeling from falling oil and gas prices, with the ringgit losing nearly a quarter of its value against the dollar this year.

"The fall in the currency, which has caused much worry, is not due to our failure in managing the economy but was caused by external factors, among them the fall in oil prices and other commodities," said Najib.

Najib also defended the introduction in April of an unpopular sales tax on goods and services

(GST), saying without it Malaysia's fiscal deficit could swell to 4.8 percent next year, rather than the 3.1 percent the government is targeting, due to an expected fall in revenues of 30 billion ringgit due to lower energy prices. "In this context, it is unimaginable if the government had not had the political bravery to implement the GST," he said.

Analysts say Najib retains the support of most of the nearly 200 powerful division chiefs who sit at the apex of UMNO's 3.5 million-member organisation, making it unlikely he can be unseated as party president and prime minister.

But he has been wounded by attacks from influential former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad, who says the party will lose the next election if Najib remains, and UMNO deputy president Muhyiddin Yassin.

In a speech to his supporters on Monday night, Muhyiddin, who was sacked as deputy prime minister in August but remains party No.2, called on Najib to "go on leave" until the investigations were completed. Responding to his critics, Najib said the August reshuffle had been necessary for maintaining government unity.—*Reuters*

# Australian police charge five over plot to attack government buildings

SYDNEY — Australian police said they had charged a 20-year-old man and a 15-year-old boy with conspiracy to attack government buildings after they were arrested during early-morning raids by counter-terrorism police in Sydney yesterday.

Police told a news conference the potential targets of the plot included the headquarters of the Australian Federal Police in Sydney, Australia's largest city, as well as randomly chosen civilians.

The arrests yesterday resulted partly from evidence seized during police raids in December 2014, a police statement said. Three other men, all of them already in custody on terrorism-related offences, were also charged later on Thursday as part of the same operation.

Each of the men, aged 21, 22 and 22, had been charged with one count of conspiracy to conduct an act in preparation for a terrorist act, the same charges levelled against the two seized in the raids earlier, police said.

The men arrested yesterday had been involved in "formulating documents connected with preparations to facilitate, assist or engage a person to undertake a terrorist act", it said.

Australia, a staunch ally of the United States and its battle against Islamist militants in Iraq and Syria, has been on heightened alert for attacks by home-grown radicals since last year.

"It is disturbing that we continue to deal with teenaged children in this environment," New South Wales state Police Deputy Commissioner Catherine Burn said.

"To be putting a 15-year-old before the courts on very serious charges that carry a maximum penalty of life imprisonment demonstrates the difficulties law enforcement face," she said.

In September 2014, police shot dead a teenager in the southern city of Melbourne after he stabbed two counter-terrorism officers. Three months later, two hostages were killed when police stormed a central Sydney cafe to end a 17-hour siege by a lone gunman, who was also killed.

A 15-year-old boy shot and killed accountant Curtis Cheng at police headquarters in the Sydney suburb of Parramatta in October and was then killed in a gunfight with police outside the building.—*Reuters*

# In smog-choked China, drivers check out electric cars



A Roewe E50 electric car is parked next to a street as a bicycle travels past, amid heavy smog, after the city issued its first ever 'red alert' for air pollution in Beijing, on 9 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

BEIJING — The heavy smog shrouding Beijing is proving to be a boon for China's nascent electric car market, with some dealers saying inquiries about all-electric models are up by almost a tenth.

Beijing issued a first pollution "red alert" on Monday, and set out measures to combat the hazardous smog, including limiting the use of conventional petrol-powered and hybrid cars to alternate days.

But all-electric vehicles are free to drive in the capital at any time. And that's prompted a rush of inquiries from would-be buyers, dealers and automakers say.

"I'm considering (an electric car) as the new policy means elec-

tric cars aren't limited from driving on heavy pollution days while other types are," said Wang Chao, 26, sizing up electric vehicles at a BYD Co Ltd dealership on Wednesday.

Wang, who runs a Beijing food wholesale business, said the driving restrictions were yet another reason to think electric, noting the attraction also of government subsidies that would save him around 100,000 yuan (\$15,560) on a new electric model. Those subsidies and other government measures have helped pure-electric car sales soar nearly five-fold to 113,810 nationwide in the first 10 months of the year, putting China on track to overtake

the United States as the largest market for electric cars this year.

Automakers including Tesla Motors and Beijing Automotive Group's [BEJINS.UL] electric car subsidiary say they have seen an uptick in potential buyers asking about pure electric cars in Beijing because of the pollution - though many don't dare leave home to do so.

"Recently, the smog is so serious that people aren't willing to go outside, so they call us to ask," said Li Hui, owner of several BYD dealerships, which focus on environmentally friendly cars. He said inquiries about the firm's e6 pure electric model were up by 8-9 percent.—*Reuters*

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## North Korean leader's H-bomb claim draws scepticism

SEOUL — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un appeared yesterday to claim the country has developed a hydrogen bomb, a step up from the less powerful atomic bomb, but outside experts were skeptical.

Kim made the comments as he toured the Phyongchon Revolutionary Site, which marks the feats of his father who died in 2011 and his grandfather, state founder and eternal president, Kim Il Sung, the official KCNA news agency said.

The work of Kim Il Sung "turned the DPRK into a powerful nuclear weapons state ready

to detonate a self-reliant A-bomb and H-bomb to reliably defend its sovereignty and the dignity of the nation," KCNA quoted Kim Jong Un as saying.

DPRK is the acronym for the isolated North's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. A hydrogen bomb, also known as a thermonuclear bomb, uses more advanced technology to produce a significantly more powerful blast than an atomic bomb.

North Korea conducted underground tests to set off nuclear devices in 2006, 2009 and 2013, for which it has been subject to

UN Security Council sanctions banning trade and financing activities that aid its weapons programme.

An official at South Korea's intelligence agency told Yonhap news agency that there was no evidence that the North had hydrogen bomb capacity, and believed Kim was speaking rhetorically.

Impoverished North Korea and rich, democratic South Korea remain technically at war after their 1950-53 conflict ended in a truce, not a treaty. The North has threatened to destroy the South and its major ally, the United

States, in a sea of flames.

Despite the underground tests, the North has been seen as short of achieving the capability to put a nuclear warhead on a missile. If the hydrogen bomb claim is true, it would indicate advances in the North's pursuit of nuclear weapons.

"I think it's unlikely that they have an H-bomb at the moment, but I don't expect them to keep testing basic devices indefinitely, either," said Jeffrey Lewis of the California-based Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey. It was possible the North was referring to the tech-

nology of boosting the yield of a nuclear device, possibly using fusion fuel, Lewis said.

North Korea claimed in 2010 that it had successfully developed fusion technology.

Assessing progress in the North's nuclear program is difficult because no one outside a close circle of leaders and experts in Pyongyang knows what advances have been made.

The North has also boasted to have succeeded in miniaturization of a nuclear warhead to mount on a ballistic missile, a claim disputed by US and South Korean experts.—Reuters

## South Korea labour boss turns himself in, weeks after violent rally



Han Sang-gyun, the head of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), reacts before surrendering voluntarily to the police at Jogye temple in Seoul, South Korea, on 10 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

SEOUL — The head of one of South Korea's two main labour groups turned himself over to police yesterday after holing up inside a Buddhist temple for nearly four weeks to evade arrest for organising a violent anti-government protest last month.

Han Sang-gyun, the head of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), the more strident of the country's umbrella labour groups, had sought sanctuary at the downtown Seoul temple after speaking at the rally on 14 November, where he urged members to protest against the government's labour reform policy.

Last month's rally involved more than 60,000 demonstrators, some of whom wielded steel pipes and clashed with police wearing riot gear, in the biggest and most violent protest since Park Geun-hye became president in early 2013.

"Even if I am arrested today, I will continue the struggle to stop the government's policy to make labour conditions worse," Han said before being taken into police custody, ending a standoff that had seen hundreds of police surround the temple.

Park's conservative government wants to enable employers to dismiss workers based on per-

formance and cap salaries of senior staff to encourage employers to hire younger people.

Han had already been subject to an arrest warrant after police said he and KCTU leadership conspired to stage illegal rallies on 1 May.

KCTU has about 626,000 members according to government data. The group puts its membership at 50,000 higher.

Police on Wednesday surrounded the temple to arrest Han but held off after the temple's chief monk persuaded Han to turn himself in.

KCTU has called for a gen-

eral strike next week and more rallies. A rally it organised last weekend ended without major incident or violence.

