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## FDI CHALLENGES REMAIN

### Agriculture, livestock and fisheries fail to attract FDI this fiscal year

Ye Myint

MYANMAR did not receive any foreign direct investment in the agriculture, livestock and fisheries sectors as of October in this fiscal year, according to the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA).

Only \$39.66 million in FDI went into the country's agriculture sector in the last fiscal year, which was up from \$20.269 million and \$9.650 in the previous years.

Likewise, FDI amounted to only \$26.86 million in the livestock & fisheries sector last fiscal year, down from \$96 million the year before.

Since 1988, the approved amount of foreign capital in the two sectors has totaled just \$700 million.

The statistics show that meager foreign investments were seen in the two sectors throughout the past three fiscal years, while other sectors drew increased FDI inflows, topping \$8.01 billion in total in the last fiscal year, up from \$4.1 billion in the fiscal year of 2013-14 and \$1.4 billion in the fiscal year of 2012-13.

Despite failing to attract foreign investment in the two sectors, Myanmar's total FDI target was set at \$6 billion for the present fiscal year and it received FDI worth US \$3.79 billion so far,



A farmer ploughs rain-fed field to grow rice in Tatkon. PHOTO: AYE MIN SOE

said DICA.

Myanmar's oil and gas sector remains among the top five sectors attracting FDI, with a total of \$2.05 billion, followed by

transport and communications worth \$736.71 million, while the manufacturing sector drew \$610.07 million and the real estate sector, \$232.87 million.

DICA's Director-General U Aung Naing Oo estimated early this month that there will be influx of foreign investment following the revision of Investment

Laws and the outdated Companies Act, with Special Economic Zones launching major operations that will further spur job growth in Myanmar.



Suspect Mr Milen Atanasov. PHOTO: POLICE

## Bulgarian charged over withdrawing money with use of fake ATM card

A BULGARIAN citizen was arrested on Thursday on suspicion of withdrawing money from several banks using fake ATM cards, police said yesterday.

An assistant manager at KBZ Bank's ATM department retrieved two suspicious credit cards inside two ATM machines in Yangon's Hledan Township, one of which included a Visa card.

On 8 November, a bank official launched an investigation against the Bulgarian at Kamayut Police Station, on the grounds that the Bulgarian national

withdrew money using fake Visa, Maestro and Master cards.

Police captured the suspect at Yangon's City Star Hotel on Thursday. He was caught in possession of 308 bank cards, an ATM receipt from Mandalay Mini-2 AGD Bank dated 4 December, an ATM receipt from Botahtaung KBZ Bank branch dated 10 December, an accessory for linking a computer with an ATM card, as well as English pound notes and more than K49.3 million.

During police interrogations, the

suspect identified himself as Mr Milen Atanasov (TASEV), 36, from Bulgaria, who flew to Myanmar on a China Airlines flight on 3 November. While staying at the City Star Hotel in downtown Yangon, he withdrew more than K1.8 million over seven times using fake ATM cards in Hledan. On 24 November he allegedly went to Mandalay and withdrew further funds.

He is currently being questioned by police, who believe he may be involved in a financial crime consortium.—GNLM

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

# Pyidaungsu Hluttaw to discuss two bills

PYIDAUNGSU Hluttaw will discuss the Bill Amending Insurance and Business Law and the Bill Amending Saving Bank Law.

At its 12th day of the final session of the first Pyidaungsu Hluttaw in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday, members of the parliaments who would like to discuss the two bills, with contradictions between Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) and Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) are asked to enlist their names by Tuesday.

More than 500 MPs, making up 80% of the total representatives attended the session.—*Myanmar News Agency*



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

## Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw urges staff and citizens to work with the new government

IT is necessary for good citizens of Myanmar to work with the new government for national development, Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw said at the meeting with locals and officials in Zeyarhthiri Township in Nay Pyi Taw on Friday.

Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann delivered a speech to staff of the General Administration Department in Zeyarhthiri Township on Thursday.

He discussed completion of work carried out with K 100 mil-

lion allotted by the Hluttaw for regional development.

Departmental officials reported to the speaker on regional development. The meeting concluded with remarks by the speaker.—*Myanmar News Agency*

## Myanmar gems, jade sales continues

THE 52<sup>th</sup> annual Myanmar gems emporium was opened at the Mani Yadana Jade Hall in Nay Pyi Taw on 7 December, 2015.

In the early morning the

successful auction of 1751 to 3500 jade lots was announced. Local traders inspected and recorded lot numbers while viewing the jade to be purchased at the emporium.

During the sales, a total 6826 jade lots were displayed for sale under open tender and competitive bidding systems.—*Myanmar News Agency*



Gems merchants evaluate jade lots. PHOTO: MNA

## New Charges for Tourist Group

THE Department of Archaeology under the Ministry of Culture has asked tourists to pay US\$20 per per-

son for entrance to the Bagan culture archaeological zone in Nyaung U Township, Mandalay.

The charge will be 25,000 kyats per person instead of US\$20 beginning 1st January 2016.—*Ministry of Culture*

## Pyithu Hluttaw International Relation Committee Chairman meets Korean Ambassador to Myanmar

THE Chairman of the International Relation Committee of the Pyithu Hluttaw, U Hla Myint Oo, met with the Korean Ambassador to Myanmar H.E. Mr. Lee Baek-

soon at the Hluttaw Affairs Building in the Parliamentary compound in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

At the meeting they discussed matters related to Hluttaw Affairs.—*Myanmar News Agency*

## Agreement made over equipment for the development of Myanmar Radio and Television



Japanese Ambassador Mr Tateshi Higuchi hands over documents for broadcasting equipment to U Myint Htwe. PHOTO: MNA

A CEREMONY to hand over agreement documents for the provision of radio and television equipment from Japan for the improvement of broadcasting and editing at Myanmar Radio and Television was held at the MRTV building in Yangon on Thursday.

It was attended by Japanese Ambassador to Myanmar Mr Tateshi Higuchi and offi-

cial. The director-general of the MRTV, U Myint Htwe said he was proud of the cooperation between the two countries and thanked the Japanese government for the help.

One of the 383 television programmes worth 81.9 million yen donated to Myanmar by Japan was presented at the occasion.—*Myanmar News Agency*

## President urges media to inform and take constructive criticisms

THE media are responsible for informing the public of up-to-date information and paying special heed to respect the people's right of access to information, President U Thein Sein yesterday told the members of the Myanmar Press Council in Nay Pyi Taw.

The newly elected members of the Myanmar Press Council were sworn in with the president in attendance.

In his speech to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw on 30 March 2011, President U Thein Sein hinted at legislative and media reforms, promising to take constructive criticisms of democratic transition and recognising the important role the media plays in the process.

The government revoked the strict censorship of the media in August 2012 in line with the constitution, paving the way for the establishment of an interim press council.

The interim press council

could focus on the emergence of a media law and ensure that the media were free, accountable and responsible while upholding their prestige. The media law came into effect on 14 March 2014 and its rules and regulations on 17 June 2015.

The press council is responsible for not only protecting the rights of journalists but also feeding information to the public, President U Thein Sein said, stressing the importance of sticking to media ethics.

He urged the press council to be prepared for collective efforts to deal with complaints by drawing lessons from how international press councils take on matters and handle their public affairs.

He praised the media community for their engagement in the abolition of censorship, the enactment of media laws and the establishment of an independent press council.—*Myanmar News Agency*



President greets members of Myanmar Press Council. PHOTO: MNA

## Post-disaster needs assessment to recovery report released

THE Post-disaster needs assessment to recovery report has suggested the need for coordination in the administrative sector to make the emergency aid system strong, to establish information systems and early an warning system, to give priority to recovery tasks, to ensure transparency and responsibility for resource sharing and to make administrative systems and its rules and regulations strong.

“This report is aimed at systematically assessing the recovery of about two million people who were affected by the disaster,” said Vice President U Nyan Tun in his remarks at a ceremony to release the report in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

It is estimated that the flood and landslides that hit the country during the past rainy season caused about US\$ 1.5 billion losses and the cost of recovery is estimated to be about the same amount as the



Vice President U Nyan Tun delivers speech at ceremony to release post-disaster needs assessment to recovery report. PHOTO: MNA

losses, said the report.

In his opening remarks at the ceremony, Vice President U Nyan Tun acknowledged the relentless efforts of the social organisations, the members of the Tatmadaw and those who sacrificed their lives to rescue people affected by the disaster

which hit the country from July to September.

Following the opening ceremony the participants of the ceremony discussed tasks, plans and strategies for the recovery of people in disaster-hit areas.—*Myanmar News Agency*

## Senior General attends graduation ceremony of 18<sup>th</sup> intake of Defence Services Technological Academy

THE graduation ceremony of the 18th intake of the Defence Services Technological Academy was held at the Academy building in PyinOoLwin on Friday.

The senior general received the salute of the graduation cadets and inspected the division.

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing delivered a speech at the graduation.

He urged the graduating cadets to carry out their duties diligently in whatever place they are assigned duties as they are the

human resources of the defence services.

Also present at the ceremony were the wife of the senior-general Daw Kyu Kyu Hla, the Joint-Chief of General Staff ( Army, Navy and Air ), the Commander-in-Chief (Air) Zeyakyawhtin Gen Khin Aung Myint and wife, Commander-in-Chief (Navy) Admiral Lt-Gen Tin Aung San and wife and other senior military officers.

The senior general and party sat for dinner with the cadets and their families.—*Myawady*



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing greets cadets of 18<sup>th</sup> intake of the Defence Services Technological Academy. PHOTO: MYAWADY

## Following is the schedule for the matriculation examination for 2016 announced by Ministry of Education

Date (1)	Time (2)	Subject (3)
9-3-2016 (Wednesday)	9:00 am to 12:00 pm	Myanmar
10-3-2016 (Thursday)	9:00 am to 12:00 pm	English
11-3-2016 (Friday)	9:00 am to 12:00 pm	Mathematics
12-3-2016 (Saturday)	9:00 am to 12:00 pm	Additional Myanmar
14-3-2016 (Monday)	9:00 am to 12:00 pm	Chemistry
15-3-2016 (Tuesday)	9:00 am to 12:00 pm	Physics
16-3-2016 (Wednesday)	9:00 am to 12:00 pm	Biology, Economics
17-3-2016 (Thursday)	9:00 am to 12:00 pm	Geography
18-3-2016 (Friday)	9:00 am to 12:00 pm	History

## Child trafficking hits record high

The total number of trafficked children under 16 in November reached 93.

**Khaing Thanda Lwin**

MYANMAR police are investigating human trafficking cases involving a record 60 child victims in November alone, according to figures released by Myanmar's Anti-Trafficking in Persons Division.

This is a record number compared to that of the previous months.

There were 617 victims including about 100 children this year, more than 500 of those victims were saved by the authorities.

Under Section 24 of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law enacted in 2005, offenders of trafficking in persons especially women, children and youth shall be punished with imprisonment from a minimum of 10 years to a maximum of life.

Last month, the authorities

uncovered 15 cases, rescuing 108 of 118 trafficked victims and arresting 30 traffickers though 24 are still at large.

According to official figures police investigations have been made into 120 cases over the past 11 months. Shan State topped the list with 36 cases, followed by Mandalay and Yangon with 17 cases each and Kachin with 13 cases.

Between January and November this year, the police arrested 226 of 355 known traffickers, the remaining suspects are on the run.

A total of 1,243 trafficking cases have been investigated nationwide between 2006 and November of this year, the figures were quoted as stating that more than 2,500 people were rescued and over 2,000 traffickers brought to justice, according to official figures.

## Psychological research papers to be read in Yangon

THE Myanmar Psychological Association will organise a paper-reading session at the Panda Hotel in Yangon on 2 January 2016, with two university faculty members to read their research papers, according to sources close to the association.

