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Save mural paintings—our heritage

Aye Min Soe

MURAL paintings created on the walls of caves and pagodas can be found in many parts of Myanmar. However, such kind of heritage in the country's sub-urban areas have been abandoned and left without preservation for many decades.

Of these is from the cave of the Htigyi Pagoda in Minbu. The mural paintings on the wall of the cave have been left to ruin. Rain seeps through the cracks of the concrete walls in the rainy season, damaging the works.

Some parts of the upper layer of the concrete walls on which the mural paintings were created have been collapsing gradually for many decades.

The wall paintings have also been damaged by the rubbing of cattle from nearby villages on the paintings.

"The wall paintings on this pagoda are in urgent need of preservation. If not, all of these works will degenerate beyond preservation in the future," said U Kyaw Sein Win, 60, a local art master.

The veteran artist has estimated that the paintings were created in the 18 century.

The subjects of the paintings are related to the life of the



Mural paintings at Htigyi Pagoda in Minbu. PHOTOS: KO KATE

Buddha and His Teachings.

During the period of the Nyaungyan, Innwa (Ava) and Konbong dynasties from the 14th to 18th centuries, which came after Bagan era, paintings were

also created on walls of caves of stupas and pagodas though in a different, distinct style.

The lines used in the paintings have become thicker than those in the Bagan era and the

composition of the paintings is not as good. However, the life of ordinary people are found for the first time in the paintings of those eras.

Myanmar traditional

painting developed with the arrival of Buddhism to Bagan Kingdom because most of the paintings date back to the period of Bagan, which began in the 11th century AD.

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Tourism via border gates increasing in Myanmar

MYANMAR has become a popular tourist destination thanks to its many cultural sites and its political, economic and social changes in the recent years. The tourists visit Myanmar, by air, by sea and via border gates from neighboring countries.

The visitors who cross the border gates, enter by convoys of cars, motorcycles and bicycles. They also travel along Ayeyawaddy and Chindwin rivers in yachts.

With the cooperation of Ministry of Hotel and Tourism

and Pegu Travels and Tours Co.,Ltd, 13 tourists on nine motorcycles entered Myawaddy border gate of south-eastern Myanmar from Thailand and visited Myawaddy, Phaang, Kyaikhtiyoo, Bago, Yangon, Pagan, Mandalay, Sagaing, Amarapura, PyinOolwin, Kalaw, Inlay, Ayethaya, Taungyi, Namsam, Monpyin, Kyaintong, and Tachilek towns. They went back to Thailand via Tachilek border gate on 14 December.

Likewise, with the cooperation of the ministry and

Mother Ayeyawaddy Travels & Tours Co.,Ltd, 16 Thai tourists on eight motorcycles came on 2 December, via Myawaddy border gate and traveled to Taungoo, Bagan, Magwe, Mrauk-U, Sittway, Thandwe, Pyi, Yangon, Mawlamyaing, and Dawei towns. They left for Thailand from Htikhee border gate on 15 December.

According to World Tourism Federation, there were 1138 million tourists in 2014, which was an increase of 4.7 per cent from 2013.—GNLM

Phase 2 section of Bo Ba Htoo Housing Complex to be completed in three years

THE Bo Ba Htoo Housing Complex Project, approved by the Yangon Government, is being implemented under the Yangon City Development Committee's supervision and constructed by the Myanmar V-Pile Company. Construction has now entered phase 2 which is set to be completed in three years. Construction began earlier this month.

The Phase 2 section is located on 14.89 acre plot of land at the corner of Bomhu Ba Htoo and Bayinnaung roads in Dagon Myothit (North) township of Yangon. The cost of the construction is estimated to be over K 20 billion. The nearby Phase 1 section of the complex is completed and the apartments are now occupied.

There will be 20 eight-story buildings with 900 sq ft apartments, and eight-story buildings with 600 sq ft apartments totaling 896 units. Each building will have elevators and four units (apartments) on each floor and like the Phase 1 section, a children's playground, a park and

parking lots are to be included.

Eight engineers and 70 construction workers are assigned to the site.

"The prices of the 448 apartments of the Phase 1 section were determined by the Yangon region government. There were 13000 applications to buy the apartments in installments and the people had to draw lots. The second phase has to be implemented soon to fulfill the demand for low-cost apartments," said Phase 2's Project Manager Daw Soe Soe Tin.

She added that the electricity supply will be insufficient and they are in discussions with the city's Electricity Supply Enterprise to ensure the supply of power.

At the Phase 1 section, 600 sq ft apartments were sold at K 25.5 million and 900 sq ft apartments were sold at K 34.7 million. The construction of the 14 eight-story buildings on a 5.26-acre land cost K 12 billion. Those buildings were also constructed by Myanmar V-Pile.—*Soe Win*



Bo Ba Htoo Housing Complex seen at the corner of Bomhu Ba Htoo and Bayinnaung roads in Dagon Myothit (North). PHOTO: SOE WIN

Italy pledges to support further development of Myanmar's aquaculture industry



A meeting at which technical support for Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries & Rural Development was discussed seen in progress . PHOTO: ZAW GYI

MYANMAR will put more effort into improving the country's aquaculture industry in collaboration with the Italian government, said U Khin Maung Maw, Director-General of the Department of Fisheries.

Italy has pledged to provide technical support including buildings and laboratories to help Myanmar meet its goals of sustainable development for the country's fisheries sector at a meeting on Friday in Yangon.

Providing technical support to small scale firms, socio development of regional fisheries organisations, the continuous development of coastal region

fisheries management and the manufacture of valued-added products were discussed at the meeting.

With the assistance of Italy, the Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development is planning to extend training capacity for industry workers.

The Italian Government Collaboration Agency, the Myanmar ministry, the Italian Foreign Affairs Ministry and CHIEAM IAMB are currently implementing a development project for the country's small scale fisheries and related organisations—*News and Photo: Zaw Gyi (Pandita)*

KOICA Fellowship Program Annual Meeting celebrated

2015 Fellowship Program Annual Meeting was celebrated with enthusiastic participation by KOICA Alumni at Novotel Max Hotel in Yangon at December 19 in order to celebrate and strengthen the friendly relations between Myanmar and South Korea.

The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) held its highly anticipated annual event of the year known as "2015 Fellowship Program Annual Meeting".

Fellowship program is one of the KOICA's core programs continuously supporting human resources development of its partner countries.

In case of Myanmar, KOI-

CA has invited nearly 1,746 Myanmar government officials and this year, over 130 officials have already participated in various training courses including 15 scholarship courses in Korea.

Korean Ambassador of the Republic of Korea Mr. Lee Back-Soon remarks on his opening speech, "Korea is putting effort on promoting and contributing to find the right way for Myanmar's sustainable development. However, the most critical factor to maximize the outcome of our development cooperation is the strong collaboration between two countries."

The event featured presentation of the KOICA Alum-

ni to sharing memories and the fellowship program they anticipated in and the Myanmar traditional dance, K-POP dance, and WFK volunteer's signing performances.

Union Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation (MOAI) U Myint Hlaing, Union Minister for Construction (MOC) U Kyaw Lwin, Economic Advisor to the President and Chair of Central Committee of MDI U Aung Tun Thet, Chairman of Myanmar KOICA Club (MMKC) U San Lwin, Chief Resident Representative of KOICA Myanmar Office Mr. Nam Kwon Hyong, and 100 government officials were present at the event.—*GNLM*

Shweli-3 Hydro Power Project to boost power supply

THE Ministry of Electric Power and Electricite De France (owned by the Government of France) on Friday signed an MoU to generate electricity on Shweli River near Moemeik.

The signing ceremony was held at Novotel Hotel in Yangon.

The Shweli-3 Hydro Power Project will be implemented through public private

partnership.

Electricite De France SA (EDF) will invest over US\$1.4 billion in the deal.

The project is expected to produce 1,050 Megawatt with power to be distributed around Myanmar via the national grid.

