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CAR TRADE CRACKDOWN

Govt to inspect machinery in Hpakant, suspends imports

FOLLOWING rumours of the illegal importation of vehicles through border checkpoints on social media the Ministry of Commerce announced that it is planning to inspect whether heavy machinery located in Hpakant, Kachin State, was imported legally or not. Furthermore, the import of vehicles has been suspended at the Kampaiti Border Trade Post.

The licenses for the import of vehicles were issued only by the Ministry of Commerce and the Customs Department collected taxes for those vehicles after checking the licenses issued by the ministry, said U Tin Ye Win, Director of the Trade Department.

Vehicles that have not received number plates, however, are allowed to operate in the country if they have all the required documents, according to the official. He added that not all vehicles that do not have number plates can be considered smuggled into country.

He said that the government has confiscated over 700 vehicles which will be auctioned to supply state funds but he did not say exactly whether the vehicles were confiscated from Hpakant.—Myanmar News Agency



Officially imported dump trucks at Kampaiti Border Trade Post. PHOTO: TRADE DEPARTMENT

The Economist declares Myanmar 'country of the year'

Ye Myint

THE ECONOMIST, a British weekly magazine covering politics and economics, has declared Myanmar its 'country of the year', saying the country improved the most over the course

of the past year.

The magazine's editors explain in the 19 December issue that in considering which country to honour as 'country of the year', its editors decided to select a country that has made the world a better place. The editors

write that Myanmar's 'transition to something resembling democracy has come faster than anyone dared expect.'

Five years ago the country was a dictatorship where even pictures of Aung San Suu Kyi, the opposition leader, were

banned from newspapers, they point out.

The article acknowledges the 'huge privileges' retained by the army in the country's political landscape but concedes that it appears ready to share power following the landslide victory of the

National League for Democracy, which won 77 percent of the vote, in November. The London-based news magazine also explained why the award did not go to one of the countries that grabbed the most headlines, such as Russia,

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Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw passes three amendment bills

THREE amendment bills received parliamentary approval at the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw yesterday with one report coming under discussion.

The Veterinary Council amendment bill, the Foreign Investment amendment bill and the Myanmar Citizens Investment amendment bill were put on record as approved by the parliament.

The Projects and Financial Development Joint Committee presented its findings on the report of the first six-month

implementation of the National Plan in 2015-16 fiscal year.

Six MPs discussed the report, with U Kyi Tha of the Gwa constituency calling for reconsideration of the efforts for the development of the industrial sector.

In the first six months of this fiscal year, agricultural products accounted for 25.9 per cent of the total imports while finished industrial products stood at 8.8 per cent, he noted.—*Myanmar News Agency*



Pyidaungsu Hluttaw convened in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

Pyithu Hluttaw

ASEAN Highway extension questioned by Pyithu Hluttaw

THE Ministry of Construction responded to queries on the construction of the ASEAN Highway and the Thuwunna housing estate at the Pyithu Hluttaw yesterday.

U Sai Win Khaing of the Theinni (also Hseniw) constituency inquired about the planned compensation to the residents affected by the extension of the ASEAN Highway, known as AH 14 between Lashio and Theinni.

Deputy Minister U Soe Tint responded that arrangements for compensation have been made in coordination with local administrative bodies.

The AH14 is being expanded into a four-lane highway from 173/3 milepost in Lashio to 205/6 milepost in Thenni.

U Thein Nyunt of the Thingangyun constituency asked about the rising rents in Thuwunna housing estate and the possibility of ownership change.

Ownership of the house will pass from husband to wife and then to their offspring, the deputy minister responded, adding that the monthly rents range from



U Khin Maung Shwe. PHOTO: MNA

K1,000 to K3,000. He called the rents relatively low.

“Property ownership is not transferable,” he said, hinting at a further reduction in rental fees. The Pyithu Hluttaw approved the report submitted by its International Relations Committee and the Criminal Procedure bill as commented on by the Amyotha Hluttaw.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker meets Korean parliamentary delegation

U KHIN AUNG MYINT, Speaker of Amyotha Hluttaw, received a Korean parliamentary committee delegation led by Mr Kim Sung Chan, a retired general, yesterday, at Amyotha Hluttaw building in Nay Pyi Taw.

Also present at the meet-

ing were Deputy Speaker of Amyotha Hluttaw U Mya Nyein, Chairman of Amyotha Hluttaw rescue and relief committee and Korea-Myanmar parliamentary friendship association Dr Khin Shwe and members of the Hluttaw affairs committees.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Amyotha Hluttaw

Amyotha Hluttaw approves draft public debt management law

THE Amyotha Hluttaw yesterday agreed on the draft public debt management law as commented on by the Pyithu Hluttaw.

An MP inquired about the possibility of updating the GSM network from 2G to 3G in Chin State, with the deputy minister for Communications and Information Technology responding that steps are being taken to finish the installation of radio stations for GSM towers in the 2015-16 fiscal year.—*Myanmar News Agency*



Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker U Khin Aung Myint chairs Amyotha Hluttaw on 17 December, 2015. PHOTO: MNA

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker conferred on AFEO Distinguished Honourary Fellow 2015



Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann receives AFEO Distinguished Honourary Fellow 2015 presented by U Win Khaing. PHOTO: MNA

SPEAKER of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Thura U Shwe Mann was conferred on AFEO Distinguished Honourary Fellow 2015 by ASEAN Federation of Engineering Organizations-AFEO.

U Win Khaing, Chairman of Myanmar Engineering Federation, clarified why the speaker was chosen to be honoured with the certificate.

The Chairman of MEF presented the honorary certificate to Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann.

The speaker expressed his thanks to the AFEO, saying that he also felt that not only he but also MPs were also conferred on the certificate. He took pride in the achievement for the first time for all MPs who amended, added and enacted 198 laws, he said.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Adviser says e-commerce essential for development

TOURISM services should be provided using e-commerce, said Prof Dr Aung Tun Thet at the launching of the Alibaba.com E-commerce Platform yesterday.

He said that tourism operations including ecotourism, bookings for hotel accommodation and air tickets should be carried out online.

Although ICT has developed around the world, Myanmar is still lagging behind and SMEs in the country are still doing business in the traditional way, he added.

The development of E-commerce will benefit not only businesses but also the public and the government that should develop infrastructure, human resources, capital, technology and market management, according to the doctor.—*Ko Moe*



Prof Dr Aung Tun Thet gives talks on e-commerce. PHOTO: KO MOE

Myanmar delegation attends COP 21

AN eighteen-member Myanmar delegation led by the Union Minister for Environmental Conservation and Forestry U Win Tun and Deputy Minister Dr Thet Thet Zin attended the Twenty-first Session of the Conference of the Parties, COP 21 and the Conference of the Parties serving

as the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, CMP 11, from 30 November to 12 December.

Peruvian Environmental Minister Manuel Pulgar-Vidal, Chairman of the session French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, Executive Secretary of UN Climate Change Convention

Ms Chrisinana Figueres and the Prince of Wales delivered speeches at the opening session on 30 November.

The union minister and the delegation also attended the launch of the international solar alliance in India.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Land management services available on-line at YCDC

THE land management services of all 33 townships under the Yangon City Development Committee could be accessible online via an e-Government system in the near future, according to the Urban Development and Land Management Department of the YCDC.

Land management services such as on-line map-copying and land surveys for a number of Yangon townships are currently

available with the entire Yangon city region hopefully available through the on-line system soon, Mayor U Hla Myint said at a press conference on Wednesday.

“The service is available for only 28 townships at present but it will be ready for all townships in Yangon Region by May 2016,” Assistant Director Daw Kyu Swe of the Urban Development and Land Management Department of the YCDC.

On-line services of the department started in May, 2012 through the On-line Land Forms Submission System.

The e-government system has been applied to the management department, the engineering department (water and sanitation), the tax and appraisal department and the environmental conservation and sanitation department of the YCDC since mid-2013.—*Ko Moe*

The Economist declares Myanmar ‘country of the year’

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or to the Islamic State, which forced itself into the news more than most countries in 2015.

“We do not wish to honour military adventurism, domestic repression and the burning of perfectly good foreign cheese. Likewise, Islamic State is disqualified because it is not a nation but an abomination.

We prefer to recognise a country that has made the world a better place.”

For that, the editors at The Economist write, Myanmar wins the prize.

The Economist is an English-language weekly news magazine owned by the Economist Group and edited in offices in London, United Kingdom. Continuous publication began under founder James Wilson in September 1843.

The Economist now claims to reach 5.3 million readers in print and online.

Police seize counterfeit notes in Yamethin

THE police have filed a lawsuit against two men on suspicion of using counterfeit notes in Yamethin on 15 December, the police source said yesterday.

When interrogated, Kyaw Lwin Oo, 33, bought a cow for 385,000 kyats from U Maung Thein, 35 and money was paid in cash with 77 bank notes of 5,000 kyat. U Maung Thein checked the money and found out that the money were counterfeit and informed the police.

During interrogation, Kyaw Lwin said that he received counterfeit notes from a person after sold

President U Thein Sein felicitates Emir of Qatar

U Thein Sein, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, has sent a message of felicitations to His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, on the occasion of the National Day of the State of Qatar, which falls on 18 December 2015.—*Myanmar News Agency*

President U Thein Sein sends message of felicitations to Qatar

U Thein Sein, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, has sent a message of felicitations to His Excellency Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister for the Interior of the State of Qatar, on the occasion of the National Day of the State of Qatar, which falls on 18 December 2015.—*Myanmar News Agency*

U Wunna Maung Lwin sends message of felicitations to Qatar

U Wunna Maung Lwin, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, has sent a message of felicitations to H.E. Dr. Khalid bin Mohammed Al-Attiyah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, on the occasion of the National Day of the State of Qatar, which falls on 18 December 2015.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Myanmar receives over 146m USD of contracted foreign investment in November

YANGON Myanmar received 146.11 million US dollars of contracted foreign investment in November this year, sources with the Myanmar Investment Commission said yesterday.

The investment, which was mainly projected into the sectors of manufacturing, power and real estate, among others, brought the total amount of foreign investment to 3.94 billion dollars in the first eight months (April to November) of fiscal 2015-16.

No foreign investment has been put in agriculture, livestock and fishery during the eight-month period, the sources said.

The investment commission is implementing a long-term project of boosting foreign investment, aiming to receive 6 billion dollars in the 2015-16 fiscal year.

Official statistics show that Myanmar attracted a total of 58.03 billion dollars in contracted foreign investment as of October 2015 since late 1988 when the country opened to foreign investors.

