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JEWELS AND JADE SELL WELL

Myanmar Gems Emporium pulls in K80.8 billion



Gems merchants evaluate raw jade stones at Myanmar Gems Emporium in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

UNCUT gems and raw jade lots worth K80.8 billion (US\$62 million) were sold at the 52nd annual Myanmar Gems Emporium at

Maniyadana Jade Hall in Nay Pyi Taw from 7 to 13 December. During the one-week sale in kyats, 152 lots of gems and

6,826 lots of jade were displayed for sale under an open tender system and competitive bidding systems. Of them, 75

lots of gems worth K1.7 billion (\$1 million) and 5,531 jade lots worth K79 billion (\$61 million) were sold.

More than 1,700 jewelry merchants attended the emporium.—*Myanmar News Agency*

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Hanthawady International Airport project to move forward

Aye Min Soe

UNION Minister for Transport U Nyan Tun Aung underlined the government's determination to complete the Hanthawady International Airport project, which was suspended in 2014.

"Under successive governments, the Civil Aviation Department has been committed to build an international airport that will become an international gateway and that is considered the pride of the nation. All the people involved are obliged to take that responsibility with firm determination," said U Nyan Tun Aung, the

Union Minister for Transport, at a meeting with department staff in Yangon yesterday.

The airport will be commissioned into service in 2022, four years later than its initial target date. The project was suspended to make time to procure Official Development Assistance loans by investors, according to the Department of Civil Aviation.

The airport project was previously targeted for completion in 2018, and then it was postponed to 2020. The airport project is expected to be complete between 2020 and 2022.

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A conceptual design of the Hanthawady International Airport, submitted by the Yongnam CAPE-JGC Consortium. PHOTO: DCA

Yangon's Kan Thar Yar Consortium Towers Project to be completed within two years

THE US\$200-million Kan Thar Yar Consortium Towers Project, which is being jointly implemented by the Yangon City Development Committee and Asia Myanmar Consortium Development Company Ltd, is now 15-percent complete, and it is targeted to be completed within the next two years.

With the help of the President's Office the project is being implemented at the old Theinbyu motorcar driving school grounds in Mingla Taungnyunt Township, Yangon. The complex will include a 23-storey residential tower, a 19-story office tower, a 19-story five-star hotel and a 19-story serviced apartment building on the 3.52 acres of the site. The residential tower will be built by Asia Myanmar Consortium Development Company Ltd, and the other three buildings will be built by Asia Myanmar Shining Star Investment Company Ltd.

"The site is located near busy

Mingala Market, and we hope many tourists will stay at the hotel for their convenience," said AMCDC's director U Kyaw Khine. "There will be a three-storey shopping mall, restaurants and gymnasiums in the 258-room hotel," he added.

The project is being constructed by 35 foreign and local engineers with over 200 construction workers. After the hotel and the service department building are completed, YCDC will rent the buildings back to Asia Myanmar Shining Star Investment Company Ltd, according to the director.

He said after the project is completed, two per cent of its annual income will be directed toward assisting the nearby community. He noted that the towers will provide jobs to 3,000 people.

The project was approved by the Myanmar Investment Commission on 30 December 2014. Construction began in December 2013.—*Soe Win (MLA)*



Conceptual design of Kan Thar Yar Consortium Towers Project.

BCIM forum in Beijing focuses on strengthening economic ties

REPRESENTATIVES of Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar held a BCIM forum on regional intergovernmental cooperation in Beijing, China, from 7 to 9 December.

Dr Kan Zaw, Union Minister for National Planning and Economic Development, led a 14-member delegation to the forum.

The Myanmar delegation attended a dinner hosted by Madame Li Xiaolin, chairperson of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) on 7 December. On 8 December, Dr Kan Zaw delivered an opening address at the forum. In his speech, the union minister expressed his belief that the forum would create a new network of links between Asian countries and other nations through the further consolidation



Union Minister Dr Kan Zaw delivers a speech at BCIM forum. PHOTO: MNA

of trade and investment.

The forum vowed to strengthen economic ties in transportation, trade and investment, and the establishment of sister cities through closer cooperation between member countries.

During their stay in Beijing,

the Myanmar delegates visited the Transportation Operation Coordination Centre, the Beijing Shougang Bioenergy Science and Technology Co Ltd, the Foton Motor Group, the Foton Beijing Engine Plant and the National Stadium.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Hanthawady International Airport project

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The Hanthawady International Airport project, which is the largest of three airport projects being undertaken to accommodate the growing number of foreigner travellers to Myanmar, will be constructed on more than 9,000 acres of land where the Japanese army

built an airport during World War II. Located about 48 miles north east of Yangon in Bago Region, the international airport is projected to handle up to 12 million passengers per year. Meanwhile, Mandalay International Airport, which was commissioned into service in September 1999, is being upgraded

to serve as a cargo hub.

A consortium including Yonnam Holdings Ltd and Changi Airport Planners and Engineering (CAPE) from Singapore and Japan's JGC Corporation won the tender for the contract to build the Hanthawady International Airport.—*GNLM*

Jivitadana Sangha Hospital to hold 26th donation fair

JIVITADANA Sangha Hospital in Yangon will hold a donation fair on 19 December.

The 26th donation fair will start at 2pm and feature sales of

food and games.

Visitors will be entertained with music provided by a Myanmar traditional music band.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Residents in Kalay provided with free health care services

A medication team led by Bishop Dr Lian Khen Thang of Kalay Roman Catholic gave free medical treatment to the people in flood-affected areas in Kalay, Sagaing Region, recently.

The team comprising 26 specialists, generalists and nurses

provided more than 530 residents with free health care services at Roman Catholic Church in Khampat, Tamu District.

This is the 5th mobile health care tour of areas which were hit by flood in July and August by the team.—*Cin Sawm Tuang*



Volunteers participate in giving free medical care to residents in Kalay. PHOTO: CIN SAWM TUANG

Dr Sai Mauk Kham inspects renovation of Yangon General Hospital

VICE President Dr Sai Mauk Kham inspected ongoing extensions and renovations to the Yangon General Hospital yesterday, describing it as the country's most reliable medical centre.

At surgical wards, the vice president offered words of encouragement to two patients whose accidentally damaged arm and finger have respectively been surgically attached.

Yangon Region Chief Minister U Myint Swe and other officials briefed the vice president on the progress of the extensions and renovations to the century-old hospital.

After hearing the briefings, the vice president praised the relevant committees for

their achievements in the construction work, stressing plans to make the hospital a protected Yangon heritage site when the renovations are completed.

He attributed the accessibility of hi-tech equipment and effective medicines to collective contributions from the public, encouraging officials to keep up their good work in order to allow the next government to continue with the project.

The Yangon General Hospital has been upgraded from a 1,500-bed to a 2,000-bed facility equipped with sophisticated equipment such as 16-Slice CT, Digital X-ray, ECG, Ultrasound, PET/CT, Cyclotron, 128-Slice CT and MRI-1.5.—*Myanmar News Agency*



Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham conforms a patient at Yangon General Hospital. PHOTO: MNA



Vice President U Nyan Tun seen off by officials as he leaves for Bangkok. PHOTO: MNA

VP discusses Dawei SEZ with Thai officials

VICE President U Nyan Tun left for Bangkok yesterday to attend a meeting on projects related to the Dawei Special Economic Zone.

The fifth bilateral meeting took place at the St Regis Astor hotel in Bangkok at 2pm, with the two countries discussing initial projects being carried out at the Dawei SEZ, their financial details, Japanese cooperation in the projects and preparatory measures for conducting a meeting of Myanmar, Thailand and Japan.

In the evening, Vice President U Nyan Tun visited the residence of the Myanmar ambassador to Thailand, where he met with the ambassador, the embassy staff and their families.

U Nyan Tun, also the chairman of the Joint Committee for the Implementation of the Dawei Special Economic Zone and its related projects, was accompanied by Union Minister U Aye Myint, Taninthayi Region Chief Minister U Myat Ko and other high-ranking officials.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Blood donors recognised for their 100th donation

YANGON Region Chief Minister U Myint Swe honoured donors who have given blood more than 100 times yesterday.

Organised by the Central National Blood Bank Committee, the 39th ceremony to honour the blood donors was held in Yangon.

At the ceremony, U Myint Swe thanked the participants from religious organisations, social society groups and the National Blood Department, who mobilised many people to take part in blood donation activities.

The chief minister also accepted a cash donation made by members of the public during the ceremony.—*Myanmar News Agency*

C-in-C attends ground-breaking of home for aged for veterans

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF Senior General Min Aung Hlaing attended the ground breaking ceremony of the Sasana Nyein Aye Pagoda, which will share a site with a new home for aged veterans, in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

The ceremony was attended also by monks and abbots, as well as Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services and Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice-Senior General Soe Win, union ministers and senior officers from the Office of the Commander-in-Chief (Army).

The ceremony began with the senior general accepting the nine precepts from the monks, who later delivered sermons.

Then, the senior general and his party presented gifts to the monks before sharing merits.

Afterward, the senior general and his party planted gem caskets at designated places in the com-

pound.

A donation ceremony for the home for the aged was also held at the venue. At the ceremony, the senior general said the donations were intended for the bereaved families and those who died in action. He said similar homes for the aged would be built in Yangon and Mandalay, in addition to housing projects for veterans.

In conclusion, the senior general urged donors to help ease the lives of veterans.

The senior general and Lt-Gen Tun Kyi (Retd) accepted the donations, and the latter thanked the donors.

The senior general and his party inspected the construction of the home for the aged by car.

A total of K1.6 billion were donated by families of the defence services, retired personnel and members of the public for the home for the aged.—*Myawady*



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing drives stake at a ground-breaking of home for aged for veterans. Photo: MNA

China welcomes Paris climate change agreement

BEIJING — The landmark agreement on climate change signed in Paris Saturday is “a new beginning in international cooperation” and is fair in splitting responsibility between developed and developing countries, according to a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson.

“We appreciate the efforts that all parties have made, especially host country France,” Hong Lei said yesterday.

“China has always promoted relative negotiations, and we will continue to work with the international community to deal with global climate change,” Hong said.

Adopted by the 196 Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement sets a target of holding the global average rise in temperature below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and preferably below 1.5 degrees. On the basis of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, developed countries agreed to raise 100 billion US dollars a year by 2020 to help developing countries transform their economies.

At the opening ceremony of



The final conference at the COP21, in Le Bourget, Paris, on 12 December 2015. PHOTO: XINHUA

the two-week Paris gathering, Chinese President Xi Jinping warned against a zero-sum game mentality in the negotiations.

Following the adoption of

the agreement, China's Special Representative on Climate Change Xie Zhenhua said, “The Paris Climate Conference is a crucial point in the global climate

governance process. The outcome has a real bearing on human beings' undertakings in climate change and our future of sustainable development.”