About 20 million of the country's 51 million population have access to electricity.—*MNA*

Free Medical Service for Dental Patients in Mon State

THE Mon Medical Association provided free dental care service to middle schools in Potpawaddy village, Mon State on Thursday. Some of the patients were from the nearby Potpawaddy village. The dental care teams were led by Dr. Myint Thein, chairman of the Mon Medical Association and 13 volunteers from Yay township and health staff from Ahyuthaung and Potpawaddy villages.—*Nay Myo Htut*

Dr Sai Mauk Kham inspects Muse CEZ development

VICE President Dr Sai Mauk Kham yesterday inspected the central economic zone in Muse, northern Shan State, giving instructions on closer coordination in regional development between the local administrative bodies.

The Shan State government and New Star Light Company are joint developers of the central economic zone that was founded on 4 July 2013 with the permission of the Myanmar Investment Commission.

Located on 294 acres of land near the Shweli river, the Muse CEZ project is now 70% complete and will comprise apartment complexes, market stalls, three-star hotels, recreation parks and playgrounds.

In the evening the vice president proceeded to Lashio airport where he called for tight security and the timely completion of the extension work.

—Myanma News Agency



Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham views the scale model of the central economic zone in Muse. PHOTO: MNA

Former DSA graduates pay respects to retired faculty members



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing pays respects to retired faculty members of DSA. PHOTO: MYAWADY

FORMER graduates of the Defence Services Academy (DSA) paid respects to their retired military and civil faculty members at the Tatmadaw Exhibition Hall in Yangon yesterday.

Graduate officers from Intakes 14 to 19 paid their respects to 109 retired faculty members in their third ceremony, which drew over 250 retired graduate officers alongside the incumbent

commander-in-chief of defence services and other senior military officers.

Vice President U Nyan Tun and Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing delivered messages expressing their deep sense of gratitude to the instructors.

On behalf of the retired teachers, ex-Lt-Gen U Kyaw Ba gave advice on upholding the

good tradition of the army in protecting the rights of the people and defending the country from internal and external threats. The former lieutenant general stressed the need to bring the armed forces up to modern standards.

Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing had lunch together with former DSA graduates and faculty members. —Myawady

Respect paying ceremony to doyen literati held for marking Myanmar Sarsodaw Day

ORGANISED by the Myanmar Writers' Association, a respect paying ceremony to the doyen literati was held to mark the Myanmar Sarsodaw Day at Yangon City Hall yesterday.

Chairman of Myanmar Writer's Association U Tin Hlaing (Letwinthar Saw Chit) spoke words of greeting to the doyen literati.

The association's secretary U Nyunt Tin (Maung Nyein Thu-Gyobinggaug), master of ceremonies, introduced the doyen literati to the guests. U Ohn Maung (Myinmu Maung Naing

Moe), chairman of fund raising working committee, read out a list of the donors.

After paying respect to the doyen literati Vice Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw U Nanda Kyaw Swar, Minister for information U Ye Htut, Vice chairman of USDP U Htay Oo, Mayor U Hla Myint, and officials of the Myanmar Writers' Association presented gifts and cash.

On behalf of the doyen literati, U Maung Maung (Maung Nyein Chan-PhyarPon) counselled to the attendees. —Yee Yee Myint, Ohnmar Than



Union Minister U Ye Htut presents gifts to doyen literati at the ceremony to mark Sarsodaw Day in Yangon. PHOTO: ZAW MIN LATT

Migrant birds arriving at Inlay Lake Wildlife Sanctuary

MIGRANT birds from the northern hemisphere have been arriving in Myanmar since October to inhabit the Inlay Lake Wildlife Sanctuary for the winter. They are now together with the native birds, according to an official of the sanctuary administration office.

He said there are 64 species of 11477 native birds and 18 species of 8795 migrant birds at the sanctuary.

The spacious Inlay Lake in Shan State, with its famous floating natural islands, was designated as Myanmar's first Biosphere Reserve under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program, in June of this year.—*Nay Myo Thu Rein (Nyaungshwe)*

Hot-air balloon trips over Bagan a hit with tourists

HOT-AIR balloon trips over the skies of Bagan, a cultural heritage city, have seen an increase in passengers year by year, reaching 17,802 in 2014, according to statistics released by the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism.

The balloon business there has seen consistently increasing income, reaching US\$4.23 million in 2014, a substantial increase from the US\$ 0.97 million gained from 4,886 passengers in 2010.

More than 20 hot-air balloons belonging to three private companies are in the air every day in Bagan, one of the country's most popular and lucrative tourist attractions.

It can cost between \$250 to \$380 USD for a person to enjoy Bagan's aerial views dotted with thousands of pagodas constructed between the 11th and 13th centuries.

According to the Travel & Tourism Economic Impact-2015 report released by the World

Travel and Tourism Council, more than K3 billion from the tourism sector boosted the country's GDP, making up 4.8

per cent of the total.

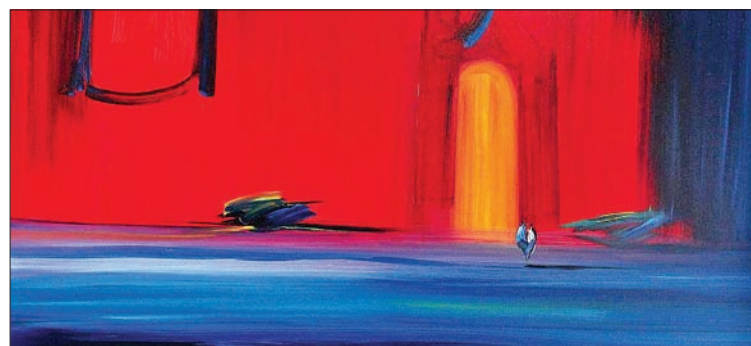
The travel and tourism sector has created more than 505,000 job opportunities in

2014 and it is expected that the sector can find jobs for a further 536,000 people in 2015.—*Kyaw Lwin (Hotel & Tourism)*



Hot air balloon over Bagan. PHOTO: REUTERS

Artist Nyein Chan Su to exhibit his works at Yangon Gallery



Work supplied by Artist Nyein Chan Su. PHOTO: KHAING THANDA LWIN

More than 20 oil paintings will be on display at the Yangon Gallery during the five-day exhibition

Khaing Thanda Lwin

THE Yangon Gallery will host a solo show of the artist Nyein Chan Su, one of the more prominent contemporary artists in Myanmar, this month featuring the artist's selected works, event organiser Lynn Whut Hmone said.

"Journey to the West-Back" will run from 23 to 27 December, showcasing more than 20 oil art-

works. All works are available for sale at the five-day event but the prices for the paintings have not been set yet.

The 42-year-old artist said he will fix the exact prices after negotiating with the event organiser, he added that he would normally sell his works at around US\$2,500 per painting.

Since entering the art scene Nyein Chan Su has had many

art exhibitions both at home and abroad, particularly in Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Singapore and Germany.

He has donated more than 50 of his own works worth around K10 million (US\$7670.18) to aid flood victims nationwide this year.

The Yangon Gallery is located within the compound of People's Park near the Planetarium Museum on Alon Road.

Crime News

Police expose 139 cases of human trafficking, arrest 396 between Jan and Nov

120 reported cases of human trafficking occurred between January and November 2015.

Among those cases, 68 people were trafficked for forced marriage, 17 for prostitution, 33 for forced labour and two cases involved children, according to the Anti-human Trafficking Force.

Of those, 73 prisoners were destined for China, 16 for Thailand and 13 for Malaysia while 18 cases occurred inside Myanmar.

In cooperation with neighbouring countries, the police force exposed 139 cases of human trafficking from 2007 to 2015, arresting 396 traffickers and rescuing 230 persons.

The 8th senior official level meeting on fighting human trafficking between Myanmar and China will be held on 23 December, 2015, at the Ngwesaung Beach in Patheingyi.—*Than Oo (Lay Myat Hnar)*

Man commits suicide in Aung Lan Township

A SUICIDE occurred in Shwe Pa Taung Village, Aung Lan Township on Thursday. According to the police investigation, Thein Htut, 52, stabbed himself in the neck with a kitchen knife

in the middle of the night.