China remains the top foreign investor with 15.34 billion dollars, followed by Singapore with 10.9 billion dollars and Thailand with 10.3 billion dollars.—*Xinhua*

out his cow and received 139 bank notes of 5,000 kyat in Pinlaung township, Shan State, two weeks ago, And, Kyaw Lwin kept 62 bank notes of 5,000 kyat at home of

Ko Zaw (a) Zaw Latt, 34.

The local police station has filed a lawsuit against both of them.—*Zaw Win Aung (Yamethin)*



PHOTO: ZAW WIN AUNG (YAMETHIN)

Indonesian House speaker resigns over alleged influence peddling

JAKARTA — Indonesia's House of Representatives Speaker Setya Novanto resigned from his position Wednesday over his alleged role in an influence peddling scandal involving a local affiliate of a giant US copper mining company.

In a letter of resignation read out by a member of the House Ethics Council, which has been hearing the case for the past couple weeks, Setya said that he decided to resign "in or-

der to maintain the honour and dignity, as well as the integrity of the House of Representatives, and to create peace among the public."

The council approved his resignation, effective immediately.

The case has drawn public attention for the past few weeks after Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Sudirman Said reported an alleged ethical violation by Setya, revealing a re-

cord of the parliamentary chief's meeting with fuel dealer Reza Chalid and Maroef Sjamsoedin, president of PT Freeport Indonesia, a unit of US natural resources company Freeport-McMoRan Inc.

During the meeting earlier this year, Setya and Reza allegedly attempted to solicit shares from Freeport Indonesia in return for a guarantee of a business contract extension for the company.—*Kyodo News*

Japan, Indonesia to start talks on defence equipment, tech transfers

TOKYO — Japan agreed with Indonesia yesterday to start negotiations on forging a pact on the transfer of defence equipment and technology to the Southeast Asian country, as the two countries aim to boost security ties in the face of a rising China.

The accord was struck during the first "two-plus-two" security talks in Tokyo involving the Japanese and Indonesian foreign and defence ministers.

In what was also the first two-plus-two meeting between Japan and a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the two countries reaffirmed their cooperation over South China Sea disputes to defuse tensions in a key international shipping route.

"We shared a perception that strengthening our maritime security cooperation is absolutely necessary to ensure peace and stability in the region including the South China Sea, and to uphold the rule of law," Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida said in a joint press conference with his Indonesian counterpart as well as the Japa-

nese and Indonesian defence ministers.

In recent years, Japan, the world's third-largest economy, has been stepping up efforts to bolster both security and economic ties with the 10-country ASEAN amid China's muscle-flexing in the South China Sea.

Experts in ASEAN affairs noted the strategic importance for Japan to forge a two-plus-two framework with Indonesia given its clout in ASEAN and Tokyo's need to demonstrate even stronger ties with the regional bloc amid a severe security environment in Asia.

"Indonesia is a leader in ASEAN and has a major influence in Southeast Asia's international politics. It has a big say on how ASEAN is moving forward," said Mie Oba, a professor of international relations at the Tokyo University of Science. "For Japan, setting up and launching a two-plus-two framework with regional power Indonesia is significant in boosting Japan's relations with ASEAN," Oba said.—*Kyodo News*

Thai court rejects ex-Prime Minister Yingluck's travel request to Japan

BANGKOK — Thailand's Supreme Court once again rejected a travel request from ousted former premier Yingluck Shinawatra, this time to Japan, according to a media report on Wednesday.

Yingluck had submitted a request to the court's criminal division for persons holding political positions in hopes of bringing her 13-year-old son to

Japan from 15 to 25 December during his school break, the report said citing a source from Pheu Thai, the former ruling party Yingluck once led.

The court informed Yingluck's lawyer about its rejection, citing insufficient reason. She had previously submitted travel requests to Europe and Hong Kong, both of which were dismissed by the court.

Yingluck was ousted by a military coup in 2014 and has been on trial for negligence charges over a rice subsidy programme that allegedly caused billions of dollars of loss to the government. She is the younger sister of former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, unseated by a 2006 military coup. He has been in exile since 2008.—*Kyodo News*

THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

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Sanda Hnin, Zu Zin Hnin
Circulation & Advertising
San Lwin (+95) (01) 8604532
Ads and subscription enquiries:
adv.gnlm@gmail.com

Printed and published at the Global New Light of Myanmar Printing Factory at No.150, Nga Htat Kyee Pagoda Road, Bahan Township, Yangon, by the Global New Light of Myanmar Daily under Printing Permit No. 00510 and Publishing Permit No. 00629.

Singapore Strait collision sinks freighter; six crew still missing

SINGAPORE — Six crew members are still missing after a general cargo freighter sank in the Singapore Strait following a collision with a chemical tanker at 8:14pm (7.14am ET) on 16 December.

The 10,385 deadweight tonne (dwt) cargo freighter Thorco Cloud, operated by Danish shipper Thorco Shipping and registered in Antigua and Barbuda, had a crew of 12.

Singapore's Police Coast Guard, supported by the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA), rescued five of the crew members, while the chemical tanker picked up a sixth, the MPA said. The rescued seamen were sent to Singapore General Hospital for observation, it said.

Search and rescue operations continued for the six missing crew members, said an MPA spokesman in an update.

To ensure shipping safety, the MPA deployed a buoy tender and a hydrographic survey vessel to cordon off the area. So far there have been no shipping disruptions, the spokesman said.

The incident, which took place in Indonesian waters six



An Indonesia rescue team approaches the sunken Antigua and Barbuda flagged freighter MV Thorco Cloud which sank after colliding with a tanker the night before, in the Singapore Strait off the Indonesian island of Batam on 17 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

nautical miles northwest of Batam, left the Cayman Islands-registered chemical tanker Stolt Commitment with minor damage and in stable condition, said the MPA.

The 37,438 dwt tanker is owned by Stolt Tankers, part of Norwegian bulk liquid transportation and storage company

Stolt-Nielsen Ltd.

Indonesian authorities have also commenced search and rescue operations and Singapore is ready to render assistance if required, the MPA said.

The sunken cargo freighter was carrying 560 metric tonnes of bunker fuel.

"While there are currently

no reports of any oil spill, MPA has also put on standby anti-pollution craft," the spokesman said.

The Singapore Strait, one of the world's busiest commercial shipping routes, is a 105-km long, 16-km wide passage between the Strait of Malacca to the South China Sea.—*Reuters*

China more than triples Macau's size with new maritime jurisdiction

HONG KONG — China has granted tiny Macau control over its surrounding sea for the first time to help boost its economic development, more than tripling the size of the former Portuguese colony's territory.

Macau, which has an area of 30 square kilometres, will administer its surrounding sea as well as its offshore border with neighbouring Zhuhai city, effectively enlarging its territory by 85 square kilometres, according to a notice on the Macau government's website yesterday.

The move, which will give access to mainland vessels wishing to use Macau's wa-

ters, comes at a time when the world's biggest casino hub is facing slumping gaming revenues and the worst economic growth on record.

Macau is the only place in China where its citizens are allowed to gamble in casinos. The new area, however, will not permit any development for the gaming industry.

"Any fresh proposal for land reclamation involving Macau's newly demarcated waters would be reported to the Central Government; and there would be no gaming venues or commercial gaming activities in such areas," Macau's Chief Executive Chui Sai On wrote in a

statement.

Like Hong Kong, Macau is ruled under the one country-two systems model that affords its residents wide-ranging personal freedoms that don't exist on the mainland. Critics say these freedoms have been eroding under pressure from China.

Space-starved Macau, which has one of the world's highest population densities for its 600,000 residents, will step up its role in national policy and help boost the nation's maritime economy, Chui added.

China has been putting pressure on Macau, home to 37 casinos, to diversify away

from an industry that brings in over 80 percent of government revenue.

Casino operators have responded by building more non-gaming amenities such as Melco Crown's Studio City resort which opened with a Batman ride and ferris wheel.

Macau's Secretary for Economy and Finance met with representatives of the city's six casino operators for talks this week about enhancing Macau's economic competitiveness.

Gambling revenue has plummeted for the past 18 months, and is expected to drop some 35 percent for 2015.—Reuters

Air India technician dies in 'mishap' at Mumbai airport

NEW DELHI — A technician working for state-owned Air India died in a "mishap" at an airport in Mumbai on Wednesday evening, according to the airline's official Twitter account.

The incident occurred during the pushback of a flight, said the tweet, which was attributed to Air India chief Ashwani Lohani. It did not elaborate on the cause of the technician's death, and said it was being investigated.

Multiple news outlets in India reported that the Air India employee had been "sucked in" by one of the aircraft's engines.

"At the moment, we are absolutely clueless on how this person was near the aircraft," a source at the airline told the *Hindustan Times* newspaper. "Only an inquiry can establish whose negligence it was and whether the engine should have been switched on at that time," the person said.

In recent years, India's national carrier has been struggling to keep up in India's fast-growing aviation market.—Reuters

Singapore seizes huge shipment of elephant tusks, pangolin scales



Seized ivory tusks are laid out in this Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore and Singapore Customs handout photo released on 17 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

SINGAPORE — Singapore authorities have impounded half a tonne of elephant tusks in one of the largest ivory seizures made in the city-state in over a decade.

The tusks, weighing 505 kg (1,100 pounds), were found along with 324 kg of pangolin scales in an air shipment on its way to Laos on 12 December, Singapore Customs and the agriculture and veterinary agency said in a joint statement yesterday.

The boxes were labelled as synthetic wigs and had come from Nigeria, the authorities said, adding that the shipment had an estimated value of S\$1.3 million (\$920,000).

Trade in ivory and the endangered pangolin, a mammal that looks like an anteater, is restricted under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), but demand remains strong in parts of Asia, where these animal products are

prized for their supposed medicinal value.

The seizure was the fifth-largest seizure made in Singapore since 2002, and follows the seizure of 3.7 tonnes of illegal ivory earlier this year in a shipping container that listed the contents as tea leaves from Kenya.

Illegal trade in wildlife products covered by CITES carries a penalty of up to two years jail or a fine of up to S\$500,000.—Reuters

UN chief says his trip to North Korea still 'under discussions'



UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon attends a press conference at UN headquarters in New York on 16 December.

PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

NEW YORK — UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said Wednesday negotiations for his visit to North Korea are ongoing and he hopes a suitable date can be agreed upon soon.

"It's still under discussions with the authorities of DPRK," the UN chief told reporters at a press conference, referring to the country by its official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. "I sincerely hope that we will be able to find a mutually convenient date as soon as possible."

If the much anticipated trip is realised, it would be the first time that a UN secretary general has visited North Korea since Boutros Boutros-Ghali travelled there in 1993.