It has frequently issued calls for general strikes in recent years, although the only significant action taken has been rotating work stoppages at locations where unionised labour is highly organised. Park's labour proposal has broad public support. A September Gallup poll of 1,002 respondents showed more than 70 percent supported the plan to make firing easier and to cap the salaries of employees nearing retirement.—Reuters

## China dominates list of Asia's most expensive cities for expats

SINGAPORE — Chinese cities dominate a list of the 20 most expensive in the Asia-Pacific region for expatriates, as the yuan strengthens against rival currencies, a cost of living survey by ECA International shows.

Chinese cities including Hong Kong account for 11 of the 20 most expensive Asian cities, the London-based consultancy said.

Shanghai jumped from third place in 2014 to become the most expensive city in Asia this year.

"In spite of the minor depreciation in the renminbi (yuan) against the dollar over the summer, it has strengthened against most other currencies leading to Shanghai becoming the most expensive Asian city for international assignees," said ECA's Asia regional director, Lee Quane.

"It is likely that major Chinese cities will remain expensive destinations for mobile executives for the foreseeable future."

Chinese cities also make up the biggest share of a list of the 30 most expensive worldwide for expatriates, with six of them beating cities in Switzerland and Japan.

Chinese cities listed in the study jumped across the board in Asia.

Beijing (2<sup>nd</sup>), Guangzhou (6<sup>th</sup>) and Shenzhen (7<sup>th</sup>) rose from fourth, 13<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Macau saw the largest rank increase, moving up to 13<sup>th</sup> place from 34<sup>th</sup> last year.—Reuters

# Hillary Clinton aims to stop 'earnings stripping' to curb US inversion deals



US Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton speaks during a town hall in Waterloo, Iowa on 9 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

WATERLOO — US Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton detailed plans on Wednesday to crack down on companies that shift profits overseas, a practice known as earnings stripping.

Clinton is spending this week explaining how, if elected president in November 2016, she would address tax-avoiding "inversion" deals in which a company buys or merges with a foreign rival and relocates on paper to lower its US tax bill.

"This is a technical term for a trick," Clinton told a town hall in Waterloo, Iowa.

Earnings stripping is a widely used technique and covers a range of deals that shrink the taxable US profits of multinational corporations while still allowing them to

take advantage of some US tax deductions.

Clinton's campaign estimates that closing the "earnings stripping loophole" would raise \$60 billion over 10 years that could be used to provide incentives for manufacturing, research and small business.

As an example, she cited the \$160 billion plan by US pharmaceutical maker Pfizer Inc (PFE.N) to purchase smaller rival Allergan Plc (AGN.N) and move its headquarters to Ireland. One of the "primary benefits" of that deal is earnings stripping, her campaign said.

Clinton, the leader in opinion polls for candidates seeking the party's presidential nomination, has called on the US Congress to stop such deals by requiring the

acquiring foreign entities to control at least a 50 percent stake in the combined company instead of 20 percent under current law. She has also suggested an "exit tax" on the untaxed earnings of corporations that use inversion deals to relocate overseas.

"I would close loopholes like what's called 'earnings stripping' that corporations are exploiting. And if Congress won't act, then I will ask the Treasury Department when I'm there to use its regulatory authority, if that's what it takes," Clinton said Wednesday.

The Treasury Department, after a wave of inversion deals, announced new regulations in September 2014, targeting certain tax-avoidance deals. The regulations did not take on earnings stripping directly, but the department reserved the right to make any future regulation retroactive to that date.

"That was a signal to me that they thought they could do something by regulation," Harvard Law School lecturer Stephen Shay said in an interview.

Shay said the "sentiment in the tax community today is yes there is regulatory authority to do something" about earnings stripping. Shay has written on the topic and has spoken to Clinton's campaign in recent weeks.—Reuters

# Nobel laureates to collect awards amid heightened security

OSLO — This year's Nobel laureates, including a pro-democracy Tunisian group, will get their prizes yesterday in Oslo and Stockholm, with security at the lavish banquets and concerts tightened after the Paris attacks last month.

Tunisia's National Dialogue Quartet won the peace prize for helping to build democracy in the birthplace of the Arab Spring, an example of peaceful transition in a region struggling with violence and upheaval.

"Security is higher than it would otherwise have been because of the situation in Europe," Johan Fredriksen, chief of staff for Oslo police told Reuters.

Fredriksen declined to go into specifics. He said there were no specific threats the police were aware of in Norway.

Last year, a demonstrator carrying a Mexican flag disrupted the Nobel ceremony at Oslo City Hall when Pakistani teenager Malala Yousafzai and Indian activist Kailash Satyarthi received their Nobel Peace Prizes.

He was not a guest but man-

**"Security is higher than it would otherwise have been because of the situation in Europe."**

**Johan Fredriksen**  
Chief of staff for Oslo police

aged to get through the security checkpoints.

The quartet of the Tunisian General Labour Union, the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts, the Tunisian Human Rights League and the Tunisian Order of Lawyers was formed in the summer of 2013.

With a new constitution, free elections and a compromise between Islamist and secular leaders, Tunisia has been held up as a model of how to make the transition to a democracy from dictatorship.

In neighbouring Sweden,

the Nobel Prize winners in literature, chemistry, physics, medicine and economics were gathering in Stockholm to receive their prizes from the King of Sweden later in the day.

Belarussian author Svetlana Alexievich won the literature prize for her portrayal of the harshness of life in the Soviet Union.

In her first public statement after winning the prize, she denounced Russia's intervention in Ukraine as an "invasion".

In Stockholm, the winners will collect their medals at a concert hall before attending a banquet at the city hall, which will include VIPs like European Central Bank President Mario Draghi.

Security around the festivities - which has hundreds of royals and prominent politicians as guests - has also been heightened this year after Sweden raised its terror threat level to the highest ever after the Paris attacks.

Each of the prizes is worth 8 million Swedish crowns (625,725 pounds).—Reuters

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Another Paris attacker named

PARIS — The third man who attacked the Bataclan concert hall in Paris on 13 November has been identified as a 23-year-old French national who went to Syria two years ago, according to officials involved in the inquiry into the multiple attacks on the French capital.

Investigators identified Foued Mohamed-Aggad as one

of three Islamist gunmen who killed 90 people at the Bataclan after his mother told them that she had been informed of his death by text message from Syria, a lawyer for the dead man's family said. Two of the three attackers killed themselves by exploding their suicide vests and another was shot dead by police.—Reuters

### Israel test-launches ballistic missile interceptor

JERUSALEM — Israel test-launched its "Arrow 3" ballistic missile interceptor yesterday, the Defence Ministry said in a statement, adding that it would provide updates on the result of the live trial.

The announcement appeared

aimed at reassuring the public, which had been jarred by previous surprise test-launches from an air base south of Tel Aviv, given Israeli worries about possible missile wars with Iran, Syria, Hezbollah's Lebanon guerrillas and Hamas in Gaza.—Reuters

### Cambodia fails to meet rice export target

PHNOM PENH — Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen said yesterday that his country has failed to export its targeted one million tons of milled rice this year.

Speaking at an agriculture conference in the capital, Phnom Penh, Hun Sen said the government's failure to meet the quota was because of a shortfall in the budget for buying rice from farmers, along with other factors such as regional and international crises and regional competi-

tion in rice production, especially from Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar and Laos.

The premier, meanwhile, said his country is also still short of well equipped rice mills and storage facilities.

In 2010, Cambodia set a target of exporting one million tons of milled rice, starting from this year. According to the government's statistics, in the first 10 months of this year Cambodia exported more than 400,000 tons of milled rice.—Kyodo News

### South Korea protests against Japanese reporting on Yasukuni explosion

SEOUL—South Korea yesterday lodged a protest with Japan over Japanese media's reporting on the arrest of a South Korean man in Tokyo on Wednesday in connection with a recent suspected bombing at a public restroom at the city's Yasukuni Shrine, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said yesterday.

"Through a diplomatic channel, we officially protested to the Japanese side against Japanese media reporting, including the revealing of the identity (of the South Korean man), his face and photo, this morning," Cho Joon

Hyeok told reporters. The Shinto shrine in Tokyo has been viewed by neighbouring Asian countries as a symbol of Japan's militarist past, as it enshrines the spirits of convicted war criminals along with millions of other war dead.