According to his mother, the man was a former alcoholic suffering from mental illness caused by drinking.—*Kyaw Zay Ya*

Motorbikes charged with 2015 vehicle law in Yangon Region



Motorbike drivers are struggling in Yangon. PHOTO: AYE MIN SOE

FOLLOWING a crackdown on motorbike drivers who break the traffic laws the Yangon Region Police Force arrested 207 motorbike drivers who did not follow traffic rules.

During the campaign which started on 11 December motorbike drivers were charged under the 2015 Vehicle Law.

The police also took action against drivers who were found with drug and knives.

The move is aimed at reducing the death toll from traffic accidents in the region.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Most road accidents involve small vehicles

Ko Moe

YANGON Region has seen a rise in car accidents this week compared with previous weeks, according to the local police press

conference on Friday. Official statistics show that the region has seen 54 accidents over the last week, up from 43 last week including 22 small vehicle, 10 taxis, 11 passenger vehicles, 3

trucks and 8 motorbikes. Police major Myo Aung Myint noted that the car accidents mostly involved small vehicles though there were slightly more accidents during day light than night time.

India and Russia eye nuclear, helicopter deals before Modi's Moscow visit

NEW DELHI — Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to promote deals for Russian nuclear reactors and military helicopters worth billions of dollars on a trip to Moscow next week, attracted by promises to transfer technology that Western nations have been slow to make.

Russia and India will manufacture 200 Kamov-226T helicopters in a joint venture, a Russian and an Indian government official said, in the first big step for Modi's campaign to build a domestic industrial base and reduce the military's dependence on expensive imports.

Modi, who heads for Moscow on 23 December, will also offer Russia a site in Andhra Pradesh to build six nuclear reactors of 1,200 megawatts (MW) each, the same sources added.

That is in addition to the six Russia is constructing in neighbouring Tamil Nadu, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the press.

New Delhi has turned to Russia as US firm General Electric and Westinghouse, a US-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi. PHOTO: REUTERS

based unit of Japan's Toshiba, are still weighing an entry into India's nuclear energy sector because of a law that makes reactor suppliers liable in case of an accident.

Modi's "Make-in-India" push for a military that has been the world's biggest importer for the last four years has also made little headway, with negotiations stalled over issues including tech-

nology transfer and the local assembly of equipment.

For Russia, India offers an alternative, fast-growing outlet for its exports as sanctions imposed by the West squeeze the economy.

"While others are making promises, Russia is moving forward with the Make-in-India programme," the Russian government source said.—Reuters

Indonesia to deploy 150,000 security personnel for year-end celebrations

CILANGKAP — Indonesia will deploy more than 150,000 security personnel and several religious organisations to safeguard churches and public places around the country during Christmas and New Year's Eve celebrations, the military chief said late on Friday.

Indonesia, with the world's largest Muslim population, has already stepped up security and surveillance in some areas in the wake of attacks in Paris last month that killed nearly 130 people and for which militant group Islamic State claimed responsibility.

"We call on all communities, such as Islamic and Hindu youth organisations, to participate in safeguarding churches during Christmas," armed forces chief Gatot Nurmantyo told reporters at the national military headquarters on the outskirts of the capital Jakarta.

"Some of the youth or-

ganisations have stated their readiness," he added.

Over 80 percent of Indonesia's population is Muslim, but the country recognises five other religions including Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

Police in Indonesia will be on their highest alert level between 24 December and 2 January, national police chief Badrodin Haiti told reporters earlier this week.

Military and police troops will be on standby at airports, train stations, houses of worship, and public celebrations, Haiti said, as millions of people travel across the archipelago for the holidays.

The government has warned that Indonesians fighting for IS in Syria and Iraq could attempt to return and mount attacks, though security officials have said they do not see credible or specific threats of an attack here in the near future.—Reuters

Organised crime costs Australia more than 26bn USD each year

CANBERRA — Serious and organised crime is costing Australia more than 26 billion US dollars every year, according to Justice Minister Michael Keenan on Friday.

Keenan said research conducted by the Australian Crime Commission (ACC) revealed the shocking figures which were more than double previous estimates.

He said drugs such as "ice" — which command prices of up to 50 times that in other countries — were enticing more and more organised crime gangs to set up shop in Australia.

"Organised crime represents an ongoing threat to this country. They are violent predators who profit from the misery of evil

trades," Keenan said on Friday.

"Australia has become a target for organised criminals from all around the world because Australians are paying top dollar for the misery these crooks peddle like the drug ice.

"Users are not only bankrolling the criminals that are infiltrating and destroying our communities with their dangerous drugs, but they are ensuring our nation remains a lucrative market for international crime syndicates."

He said the 25 billion US dollar figure took into account both the cost of serious and organized criminal activity (15 billion US dollars) as well as the cost of preventing it (11.5 billion US dollars).

Recently, he said, Australia has embarked on stopping criminals from reaching its shores by setting up joint taskforces with nations such as China.

"The ACC is boosting our international cooperation to crack down on organised criminal syndicates responsible for the exportation of ice to Australia, including through Taskforce Blaze — a joint agency taskforce between the Australian Federal Police and the Chinese National Narcotics Control Commission," Keenan said on Friday.

"It is focused on investigating organised criminal syndicates responsible for the exportation of ice to Australia. This is the first ever joint agency taskforce of its kind."

Keenan said the revelation — the first in Australia's history — would further help the government crack-down on organised crime, as law enforcement agencies now have a greater understanding of dire situation.

"This is the first time the ACC has estimated the cost of serious and organised crime on the economy. It does not represent an explosion in crime, rather an improved understanding of the cost impacts to government, the community and the private sector," he said in the statement.

"This will assist government and our law enforcement and intelligence agencies to make an informed response to tackling this evolving market."—Xinhua

Thailand, Cambodia to triple bilateral trade in 5 years

BANGKOK — Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen agreed in talks here Friday to triple the value of their bilateral trade to \$150 billion within the next five years, according to the Thai government.

As part of the agreement, the two sides will start cross-border rail services, upgrade roads con-

necting the neighbouring countries and develop special economic zones, deputy spokesman Maj. Gen. Werachon Sukondhapatipak said after the meeting at Government House.

Hun Sen arrived in Thailand earlier in the day for a two-day visit that included a joint Thai-Cambodian Cabinet meeting yesterday.

To commemorate the 65th anniversary of diplomatic relations, the leaders also agreed to hold a friendly soccer match that will be broadcast live in both countries.

According to a draft of the agreement, a rail service between Bangkok and Phnom Penh will be operating by the end of 2016. By the first half of next year, a

cross-border rail linkage will be established between the Thai border town of Aranyaprathet and Poipet on the Cambodian side, it said.

This route forms a part of the Southern Economic Corridor, a transportation route that will eventually be extended to the Dawei Special Economic Zone in south-eastern Myanmar.—Kyodo News

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637 terrorists killed, 710 arrested in Pakistan in 2015



A Pakistani policeman checks the identity card of a passenger due to security high alert in northwest Pakistan's Peshawar, on 18 December 2015. PHOTO: XINHUA

ISLAMABAD — At least 637 terrorists have been killed and 710 others arrested by the police and security forces in Pakistan during the year 2015, the interior ministry informed the country's Upper House Friday.

The Senate was informed that a total of 373 terrorists were killed in the Federally Adminis-

tered Tribal Area (FATA), 98 in southwest Balochistan province, 55 in east Punjab province and 36 in south Sindh Province.

One miscreant was killed by police in the capital city Islamabad and another in north Gilgit-Baltistan area this year.

All the terrorists have been killed under the National Action

Plan (NAP) launched by the country in January this year to curb militancy in restive tribal and sensitive settled areas of the country.

The Senate was informed that a number of steps have been taken by Frontier Corps in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces to check infiltration of terrorists from Afghanistan into Pakistan through the porous border lying between the two countries.

The Senate was also informed that the country has banned 14 militant organisations this year, bringing the total number of banned outfits in the country to 61.