Dr Tin Mar San, associate professor at the Department of Psychology, Dagon University, will give a reading of a paper titled "A survey of teenager behaviour on social net-

working sites", while U Tin Aung Moe, assistant lecturer at the Department of Psychology, Yangon University, will present his research work focusing on "The role of conflict, ambiguity and occupational stress in job commitment and job satisfaction among nurses". The event is open to enthusiasts through direct contact with the Myanmar Psychological Association.—*Myanma News Agency*



Members of Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association left Yangon for Vietnam yesterday to attend ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs' Network (AWEN) forum on ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs and the Regional Economy Ready for Action on 10 and 11 December. PHOTO: MWEA

## Educational talks on Literati Day

EDUCATIONAL talks were held in praise of the Literati Day with the purpose of improving reading knowledge and enabling local residents to have access to reading materials took place at the Light library, Yedashe Township, Toungoo on Thursday. Daw Khine Khine Thin, General Staff Officer of Toungoo Township and officials gave educational talks on articles and poems.

They distributed pamphlets to people at the ceremony.—*Shwe Win(017)*



Villagers read posters displayed in Yedashe to mark the Literati Day. PHOTO: SHWE WIN

## Crime News

### More than 100,000 Yabba pills seized in Kalaw



Sai Ywat Main and Sai Kham Taing. PHOTO: POLICE

A LOCAL anti-drug squad in Taunggyi seized 191,500 Yabba pills (a synthetic-amphetamine based narcotic) from a car en-route from Taunggyi to Kalaw on Thursday.

Action has been taken against Sai Ywat Main, the driver of the car, and Sai Kham Taing, his passenger.

A local anti-drug squad in Mawlamyine discovered 200 pills on Saw Linn Than alias A tu Ar and a further 20 pills at his home.

The police searched a house where he bought the drugs and seized 170 pills, arresting Ma Zin Mar Oo who was found at the scene.

The police have taken action against them under the Anti-Narcotic Act.—*Stringer*

### One child dies in service tank collapse

A CONCRETE service tank at a school in Yamethin Township collapsed on Monday, killing one schoolchild.

Thiha Min, 5, and Hein Zay Man, 5, left their classroom around 9AM, soon after leaving their teacher reportedly heard the sound of the collapse.

Both children fell into the tank where they were discovered by the same teacher.

Those nearby came to render assistance to the children (the tank being 15 ft in length, 10 ft in width and seven ft in depth) However Thiha Min was later confirmed dead later at hospital.—*Stringer*

# Thousands of cyclists honour Thai king

BANGKOK — Thousands of cyclists streamed through Bangkok yesterday to honour Thailand's revered but ailing king in an outpouring of loyalty that comes against a backdrop of an unprecedented crackdown on those perceived as critical of the monarchy.

"Bike For Dad" is part of weeks of celebrations marking the birthday of King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the world's longest reigning monarch, who turned 88 on 5 December.

Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn, the king's only son and heir, led a throng of cyclists on a 29 km (18 miles) route starting in Bangkok's old quarter.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha and several cabinet ministers joined the procession of yellow-shirted riders. Yellow is the colour that represents the king.

"Many people want to share this moment to send a sign to our king that we all love him very much," said Nusara Anuntavanichaya, 44, who sat with her six-year-old daughter on the route, along with thousands of yellow-clad spectators.

Many Thais see the king as a unifying figure in a country that

has suffered bouts of violent upheaval over the past decade as rival power networks, one closely associated with the royalist military, vie to run the country.

The king is in frail health and has not been seen in public since 1 September. He is in a Bangkok hospital, where he has spent much of the past six years, and where doctors in August treated him for what the Royal Household Bureau called "water on the brain", or hydrocephalus.

The cyclists passed the hospital on their route.

The king is a constitutional monarch, with no formal political powers, and long wielded immense influence.

The crown prince does not command the same devotion his father does, leading to apprehension about the succession. He smiled at cheering crowds as he cycled past yesterday.

The military, since seizing power in a May 2014 coup, has zealously pursued anyone perceived to have defamed the royals, including senior military and police officers, under draconian lese majeste, or royal insult, laws.

Two suspects have died in military custody during a police



People take part in the 'Bike for Dad' event in Bangkok, Thailand, on 11 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

investigation of corruption involving "Bike For Dad" and another cycling event aimed at celebrating the royals.

Police said last week they had launched an inquiry into US Ambassador to Thailand Glyn Davies after he criticised "lengthy and unprecedented" jail sentences for those found guilty of lese majeste.

Authorities said about 30,000 police and soldiers were on duty for the bike ride, which comes four months after a bomb at a city shrine killed 20 people.

Police said a people-smuggling gang angry about a crackdown was responsible. The blast came a day after a "Bike For Mom" cycling event in honour of

Queen Sirikit.

Police said yesterday they had arrested a group of people who planned to "create a disturbance on an important day."

They did not elaborate but Prayuth said authorities had foiled a plot to assassinate senior government officials at the procession.—Reuters

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# China army paper warns of lost wars and shame if no reform

BEIJING — China's military risks losing wars and bringing millennia of shame upon itself if it drags its heels on reform, the army's official newspaper said yesterday, warning that modernisation of the armed forces was behind that of advanced foreign counterparts.

President Xi Jinping unveiled a broad-brush outline of the reforms last month, seeking further streamlining of the command structure of the world's largest armed forces, including job losses, to better enable it to win a modern war. Xi is determined to modernise at the same time as China becomes more assertive in its territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas. China's navy is investing in submarines and aircraft carriers, while the air force is developing stealth fighters.

The reforms, kicked off in September with Xi's announcement he would cut service personnel by 300,000, have been controversial. The military's newspaper has published a series of commentaries warning of opposition to the reforms and worries about lost jobs. In a lengthy commentary provided by the Chongqing military command,



China's President Xi Jinping. PHOTO: REUTERS

the *People's Liberation Army Daily* said China had managed to narrow the gap with its peers in developed countries though existing reform programmes. "But, generally speaking, our military modernisation level is not commensurate with the security needs

of the world's largest developing country and the gap with the world's advanced militaries," it said. China has too many levels of command, "backward" combat effectiveness and too many layers of bureaucracy, the paper said.

**"China has too many levels of command, "backward" combat effectiveness and too many layers of bureaucracy."**

People's Liberation Army Daily

"This directly impacts upon and constrains our military in trying to raise the ability to win battles," it added.

History shows that only those who embrace change thrive, and "no change means falling behind and taking a beating", the commentary said. "Looking at the situation broadly, whether the armed forces bring glory or disgrace ultimately rests on the basis of the country's power and military's strength," it added.

"If there is no reform, once something happens and the armed forces cannot win, then they will be condemned through the ages."

There was no room for standing on the sidelines or prevarication, and those who spread "lies and slander" about the reform process must be firmly rejected, it added. Xi's reforms include establishing a joint operational command structure by 2020 and rejigging existing military regions, as well as cutting troop numbers, to make the armed forces more streamlined and efficient.

On Monday, the same paper told high-ranking officers to hold their tongues about concerns over military reform and lead from the front to ensure the rank and file are on board.—Reuters

# China, Russia fail to stop UN meeting on rights in North Korea

UNITED NATIONS — China, Russia, Venezuela and Angola failed on Thursday to stop the United Nations Security Council from holding its second meeting on human rights in North Korea, which has been accused by a UN inquiry of abuses comparable to Nazi-era atrocities.

China called a vote to stop the meeting, but lost nine to four. Nigeria and Chad abstained. Nine votes are needed to win a procedural vote and the five permanent members — China, Russia, the United States, Britain and France — cannot use their vetoes.

It was the first time a procedural vote has been held on an item already on the council's agenda, according to think-tank Security Council Report. The United States, France, Jordan, Lithuania, Malaysia, New Zealand, Chile, Spain and Britain voted to hold the meeting.

"The Security Council is not the place to address human rights, nor should it politicize the issue," said China's Deputy UN Ambassa-

dor Wang Min. "The human rights situation of the DPRK (North Korea) does not constitute a threat to international peace and security."

The 15-member council added the situation in North Korea — including human rights — to its agenda and held its first meeting on the issue a year ago, despite objections at the time by China, a firm ally of North Korea, and Russia.

Previously, the council's discussion of North Korea was limited to its nuclear weapons programme. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on Thursday claimed his country had developed a hydrogen bomb, but outside experts were sceptical.

North Korean diplomats did not attend Thursday's Security Council meeting.

"The international community has a collective responsibility to protect the population of the DPRK, and to consider the wider implications of the reported grave human rights situation for the stability of the region," Jeffrey Felt-



United Nations Security Council members cast their votes in favour of the adoption of the agenda during a meeting of the United Nations Security Council on alleged human rights abuses by North Korea on 10 December 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

man, UN political affairs chief, told the council.

The 193-member UN General Assembly has urged the UN Security Council to consider referring North Korea to the International Criminal Court after a UN Commission of Inquiry detailed wide-ranging abuses in the im-

poverished Asian state.

China is likely to veto such a move, diplomats said.

"Gross violations continue, the institutional nature and severity of which pose a threat to international peace and security," UN Human Rights Commissioner Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein told the

Security Council.

"The continuing violations and systemic failings simply heighten international anxieties over the possibility of a precipitous turn, an event of great centrifugal consequence which could rapidly engulf the region," he said.—Reuters

# US updates jet-engine technology transfer policy with India



India's Minister of Defence Manohar Parrikar (L) and US Defence Secretary Ash Carter (C) inspect a jet engine in the hanger deck of the USS Eisenhower off the coast of Virginia, in the Atlantic Ocean on 10 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

WASHINGTON — The United States has updated its policy on gas-turbine engine technology transfer to India, a move that should lead to expanded cooperation in production and design of jet-engine components, a joint statement said on Thursday.

US Defence Secretary Ash Carter informed Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar of the decision during the latter's visit to Washington this week and said it was made possible by the strengthening relationship between two countries.

"As a result of this policy update, the Secretary is confident that the United States will be able to

expand cooperation in production and design of jet-engine components," the joint statement said.

It said the two sides looked forward to US companies working with their Indian counterparts "to submit transfer requests that will benefit from this updated policy."

The statement gave no details of the policy update and a Pentagon spokesman was unable to provide more information.

India and the United States were often at odds during the Cold War but have been working in recent years to expand defence cooperation given shared concerns about China's rising power.

The United States has be-

come one of the main sources of weapons for the Indian military, and under Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Make-in-India" programme has offered joint development and production of military technologies.

The scope of this Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) has so far been modest because of concerns about intellectual property protection on the part of US companies. In June, Carter and Parrikar signed a new 10-year defence cooperation pact and sealed an agreement for joint development of protective gear for soldiers against biological and chemical warfare, and another on building generators.

In August, the two sides also held an inaugural working-level meeting aimed at establishing broader cooperation on the design, development and production of aircraft carriers.

Parrikar told a joint news conference on Thursday that he had told Carter of India's desire for further collaboration in higher-end technologies under DTTI.

He said "many" more DTTI initiatives could be expected that would involve technology transfers and US firms setting up production facilities in India. "This enhanced cooperation will definitely result in a great deal of things coming out in the next six months," he said without elaborating.—Reuters

# 2 Koreas hold vice-ministerial talks to improve ties

SEOUL — North and South Korea held a brief session of vice-ministerial talks on Friday morning aimed at reducing tension following heightened cross-border military tensions in August.

It was not immediately clear if the talks, which started around 10:40am at a joint industrial zone in the North's border city of Kaesong and lasted for half an hour, might resume in the evening or on Saturday.

More than five hours after the morning session ended, the talks had still not resumed.

South Korean Vice Unification Minister Hwang Boo Gi and two other officials met with a three-member North Korean delegation headed by Jon Jong Su, vice director of the secretariat of North Korea's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea.

Each side presented their position on pending inter-Korean issues, South Korean Unification Ministry spokesman Jeong Joon Hee told reporters, according to a media pool report.