While he pointed to some "encouraging" developments between North and South Korea, highlighting the recent reunions of separated families, Ban explained how last week's vice ministerial talks "have not yielded much-expected results." But he added, "We should not be frustrated."

Ban expressed hope for the continuation of talks to "build reconciliation between the two parties." He also offered to be of "any service" both in his role as the secretary general and as "one of the citizens coming from Korea."

Meanwhile, in answering a question about rumors of his possible run for president of South Korea, he said he remained focused on his current job "until the very last day of next year." His term of office expires 31 December, 2016.—Kyodo News

NATO aid for Turkey also meant to prevent Russia clash



A Turkish Air Force F-16 fighter jet lands at Incirlik air base in Adana, Turkey. PHOTO: REUTERS

BRUSSELS — NATO plans to send air defence support to Turkey partly to minimise the risk of Ankara shooting down another Russian warplane while assuaging its fears of a spillover from the conflict in Syria, senior alliance sources say.

The mission, expected to be approved by the Western defence alliance's council on Friday, has been under preparation for 10 months, long before the incident with Russia, and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has said it is not linked.

But NATO sources said the shooting down had galvanised allies to come forward with more support and tailor the assistance

to help lower tensions between Moscow and Ankara by taking a role in managing Turkish airspace.

"NATO rules of engagement are more cautious than those of Turkey," said another NATO source.

While the US-led alliance publicly backed Turkey after its fighters downed a Russian bomber that strayed into its airspace from Syria on 24 November in the first such incident since the Cold War, several allies were privately alarmed and urged restraint.

A Turkish official in Ankara said Turkey and NATO were looking to develop a system whereby problems in Turkish and

NATO airspace could be avoided but it was too early to share details.

Stoltenberg said strengthening air defences for Turkey, which has long expressed alarm over the civil war raging near its border, was a commitment that went back well before the shooting down of the Russian plane.

The package, set to be approved without debate, includes interceptor aircraft, Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) radar planes and a naval unit with command ships and frigates with anti-ship and anti-aircraft missiles. — Reuters

Cuba says Obama welcome to visit but not to meddle

HAVANA — US President Barack Obama is welcome to visit Cuba but not to meddle in its internal affairs, a senior foreign ministry official said on Wednesday on the eve of the first anniversary of the two countries' historic rapprochement.

"The day that the president of the United States decides to visit Cuba, he will be welcome," Josefina Vidal, director of US affairs in the Cuban foreign ministry, told reporters. "Regarding what I just said, I'd like to recall that Cuba has always said ... it is not going to negotiate matters that are inherent to its internal system in exchange for an improvement in or the normalization of relations with the United States," Vidal said.

Obama told Yahoo News in an interview about the 17 December anniversary that he hopes to visit Cuba in 2016 but only if enough progress has been made in bilateral relations, he is able to meet with political dissidents, and if he can possibly "nudge the Cuban government in a new direction". It was a year ago that Obama



US President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro meet at the United Nations General Assembly in New York, on 29 September. PHOTO: REUTERS

and Cuban President Raul Castro shocked the world by announcing the former adversaries would normalize relations. By July they had agreed to restore diplomatic ties after a 54-year break.

Obama has about 400 days left in office before handing over to the next president, potentially a Republican hostile to his new Cuba policy.

Castro has 800 days left before stepping down and handing over power to a new Communist leader.

Both have some urgency to cement the new relationship while advancing their strategic interests. "We are playing a game of chess and we have to make a certain number of moves before the time is up," said Rafael Hernandez, a Cuban political analyst. "We have to make enough moves so that if there is an unfavorable change in the US administration, we will be too far along to turn back." — Reuters

NEWS IN BRIEF

After Iran missile test, US lawmakers call for continued sanctions

WASHINGTON — Dozens of US Republican senators called on President Barack Obama on Wednesday not to lift sanctions on Iran, saying Tehran's recent ballistic missile testing showed "blatant disregard for its international obligations."

Thirty-six of the 54 Republican senators, including Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, signed a letter urging Obama not to lift sanctions on

Iran as planned under an international nuclear agreement announced in July.

The letter, seen by Reuters, said the missile tests enhance Tehran's capability to target Israel and US troops in the region.

"That is why it is a mistake to treat Iran's ballistic missile programme as separate from Iran's nuclear programme," the letter said. — Reuters

Japanese journalist cleared of defaming South Korea president

SEOUL — A South Korean court found a Japanese journalist not guilty yesterday of defaming President Park Geun-hye in a case that has inflamed the two countries' diplomatic ties and intensified questions about freedom of the press in South Korea. Tatsuya Kato, former bureau chief of

Japan's *Sankei Shimbun* newspaper, was indicted last year for writing an article about Park that the prosecution said was based on "false information."

The article discussed Park's personal life and her whereabouts on the day of a deadly ferry disaster in April 2014. — Reuters

Kiev 'ready to pay price' after Russia curbs trade ties over EU deal

MOSCOW — Ukraine is "ready to pay the price" for a trade deal with the European Union, President Petro Poroshenko said on Wednesday after Moscow moved to restrict its own trade ties with Kiev over the accord that is due to take effect on 1 January.

Controversy over the EU-Ukraine trade deal was the initial trigger of unrest in Kiev that culminated in the ousting of a Moscow-allied president in 2014.

Russia then annexed Crimea and backed a separatist revolt in eastern Ukraine in moves that led to Moscow's worst standoff with the West in decades.

As Poroshenko arrived in Brussels, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered his government to suspend a free trade zone with Ukraine from 1 January, making good on Moscow's threats to retaliate if Kiev presses ahead with closer EU ties. — Reuters

Turkey kills 23 Kurdish militants in southeast towns: state media

ISTANBUL — Turkish security forces have killed 23 Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants during two days of operations in the towns of Silopi and Cizre in southeast Turkey, state-run Anadolu Agency said yesterday.

The two towns, near the Syrian and Iraqi borders in the southeastern province of Sirnak, were placed under curfew on Monday night as Turkey launched operations targeting PKK fighters in the area. — Reuters

Austria arrests two suspects with links to Paris attacks

VIENNA — Austrian police have arrested two suspects with potential links to the Paris terror attacks at a refugee shelter in Salzburg, the prosecutor's office there revealed on Wednesday.

While Robert Holzleitner from the prosecutor's office declined to name the nationalities of the two suspects, noting only that they had arrived from the Middle East, the *Kronen Zeitung* newspaper reported them

as being French nationals with Algerian and Pakistani backgrounds.

They had allegedly been posing as asylum seekers, and had reportedly entered Europe via the Greek island of Leros in October on fake Syrian passports, in the same group as Islamic State members who went on to carry out the Paris attacks which killed 130 people in November. — Xinhua

Yazidi woman begs UN Security Council to wipe out Islamic State



Nadia Murad Basee, a 21-year-old Iraqi woman of the Yazidi faith, speaks to members of the Security Council during a meeting at the United Nations headquarters in New York, on 16 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

UNITED NATIONS — A young Yazidi woman pleaded on Wednesday for the United Nations Security Council to wipe out Islamic State after describing the torture and rape she suffered at hands of the militants, who abducted her as “war booty” and held her for three months.

“Rape was used to destroy women and girls and to guarantee that these women could never lead a normal life again,” Nadia Murad Basee Taha, 21, told the 15-member council’s first meeting on human trafficking.

“Islamic State has made Yazidi women into flesh to be trafficked in,” she said of the extremist group that has seized swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria.

Taha said she was abducted in August last year from her village in Iraq and taken by bus to a building in the Islamic State stronghold of Mosul, where thousands of Yazidi women and children were exchanged by militants as gifts.

A few days after she was taken by a man, she said: “He forced me to get dressed and put my make-up on and then that terrible

night, he did it. He forced me to serve as part of his military faction, he humiliated me every day.”

She tried to flee, but was stopped by a guard.

“That night he beat me. He asked me to take my clothes off. He put me in a room with the guards and then they proceeded to commit their crime until I fainted,” she said. “I implore you, get rid of Daesh (Islamic State) completely.”

Taha, who said several of her brothers were killed by Islamic State militants, eventually escaped and is now living in Germany. Vis-

ibly emotional after telling her story, the members of the UN Security Council applauded her courage.

The United Nations has said that Islamic State may have committed genocide in trying to wipe out the Yazidi minority and has urged the UN Security Council to refer the issue to the International Criminal Court for prosecution.

The council said in a statement on Wednesday that it deplored people trafficking by Islamic State and other groups such as the Lord’s Resistance Army and Boko Haram. It warned that “certain acts associated with trafficking in persons in the context of armed conflict may constitute war crimes.”

Islamic State militants consider the Yazidis to be devil-worshippers. The Yazidi faith has elements of Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Islam. Most of the Yazidi population, numbering around half a million, remains displaced in camps inside the autonomous entity in Iraq’s north known as Kurdistan.

Of around 5,000 Yazidi men and women captured by the militants in the summer of 2014, some 2,000 have managed to escape or been smuggled out of Islamic State’s self-proclaimed caliphate, activists say. The rest remain in captivity.—Reuters

IS fires rockets at Iraq base used by Turkish troops

ANKARA —Islamic State militants fired rockets at a base in northern Iraq where Turkish troops are stationed on Wednesday, as they launched a wave of attacks against Kurdish forces, officials said.

The Turkish Armed Forces said in a statement its soldiers returned fire, and four had been lightly injured when katyusha rockets landed in their camp north of the Islamic State stronghold of Mosul.

Turkey deployed around 150 troops in the Bashiqa area earlier this month with the stated aim of training an Iraqi militia to fight Islamic State. The Iraqi government says they are not welcome and must withdraw.

The base is in an area controlled by Kurdish peshmerga forces, which repelled several attacks by Islamic State on Wednesday with the help of more than 25 air strikes from the US-led coalition.

Seventy “terrorists” were killed in the fighting, in which the Sunni

Islamists used suicide bombs and car bombs, the Kurdistan Region’s Security Council said in a statement.

“This was an attempt by ISIL (Islamic State) to breach peshmerga defensive lines following significant losses in recent months,” read the statement.

“Pressure continues to build on ISIL as peshmerga forces hold supply lines connecting their key strongholds in Iraq and Syria”.

Kurdish forces last month retook the town of Sinjar from Islamic State, cutting the main road between Mosul and Raqqa.

The Turkish deployment in Iraq has strained relations between Ankara and Baghdad, which complained to the UN Security Council last week. Turkey withdrew some troops earlier this week, moving them to another base inside Iraq’s Kurdistan region, but Baghdad said they should pull out completely.—Reuters

US supplies Syrian fighters ahead of push for Islamic State town

WASHINGTON — The United States has delivered a fresh supply of ammunition to Syrian Arab fighters ahead of an expected stiff battle with Islamic State as they push toward the Syrian town of al-Shadadi, a key logistics hub for the group, US officials tell Reuters.