“China will take international obligations commensurate with its own national condition, development stage and actual capacity,” Xie vowed. —Xinhua

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2 Koreas end vice-ministerial talks without reaching agreement

SEOUL — North and South Korea on Saturday ended two days of vice-ministerial talks without reaching any agreement, according to a South Korean news pool report.

The talks, aimed at finding ways to improve relations following heightened cross-border military tensions in August, began Friday at a joint industrial zone in the North's border city of Kaesong and continued late into the night. They resumed Saturday morning and were held on and off throughout the day.

South Korean Vice Unification Minister Hwang Boo Gi and

two other officials attended the talks 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.

The two sides failed to set a date for the next round of talks.

Topics likely taken up 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

demanding 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. Only 20 inter-Korean reunions have been held 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 rela-

tives in the North before they die.

The current talks are the result of an agreement by the two nations in August to hold high-level talks in a bid to improve relations.

Tensions had escalated earlier that month after South Korea accused the North of planting land mines in the Demilitarised Zone between the two countries 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

Bangladesh needs to create 21m jobs in next 10 years

DHAKA — World Bank (WB) Senior Vice President and Chief Economist Kaushik Basu said here Sunday creating more higher-skilled jobs was a top priority for Bangladesh.

The chief economist also commended the country's remarkable development progress.

Basu made his observations while meeting Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

He praised Bangladesh's efforts to create more and better jobs, a prerequisite for reducing poverty and boosting shared pros-

perity. Since 2003, the country has been able to create 14 million higher-value jobs and bring more women into the workforce, which has lifted millions of people out of poverty, said Basu, adding 75 percent of the new jobs created were in the manufacturing and service sector.

“But, there is no time for complacency. Bangladesh needs to create 21 million jobs in the next 10 years for the new entrants in the job market. The country needs to address infrastructure bottlenecks, improve business and investment

in climate and enhance the quality of education and vocational training to create adequate jobs for its youths.” Basu was quoted as saying in a statement of the World Bank.

Basu will meet with senior government officials, including the Finance Minister and the governor of Bangladesh Bank, among others. He also met with the private sector leaders and development partners.

“I am happy to be back in Bangladesh. The resilience of its people, the innovation and pro-

gress in this country has been impressive,” said Basu.

“Bangladesh has made great strides in promoting financial inclusion, and raising agricultural productivity. Indeed, other countries can learn from Bangladesh's rich experience of reducing poverty and advancing the development agenda. With the right policies and a few timely actions, it is possible for Bangladesh to emerge as the next Asian Tiger. That today we can think along these terms is testimony to how far Bangladesh has come.”—Xinhua

North Korea slams US over UN meeting on human rights 'racket'



North Korean refugees Jung Gwang Il (R) and Grace Jo (L) appear at a news conference before attending a meeting of the United Nations Security Council on alleged human rights abuses by North Korea which has been accused by a UN inquiry of abuses comparable to Nazi-era atrocities at UN headquarters in New York. PHOTO: REUTERS

UNITED NATIONS — North Korea on Saturday blasted the United States for organising a meeting of the UN Security Council on alleged human rights abuses in the reclusive Asian country that has been accused by a UN inquiry of abuses comparable to Nazi-era atrocities.

China, Russia, Venezuela and Angola tried but failed on Thursday to stop the 15-nation council from holding its sec-

ond meeting on human rights in North Korea. North Korean diplomats did not attend the session, at which UN officials as well as the United States and its allies accused Pyongyang of widespread abuses.

"We strongly denounce and categorically reject the US convocation of another meeting of the UN Security Council aimed at finding fault with the 'human rights' in the DPRK (Democratic

People's Republic of Korea) despite opposition by many countries," North Korea's Foreign Ministry said, according to a statement sent to reporters by the country's UN mission.

The United States and eight other council members voted in favor of holding the meeting. In addition to the four nations that opposed it, Nigeria and Chad abstained.

North Korea said the oppo-

sition to the meeting undercut the US attempt to criticise Pyongyang.

"This revealed the sinister aim sought by the US in its farce and hardened the objective understanding that the US anti-DPRK 'human rights' racket is a product of its persistent hostile policy toward the DPRK," the statement said.

It added that instead of looking at human rights, the council "should handle such issues as the US harsh tortures and the US-South Korea joint military exercises."

The 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, an ally of North Korea, and Russia.

Previously, the council's discussion of North Korea was limited to its nuclear weapons programme.

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

The commission of inquiry report detailed wide-ranging abuses in North Korea including prison camps, systematic torture, starvation and killings.—Reuters

China navy carries out more drills in disputed South China Sea

BEIJING — China's navy has in recent days carried out more exercises in the disputed South China Sea, the Defence Ministry said yesterday, calling them routine drills.

China claims almost all of the energy-rich waters of the South China Sea, through which more than \$5 trillion of maritime trade passes each year. The Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam, Malaysia and Taiwan have overlapping claims. "The People's Liberation Army Navy in recent days organised a fleet to go to relevant seas in the South China Sea, by way of the Western Pacific, to carry out exercises," China's Defence Ministry said in a brief statement.

"This action is a routine arrangement made in accordance with this year's naval training plan," it added, without elaborating. Pictures on social media accounts of Chinese state media have in recent days shown pictures of Chinese navy ships engaged in live-fire exercises in the South China Sea, without saying where exactly they took place.

China periodically announces such exercises in the South China Sea, as it tries to demonstrate it is being transparent about its military deployments.

China has been at odds with the United States of late over the strategic waterway.

Washington has criticised Beijing's building of artificial islands in the South China Sea's disputed Spratly archipelago, and has conducted sea and air patrols near them. Last month, US B-52 bombers flew near some of China's artificial islands and at the end of October a US guided-missile destroyer sailed within 12 nautical miles of one of them.

China expressed concern last week about an agreement between the United States and Singapore to deploy a US P8 Poseidon spy plane to the city state, saying the move was aimed at militarising the region.—Reuters

Ten killed, over 30 injured in NW Pakistan blast

ISLAMABAD — At least 10 people were killed and over 30 others injured when a blast hit a market in northwest Pakistan's Parachinar town along the Pak-Afghan border yesterday, reported local Urdu TV channel Geo quoting local officials.

According to the local media reports, the blast took place at about 12:30 pm local time inside a scrap shop at a market area in Parachinar.

Many people were shopping in the market when the blast occurred, eyewitnesses told the me-

dia, adding that several shops were damaged in the explosion.

Initial investigation said it was a planted bomb detonated with a remote-controlled device. Rescue team and police rushed to the site shortly after the blast was reported.

All the injured have been

shifted to nearby hospitals where seven of the injured were said to be in critical condition. Police have cordoned off the area for a search operation. Two suspects have been arrested, said police. No group has claimed responsibility for the blast yet.—Xinhua

Central African Republic votes in crucial referendum

BANGUI — Voters in Central African Republic cast their ballots yesterday in a constitutional referendum seen as crucial to ending nearly three years of violence, while rebels denounced the process and called for a new transitional government.

The former French colony descended into chaos in early 2013 when mainly Muslim Seleka rebels seized control in the majority Christian nation.

Their abuses led to reprisals by Christian anti-balaka militias, sparking inter-religious violence that has killed thousands and dis-

placed nearly a million in a de facto partition of the country.

The expected approval of the new constitution would pave the way for 17 December polls to elect a new president and parliament, restoring democratic rule in the wake of two successive transitional governments.

Voting got off to a late start in many neighbourhoods in the sprawling, riverside capital Bangui, but queues formed in front of polling stations across the city.

However, gunfire that began overnight around the PK5 neighbourhood continued into yester-

day morning. Residents of the isolated Muslim enclave marched to the headquarters of the country's UN peacekeeping mission to complain they were unable to cast their ballots.

In a statement distributed yesterday, the former Seleka coalition said conditions, including the return of refugees, were not in place to allow for the elections to go ahead.

"CAR (Central African Republic) isn't ready to organise inclusive, democratic, credible, safe and transparent elections," it said. "A third transition with a

new consensual team is needed, the elections ... and the referendum must be cancelled."

Earlier this month, Nourredine Adam, the leader of one of Seleka's main factions, threatened to block the polls in areas under his control. Government spokesman Dominique Said Panguindji acknowledged there had been several incidents in Bangui and elsewhere in the country. However, he said that conditions were generally calm and turnout was healthy.

"The overall opinion is that there must not be a third transi-

tion. We must have elections. This is the will of the people," he said.

Central African Republic has seen a succession of coups since becoming an independent nation in 1960, and the resulting instability has eroded state authority.

The proposed constitution limits the power of the president and increases that of the parliament, creating a senate to compliment the already existing national assembly. It also establishes a Special Criminal Court to try serious crimes.—Reuters

Spain's new parties gain ground ahead of election

MADRID — Spain's new political forces Podemos and Ciudadanos have gained ground ahead of a general election on 20 December a poll showed yesterday, sapping support for mainstream parties and reinforcing expectations that no one party will manage to win a majority.

The governing centre-right People's Party (PP) is widely expected to win the election, though with far less backing than it garnered four years ago as the vote becomes a four-way race.

Over recent decades two parties — the PP and the opposition

Socialists (PSOE) — have alternated power, but a crushing economic crisis marked by soaring unemployment has broken their dominance, as many voters seek out alternatives.

The PP would win the election with 28.3 percent support, a GAD3 poll published in the conservative ABC newspaper showed, giving it between 117 and 124 seats in the 350-seat parliament.

That was slightly up from the 28.2 percent support it got in a GAD3 poll on 7 December, though backing for the party has

slipped since late November. It won an absolute majority in 2011, but unpopular austerity measures and corruption scandals have eroded its support, even as the economy improves and jobs return.

Ciudadanos, a centrist, market-friendly party that has taken votes from the PP and the Socialists, is seen grabbing 18.1 percent of the vote — or 59 to 63 seats — compared with 17.9 percent on 7 December.

Leftist Podemos, meanwhile, an anti-austerity party founded barely two years ago, would get

17.6 percent of the vote, or 50 to 53 seats, up from 16.6 percent last time.

Gains for these two parties have squeezed the Socialists, with their backing falling to 21.2 percent, or 83 to 85 seats, from 21.5 percent on 7 December.

Ciudadanos, led by telegenic 36-year-old Albert Rivera, is increasingly being painted as the kingmaker party, and is expected to do particularly well in regions that were previously PP bastions, such as Madrid and Valencia, a separate poll by Sigma Dos in El Mundo newspaper showed.

Podemos should also garner strong support in Madrid, according to that poll, leaving the Socialists trailing in fourth place there.

The last week of campaigning could yet lead to surprises. One in three people either refused to give their preference, were undecided or planned to abstain, an official poll showed recently.