The banned outfits included the Islamic State (IS), sectarian outfits; Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah Muhammad Pakistan, Jaish Muhammad and Sipah Sahaba, and separatist organisations; Balochistan Republican Army and Lashkar-e-Balochistan among others. Extremist groups Tehreek Nafaz-e-Shariat Muhammadi, Tehreek-e-Islami Pakistan and Shia Talaba Action Committee are also among the 61 banned organisations.—Xinhua

Sonia, Rahul Gandhi given bail in graft case

NEW DELHI — A court granted bail to opposition leaders Sonia Gandhi and her son Rahul yesterday in a case involving the alleged misappropriation of party funds that has become a political flashpoint with the ruling party.

The mother-son duo made a rare appearance in a dingy Delhi courtroom to answer summons in the lawsuit brought by a member of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party.

Senior Congress leader Kapil Sibal said the court granted bail to party chief Sonia and vice president Rahul without any conditions after a brief hearing.

Hundreds of members of the Congress party were massed outside the court premises in a show of support for the torchbearers of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty that ruled India for more than four decades after independence in 1947.

Congress party leaders blamed Modi for unleashing a political vendetta against the mother-son duo, saying he was

trying to snuff out those opposed to him since his election in 2014.

"We will fight this vendetta on every front. Make no mistake about it," said Kamal Nath, a senior leader as he arrived in court along with other senior members of the party.

BJP leader Subramanian Swamy who has brought the

lawsuit has pledged to send the Gandhis to jail, alleging they formed a shell company and illegally gained control of properties worth \$300 million belonging to a newspaper founded by first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

The family has denied any wrongdoing.—Reuters



Congress party president Sonia Gandhi and her son and the party's vice-president Rahul Gandhi (2nd R) arrive at a court in New Delhi, India, on 19 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

UNESCO calls for joint documentary heritage proposals

TOKYO — UNESCO has urged its members to coordinate in advance and jointly apply for documentary heritage registration if documents are located in more than one country, a reform apparently in line with a Japanese request, sources familiar with the matter said Friday.

Japan has called on the UN body to improve the Memory of the World listing system of its world heritage body, following the registration of China's "Documents of Nanjing Massacre" in October despite Japanese objections.

Japan and China differ over

the number of victims in the 1937 Nanjing Massacre.

UNESCO said in a document released Wednesday that it is reviewing guidelines for the listing system.

Tokyo has called for greater transparency and fairness in the screening and registration pro-

cesses, calling into question the closed-door screening of the International Advisory Committee.

UNESCO is expected to discuss detailed reform measures next spring.

The organisation plans to extend the deadline for applications to the end of May next year, rather

than the end of March. UNESCO screens documentary heritage applications every two years.

Officials of Japan's education and foreign ministries said the new timetable apparently encompasses improved procedures and they expect a change for the better.—Kyodo News

US studying Chinese complaint that B-52 flew near man-made island

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon said on Friday it was looking at Chinese complaints that a B-52 bomber recently flew near a Chinese artificial island in the South China Sea, a sensitive issue because the two powers disagree over Beijing's territorial claims in the region.

Navy Commander Bill Urban, a Pentagon spokesman, said the United States regularly conducts B-52 training missions throughout the region but there was no plan for the B-52 to fly within 12 nautical miles of any artificial island.

"This was not a Freedom of Navigation operation," said Urban, referring to regular US Navy missions conducted to challenge what the United States believes are excessive territorial claims made by other countries.

"The Chinese have raised concerns with us about the flight

path of a recent training mission," Urban said. "We are looking into the matter."

China's defence ministry said in a statement on its website on Saturday that its forces had closely monitored the plane and warned the aircraft to leave.

Referring to the manoeuvre as "provocation", the ministry said it urged the United States "to immediately adopt measures to put an end to such kind of dangerous actions, in order not to impact the two countries' military relations."

The US guided missile destroyer USS Lassen sailed within 12 nautical miles of Subi Reef in late October to deliberately challenge China's claims of territorial waters there. The decision drew an angry rebuke from China, which called it "extremely irresponsible."—Reuters



A US AIR FORCE B-52. PHOTO: REUTERS

Six wounded in blasts at mosque in Bangladesh naval base

DHAKA — At least six naval personnel were seriously wounded in explosions at the end of prayers on Friday at a mosque inside a Bangladesh naval base in Chittagong, police said.

Two people were arrested in connection with the blasts. Police said they had confessed to being members of banned militant group Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh.

The group wants to establish a sharia-based Islamic state in Bangladesh and tends to target government facilities.

"Two bombs blasted at the mosque after Jumma prayer and six persons were critically injured," said Devdas Bhattachariya, an additional commissioner of Chittagong Metropolitan Police, adding that all the wounded were from the navy.

No one from the navy was available for comment.

Security forces also deactivated five unexploded bombs from the mosque in the port city of Chittagong, some 265 km (165 miles) southeast of Dhaka.—Reuters

Obama urges Americans remain vigilant against homegrown threats



PHOTO: REUTERS

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama urged Americans to remain vigilant against the potential threat of homegrown Islamic State militants on Friday, acknowledging the difficulty of tracking “lone wolf” attackers like those who went on a shooting spree in California.

Obama appeared in the White House press briefing room for a year-end news conference shortly before travelling to San Bernardino, California, where the 2 December shootings took place, to meet privately with families of the victims en route to spending the holidays in Hawaii.

Obama talked tough about the prospects of defeating Islamic State militants who control broad swathes of territory in Syria and Iraq but admitted US law enforcement agencies have limitations in tracking the threat at home.

“It’s not that different from us

trying to detect the next mass shooter. You don’t always see it. They’re not always communicating publicly,” Obama said.

A day after telling Americans that there is no current credible militant threat in the United States, Obama said that “lone wolf plotters” are difficult to track, particularly if they are a husband and wife like the two radicalized Muslims who killed 14 people in San Bernardino.

As for US efforts to track potential attackers, Obama said social media postings by potential militant suspects are constantly being reviewed by law enforcement agencies but that private online communications are far more difficult to track.

He said he believes law enforcement officials have struck the right balance between privacy concerns and making sure information gathering is carried out.

But the White House plans to work with tech companies to try to find ways to “discern more rapidly” potential threats in private communications, he said.

Concern about terrorism threats has spiked sharply since the 13 November attacks by Islamic State militants in Paris, with more than 30 percent of Americans citing terrorism as the most important problem facing the United States, according to Reuters/Ipsos polling.

The fight against Islamic State militants is likely to hang over the rest of Obama’s presidency, which ends in January 2017. Obama trod carefully around the subject of how to get Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to leave power, saying Assad needed to leave for civil war to cease, but declining to say whether that would happen in the next year.—Reuters

Bigotry, panic reflected in media coverage of migrants and refugees

LONDON — From Bulgaria to Brazil, journalists reporting on the global migration and refugee crisis often fail to tell the full story, and regularly perpetuate negative stereotyping used by politicians looking to score points, research shows.

A study of media coverage in 14 countries said a lack of resources and journalists able to provide in-depth and sensitive reporting contributed to a distorted picture of the refugee crisis — one of the biggest global stories of the year.

The report by the Ethical Journalism Network (EJN), issued to coincide with International Migrants Day on Friday, also highlighted confusion in the media over the correct use of terms migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

“Around the world media coverage is often politically led with journalists following an agen-

da dominated by loose language and talk of invasion and swarms,” said Aidan White, director of EJN, which groups more than 40 media organisations.

“But at other moments the story is laced with humanity, empathy and a focus on the suffering of those involved,” he said in a statement.

The number of people forcibly displaced worldwide is likely to have “far surpassed” a record 60 million this year, mainly driven by the war in Syria and other long-term conflicts, the United Nations said on Friday.

The estimated figure includes 20.2 million refugees fleeing wars and persecution, the most since 1992, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said.

While much of the international coverage has focused on European countries struggling to

deal with the arrival by land and sea of almost 1 million people so far this year, mainstream media has ignored stories of mass migration elsewhere, EJN said.

For example, internal migration in China, Brazil and India involves millions and dwarfs international migration numbers, with the biggest movement of people in history taking place in China over the last 35 years, it said.