The munitions were shipped into Syria over land in recent days to Syrian Arab forces fighting in the northeast part of the country, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitive nature of the operation. It appeared to be the third delivery of ammunition to the Syrian Arabs since the United States started supplying them with an air-drop in October.

The Syrian Arabs are allied with Kurdish fight-

ers, and the initial shipment of US ammunition unnerved NATO ally Turkey, which is sensitive to any operations that could benefit Syrian Kurdish YPG militia.

The Syrian Arabs number around 5,000 fighters. With the Kurds and others, they form the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces seeking to claw back land from Islamic State, officials say.

The US officials said the fighters were preparing eventually to move toward al-Shadadi, which is located on a strategic network of highways. Capturing it would help isolate Raqqa, Islamic State’s de facto capital.

US Army Colonel Steve Warren, a Baghdad-based spokesman for the US-led coalition



Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) fighters gather at the eastern entrances to the town of Tel Abyad of Raqqa governate on 14 June. PHOTO: REUTERS

against Islamic State, said the militants used al-Shadadi to stage weapons, equipment and personnel for distribution throughout the battlefield.

Warren declined to comment on any specific US resupply operations but noted past US commit-

ments to carry them out.

The Pentagon also declined to comment on any specific operations but noted President Barack Obama has said the support of Syrian forces on the ground is a key part of his strategy for combating Islamic State.—Reuters

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV KOTA TAMPAN VOY NO (TPN-675)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV KOTA TAMPAN VOY NO (TPN-675) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 18.12.2015 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T.T/A.W.P.T where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim’s Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

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AGENT FOR: M/S ADVANCE CONTAINER
LINES

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OPINION

Light at the end of the tunnel

Kyaw Thura

IT seems a reasonable supposition that peace is the mother of inclusive development, whereas war is the bringer of total destruction. Simply put, peace is another word for being free from any form of conflict capable of triggering fear, anxiety and violence.

It is obvious to all of us that over six decades of internal armed conflict have never solved any of the existing problems facing the country, but

rather dragged the country down. It, however, seems that the days of internal conflict are numbered in part because the Union Peace Conference has been scheduled for early January in line with the political dialogue framework finalised three days ago.

The government reached the nationwide ceasefire agreement with eight ethnic armed organisations on 15 October, which President U Thein Sein called a political assurance rather than a truce. The stakeholders were required to finalise a framework for political dialogue sixty days after the signing of the ceasefire agreement.

Now that the political dialogue framework has been handed to the president, the onus is on all the parties involved in the peace process to display their genuine and solemn interest in restoration of peace and their willingness to reach a conclusive end to six decades of internal armed conflict. Ac-

cording to a senior adviser to Myanmar Peace Centre, it is unclear whether ethnic leaders who are yet to sign the ceasefire truce will be invited to the peace conference. Either way, we are seeing the dawn of peace that will create a new era of a democratic and federal system.

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.

Reflecting Back on the Past

Khin Maung Myint

LATELY, I had been doing a lot of reflecting on the past, like most people my age do in their waning years. There were many pleasant as well as unpleasant memories cropping up to get my attention. I wouldn't be bothering the readers with the unpleasant ones. The pleasant memory that came forth in my mind was that of my student days, spanning from the primary to the university.

During the pre-war days, I did not have the chance to attend school, as I was still young. However, after the war I was already eight years old, when the schools reopened. I must say, I was fortunate that I didn't lose any schooling years, due to the war, as I was placed in the second standard right away, after being evaluated on admission. An eight year old in the second standard was an appropriate thing, but there were many in my class, three to four years older than me. The war had deprived them of the precious years of their lives that caused great disadvantages later in life. The age limitations that some coveted jobs set for the applicants proved to be great obstacles.

I was able to get placed in the second standard because I had been home-tutored during the war, by my father who was a headmaster before the war. The school I attended was a private English High School for boys, ran by Roman Catholic priests in Maymyo, now Pyin Oo Lwin. Most of the priests were foreigners and among the teachers, the Anglo-Indians and the Anglo-Burmans were the majority with very few Karens and Bamars. All the subjects, except for the Burmese (Myanmar) subject were taught in English.

Some would be surprised if I mention that even when teaching the Myanmar subject, the teachers had to explain some of the vocabularies in English for those non-Bamar students. Students were not allowed to speak in Myanmar, at any time, even while playing during the recess periods.

The disciplines were very strict, but not so tight that we couldn't abide by. As there were strict disciplines there were, on the other hand, recreational facilities and activities arranged for the students to enjoy. We were also taught the Morals and Manners lessons, which, together with the strict disciplines, made us well-behaved, polite and law-abiding citizens when we grew up. One period was set aside for physical trainings (PT), which the students looked forward to, as they provide respites from the monotony of the class rooms. The PT Instructor gave orders in English.

There was a time when the state ran schools taught English starting from the fifth standard. However, the private schools kept on teaching English in the Kindergarten until the schools were nationalized. The teaching methods differed from one school to the other and the levels were also different. This I knew for fact, because I had attended two schools in my high school days. While in my sixth standard I transferred to another school, during the mid-term. It was a private co-educational Baptist Missionary school.

At the second school, I was evaluated by two teachers separately. Afterwards, the headmistress told my father, who came along with me, that the two teachers recommended to place me in the eighth standard. My father declined her offer and told

her to put me in the seventh standard. I was still young and if I managed to pass my exams yearly and eventually matriculated, I wouldn't be eligible for the university as I would still be underage. Anyhow, I gained one class at the second school.

I am mentioning this to depict a picture that even the standards of the private schools differed greatly. The level of teaching was very high in the first school. The teaching of English there was more systematic. In our lower standards, students were required to go to the front of the class and read the passages from the text books aloud. The teachers would correct our pronunciations and punctuations. We also had dictations regularly, essay competitions and the grammar and composition lessons were properly conducted, starting from the second standard. We had to do mental mathematics or mensuration sums that proved to be very useful later in life. By the time we reached the middle school level, we were quite versed in grammar and the four skills of learning English--listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

At the universities during our student days, every subject, except the Burmese (Myanmar) subject, was taught in English. Also there were many foreigners among the teaching staffs. While some students who had little background in English were struggling in their fresher year, we had no trouble in following the lectures. At the universities, the teaching technique was totally different from the high schools. All subjects were taught in lecture form, which some students were unfamiliar and found it difficult to follow in their first year.

I am not sure how the universities are running the classes today, but assume that they are the same as in our days. If that should be the case, the students of today would be faced with more difficulties than those of the past. My assumption is based on the fact that today almost every student, including medical and engineering students, are relying on the private tuitions. Such things were totally unheard of, even in our high school days. In those days, only those who couldn't attend regular schools or those who were repeaters, relied on the private tuitions. Also, the students of today tend to learn everything by heart or memorize the lessons. Whereas, in our schooling days we tried to understand the subject thoroughly and in answering, we wrote in our own words as we understood.

However, today, in the high schools the teachers made the students memorize everything, even the mathematics. Those who were accustomed to such methods of teaching faced with difficulties, when they came face to face with the university style of teaching. I found that, if a student had read the lessons in advance, they could follow the lectures without difficulties. To do that he must have a good command of English.

Most of the teachers expect the students to answer word for word, without any deviation, as written in the text books or the class notes given by them. That must be the way they had learned themselves during their school days. I am saying this not without any proof. One example is a teacher in a certain school gave a student a cross for his right answer in mathematics. The question was: how much is 3 multiplied 5 equals to. The student in

answering that question wrote in the answer paper thus: $5 \times 3 = 15$. In my opinion if the answer is correct it should be ticked as right.

The place where I am living is surrounded by numerous private tuitions and I couldn't avoid noticing the students reciting, repeatedly in unison, what the teacher uttered. At first, I thought they were primary students but later learned they are matric students. This sort of teaching was only found in Buddhist monastic schools and in some primary schools in our school days. That method of teaching was to make the students memorize. It's no wonder some tuitions advertise their classes as "group learning sessions". The students went there to do their home works and learn their class lessons with the guidance of a teacher or in some cases, a "guide" who had just passed the matriculation exams with multiple "Ds".

I don't blame either the teachers or the students, but these are the consequences of the frequent experimenting with the educational systems. I had seen our educational system changing now and then in the past. I am not an academician, but as I was once a student myself and a parent of a school-age son, I am quite aware of the consequences of those experimentations. It is high time that something should be done urgently to upgrade the standards of our state-run schools or they would be over-shadowed by the private schools that are cropping up rapidly today. The private schools should also be scrutinized thoroughly so that they do not undermine our cultures and faiths and instill their concepts that are contrary to ours, into our children's minds.

Plastic baskets replace rattan, bamboo as deforestation continues

BASKETS woven from plastic strips are becoming increasingly popular in northern Myanmar as rattan and bamboo, the raw material traditionally used for basket weaving, has grown scarce because of deforestation.

Hand-woven basket makers have turned to the imported, environmentally unfriendly plastic material over the last five years in order to keep on producing baskets, said a basket-maker from Khamauktung Village in Kawlin Township, which is regionally well-known for its production of traditional rattan and bamboo

baskets. "In the past, we bought rattan from Moehnyin Township in Kachin State to weave baskets. When the price of rattan rose and the material grew rare, we turned to bamboo as our raw material. When bamboo became rare, we started weaving plastic strips into baskets," he said.

Most of the residents of the village are ethnic Shans who cultivate rice and seasonal crops as their primary occupations. They make baskets to earn extra income. Their baskets have been distributed to markets across the country for many years.—*Sai Lu Min*



Workers weaving baskets from plastics materials in Kawlin as rattan and bamboo are becoming scarce because of deforestation. PHOTO: SAI LU MIN

Myanma Railways to contract cleaning company for trains

MYANMA Railways (MR) has opened a tender to select a company to manage daily cleaning services on Yangon's circular trains.

In its announcement, MR asked private local companies to send documents related to cleaning services for the RBE air-condi-

tioned coaches and their conceptual plans to MR's head office in Yangon by 13 January 2016.

Eligible companies must be owned by a Myanmar citizen, but they can cooperate with a foreign company if necessary, said the announcement.—*GNLM*

Number of visitors to Mandalay Hill reaches peak



Foreign tourists visiting famous Mandalay Hill. PHOTO: THAN ZAW MIN

VISITOR arrivals to the famous Mandalay Hill have reached a peak this opening season, with about 100,000 local visitors and around 1,000 tourists per day.