Chon Chang Han, 27, who was arrested on the technical grounds of entering premises for unlawful purposes, returned to South Korea shortly after the incident late last month, but flew back to Tokyo's Haneda airport on Wednesday morning, investigative sources said.—Kyodo News

### Baltimore policeman testifies he is sorry over man's death

BALTIMORE — A Baltimore police officer charged in the April death of a black man from a spinal injury suffered in custody said at his trial on Wednesday that he was sorry about the death.

Officer William Porter, 26, who faces manslaughter and other charges in the death of Freddie Gray, said during more than four hours on the witness stand that he had become acquainted with Gray while patrolling the man's

crime-ridden neighbourhood.

Asked by defence lawyer Gary Proctor if he was sorry about Gray's death, Porter told a packed courtroom, "Absolutely. Sorry to see that, any loss of life."

Gray's death triggered rioting in Baltimore and fuelled concern about police tactics in the United States. Porter is the first of six officers, three of them black, to face trial in Baltimore City Circuit Court.—Reuters

## OPINION

## Plugging in the national economy

Kyaw Thura

**H**ISTORY shows that no country has ever enjoyed prosperity without the participation of its citizens and effective management. It is therefore necessary for governments and policymakers to solicit advice from scholars in order to devise practical solutions to the challenges of development.

As a developing country, Myanmar faces the challenge of breaking the cycle of poverty and inequality by drawing up national strategies alongside effective actions based on solid research. Finding new ways to stimulate the private sector is absolutely central to revitalising the country's troubled economy. Our country has long been undergoing a sluggish economy as a direct consequence of an inadequate power supply, thereby imposing serious constraints on foreign firms hoping to do business in the country.

It is encouraging, however, to see that the World Bank approved a US\$400 million credit from the International Development Association to Myanmar on 16 September this year in a bid to help the country develop its National Electrification Plan, which will ensure universal access to electricity by 2030. Under the plan, over six million people will have easy access to electricity by 2021. In addition, the plan is expected to attract foreign investment.

According to the master plan, the demand for electricity is expected to reach 23,594 megawatts in 2030, of which 8,965 megawatts will come from hydropower stations, according to government reports.

It is understandable that the country sees a 15 percent annual growth in the demand for electricity, given the number of factories and industrial zones emerging across the country. After all, sweeping political reforms have endowed the country with ample opportunities to strengthen its economy and combat poverty.

Many pieces of the puzzle are already poised for placement. The success of Myanmar's development will depend on whether these pieces are laid in a way that maximises efficiency and sustainability on the one hand and minimises human suffering on the other.

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



PHOTO SUPPLIED BY CVT

# The apprentice that gets hired

Jessica Mudditt

**M**YANMAR has a large workforce comprising more than 30 million people, of whom half are aged between 15 and 29, according to World Bank data. Yet while the country's potential productivity is vast, it remains largely untapped. Despite significant gains made in the years since Myanmar's reform process began, the decades-long legacy of an underfunded education system remains challenging for young people seeking gainful employment. University enrolment rates stand at 11 percent and just 1.7 percent of those aged between 16 and 19 are engaged in some form of vocational or technical skills training; while less than four percent of Myanmar's total population is undertaking training, according to figures from the International Labour Organisation, Asian Development Bank and 2014 census data. These figures in no way reflect a collective lack of ambition or drive: the barriers to accessing credible qualifications remain insurmountable for many. And at the same time, Myanmar's opening up to the world has led to an ever-increasing demand for skilled workers.

Since 2002, the Centre for Vocational Training (CVT) in Yangon has been working hard to help young people, and particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to overcome the many barriers to learning and improve their employment prospects.

CVT was established by Swiss citizen Max O. Wey, who came to Myanmar as a Red Cross delegate with a three year tenure, after spending most of his adult life in Asia and Africa. Mr Wey became keenly aware of the need for young people in Myanmar to acquire vocational training and a corresponding lack of opportunities. As the years passed, Mr Wey came to regard Myanmar as his home and its people as his family, according to CVT Director Daw Yin Yin Aye, who has been with CVT since its humble beginnings. Mr Wey remained in Myanmar until two weeks before his death in 2008.

"In the past, vocational training in Myanmar was scattered across a number of different ministries, which meant that no one ministry was really onboard to develop such programmes," Daw Yin Yin Aye said.

Using his knowledge of the Swiss dual education system, Mr Wey launched the first vocational training class in Yangon in De-

ember 2002. Today, CVT teaches 30 different classes and offers diploma courses to aspiring cabinet makers, electricians, metal workers, commercial assistants and hotel and gastronomy assistants. It has worked in collaboration with the Swiss Agency of Development and Cooperation since 2013. Further progress was made when CVT signed an MOU with the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Social Security and Welfare, which streamlined the qualifications process. CVT now also serves as an assessment centre for Myanmar's National Skills Standard Authority (NSSA) for five different trades and professions.

Swiss teachers work with their Myanmar counterparts at CVT to adapt a Swiss curriculum that suits local market needs. Swiss textbooks are translated from English to Myanmar and exam papers are marked by Swiss teachers, each of whom work on a volunteer basis for CVT. While first and second year course books are in the Myanmar language, every course book produced by CVT is bilingual, which gives students the opportunity to learn English should they be inclined to do so. Hospitality students switch to studying exclusively in English in their second and third years, due to the international nature of the industry.

## Boosting the local skills force

Approximately 20 percent of the businesses involved with CVT are foreign-owned, while the vast bulk are locally owned, Daw Yin Yin Aye said. However the ratio is shifting in the hotel sector rather rapidly due to the growing number of international hotels setting up a presence in Myanmar.

"There are also many international tourism companies interested in our programmes. However we actively seek to involve mostly local tour companies so that we can contribute to building skills domestically," said Daw Yin Yin Aye.

Priority is also given to students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

"We receive a lot of applications to take part in CVT programmes because young people are eager to have well-recognised, Swiss qualifications. However when we assess admission profiles, we give priority to disadvantaged youths. We do this because we know we can change young peoples' lives by providing vocational educational courses," she said.

## Earn while you learn

Students spend one day a week learning theory at CVT, which is based at the Myanmar Red Cross building in Yangon. The remaining four days are spent at a workplace where they hone their practical skills.

"Students can discuss problems that they cannot solve at a workplace when they come to

CVT, such as why a particular piece of wood being used to make a cabinet is shrinking," said Daw Yin Yin Aye.

Those in the commercial sector earn an average apprentice wage of K80,000 per month. Those who perform particularly well often receive increment salary increases, which can reach up to K110,000.

Daw Yin Yin Aye said that

many students take pride in being able to contribute to their family's income.

"Although it is a small income, they are nonetheless making a contribution to their families. The majority of CVT students say that they give at least half their earnings to a family member, such as their mother or an aunt."

In the current 2015-16 financial year, CVT has been providing

training to 500 apprentices and 100 E4Y students, the latter of whom are under-privileged school drop-outs aged between 11 and 15.

"E4Y students can read and write but cannot continue their studies due to various personal circumstances, which can include illness or the death of a parent."

Although primary schooling itself is free of charge in Myanmar, the associated costs of daily



Students at CVT's learning centre. PHOTO: JESSICA MUDDITT

bus fares, uniforms, school bags, umbrellas and meals can prove cumbersome enough for some families to have to discontinue their children's education at a young age.

"Some families don't have enough money to put food on the table - school expenses are just out of the question," said Daw Yin Yin Aye.

CVT aims to break the cycle of poverty being passed down from one generation to the next. Approximately 120 candidates are selected from social welfare institutions, including a Yangon hostel that houses 200 orphans and disabled youth. Funds are provided to cover meals, travel and the like.

## Proven track record

Daw Yin Yin Aye said that most apprentices remain with the company once their training period is complete. While some companies may only select half or so of the apprentices they take on, CVT students are provided with CV writing assistance and have ample time to find another employer before the apprenticeship period ends, she added.

Marketing research company MMRD conducted a baseline study recently, which found that 98 percent of apprentices go on to find stable work, Daw Yin Yin Aye said.

Furthermore, drop-out rates are extremely low.

"Out of the 500 people that started courses at the beginning of the school year, only 14 have discontinued the course," she said.

One of the reasons why students drop out is because they are poached by other companies after acquiring a basic skills set.

"A student may be offered a slightly higher salary by another company, which is the main reason why they don't complete the course," she said.

The odd CVT student returns to visit their training school to give thanks to their teachers. Many have gone on to become small business owners, or undergo further training to become a CVT instructor. Former students also network together on a regular basis.

"Some of our students now earn higher salaries than us!" said Daw Yin Yin Aye with a grin.