On Monday, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy will go head to head with Socialist leader Pedro Sanchez in his first appearance in a televised debate, having shunned previous ones.—Reuters

UK's Cameron prepared to drop key EU welfare demand



Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron. PHOTO: REUTERS

LONDON — British Prime Minister David Cameron is prepared to drop a demand to curb welfare benefits for migrant workers as he attempts to renegotiate the terms of Britain's membership of the European Union, two British newspapers reported on Saturday.

The demand that European migrant workers wait four years before claiming state benefits has so far been presented as a central plank of the new deal Cameron is seeking to clinch ahead of a referendum on whether to stay in the bloc or leave.

Seen as a way to reduce Britain's attractiveness to migrants from poorer EU members in eastern Europe, a major domestic political issue in Britain, the welfare demand has been one of the biggest stumbling blocks in the renegotiation process.

Citing government sources, the *Telegraph* and *Independent* newspapers reported that Cameron would tell fellow EU leaders in Brussels on Thursday that he was prepared to drop the plan if they agreed on alternative measures to help reduce immigration.

A spokeswoman for Cameron's Downing Street office said she had no immediate comment

and was looking into the reports.

Dropping the demand, which has received extensive coverage in the British media, would be seen as an embarrassing climbdown and would likely antagonize the large and vocal eurosceptic wing of Cameron's Conservative Party.

The opposition Labour Party was quick to react to the unconfirmed reports, saying Cameron had been "undone" by a failure to build alliances and goodwill in Europe.

"He chose to make benefits the centerpiece of his renegotiation, but it was never a good idea to reduce the whole future of our cooperation with Europe, and the jobs, investment, growth, security and influence it has brought us, to just this issue," said Hilary Benn, Labour's foreign affairs spokesman. He called on Cameron to "make the broader case" for remaining in Europe.

Both newspapers said that Cameron would tell fellow leaders at a European Council meeting in Brussels on 17-18 December that the contentious proposal would remain "on the table" until a better alternative was found to address the immigration issue.

"What matters most is to fix the problems, not the precise form

of the arrangements," the *Telegraph* quoted a Downing Street source as saying.

On a tour of several eastern European countries this week as part of his renegotiation drive, Cameron found that his proposal on welfare was the most problematic issue for fellow heads of government.

After meeting with Cameron in Warsaw, Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydlo said they had not reached full agreement on certain issues, singling out the welfare benefits proposal.

Poland has been one of the main beneficiaries of the EU's principle of free movement since it became a member in 2004. Tens of thousands of Poles live and work in Britain. Cameron has promised to hold a referendum on whether Britain should remain in the EU or exit the bloc by the end of 2017, although it could take place much earlier than that. He has said his preference would be to remain in a reformed EU.

A British vote to quit the EU, the so-called "Brexit" scenario, would shake the 28-member bloc to its core, depriving it of its second-biggest economy and most important financial center.—Reuters

NEWS IN BRIEF

World Bank chief says ready to help countries implement climate pact

WASHINGTON — World Bank President Jim Yong Kim on Saturday welcomed the historic global climate agreement reached in Paris in the same day, saying the World Bank is ready to help countries deal with climate change.

"We welcome the historic agreement that has just been reached in Paris. The world has come together to forge a deal that finally reflects the aspiration, and the seriousness, to preserve our planet for future

generations," the World Bank President said in a statement.

The deal protects the poorest people and the most vulnerable countries, and sends the signal to trigger public and private sectors investments to drive economies toward a carbon neutral world, said Kim.

He said that the World Bank is ready to help and will do its utmost to help countries implement the climate deal and address climate change.—Xinhua

14 die from drinking tainted alcohol in Cambodia

PHNOM PENH — At least 14 people have died from drinking tainted rice wine and herbal wine in Cambodia's northeastern province of Kratie since 19 November, the Ministry of Health said Sunday.

Ministry spokesman Or Vandin said that 129 people were also sickened in the incidents that occurred in four dis-

tricts in the province.

Health Minister Mam Bunheng said yesterday that tests conducted on the rice wine and herbal wine drunk by the villagers showed high levels of toxic methanol.

He appealed to all villagers to immediately stop drinking local rice wine.—Kyodo News

Death toll of psychiatric hospital fire in Russia climbs to 23

MOSCOW — At least 23 people were killed in a deadly blaze at a psychiatric hospital in the southwestern Russian region of Voronezh, the Russian Emergency situations Ministry said yesterday.

Rescuers have found two more bodies at the debris after 19 dead bodies were recovered at the site earlier and another two died in a local hospital.

Over 70 people were inside the psychiatric hospital when the fire broke out late Saturday night, and 51 of them were evacuated from the 700

square metres building. Twenty one people with burns of various degree have been hospitalised.

All the dead were bedridden patients or patients who took strong drugs, the TASS news agency said, quoting an unnamed law enforcement official.

The fire has been put out, but the cause of it remains unknown. A preliminary investigation into the tragedy has been launched by Russia's Investigation Committee.—Xinhua

Al Qaeda's Syria wing says truces only benefit government

BEIRUT — Truces between the Syrian government and rebels only benefit Damascus, the leader of one of the largest insurgent groups in the war said in comments broadcast on Saturday, in which he also criticised a recent opposition meeting as a “conspiracy.”

The remarks by Abu Mohammad al-Golani, head of al Qaeda's Syria wing Nusra Front, came after the implementation of a truce deal in Waer, the last insurgent-held area of Homs city, between the local government and insurgents.

“Truces are the first step to surrender and take place only in the interests of the regime,” he said in comments to reporters broadcast on opposition-affiliated Orient News TV.

It was not immediately clear when the recording took place. Golani's face was digitally obscured.

Under the Waer deal, fighters who rejected the terms and some civilians were allowed leave and humanitarian aid was allowed in. Nusra Front fighters were among those who rejected the ceasefire and left.

A senior United Nations official told Reuters this week the Waer ceasefire was a good model to build on and could help promote a nationwide truce in the

nearly five-year conflict that has killed 250,000 people. UN officials were present when fighters started to leave Waer last week.

Golani also criticised a Saudi-hosted Syrian opposition conference held last week as “a conspiracy”.

“Whoever went to the conference does not have the ability to implement things on the ground,” he said.

He also said that the Riyadh conference sought to keep the Syrian president in power.

“It wants to keep Bashar al-Assad and to incorporate the armed opposition into the regime forces and then wants this merged group to fight Nusra Front and Islamic State and then seeks to impose a truce on the Syrian people,” he said.

Nusra Front, a Sunni Muslim hardline group, was not invited to Riyadh and Golani said the group would not have wanted to attend anyway.

“(The conference) was not in the interests of the people of Syria, which is unacceptable,” he said.

“It is a big betrayal of these young people who sacrificed their blood and everyone who sacrificed their blood for the establishment of Islamic rule ... this is a conspiracy of many factions and we must work to



Al Qaeda-linked Nusra Front fighters carry weapons on the back of pick-up trucks during the release of Lebanese soldiers and policemen in Aarsal, eastern Bekaa Valley, Lebanon, on 1 December 2015.

PHOTO: REUTERS

thwart such plots.”

Golani gave a rare two-part interview to the Qatari-financed Al Jazeera channel earlier this year in what appeared to be an attempt by his group to cast itself to an Arab audience as a Syrian national movement.

“We took the path of jihad and we have to complete the process, and we are talking about liberating more than 80 percent of Syrian territory,” he said on Orient News.

In response to a question about the group's relationship

with al Qaeda, he said Nusra would not cooperate with the West and would stick to its principles.

“We will not give up our principles whether we are al Qaeda-linked or not al-Qaeda linked,” he said.—Reuters

Thousands of Iraqis in Baghdad, Basra protest Turkish deployment in north



Riot police stand in front of protesters during a demonstration against Turkish military deployment in Iraq, in Najaf, on 12 December.

PHOTO: REUTERS

BAGHDAD — Thousands of Iraqis protested on Saturday against Ankara's deployment of troops to a base near the northern city of Mosul, with some burning Turkish flags and threatening violence against the soldiers for what they see as a violation of sovereignty.

News of the deployment of 150 Turkish soldiers earlier this month triggered a crisis between Ankara and Baghdad, which has appealed to the United Nations Security Council to demand their immediate and unconditional withdrawal. Ankara has refused, saying the troops were part of an

international mission to train and equip Iraqi forces to fight Islamic State, which still controls a large part of the country. Baghdad denies inviting such a force.

As tensions smoulder between Moscow and Ankara over Turkey's downing of a Russian warplane last month, Russia labelled the Turkish deployment an “unlawful incursion”.

At least 4,000 demonstrators gathered in Tahrir Square in central Baghdad on Saturday, and several thousand more in the oil city of Basra in the south, including Shi'ite militia members who held up banners reading “Death to

Turkey. Death to Erdogan”.

“We consider any military presence on Iraqi land as foreign aggression which we should stand against using all possible means,” Hadi al-Amiri, a Shi'ite lawmaker who heads the powerful armed Badr Organisation, told protesters in Baghdad.

The rallies were organised and led by Shi'ite militia groups, which have threatened to use force against Turkey unless it withdraws. Pointing his pistol towards an image of Erdogan, Amjad Salim, a local commander in the Badr Organisation in Basra, said: “We are on high alert now awaiting orders from our commanders to set fire to the ground beneath the feet of Turkish soldiers.”

In Baghdad, Reuters reporters saw angry protesters trample on the Turkish flag and hit a caricature of Erdogan with slippers in a mark of disrespect.

“If Turkey thinks Iraq is busy with fighting Daesh and it can seize the opportunity to deploy troops then it should think twice before making such a mistake,” said Abu Muntathar al-Moussawi, a local commander in Iranian-backed Asaib Ahl al-Haq paramilitary group.

“We can target Turkish soldiers and coming days will prove it.”—Reuters

First woman is elected to Saudi local council

RIYADH — Saudi Arabia said yesterday that Salima bint Hazab al-Otaibi had become the first woman elected to public office in the conservative Islamic kingdom after winning a seat on the municipal council in Mecca in Saturday's election.

The election was the first in which women could vote and run as candidates, a landmark step in a country where women are barred from driving and are legally dependent on a male relative to approve almost all their major life decisions.

However, the election was for only two thirds of seats in municipal councils that have no lawmaking or national powers, and follows men-only polls in 2005 and 2011.

Otaibi won a seat in the Madrika district of Mecca, the holiest city of Islam, and where all the other successful candidates were men, the official Saudi Press Agency reported in a list of preliminary results.

Results from Northern Borders Province and the southwestern province of Asir, the only others to have been announced, had no successful women candidates.

Under King Abdullah, who died in January and who announced in 2011 that women would be able to vote in this election, steps were taken for women to have a bigger public role, sending more of them to university and encouraging female employment.