The 776-ft high mountain which is located to the northeast of the city centre of Mandalay in central Myanmar is crowded with tourists in the evening to see the sun set as the mountain offers a panoramic view of Mandalay from the summit.

Mandalay City took its name from the hill which is known for its abundance of pagodas and monasteries, and has been a major pilgrimage site for Buddhists for nearly two centuries. There are four covered stairways called zaungdan leading up the hill from the south, southeast, west and north. These days there is a road as well as an escalator and lift to the pagoda at the summit to aid the transport of tourists.—*Than Zaw Min*

Technological University of Thanlyin & University Malaysia Perlis (Uni MAP) reach deal on educational cooperation

THE Technological University of Thanlyin and University Malaysia Perlis (Uni MAP) signed a memorandum of understanding in regard to educational cooperation at the Convocation hall on Tuesday.

Thanlyin Technological University's Rector Dr Kay Thi Lwin spoke at the ceremony along with University Malaysia Perlis' Vice Chancellor Dr. Kamarudin who presented a power point on the

cooperative education programmes to come and the activities of the university.

The two men signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperative education and exchanged gifts. The agreement will bring benefits to university students and lecturers from the international community with an aim to improving educational resources with other universities in ASEAN countries.—*Than Win (Thanlyin)*

Crime News

Three men arrested for possession of almost 200 yabba pills in Lashio

AN Anti-drug squad in Lashio discovered 193 yabba pills (a synthetic-amphetamine based drug) in a car heading from Hoe pait village to Lashio on Tuesday. Charges have been filed against Hein Htut Aung,

alias Li Shin Tat, the driver of the car, Maung Yee, alias Ar Yee and Tone Phar Chan, alias Tone Ti, his passengers. The men are being charged under the Anti-Narcotic Act.—*Police IPRD*



Hein Htut Aung, alias Li Shin Tat, Maung Yee, alias Ar Yee and Tone Phar Chan, alias Tone Ti. PHOTO: POLICE

Murder in Magway

A MAN has been charged with murder after allegedly killing his twin brother, according to a police report from Saw township station, Magway Region.

It is alleged that this past Monday U Thein Htay joked

that his twin brother, U Than Htay, looked like a homosexual. U Than Htay allegedly shot his brother dead on the spot following that remark.

The local police station has filed a murder charge against him.—*Police IPRD*

5.432 kilo Marijuana haul leads to arrests

A LOCAL anti-drug check point has seized a cache of Marijuana weighing 5.432 kilo, arresting two men on board a Min Htet Thar Mini Bus on Sunday in An, Rakhine State.

On Monday this week police discovered almost 10,000 yabba pills and 0.19 kilos of heroin on a bike heading from Nan Kwan Village to Ho Lie village. The police also arrested a man transporting 10.8 million Sudafedrin pills at high-way bus station on Tuesday.

Local police further seized 148 yabba pills from one Aung Zaw Moe Naing and Kyaw That Min. A search of a house owned by Aung Zaw Moe Naing led to the seizure of further 1590 pills on Tuesday.

The police are filing charges against the men under the anti-Narcotic Act.—*Police IPRD*

Woman drowns following epileptic fit

A DROWNING occurred at Thaphan lake, Natmauk township, Magway Region on Monday.

According to an investigation, Moe Thein, 35, was fishing at That Phan lake which is over 4 acre wide and 4 feet high, when he suffered a sudden epileptic fit and fell into the lake, causing him to drown and die.—*Police IPRD*

UK car production rises 9pc in November

LONDON — British car production rose 9 per cent year-on-year in November, helped by a strong increase in exports, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) said yesterday.

A total of 150,084 cars were built last month with an 11 per cent rise in the number of vehicles headed overseas compared with a 3 per cent increase in the amount of cars destined for the domestic market.

Around four in five cars built

in Britain are exported. “Particularly pleasing is the recent pick-up in export production, which is proof that despite challenges in some global markets, the UK continues to build cars that appeal to consumers across the world,” said Mike Hawes, chief executive of the SMMT. Output stood at 1.47 million in the 11 months to November, making it likely Britain will surpass the total tally of 1.53 million achieved last year once December’s figures come through. — Reuters



An employee works on a 2013 Mini at BMW’s plant in Oxford, southern England in 2013. PHOTO: REUTERS

Google to make driverless cars an Alphabet company in 2016



A prototype of Google’s own self-driving vehicle is seen during a media preview of Google’s current autonomous vehicles in Mountain View, California, on 29 September. PHOTO: REUTERS

NEW YORK — Google plans to make its self-driving cars unit, which will offer rides for hire, a stand-alone business under its parent company Alphabet Inc next year, Bloomberg reported.

The service could be launched in San Francisco and Austin, Texas locations, where it has tested the cars extensively, Bloomberg said, citing a person briefed on the company’s strategy.

The fleets could be deployed first in confined areas like college campuses, military bases or corporate office parks, Bloomberg reported.

Alphabet declined to comment.

The company reorganised itself in August to separate the core web advertising business from newer ventures like driver-

less cars. Under the new structure, search, advertising, maps, YouTube and Android are part of the Google unit. Alphabet’s businesses include connected home products maker Nest, venture capital arm Google Ventures, and Google X, the secretive research arm which houses the self-driving car unit.

Alphabet’s pet project of driverless cars started in 2009 and it along with other automakers have said the technology to build self-driving cars should be ready by 2020.

The company said in July it was testing a fleet of 23 specially equipped Lexus prototypes, which had logged more than 1 million test miles.

In June, the company began testing tiny, bubble-shaped self-driving prototype vehicles

of its own design on public roads around Mountain View. The company has also started testing self-driving prototypes in Austin.

Google’s move to put the self-driving cars up for hire will put it in direct competition with ride hailing services such as Uber and Lyft.

Uber also currently uses Google Maps to help users hail a cab as well as chalk out routes. But, Uber awarded TomTom a contract in November to provide digital maps and traffic data for the software used by its drivers.

Google-owned online mapping company Waze in July launched a carpooling pilot programme called RideWith in Israel where commuters pay fellow drivers a small fee for a ride.—Reuters

Dollar rises to upper 122 yen in Tokyo after US rate hike

TOKYO — The US dollar rose to the upper 122 yen range yesterday morning in Tokyo following the US Federal Reserve’s first interest rate hike in nearly a decade.

At noon, the dollar fetched 122.61-62 yen compared with 122.17-27 yen in New York and 121.91-93 yen in Tokyo at 5pm Wednesday.

The euro was quoted at \$1.0849-0850 and 133.03-05 yen against \$1.0908-0918 and 133.31-41 yen in New York and \$1.0939-0941 and 133.36-40 yen in Tokyo late Wednesday afternoon. The US currency gained in Tokyo as Fed Chair Janet Yellen showed confidence in the US economic recovery while stressing that rates would be raised at a gradual pace in her press conference following the

policy meeting that decided on the rate hike, dealers said.

“Although the hike was expected, Tokyo stocks responded positively and created a risk-on mood, which drove traders to sell the yen, perceived as a relatively safe currency,” said Masayuki Hoshina, chief economist at Okasan Securities Co.

The US unit also drew buying as some market players were encouraged by Fed officials keeping their median forecast for the interest rate through 2016, suggesting an outlook of four quarter-point hikes next year. The market largely expected the officials to cut their forecasts to imply three hikes or less through 2016 given downside risks to the pace of the US economic recovery, dealers said.—Kyodo News

Facebook partners with Uber for ride-hailing service via Messenger

SAN FRANCISCO — Facebook Inc said on Wednesday it is testing a service that will allow users of its Messenger app to hail Uber rides directly from the app, without leaving a conversation or downloading the ride-hailing app. Uber is the first partner for the Transportation on Messenger service, which will be available to select users in locations where Uber operates in the United States, Facebook said in a blog post.

Uber on Messenger will start rolling out in the United States on Wednesday, Uber said in a blog post.

Lyft, a rival ride-hailing service provider, will be added to Transportation on Messenger in January, sources

close to Lyft told Reuters.

Users can hail a ride in the latest version of Messenger by choosing “transportation” from a menu or by tapping on a car icon within a chat.

“Facebook is looking at this as a way to make Messenger more attractive,” Thilo Koslowski, vice president and automotive practice leader of Gartner said. He said the service provides a “huge market place” for Uber.

Facebook has been aggressively working to boost the appeal of its messenger service, including making it mandatory last year for users to install a separate app to send and receive messages. Since then, Facebook has beefed up the app’s features by allowing users to send and receive money through Messenger.—Reuters

Unusual 'sail-backed' dinosaur roamed Spain 125m years ago

WASHINGTON — Along a lush river delta in what is now north-eastern Spain, a herd of dinosaurs munched on ferns and conifers similar to modern-day cypresses 125 million years ago.

These creatures stood out from the others in this Cretaceous Period landscape by virtue of the unusual sail-like structure on their backs, and experts today can only hypothesize about its function.

Scientists announced on Wednesday the discovery near the town of Morella in Spain's Castellón Province of the fossil remains of a medium-sized dinosaur they named Morelladon, a four-legged herbivore that measured 6 metres (20 feet) long.

Protruding from its back was a series of bony spines that formed the sail-like structure that stood about 2 feet (60 cm) tall.

"The sail could help in heat exchange — thermoregulation — focused on releasing excess body heat into the environment, like the ears of the modern-day elephants, or as a storage place for fat to be used during periods of low food supply," said paleontologist Fernando Escaso of the National University of Distance Ed-

ucation's Evolutionary Biology Group in Spain.

The structure also could have served a display role in attracting mates, Escaso added.

Escaso noted that sail-like structures appeared periodically in the evolutionary history of vertebrates, often in animal groups not closely related to one another.

Another plant-eating dinosaur called Ouranosaurus with similarities to Morelladon lived about the same time in Africa. The biggest sail-backed creature was Spinosaurus, which lived a semi-aquatic lifestyle 95 million years ago in Africa. At 50 feet long (15 metres) and 7 tons, it was the biggest dinosaur predator on record, larger even than Tyrannosaurus rex.

Millions of years before the rise of the dinosaurs, there were other sail-backed creatures including the carnivorous reptile Arizonasaurus, the amphibian Platyhystrix and the distant mammal relatives Dimetrodon and Edaphosaurus.

Morelladon is known from a partial skeleton including the spines, other vertebrae, pelvic bones, a thigh bone and teeth.