The spokesman declined to provide specifics, but topics likely to be taken up at the talks include a programme that had enabled South Korean tourists to visit the North's Mt. Kumgang resort. It was suspended in 2008 after a South Korean

tourist was shot dead by a North Korean soldier for crossing into an off-limits zone.

North Korea has repeatedly demanded that the South restart the tour programme, which had been an important source of hard currency for the North.

South Korea is widely expected to prioritize the holding of additional rounds of reunions of families left divided by the 1950-1953 Korean War. The events have been held 20 times since 2000 when leaders of the two rival Koreas held a landmark summit.

The South regards the reunions as an urgent humanitarian issue as many members of separated families are of advanced age and strongly wish to see their relatives in the North before they die.

Friday's talks came after the two Koreas agreed on Aug. 25 to hold high-level talks to improve relations.

Tensions had escalated earlier that month after South Korea accused the North of planting land mines in the Demilitarized Zone between the two Koreas that seriously injured two South Korean soldiers. Tensions rose further after the two sides exchanged artillery fire.

The two Koreas are still technically in a state of war as the Korean War ended in an armistice, not a permanent peace treaty.—Kyodo News

# Oregon declares emergency for counties hit by storm



A woman poses for a photo in front of Snoqualmie Falls after recent storms increased water flow in Snoqualmie, Washington, on 10 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

SEATTLE — Fresh storms hit the US Pacific Northwest on Thursday, triggering a state of emergency in several counties, after it received record-breaking rainfall that left two dead in Oregon and triggered widespread flooding, landslides and power cuts.

Periods of heavy rain and fierce winds will continue across the region and down into northern California as the next installment of storms moves onshore, and warnings of coastal floods were issued for 3 am to 9 am local time on Friday morning (1100 to 1700 GMT), the National Weather Service said. Oregon Governor Kate Brown declared a state of emergency for 13 counties.

“Heavy rains and wind have required the evacuation of residences and mudslides and high water have severely damaged or blocked major roadways in these areas of the state,” she said in a

statement. Meteorologists said the El Niño weather phenomenon, which can trigger above average precipitation in areas like the Pacific Northwest, is expected to remain strong through this winter.

“We still have rivers over flood stage in 11 counties as of 6am (local) but most of the rivers have crested and are falling,” said Washington Military Department spokesman Mark Stewart. Rainfall was expected for Friday and Saturday, he said.

The storms this week, which shattered at least five weather records for the Seattle area including the wettest first nine days in December, triggered mudslides and flooding, closed roadways and schools and prompted Washington Governor Jay Inslee to declare a state of emergency.

In a rare event for the Pacific Northwest, the National Weather Service on Thursday said it re-

ceived reports of a moderate-strength tornado in Battle Ground, Washington.

In Oregon, a 60-year-old Portland woman died in bed this week when a tree fell on her house and another woman drowned when her car became submerged in standing high water in the state’s north, officials said.

Power outages affected thousands of residents in various parts of the region with a principal utility in Portland, the largest city in Oregon, reporting 2,250 without power on Thursday evening. Schools in a number of districts were closed on Thursday.

In Kalama, along the Columbia River in southern Washington, flooding prompted evacuations of businesses and homes and a pool of sewage-tainted water formed over several blocks and began seeping into the police station and other buildings, Stewart said.—Reuters

## EU eyes extending Russia sanctions before summit next week

BRUSSELS — The European Union is likely to extend economic sanctions against Russia next week before leaders of the bloc meet for a summit, diplomats said, after unexpected opposition by Italy blocked the rollover earlier this week.

The EU targeted Russia’s energy, banking and defence sectors in July 2014, blaming Moscow for driving a separatist revolt in east Ukraine, where 9,100 people have been killed in fighting between the rebels and Kiev’s forces.

Italy’s last-minute demand on Wednesday for a discussion on extending the sanctions, which

expire at the end of January, meant that a six-month rollover was not rubber-stamped by member states’ envoys to the EU as had been expected.

But diplomats said on Thursday the extension was likely to come next week before member states’ leaders meet in Brussels on 17-18 December for their last summit of 2015. Migration, countering terrorism and British EU negotiations are expected to dominate the summit agenda.

The decision on sanctions could take place when the bloc’s foreign ministers meet on 14-15 December or during another meeting of the EU envoys to

Brussels before the summit.

Diplomats said there was little appetite among member states to put the decision on the leader’s agenda and that was unlikely. If it happened, it would highlight the growing lack of unity within the EU on the issue.

The conflict in Ukraine sent ties between Moscow and the West to post-Cold War lows but signs of a tentative rapprochement have since emerged.

Some European capitals believe it is important to engage with Moscow on fighting terrorism, especially following the Nov. 13 attacks in Paris that left 130 people dead.—Reuters

## United Nations Secretary-General’s Message on Universal Health Coverage Day

12 December 2015

Our best defences against any health emergency are strong and resilient health systems that serve all people without exposing them to financial hardship.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by world leaders in September, envisages universal health coverage and other important measures to ensure that children live into adulthood, mothers survive childbirth and countries strengthen their response to infectious and non-communicable diseases.

To galvanize action on health, in September I also launched the Global Strategy for Women’s Children’s and Adolescents’ Health. Our aim, together with the Every Woman Every Child movement, is to end preventable deaths among these groups and secure their well-being by helping countries to provide quality and affordable health care to all.

Today, at least 400 million people lack access to essential health services. Every year, health care costs plunge millions of people into poverty – or keep them trapped there. That is why I call on all countries to ensure that every person can access essential and affordable health services.

We are starting to see progress across the world as countries advance on the road towards health systems that cover all people.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to achieving universal health coverage. Every solution will be unique to the context.

In all cases, success demands substantial investments, which pay huge dividends in the form of healthier individuals, better social cohesion, greater economic prosperity, and national resilience in the face of any unexpected disease outbreak.

On Universal Health Coverage Day, let us resolve to realize this vision as part of our efforts to enable all people to enjoy better health for generations to come.—UNIC/Yangon

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Connecticut to ban gun sales to people on watch lists: governor

WASHINGTON — Connecticut would become the first US state to ban the sale of guns to people on government watch lists under an executive order that Governor Dannel Malloy, a Democrat, said on Thursday he will sign.

The measure, which Malloy said needs federal approval, would require state police to review whether a potential gun buyer was on the federal no-fly list or on a watchlist for people suspected of ties to terrorism.

It would also revoke existing gun permits issued to people whose names were found on

such a list. The move follows a call by President Barack Obama for Congress to prohibit people on the no-fly list from purchasing firearms in the wake of the last week’s massacre in San Bernardino, California, of 14 people by a married couple inspired by Islamic State militants.

“I am taking this common-sense step with this executive order simply because it’s the right thing to do,” Malloy told reporters in Hartford. “If you can’t fly without clearing government watchlists, you shouldn’t be able to buy a gun.”—Reuters

#### Lao population reaches 6.8m people in 2015

VIENTIANE — Lao population is estimated to reach around 6.8 million people in 2015, according to National Steering Committee of Laos. The figure was released at the fourth Population and Housing Census held in capital Vientiane Thursday, Lao local Vientiane Times online newspaper reported yesterday. The census was conducted earlier in March 2015.

The census shows that the

country’s population has grown relatively slowly over the past 10 years. At the time of conducting the census, Laos’ population stayed at 6,472,400 people, of which 3,237,600 were women and 3,254,800 were men.

Compared to the 2005 figure, population growth has averaged 1.45 percent per year, down from the growth rate of 2.08 percent recorded by the 2005 census.—Reuters

## OPINION

### The Yangon Stock Exchange: a step in the right direction

Kyaw Thura

WITH the country's first-ever stock exchange market making its debut on 9 December in the commercial capital of Yangon, companies are keen to list shares in the belief that the newly-inaugurated financial institution has all the promise of a modern exchange.

It seems like a dream come true, given the country's sluggish economy and transitional period. Nevertheless, optimistic analysts attribute the rise of the ex-

change market to a product of the government's commitment to democratic reform.

Recent years have seen an unprecedented increase in foreign investments in the extractive industries, even though there is no telling when foreign investors will be granted access to the Myanmar bourse.

One possible reason is that the country is in the middle of drafting its companies law, according to U Maung Maung Thein, Deputy Minister for Finance and also Chairman of the Myanmar Securities and Exchange Commission. In addition, foreign financial experts argue the unlikely start of the stock market until the new government takes office.

There is no rush as the people of Myanmar are green to the stock exchange. Frankly, there is still a lot more work to create the right market infrastructure, write financial laws and promote our market-structure expertise in collaboration with economic experts from regional and international economies.

It is time for our country's economy to gain its poise for recovery. According to the Asian Development Bank, our economy is set to expand by around 8.3 percent this year following a flood of direct foreign investment. The Yangon Stock Exchange has set off at a slow pace, yet it is definitely a step in the right direction.

### Write for us

We appreciate your feedback and contributions. If you have any comments or would like to submit editorials, analyses or reports please email [thantunaungnlm@gmail.com](mailto:thantunaungnlm@gmail.com) with your name and title.

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

# Independence of Judiciary

U Khin Maung  
(A retired diplomat)

THERE are three organs of state power in any sovereign and independent state, namely the legislative, executive and judicial organs. These organs or these bodies carry out their respective functions in accordance with the constitutional law of the state. The legislative body makes or provides the laws, the executive or the administrative body administers the state and the judicial body or the judiciary carries out judicial functions or in other words, carries out the administration of justice functions. Of the three organs of state power, the legislative body or the parliament is the most powerful organ as it is made up of the people's representatives who are elected and entrusted with the law-making, law-providing power. To observe and obey the laws made by the parliament, or to ensure the rule of law prevails, the executive and the judicial organs have to carry out their functions – administrative and judicial functions in strict accordance with the spirit and the letter of the law. And in this article, I would like to present to you, independence of judiciary, as much as my knowledge goes and expands.

At the time, when I was recruited to the Burma Civil Service (B.C.S) the magisterial power was conferred upon me, starting from the third class, the second class, the first class and then to the special power depending upon and taking into consideration of my length of service and my knowledge, experience and expertise accumulated in laws through my studies and constant learning. Under the then administrative system, we, the civil servants were appointed first on probation and we had to sit for and pass the departmental examinations in those subjects, such as the civil and criminal laws, treasury and revenue laws and regulations. Only then, were we appointed as

permanent. And the magisterial powers were conferred upon as by virtue of our posts and then additional powers were again conferred, taking into consideration of our experience and expertise in laws.

All the magistrates, appointed under the criminal procedure code were subordinate to the district magistrate, and he might from time to time make rules or would give special orders consistent with the code as to the distribution of business among such magistrates but would never exercise power or influence to encroach upon the rights to independence of these subordinate courts. Instead, the district magistrates and the district and sessions judges advised, guided, and pointed out the errors, if any, the magistrates might have made, in the meetings and in the appeals, and revision cases. And the district magistrates and sessions judges educated the subordinate magistrates and judges and encouraged and guided them to broaden their horizons through constant learning.

With all my thanks and immeasurable debts of gratitude I owe to all my superior magistrates and sessions judges, I would like to present to you a few of their teachings and guidance to enlighten us and to apply and strictly follow the legal maxims and principles.

These maxims and principles are as follows:

- (1) Justice rushed is justice crushed.
- (2) Justice delayed is justice denied.
- (3) He who does justice, justice cares for him.
- (4) The parties or the clients before a court of law want justice, nothing more or nothing less.
- (5) It is not enough that justice is done, justice must be seen to have been done.
- (6) Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.
- (7) Magisterial powers, judicial

powers conferred upon the magistrates and the judges are not for abuse and not for their personal gains but for the cause of justice and the rule of law.

(8) Cases brought before the courts must be disposed of correctly, judiciously in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the law and swiftly, speedily.