However, while women's suffrage has in many other countries been a transformative moment in the quest for gender equality, its impact in Saudi Arabia is likely to be more limited due to a wider lack of democracy and continued social conservatism.

Before Abdullah announced women would take part in this year's elections, the country's Grand Mufti, its most senior religious figure, described women's involvement in politics as “opening the door to evil”.—Reuters

OPINION

The uses and abuses of literature

Kyaw Thura

Literature is considered to have a major impact on business and social issues; it has the power to shape a society by influencing its political systems.

A good example of this is the potential impact of foreign literature on our own literature, considering its penetration into our daily conversations and periodicals. It is commonplace

for teenagers to speak with a mixture of Myanmar and English in their conversations and writings. Such language mixes cause a problem in trying to get a message across to an audience.

A glance at social media is enough to notice the frequent abuses of our own language by our own people. It is hard to believe that young educated people are in the majority. It is often claimed that the foundation of every state is the education of its youth simply because the future of a nation is in the hands of its educated youth.

Literature is generally used not only as a vehicle for spreading nationalistic propaganda but also as an effective means of pointing out where the decision makers go wrong in legislative, executive, judicial, economic and social arenas. Either way, literature does have the power to effect

change. But the question is whether this happens is for the better or the worse. Nevertheless, the use of literature plays a critical role in upholding national characteristics and uplifting a stable societal structure in every community.

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 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.

Improve Our English

Htun Tin Htun

I would like to recommend those who want to study to improve their English based on my practical experience.

Many books, pamphlets, brochures and periodicals are available nowadays in our surroundings.

Private study can be of helpful to read, to speak aloud, to write and to memorize.

Repetition is the best for the scriptures and non-repetition is the bane of scriptures like negligence is the bane of a home.

Oral tradition of teaching and learning is the fundamental learning of mind-centered teaching since over 2600 years ago.

Visual and audio materials are effective teaching aids for the lifelong learners who are eager to learn.

Evidence has shown that rote learning is one of the effective learning methods for some of the professions.

Only the heedful and meditative attain great happiness. One truly is the protector of oneself, who else could the protector be? One will always be happy by not encountering fools.

Understand that "let one not neglect one's own welfare for the sake of another, however great, clearly understanding one's own welfare, let one be intent upon the good.

Right product with the right price at the right place with the right promotion is good marketing mix in which people are centered. Right learning through Newspaper reading makes us good English learners.

English daily newspapers in the world are reliable reading materials for all of us in this planet for knowledge and information sharing.

No-two in Myanmar is our "The Global New Light of Myanmar", Myanmar's highest circulation newspaper and oldest newspaper in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

Get, kindly, my experiences of reading, writing, speaking practice from the Working People's Daily Newspaper since 1980's, I prepared (4) books on the Cooperative Movement in Burma (1981), (1982), (1986) and (1987) and (3) working papers in English language for Burma-Myanmar (since 1905 of its inception of cooperatives in Myanmar, I am the only one (within 110 years) who translated and adapted (14) technical books and over (60) articles in Myanmar language for Cooperative Movement in Burma-Myanmar up to now) and (7) resource guide books on cooperative management in English for the Republic of Malawi and the Republic of Kiribati where I was serving as International Volunteer, Small Business and Cooperative Specialist because of an English learning through 3 months practicing of reading, writing, speaking aloud and memorizing by studying English Newspaper (do not forget that I am a graduate from the Yangon Institute of Economics in '1970' and I got H.G.P '1972' and R.L. '1977' too).

Low price (but not free of charge), for which we need to pay Kyats 3000 a month for "The Global New Light of Myanmar Daily" nowadays and we need only Kyats 2000 worth of English-Myanmar Pocket Dictionary as initial investment and note the fact that "Should a person do good, let him do it again and again, let him find pleasure therein, for blissful is the accumulation of good."

I would therefore most sincerely like to recommend those

who want to improve their English, give time for such purpose stage by stage, 3 months, 6 months, 9 months and 12 months and I would like to encourage those University Students who have been undergoing undergraduate and post-graduate classes for improving English.

Systematic approach needs to be done for such study: (1). Reading (especially editorial/perspective/opinion of the daily or other interesting news which explains current affairs of the country or the world) (finding those words in dictionary if necessary); it will take 10 to 15 minutes (2). Writing down the description, it will take 15 minutes; (3) Practicing of speaking out aloud by yourself such writings three or four times (the writings will be not more than 1 sheet of A4 paper so that it takes 3 minutes maximum and for four times of speaking out, you will need 12 minutes only); and (4). Memorizing it as much as you can; and after that if you have time, to read other news.

(1). Hearing/Listening; (2). Thinking; (3). Asking/Questioning; (4). Speaking/Talking; (5). Studying; (6). Writing; (7) Rote learning and (8) Reciting are the eight flowers in a garland of a learner in his daily life of lifelong learning.

About the author

Freelance Management and Development Consultant, Former International UNV UNCHS/ILO/UNIDO Cooperative and Small Business Specialist in Malawi and Kiribati /UNDP Community Empowerment and Development Specialist in Bangladesh

The spirit of Christmas! (Peace on Earth)

KhupLian Pau (Paubawi)

MYANMAR is a land of many festivals and religions that are free to profess the religion of their choice. Today, Christians and non-Christians alike partake of Christian's celebration of the birth of JESUS CHRIST and other communities join in the sense of sharing. We, the people of Myanmar, who find unity in diversity, are aware of the freedom of religious pursuit, and exercise it in the most practical way.

PEACE on earth and goodwill to man is the message of JESUS CHRIST. The spirit of this message is shared by not only Christians but also other religions and World leaders too. Today, when the state Peace and Development Council's undertakings are committed more peace and development for the

benefit of all mankind.

Look at Christmas is an occasion for joy, for boundless love, for forgiveness, for goodwill and for redoubling efforts for true Peace throughout the globe. Peace shall never be a commodity that runs scarce, nor hard to forge.

Who is JESUS...??? He is the beginning and the end. The great man in history. — JESUS had no servants, yet they called Him MASTER. — JESUS had no degree, yet they called Him TEACHER. — JESUS had no medicines, yet they called Him HEALER. — JESUS had no army, yet kings feared Him.

He won no military battles, yet He conquered the world. — He committed no crime, yet they crucified Him. — He was buried in a tomb, yet HE lives today. For the reason, we all celebrate the Birth of JESUS in every year

PEACE on EARTH!
MERRY CHRISTMAS! & A
HAPPY NEW YEAR!



Myanmar women entrepreneurs are seen at Yangon International Airport on 11 December, 2015, before they leave for Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam, to attend "ASEAN + 3 Young Entrepreneurs Forum". The delegation comprising Daw Khin La Pyae Win and Daw Eindray Min Min will participate in the forum from 11 to 14 December. PHOTO: MYANMAR NEWS AGENCY

Powintaung Cave Pagodas to be developed

THE Powintaung Cave Pagodas, a site of religious significance to Buddhists, will be further developed using funds raised from pilgrimages to the sacred Shrine of Venerable Monk Alungdaw Shinmahar Kathpa at the nearby Alaungta Kathapa National Park, according to the secretary of the shrine's board of trustees U Maung Maung Htay.

The cave pagodas are located in Yinmapin Township, and Alaungta Kathapa National Park is in neighbouring Monywa Township, which are both in Sagaing Region.

"We will rebuild the road from Powintaung to Alaungta Kathapa, which was built 50 years ago before the death of the Venerable Monk of Powintaung. There will be a religious festival in February at Alaungta Kathapa Shrine. We plan to develop the two religious sites according to the wishes of the Venerable Monk Powintaung," said the secretary.

Over six hundred pilgrims from Yangon visited the religious sites last year. More pilgrimages are expected this year to contribute to the development of the religious sites, he added.

The ancient Powintaung Cave Pagodas formed entirely



Buddhist devotees wait to ride an elephant on their way to Powintaung Cave Pagodas. PHOTO: MYO WIN TUN

out of natural rocks. All the pathways, vestibule chambers and Buddha images are carved out of solid rock. According to early inscriptions, the caves are said to

be more than 700 years old.

The Alaungta Kathapa National Park, with an area of 620.32 square miles, is well known not only in Myanmar

but also throughout ASEAN.

The park is home to large populations of wild elephants and other rare wildlife species.—Myo Win Tun

Myawady residents to get free tuberculosis treatment

PUBLIC educational talks on tuberculosis and its treatments and risk factors were held in Myawady the District Hospital in Kayin State on 11 December.

District Commissioner U Lwin Ko Oo made a speech at the event. The State Tuberculosis Prevention Team head Dr Win Naing explained the activities of the mobile prevention team around the state.

Together with District Deputy Health Officer Dr Ne Winn Lin and Dr Thein Myint of the World Health Organisation, local officials discussed inviting the mobile team to visit Myawady from 14 to 18 December. The team aims to provide medical checks for TB among the local community.

The visit will be the mobile team's second visit to the town. During its first visit, 165 locals were found to have tuberculosis, and 17 were found to be positive.—Htein Lin Aung (IPRD)



An eye specialist presents certificate of honour to a donor. PHOTO: WIN KYAING (IPRD)

Cherry Myetta Foundation provides eye care to Kyaungon residents

EYE examinations and treatments were provided to residents of Kyaungon Township, Ayeyawady Region, by the Cherry Myetta Foundation from 7 to 11 December.

This was the foundation's 14th contribution to the local community. A total of 2,258 residents

came to have eye check-ups at the town's Dhamma Nanda Monastery.

From 9 to 11 December, 197 patients were given eye operations, and 12 patients were provided with other medical treatments at the township hospital. The foundation offered meals

to the patients and their family members. The foundation donated K300,000 each to the monastery, township hospital and to youths who helped with the donation events. The foundation also provided follow-up medicines and eye glasses to the patients.—Win Kyaing (IPRD)

Crime News

One dead, 17 injured after single-car crash

ONE man is dead and 17 were injured in a single-car crash in Tatkon Township, Nay Pyi Taw, on 10 December, police reported.

A light truck driven by U Myint Hsaung, 58, of Paybinlay Village in Pyawbwe Township,

turned over near mile post No. 6/6-7 on the Yangon-Mandalay highway when the driver lost his control.

Passenger U Htay Aung, 50, of Yamethin Township, died on the spot, while the driver and 16

passengers were injured and admitted to the General Hospital in Tatkon Township.

The Shwe Township Police Station has logged a lawsuit against the reckless driver.—Police IPRD

Police suspects arrested in stolen motorbike cases

FIVE young men wanted for stealing motorbikes in Mandalay this month have been charged under the law by the police.

The authorities investigated two cases of motorbike thefts on

10 December and arrested three of five total suspects and seized the stolen items at the No. 3 Police Station in Chanayethazan Township.