With CVT's existing school bursting at the seams, a larger complex will open in Yangon's Thimgangyun Township in May 2017, thanks to support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. This will allow CVT to double its intake of students in vocational training programmes and further expansion will always remain the aim of the game.

For more information, visit [www.cvt-myanmar.com](http://www.cvt-myanmar.com)



CVT Director Daw Yin Yin Aye. Photo: Jessica Mudditt



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PHOTO SUPPLIED BY CVT



## Yemeni foreign minister says 7-day ceasefire can be renewed

DOHA — Yemeni Foreign Minister Abdel-Malek al-Mekhlafi said on Wednesday that a seven-day ceasefire expected to start with peace talks next week would be renewed if Iran-backed Houthi militias abided by it.

Yemen's President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi said on Monday he had asked the Saudi-led coalition fighting the Houthis to begin a ceasefire on 15 December in a bid to end months of fighting that has killed nearly 6,000 people and displaced millions.

"The truce is for seven days and subject to automatic renewal provided that the Houthis abide by it," Mekhlafi told the Doha-based al-Jazeera television.

Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, United Nations special envoy to Yemen, said that Hadi's government and the Houthis were committed to the peace process laid down by the Security Council last April.

Resolution 2216 called on all sides to end the violence and demanded that the Houthis withdraw from all areas seized since the conflict began in September last year.

Forces loyal to Hadi, backed by air strikes and ground forces from a mainly Gulf Arab coalition, have been locked for nine months in a civil war with the Houthis, who rule the capital Sanaa and other cities.

The Houthi group says it led a revolution against the corrupt government of Hadi, but his administration and Gulf allies accuse them of carrying out a coup and advancing Iranian influence in the Arab world.

Earlier on Wednesday, unknown attackers blew up an abandoned Catholic Church in the southern Yemeni port city of Aden days after Islamic State militants assassinated the city's governor.

Hadi's embattled government is based in Aden but has struggled to impose its authority there since its forces, backed by Gulf Arab troops, expelled the Houthi fighters from the city. — Reuters



A tank operated by government army moves to shell Houthi positions in al-Labanat area between Yemen's northern provinces of al-Jawf and Marib, on 5 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

## Syrian fighters arrive in Idlib after Homs ceasefire deal

BEIRUT — Buses carrying Syrian rebel fighters and their families safely reached the northwestern city of Idlib yesterday after withdrawing from Homs under a local ceasefire agreement, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The United Nations presided over the implementation of the deal, which the mayor of Homs said involved 300 fighters and 400 members of their families leaving Waer, the last rebel-held area of the city that was a centre of the uprising against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad earlier in the conflict.

The Observatory said about 750 people had left, including

fighters from the al Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front and fighters linked with Islamic State.

Islamic State does not have a major presence in western Syria.

Four buses arrived in Idlib overnight out of a total of around 15 that left Homs, and the rest arrived during the day on Thursday, Observatory director Rami Abdulrahman said. The Britain-based Observatory tracks the conflict through a network of contacts on the ground.

Lebanon-based al Mayadeen TV, which has good contacts in Syria, reported the "operation was completed" yesterday.

Some diplomats say local ceasefires may be the most ef-

fective way of gradually bringing peace to Syria, where more than 250,000 people have been killed during nearly five years of conflict. However, one such ceasefire concluded in Homs in 2014 was widely seen as a forced surrender.

In late September, Iran and Turkey, which back opposing sides in the Syrian conflict, helped to broker local ceasefires in two villages near Idlib and a town on the Lebanese border.

A diplomat who tracks Syria said there could be more local ceasefires. The United States has said they could happen more frequently, after world powers called for a nationwide truce to halt Syria's civil war.—Reuters

## First planeload of Syria refugees arrives in Toronto

OTTAWA — The first planeload of Syrian refugees from camps in Jordan and Lebanon arrived in Canada yesterday, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Wednesday.

Another such aircraft will arrive in Montreal on Saturday, he told legislators.

"Resettling refugees demonstrates our commitment to Canadians and the world that Canada understands we can and must do more," said Trudeau.

The Liberal government plans to resettle 10,000 refugees from Syria's four-year-old civil war by the end of the year and a further 15,000 by the end of February. Officials say the refugees on the first plane loads will be mostly or entirely privately sponsored.

The government last month acknowledged that its original 1 January target for accepting 25,000 Syrian refu-

gees was too difficult to meet. Trudeau made the initial pledge part of his election campaign but a wide array of critics said the goal was unrealistic.

Ottawa plans to accept Syrians from Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. But Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Minister John McCallum said on Wednesday the process was not as advanced in Turkey as in the other two nations.

His department's website (here) said that as of 3 December, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees had referred 8,554 Syrians to Canadian officials for interviews.

As of 7 December, there were 1,451 Syrian refugees who had received permanent resident visas to come to Canada but had not arrived. McCallum said Canadian officials were now interviewing a total of 800 refugees each day in Amman and Beirut.—Reuters

## Egypt frees Israeli held for spying in prisoner swap

CAIRO — Egypt has freed an Israeli-Arab held in its jails for 15 years on espionage charges in exchange for the release of two Egyptians held in Israel, Egyptian and Israeli officials said yesterday.

Uda Tarrabin, originally from a tribe in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, on the border with Israel and the Palestinian Gaza Strip, had been convicted of spying for Israel and had completed his term, Egyptian secu-

rity sources and state television said.

The Israeli government said Tarrabin was already back in Israel.

"At the same time, Israel released two Egyptian prisoners who were held in Israel and had finished serving their sentences," it said in a statement.

Neither Israeli nor Egyptian officials would comment on the identity of the Egyptian prisoners.—Reuters



Syrian Red Crescent units wait in the district of Waer during a truce between the government and rebel fighters, in Homs, on 9 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

# Don't tell Ahab: scientists find the real great white whale

WASHINGTON — Don't call me Ishmael. Call me "Albicetus."

Scientists on Wednesday said fossils unearthed in 1909 in Santa Barbara, California, that had been wrongly categorised for decades as belonging to a group of extinct walrus were the remains of a fearsome sperm whale that swam the Pacific Ocean 15 million years ago during the Miocene Epoch.

They named it *Albicetus*, meaning "white whale," a reference to the leviathan in Herman Melville's classic 1851 novel "Moby-Dick," centering on Captain Ahab's obsession with a huge white sperm whale.

"Because the fossil specimen is a pale white colour, and an ancient sperm whale, it seemed appropriate to honor Melville's infamous whale," said researcher Alex Boersma of the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of Natural History in Washington.

*Albicetus* (pronounced al-bee-SEE-tus) was around 20 feet long (6 metres) and likely weighed about 5 tons. It was a distant relative to today's sperm whales but smaller: modern ones reach 60 feet (18 metres). Its large conical teeth and its jaws were much more robustly built

than today's sperm whales, indicating *Albicetus* was more vicious.

"The presence of large upper and lower teeth suggests that *Albicetus* was likely hyper-carnivorous, meaning that it fed primarily on other marine mammals such as smaller whales and seals," Boersma said.

"I wouldn't have wanted to be a seal in the Miocene oceans," added Nicholas Pyenson, the museum's curator of fossil marine mammals.

This feeding style is uncommon among modern whales, limited to killer whales. Modern sperm whales feed mainly on squid.

"It was evident to us at first look that it was different from any other fossil sperm whale we had seen, which meant that it may hold the key to important tidbits about the evolution of sperm whales," Boersma said.

The earliest-known sperm whale lived 25 million years ago.

Sperm whales are known for their unique block-shaped heads, which house what is known as the spermaceti organ, thought to play a role in the generation of sound used in finding prey. *Albicetus'* skull shape suggests its

spermaceti organ was much smaller, giving it a somewhat less-bulbous forehead.

The bulky fossils of its skull, jaws and teeth were first de-

scribed in 1925 by Smithsonian paleontologist Remington Kellogg but had not been carefully examined since. Kellogg knew it was a sperm whale but unwitting-

ly gave it a scientific name, *Ontocetus*, covering a group of walrus. The research was published in the journal *PLOS ONE*. — Reuters



Alex Boersma, research student at Smithsonian Institution and recent graduate of Vassar College, is shown with skull of *Albicetus*, meaning "white whale" in this image released on 8 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

## First ever test-tube dogs give 'puppy love' a new meaning

NEW YORK — Rarely is a major scientific breakthrough so darn cute.

Researchers at Cornell University in New York State and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, announced on Wednesday the first litter of puppies born through in vitro fertilization.