Northeastern Spain during



A life reconstruction of Morelladon is shown in this illustration provided by Carlos de Miguel Chaves. PHOTO: REUTERS

Morelladon's time alternated between wet and dry periods, with strong temperature variations ranging from 40 degrees Fahrenheit (4 Celsius) to about 104 F (40 C). Escaso said the main predator in the area was Baryon-

yx, a relative of Spinosaurus, and there were other plant-eating dinosaurs around as well as crocodilians and the flying reptiles called pterosaurs. The research was published in the journal *PLOS ONE*.—Reuters

Non-invasive test could help diagnose rare childhood cancer

LONDON — Researchers have developed a non-invasive, low-cost test that could help doctors diagnose some types of malignant childhood tumors, according to a study published Wednesday by the University of Cambridge.

The target of the test is a type of cancer known as germ cell cancer. Germ cells can develop into tumors, particularly in the testes or ovaries, where the cells are normally found. Occasionally, germ cells can become trapped in the wrong part of the body during development and may later turn into brain tumors, for example.

Accurate diagnosis and mon-

"At the moment, we are not good enough at diagnosing these tumours and monitoring their treatment: we need better, safer and more cost-effective tests."

Professor Nick Coleman
University of Cambridge

itoring is crucial to improving outcomes for patients. But all of the current tests are expensive, and none are ideal, the study said.

Researchers at the University of Cambridge and Addenbrooke's Hospital have developed a test for blood and cerebrospinal fluid samples that looks for a spe-

cific panel of four pieces of short genetic code known as microRNAs, which are found in greater quantities in malignant germ cell tumours.

The test can distinguish malignant germ cell tumors from benign germ cell tumors and other cancers, and can be used for diag-

nosis of malignant germ cell tumors in any part of the body, including the brain, according to the study.

The test can also be used to check the effectiveness of treatments and, as it is safe and cost-effective, allows for frequent testing to monitor for the recurrence of malignant germ cell tumors, researchers said.

"At the moment, we are not good enough at diagnosing these tumors and monitoring their treatment: we need better, safer and more cost-effective tests," said Professor Nick Coleman from the University of Cambridge.—Xinhua



A duck walks in freshly-fallen snow in Vertou in 2012. PHOTO: REUTERS

France reports new bird flu strain as outbreak spreads

PARIS — France has detected the first cases of low pathogenic H5N3 bird flu and found more cases of highly infectious strains in an outbreak of the disease in the southwest of the country.

Three cases of H5N3 bird flu were found at three different farms in the southwest, the French agriculture ministry said in a report posted by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) on Wednesday.

The French farm ministry said the strain found in two farms in the Landes department and one in the Pyrenees-Atlantiques were found in a nationwide surveillance cam-

paign following other outbreaks in the region. "There is no risk for human health and no impact on our management of the crisis," a ministry official said.

France, the European Union's largest agricultural producer, has been facing cases of bird flu since late last month involving three highly pathogenic strains—H5N1, H5N2 and H5N9.

The number of cases of highly pathogenic bird flu has now increased to 30, compared with 15 known cases as of Monday, the farm ministry said in an update on its website.

The emergence of three differ-

Crews remove equipment from contested Hawaii telescope site

LOS ANGELES —

Construction crews for what would be one of the world's largest telescopes have removed equipment from the dormant volcano in Hawaii where it was set to be built after the state Supreme Court revoked its permit, project officials said on Wednesday.

The move by TMT International Observatory signals the project faces a potentially significant delay if the team behind it ever applies to state officials for a new permit to build at the Mauna Kea volcano on Hawaii's Big Island.

Astronomers consider the volcano one of the world's best places to view the cosmos, and planned to use it as the site of the Thirty Metre Telescope, which project officials said would have a primary mirror spanning 30 metres (100 feet) and rank as the most powerful optical telescope on the planet.

But Native Hawaiians and environmentalists oppose the project, saying it would damage sacred lands. Protesters have repeatedly tried to block construction at the site this year.

The Hawaii Supreme Court found on 2 December that the permit for the project issued by state officials in 2013 was invalid because at that time, a public hearing to air objections to the plan had not been held.

"We respect the Hawaii Supreme Court decision and, as good neighbours and stewards of the mountain, TMT has begun relocating construction vehicles and equipment from Maunakea," Henry Yang, chair of the TMT International Observatory board of governors, said in a statement.

Officials with TMT are assessing which steps they will take following the court ruling, said Scott Ishikawa, a spokesman for the project.—Reuters

ent highly pathogenic strains in such a short time is unprecedented, the OIE said last week, adding that one hypothesis was that low pathogenic strains had evolved into high pathogenic ones.

The French farm minister said on Monday these strains had no risk of spreading to humans and that the virus cannot be transmitted through food, encouraging people to eat foie gras, produced mostly in the affected regions, over the year-end holiday season. France is nonetheless facing restrictions on its exports of live birds and poultry products from several countries, including top foie gras customer Japan.—Reuters

No evidence California attackers were part of terrorist cell: FBI head

NEW YORK — There is no evidence a married couple who killed 14 people in California this month were part of a terrorist cell, the head of the FBI said on Wednesday, confirming that investigators believe the pair were inspired but not directed by Islamic State.

The Islamist militant group has “revolutionised” terrorism by seeking to inspire such small-scale attacks, FBI Director James Comey said, noting the group uses social media, encrypted communications and slickly produced propaganda to recruit followers around the world.

“Your parents’ al Qaeda was a very different model than the threat we face today,” Comey told a counterterrorism conference in New York.

However, he said that while the perpetrators of the 2 December shootings in San Bernardino, California — Syed Rizwan Farook, 28, and Tashfeen Malik, 29 — had expressed support for “jihad and martyrdom” in private communications as early as 2013, they never did so publicly on social media.

He also said authorities believe Mohammed Abdulazez, the suspect in July’s fatal shooting of four US Marines and a Navy sailor in Chattanooga, Tennessee, was radicalized by militant propaganda.

“To my mind, there’s no doubt that the Chattanooga killer was inspired and motivated by foreign terrorist organisation

propaganda,” he said, but did not specify any particular group.

Comey said the Federal Bureau of Investigation currently has “hundreds” of investigations in all 50 US states involving potential Islamic State-inspired plots.

Islamic State controls wide swaths of Iraq and Syria, where it seeks to carve out a caliphate. It claimed responsibility for attacks in Paris on 13 November that killed 130 people.

The group has a three-pronged strategy, Comey said: recruit fighters to join it in the Middle East, inspire individuals in other countries to carry out attacks and send out trained operatives to commit violence in Europe and the United States. It has perfected the use of social media, and Twitter in particular, to contact potential followers, he said.

“Twitter works as a way to sell books, as a way to promote movies, and it works as a way to crowdsource terrorism — to sell murder,” Comey said.

Islamic State also frequently employs encrypted communications, Comey said. He renewed his calls for technology companies to avoid creating devices and services that cannot be accessed, even with a proper court order. But Comey said he is convinced that law enforcement and tech companies can work together without compromising personal privacy.

“We are not going to break the Internet,” he said.—Reuters

Merkel to explore new proposals on migrant crisis at EU mini-summit



A migrant family from Syria sits in a refugee centre in Hamm, Germany, on 7 September. PHOTO: REUTERS

BRUSSELS — German Chancellor Angela Merkel will explore new possible ways to admit Syrian refugees to Europe at a mini-summit with Turkey and several EU leaders on Thursday, as she struggles to control a migrant crisis that has split the 28-nation bloc.

The mass influx of migrants will feature prominently on the agenda of a full European Union summit later on Thursday, after the executive European Commission proposed this week new measures to stem the tide, including a common coastguard.

Merkel and Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker will meet Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu with several EU leaders beforehand, diplomats close to the talks said.

They will discuss taking in Syrians directly from Turkey under an additional scheme which member states would be able to join voluntarily.

Germany, by far the top destination for asylum seekers in Europe, has been the driving force behind the voluntary resettlement idea, saying it would help Turkey, as well as EU member states to have more control over who gets to Europe.

The idea for voluntary resettlement is linked to a wider deal with Turkey under which Ankara would prevent migrants leaving for Greece in return for financial aid from the bloc, accelerated visa-free travel for Turks to the EU and reviving long-stalled membership talks.

The EU is at loggerheads over two distinct is-

sues - relocation of migrants who have already arrived in Europe through Greece and Italy, and resettlement of a limited number directly from Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon.

The proposal, however, does not set a minimum number of refugees EU states would take from Turkey in the next five years and no formal decisions are expected when leaders of Germany, Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, Finland, Sweden, Greece and the Netherlands meet Davutoglu.

Merkel may also try to enlist the help of other leaders individually during the main summit, diplomats said. France and others could still decide to join the prior meeting, they added.

A draft final statement prepared by diplomats for

the full EU summit said only that member states should “rapidly examine” proposals for a “voluntary humanitarian admission scheme”.

Resettlement would be carried out by the United Nations refugee agency UNHCR. The Commission said the body is able to handle 80,000 cases globally a year — less than 10 percent of the number of migrants that have flooded into Europe in 2015.

The figure puts a clear cap on the scope of any such scheme. Die Welt newspaper quoted Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann as saying Europe should be ready to take in 40,000 to 50,000 refugees from Turkey under the programme, provided Ankara delivers on the secure border commitment.—Reuters

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Raised 'Chavista' in poor Venezuela, lawmaker-elect jolts opposition image

CARACAS — She grew up in a poor and dangerous part of Caracas, was raised by a family fiercely loyal to late socialist leader Hugo Chavez and attended so many rallies that she can still sing along to tunes glorifying him.

Marialbert Barrios, 25, isn't your typical opposition politician.

Yet in this month's legislative elections, Barrios was one of 112 opposition lawmakers elected to Venezuela's National Assembly as voters punished the OPEC country's left-wing government for a gruelling economic crisis.

And she won in an area covering a cluster of Caracas' traditionally pro-Chavez slums, including the hillside stronghold of Catia, unexpectedly beating a top Socialist Party politician to become one of Venezuela's youngest lawmakers.

"There's a clamour for change. This is a broken, thieving government," said Barrios, a member of the Justice First opposition party who first entered anti-government politics when she was a student at a state-run university.

Victories like hers have helped shake up the



Marialbert Barrios, a newly elected deputy from Venezuelan coalition of opposition parties (MUD), speaks during an interview with Reuters in Caracas, on 14 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

image of the opposition, which struggled throughout Chavez's 1999-2013 rule to appeal to the poor and tap leaders from poorer families.

The main opposition coalition has worked to change that in recent years and has slowly been reaping electoral rewards.

"People need lawmakers who understand, know, and live their same problems," Barrios said in an interview in Caracas.

Inspired by two-time presidential candidate Henrique Capriles' grassroots outreach strategy, Barrios campaigned in the subway, markets, and even while queuing up for goods at poorly-stocked stores.