Now allow me to present to you something about the independence of judiciary. I believe the phrase, independence of judiciary is so concise and clear in itself that it needs no further explanation or explication. Under this doctrine, a magistrate or a judge is vested with the judicial powers i.e the authority to hear and decide the cases, independently and at his own discretion, but strictly in accordance with the law. But there is one most vital point to note. Independence of judiciary doesn't mean, judicial powers may be exercised at the whims and fancies of the magistrates or the judges leaving aside all the relevant laws and evidence pertaining to the cases. In other words, independence of judiciary does not mean that a magistrate or a judge can decide the cases with prejudice and bias, with fear or favour. And from one point of view, while exercising independence of judiciary, the judges, and of course the magistrates inclusive, must be those dignitaries worthy of their status and their position, with no iota of or with zero bribery and corruption. Herein, I would like to present to you, sir, our supreme court ruling as regards the term, "Corruption". In the ruling, the supreme court pointed out that "corruption". means not merely, taking a bribe, corruption also means mismanagement, i.e doing things that ought not to be done and failing to do something that ought to be done." A judge, according to our Myanmar language, if I may interpret, means a person who is head of justice or who is in charge of justice, or a person who is entrusted

to administer justice due to his wisdom, integrity and honesty. A judge must therefore be free from four kinds of prejudice and bias. If freely translated, I think they may read as emotion, anger, fear, ignorance.<sup>1</sup>

So, if a judge makes judgment based not on relevant laws and evidence, but out of emotions, love, hatred, jealousy or fear, etc, he is said to be prejudiced and biased. If a judge decides a case out of anger, out of fear of danger, that particular learned judge is said to be prejudiced and biased. Similarly, if a judge passes judgment without studying and knowing the laws full well, relevant to the case and without knowing the latest rulings, pertaining to the case, that judge is said to have committed prejudice and bias.

In practicing and promoting "independence of judiciary," it must be made double sure that bribery and corruption, prejudice and bias – all the malpractices and

acts of mismanagement must be totally wiped out and cleansed so as to win the public confidence, trust, and participation in our highly esteemed judiciary, and its independence.

In conclusion, I pay homage and deep respect to all my superior officers – district magistrates and district and sessions judges and, of course, to all my superior officers from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for their teachings and guidance, because I owe immeasurable debts of gratitude to all of them. Why? Simply because they all shaped my future and they all made me become what I am to day.

\* <sup>1</sup> ဆန္ဒ၊ ခေါင်း၊ ဘာသာ၊ မောဟ (အာတိတ်စာရေးလေးပါး) \*

Reference:

- (1) Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary
- (2) Black's law Dictionary, Bryan A. Garner.
- (3) A book of essential quotations – Edited by Eric Patridge.

### POEM:

#### Shwedagon Pagoda Great Wonder

Seeing is believing  
How this great wonder is enchanting  
World recognize it as great wonder  
East can take this glorious pride  
Dates back to the years over 2600  
All participate to conserve it together  
Great wonder of its kind in this planet  
Open to all to pay their respect and homage  
No-two pagoda in this world  
Praying for peace and freedom everywhere  
All are wholeheartedly welcome to come and see here  
Generosity can be learned from merit done  
One can come for good to learn  
Design of this pagoda is so much fascinating  
Actually you can't find such design in anywhere  
Gods came to help in constructing this great wonder  
Royal families did contributing with their faith  
Everybody can make donation small or big  
Action will surely make you happy and peace  
Together everybody achieves more  
Wish-to-do, work-hard, will and wisdom can make goal  
Outstanding performance and satisfaction is our aim  
Not to do evil, to cultivate good and to cleanse one's mind-this is our theme  
Discipline and wisdom are power  
Enduring patience is the highest austerity  
Right mindfulness and comprehension are our alert.

Htun Tin Htun



## Conservation efforts launched in Alaungkaw Kathapa National Park



Visitors ride elephants as they tour around Alaungkaw Kathapa National Park. PHOTO: PHO CHAN (MONYWA)

THE ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity in the Philippines and joint technical advisor officers from KFW Bank in Germany is visiting the Alaungkaw Kathapa National Park to carry out a small grant project.

ACB will carry out conservation tasks for Alaungkaw Kathapa National Park, Natmataung National Park, Mainmahla Sanctuary and Inntawgyi in Myanmar.

The two organisations will cooperate in drafting a 5-year management plan for supporting residents who reside around the park as part of an effort to conserve the Alaungkaw Kathapa National Park, said U Ye Tun, head of the park's administrative body.

Currently, the EPU (Elephant Protection Unit) under the World Conservation Society laid out guidelines for the breeding and protection of wild elephants.

In the park, staff regularly make conduct checks for illegal logging, hunting, fishing, orchid collecting and drug production. Those caught involved

in any such activities are charged in accordance with the law. Staff use GPS equipment and cameras to record sightings of rare animal species and new plant species to be entered into a database. After that, they compile monthly and yearly reports. They also give educational talks to residents who live around the park.

Alaungkaw Kathapa National Park, with an area of 620.32 square miles (346,639 acres), is well-known not only in Myanmar but also throughout ASEAN. The park was originally established on 20 January 1989. It is located in Mingin Township, Sagaing Region.

The park is home to large populations of wild elephants and other rare wildlife species. Other inhabitants of the national park include jungle cats, monkeys, jungle goats, wolves, wild boar, tigers, gaurs, leopards and 486 varieties of birds, 94 varieties of reptiles, 42 varieties of insects and 250 varieties of butterfly.—Pho Chan (Mon Ywa)

## Myanmar takes leap forward in ICT in teacher education reforms

Poe Siant

ICT in education, a topic that seemed largely unfeasible for Myanmar just a few years ago when less than 2% of the population had access to internet, is now claiming a central place in discussions on the future of teacher education reforms.

Given the 300% increase in mobile subscriptions in the last one year alone, UNESCO is now working with the Myanmar Ministry of Education (MoE) to leverage the radical growth in access to ICT to benefit teacher education through the “Strengthening Pre-service Teacher Education in Myanmar” (STEM) project, which is supported by the Australian government.

While Education Colleges (ECs) in Myanmar have been historically under resourced, through STEM, there is growing recognition of the important role ECs play in promoting teacher quality as the providers of pre-service training for the majority of Myanmar's government teacher workforce, last year graduating over 13,000 new teachers into basic education classrooms around the country.

Since early 2015, UNESCO, in collaboration with the MoE, has been implementing a multi-step programme of support for ICT development in Myanmar's ECs, including the conduct of an in-depth assessment, the development of a five-year Framework for upgrading ICT capacity in ECs, and the facilitation of training programmes for teacher

educators.

Based on UNESCO's recommendations, one key action point for implementing the Framework for ICT development in ECs is to ensure there are enough ICT in education-qualified teacher educators to support the integration of ICT into pre-service programmes.

Taking immediate policy action on this recommendation, the MoE has now recruited three new ICT teacher educators per EC – 65 new recruits in total – underscoring the centrality of ICT-savvy teacher educators to the effective use of ICT for teaching and learning in ECs.

Building on earlier pilot trainings, as a first phase of training the new ICT teacher educators, UNESCO developed customized training modules, designed to bring together participants' existing ICT technical skills with key learning theories and strategies, and, in November 2015, facilitated intensive five-day programmes in Mandalay and Yangon for the new recruits.

Utilizing a learning-by-doing approach, the teacher educators completed a series of interactive modules which can, in turn, be used with their student teachers to expand upon the current EC ICT course, which is focused mainly on office productivity software, through project-based learning introducing ICT in- and for- education.

“The idea that learning about technology can be paired successfully with learning about teaching was a new and exciting



Participants find and evaluate resources to use in their teaching. PHOTO: UNESCO/S-KYAW

idea for many participants,” observed UNESCO facilitator and ICT in teacher education expert, Ms. Susan Atkins.

As one current ICT teacher educator, who works at an EC in Lower Myanmar, noted, “I will be able to take the ICT activities from this training to make my teaching more interactive, engaging, and relevant for the student teachers.”

Several participants also mentioned that the training had given them a new sense of responsibility and motivation to use ICT in education as an entry point for EC reforms. As one ICT teacher educator stated, “I am now aware that my role is very important for supporting student teachers to be able to learn and

teach effectively and for building human resource capacity in the country.”

Participants noted that they had learned how to better use the ICT textbook to support the learning of student teachers and how to make lesson plans for their teaching.

“This is a talented group of new teacher educators,” reflected Ms. Atkins, “They are capable ICT technicians who were able to quickly catch on to ideas of teaching and learning. It is easy to envision them playing an integral role in connecting their respective ECs with quality learning resources and new teaching strategies.”

UNESCO will follow-up with the new ICT teacher edu-

cators as they begin their teaching assignments with a view to providing on-going support and training for ICT course development, the establishment of ICT departments, the management of EC ICT infrastructure, and the training of other teacher educators in ICT for teaching and learning.

With ICT in education as a strategic focus of its country programming, UNESCO is committed to supporting Myanmar as it digitally leapfrogs into the world of smartphones and internet access, aiming for 70 – 80 per cent mobile penetration rates in 2016 in line with its Southeast Asian neighbours, with new opportunities for improving education access and quality through ICT.

# Islamic State oil is going to Assad, some to Turkey, US official says

LONDON — Islamic State militants have made more than \$500 million (£330 million) trading oil with significant volumes sold to the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and some finding its way to Turkey, a senior US Treasury official said on Thursday.

The United States, France, Britain and Russia have vowed to defeat Islamic State, which uses an extreme interpretation of Islam to justify attacks and brutality in large parts of Syria and Iraq that it controls.

A US-led coalition is bombing the hardline Sunni group, as is Assad's only big-power supporter Russia, in an attempt to kill its leaders and cripple the oil wells which the group uses to finance its rule and attacks abroad.

In one of the most detailed public explanations of Islamic State's oil trade, US Treasury Department official Adam Szubin said militants were selling as much as \$40 million a month of oil at the installations which was then spirited on trucks across the battlelines of the Syrian civil war and sometimes further.

"ISIL is selling a great deal of oil to the Assad regime," Szubin, acting under secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence with the Treasury, told an audience at Chatham House in London.



A member from the Iraqi security forces guards as smoke rises from Baiji oil refinery, north of Baghdad, Iraq. PHOTO: REUTERS

"The two are trying to slaughter each other and they are still engaged in millions and millions of dollars of trade," Szubin said of Assad's government and Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL.

The "far greater amount" of Islamic State oil ends up under Assad's control while some is consumed internally in Islamic State-controlled areas. Some

ends up in Kurdish regions and some in Turkey, he said.

"Some is coming across the border into Turkey," Szubin said when asked for details on the money trail.

"Our sense is that ISIL is taking its profits basically at the wellhead and so while you do have ISIL oil ending up in a variety of different places that's not really the pressure we want when

it comes to stemming the flow of funding — it really comes down to taking down their infrastructure," he said. Szubin said it was unclear whether the \$40 million a month estimate could be multiplied over a year. But in remarks prepared for delivery, he said Islamic State had made more than \$500 million from the oil trade, but did not give a more specific time period.—Reuters

## IS truck bomb in Syria kills 50-60 in Kurdish-held town

BEIRUT — A triple truck bomb attack carried out by Islamic State in northeastern Syria killed at least 50 people and wounded 80 others, a spokesman for the Kurdish militia that controls the area said yesterday. The town in the northeastern province of Hasaka is controlled by the Kurdish YPG militia, which has been battling Islamic State with the support of US-led air strikes.

Kurdish fighters have advanced in the last few weeks against Islamic State in Hasaka province, notably with the takeover of the town of al Houli by a US-backed rebel alliance that includes the YPG.

The three blasts, carried out by at least two suicide bombers, hit outside a hospital, at a market and in a residential area in the town of Tel Tamer late on Thursday, the YPG's Redur Xelil said via internet messaging service.