The seven puppies were born on 10 July and include five beagles and two beagle-cocker spaniel mixes. The results were published on Wednesday in the science journal *PLOS ONE*.

The process of in vitro fertilization, in which eggs are fertilized with sperm outside the body before the embryos are implanted into a female, has been in use since the 1970s to assist in human birth.

But scientists have long struggled to reproduce those results with dogs, in part because the canine reproductive cycle differs from that of other mammals.

"Since the mid-1970s, people have been trying to do [IVF] in a dog and have been unsuccessful," said one of the authors, Alex Travis, the head of the laboratory at Cornell's Baker Institute for Animal Health.

Female dogs only ovulate once or twice a year, and their eggs tend to be less mature at that stage, according to the research paper. The scientists built upon



Jennifer Nagashima (Lead Author, Cornell-Smithsonian Joint Graduate Training Programme) (L) and Nucharin Songsasen (Co-author, SCBI research biologist), hold puppies from the first litter born by in-vitro fertilization. PHOTO: REUTERS

an earlier success. In 2012, Travis' laboratory was able to produce Klondike, the first puppy in the Western Hemisphere to be born from a frozen embryo.

The technique could eventually be used to help breed endangered species in captivity, Travis said, for example the African painted dog.

He also said the development opens the door to detecting genetic traits that lead to disease and fixing them preemptively.

"Instead of trying to cure dis-

ease, we can help prevent it from happening in the first place," he said. The paper, whose lead author was Jennifer Nagashima, a postdoctoral fellow at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, said the research could shed light on the genetic basis for numerous disorders that affect both dogs and humans.

Dogs share more than 350 similar heritable disorders and traits with humans, almost twice as many as any other species, according to the paper. — Reuters

## Norovirus confirmed in Boston students who ate at Chipotle

BOSTON — At least 80 students in Boston have been sickened by norovirus linked to a Chipotle restaurant, the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) said on Wednesday, indicating that the outbreak may not be related to a spate of *E. coli* infections in several states.

The BPHC said laboratory testing had confirmed the presence of norovirus and that at least 80 of the known cases had eaten at a Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc restaurant in Boston's Cleveland Circle.

People who have been in physical proximity to the infected have also become ill, the commission said, adding that Boston College had received reports of students' roommates contracting the illness.

Chipotle has been under scrutiny since November, when it was first linked to an *E. coli* outbreak that has sickened 52 people in nine states.

The burrito chain's restaurant in Cleveland Circle has been temporarily closed while the Boston Inspectional Services Department and BPHC continue investigations.

Chipotle said it would complete a full norovirus sanitization in the restaurant, and employees of that outlet would not return to work until they had been tested for norovirus

and cleared. Shares of Chipotle closed up 1 percent at \$548.01 on Wednesday.

Over 120 Boston College students have reported to Boston College Health Services with symptoms consistent with the norovirus, Boston College spokesman Jack Dunn said.

The students have also been tested for *E. coli*, but results are awaited, he said.

Norovirus is a highly contagious virus easily passed among those in close proximity and can spread through contaminated food, improper hygiene, and contact with contaminated surfaces.

The virus can cause nausea, vomiting and diarrhea and incubation can occur between two and eight days.

The *E. coli* outbreak last month was the company's third food safety incident since August.

It has raised concerns about potential reputational damage to the fast-growing brand that has won a loyal following for its food made with fresh produce, meats raised without antibiotics and ingredients that are free of genetically modified organisms, or GMOs.

In August, norovirus was blamed for sickening nearly 100 people at a Chipotle restaurant in Simi Valley, California. — Reuters

## 347 deaths in rain-related incidents in Tamil Nadu since Oct

CHENNAI — As many as 347 persons have died in Tamil Nadu in various rain-related incidents since October, the state government said yesterday.

While, 347 human lives were lost since 1 October, about 17.64 lakh people were rescued and sheltered in 6605 relief centres across the state, it said. The government, which has expedited rehabilitation efforts, said over 1.28 crore food packets have been distributed and an immediate relief amount of Rs 67.47 crore was disbursed among over 1.11 lakh families.

Twelve columns of Army, 48 NDRF teams, 400 Navy and Coast Guard personnel, five helicopters from Indian Air Force, two from the Coast Guard and two from Navy were de-

ployed for relief operations, an official release said.

590 tonnes of milk powder has been distributed, 4.05 lakh sanitary napkins have provided to women, including those in relief camps, so far, against the targeted 10 lakh, it said.

The fury of north-east monsoon had left a trail of destruction in the state, especially in Chennai, Kanchipuram, Tiruvallur and Cuddalore.

Chief Minister J Jayalithaa, who had earlier pegged the damage at Rs 8,148 crore, has demanded that the Centre declare the “unprecedented, catastrophic floods” as a national calamity and suggested a series of measures including moratorium on home and vehicle EMIs and providing soft loans to the affected people.—PTI

## Two dead, thousands without power after US Pacific Northwest storms

PORTLAND — Drenching storms triggered mudslides and flooding in the Pacific northwest on Wednesday, knocking out power to thousands of people and leaving two women dead in Oregon, authorities and local media reported.

Portland has endured more than 5 inches of rain in three days, nearly as much as all of December in a typical year, and Seattle exceeded its normal December rainfall tally in just 8 days, the National Weather Service said.

The service said mountainous areas of Oregon and neighbouring Washington state, where Governor Jay Inslee declared a state of emergency on Wednesday, have received more than a foot of rain.

The record-breaking storms opened sinkholes in several major roads, caused rivers to spill over their banks and closed roads and schools for a third day in the worst-hit areas across the region.

The Weather Service forecast said a number of major Puget Sound area rivers had overflowed, and it issued warnings of other floods.

National Weather Service meteorologist Gerald Macke said he could not definitively say whether the parade of storms was linked to



A road closed sign is pictured as flood waters of the Snoqualmie River cover NE 80th Street during a storm in Carnation, Washington on 9 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

the El Niño weather pattern. “Once or twice every winter we get prolonged flooding in our region, kind of like how in Oklahoma they get tornadoes.”

A 60-year-old Portland woman died when a tree fell on her house, according to the city’s fire department.

Another woman drowned on Wednesday when her car became submerged in standing high water in Clatskanie, in the state’s north, the Oregonian reported.

In Clackamas County, firefighters waded through hip-deep water and used

rafts to help rescue people trapped in their homes, authorities said.

Outside Tacoma, Washington, emergency officials rescued several people who were swept into the swollen Puyallup River overnight on Wednesday from a bankside homeless encampment, police said.

Washington transportation officials said interstate highway travel between Portland and Seattle would be closed until at least Thursday morning, as engineers needed to evaluate an unstable hillside after boulders fell onto the freeway

north of Portland.

Puget Sound Energy, a utility that serves Seattle, reported 37,000 customers were without electricity after fierce winds and hail hit the city.

Storms have also left 26,000 customers without power in the Portland area, utility Portland General Electric said.

Last December, harsh weather was blamed in the deaths of a homeless man camping with his son near Ashland, Oregon, as well as a passenger in a car that swerved into a tree in Portland.—Reuters

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Dated 11 December 2015

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## ‘Hibaku’ rice planted to remember horror of atomic bombing

TOKYO — “Hibaku” rice tasseled again this year in various parts of Japan as a “living witness” to the horror of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki 70 years ago.

The rice is derived from seeds collected in October 1945 by Kyushu University researchers in areas close to the epicenter of the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki just before the end of World

War II in August of that year.

Hibaku (exposure to radiation) rice looks healthy though greener than usual. But its husks are “almost empty,” Kikuo Sakai, 81, said in early October, pointing to the rice grown in a 100-square-metre plot in his rice paddy in Motomiya, Fukushima Prefecture.

“The taste isn’t good,”

added his wife Ko, 76.

Sakai learned about the hibaku rice seeds from a farming magazine and began growing it, not for sale but to remember relatives who went to war and never returned, and the acute food shortages experienced in Japan during and after WWII.

“I will continue growing the rice as long as I live,” Sakai said.

The husks of many plants produced from such seeds are empty because of chromosome damage caused by radiation.

Planting of the rice around Japan as an act of remembrance began following a 1995 documentary aired by Japan Broadcasting Corp., the public broadcaster more commonly known as NHK.

The documentary was produced by then NHK director Taketoshi Koga, 74, a graduate from Kyushu University’s agricultural department who had been given some of the rice seeds.

Seeds from the cultivated hibaku rice in Nagasaki were distributed to citizens and planted in at least 24 prefectures including Hiroshima.