Other opposition politicians made inroads in poor areas that have suffered the brunt of the recession, helping the opposition win a two-thirds legislative majority.

Nearby, in the 23 of January slum home to Chavez's mausoleum and dotted with murals of leftist icons including Argentine revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the opposition also staged an upset win.

And in another symbolic shift, Chavez's home state of Barinas in Venezuela's sweltering central plains flipped allegiances with even the late leader's brother losing to the opposition.—Reuters

Thousands of workers go on strike to demand higher wage in Cambodia

PHNOM PENH — Thousands of Cambodian factory workers in two special economic zones (SEZs) in eastern Svay Rieng Province's Bavet town continued their protests yesterday to demand higher minimum wage, a senior labour official said.

"Nearly 30,000 workers at 39 factories in the Manhattan and Tai Seng SEZs have gone on strike since Wednesday afternoon to demand higher minimum wage," Has Bunthy, chief of Svay Rieng Provincial Labour Department, told Xinhua. Their protests came after provincial labor officials announced the amount of increase in the minimum wage for the garment and footwear sector that takes effect next month, he said.

In October, the Cambodian government set the new

monthly minimum wage for the garment and footwear sector at 140 US dollars for next year, up 9.4 percent from the current 128 US dollars. "The protesters said the increase was too low and demanded that the wage should be raised to 148 US dollars," he said. "We cannot agree with their demand because the government has already decided over the minimum wage for 2016."

He said the protests started from Kingmaker Cambodia Footwear factory in Manhattan SEZ on Wednesday when some protesters had thrown stones at factories' windows and forced workers in other factories to join them. According to Has Bunthy, hundreds of security forces have been deployed to the two SEZs to protect factories and investors on Thursday.

The Garment Manufacturers Association in Cambodia (GMAC) called on the government, especially competent institutions and local authority, to take immediate effective and appropriate measures for the protection of security and safety of the investors and their properties.

"Today 17 December, 2015, the whole production activities of Manhattan Special Economic Zone have been completely stopped, causing millions of dollars in loss," the GMAC said in an open letter sent to Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen.

Garment and footwear sector, the kingdom's largest foreign currency earner, are comprised of nearly 1,100 factories with some 700,000 workers, according to the government figures.—Xinhua

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yma@kcyangon.com

Dated 18 December 2015

THE REPUBLIC OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR MINISTRY OF ENERGY MYANMA OIL AND GAS ENTERPRISE (INVITATION FOR OPEN TENDER)

(17/2015)

Open tenders are invited for supply of the following respective items in United States Dollars.

Sr.No	Tender No	Description	Remark
(1)	IFB-059(15-16)	Spares for HDD Rig Model 11-046 (HK 250 T) (3 Items)	US\$
(2)	IFB-060(15-16)	Spares for ZJ 70L SR - 2 Rig (5) Items	US\$
(3)	IFB-061(15-16)	Spares for Niigata Transmission and Reduction Gear Box Ex TM 3500 Drilling Rig (55) Items	US\$

Tender Closing Date & Time - 11-1-2016, 16:30 Hr

Tender Document shall be available during office hours commencing from 16th December, 2015 at the Finance Department, Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise, No(44) Complex, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar.

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Roll over Beethoven, Croatia's 2Cellos go for AC/DC

LONDON — If you were to list the great cello works, you'd probably say Vivaldi, Bach and Haydn and skip AC/DC, Michael Jackson and Coldplay.

But then that would be before you heard Croatian duo 2Cellos tear up the rule book to give the instrument a rock-star makeover.

Classically trained cellists Luka Sulic and Stjepan Hauser became overnight Internet sensations when their low-budget video of Jackson's "Smooth Criminal" went viral in 2011, getting three million hits in two weeks.

Fast-forward a few years and they are now worldwide headliners in their own right, and released their third album earlier this year, having performed and collaborated with the likes of guitarist Steve Vai, Chinese concert pianist Lang Lang and Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli.

"We were young and played classical music with lots of energy, but we always had this rock animal inside of us," Hauser told Reuters before a show this week in London.

The pair cite Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich and English cellist Jacqueline du Pré as early influences. Then their musical tastes expanded to Jackson and later AC/DC with its lead guitarist Angus Young. Hauser goes so far as to incorporate a few Young-style antics into the pair's stage show, — at one point dropping to the floor and circling around on his back, all the while never missing a note.

"We've shown all the different possibilities (of the cello), especially when it's combined with classical music. Who would combine (Gioachino) Rossini opera with Iron Maiden," Hauser



Stjepan Hauser and Luka Sulic of the group 2Cellos perform at London's Eventim Hammersmith Apollo in London, Britain, on 15 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

added, referring to the duo's fusion of the "William Tell Overture" and the metal band's "The Trooper", which opens their new album "Celloverse" and kicked-off the London encores.

The show started on a gentle-note with beautiful renditions of songs by Sting and U2, but once the opening notes of

"Smooth Criminal" sounded, the crowd went into a frenzy, which only grew as the pair rocked their way through hits from Nirvana, Guns and Roses, and of course AC/DC.

The audience — from children to pensioners — even rushed the stage. A high-energy jaunt through The Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction" saw the two try to beat Mick Jagger and Keith Richards at their own game.

But the pair bristles at the suggestion they are a covers band. "When we do something we want it to be something special, something unique, we put our own stamp on it," Sulic said.

Sulic said much of the classical musical establishment appreciated what the group

was doing. "We introduce classical music, especially to the young generation. The kids love what we are doing, we inspire them so the teachers are happy and the parents are happy."

Cello bows shredded, it was time to take it down a notch in London to end the evening with an impromptu Christmas Carol medley sing along and an elegant rendition of Johann Sebastian Bach's "Air on the G String".

Regretting the missed opportunity to collaborate with Jackson, who died in 2009, Hauser said the pair would instead like to work with someone unexpected like American rapper Eminem.

"Imagine hip hop and cello. That would be intense," he said with a grin.—Reuters

Michael Jackson's 'Thriller' is first to sell 30 million in US

LOS ANGELES — Michael Jackson's album "Thriller" is still breaking barriers more than 30 years after its release and six years after the pop superstar's death, becoming the first album in history to cross the 30 million mark in US sales, record industry officials said on Wednesday.

"Thriller," released in 1982 and featuring seven hit singles including "Billie Jean," "Beat It" and its title track, had already crossed 20 million copies in US sales by 1984 during its 112th week on Billboard's album chart, according to the Recording Industry Association of America.

Its continued popularity after Jackson's death in 2009 from an overdose of the powerful anesthetic propofol underscores the strength of the late singer's appeal. The King of Pop remains the biggest-selling recording artist of all time.

"RIAA has awarded gold and platinum records on behalf of the music business for nearly 60 years, but this is the first time an artist has crossed the 30X multi-platinum plateau," RIAA Chairman and Chief Executive Cary Sherman said in a statement.

"Thriller" has also surpassed sales of 100 million copies worldwide, according to the RIAA statement.

"Thriller" has sold more than 2.1 million units in the United States since Jackson's death, according to Nielsen Music.—Reuters

Rita Ora was 'obsessed' with Googling herself

LONDON — Singer Rita Ora was once "obsessed" with Googling herself.

The 25-year-old British Singer there was a point in her life when she used to search for everything written about her, reported Female First.

"I used to be obsessed with it. I would Google my name and blah, blah, blah. But see, even talking about it now makes it a topic of conversation. The gossip side doesn't affect what I do.

"The personal stuff of actually, like, being in a relationship is what affects me. I don't expect anybody to understand my relationships, because they're not in my position in that moment, in that relationship," Ora said.—PTI



PHOTO: REUTERS

'Star Wars: The Force Awakens' among AFI's best films of 2015

LOS ANGELES — "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" racked up its first award on Wednesday when the American Film Institute named it as one of the 10 best films of the year.

"The Force Awakens," opening in theaters across the world this week, was included in a list alongside awards front-runners such as Wall Street misdeeds comedy "The Big Short" and lesbian romance drama "Carol."

The American Film Institute's top films of the year are selected by critics,

scholars, TV and film artists and AFI trustees, and come on the heels of this year's Golden Globe and Screen Actor's Guild (SAG) nominations.

While "Star Wars" did not receive any Globe or SAG nominations, likely due to the fact that voters would not have seen

the film, which has been shrouded in secrecy, its AFI nomination makes it a potential contender for February's Oscars ceremony.

Awards voters often shun action-packed and special effects-laden big studio fare in favor of more dramatic and grounded stories. But this year, "Star Wars" was named on AFI's list alongside blockbuster action film "Mad Max: Fury Road" and space adventure "The Martian."

Other films on the list included psychological thriller "Room," Roman Catholic Church newspaper probe "Spotlight," Cold War drama "Bridge of Spies" and Pixar's animated extravaganza "Inside Out" and rap biopic "Straight Outta Compton." The AFI also selects the year's top 10 best television programmes.—Reuters



PHOTO: REUTERS

'Charlie Brown' school play in Kentucky to cut Bible reference

LOUISVILLE — A Biblical reference made by a Peanuts character has been cut from an elementary school performance of "A Charlie Brown Christmas" in eastern Kentucky in order to abide by federal laws and court rulings that schools may not endorse any religion, school officials and protesters said.

The show is scheduled to be performed yesterday at W.R. Castle Elementary in Wittensville, roughly 90 miles east of Lexington, according to local media. The school is in Johnson County.

"The US Supreme Court and the 6th Circuit are very clear that public school staff may not endorse any religion when acting in their official capacities and during school activities," the superintendent of Johnson County Schools, Thomas R. Salyer, said in a statement posted online regarding school plays at county elementary schools.

The school district did

not specify which plays would be affected. Alliance Defending Freedom, a nonprofit religious advocacy group, cited the Charlie Brown performance in a request that the district reverse its decision.

"Schools should not have to think twice about whether they can allow students to perform a classic Christmas production simply because it contains Biblical references," Matt Sharp, an ADF attorney, said in a statement.

Johnson County is about 40 miles southeast of Morehead, Kentucky, which garnered national headlines earlier this year when county clerk Kim Davis, citing her Apostolic Christian beliefs, spent five days in jail for refusing to sign marriage licenses for gay couples.

In the play, Charlie Brown's friend Linus explains the birth of Jesus Christ, using text from the gospel of Luke in a key moment of the show after a frustrated Charlie Brown

asks what the holiday is about.

Linus says, "Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in the manger. And suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace, good will toward men.'" Linus then says, "That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown."

Salyer and the school's principal could not be reached for comment.

Amber Duke, a spokeswoman for the Kentucky chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, did not say whether the group received a complaint about the play, citing its confidentiality policy.