"There is massive destruction in the town, and the number killed is between 50 and 60, all of them civilians," he said.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights gave an earlier death toll of at least 22 people in the attack, saying that number was likely to increase.

Amaq News Agency, which supports Islamic State militants, said in a statement that the group had carried out the attack, targeting Kurdish "bases" in Tel Tamer with three suicide bombs.—Reuters

## Yemen's Houthis says sent list of negotiators to UN for peace talks



Yemen's President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi (3<sup>rd</sup> L) preforms prayers during the funeral of the governor of Yemen's southern port city of Aden, Jaafar Mohammed Saad, in Aden on 8 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

DUBAI — The leader of Yemen's Houthis said on Thursday his movement had given the United Nations the names of its delegates to UN-sponsored peace talks due to start in Switzerland next week.

The Iran-allied Houthis and President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi's Saudi-backed government have accepted a UN invitation to hold the talks aimed at ending nearly nine months of fighting that has killed almost 6,000 people.

"We handed over the names of our negotiating delegation to the UN," Abdul-Malik al-Houthi said in a statement posted on the group's Facebook page.

The statement said a draft agenda for talks had been agreed with the United Nations and called for a "serious and responsible dialogue."

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.

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 the Houthi militias abided by it. Also 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

## Three Islamic State leaders killed in recent strikes: US military

WASHINGTON — The US-led coalition fighting Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria has killed the group's finance minister and two other senior leaders in air strikes in recent weeks, a US military spokesman said on Thursday.

Army Colonel Steve Warren told a Pentagon briefing coalition strikes had killed Abu Salah, Islamic State's financial minister, in late November.

"He was one of the most sen-

ior and experienced members of ISIL's financial network and he was a legacy Al Qaeda member," Warren said.

Warren said Salah was the third member of the finance network who had been killed in as many months.

"Killing him and his predecessors exhausts the knowledge and talent needed to coordinate funding within the organisation," Warren added.

According to a Brookings Institute report, Abu Salah's real name is Muafaq Mustafa Mohammed al-Karmoush. Warren said a senior leader responsible for coordinating the group's extortion activities and another leader who acted as an executive officer had also been killed.

The Islamic State, which the United States calls the wealthiest militant group of its kind in history, has a number of revenue streams.

It has built up what amounts

to a "durable and resilient financial portfolio," funded by oil sales, extortion, and sales of antiquities, said Thomas Sanderson, an expert on terrorism at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Recently, US defence officials estimated that Islamic State was earning about \$47 million per month from oil sales prior to October. That same month, the Pentagon started an operation known as "Tidal Wave II" targeting Islamic

State's oil revenue. Warren said it was too early to tell what the impact of the strikes had been and that it was similar to a boxing match.

"You work the body in (the) early rounds and maybe you won't get a knockout from those early round body shots, but several rounds later you'll see your... opponents knees begin to get weak... and now he's beginning to get set up for the knockout," Warren said.—Reuters

# IMF warns UK growth could suffer due to EU vote

LONDON — Uncertainty about the outcome of Britain's referendum on leaving the European Union could hurt its economy, the International Monetary Fund said yesterday, though it also praised the way the country has bounced back from the global financial crisis.

In a contrast to tension in recent years between Fund staff and Chancellor George Osborne over his austerity push, IMF chief Christine Lagarde was effusive as she stood alongside him at the launch of an IMF report on Britain's economy.

"We are saluting a very strong performance by the UK economy which is due clearly to the commitments to consistent policies which have managed to restore confidence in the British economy," she told reporters.

Osborne said the praise from the IMF would help his plan to turn Britain's still large budget

deficit into a surplus by 2020, something many economists say is not necessary.

"This is the strongest IMF assessment of the British economy in the five years that I have been in this job," he said.

Britain grew faster than any other rich nation last year and is close to the top of the pack again in 2015, helping Osborne and Prime Minister David Cameron lead their Conservatives to a decisive election win in May.

But Cameron's promise to hold a referendum on membership of the EU has raised questions about Britain's relationship with its main trading and investment partners in Europe. It could also lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom if Scotland then pushes to leave the UK in order to stay in the EU. The IMF listed the EU vote among the vulnerabilities for Britain which also included a "strikingly large" current

account deficit and high levels of household debt and house prices which could be a problem when interest rates finally start to rise.

Lagarde said it was unclear what relationship Britain would have with Europe if it were outside the EU. The Fund will assess the issue in its 2016 report on Britain, which is due next May.

"How quickly will there be trade agreements? How promptly will the partners want to reestablish or reset the framework within which its financial and trade relationships are put in place?" she said in response to questions from reporters.

"We will spend a lot of our collective brain power so that for the next Article IV (report) we can have a solid assessment. Because by then we will know better what the alternatives are in that new framework, if there was such a thing," she said.

Lagarde, a former French fi-



A rig surrounds the top of one of the chimneys of Battersea Power Station as demolition work is carried out, in London. PHOTO: REUTERS

nance minister, said she personally hoped Britain would stay in the EU but stressed she was not speaking for the Fund.

Opinion polls show Britons fairly evenly divided on whether

to remain in the 28-member bloc.

The IMF report, while backing Osborne's plans to run a budget surplus by 2019/20, urged him to give the economy more help if growth slows.—Reuters

## US states pass laws backing Uber's view of drivers as contractors



The logo of car-sharing service app Uber on a smartphone over a reserved lane for taxis in a street is seen in this photo illustration taken in Madrid. PHOTO: REUTERS

SAN FRANCISCO — State legislators in Ohio and Florida are moving ahead with regulations governing Uber and other ride services that would designate all drivers as independent contractors, bolstering a critical but much-disputed aspect of Uber's business model.

The states would join North Carolina, Arkansas, and Indiana in requiring the contractor designation as part of new laws governing so-called transportation network companies, a Reuters review of state legislation showed.

The contractor provisions of the current and proposed laws in

the five states have not previously been reported. Reuters reviewed the transportation legislation of more than 40 states that have considered regulations for companies such as Uber and its rival Lyft over the past two years.

Uber has built its business on the contractor model, arguing that its smartphone app simply connects riders and drivers, who own their cars and pay their own expenses.

But Uber is fighting a class-action lawsuit in California by drivers who said they should be treated as employees. Many of a group of 160,000 California drivers could potentially be part of the class, according to a judge's ruling Dec. 9, and possibly be eligible for back pay and reimbursement of expenses.

The contractor requirement in the new state laws could help Uber limit the potential damage if it were to lose the California lawsuit and also head off similar challenges in other states.

An Uber spokeswoman said

the company supported the Arkansas, Indiana and North Carolina laws, as well as the pending Ohio and Florida bills.

She declined to comment on the company's involvement in drafting those laws, however.

In Ohio, state Rep. Bob Hackett said Uber, Lyft, the taxi industry and other parties were involved in drafting the bill.

At one point, Uber sent five representatives to a meeting with members of the insurance industry to negotiate language in the bill, Hackett said.

"I believe they are independent contractors. And the bill says the State of Ohio believes that they are independent contractors," Hackett said.

The state Senate cleared the bill on Wednesday, sending it to the House. Sponsors in both houses said they expected it to be approved. Bills on the designation of Uber drivers have also been introduced in New Jersey and Alabama but they have not been enacted.—Reuters

## Facebook service aimed at professionals to launch in coming months

SAN FRANCISCO — Facebook at Work, Facebook Inc's (FB.O) professional version of its social network, is expected to launch in the coming months, after spending a year in tests, a company executive said.

The new service, geared towards workplace collaboration, is nearly identical to its ubiquitous social network, with a scrolling news "feed", "likes" and a chat service. "I would say 95 percent of what we developed for Facebook at Work," Julien Codorniou, director of global platform partnerships at Facebook, told Reuters.

However, Facebook at Work users will maintain special profiles that are distinct from their existing Facebook profiles. The company is also developing exclusive products for Facebook at Work, including security tools, Codorniou said. Facebook started beta-testing the service in January and has kept it as a free, "invite-only" service for companies so far. The service will be open to all companies once launched and Facebook plans to charge "a few dollars per month per user" for premium services such as analytics and customer support, a company spokeswoman said. The online career market, which includes LinkedIn Corp (LNKD.N) and Monster Worldwide Inc (MWW.N), is worth about \$6 billion a year, market research firm IDC had said in August.—Reuters

## John Lewis weekly department store sales up 3.5 percent

LONDON — John Lewis [JLP.UL] [JLPLC.UL], Britain's biggest department store group, said on Friday its sales rose 3.5 percent year-on-year in the week to 5 December, partly driven by matching the prices of competitors' deals.

The employee-owned firm said sales totalled 165.6 million pounds.

A week-on-week decline of 11.8 percent reflected the previous week's record-breaking numbers on the back of the "Black Friday" (27 November) promotional day.

John Lewis is the only major British retailer to publish weekly sales data, providing the most up-to-date snapshot of shopping trends. Britons' spending power has benefited over the past year from a pick-up in earnings when inflation is hovering around zero and interest rates are still at record lows. However, data published on Tuesday showed British retail sales grew at the weakest pace for any November since 2011 as hopes of an industry-wide boost from Black Friday discounts fell flat.—Reuters

## Ford to invest \$4.5bn more in electric car plan by 2020

DEARBORN — Ford Motor Co (F.N) plans to invest an additional \$4.5 billion by 2020 in programmes to broaden its offerings of hybrids and electric vehicles, Chief Executive Officer Mark Fields said Thursday.

Fields said it will launch late next year a new version of its Ford Focus electric car that has a 100-mile range and can recharge in 30 minutes.

Ford also plans to add 13 new plug-in hybrid, hybrid or electric vehicles to its lineup by 2020,

moving to more than 40 percent the share of the company's vehicle lines that will be electrified.

Fields said the company sees plug-in hybrid systems - which allow drivers to operate part of the time on batteries recharged from the grid, and part of the time on gasoline - as the solution many customers will prefer. The batteries for plug-in hybrids are not as heavy or expensive as those required to deliver 200-mile or more range in an all-electric vehicle.—Reuters

## Global climate talks stumbling near finish line; Obama, Xi talk

PARIS — Efforts to craft a global accord to combat climate change stumbled early on Friday after a “hard night” of talks, forcing host nation France to extend the UN summit by a day to overcome stubborn divisions.

After revealing a new draft treaty that removed some main points of contention last night, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said a final text would now be presented to nearly 200 nations for review only on Saturday, not later on Friday as he had hoped just hours earlier.

While annual UN climate meetings almost always run into overtime, the abrupt announcement came as some officials and observers also said that week-long discussions had not run as smoothly as hoped. The talks had been due to end on Friday.

As at the outset two weeks ago, some nations remain at odds over issues such as how to balance actions by rich and poor to limit greenhouse gases, and also the long-term goals of any agreement to limit emissions that are warming the earth.

One source said the “night was very hard”.

“Major countries have entrenched behind their red lines instead of advancing on compromise,” said Matthieu Orphe-

lin, spokesman for the Nicolas Hulot Foundation.

Fabius, speaking on French BFMTV, kept a positive tone.

“But the atmosphere is good, things are positive, things are going in the right direction,” he said.

Separately, China’s President Xi Jinping and US President Barack Obama spoke by telephone and said their countries would maintain cooperation on climate change, Chinese state television reported. It was unclear what they discussed, or whether the call signalled new divisions between the world’s largest emitters, who struck a landmark climate accord last year.

Xi said the two nations “must strengthen coordination with all parties and work together to ensure the Paris climate summit reaches an accord as scheduled”, according to a report on state CCTV.

The latest draft pointed to a compromise on the once-formidable divide over how ambitious the deal should be in trying to control the rise in the earth’s surface temperature. It indicated apparent agreement on seeking a more ambitious goal to restrain the rise in temperatures to less than 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.—Reuters

## Argentina’s Macri sworn in as president, ousting Peronists

BUENOS AIRES — Mauricio Macri took office as Argentina’s first non-Peronist president in more than a decade on Thursday, promising to end policies of leftist populism and revive the South American country’s ailing economy.