In Africa, the headlines have focused on people leaving the continent for Europe. Their plight, alongside thousands fleeing violence in the Middle East, stirred international alarm this year, with hundreds dying as they crossed the Mediterranean in boats and dinghies.

But the majority of Africans who emigrate remain within Africa.—Reuters

NEWS IN BRIEF

California governor declares emergency in response to San Bernardino attack

SACRAMENTO — California Governor Jerry Brown on Friday declared a state of emergency in San Bernardino County, following the massacre by an Islamic State-inspired couple at a holiday party for county workers.

Because the 14 people killed and 26 wounded in the terrorist attack were largely employees in the county’s environ-

mental health department, the massacre left San Bernardino County with too few health inspectors and others needed to carry out critical work, Brown said in his emergency proclamation. Declaring an emergency will allow the state to send in health inspectors as replacements until the county is able to resume normal staffing, Brown said.—Reuters

Slovak police seize dozens of illegal firearms

BRATISLAVA — Slovak police have seized dozens of illegal guns and ammunition in raids this week, including decommissioned machine guns that had been restored to full operation, a police spokesman said on Friday.

Smuggling of illegal guns across Europe has come under scrutiny since the Islamist attacks on French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo in January

and the 13 November Paris attacks that killed 130 people.

The latest finds highlight gaps in the control of weapon sales in Slovakia, a European Union member that is part of Europe’s passport-free Schengen travel zone. It has been criticised by security experts, especially over the sale of decommissioned weapons that can be converted back into functional firearms.—Reuters

Turkey says 69 Kurdish militants killed in southeastern offensive

DIYARBAKIR — Sixty-nine Kurdish militants and two Turkish soldiers have been killed in four days of fighting across southeast Turkey as security forces ramp up operations against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), security sources and the military said yesterday.

The military said Turkish warplanes taking off from their southeastern base in Diyarba-

kir had also bombarded PKK camps in northern Iraq on Friday, destroying shelters and weapon posts.

A two-year ceasefire between Turkey and the PKK fell apart in July, shattering peace talks and reviving a conflict that has afflicted the mainly Kurdish southeast for three decades, killing more than 40,000 people.—Reuters

Indonesia’s disaster agency says La Nina weather to strengthen in mid-2016

JAKARTA — Indonesia’s National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB) said on Friday that the La Nina weather pattern will strengthen from mid-2016, citing data from the country’s weather agency.

“Rain volume during 2016 will increase, causing floods and landslides,” said Sutopo Nugroho, spokesman of BNPB.

La Nina is a cooling of the Pacific

that is a counterpart to the El Nino weather event that is characterised by warmer waters. El Nino typically has knock-on effects that can cause billions of dollars of damage to food and water supplies around the globe.

Indonesia the world’s top palm oil producer and a major grower of other commodities like coffee, cocoa and rubber.—Reuters

Thailand seizes \$1m worth ivory, pangolin scales

BANGKOK — Thai customs authorities announced Friday the seizure of 281 African elephant tusks, weighing about 770 kilograms, and 587 kg of pangolin scales, worth about \$1.1 million in total. The tusks and pangolin scales were seized last week at an airport on the southern resort island of Koh Samui after the

cargo, which originated in Nigeria, arrived from Singapore by Bangkok Airways.

The illegal cargo was destined to go from there to Bangkok’s Suvarnabhumi Airport and finally Vientiane, the capital of Laos, which has become a hot-spot for trade in ivory and wildlife products.—Kyodo News

OPINION

Safety first

Kyaw Thura

IT is absolutely unfair for workers to be subject to legal action at the outbreak of labour disputes while employers make good their escape.

This sentiment has become the talk of the community following widespread dissatisfaction with the refusal by the parliament to inflict punishments on employers who fail to obey the tribunal's decisions. The government proposed the in-

clusion of that penalty in the labour bill without success. It is, however, expected that the matter will be brought before the new parliament.

In every sense, the government has a primary role to play in ensuring the rising socioeconomic status of its people by convincing itself that human security is fundamental to national security. The Human Development Report published in 1994 has listed seven essential dimensions of human security - economic, personal, environmental, political, health, food and community.

In a broader sense, human security is concerned with 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want'. In other words, this initiative is to enable people from different social strata to live in dignity. Human security should, therefore, serve as a dynamic and practical policy frame-

work for workers to be able to enjoy all their rights to develop their human potential. All things considered, 'safety first' is the name of the game in ensuring the concept of human development through human security.

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.

Water — Our Resource

Htun Tin Htun

WATER is essential to human survival and well-being and important to many sectors of the economy. However, resources are irregularly distributed in space and time, and they are thus under pressure placed by human activity. Nearly 97 per cent of the world's water supply by volume is held in the oceans. The other large reserves are groundwater (4 per cent) and icecaps and glaciers (2 per cent), with all other water bodies together accounting for a fraction of 1 per cent. Residence times vary from several thousand years in the oceans to a few days in the atmosphere.

Although public awareness of the need to better manage and protect water has grown over the last decade, economic criteria and political considerations still tend to drive water policy at all levels. Humans need water for drinking, sanitation, agriculture, and industry, and contaminated water can spread illnesses and disease vectors. So, clean water is both an environmental and a public health issue. Meeting a continuous and ever increasing demand for water requires efforts to compensate for natural variability, and to improve the quality and quantity available.

The world's water exists naturally in different forms and locations: in the air, on the surface, below the ground, and in the oceans. Freshwater accounts for only some 6 per cent of the world's water supply, but is essential for human uses such as drinking, agriculture, manufacturing, and sanitation. Two-thirds of global freshwater is found underground. If you dig deeply enough anywhere on Earth, you will hit water. Some people picture groundwater as an underground river or lake, but in reality it is rarely a distinct water body (large caves in limestone aquifers are one exception). Rather, ground-

water typically fills very small spaces (pores) within rocks and between sediment grains, thus I have learned.

Earth's water resources, including rivers, lakes, oceans, and underground aquifers, are under stress in many regions. Millions of people worldwide depend on groundwater stocks, which they draw from aquifers— permeable geologic formations through which water flows easily. Very transmissive geologic formations are desirable because water levels in wells decline little even when pumping rates are high, so the wells do not need to be drilled as deeply as in less transmissive formations and the energy costs of lifting water to the surface are not excessive. Under natural conditions many aquifers are artesian: the water they hold is under pressure, so water will flow to the surface from a well without pumping, thus I have learned.

River flows can vary greatly from one season to the next and from one climatic region to another. Rivers contain a relatively small share of fresh water, but the flux of water down rivers is a large part of the global hydrologic cycle and they are centrally important in shaping landscapes. Their flow erodes solid sediment and carries it toward the sea, along with dissolved minerals. These processes shape land into valleys and ridges and deposit thick layers of sediment in flood plains. Over geologic time the erosion caused by rivers balances the uplift driven by plate tectonics. Much of Earth's freshwater flow passes through several of the planet's largest rivers: the Amazon carries 15 per cent of total river flow on Earth, the Congo carries 3.5 per cent, and rivers that flow into the Arctic Ocean carry 8 percent. The average residence time of water in rivers is less than a year, thus I have learned.

Overall, water shortages severely reduce biodiversity in both

aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, while water pollution facilitates the spread of serious human diseases and diminishes water quality

Underground water is often overexploited and polluted. Unmanaged systems are likely to be most vulnerable to climate change challenges, existing water resources management practices by adding additional uncertainty and integrated water resources management will enhance the potential for adaptation to change, thus I have learned.

Really, water resources are under major stress around the world. Rivers, lakes, and underground aquifers supply fresh water for irrigation, drinking, and sanitation, while the oceans provide habitat for a large share of the planet's food supply. Today, however, expansion of agriculture, damming, diversion, overuse, and pollution threaten these irreplaceable resources in many parts of the globe. Providing safe drinking water for the more than one billion people who currently lack it is one of the greatest public health challenges facing national governments today. In many developing countries, safe water, free of pathogens and other contaminants, is unavailable to much of the population, and water contamination remains a concern even for developed countries with good water supplies and advanced treatment systems. And overdevelopment, especially in coastal regions and areas with strained water supplies, is leading many regions to seek water from more and more distant sources.