The average age of A-bomb survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki now tops 80. “While it should be tough both physically and mentally for the survivors to talk about their experiences, hibaku rice shows the horror of atomic bombing by just being there,” Koga said.

Toshiro Taki, a 78-year-old former junior high school teacher in Unnan, Shimane Prefecture, also grows hibaku rice.

Taki’s father was an elementary school teacher who taught physician Takashi Nagai, known as the “saint of Urakami” for his devoted treatment of A-bomb survivors in Nagasaki despite his own grievous injuries from exposure to radiation near Urakami Cathedral in the vicinity of the bombing epicenter.—Kyodo News



Kikuo Sakai examines a bunch of harvested rice stalks grown from seeds deriving from those collected in Nagasaki in 1945 after the atomic bombing of the southwestern Japanese city, as seen in this photo taken in Motomiya, Fukushima Prefecture, on 12 October. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

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# Climate change and conflict meet in Cameroon

**N**ADINE Wondje, a native of Manoka, an island off the coast of Cameroon's economic capital, Douala, fears the sea will soon "swallow" her village.

"Those poles and the other stakes you see is what remains of our homes that were once located there," she told IRIN, pointing out to sea. "We have been displaced many times, each time further and further inland."

Wondje doesn't know where her family will go the next time a storm destroys her house, but coastal erosion and regional flooding have forced many away already. Tens of thousands of people in Cameroon are not only being driven from their homes and communities due to deadly attacks by Boko Haram, but also, increasingly, because of extreme weather events, including drought and monsoon rains.

At least 120 villages have been destroyed since 2012 by flooding, along with thousands of hectares of farmland, according to Cameroon's Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization.

Hamadou Mainou, a 41-year-old fisherman, lost his home along the Logone River in the Far North Region during a storm earlier this year.

"At least half of the homes in this village [Glaou Bardai] have been taken by



**Many Cameroonians who rely on the Logone River for their survival have been forced to flee inland, as rising waters, storms and flooding destroy their homes and fishing boats.**  
PHOTO: IRIN

the wind during the last six months," he told IRIN. "I was able to rebuild my house once before, further inland, but now the floods destroyed it again. This latest time, my boat and its motor, my nets and my stock of fish, were swept away by water. I have nothing left."

Mainou was forced to leave, along with his two wives and children, to look for work in Kousseri.

#### Double displacement

Some 70 kilometres away near the border with Chad, Kousseri has also become a place of refuge for thousands who have fled Boko Haram, the Nigerian Islamist group that has recently launched a spate of cross-border attacks into Cameroon. As others displaced by weather events join them, employment is

hard to come by and there simply aren't enough places to live.

"We've seen a large number of people abandon their villages," Henri Mani, an engineer at the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD), told IRIN. "In the west of Cameroon, the problem of access to water in certain communities makes life quite difficult, and in the north of the country, drought is destroying pastures and fields, as well as driving up the prices of local crops and meat."

The situation is particularly bad in the Far North Region, where close to 100,000 people have fled violence and taken refuge within host communities or camps for the internally displaced. More people than

ever are now competing for already scarce farmland.

"Faced with the negative impacts of climate change in places where Boko Haram already harasses, countless farmers and herders in the Far North are now in search of more bountiful lands," Abel Gwoda Adder, a professor at the University of Yaoundé, told IRIN. "We aren't far from an additional war over land and water."

#### Difficult to fix

There are no easy answers when it comes to solving climate change, especially in poor, underdeveloped countries where governments have limited means. But experts say there a number of measures that can be put in place to help lessen the impact that people feel.

This includes things

such as better water management in dry areas, flood prevention and mitigation strategies, and implementing policies to help manage people's movements from high-risk areas to safer ones.

"The negative impact that these extreme and strange weather events are having on this country is closely linked to its lack of preparedness, which would give it the capacity to better respond," CIRAD's Mani said. "The government should integrate climate change adaptation strategies in its national development plan to protect and improve the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of its citizens. "Improving agricultural productivity is also a way to reduce the vulnerability of people faced with a changing climate."

Charles Eleme, who works as a town advisor for the city of Douala, said that growing populations, particularly in urban areas must also be taken into consideration.

"Douala is overpopulated [with some five million inhabitants] and the population is only growing," he told IRIN. "This city risks, inevitably, flooding, and flooding in a city with that many people is a threat to the stability of the entire region."

#### 'Refugees on our own land'

Jean-Pierre Nana, director of civil protection at

the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, insisted the government was aware of the problem and dealing with it as best it can.

"We haven't been skimping on the means needed to help permanently ensure the protection of people, goods and the environment against the risks... of natural disasters or catastrophes, in order to reverse the effects of these disasters," Nana told IRIN.

The official cited the setting up in 2014 of a unit for disaster prevention in the Far North Region as just one example of the government's efforts.

The Ministry of the Environment and Nature Protection said it too continues to promote sustainable management of forests and reforestation campaigns.

But in Cameroon's coastal communities, the water level continues to rise as villagers cut down the mangroves to build new houses and smoke their fish.

"Coastal erosion is happening so quickly that every day crops and homes are being destroyed," Maboua Moulema, a village chief on Cap Cameroun Island, near Manoka, told IRIN. "So many people have abandoned this place over the past year... Others have stayed but now sleep under the stars. We have become refugees on our own land."—IRIN

## Australia's Origin Energy to market new Tesla solar storage battery

SYDNEY — Tesla Motors has given marketing and distribution rights of its new solar battery storage product to Australia's largest gas and power retailer Origin Energy as part of global launch in

just two countries outside of the United States.

Australia has the highest per-capita rooftop solar power mainly due to high retail prices for energy, which Tesla's new lithium ion bat-

tery called the Powerwall — used for storing solar energy for home power usage and charging electric cars — is set to capitalise on. Origin chief executive for energy markets Frank Calabria said

yesterday said the company would package the Tesla storage solution with PV solar panels from Trina Solar Ltd and inverters from Israeli-based SolarEdge technologies. Tesla said other

Australian companies would also become distributors, though those firms weren't announced. Australian climate advocates have said coupling solar PV panels with high capacity battery

storage could be the cheapest way to obtain electricity within three years, creating a 24-billion-Australian dollar industry if just half of the nation's households adopted the technology.—Xinhua

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# Michael Learns to Rock set for 5 city tour of India



PHOTO: XINHUA

NEW DELHI — For the 80s child, Michael Learns to Rock is the stuff of legend.

The Danish band which brought out classic hit songs like “Sleeping Child”, “The Actor” and “Paint My Love” is now set for its most extensive tour yet of India with gigs lined up in Guwahati, Dimapur, Kolkata and Goa beginning tomorrow in Gurgaon.

The occasion is part of silver jubilee celebrations of the group titled ‘25 Live’.

“In India we have the most energetic and crazy fans. We love to meet our fans in India and to see the smile in their eyes when we play for them. The whole vibe about India is great and gives us a

lot of fantastic and unforgettable moments that we couldn’t live without,” says Kare Wanscher, the band’s drummer.

Besides Wanscher, the band formed in 1988 originally as a high-school cafe band, comprises singer-keyboard player Jascha Richter and guitarist Mikkel Lentz.

The rock band’s previous performances in the country includes one of its “most memorable concerts” in Shillong in 2005 where it recorded a live album on the show besides a three-city gig in 2010.

A live album titled “The Live Musical Adventures of Michael Learns to Rock-I Walk This Road Alone” featured 14 live audio recordings mostly from its September 2005 concert at Shillong.

The band, had also played in Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru in June 2010 to promote its album “Eternity”.

The group inspired by the late King of Pop Michael Jack-

son for their rather peculiar name MLTR, has recorded eight studio albums and sold over 11 million records worldwide.

“Ever since our last visit to India we have wanted to come back and play in more Indian cities. For some reason it has taken a long time to make it happen. If it was all up to us we would tour many more cities in India, but a lot of things have to fall in place to make that happen,” says Kare Wanscher, the band’s drummer.

So how did a Danish band singing in English manage to draw such a huge fan following in Asia, especially in India where the group’s singles still seem to resonate and go strong?

“The reason behind our success is basically our music and the fact that we have been able to hit the people in India and Asia in their hearts. We are still not sure exactly how that happened by we have toured a lot in Asia and India and feel very close to our fans here,” Wanscher told.—PTI

## Film sets are dangerous places for children: Megan Fox

LONDON — Actress Megan Fox has banned her children from her film and TV sets after her eldest son bust his lip open during a visit to see mother at work.