Macri began his 4-year term in a ceremony snubbed by his predecessor, Cristina Fernandez, following a rancorous argument over where the handover of power should take place.

The 56-year-old Macri, his wife and daughter were escorted by horse-riding guards through streets packed with cheering supporters waving the national flag and yellow balloons, the color of Macri’s “Let’s Change” alliance.

In his first speech as president, the former centre-right mayor of Buenos Aires vowed to make the economy grow, lift all Argentines out of poverty and tackle endemic graft.

“Multiplying job opportunities is the only way to achieve prosperity where, today, there is an unacceptable level of poverty,” Macri told lawmakers moments after taking his oath in the National Assembly.

His victory delivered a hammer-blow to the Peronist move-



Argentina’s President Mauricio Macri waves after being sworn-in to office at the Argentine Congress in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 10 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

ment that has dominated Argentine politics for much of the past 70 years and which will be ready to pounce on him if his planned reforms to the fragile economy unleash a new crisis.

Peronism is a now a fragmented force but many Argentines who in the same breath voice support and disdain for it have tended to turn to it in times of political and economic turmoil.

Reading from a script, Macri did not provide any fresh details on how he would unwind capital controls and import restrictions, tame

double-digit inflation or narrow Argentina’s yawning fiscal deficit.

They are tasks that will be complicated by a central bank running low on US dollars and a festering debt dispute with creditors that isolated Argentina from global debt markets and plunged it back into default last year.

Tens of thousands of Macri supporters swarmed toward the Pink House presidential palace, where Macri later received the presidential baton and sash from the Senate leader in Fernandez’s absence.—Reuters

## Divers search lake for evidence in Southern California massacre

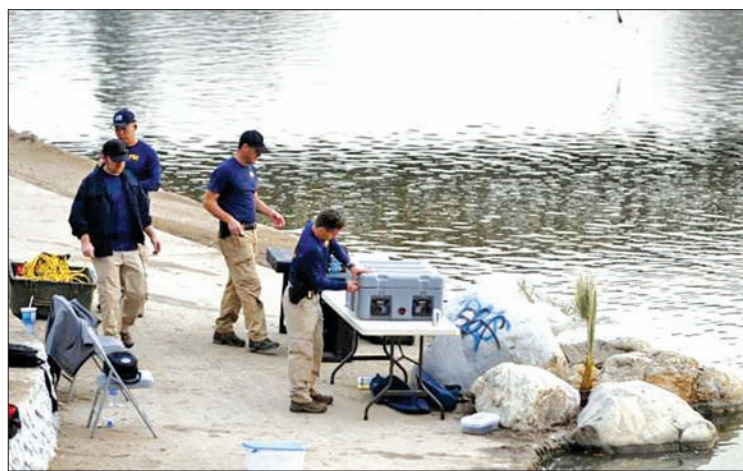
SAN BERNARDINO — A week-old investigation into the shooting rampage that left 14 people dead at a holiday party in Southern California turned on Thursday to a small lake near the scene of the massacre, where divers searched for evidence.

The FBI also revealed investigators were looking into any connections there may have been between one of the two killers in San Bernardino last week and four men arrested in 2012 in a separate federal terrorism case brought in nearby Riverside, California.

Thursday’s underwater search stemmed from unspecified leads indicating the married couple who carried out the shooting spree had been in the vicinity of Seccombe Lake in San Bernardino on the day of the killings, said David Bowdich, assistant director of the FBI field office in Los Angeles.

Bowdich said he would not discuss the “specific evidence we’re looking for.”

CNN reported investigators were seeking a computer hard drive that belonged to the couple, who the FBI has said were inspired by Islamic extremists. Bowdich said investigators already have combed the surrounding park, and that the search of the lake by FBI and Sheriff’s De-



FBI agents pack up diving gear after searching in the water at Seccombe Lake Park, after last week’s shooting in San Bernardino, California 10 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

partment divers could take days.

Seccombe Lake Park lies about 2.5 miles (4 km) north of the Inland Regional Centre, the social services agency where 14 people were killed and 22 others injured when Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, stormed a holiday gathering of his co-workers there on 2 December and opened fire with assault rifles.

Farook, 28, a US-born son of Pakistani immigrants, and Malik, 29, a Pakistani native he married last year in Saudi Arabia, were slain hours after their attack in a shootout with police.

The FBI said it is treating the

mass shooting as an act of terrorism, citing the couple’s declaration that they were acting on behalf of the militant group Islamic State, as well as a large cache of weapons, ammunition and bomb-making materials seized in the investigation.

The couple’s motives remain unclear. But if the crime proves to have been the work of killers driven by militant Islamic ideology, as the FBI suspects, it would mark the deadliest such attack on US soil since 11 September, 2011.

The latest slayings and disclosures about the killers’ backgrounds have put law US law

enforcement on heightened alert and reverberated into the US presidential campaign, intensifying debates over gun control, immigration and national security.

Speaking to reporters at Seccombe Lake on Thursday, Bowdich disclosed the FBI was examining whether Farook had any links with the four conspirators in the Riverside case, as CNN and other media outlets have reported.

A jury last year convicted two of those men, including Afghan-born ringleader Soh-eel Omar Kabir, of conspiring to provide material support and resources to al Qaeda and plotting to attack US military forces in Afghanistan. Their two co-defendants pleaded guilty in the case.

CNN, citing unnamed officials, reported Farook had been a member of Kabir’s social circle. Asked whether the FBI knew of any ties between Farook and the four convicted Riverside conspirators, Bowdich said: “It would be irresponsible not to investigate.” He stressed the four Riverside defendants were never accused of planning attacks within the United States.

FBI Director James Comey told a US Senate committee on Wednesday that the couple were discovered to have been discuss-

ing jihad and martyrdom online with each other as far back as 2013, a year before they met in person.

Comey said the precise origins of the couple’s radicalisation were as yet unknown but appeared to predate the rise of Islamic State, the militant group that has seized vast swaths of Iraq and Syria and last month claimed responsibility for the assaults on Paris that left 130 dead.

US government sources told Reuters on Thursday that Malik tried in vain to contact multiple Islamic militant groups in the months before she and Farook staged their attack, but her overtures were ignored.

The organisations Malik sought out likely shied away out of extreme caution in communicating with individuals unknown to them and a fear of being caught up in a law-enforcement “sting” operation, sources said.

The number of organisations that Malik attempted to approach and how she sought to reach them were unclear, though the groups almost certainly included al Qaeda’s Syria-based official affiliate, the Nusrah Front, the government sources said. One source said investigators have little, if any, evidence that Malik or her husband had any direct contact with Islamic State.—Reuters

# Smugglers are least bad option for border returnees

ATHENS — Give up on their dreams and go home, seek asylum from Greece's dysfunctional bureaucracy with the prospect of deportation if they fail, or run the gauntlet of smuggling operations and plough on into northern and western Europe: the options facing thousands of migrants and refugees forcibly removed from the Greek-Macedonian border are all bad.

On Wednesday morning, 45 buses were used to transport approximately 2,400 migrants from the border village of Idomeni, where some had been camped out for the past three weeks, to emergency accommodation in a Taekwondo stadium in Athens.

Growing numbers of migrants have been stranded in Idomeni since 18 November when Slovenia announced it would only admit refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, a move then mirrored by all of the Balkan states down the chain. A chaotic and often violent bottleneck built up at the Macedonian border. A group of Iranians went on hunger strike and protested by sewing their lips shut and last week a Moroccan man died after touching high voltage power cables.

Stella Nanou, an official with the UN's refugee agency in Greece, expressed concern about the dangerous paths that asylum seekers will have to take to reach sanctuary in northern Europe now that borders are slamming shut all across the continent.

"This is a great opportunity for the smuggling routes to be re-activated," she told IRIN.

The majority of those arriving in Athens on Wednesday were weary and had no idea how they would proceed on their journeys. Those that had returned from the border several days ago had some leads. Standing outside the stadium, three Moroccans and one Iranian told IRIN that smugglers in Idomeni had offered them car rides to Italy for between €1,500 and €2,000 each.



Migrants disembark from buses at the Taekwondo Stadium in Athens. PHOTO: IRIN

Others talked about diverting through neighbouring Bulgaria, a particularly risky route due to abuses and extortion by Bulgarian police that have been documented by agencies such as Human Rights Watch and, most recently, the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights.

## One step forward, two steps back

Shopkeeper Hanif, 28, spent over a month travelling from Peshawar — scene of the worst terrorist attack in Pakistan's history last year when Taliban gunmen shot dead 132 school children — to Idomeni, where he hoped to continue on to Switzerland.

"I tried two times crossing into Macedonia," he told IRIN. "We walked for two days without sleep and nearly reached Skopje [the capital]. Then the police caught us and beat us badly, like animals. Now I just want to sleep. I'm going to stay here for a few months, hopefully get a job, and then I'll decide what to do later."

A Yemeni family of eight stood outside the stadium gates negotiating with a taxi driver to take them to another camp with better medical facilities. They arrived in Greece two weeks ago

after fleeing the war in their home country. Airstrikes by a Saudi-led coalition pounded their hometown of Hodeida last month. The wheelchair-bound mother needs weekly blood tests due to a heart condition.

"We are from Yemen, and there is war there too, like Syria, but we don't know what we can do now," her daughter told IRIN. "They say the border is closed and we should go home, but we can't go back to Yemen. There is barely an airport!"

Joseph, 43, a builder from the Democratic Republic of Congo who spent 15 days at Idomeni, was huddled under one of the grey blankets given to asylum seekers in the Taekwondo stadium. Like many new arrivals, he lacked the funds to pay a smuggler.

"You run from the fire because something bad happened to you, and you need to survive. I know Europe has problems, but why can I not try to make something here? Everywhere is closed."

## Can Greece cope?

There are mounting concerns about how the deeply indebted Greek state will manage to look after the increasing numbers of

migrants unable to move on, but European Commission spokeswoman Tove Ernst said Macedonia's system of filtering asylum seekers by nationality was not illegal.

"Under international law (the Geneva Conventions) and EU law, if a person does not fulfil entry conditions and does not apply for asylum despite having received the possibility to do so, his or her access to the territory can be refused," she told IRIN.

The asylum seekers returned to Athens now have several options: if they have a well-founded fear of persecution they can begin an asylum process in Greece, but the country's asylum system has long been described as dysfunctional with claims sometimes taking years to be determined. Unsuccessful asylum claims can result in deportation. Last week, Greek authorities tried to deport a planeload of Pakistani migrants to Islamabad, but had to fly them back to Athens after Pakistani authorities refused to accept them in a row over a readmission agreement.

Alternatively, they can opt for voluntary repatriation with the assistance of the International

Organisation for Migration.

They are not considered eligible for the EU's relocation scheme, which is only being applied to Syrians and Eritreans and has so far only resulted in 160 asylum seekers being relocated (just 30 from Greece) out of a target of 160,000 agreed by member states in September.

The final option, and by far the most popular, is to continue trying to reach the wealthier parts of Europe using clandestine smuggling networks to arrange transport through the Balkans. This option carries its own risks. In August, 71 refugees were found asphyxiated in the back of a smuggler's truck abandoned on the side of a motorway in Austria.

## No let-up in new arrivals

Meanwhile, travel agencies on the Greek islands are still selling migrants package deals that include ferry passage and bus tickets to Idomeni, with no mention that certain nationalities are being refused entry. On Wednesday, Greek police were stopping buses en route to the Macedonian border and turning them back to Athens.

According to figures from the Greek Ministry of Shipping, 2,702 refugees arrived at the Athens port of Piraeus on Thursday morning from the Aegean islands of Lesbos, Samos and Chios, with a further 1,771 expected later in the day.