Realizing that the water covers about three-quarters of Earth's surface is a necessary element for life. During their constant cycling between land, the oceans, and the atmosphere, water molecules pass repeatedly through solid, liquid, and gaseous phases (ice, liquid water, and water vapour), but the total supply remains fairly con-

stant. A water molecule can travel to many parts of the globe as it cycles, thus I have learned.

Even though the temperature of the water vapour may not increase when it evaporates from liquid water, this vapour now contains more energy, which is referred to as latent heat. Atmospheric circulation moves this latent heat around Earth, and when water vapour condenses and produces rain, the latent heat is released. Water vapour redistributes energy from the sun around the globe through atmospheric circulation. This happens because wa-

ter absorbs a lot of energy when it changes its state from liquid to gas.

Studies show that the land and water resources and the way they are used are central to the challenge of improving food security across the world. Demographic pressures, climate change, and the increased competition for land and water are likely to increase vulnerability to food insecurity particularly Africa and Asia. The challenge of providing sufficient food for everyone worldwide has never been greater.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

My heartiest congratulations Mr. Kailash Satyarthi for the global recognition for his selfless and dedicated efforts in securing safe childhood for millions of unfortunate, helpless and defenseless children in India. As a huge country with substantial human population, India represents an important global stake in any social movement that is undertaken. I am sure that Mr Satyarthi's monumental struggle in India will continue to address this serious question of preventing child abuses and for securing a better future for them. However, I sincerely feel that helpless children from the Indian subcontinent or the SAARC neighborhood such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, the Maldives and Sri Lanka; and the adjoining SE Asian nations like Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos that do not have a figure like Mr Satyarthi to help protecting them. While I extend my prayers and best wishes for his continual success in working towards improving the life of millions of kids in India; I also humbly beg him through your esteemed newspaper to extend some of his service and/or training, guidance and consultancies to dedicated individuals, governments, non-government organizations and allied agencies in all these countries too. My humble request to Mr Satyarthi is to kindly advocate to the governments of South and SE Asia to kindly use the SAARC and ASEAN platforms to extend cooperation and collaboration to the neighboring countries to save millions of highly deprived, exploited and unfortunate children for a better future; and for their education and security. I sincerely believe that a stable and economically and aware neighborhood will contribute to the further development and progress of India too. Honourable Mr. Satyarthi's support and attention could change the underprivileged children in the SAARC and ASEAN neighborhoods significantly.

Thanking you
Sincerely yours
Saikat Kumar Basu

A New Era of Opportunity

Ban Ki-moon

SEVENTY years ago, the United Nations was created from the ashes of the Second World War. Seven decades later, in Paris, nations have united in the face of another threat – the threat to life as we know it due to a rapidly warming planet.

Governments have ushered in a new era of global cooperation on climate change – one of the most complex issues ever to confront humanity. In doing so, they have significantly advanced efforts to uphold our Charter mandate to “save succeeding generations”.

The Paris Agreement is a triumph for people, the environment, and for multilateralism. It is a health insurance policy for the planet. For the first time, every country in the world has pledged to curb their emissions, strengthen resilience and act internationally and domestically to address climate change.

Together, countries have agreed that, in minimizing risks of climate change, the national interest is best served by pursuing the common good. I believe it is an example we could gainfully follow across the political agenda.

The victory in Paris caps a remarkable year. From the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction to the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, from the historic Sustainable Development Summit in New York to the climate conference in Paris, this has been a year in which the United Nations has proved its ability to deliver hope and healing to the world.

Since my first days in office, I have called climate change the defining challenge of our time. That is why I have made it a top priority of my tenure. I have spoken with nearly every world leader about the threat climate change poses to our economies, our security and our very survival. I have visited every continent and met communities living on the climate front-lines.

I have been moved by suffering and inspired by the solutions that will make our world safer and more prosperous.

I have participated in every United Nations climate conference. The three Climate Summits I convened mobilized political will and catalyzed innovative action by governments, business and civil society. The Paris Action Agenda, along with the commitments made at last year’s Climate Summit, show that the answers are there.

What was once unthinkable is now unstoppable. The private sector is already investing increasingly in a low-emissions future. The solutions are increasingly affordable and available, and many more are poised to come, especially after the success of Paris.

The Paris Agreement delivered on all the key points I called for. Markets now have the clear signal they need to scale up investments that will generate low-emissions, climate-resilient development.

All countries have agreed to work to limit global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius and, given the grave risks, to strive for 1.5 degrees. This is especially important for the nations of Africa, Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries.

In Paris, countries agreed on a long-term goal to cap global greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible in the second half of the century. One hundred and eighty-eight countries have now submitted their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions, which show what they are prepared to do to reduce emissions and build climate resilience.

Currently, these national targets have already significantly bent the emissions curve downwards. But, collectively, they still leave us with an un-

acceptably dangerous 3 degrees Celsius temperature rise. That is why countries in Paris pledged that they will review their national climate plans every five years, beginning in 2018. This will allow them to increase ambition in line with what science demands.

The Paris Agreement also ensures sufficient, balanced adaptation and mitigation support for developing countries, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. And it will help to scale up global efforts to address and minimize loss and damage from climate change.

Governments have agreed to binding, robust, transparent rules of the road to ensure that all countries do what they have said they would do. Developed countries have agreed to lead in mobilizing finance and to scale up technology support and capacity building. And developing countries have assumed increasing responsibility to address climate change in line with their capabilities.

In acknowledging this historic achievement, I would be remiss if I did not recognize the leadership and vision of the business community and civil society. They have highlighted both the stakes and the solutions. I salute them for their outstanding display of climate citizenship.

Now, with the Paris Agree-

ment in place, our thoughts must immediately turn to implementation. By addressing climate change we are advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Paris Agreement has positive implications for all the Sustainable Development Goals. We are poised to enter a new era of opportunity.

As Governments, business and civil society begin the mammoth project of tackling climate change and realizing the Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations will assist Member States and society at large at every stage. As a first step in implementing the Paris Agreement, I will convene, as requested by the Agreement and by the Convention, a high-level signing ceremony in New York, on 22 April next year.

I will invite world leaders to come to help keep and increase momentum. By working together, we can achieve our shared objective to end poverty, strengthen peace, and ensure a life of dignity and opportunity for all.

The writer is Secretary-General of the United Nations

Water Our Resource

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The world’s population continues to rise. Today’s population of around 7 billion is expected to increase to about 9 billion by 2050 (United Nations, 2009). By this time, another one billion tonnes of cereals and 200 million extra tonnes of livestock products will need to be produced every year (Bruinsma, 2009). The imperative for such agricultural growth is strongest in developing countries, where the challenge is not just to produce food but to ensure that families have access that will bring them food security. Today almost 1 billion people are undernourished, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (239 million) and Asia (578 million). In developing countries, even if agricultural production doubles by 2050, one person in twenty still risks being undernourished – equivalent to 370 million hungry peo-

ple, most of whom will again be in Africa and Asia. Such growth would imply agriculture remaining an engine of growth, vital to economic development, environmental services and central to rural poverty reduction. For nutrition to improve and for food insecurity and undernourishment to recede, future agricultural production will have to rise faster than population growth. This will have to occur largely on existing agricultural land. Improvements will thus have to come from sustainable intensification that makes effective use of land and water resources as well as not causing them harm. The policies, practices and technologies needed to boost production and strengthen food security have long been discussed. Institutional mechanisms, the development of trade and markets and the financial facilities needed to raise productivity in a sustainable way

have been negotiated at the international level. At national level, measures to raise output and strengthen food security are being put in place, including investment in pro-poor, market-friendly policies, institutions and incentives, as well as the infrastructure and services needed to improve productivity. Yet the challenge still remains.

Of the freshwater which is not frozen, almost all is found below the surface as groundwater and generally of high quality. Groundwater is being withdrawn mostly to supply drinking water and support farming in dry climates.

Using water resources sustainably is challenging because of many factors involved including changes in climate, the natural variability of the resource, as well as pressures imposed by human activity.