Police said the two motor-

bikes were stolen within two weeks of each other by Kyaw Khaing Tun (aka Tokegyi), Zaw Htet Lin (aka Kaone), Hein Thant, Lwin Moe Aung and Kyaw Thu Lwin.—Police IPRD

Illegal teak seized in Magway

A CACHE of illegal swan teak timber was seized in Aunglan Township, Magway Region, on 10 December, according to a police officer.

Acting on a tip-off, a combined investigation team comprising police and staff of the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry intercepted the two tractors near mile post No. 207/ 3 on the Yangon-Mandalay Road and searched the vehicles.

The authorities found 66 pieces of swan teak timber weighing 1.5 tonnes on a tractor driven by U Myo Aung, 24, of Intawtha Village in Aunglan Township, and another 64 pieces weighing 1.5 tonnes on another vehicle driven by U Nyunt Win, 42, of Pyalo Village in the same township. Four suspects have been charged under Section 6(1) of the Public Property Protection Act by the Duingabo District Police Station.—Police IPRD

Musk, other tech chiefs back artificial intelligence startup with \$1 billion

SAN FRANCISCO — Tesla Motors Inc Chief Executive Officer Elon Musk and other prominent tech executives are pouring \$1 billion into a non-profit aimed at creating artificial intelligence that augments humans' capabilities, rather than making them obsolete.

The effort announced on Friday, called OpenAI, joins significant investments from companies such as Alphabet Inc's Google, Facebook Inc and Am-

azon.com Inc, which have used artificial intelligence to sharpen their businesses with services such as facial recognition or language processing. But the OpenAI founders suggested they have set their sights on bigger problems.

"Our goal is to advance digital intelligence in the way that is most likely to benefit humanity as a whole, unconstrained by a need to generate financial return," a blog post on OpenAI's

website said. Predicting that human-level artificial intelligence will eventually arrive, the backers argued that it was vital to have a research institution like OpenAI in place to seek "a good outcome for all over its own self-interest."

Musk has warned of the harm that may come from artificial intelligence, telling Massachusetts Institute of Technology students it was humanity's "biggest existential threat."—Reuters

Nestle CEO says won't revise targets, leaves board move open



Chocolate packets are displayed in the showroom at the headquarters of Nestle in Vevey, Switzerland, on 16 October, 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

ZURICH — Nestle could leave Switzerland if limits on pay and immigration restrict its staffing choices but continues to invest in the country, chief executive Paul Bulcke said in an interview published on Saturday.

He also told newspaper *Neue Zuercher Zeitung* the world's largest packaged food company would not revise its growth targets despite a tough market environment and said he would not automatically step up

to chairman when the seat becomes vacant.

Bulcke cited referendum votes last year and in 2013 to set immigration quotas and limit executive pay as threats to the business environment in Switzerland, but said the failure of similar initiatives since suggested that "wisdom is returning".

"Should it become difficult to bring specialists into the country, then we will have to go somewhere, where this flexibility still

exists," Bulcke said in the interview. He said Nestle would not revise its medium to long-term growth targets down from the current 5–6 percent target range.

"Within a weak economic environment, at 5 percent, we've grown better than the market," Bulcke said.

"If we were to revise the goal downward, then (our performance) would certainly also move down ... The important thing is that we grow faster than the others and outperform them through our strong innovation. That's what we strive for."

Asked if he would succeed his predecessor as CEO Peter Brabeck-Letmathe when the 71-year-old retires as Nestle chairman in 2017, Bulcke said: "Nothing is automatic."

"It's an advantage for someone who knows the company to take over leadership. But that's not enough," the Belgian native told NZZ, referring to the chairmanship and CEO positions.

"We're open and have repeatedly recruited from outside the company in recent times."—Reuters

Before Paris climate deal, a landgrab on the web



A participant holds an apple marked with the logo of the World Climate Change Conference 2015 (COP21) during a meeting at Le Bourget, near Paris, France, on 7 December 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

PARIS — Months before the world's nations began forging a climate accord in Paris, a California environmentalist named John Niles was digging into his pockets to buy a slew of internet domain names.

A constant presence at past UN-sponsored climate deliberations, he had heard that the agreement to be hashed out in France would be named "The Paris Agreement" and he wanted to make sure any website that included those words was his.

"We needed that digital real estate," said Niles, a carbon dioxide expert at the non-profit Greenhouse Gas Management Institute. "It was a way to keep the control over information about the deal, to keep it out of the bad guys' hands."

For Niles, that would include US conservative groups like the Heartland Institute and the Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow, which vocally oppose efforts to wean the global economy off planet-warming fossil fuels.

Heartland and CFACT last week sponsored a day of events in Paris aimed at casting doubt on the wisdom of a climate deal, including the launch of a movie called "Climate Hustle."

CFACT also runs a website called *climatedepot.com* devoted to arguments against regulating climate change.

"We didn't want them to use the name of this agreement for their arguments," Niles said.

Niles bought *parisagreement.com*, *theparisagreement.org*, and twelve other variations, according to a domain registry search on data provider *whois.net*. He then gave them to the US green advocacy organisation The Tropical Forest Group, which has been using them to publish updates on the talks.

"This allowed us to tell the story in our own way with as little bias as possible," said TFG director Patrick Cage. "Well, with the bias that we think an agreement is a good idea."

The Paris Agreement was adopted on Saturday. —Reuters

Alibaba to buy South China Morning Post in Hong Kong

BEIJING — Alibaba Group Holding Ltd (BABA.N) has agreed to buy Hong Kong's flagship English-language newspaper, the *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), in the most politically sensitive acquisition by the e-commerce giant to date.

Alibaba and SCMP Group Ltd (0583.HK) announced on Friday that the Hangzhou-based company would buy the 112-year-old newspaper and other media properties for an undisclosed amount.

The purchase, which follows a string of media deals by Alibaba, is likely to raise concerns in Hong Kong, where the *South China Morning Post* occupies an important position among the

English-speaking elite who still dominate the former British colony.

Chinese-language dailies may be more influential than the Post, but changes in its editorial direction are seen as a barometer for press freedom under Chinese rule.

Alibaba has acquired or invested in a growing portfolio of media and content companies in recent years. In June, the company agreed to pay \$194 million (£128 million) for an undisclosed stake in the China Business News, the domestic financial media firm.

"The SCMP has iconic status in the region, with a strong reputation internationally for the quality and credibility of its journalism

over the years," Joe Tsai, executive vice chairman of Alibaba Group, said in a letter to SCMP readers.

"Like many print media, however, the SCMP faces challenges amid the dramatic changes in the way news is reported and distributed. But these changes play to Alibaba's strengths, which is why we believe the two companies complement each other well."

Alibaba Chairman Jack Ma is no stranger to controversy at the newspaper.

In 2013, a reporter for the Post quit after quoting Ma as having made remarks in support of Beijing's violent crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Ma denied

at the time that he had made such an assertion.

Tsai sought to address concerns about editorial independence in his letter.

"In reporting the news, the SCMP will be objective, accurate and fair ... day-to-day editorial decisions will be driven by editors in the newsroom, not in the corporate boardroom."

However, some SCMP staff members said the takeover was unlikely to have much impact over the publication's content, and greeted the news with resignation.

"The SCMP has not had an editorial balance for more than a decade. We don't think that will change under a mainland Chinese owner," said an editor who has

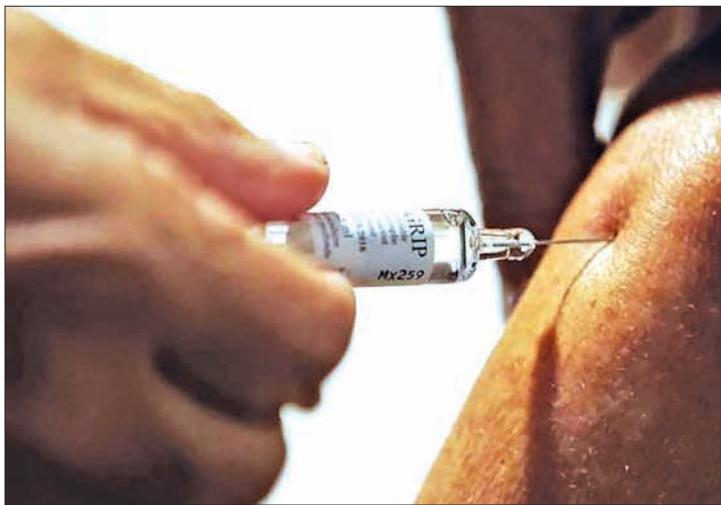
worked at the newspaper for more than a decade.

"You can expect a Chinese angle on every story."

Friday's agreement includes SCMP Group's other media assets, such as licenses to the Hong Kong editions of *Esquire*, *Elle*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Harper's Bazaar*. In November, the publisher said it had received a preliminary approach by an unidentified third party interested in its media properties, and media outlets had reported Alibaba was the potential buyer. Financial terms of the deal were not disclosed.

SCMP has a market value of HK\$3.04 billion, or \$392 million, according to Thomson Reuters data.—Reuters

Early vaccination tied to fewer flu symptoms for health workers



A nurse vaccinates a patient as part of the start of the seasonal influenza vaccination campaign in Nice, southeastern France, on 21 October 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

CHICAGO — For health care providers, earlier influenza vaccination is linked to fewer flu symptoms and less time away from work, a Mexican study suggests.

“It’s a straightforward phenomenon: it takes three weeks for antibodies to develop, thus the earlier you get vaccinated the better,” said senior study author Dr. Adrian Camacho-Ortiz, of the University Hospital Dr. Jose Eleuterio Gonzalez in Mexico.

“The most important finding of our study is that we provide proof of this phenomenon, which is scarce, moreover in health care providers,” Camacho-Ortiz added by email. “We found that health care workers

vaccinated earlier in the season had less influenza-like syndrome and were less likely to lose working days.”

Camacho-Ortiz and colleagues analyzed data on nearly 6,200 health care workers over two flu seasons at one teaching hospital in Mexico.

During the first season, from September 2013 to April 2014, vaccines were given later than during the subsequent season, spanning 2014 to 2015.

Roughly 59 percent of the health care workers studied got vaccinated in each of the two flu seasons, the research team reported in the *American Journal of Infection Control*.

But during the first year of the study, only 23 percent of

vaccinated workers were inoculated by the beginning of November, two months into the flu season. In the second year, 56 percent of the vaccinated workers were inoculated by November.

The difference may be due at least in part to earlier efforts to promote vaccination during the second season, the researchers note.

Fewer workers vaccinated early during the first year translated into more leaves of absence among the study participants — 52 the first year, compared with just 15 the following year — and more total days of lost work — 218 versus 68.