"Religious liberty requires protecting BOTH the right of free exercise for individuals of every faith and the right to remain free from government coercion and promotion of religion," she said in a statement.—*Reuters*

Foreign visitors to Japan hit new record, 19m in sight by year-end

TOKYO — The number of foreign visitors to Japan this year reached a record 17.96 million as of 30 November, and is expected to top 19 million by year-end, the Japan National Tourism Organisation said Wednesday.

Visitors this year surpassed the previous annual record of 13.41 million in September. In November, 1.65 million foreigners came to Japan, up 41.0 percent from a year before.

The annual total "is expected to top 19 million. Our goal is nearing a reality," Akihiko Tamura,

head of the Japan Tourism Agency, told a press conference, referring to the government target of 20 million by 2020 when the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games will be held.

In 2016, the number of foreign visitors is likely to jump to 23.50 million, tour operator JTB Corp. said Wednesday.

By nationality, the number of Chinese visitors in November soared 75.0 percent from a year earlier to 363,000, followed by 359,800 from South Korea and 296,500 from Taiwan,

according to the tourism organisation.

In the January-November period, Chinese visitors surged 109.4 percent year-on-year to 4.65 million. But the number of Chinese tourists has declined in recent months from the peak of more than 590,000 in August.

"Reservations from individual (Chinese) travelers are firm, but those from group tours have become somewhat slow. We would like to continue paying attention to the Chinese economy," Tamura said.—*Kyodo News*

Lighthouse decorated as Santa Claus in tradition started after quake

FUKUOKA — A red lighthouse at the port of Hakata is decorated to look like Santa Claus ahead of Christmas as part of a tradition started 10 years ago after a magnitude 7.0 earthquake struck the area in southwestern Japan.

The Fukuoka Coast Guard Office began the decoration in 2005 following the quake in March that

year, hoping the smiling face of the lighthouse Santa Claus would help cheer up local people.

This year, the decoration has expanded to include a white lighthouse standing on the opposite shore, adorned with the image of a snowman, also smiling.

"We hope the decoration will make not only

tourists but also people working at the port and on the sea happy," said Kimio Iki, 41, of the office. There are also illustrations of the U flag and W flag, part of the international maritime signal flags, above the snowman decoration, to show UW in a two-letter signal meaning "We wish you a safe and pleasant voyage." —*Kyodo News*



News Channel in Brief

(18-12-2015, Friday)

6:00 am

• Paritta By Hilly Region Missionary Sayadaw

7:35 am

• People's Talks

8:35 am

• Current Affairs

9:35 am

• Weekly Entertainment

10:35 am

• MRTV's Youth Programme

11:35 am

• Science and Technology

Programme

12:50 pm

• TV Drama Series

1:35 pm

• TV Drama Series

2:45 pm

• Myanmar Traditional Boxing

3:35 pm

• Clever

4:35 pm

• Weekly Sports Info

5:35 pm

• Hyper Sports

7:15 pm

• TV Drama Series

8:00 pm

• News/ International News/ Weather Report

9:00 pm

• News

• TV Drama Series

• Amazing World

• Documentary

Note/ Hourly News Bulletins (Local + International)



Myanmar International

(18-12-2015 07:00 am ~ 19-12-2015 07:00 am) MST

Today Fresh

07:03 Am News

07:26 Am Visiting A Serene Village In The Northwest Of Myanmar

07:42 Am Amazing "Sayargyi Nyein Chan Aung"

07:54 Am Kayah

08:03 Am News

08:26 Am Kyaikhteeyoe: Mountain Drivers

08:32 Am Myanmar Traditional Instruments - Myanma Harp (Episode-1)

09:03 Am News

09:26 Am "Myanmar's Traditions and Culture" Novicehood in Myanmar

09:51 Am Sagaing: Gold Leaf

10:03 Am News

10:26 Am A Way of Life: Karate-do

10:39 Am Chanmyay Yeiktha Meditation Centre- Chaw Dwin Gone

10:55 Am Sticky Shan Snack

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

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

Prime Time

07:03 Pm News

07:25 Pm Pagoda Forest in Pa-O Land

07:47 Pm ABU Song Festival

08:03 Pm News

08:26 Pm Architect: U Thaw

08:51 Pm Myanmar Masterclass: 3D

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

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

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

(For Detailed Schedule - www.myanmaritv.com/schedule)

Host of New York's Westminster dog show to step down after 25 years

NEW YORK — David Frei, the longtime co-host of New York's Westminster Kennel Club dog show, will step down this year, organisers said on Wednesday, ending a quarter century as the voice of one of the world's most prestigious showcases for purebred dogs.

Frei, known for his vast knowledge of purebreds and quirky canine anecdotes, will "move on to other opportunities" after co-hosting the two-day show for a final time on 15 and 16 February at Madison Square Garden, Westminster said in a statement. He has generally worked with a different co-host every year.

Frei hosted his first Westminster show, entering its 140th year, in 1990. He is a champion breeder and handler of purebred dogs, particularly silky-coated Afghan Hounds and bird-hunting Brittanys. He is also known as an advocate of

therapy dogs.

It was not immediately clear who would replace Frei, who also serves as Westminster's communications director.

Gail Miller Bisher, a dog show judge and exhibitor, has been named the club's new communications director. "For someone who loves dogs as I do, there is nothing more exciting than to be part of The Westminster Kennel Club, the premier organisation in our sport and such a strong voice for all dogs," Bisher said in a statement. Frei could not immediately be reached for comment.

The Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show hosted nearly 200 dog breeds and varieties from 15 countries and all US states except North Dakota and Idaho last February. A bouncy 15-inch beagle named Miss P won the top honor of "Best In Show", besting more than 2,700 competitors. — *Reuters*

Leicester aim to extend lead as Arsenal host City

THE Premier League's leading goalscorers will be on show at when surprise leaders Leicester City bid to move further ahead at the top with victory against Everton at Goodison Park on Saturday.

The match will pitch England's Jamie Vardy, with a league-leading 15 goals this season for Leicester, against Everton's Belgium forward Romelu Lukaku (12), with Vardy's attacking partner, Algeria winger Riyad Mahrez (11), in a supporting role.

All three players are on the "wanted" lists of some of the league's biggest clubs, with goal-shy Manchester United already heavily linked with former Chelsea striker Lukaku.

His exit from Stamford Bridge in 2014 must be viewed with increasing frustration by Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho as his lacklustre champions spiral into crisis.

In contrast, Claudio Ranieri, Mourinho's predecessor as Chelsea boss in his first spell, has declared his dynamic duo to be "priceless" ahead of the January transfer window.

Fresh from beating visitors Chelsea 2-1 on Monday, Leicester can extend their two-point lead at the top because nearest rivals Arsenal do not host third-placed Manchester City in the schedule's outstanding fixture

until Monday.

In-form Arsenal will be determined to beat Manuel Pellegrini's inconsistent City to endorse their championship credentials and widen the gap to their nearest challengers.

City have not won away in four league games since a 1-0 triumph at Crystal Palace in September and, if captain Vincent Kompany and Sergio Aguero remain absent, their chances of ending that run — and boosting their title hopes — may be dented.

Ranieri's effervescent Leicester team can create a five-point cushion by claiming an eighth success in 10 league games since their 5-2 home defeat by Arsenal in September.

Victory at 10th-placed Everton, unbeaten in six, would also enhance the status of league top scorers Leicester — who have 34 goals in 16 league games — as genuine title contenders.

While the strike trio strut their stuff at Goodison, crisis-racked champions Chelsea, in 16th place, host Sunderland, 19th, in what could be viewed as an unexpected relegation scrap at Stamford Bridge.

Given that Sunderland won this fixture in 2010 and 2014 — and the dismal form of the hosts — Chelsea cannot rely on a straightforward afternoon.

Indeed, Sunderland have



Leicester's Christian Fuchs and Kasper Schmeichel celebrate at the end of the match during Barclays Premier League at King Power Stadium on 14 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

lost only once to Chelsea in their last four meetings in all competitions.

A 10th defeat in 17 league games could see Chelsea, already enduring their worst start to a Premier League season, fall into the bottom three, heap-

ing more pressure on the beleaguered Mourinho.

His friend, Manchester United's Louis Van Gaal, who is also under fire, could ease the pressure on his own head with a home win over struggling Norwich City.

Eliminated from the Champions League and beaten last Saturday at promoted Bournemouth, goal-shy United are fourth but could draw level on 32 points with Manchester City, at least until their local rivals play on Monday.—Reuters

Bjorkman no longer part of Murray's team



Great Britain's Andy Murray with coach Jonas Bjorkman during a practice session of Barclays ATP World Tour Finals Media Day at O2 Arena, London, on 13 November. PHOTO: REUTERS

LONDON — World number two Andy Murray will not be working with Swede Jonas Bjorkman next year after his French coach Amelie Mauresmo resumed her role following the birth of her son.

Bjorkman joined Briton Murray's team in March.

"Nice to have Amelie back in the team out in Dubai," Murray, who is competing in the International Premier Tennis League, said on his Facebook page on Wednesday.

"Thanks to Jonas for helping out this year. I enjoyed working with one of the nicest guys on the tour, bring on 2016."

Former world number one Mauresmo gave birth in August but will return to work with Murray for 22 to 24 weeks next year.

"Amelie did come in at a difficult time, when I had just come back from back surgery, which was tough," Murray, who will become a father in February, told the BBC. "When I started working with her officially I was ranked 11 in the world — I had just dropped out of the top 10 for the first time in eight years — and I'm now back up to number 2, which is my highest ranking."—Reuters

One billion watched 2014 World Cup final on TV

LONDON — More than one billion television viewers watched last year's World Cup soccer final between Germany and Argentina in Brazil although audience figures for the tournament were slightly down because of adverse kickoff times, according to a FIFA report on Wednesday.

The report, produced by Kantar Media, said 695 million people watched at least 20 minutes of the final at home, a 12 percent rise on 2010, with out-of-home viewers taking the figure past one billion.

The global in-home audience for the whole tournament, based on at least 20 minutes of viewing, was 2.1 billion in 207 countries — down four percent on 2010 owing to matches kicking off in the middle of the night

in Asia. Some 280 million watched matches online or on mobile devices.

Audience reach was highest in China, where 252.3 million viewers tuned in during the tournament, 18.1 percent of the total population, while Germany set an all-time domestic viewing record when an average of 34.5 million people watched the country beat Argentina in the final.

The growth in interest in soccer in the United States was reflected in an average of 18.2 million people watching the US versus Portugal, making it the most-watched soccer match ever on US television.

In all, broadcasters showed some 98,087 hours of match footage from Brazil, up 36 percent from 2010. — Reuters