Realize that “Our water resources are under pressure and

more reliable information is still needed regarding the quality and quantity of available water, how this availability varies in time and from place to place and human activities affect the water cycle in many ways, which need to be understood and quantified to manage water resources responsibly and sustainably.”

Changes in climate are affecting water availability, pollution, water diversions and uncertainties about the abundance of water are threatening economic growth, environment, and health, to augment water supply, traditional techniques – such as rainwater collection – are now being supplemented by newer technologies like desalination and water reuse and political support is needed to improve information collection that can in turn enable better decision making about the management and use of water.

Estimates from river outflows indicate that some 17 billion tons of material are transported into the oceans each year, of which about 80 percent

is particulate and 20 percent is dissolved. On average, Earth’s surface weathers at a rate of about 0.5 millimeter per year. Actual rates may be much higher at specific locations and may have been accelerated by human activities, such as emissions from fossil fuel combustion that make rain and snowfall more acidic, thus I have learned. May all beings be free from fresh water shortage in the years to come!!! May adequate fresh drinking water be in your easy access!!! May God bless you always!!!

About the author

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

At UN, Turkey accuses Iraq of undermining Islamic State fight



Turkey's Ambassador to the United Nations, Yasar Halit Cevik, addresses the Security Council during a meeting about the situation in the Middle East, including Palestine, at United Nations headquarters in New York. PHOTO: REUTERS

UNITED NATIONS — Turkey accused Iraq on Friday of undermining the global fight against Islamic State militants by taking its complaint about the deployment of Turkish troops in northern Iraq to the United Nations Security Council.

The 15-member council met on the issue on Friday at the request of Iraq and Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari who asked the body to adopt a resolution demanding Turkey withdraw its troops immediately.

Jaafari signalled the request for council action was a last resort. "Iraq has spared no effort to exhaust all diplomatic channels and bilateral negotiations with Turkey, in order to withdraw its forces that are unauthorised in Iraq," he said.

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. Turkey withdrew some troops this week, moving them to another base inside Iraq's

Kurdistan region, but Baghdad said they should pull out completely.

Turkey's UN Ambassador Halit Cevik said the deployment had been taken out of context and that additional troops had been sent to the camp to provide force protection due to increasing threats.

He said Ankara believed it had taken sufficient measures to de-escalate the situation, so efforts could be re-focused in combating Islamic State militants, who have seized swaths of Iraq

and Syria. Islamic State is also known as Daesh.

"From the outset, we tried to resolve this matter through bilateral channels. Because taking this issue to various international platforms would serve no other purpose than to undermine the solidarity of the international community against Daesh," Cevik told the Security Council.

He said Turkey has never had and will never have any interest in violating Iraq's sovereignty.—Reuters

Israeli troops kill three Palestinians in West Bank, Gaza clashes

JERUSALEM — Israeli soldiers shot dead a Palestinian who tried to ram them with a car and another who took part in a violent demonstration in the occupied West Bank on Friday, the military and medical officials said.

In the Gaza Strip, Israeli army fire killed another Palestinian during a border protest, medics said.

A campaign of stabbings, shootings and car-rammings by Palestinians has killed 19 Israelis and a US citizen since October. Israeli forces or armed civilians have killed at least 117 Palestinians, 69 of whom authorities described as assailants.

The army said a motorist tried to run over Israeli soldiers during a violent demonstration by Palestinians near the West Bank town of Silwad. An Israeli police spokeswoman said the Palestinian had a knife with him in the car.

In the West Bank city of Ramallah, medical officials said a Palestinian was shot and killed by Israeli

troops during a violent protest. In central Gaza, Palestinians massed near the fenced-off border with Israel, throwing rocks at troops beyond. Gaza medics said Israeli army gunfire killed one protester and wounded 37.

Israel maintains a no-go buffer zone near the Gaza fence in what it describes as a precaution against Palestinian infiltration or ambush attempts. The army said it discovered and defused two improvised explosive devices on the fence on Friday.

Another Palestinian was shot and wounded by Israeli police on Friday during a car-ramming attempt at the West Bank checkpoint of Qalandia, a police spokeswoman said.

The surge in violence has been partly fuelled by Palestinian frustration over the collapse of US-sponsored peace talks in 2014, the growth of Jewish settlements on land they seek for a future state and Islamist calls for the destruction of Israel.—Reuters

Yemen negotiators to form ceasefire committee as UN peace talks resume

DOHA — Yemeni negotiators taking part in UN-sponsored peace talks agreed yesterday to form a committee to oversee a fragile ceasefire after fresh fighting imperilled their efforts to end Yemen's civil war, sources close to the talks told Reuters.

They said the committee would be headed by a Lebanese army general and consist of representatives from the Saudi-backed government of Yemen's President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and from the rival Houthi movement, which is allied to Iran.

Both sides arrived at a hotel in the Swiss city of Biel yesterday to attend a fifth day of talks aimed at halting the eight-month conflict in the Arab world's poorest nation, which has killed thousands of people and caused widespread destruction and a major humanitarian crisis.

A supposed one-week truce came under strain on Friday when troops loyal to Hadi seized an important northwestern city and a military base from Houthis



A soldier loyal to Yemen's President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi stands atop a tank as he uses binoculars in Majaz district, in the country's northwestern province of Marib, after the pro-Hadi forces took the area from Houthi rebels, on 18 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

who still control the capital Sanaa, residents and tribal sources said.

Planes and gunboats from a Saudi-led military coalition also bombarded targets in northern Yemen, residents said.

The United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen voiced deep concern at "numerous reports of violations of the cessation of hostilities", a UN statement said on

Friday.

Yemen, which was swept by mass Arab Spring-inspired protests in 2011, was this year plunged into war after the Houthis overthrew the Sanaa government, prompting Saudi Arabia and other Arab states in March to launch a wide-scale bombing campaign.

The UN talks started away from television cameras on Tuesday and have been

marked by distrust, with each side accusing the other of violating the truce.

Face-to-face talks between Hadi's government and the Houthi group have not occurred since Wednesday evening, after the Houthis rejected demands for the release of detained senior officials, including Yemen's defence minister and Hadi's brother, said sources close to the talks.—Reuters

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.

Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise
Ph +95 67 - 411097 / 411206

German spies cooperating again with Assad's secret service: Bild

BERLIN — Germany's spy agency is working again with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's secret service to swap information on Islamist militants, the Bild daily said, despite Berlin's opposition to Assad staying in power under any peace deal for Syria.

Citing well-informed sources, the mass-circulation newspaper said German foreign intelligence BND agents had been travelling

regularly to Damascus for some time for consultations with Syrian colleagues.

Two weeks ago Germany's parliament approved a plan to support a US-led air strike campaign against Islamic State insurgents in Syria by sending Tornado reconnaissance jets, a frigate to help protect the French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle, refueling aircraft and up to 1,200 military personnel. German media have

dubbed the mission Chancellor Angela Merkel's "first war" and have highlighted the risks of German pilots crashing in Islamic State-held territory.

The aim of renewed BND contacts with Damascus is to exchange information about militants, especially those in Islamic State, and to set up a fixed communication channel in case a German Tornado pilot is downed over Syria, Bild said.—Reuters

BlackBerry results trounce expectations on software; shares rally

TORONTO — BlackBerry's pivot to software began to show traction on Friday, after the company reported a smaller quarterly loss and its first quarter-to-quarter revenue increase in over two years, sending its stock soaring 13 percent.

Significantly, gains in software revenue more than offset a steepening decline in legacy system access fees for the first time, and the Waterloo, Ontario-based company said this trend should continue.

The company may break even in the current quarter, but this could be complicated by investments being made toward growing both software and hardware sales, said Chief Executive John Chen, who sees a return to sustainable profitability in fiscal 2017, which begins 1 March.

BlackBerry has staked its turnaround on software and more aggressively licensing its trove of patents after its once-dominant handsets conceded the consumer smartphone market.

"BlackBerry hit a software number that investors have been looking for them to hit for quite some time," said Morningstar analyst Brian Colello. "I think the investment in security, in

software, is the right move."