In the first year, 49 vaccinated workers experienced flu like symptoms, compared with just 24 the following year. There wasn’t a difference, however, in the proportion of vaccinated workers who had confirmed cases of influenza.

One limitation of the study is that the vaccine was known to be less effective during the second season. Contrary to the study results, the authors speculate that this should have increased the number of people with flu like symptoms and confirmed influenza cases during the second season.

Common misperceptions about vaccination, such as an incorrect belief that people can

get influenza from the flu shot, may still lead some health care workers not to get inoculated, noted Sherri LaVela, a researcher at the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University in Chicago.

“Many organisations that have instituted mandatory vaccination initiatives have seen large improvements in vaccination rates among health care workers,” LaVela, who wasn’t involved in the study, said by email.

Beyond the lost work from delayed or skipped vaccinations, health care workers who aren’t protected against influenza can infect patients, noted Mary Lou Manning, president of the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology and a researcher at Thomas Jefferson University College of Nursing in Philadelphia.

“The scientific evidence is clear that the routine annual influenza vaccination of health care providers can reduce influenza-related illness and its potentially serious consequences among the providers and their patients,” Manning, who wasn’t involved in the study, said by email. “There is also evidence to suggest that when hospital workers get vaccinated, community flu rates decline.”—*Reuters*

Roche gets accelerated US approval for lung cancer drug

SWITZERLAND — US health regulators on Friday said they have granted accelerated approval to Roche Holding’s drug for advanced lung cancer in patients with a specific genetic mutation.

The drug, alectinib, to be sold under the brand name Alecensa, was approved to treat patients with advanced ALK-positive non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) whose disease has worsened after, or who could not tolerate, treatment with Pfizer’s Xalkori.

“Today’s approval provides a new therapy for a group of patients who would have few treatment options once their disease no longer responds to treatment with Xalkori,” Richard Pazdur, head of the Food and Drug Administration’s Hematology and Oncology Products division, said in a statement.

Xalkori was seen as an advance in the field of personalised medicine as it was designed to treat only patients with the ALK genetic mutation, which account for about 4 percent of NSCLC patients. Pfizer is also developing a drug for ALK positive patients who have stopped responding to Xalkori.

The FDA’s Accelerated Approval Programme allows conditional approval of a medicine that fills an unmet medical need for a serious condition based on early evidence of clinical benefit.

A confirmatory study is required to verify the benefit of Alecensa for it to gain full approval, the agency said.—*Reuters*

Melting glaciers blamed for subtle slowing of Earth’s rotation

WASHINGTON — The melting of glaciers caused by the world’s rising temperatures appears to be causing a slight slowing of the Earth’s rotation in another illustration of the far-reaching impact of global climate change, scientists said on Friday.

The driving force behind the modest but discernible changes in the Earth’s rotation measured by satellites and astronomical methods is a global sea level rise fueled by an influx of meltwater into the oceans from glaciers, the researchers said.

“Because glaciers are at high latitudes, when they melt they redistribute water from these high latitudes towards lower latitudes, and like a figure skater who moves his or her arms away from their body, this acts to slow the rotation rate of the Earth,” Harvard University geophysicist Jerry Mitrovica said.

The movement of ice and meltwater is also causing a slight migration of the Earth’s axis, or north pole, in a phenomenon

known as “polar wander,” the researchers said.

“Imagine a figure skater who doesn’t stick their arms straight out but rather sticks one at one angle and the other out at another angle. The figure skater will begin to wobble back and forth. This is the same thing as polar motion,” Mitrovica said.

The research looked at the changes in the planet’s rotation and axis in light of the world’s sea level rise in the 20th century as a result of increasing global temperatures.

The melting of the ice sheets and the rise in sea levels moved the planet’s rotation axis, or north pole, at rates of less than a centimeter per year, Mitrovica said. This melting slowed the Earth’s rotation and increased the duration of a day by about a thousandth of a second over the 20th century, Mitrovica said.

“These are small effects,” but are another indication of the profound impact of human-induced climate change on the

planet, Mitrovica said. The observed rotation slowdown does not pose a danger to the planet, he said.

If polar ice sheets melt at higher rates this century, as experts forecast them to do, the impact on Earth’s rotation will

grow, Mitrovica said.

The research was published in the journal *Science Advances*.—*Reuters*



The Thwaites Glacier in Antarctica is seen in this undated NASA image. Vast glaciers in West Antarctica seem to be locked in an irreversible thaw linked to global warming that may push up sea levels for centuries, scientists said on 12 May 2014. PHOTO: REUTERS

With landmark climate accord, world marks turn from fossil fuels

PARIS — The global climate summit in Paris forged a landmark agreement on Saturday, setting the course for a historic transformation of the world's fossil fuel-driven economy within decades in a bid to arrest global warming.

After four years of fraught UN talks often pitting the interests of rich nations against poor, imperilled island states against rising economic powerhouses, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius declared the pact adopted, to the standing applause and whistles of delegates from almost 200 nations.

"With a small hammer you can achieve great things," Fabius said as he gavelled the agreement, capping two weeks of tense negotiations at the summit on the outskirts of the French capital.

Hailed as the first truly global climate deal, committing both rich and poor nations to reining in rising emissions blamed for warming the planet, it sets out a sweeping, long-term goal of eliminating net manmade greenhouse gas output this century.

"It is a victory for all of the planet and for future generations," said US Secretary of State John Kerry, who led the US negotiations in Paris.

"We have set a course here. The world has come together around an agreement that will empower us to chart a new path for our planet, a smart and responsible path, a sustainable path."

It also creates a system to encourage nations to step up voluntary domestic efforts to curb emissions, and provides billions more dollars to help poor nations cope with the transition to a greener economy powered by renewable energy.

Calling it "ambitious and balanced", Fabius said the accord would mark a "historic turning point" in efforts to avert the potentially disastrous consequences of an overheated planet.

For US President Barack Obama, it is a legacy-defining accomplishment that, he said at the White House, represents "the best chance we have to save the one planet that we've got."

The final agreement was es-



Representatives of indigenous peoples demonstrate in Paris, France, as the World Climate Change Conference 2015 (COP21) continues at Le Bourget on 12 December 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

entially unchanged from a draft unveiled earlier in the day, including a more ambitious objective of restraining the rise in temperatures to "well below" 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels, a mark scientists fear could be a tipping point for the climate. Until now the line was drawn only at 2 degrees.

In some ways, its success was assured before the summit began: 187 nations have submitted de-

tailed national plans for how they will contain the rise in greenhouse gas emissions, commitments that are the core of the Paris deal.

While leaving each country to pursue those measures on its own, the agreement finally sets a common vision and course of action after years of bickering over how to move forward.

Officials hope a unified stance will be a powerful symbol for world citizens and a potent signal to the executives and inves-

tors they are counting on to spend trillions of dollars to replace coal-fired power with solar panels and windmills.

"This agreement establishes a clear path to decarbonise the global economy within the lifetimes of many people alive today," said Paul Polman, the CEO of consumer goods maker Unilever and a leading advocate for sustainable business practices. Polman said it will "drive real change in the real economy".—Reuters

IMF's Lagarde calls Paris climate agreement 'critical step forward'

WASHINGTON

International Monetary Fund chief Christine Lagarde on Saturday hailed the landmark accord reached in Paris "a critical step forward" for addressing global climate change in the 21st century and said her key message is to "price carbon right."

"Governments must now put words into actions, in particular by implementing policies that make effective progress on the mitigation pledges they have made," Lagarde said in a statement. "That is why my key message is to price carbon right and to do it now."

"Charging for the emissions of fossil fuels puts in place the needed incentives for low-carbon investments; it also provides revenues to safeguard the poor, reduce debt, and lower the burden of other taxes on households and businesses," Lagarde added.

"We look forward to dialogue on carbon pricing and helping governments put this vital policy into practice."—Reuters

Suspect arrested for arson, hate crime in California mosque fire

COACHELLA — Police have arrested a 23-year-old man suspected of setting a fire at a Southern California mosque in a hate attack, following the massacre of 14 people in San Bernardino by a Muslim couple in what the FBI is treating as an act of terror, authorities said on Saturday.

Carl James Dial Jr was arrested in connection with Friday's fire in the entrance of Islamic Society of the Coachella Valley, the Riverside County Sheriff's Department said in a statement.

Authorities have said the fire caused no injuries. But it charred the building's stucco front entrance, leaving it with chunks of plaster torn out and littered with debris. The blaze heightened concerns about an anti-Islamic backlash in the wake of the 2 December massacre of 14 people by US-born Syed Rizwan Farook, 28, and his Pakistani-born wife Tashfeen Malik, 29, at a holiday party in San

Bernardino, about 75 miles (121 km) northwest of Coachella.

The FBI has said it is treating the shooting as an act of terrorism, citing the couple's declaration that they were acting on behalf of the Islamic State militant group.

The statement from the Riverside County Sheriff's Department, which is leading the investigation into the fire, said Dial, 23, was arrested in Palm Desert, a community near Coachella, on suspicion of arson, hate crime and burglary. Online jail records indicated he was arrested on Friday night and held in the Indio Jail on bail of \$150,000. The Sheriff's Department declined to release further details, including whether Dial was motivated to burn the mosque in direct reaction to the San Bernardino shooting.

It was not clear if Dial had obtained an attorney, and he could not be reached for comment from jail.



A view of damage at the burned Islamic Society of Coachella Valley on 12 December 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

On his Facebook page, Dial made a number of references to Islamic State, such as on 31 October when he wrote that he was watching execution videos by the militant group. He also overlaid his profile picture with the French flag, as have many Facebook users in response to Islamic State's coor-

ordinated series of shootings and suicide bombings in Paris that killed 130 people last month.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation joined the probe into the fire at the mosque as a possible civil rights violation motivated by religious bias, said FBI spokeswoman Laura Eimiller.—Reuters

Three killed, 14 injured in S Philippines landmine attack

MANILA — Two government soldiers, a civilian were killed and fourteen others wounded in a landmine attack by leftist rebels in southern Philippines of Compostela Valley Province on Saturday night, the military said yesterday.

Capt. Rhyan Batchar, public affairs officer of the Army's 10th Infantry Division, said troops from the 1001st Brigade were on a se-

curity patrol when New People's Army (NPA) militants detonated the landmine around 6:30 pm along a provincial road near Mabini town.

"Our troops were on foot, conducting patrol. Unfortunately, the rebels were waiting for them," said Batchar.

"The (killed) civilian was incidentally passing the area when

the rebels detonated the IED (improvised explosive device)," he said.

Batchar said the soldiers retaliated, forcing the undetermined number of rebels to withdraw. "The troops fought back but they gave priority to the evacuation of the wounded," said Batchar.