The 29-year-old actress’ boys Noah Shannon, three, and Bodhi Ransom, 22 months, love spending time with mother, but they are no longer allowed to accompany her to work, reported Contact music.

“I took Noah for the first time when he was two to the set of (Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles). It’s a dangerous place for kids. He tripped over a wire

and busted open his lip, so I’ve never brought my kids back to set,” she said.

However, Noah is quickly growing up and realising he is no longer a baby.

“Once, he grabbed my hand and he said, ‘Mommy, I’m going to hold your hand so that I can help you if you ever fall down,’” she recalls. “He was two when he said that. (Now he) is just growing up really fast”.

“Yesterday, he was like, ‘Mommy, I’m your baby?’ And I said, ‘Yeah.’ And he said, ‘But this baby is growing up.’ I was like, ‘Woah. Yeah,’” she added.—PTI

## Taylor Swift named Billboard magazine’s top artist

LOS ANGELES — Superstar Taylor Swift has been named Billboard Magazine’s top artist of 2015.

Editors at the publication picked the artist because of her mega-successful tour, hit singles and her 1989 album, which also earned the Album of the Year title, reported *Billboard* magazine.

This is the second time Swift, 25, has been honoured by the magazine — in 2009, she was named Top Artist following the success of her second album, *Fearless*.

Adele remains the only female artist to claim the title two years in a row for 2011 and 2012.

In addition to Swift’s honour, Mark Ronson and Bruno Mars’ “Uptown Funk” was named Top Song and Fetty Wap the Top New Artist.—PTI



PHOTO: REUTERS

## Abrams says drew on Terrence Malick films for new ‘Star Wars’

LOS ANGELES — As he set off for a galaxy far, far away to make the latest “Star Wars” film, director J.J. Abrams looked beyond the sci-fi saga’s past movies for inspiration.

Just like the films’ creator George Lucas, Abrams watched the works of late filmmakers Akira Kurosawa and John Ford.

“Instead of just having ‘Star Wars’ movies as a reference for this, I also went back and watched some of my favorite films,” Abrams told Reuters.

“Obviously ‘Seven Samurai’ ... some of the John Ford films, because I knew those were also influences that George (Lucas) had.”

The seventh episode in the franchise “The Force Awakens” hits cinemas next week in one of the most-anticipated movie openings of the year.

Abrams, who has already made sci-fi films such as “Star Trek” and “Star Trek Into Darkness”, also cited American cult director Terrence Malick, known for “The Tree of Life” and “The Thin Red Line”, as an

important influence.

“Malick (is) not a director you would normally think you’d ... go to for a ‘Star Wars’ movie and yet ... I don’t know of a more profound and emotional filmmaker than Malick,” he said. “It sounds very pretentious to say ‘oh I’m inspired by this person, that person’, it’s more about ... seeing things that you can aspire to ... and where appropriate apply lessons that you’re learning from them.”

The movie, the first “Star Wars” film installment in 10 years, has been shrouded in secrecy with details kept tightly under wraps bar some broad character outlines.

It stars newcomers Daisy Ridley, Adam Driver, John Boyega as well as old “Star Wars” hands Harrison Ford, Mark Hamill and Carrie Fisher.

“It’s a story that I think gets to see new characters, these underdogs, in a world that is bigger and more spectacular than they could ever imagine and existing characters that some people know and love,” Abrams said.—Reuters



Megan Fox. PHOTO: REUTERS

# Japan slaps temporary ban on exports of rare turtles



"Nihon ishigame" a Japanese pond turtle. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

TOKYO — Exports of Japanese pond turtles have been increasing sharply since early this year, prompting the government to impose partial restrictions to conserve the species.

The "nihon ishigame" (Japanese stone turtle) is in strong demand in China and Hong Kong as an ingredient of health food. It is also popular as a rare pet from Japan.

In Japan, the animal is also known as "zeni (money) turtle" because the brownish-red mail of baby turtles looks like a coin used in the Edo period (1603-1868).

Government permission is required to export the rare turtle species under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and

Flora known as the Washington Convention.

Some 28,000 turtles were exported between June 2013, when the requirement took effect, and September this year, according to the Environment Ministry. Of the total, 15,000 were exported after March when exports increased to a record 3,561.

Exports of Japanese pond turtles have increased sharply, possibly as an alternative to Asian brown pond turtles endemic to the Yaeyama Islands, a group of islands in the southwest of Okinawa Prefecture, because the ministry imposed a ban on exports of the latter species in March in the face of its plunging population as a result of overexploitation.

The population of Japanese

pond turtles has been rapidly declining due to competition with introduced red-eared sliders and cross-breeding with Reeve's turtles.

As there are some 980,000 Japanese pond turtles across the country, the increase in exports is not considered an overall threat to the species, but the possibility of extinction in specific areas, including waterways in Aichi and Shizuoka prefectures, cannot be ruled out.

The ministry has slapped a temporary ban on exports of wild Japanese pond turtles of breeding age with 8-centimetre or larger mails, regardless of sex. It continues to permit the capture of turtles for domestic use and exports of baby turtles and those born in captivity.—Kyodo News

## Spain's Barcelona embraces Christmas season amid tightened security

BARCELONA — Citizens of the northeastern Spanish city of Barcelona are embracing the Christmas season amid increased police patrols on the streets.

The central streets of Barcelona, already busy at any time of year, will be busier due to Christmas shopping, visits to the famous Christmas markets and the increased number of tourists who make good use of the holidays to visit the city.

In Spain, the end of the Christmas season also coincides with the winter sales, so the

city council will intensify police services, carried out by the Guardia Urbana and the Mossos d'Esquadra, within the shopping areas during this period that will begin on 7 January.

An increase in sales compared with the previous year is also expected for this Christmas. According to the Confederation of Commerce of Catalonia (CCC), traders expect sale increases of between 4 and 6 per cent.

Therefore, although the police presence will cover all dis-

tricts of Barcelona, it will focus mainly on the central and commercial areas to improve road and public security and control noise pollution.

There will also be a specific police presence for key dates such as New Year Eve or the Three Kings Parade, and for specific places like the Kings Fair in the central street of Gran Via.

Barcelona Christmas fairs are the main attractions of the holidays, especially those of Santa Llucia, the Sagrada Familia and the Kings.—Xinhua

## Tibet to get first KFC next year

DALLAS — KFC is expected to open its first restaurant in Tibet next year, as parent Yum Brands Inc looks to expand in the Chinese market and shake off a series of food scares and marketing blunders that have severely dented its sales in the country.

A franchisee will open the KFC restaurant, known for its American-style fried chicken, in the Tibetan capital, Lhasa, in the first half of 2016, Yum said

in a statement.

The move comes as the owner of the KFC, Pizza Hut and Taco Bell brands prepares to spin off its business in China.

The China unit aims to roughly triple its restaurant count to 20,000 and bring in more franchise partners.

KFC pulled plans to set up shop in Tibet more than a decade ago, saying in 2004 it was not "economical-

ly feasible" to enter the region. As China's economy stutters, Yum's 6,900 China restaurants face the challenge of luring diners who increasingly are looking for healthier, local options and going online to hunt for deals.

Yum executives are hosting an investor meeting in Dallas yesterday, where they are expected to unveil more details about the China spinoff planned for late 2016.—Reuters

## Funassyi merchandise store grabbing women's hearts

TOKYO — A merchandise store for Japan's favourite "pear fairy" mascot Funassyi is attracting women customers in Tokyo's Harajuku shopping district.

Funassyiland Select Harajuku, a permanent merchandise store featuring the unofficial mascot of the city of Funabashi

in Chiba Prefecture, opened at Kiddy Land last weekend after the previous Funassyi corner proved a big hit during its two-year run.

"Otona-kawaii" — mature cute — is the theme of the revamped store as some of the new Funassyi products have overturned the image of charac-

ter goods as being childish.

One store visitor, a long-time fan of Funassyi, called the new products "something different," adding, "They make me want more and more."