The Taekwondo stadium is reportedly nearing maximum capacity and other asylum seekers are being taken to alternative emergency accommodation at the Galatsi Olympic stadium and to Ellinikon, the former Athens airport.

Outside the Taekwondo stadium, Sharif, a 39-year-old farmer from Algeria, appeared to have given up hope. "I dreamt to go to France and join my family, but now... no chance." He pinched his nose, began to weep, and walked back inside his latest, temporary home.—IRIN

## Illuminated structure at Kobe Luminarie event collapses, no injuries

KOBE — One of the illumination displays at the Kobe Luminarie light festival, held to commemorate the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake in the western Japan port city, was knocked down Friday apparently by strong winds, the organizing committee said.

A structure some 9 metres tall and approximately 25 metres in diameter erected around a water fountain was found collapsed at around 5:30am. No injuries were reported. The committee checked other illumination displays and said the annual festival, will continue as scheduled through Sunday. The festival, held for the 21st time, started on 4 December.

Workers were seen taking

the frames of the structure out of the water fountain and unwinding cords with light bulbs as they cleared up the area.

A warning against strong winds was issued for Kobe on Friday, according to the local observatory. A maximum wind velocity of 96.12 kilometres per hour was registered at Kobe airport at 5:43am. The event attracts more than 500,000 visitors a day at its peak with multiple illuminated structures including arch-shaped luminous gates lined up at the main venue creating a corridor.

Around 300,000 light-emitting diode bulbs installed at 17 illuminated structures were lit up this year.—Kyodo News

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# 'Carol,' 'The Big Short' lead varied field in Golden Globe film race

BEVERLY HILLS — Lesbian romance drama "Carol" and Wall Street misdeeds comedy "The Big Short" led a diverse range of films honored with Golden Globe nominations on Thursday, with genres spanning indie thrillers to big budget sci-fi action adventures.

"Carol," the story of a married older woman who falls in love with a young shopgirl in the 1950s, garnered five nominations including best drama film, director, score and acting nods for Cate Blanchett and Rooney Mara.

"Carol" is up for best drama against Pioneer-era movie "The Revenant," psychological thriller "Room," Catholic Church abuse probe "Spotlight" and thriller "Mad Max: Fury Road," a surprise contender in the category, which rarely sees a blockbuster action nominee.

"The Big Short," which takes a quirky look at the housing bubble collapse that led to the 2008 U.S. recession, led the comedy nominees with four nods; best comedy, screenplay and actor for Christian Bale and Steve Carell.

"We really tried to craft a movie that was energetic and entertaining, that could bring people to this issue with some excitement as opposed to being very dry," director and co-writer Adam McKay told Reuters.

It will compete with blockbuster space adventure "The Martian," Melissa McCarthy caper "Spy," coming-of-age comedy "Trainwreck" and "Joy," inspired by the story of the woman who designed the household Miracle Mop.

The Golden Globe winners



Miss Golden Globe 2016 Corinne Foxx, America Ferrera, Chloe Grace Moretz, Angela Bassett and Dennis Quaid pose during the nominations for the 73rd annual Golden Globe Awards in Beverly Hills, California, on 10 December 2015. The awards will be presented on 10 January 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

will be announced at a televised ceremony in Los Angeles on Jan. 10, hosted by comedian Ricky Gervais. In December last year, showbiz satire "Birdman" and coming-of-age movie "Boyhood" were already established as Oscar frontrunners. "Birdman" eventually edged out "Boyhood" for the best picture Oscar.

But this year, the race is wide open with numerous contenders for the coveted best picture award, and not necessarily the most obvious

ones, said Tom O'Neil, founder of awards tracker Goldderby.com.

"The giant made-for-Oscars studio contenders are falling out," O'Neil said, citing Focus Features' "The Danish Girl," Universal Pictures' "Steve Jobs" and Disney's Tom Hanks movie "Bridge of Spies."

"Instead we see 'Room' and 'Spotlight,' little indie films, and that's sending a powerful message to Hollywood that size doesn't matter and they may have to try

harder." But the inclusion of "Mad Max" shows that voters are not dismissing blockbuster, special effects-laden fare - rather, "they're just not going for the ones we thought they would," O'Neil said.

The Globes, announced next month, are seen as one of the indicators of Oscar contenders. In recent years, "Argo" and "12 Years a Slave" both won the best drama film Golden Globe and went on to win the best picture Oscar.—Reuters

## Adele tops BBC Music Awards

LONDON — Adele's great 2015 run now includes scoring the top prize at the BBC Music Awards where she was named the British Artist Of The Year.

Just weeks after the 27-year-old "Hello" singer released her record-breaking comeback album 25, breaking chart records around the world, Adele was honoured with her latest accolade at the ceremony in Birmingham, England, where she beat out the likes of Ed Sheeran, Jamie XX, Florence + The Machine, Foals and Years & Years for the trophy.

Adele also won Best Live Performance for her recent UK TV special, Adele at the BBC, but she was unable to pick up the top prizes in person, and instead sent a video message to show her appreciation, saying, "Sorry I'm not there. I'm absolutely gutted, but thanks so much for my award."

"That's amazing. I've only just put out new music. I'm so chuffed. I hope you're all having a wonderful evening."

Also absent from the show was Taylor Swift, who won the International Artist of the Year honour. She also sent a video from Australia, where she is wrapping up her 1989 world tour, and joked, "Oh my God, this is really heavy. I really appreciate you guys shipping this out,

because it must have cost a lot."—PTI



Saoirse Ronan PHOTO: REUTERS

## Harrison Ford says he's not involved in 'Star Wars' spin-off

LOS ANGELES — Harrison Ford reprises the role of Han Solo in the next "Star Wars" film but the Hollywood actor says he will not be involved in the character's own standalone movie.

The Walt Disney Co said in July the space saga hero would get his own film, set for release in May 2018. Asked about the project and who he thought should be cast, Ford told Reuters: "I don't think it's about being like me, it's about us being like Han Solo."

"So I'm sure whoever is responsible for that film, and I'm not, will think through the issues and problems of doing such a thing ... Let's make them responsible for those questions you might think to ask me because I'm not involved."

Disney said the standalone would look at how Han Solo became the smuggler Luke Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi first

meet in the 1977 original "Star Wars" film.

Asked if he would provide any tips on how to be Han Solo in the spin-off, Ford, 73, said: "No, I'm not going to do that."

The upcoming "The Force Awakens", the first "Star Wars" film installment in 10 years, has been kept under wraps bar some broad character outlines.

"I'm pleased to see the skill with which the story has been rendered," Ford said. "I think it all came together very well."

The movie will premiere in Los Angeles on Monday and hit cinemas soon after in one of the most-anticipated releases of the year. "I don't really worry about it any more. I didn't worry about it then because I felt like it had very little to do with me," Ford said when asked how the upcoming release compared to the one in 1977.—Reuters

## Irish actress Saoirse Ronan: still a tongue-twister for Hollywood

LONDON — Irish actress Saoirse Ronan expressed delight that no-one stumbled over her name when she was nominated for a Screen Actors Guild award on Wednesday.

"I've been lucky enough to be a working actor for almost 10 years and the mere fact that people can finally pronounce my name is pretty exciting!," the 21 year-old said in a statement.

But she had spoken too soon.

On Thursday, Ronan was also nominated for a Golden Globe for her role in Irish immigrant drama "Brooklyn" but Hollywood veteran Dennis Quaid fumbled her first name, calling her "Sheesha" while making the televised announcement.

The flub swiftly trended on Twitter.

Entertainment website Moviefone.com called Quaid "the John Travolta of 2106 Golden Globe

Pronunciations" likening his slip to Travolta's introduction of "Wicked" singer Idina Menzel as "Adele Dazeem" at the 2014 Oscars ceremony.

Website Mashable.com said "'Sheesha Ronan' gets surprise nomination for best Butchered Awards Name."

Ronan, who has been acting since she was a child, earned an Oscar nomination in 2008 for her breakthrough role as the curious young sister whose accusations of rape ruin lives in "Atonement."

Some 10 movies later, she is seen as a front-runner for Oscar glory for playing a young woman who is torn between two men on the opposite sides of the Atlantic in "Brooklyn." So how do you pronounce her first name? SIR-Sha.—Reuters

# St Petersburg 'Nutcracker' shows global appeal of festive ballet

ST PETERSBURG — When the curtain rises for “The Nutcracker” at St Petersburg’s Mikhailovsky Theatre, it is the culmination of hundreds of hours of toil and sweat by dancers, costume makers, set designers and musicians.

It appears to have paid off. At a recent matinee performance, children looked on wide-eyed as the evil Mouse King did his worst and the Sugar Plum Fairy wowed the capacity audience with a legendary pas de deux that dancers have performed since the first rendition of the ballet in 1892.

A Reuters photo essay on the production— by Spanish choreographer Nacho Duato, with French stage designer Jerome Kaplan assisting with choreography — lifts the curtain on the backstage preparations.

Found at reut.rs/1OjPlpM it runs the gamut from a painter touching up scenery to a violinist practicing and ballerina Valeria Zapasnikova leaping in a work-out.

“Nacho Duato has created a real fairy tale and a beautiful ballet,” Leonid Sarafanov, principal male dancer at the Mikhailovsky Theatre, told Reuters. “I am always happy to rehearse and perform his choreography.”

The production, meanwhile, is a clear demonstration of the

global appeal of the Christmas classic.

For it is not just in Russia — where dance appeals to fans young and old from many economic backgrounds — that the ballet continues to draw crowds more than a century after Pyotr Tchaikovsky wrote the score.

In New York, for example, “The Hip Hop Nutcracker” includes the rapper Kurtis Blow, while a more traditional production by English National Ballet is performed at The Coliseum in London’s West End.

“It’s magical, a typical fairy-tale ballet,” Barry Drummond, a dancer with the English National Ballet, who plays roles including the older Freddie, told Reuters. “I could go and watch it again and again.”

Drummond, who started to dance aged 11, first saw The Nutcracker — sometimes billed as simply Nutcracker — about five years later.

“It was two hours of being taken somewhere completely different,” he recalls. “That’s very special at Christmas.”

Wherever The Nutcracker is staged, from Los Angeles to Melbourne via Tokyo, the performance does not just happen. The entire dance troupe at the Mikhailovsky started one day of



Ballet dancers perform in Nacho Duato’s “The Nutcracker” at the Mikhailovsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia, on 20 November 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

painstaking preparation with a dance class even before formal rehearsals begin, which continued beyond 9 pm.

“It’s extremely demanding and requires a huge amount of stamina,” says Drummond at the English National Ballet.

At the theater in St Petersburg, Zhanna Ayupova, was repetiteur, or rehearsal director.

“From time to time (she) tried to overcome my strong character and turn me into a delicate and fragile girl,” Valeria Zapasnikova, soloist at the Mikhailovsky Theatre, told Reuters.

“The role of Masha has become a great pleasure for me,” she says, referring to the affectionate name given in Russia to the character Clara. “This is another mile-

stone in my professional development.”

Among the rewards for all the rehearsals and a long string of performances of The Nutcracker is helping to preserve an age-old ballet tradition, Drummond in London says.

“When you take your call at the end, all the hard work is absolutely worth it.” —Reuters

## Metal detectorist finds Viking treasure in Britain

LONDON — A hoard of Viking coins, silver and jewelry could shine new light on the history of how the Kingdom of England came to exist, after it was discovered by a British amateur metal detectorist.

The 186 coins, seven pieces of jewelry and 15 silver ingots were buried around the end of the 870s AD as Anglo-Saxon kings, in what is today England, began to fight back against Viking expansion across Britain.

“The hoard comes from a key moment in English history,” said Gareth Williams, curator of Early Medieval Coinage at the British Museum.

Detectorist James Mather found the hoard, described as “nationally significant” by archaeologists, in October in Wat-

lington, Oxfordshire and his discovery was announced on Thursday at the British Museum in London.