Among the 14 wounded soldiers, one was in "critical condi-

tion", according to Batchar.

The NPA, armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines, has been waging a guerrilla campaign against the government in the countryside for four decades. Military estimates the NPA strength at more than 4,000 men scattered in more than 60 guerrilla fronts throughout the country.—Xinhua

China holds Nanjing Massacre ceremony, Xi absent unlike last year

NANJING — China held a memorial ceremony yesterday for victims of the 1937 massacre committed by the Imperial Japanese Army in Nanjing, with President Xi Jinping skipping the event after attending last year, as the two countries have moved toward repairing their often-testy relations.

This year's ceremony in the eastern Chinese city comes after China's successful bid in October to include documents on the military rampage in the "Memory of the World" programme by UNESCO, the UN cultural agency.

China last year designated 13 December as a national memorial day for the victims and for the first time held a state observance of the tragedy that Beijing says killed more than 300,000.

The previous ceremony was spotlighted internationally as Xi delivered a speech saying that nobody can deny the atrocities, at a time when Sino-Japanese relations were still much more fragile than they are now.

However, in addition to Xi, none of the others who sit on the Chinese ruling party's seven-member Politburo Standing Committee, the country's apex of power, participated in this year's event.

Leading up to the service, coverage by Chinese official media was also low-key, amid a gradual-but-steady improvement in diplomatic relations between Tokyo and Beijing.



Li Jianguo, vice chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, addresses a memorial ceremony in Nanjing on 13 December 2015, for victims of the 1937 massacre committed by the Imperial Japanese Army in the eastern Chinese city. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

The highest-ranking Chinese official at the ceremony to mark the 78th anniversary of the massacre was Li Jianguo, vice chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress.

Citing UNESCO's recent inscription of a dossier on the widespread killings, Li said "history is the best textbook" in his speech at the venue, where thousands of Chinese officials, veterans and schoolchildren were present.

Li said the massacre has "world significance" as a lesson from the past.

"We have to resolutely oppose anyone who beautifies the war of aggression and any action or word that attempts to drive

history backward," Li said.

But at the same, in line with what Xi has been saying in past months, the vice chairman said the two countries have witnessed a great development since the 1972 normalisation of diplomatic ties and that both should continue to promote friendly cooperation with a future-oriented spirit and contribute to world peace.

The Japanese army invaded China in the 1930s and the two Asian countries fought a full-scale war from 1937 to 1945 that ended with Japan's defeat in World War II.

On 13 December, 1937, Japanese forces took control of Nanjing, the Chinese capital at the time.

Japanese troops' killing of a large number of Chinese civilians, rape of women and looting, in both the run-up to the city's capture and the weeks that followed, remains one of the biggest sources of friction between the neighbouring countries.

China this year has held a series of events to mark the 70th anniversary of what it calls its victory against Japan's aggression, including a massive military parade in September in Beijing.

Japanese and Chinese historians are still divided on the number of victims in the mass murder.

Differing views on the number has been a cause of tension between them.

Japanese and some foreign historians have estimated the number of Chinese civilians and soldiers killed by the Japanese military to range from the tens of thousands to 200,000.

Some Japanese nationalists dispute that a massacre in Nanjing, which is now the provincial capital of Jiangsu province, even took place.

With regard to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's inscription, the Japanese government has lodged a protest over an entity that should be neutral in sensitive political and historical issues "unilaterally" including the Chinese documents in the world list without allowing Tokyo to access them for verification.—Kyodo News

Kuwait court upholds one death sentence in mosque bombing

KUWAIT — A Kuwaiti appeals court upheld one death sentence and overturned another in the case of an Islamist suicide bombing at a mosque in June, Kuwaiti newspaper al-Qabas reported yesterday.

A criminal court in September had sentenced seven defendants to death in the case. Eight other suspects had been given prison sentences ranging from two to 15 years. Fourteen other defendants were acquitted at the time.

The status of the five other defendants sentenced to death in September was not clear. Al-Qabas said the court had stopped looking into their appeals, without elaborating.

Islamic State claimed responsibility for the June 26 bombing, when a Saudi suicide bomber blew himself inside the Imam al-Sadeq mosque in Kuwait City, killing 27 people. Hundreds of Shi'ite Muslims were performing Friday noon prayers when the bomb went off.

Kuwait cracked down on Islamist militants after the bombing, the country's worst militant attack. Officials say the bombing was aimed at stoking strife between Sunnis and Shi'ites in the majority Sunni state, where the two sects have usually coexisted in peace.—Reuters

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North Korean pop band cancels Beijing concert, leaves for home



Members of the Moranbong Band from North Korea carry their instruments as they leave a hotel in central Beijing, China, on 11 December 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

BEIJING — An all-female North Korean pop group formed by leader Kim Jong Un abruptly canceled a Beijing concert on Saturday because of “communication issues” and headed home, Chinese media and the concert venue said.

The Moranbong Band was visiting China along with North Korea’s State Merited Chorus and was due to perform at Beijing’s Na-tion-

al Centre for the Performing Arts. The band is Kim’s pet project as he tries to put his personal stamp on the North Korean arts, and the short haircuts of the group’s young women members are trend-setting in the capital, Pyongyang.

A member of staff who answered the telephone at the venue said the show had been canceled for “some unknown reason”.

Chinese news portal Sohu said the women had flown home and the stage they were due to perform on had been dismantled. China’s official Xinhua news agency, citing unidentified “relevant departments”, said the performances “cannot be staged as scheduled due to communication issues at the working level”.

“China attached high importance to the cultural exchanges with the DPRK, and was ready to continue to work with it to promote the bilateral exchanges and cooperation in culture and all other areas,” it said, using the country’s official name, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

Pictures obtained by Reuters showed the band leaving their hotel

in Beijing around noon on Saturday, with their baggage.

The show was due to be their first overseas appearance. Chinese media said they were due to give three concerts in Beijing. There was no immediate word from North Korea on their departure.

The band’s China visit had been seen as an indication of improving relations between China and its isolated neighbour.

China is North Korea’s main economic and diplomatic backer, but was infuriated in 2013 when Kim ordered the country’s third nuclear test.

Several subsequent rounds of sabre rattling by North Korea towards South Korea and the United States have also tested China’s patience.

On Friday, North Korea’s official KCNA news agency lauded the attention the band’s arrival in China was drawing, saying world media “vie with each other to report about the China visit”.

The ensemble, whose members were reportedly handpicked by Kim, was formed in 2012.

“In July three years ago, Kim Jong Un watched a demonstration performance of the Moranbong Band and appreciated it for having greatly improved all the musical elements — from theme and formation to arrangement, composition of instruments, technical skill and representation,” KCNA said earlier in the week.—*Reuters*

Taylor Swift trying to patent ‘1989’, title of her novel

LOS ANGELES — Singer Taylor Swift has apparently filed trademark applications for five phrases including “Swiftmas,” “Blank Space,” “And I’ll Write Your Name,” “A Girl Named Girl” and “1989”.

While “1989” is the title of 25-year-old singer’s latest album, “A Girl Named Girl” is the title of a novel the singer wrote when she was 14 which remains unpublished, reported *Aceshowbiz*.

The patent will debar people from using the phrases in performances, on clothing, merchandise, stationery, and in books and publications freely.

For “1989”, the trademark will apply only to the year presented in “stylized form”, which looks like the one on Swift’s album cover.

Back in February, the “Bad Blood” hit-maker sought patents for phrases including “This Sick Beat,” “Nice to Meet You, Where You Been?” and “Party Like It’s 1989.”—*PTI*



PHOTO: REUTERS

One Direction hiatus was a unanimous decision

LONDON — One Direction will be going on a two-year hiatus in March next year and the boys say it was an “unanimous” decision.

The British group said past few years had been crazy for them and they all just needed a break from their busy routine, reported *Digital Spy*.

“Yeah, I think we are all on the same page. We know how intense it’s been and could do with a little break,” said Louis Tomlinson.

The first thing that Liam Payne

wants to do is spend time with his family. “We all do the songwriting thing and that is going to be the thing that keeps us within doing the stuff that we love too. It’s just the stage we have to miss,” he said.

Niall Horan dreams of travelling a little bit and Harry Styles would like to confirm has not yet recorded a solo album.

The band said the break won’t be forever though, with Louis suggesting they “give it 18 months” and see what happens.—*PTI*



Lady Gaga.
PHOTO: REUTERS

Music industry boys club: Lady Gaga

NEW YORK — Singer Lady Gaga has called out the music industry for being a boys club.

The performer, who was honoured with the Woman of the Year title at this year’s Billboard Women in Music event, gave an emotional speech while ac-

cepting her award, reported *People* magazine.

“What I really want to say is that it is really hard sometimes for women in music. It’s like a ... Boys club that we just can’t get in to,” Gaga, 29, said.

“I tried for so long, I just really wanted

to be taken seriously as a musician for my intelligence more than my body ever in this business. You don’t always feel like when you’re working that people believe that you have musical background, that you understand what you’re doing because you’re a female.—*PTI*

Naughty or nice, SantaCon revelers descend on New York



Revelers dressed in Santa Claus and other holiday themed outfits pose for a group photo before the start of the annual SantaCon event in the Brooklyn borough of New York, on 12 December 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

NEW YORK — Thousands of merrymakers dressed like Santa Claus and his elves took to the streets of New York on Saturday for the annual pub crawl known as SantaCon, a Yuletide rite with a reputation for inspiring bad behavior among the revelers.

While some bar owners reported respectful crowds of red-and-white clad partiers, social media was alive with photos of Santas mooning motorists, passed out in doorways, and urinating on the street.

But thankfully, said bar manager Carlos Virgil, those particular Santas did not show up at Viva Tor in Brooklyn's hip Williamsburg neighbourhood.

"We had a safe event for everybody, and I'm happy about that because in the past, SantaCon has had a bad reputation," said Virgil, whose bar hosted more than 1,000 Santas and elves as an official SantaCon destination.

More than 14,000 people signed up to participate on the SantaCon NYC Facebook page.

"I'm just here to have fun and be a part of something," said a Santa-suited Terance McNamara, 25, of Hoboken, New Jersey.

Last year, some city officials urged bar and restaurant owners to boycott the event for fear of rowdiness, vomiting and public urination, which has marred some of the events in the past. But the backlash appears to have eased as organisers have worked to re-brand the event as a good-spirited fundraiser for charity.

"We are trying to transit from what SantaCon was to something more positive for this year and in the future," said Norman Siegel, a civil rights lawyer who is working with the organisers.

On Saturday evening, Jasmine Henderson and her friends, wearing Santa hats and red clothes, stood near a Williamsburg beer garden after a few hours of merrymaking and tried to decide where to go next.

She said the Santas she partied with have only been a little bit naughty.