In addition, a mailbox is located at the store's entrance, enabling customers to send letters to Funassyi.—Kyodo News



### Entertainment Channel

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(11-12-2015, Friday)

<p><b>6:00 am</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alinka Wut Yee Music Troupe</li> </ul> <p><b>6:20 am</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pyi Thu Ni Ti</li> </ul> <p><b>6:40 am</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Song Programme</li> </ul> <p><b>7:00 am</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TV Drama Series</li> </ul>	<p><b>7:50 am</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TV Drama Series</li> </ul> <p><b>8:35 am</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Musical Programme</li> </ul> <p><b>8:50 am</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Myanmar Video</li> </ul> <p><b>9:50 am</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My Dream</li> </ul> <p><b>10:00 am</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Myanmar Video</li> </ul>
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### Myanmar International

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(11-12-2015 07:00 am~ 12-12-2015 07:00 am) MST

**Today Fresh**

07:03	Am	News
07:26	Am	A Glance At A Naga Family Life
07:45	Am	A village where old traditions prevails
08:03	Am	News
08:26	Am	Shwe Maw Daw: The Glory Of Bago City
08:52	Am	Porcelain and Glass
09:03	Am	News
09:26	Am	Shan Novices To Be.....
09:41	Am	A Pilgrimage To Prominent Pagoda In Pakokku
09:53	Am	Creations of a Designer
10:03	Am	News
10:26	Am	News Extra: R.A.T Race
10:50	Am	A Happy Visit to Zoological Garden (Nay Pyi Taw)

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

**Prime Time**

07:03	Pm	News
07:26	Pm	Five Treasures in the Ancient City Of Mrauk U
07:43	Pm	Mt. Naw Bu Baw
07:53	Pm	A Girl Guide
08:03	Pm	News
08:25	Pm	Orchidologist Dr. Saw Lwin
08:47	Pm	Myanmar Masterclass "Min Wae Aung"

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

(For Detailed Schedule – [www.myanmaritv.com/schedule](http://www.myanmaritv.com/schedule))

# Giroud treble inspires rampant Arsenal to reach last 16

ATHENS — Olivier Giroud grabbed a superb hat-trick as Arsenal crushed Olympiakos Piraeus 3-0 to book their spot in the Champions League's last 16 with a classy demolition job that ended the hopes of their Greek opponents on Wednesday.

With Arsenal needing an emphatic victory to make it out of Group F, France forward Giroud produced a high-calibre display to ensure the English club finished second, level on nine points with Olympiakos, but ahead by virtue of their better head-to-head record.

Giroud opened the scoring in Greece with a powerful header in the first half, doubled Arsenal's advantage with a calm left-footed finish quickly after the restart and rounded off a superb individual display with a penalty.

The victory completed a remarkable turnaround in fortunes for Arsenal who lost three of their first four games of the campaign and needed to win by any result other than 1-0 or 2-1 in their decisive group clash to finish second behind group winners Bayern Munich.

"I told you before that it would be the greatest escape," Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said.

"I must say I'm very proud of



Olivier Giroud shoots to score a penalty kick goal for Arsenal during UEFA Champions League Group Stage, Group F at Georgios Karaiskakis Stadium, Piraeus, Greece, on 9 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

the team as we had to be right on the mental and tactical side."

In what was a straight shootout for the second spot in the group at the Georgios Karaiskakis stadium, Giroud opened the scoring with a stooping header from Aaron Ramsey's cross just before the half-hour.

Olympiakos responded to going behind positively, however, and finished the first half stronger. Felipe Pardo's cross was deflected over by Laurent Koscielny and Arthur Masuaku tested Arsenal keeper Petr Cech with a long-range drive.

Arsenal grabbed the vital

second goal shortly after the restart as Giroud benefitted from Joel Campbell's trickery to latch onto the Costa Rica forward's neat pass and side-foot past Olympiakos keeper Roberto four minutes after halftime.

While Arsenal controlled possession, they looked vulnera-

ble at times on the break and the hosts almost hit back immediately.

An unmarked Manuel Da Costa headed a corner straight at Cech, who shortly afterwards made a superb flying save to deny the impressive Kostas Fortounis.

Any hope of a comeback from the hosts though was extinguished when Italian referee Nicola Rizzoli awarded a penalty against Omar Elabdellaoui for handling Nacho Monreal's shot, with Giroud sending Roberto the wrong way from the spot.

The win preserved Arsenal's superb record in the Champions League, having now qualified for the competition's second stage for the 16<sup>th</sup> time in succession.

Olympiakos coach Marco Silva was understandably deflated but gracious in defeat.

"We were eliminated simply because Arsenal were better; they showed their level tonight and we just couldn't make it despite a massive effort," said the 38-year-old, whose side will now play in the continent's second tier Europa League. "Our fans should be proud though... the team gave all they had and it's significant that we were in with a chance of qualifying for the second stage in the last round of group matches."—Reuters

## Federer parts ways with Edberg, brings Ljubicic on board

ROGER Federer has rejigged his coaching team for next year by parting company with Stefan Edberg and bringing Ivan Ljubicic on board, the 17-times grand slam champion said on Wednesday.

Former world number one Edberg had worked as part of a team led by Federer's long-term coach Severin Luthi since January 2014, a period in which the 34-year-old revived his career without adding to his tally of grand slam titles.

"After two very successful years, I would like to thank Stefan

Edberg, my childhood idol, for agreeing to join my team," Federer said in Facebook post.

"It was a dream come true. Although it was supposed to only be for 2014, Stefan was great and agreed to extend the partnership through this year which I really appreciated.

"He taught me so much and his influence on my game will remain. He will always be a part of my team.

"Severin Luthi, who I have been working with since 2008, will continue to be my main coach and he will be joined by Ivan Lju-

bicic," Federer added.

Croatian Ljubicic, who retired in 2012 after a long career which peaked when he reached number three in the world, coached Canadian Milos Raonic for two years until last month.

Swede Edberg released a statement to the ATP thanking Federer for what he described as a "wonderful two years".

"It became very clear from the start that this was going to be a special partnership, working with the greatest ambassador tennis has ever seen," the six-times grand slam champion said.

"It was exciting for me to be back out on tour and to see that the sport has made so much progress.

"After an amazing 2014, I decided to continue on for another year, but with a clear understanding that it would be my last year given the time commitment."

"I believe Roger still has a lot left to give to the sport of tennis and is capable of winning the big events."

Federer, who finished 2015 ranked third in the world after winning six titles, will start next season at the Brisbane International in early January.—Reuters

## Leicester's title credentials on show against champions

LONDON — It is still easy to squint at the Premier League standings and assume you are reading them upside down but Leicester City's title credentials would be difficult to mock if they beat reigning champions Chelsea on Monday.

Going into the 16<sup>th</sup> round of fixtures, Claudio Ranieri's vibrant side are two points clear of Arsenal at the top and brimming with confidence.

Such has been the remarkable transformation that Leicester, who spent 140 days at rock bot-

tom last season, could justifiably be regarded as favourites to beat a struggling Chelsea side and retain their lead.

When the sides met at the Kingpower Stadium on 29 April, Chelsea won 3-1 to all but clinch the title and stall Leicester's ultimately successful relegation escape bid.

Rewind back to the identical stage of last season, after 15 games Chelsea were top with 36 points while Leicester were marooned on 10 and apparently doomed.

Now, Leicester have 32 to Chelsea's 15.

A Leicester win on Monday would mean a 49-point swing in their favour compared to Jose Mourinho's Chelsea after 16 games of the previous campaign.

And Leicester's form is clearly no flash in the pan either.

In the last 24 Premier League games, stretching back to last season, they have 54 points, four more than Arsenal and Manchester City during the same period. Chelsea have 35.

Former Manchester United

manager Alex Ferguson believes Leicester, 2000-1 shots before a ball was kicked in August, can sustain their form and become champions.

And the belief is evident throughout a squad which, in Jamie Vardy and Riyad Mahrez, boasts the most prolific duo in the top flight, with 24 goals and eight assists between them so far.

"We always think we can score," winger Marc Albrighton said. "I think teams fear us a little bit going forward so we know we have that security."—Reuters

## Myanmar National Cricket Championship underway

THE Myanmar National Cricket Championship 2015 has held from 10 to 16 December in Yangon.

Eighteen men's and women's teams are taking part in the championship which is scheduled to be held at the Shwe Pin Lone cricket stadium, BEHS No 6 (Botahtaung), BEHS No 4 (Ahlon).

The opening ceremony of the Championship will take place on 12 December.

The teams will represent Shan State, Mandalay Region, Sagaing Region, Rakhine State, Taninthayi Region, Kayah State, Ayeyawady Region, Magway Region, Bago Region, Kayin State and Mon State. Championship, runner up and sprit of cricket awards will be given to the top players. The championship is being conducted by the Ministry of Sports, the Ministry of Education and the Myanmar Cricket Federation.—Myanmar Cricket Federation