Vikings had been attacking Anglo-Saxon positions in today’s Britain since the late 8th century but at the end of the 9th century, King Alfred of Wessex, Alfred the Great, defeated Viking forces at the battle of Edington, in southwest England.

It was a turning point that eventually caused Anglo-Saxon power to be unified as the Kingdom of England in the 10th century.

The find includes rare coins from Alfred’s Wessex and from King Ceolwulf II’s Kingdom of Mercia. It also contains Viking arm-rings and silver ingots.

“This hoard has the poten-

tial to provide important new information on relations between Mercia and Wessex,” Williams said.

The hoard will now be assessed by an inquest at which a coroner will decide whether it can be officially regarded as treasure. If it is, Oxford’s Ashmolean Museum has expressed interest in helping put it on display.

The find is one of many made by members of the public every year. These finds are recorded by Britain’s Portable Antiquities Scheme which can be viewed online. Over 100,000 archaeological finds were reported to the scheme in 2014 and 1,008 finds were declared as treasure. Ninety percent of this treasure was found by people with metal detectors.—Reuters

## News Channel in Brief

(12-12-2015, Saturday)

- 6:00 am**
  - Pritta By Venerable Mingun Sayadaw
- 7:35 am**
  - Hyper Sports
- 8:35 am**
  - The Farmer
- 9:35 am**
  - MRTV’s Youth Programme

- 10:35 am**
  - Science and Technology Programme
- 11:15 am**
  - Documentary
- 1:15 pm**
  - Round Up of Week’s Hluttaw
- 2:05 pm**
  - TV Drama Series

- 4:15 pm**
  - Documentary
- 5:35 pm**
  - Kabyar Yake Myoung
- 6:35 pm**
  - Business News
- 7:15 pm**
  - Radio Drama (Part-1)
- 8:00 pm**
  - News/ International News/ Weather Report
- 9:00 pm**
  - News
  - Gitadagale Phwintbaohin
  - Pyi Thu Ni Ti

Note/ Hourly News Bulletins (Local + International)

### Entertainment Channel

(12-12-2015, Saturday)

<p><b>6:00 am</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classical Songs</li> </ul> <p><b>6:20 am</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real Story, Real Movie</li> </ul> <p><b>6:40 am</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Myanmar Series</li> </ul>	<p><b>7:00 am</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cassette Drama</li> </ul> <p><b>8: 25 am</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dramatic Arts</li> </ul> <p><b>10:10 am</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Myanmar Video</li> </ul>
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### Myanmar International

(12-12-2015 07:00 am~ 13-12-2015 07:00 am) MST

**Today Fresh**

07:03	Am	News
07:26	Am	Great Shwedagon- The Planetary Posts
07:39	Am	Oboist and His Life
08:03	Am	News
08:26	Am	Myanmar Traditional Festival
09:03	Am	News
09:26	Am	Gold: King Of All Metals
10:03	Am	News
10:26	Am	Amazing May Phoo Han
10:37	Am	Myanmar Weaving
10:49	Am	Chanmyay Yeiktha Meditation Centre- Hmawbi

**(11:00 Am ~ 03:00 Pm) - Friday 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
07:25	Pm	Myanmar’s Traditions and Culture “The Golden Land”
07:45	Pm	Goldsmith
07:49	Pm	Today Myanmar: Soap for Hope
08:03	Pm	News
08:26	Pm	Bogalay Tint Aung: A Man of Versatility (Part- 1)
08:50	Pm	Sagaing: Guitars

**(09:00 Pm ~ 11:00 Pm) - Today Repeat (09:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)**  
**(11:00 Pm ~ 03:00 Am) - Friday 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)**

## Galloway ties himself to Everton till 2020

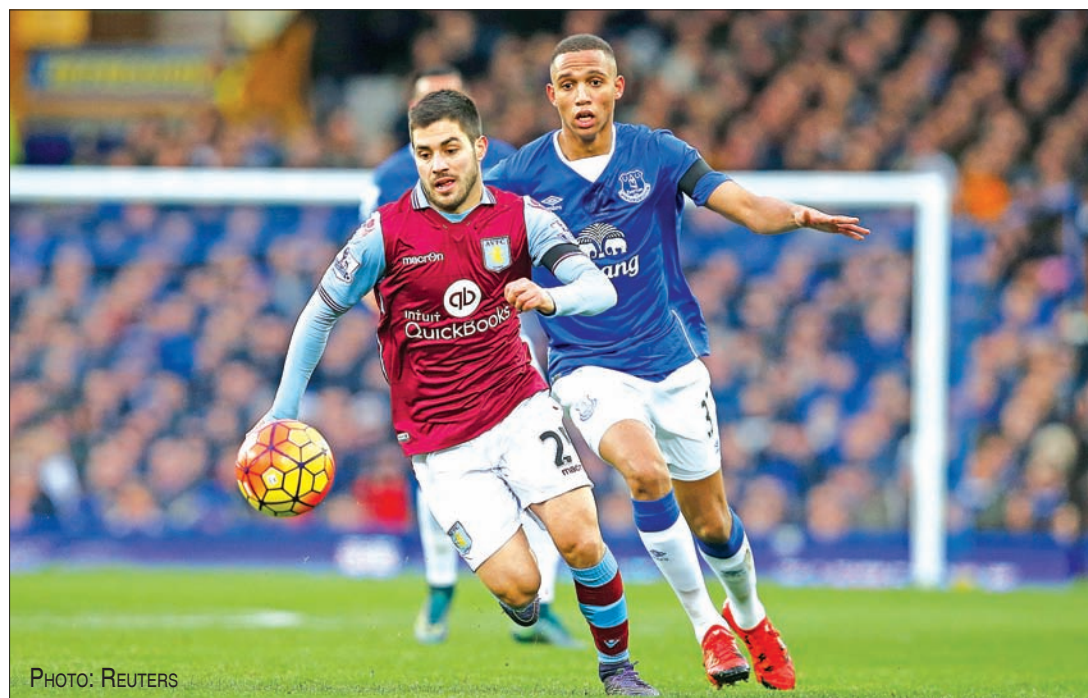


PHOTO: REUTERS

LONDON — Defender Brendan Galloway has signed a new deal with Everton that will keep him at the club until June 2020.

The 19-year-old has made 16 appearances for the Merseyside club in all competitions this season, including 14 in the Premier

League. “Brendan arrived at the football club with a very clear development path in front of him but the reality is that he has surpassed that,” manager Roberto Martinez told the club’s website.

Galloway joined Everton from MK Dons in August 2014

and made his first-team debut against West Ham United on 16 May. His performances for Everton at left-back in the wake of injuries to Leighton Baines and Bryan Oviedo earned him a call-up to England’s under-21 side. —Reuters

## Myanmar traditional boxing ceremony held in Mandalay



A winner of Myanmar Traditional Boxing 2015 accepts the trophy from an official. PHOTO: THIHA KO KO

AN award ceremony was held in Mandalay for Myanmar Traditional Boxing 2015 at Kimar Tin Win Hall in Maha Aungmye Township yesterday.

The ceremony was attended by officials of the Myanmar traditional sports federation, referees, the chairman of the Mandalay traditional boxing sub-committee and its departmental officials as well as boxers from various clubs.

Mandalay Regional Chair-

man of the Myanmar traditional boxing sub-committee U Tin Win (Kimar) and organiser U Myint Lwin (Kyar Gyi), Yangon gave opening speeches during the ceremony. U Kyaw Thu, also known as U Jon Paul, gave an address during the awards ceremony.

U Tin Win (Kimar), Saya Sanay Maung Maung, U Kyaw Thu alias U Jon Paul and U Soe Min presented the best player and team awards.—Thiha Ko Ko

## Leicester sweep monthly league awards as Vardy wins again

LONDON — Jamie Vardy was named the Premier League’s player of the month for the second month in succession, while Claudio Ranieri bagged the managerial award to ensure a clean sweep for Leicester City.

The table-topping Foxes went through the month undefeated, beating Watford 2-1 at home and Newcastle United 3-0 away, before drawing 1-1 with Manchester United at the King Power Stadium.

Vardy wrote his name into the record books against United

on 29 November, when he became the first player to score in 11 successive Premier League matches, eclipsing the mark set by former United striker Ruud van Nistelrooy in 2003.

The 28-year-old leads the division’s scoring charts with 14 goals and is the fifth player in Premier League history to win the award in consecutive months, after Robbie Fowler, Dennis Bergkamp, Cristiano Ronaldo and Harry Kane, Leicester said on its website (www.lfc.com).—Reuters

## Real’s appeal against King’s Cup expulsion rejected

MADRID — Real Madrid’s appeal against their expulsion from the King’s Cup for fielding an ineligible player was rejected by the Spanish football federation (RFEF) on Thursday.

Real included Denis Cheryshev in their starting lineup for last week’s last 32, first leg game at third-tier Cadiz even though he should have been serving a one-match suspension. The Russia forward opened the scoring in a 3-1 victory. Real president Florentino Perez insisted the club had not broken the rules and said neither Cheryshev, who incurred the sanction playing on loan at Villarreal last season, nor Real were notified that he was banned.

However, the RFEF sharply

criticised Real in an initial nine-page ruling, saying they should have been aware of the ban, and as well as disqualifying the club fined them 6,001 euros (4333 pounds).

The federation’s appeals committee rejected Real’s plea, meaning the club is likely to lodge a new appeal with the Spanish government’s Disciplinary Committee for Sports (TAD), which typically meets every Friday. The Cup return leg was due to be played at Real’s Bernabeu stadium next Wednesday. Former Real midfielder Figo had little sympathy for Cheryshev when asked about the issue at an event in Madrid on Thursday.—Reuters

## Stunning Hanyu smashes SP record score at Grand Prix Finals

BARCELONA — Japan’s Yuzuru Hanyu was at his scintillating best at the Grand Prix of Figure Skating Finals in Barcelona on Thursday, scoring a record 110.95 points in the men’s short programme — 4.62 points better than his own record set at the recent NHK Trophy in Nagano.

The 21-year-old Hanyu, who set both the short and free skate record scores only two weeks ago, put in another impeccable performance to lead the competition by nearly 20 points, having landed his quad salchow, quad-triple combination and triple axel in a near flawless display. “There was pressure to better the NHK Trophy score, to perform the same as I did (there), but I managed to control myself while feeling that (pressure),” said Hanyu. “It is something to take away that I put in a good performance (here) in an unfamiliar place, in a different environment.”

“I was really nervous and tried to use the 30 seconds (before the performance) to relax. The feeling might be close to that of the free skate at the NHK

Trophy (where he scored 216.07), acknowledging the pressure and skating while contemplating how to deal with it.”

Skating to the Ballade No. 1 op. 23 in G minor by Chopin, Hanyu received 10 out of 10 for his performance/execution component and upper nines in four other categories to finish with a short program components score of 49.14 out of a possible 50.

Hanyu, who suffered a head injury during a warm-up collision at the Cup of China in November last year

and had a spell on a sideline following the urachal remnant operation a month later, says there is no secret behind his increasingly stable quad salchow.

“There’s been no change made. I’m in my fourth season since I started trying it. There was a period of time I was off the ice, but the challenge from the past three years doesn’t go away,” he said. “I keep believing in what I’m doing and tuning myself

up, looking for what I need to be careful with in the actual competitions.” Ahead of the

Saturday’s free skate, Javier Fernandez sits second on 91.52 on his home ice in Spain, followed by China’s Jin Boyang on 86.95. Japanese 17-year-old skater Shoma Uno is in fourth on 86.47, with Daisuke Murakami, 24, in fifth after scoring a personal best of 83.47.—Kyodo News



Yuzuru Hanyu of Japan performs during the men’s singles short programme at the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating final in Barcelona, Spain, on 10 December. PHOTO: REUTERS