"I haven't run into any problems," said Henderson, 25. "The most I saw were lots of lap dances." The event originated in San Francisco more than 20 years ago as a boozy, tongue-in-cheek protest against the commercialization of Christmas.

"SantaCon is a cultural public commentary on the Christmas season, from a critique of consumerism to cultural and charitable giving," said Siegel, who regards SantaCon as an exercise in free speech. "It's part satire and has an edge."

The New York crawl, one of dozens scheduled in cities around the world, wound its way to Manhattan's Lower East Side, where most of this year's participating bars are located. In the past, organisers have kept the pub crawl route secret until the night before, unsettling residents and businesses in neighbourhoods anticipating a deluge of well-oiled merrymakers. This year the map of events was released earlier this week.

Last year's SantaCon in New York City coincided with street demonstrations against police violence sparked by killings of unarmed black men, complicating security considerations. Even so, there were no arrests or summonses issued last year, Siegel said.

"I'm not worried about the event," said Greg Jacobson, general manager at Verboten, another hosting bar. "That's what I have security for."—Reuters

New Zealand to train more overseas aircraft engineers

WELLINGTON — New Zealand aviation training bodies will be targeting China, India and Southeast Asia with the introduction of international-standard regulations next year, Associate Transport Minister Craig Foss said Friday.

Civil Aviation Rule Part 147 (Maintenance Training Organisations), which comes into force on 1 February, would enable New Zealand aircraft maintenance training organisations to more easily train overseas aircraft engineers.

"This rule will ensure New Zealand aligns with international best practice in certification and operation of aviation maintenance training organisations," Foss said in a statement.

New Zealand stood to gain from the opportunity to train overseas aircraft engineers with target markets including China, Indonesia, India, Vietnam and Malaysia.

To become Part 147 certificated, organisations undertaking specific types of aircraft maintenance training must demonstrate to the director of Civil Aviation how they would meet the requirements in Part 147.


The requirements related to aspects such as employing appropriately qualified staff, providing appropriate facilities, keeping accurate records and ensuring training courses and examinations are appropriately conducted.—Xinhua



Entertainment Channel

(14-12-2015, Monday)

<p>6:00 am</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alinka Wut Yee Music Troupe <p>6:20 am</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pyi Thu Ni Ti <p>6:40 am</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fashion Show <p>7:00 am</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TV Drama Series 	<p>8:40 am</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Golden Music of Old Stars <p>9:10 am</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Myanmar Video <p>10:20 am</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Myanmar Video <p>12:00 noon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close Down
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Myanmar International

(14-12-2015 07:00 am ~ 15-12-2015 07:00 am) MST

Today Fresh

07:03	Am	News
07:26	Am	Tapestry- A Unique Combination Of Painting and Craftsmanship
07:45	Am	Well-Trained Elephants
07:55	Am	Modifying Natural Thanakha Bark into Ready-Made Skin Care Product
08:03	Am	News
08:26	Am	A Visit To San-Taw-Shin Kyike-Hti-Yo Pagoda
08:42	Am	Licuala Palm Leaf
08:51	Am	Dengue Fever
09:03	Am	News
09:25	Am	Wet Markets in Yangon: Shwe Pa Dauk Fish Market
09:34	Am	A May Yay Yin Nat Festival (Episode- I)
09:50	Am	Kay Tu Mar Lar "The Family"
10:03	Am	News
10:26	Am	The Caves
10:41	Am	All About Orchids
10:54	Am	Traditional Snacks

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

Prime Time

07:03	Pm	News
07:26	Pm	Food Trip (EP-4) (Part-2)
07:50	Pm	Farming: Duck Breeder
08:03	Pm	News
08:26	Pm	Taste Of Myanmar (Noodle With Fermented Soya Bean)
08:43	Pm	Director: Thiha Kyaw Soe

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



News Channel in Brief

(14-12-2015, Monday)

<p>6:00 am</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pritta By Hilly Region Missionary Sayadaw <p>7:35 am</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People's Talks <p>8:35 am</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentary (Women in Myanmar Society) 	<p>9:35 am</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentary (ASEAN) <p>10:35 am</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly Entertainment <p>11:35 am</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MRTV's Youth Programme <p>12:35 pm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TV Drama Series
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<p>1:20 pm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tasty Trip <p>3:35 pm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People's Talks <p>5:35 pm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio Economic Scenes <p>6:35 pm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentary <p>7:15 pm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TV Drama Series <p>8:00 pm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • News/ International News/ Weather Report • TV Drama Series • Pyi Thu Ni Ti 	
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Note/ Hourly News Bulletins (Local + International)

Spain meet Czechs as Euros shape up without Platini

PARIS — Spain will begin their bid for an unprecedented third successive European Championship title against Czech Republic while hosts France will open the 2016 tournament against Romania after the draw was made on Saturday.

Delegates were met by tight security at the Palais des Congress but one man notable by his absence was UEFA president Michel Platini, architect of the biggest-ever expanded 24-team finals that will run from 10 June to 10 July.

Instead of taking centre stage, the leader of European football's ruling organisation was banned under the terms of his provisional 90-day FIFA suspension that forbid him from any involvement in the sport, pending investigations into his financial arrangements with world football's governing body.

Swiss Sepp Blatter, who usually attends these gala events in his position as FIFA president, was another notable absentee,

banned under the same terms as Platini while scandal-ridden FIFA probes his financial dealings with the Frenchman.

UEFA general secretary Gianni Infantino, who has declared his candidacy for FIFA presidency in February's election, conducted the draw.

Infantino made no reference to FIFA matters but he did talk about the attacks on the French capital by Islamic State on 13 November that killed 130 people.

"We are in Paris, a city that only a few weeks ago witnessed tragic events. I wish to express my solidarity to the French people... our thoughts are with the victims," he told around 1,500 delegates.

The first team drawn out were hosts France, designated position A1 to ensure they played in the opening match at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis where one of the 13 November attacks took place.

France, who won Euro 1984 and the 1998 World Cup on home soil, kick off against Romania on



Euro 2016 trophy is on display with the results of the draw in the background at Euro 2016 draw, Palais des Congress, Paris, France on 12 December 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

June 10 before meeting Albania in Marseille five days later and Switzerland in Lille on 19 June.

Les Bleus coach Didier Deschamps told reporters: "We don't know the Romanian team that well even though they performed very well during the qualification stage with the best defence and just two

goals scored against them.

"It is the most important match for us. We have to be careful and not be over-confident."

Spain, who were also drawn in the same section as Croatia and Turkey, open up against Group D opponents Czech Republic in Toulouse on 13 June.—Reuters

Barca let two-goal lead slip in draw with Deportivo

BARCELONA — Leaders Barcelona threw a two-goal lead away as late strikes from Lucas Perez and Alex Bergantinos gave Deportivo La Coruna a 2-2 draw in La Liga on Saturday.

A Lionel Messi free kick and a bullet strike from Ivan Rakitic put Barca in control but they eased up in the closing stages and the visitors took advantage.

Messi curled the ball into the top corner of the net from 25 metres to break the resistance of a well-organised Deportivo team after 39 minutes.

Rakitic then fired home from a similar distance in the 62nd minute before in-form Lucas pulled a goal back after 77 and Bergantinos equalised four minutes from time.

It was the second successive draw in the league for

Barca who have 35 points from 15 games. Surprise packages Deportivo are sixth on 23.

Second-placed Atletico Madrid, on 32 points, host Athletic Bilbao on Sunday when Real Madrid, third with 30, have a tough match at Villarreal.

"It is difficult to explain," Barca midfielder Andres Iniesta told reporters. "We lost control when we needed to keep it and made it easy for the opposition at 2-0.

"These things happen and we will analyse it and try and make sure it doesn't happen again."

An exquisite chip from Iago Aspas gave fourth-placed Celta Vigo a 1-0 victory over Espan-

yol. The former Liverpool forward skipped past Alvaro Gonzalez and lofted the ball over keeper Pau Lopez from 25 metres after 43 minutes.

Celta's Pablo Hernandez was dismissed for a second yellow card after the break but they still went close to scoring with Aspas and Theo Bongonda hitting the woodwork.

Substitute Kevin Gameiro grabbed a double in the final 15 minutes to give Sevilla a 2-0 win over Sporting Gijon.

The game turned following a disputed 74th-minute foul on Fernando Llorente by Luis Hernandez, who was also given a second yellow card, and Gameiro slotted home the penalty.

The Frenchman

then headed home a Yevhen Konoplyanka cross after 80 minutes to seal the win.

Two goals by Adalberto Penaranda handed Granada a 2-1 victory at Levante, who replied through Simao Mate, while an injury-time effort from substitute Willian Jose saw Las Palmas beat Real Betis 1-0.

The injured Neymar was missing from Barca's ruthless attacking trio and the door was opened for youngster Sandro Ramirez. Barca were up against a tactically strong Deportivo, who have one defeat in 12 matches, and their game plan was not to sit too deep but have players ready up front to take advantage of counter-attacks.—Reuters



Barcelona's Lionel Messi (C), Deportivo Coruna's Alex Bergantinos and Juanfran (R) in action during Spanish Liga BBVA at Camp Nou, Barcelona, Spain on 12 December 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

Langer sweeps Champions Tour honours

LONDON — German Bernhard Langer was named Player of the Year on the PGA Champions Tour for a record fifth time on Saturday in another dominant year with the seniors.

Twice Masters champion Langer recorded victories this season at the Senior Players Championship major and the San Antonio Champion to add another Jack Nicklaus Award to his previous trophies claimed in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2014.

"I'm thrilled to be voted by my peers as the Player of the Year," said Langer, who won over fellow nominees Jeff Maggert, Billy Andrade, Colin Montgomerie and Marco Dawson. Lee Trevino and Hale Irwin each claimed the award three times. "The Jack Nicklaus Award is a very meaningful achievement in my career, and to have now won it five times is certainly pretty special," the 58-year-old Langer said in a statement.

"There are so many great players on the Champions Tour and it has become so competitive. This honour is something I don't take for granted."—Reuters

Grevers sets short course record in 100 metres backstroke

INDIANAPOLIS — Olympic champion Matt Grevers swam a world short course record in the 100 metres backstroke in Indianapolis on Saturday.

At the Duel in the Pool meeting between the United States and Europe, Grevers covered the distance in 48.92 seconds in the 25m pool at Indiana University.

The 30-year-old from Illinois shaved 0.02 seconds off the previous mark held by fellow American Nick Thoman.

"I knew it was going to be close ... I thought there would be a chance and luckily everything went really well," said Grevers, who was named Male Athlete of the Meet.

Ranomi Kromowidjojo of the Netherlands, who matched her own world record in the women's 50m freestyle, with a time of 23.24, was Female Athlete of the Meet.—Reuters