The better-than-expected results were driven by a sharp jump in software and patent licensing revenues and a higher average selling price for phones, driven by the Priv, its new Android-powered device.

"We're planning on other Android phones, but it all hinges on how we do with the Priv," said Chen at a media roundtable, adding the Priv will be hitting over 30 countries this quarter.

Chen, who sees the hardware business possibly turning the corner this quarter, said BlackBerry is open to licensing some of its proprietary software features.

"I've said that if we cannot make money we're going to get out of the phone business, and I mean hardware. We have tons of software that absolutely could run, not only on Android phones, but Apple and Windows phones too," said Chen.

"We will remain in the phone business one way or the other," said Chen, stressing that ideally he would like to keep making devices and licensing at the same time.

In the quarter ended 28 November, BlackBerry reported a loss of \$89 million, or 17 cents a



A reporter uses a BlackBerry device to photograph BlackBerry CEO John Chen as he speaks to reporters following their annual general meeting for shareholders in Waterloo, Canada.

PHOTO: REUTERS

share. That compared with a year ago loss of \$148 million, or 28 cents a share.

Excluding restructuring charges and other one-time items, the company posted a loss of \$15 million, or 3 cents a share.

Quarterly revenue fell 31 percent to \$548 million from a year earlier, but rose 12 percent from the prior quarter, after nine consecutive quarters of declines.

Analysts, on average, expected BlackBerry to post a loss of 14 cents a share on revenue of \$489 million.

Software revenue more than doubled in the quarter, putting BlackBerry within striking range of its \$500 million target for the fiscal year ending 29 February, 2016.

Device sales also rose for the first time in four quarters to \$214 million from \$201 million in the second quarter on the back of the Priv.

BlackBerry sold 700,000 devices, down from about 800,000 in the prior period, but average selling prices jumped to \$315 from \$240.—Reuters

Alibaba avoids being named on US blacklist for fakes



Alibaba Executive Chairman Jack Ma delivers his speech during the World Climate Change Conference 2015 (COP21) at Le Bourget, near Paris, France, on 5 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

WASHINGTON — Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba Group Holding Ltd has avoided being named on a US blacklist for sites hosting the sale of fake goods, a victory for the firm after lobbying hard to avoid inclusion on the list.

The US Trade Representative (USTR) said, though, it was

"increasingly concerned" about Alibaba's enforcement programmes and warned it must make a greater effort to stop the sale of pirated and counterfeit products on its online platforms.

Inclusion on the annual list of the world's most "notorious markets" for sales of pirated and counterfeit goods, while not car-

rying direct penalties, would be a blow to Alibaba's efforts to shed perceptions its sites are riddled with fakes.

The firm has pushed hard over the last few months to avoid being named on the list, concerned it could drag down its share price after coming under renewed pressure this year over suspected counterfeits on its platforms.

"Counterfeiting is an issue all global e-commerce companies face, and we are doing all we can to address and fight it," an Alibaba spokesman said in an emailed statement to Reuters.

"We will continue to work with brands, governments and our sellers to maintain the integrity of our marketplaces."

Alibaba's Taobao Marketplace and Alibaba.com were both previously on the piracy blacklist, which highlights markets linked to significant intellectual property infringement. Alibaba.com was removed in 2011 and Taobao in 2012 after efforts to work with sellers of le-

gitimate goods to clean up the sites.

Since then, the Chinese e-commerce giant has worked toward enforcing anti-counterfeit procedures, but the US trade office said it was unclear what effect these measures have had.

"Despite these new procedures, USTR is increasingly concerned by rights holders' reports that Alibaba Group's enforcement programme is too slow, difficult to use, and lacks transparency," the trade office said in a statement on Thursday, referring to complaints from trademark holders that sell merchandise on the site.

In October, The American Apparel and Footwear Association urged the trade office to blacklist Taobao for persistent intellectual property rights violations.

The trade office said on Thursday it would continue to monitor the sites over the coming year to see if overall efforts to remove fakes and penalize counterfeit sellers are effective.—Reuters

Toshiba to incur several hundred billion yen net loss in FY 2015

TOKYO — Toshiba Corp. estimates it will report several hundred billion yen in group net loss for the business year ending in March, much larger than its loss the previous year, as it makes greater efforts to streamline operations following its profit-padding scandal, a company source said yesterday.

The loss, which was 37.8 billion yen in fiscal 2014, may exceed its record of 398.8 billion yen logged in the year through March 2009 in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, the source said.

Slated to announce Monday a restructuring plan for its home electronics business, including white goods, televisions and personal computers, it will also unveil its earnings outlook for the current fiscal year, which has so far been withheld.

The company is considering slashing several thousand jobs in Japan and abroad, sources said earlier.—Kyodo News

Thailand's True, Jasmine win \$4.2bn 4G auction

BANGKOK — Thailand's largest fully-integrated telecoms service provider True Corp and broadband operator Jasmine International were the surprise winners of a second auction for two 4G spectrum licences valued at 151.95 billion baht (\$4.2 billion), the regulator said yesterday.

Market expectations were for the country's two top mobile firms, Advanced Info Service Pcl (AIS) and Total Access Communication Pcl (TAC) to win the bid.

Thailand's \$6.7 billion mobile market is dominated by the top three players — AIS, TAC and True Move, a unit of True Corp — and analysts expect competition will intensify now that Jasmine has won a licence to become the fourth operator.

Analysts said the high level of the bids could put pressure on True and Jasmine's financial position, which could increase the risks of an equity issue.

Before the bidding closed on Friday, shares in Thailand's telecoms sector slid to a three-year low as investors focused on the cost of 4G mobile licences and the possible entry of a new player that could spark a price war.—Reuters

NATO agrees Turkey air defence package, seeks 'predictability'

BRUSSELS — NATO allies agreed on Friday to send aircraft and ships to Turkey to strengthen Ankara's air defences on its border with Syria, the alliance's chief said.

Diplomats said the package is partly designed to avoid more shoot-downs of Russian planes.

Envoys to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation approved the plan and must now decide what military assets to send to Turkey, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told Reuters, stressing that it was a defensive measure.

"We have agreed on a package of assurance measures for Turkey in view of the volatile situation in the

region," Stoltenberg said, although he avoided any reference to Russia's military involvement in Syria and its air incursions.

Given that Turkey already has a formidable air force, NATO diplomats and military experts say the alliance's involvement is to minimise the risk of any repeat of Turkey's 24 November shooting down of a Russian warplane that flew into Turkish airspace.

That was the first known incident of its kind since the Cold War and the most serious of several air incursions since early October, leaving relations between Turkey and Russia at their lowest ebb in recent memory. Moscow has re-

taliated with sanctions and called it a "hostile act".

Due to be assembled in the coming weeks, the package will include NATO's AWACS surveillance planes and what Stoltenberg described as "enhanced air policing, and increased naval presence including maritime patrol aircraft."

The ships will be provided by Germany and Denmark, which are exercising in the eastern Mediterranean.

AWACS monitor airspace within a radius of more than 400 km (250 miles) and exchange information via digital data links, with ground-based, sea-based and air-



Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg. PHOTO: REUTERS

borne commanders.

Asked if this was about managing Turkey's airspace with more caution than Ankara has shown in

the past, Stoltenberg said: "This will give us a better situational awareness ... more transparency, more predictability and that

will contribute to stabilising the situation in the region and also calm tensions," Stoltenberg said.—Reuters

Russia sees court fight after Ukraine 'defaults' on \$3bn bond

KIEV/MOSCOW — Ukraine and Russia appear all but certain to take their dispute over a \$3 billion Eurobond to court after Ukraine said it would not repay the bond when it matures next week, prompting Russia to cry default and say a legal battle was now on the cards.

Ukraine has included the two-year bond which matures on 20 December in

external commercial debt it is restructuring to shore up its war-torn economy.

But Russia, whose political relations with Ukraine are at rock bottom, has refused to accept these terms, insisting the bond is an official country-to-country loan, not commercial debt.

Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk said on Friday that Ukraine would not repay the Eurobond when it

matures and that Kiev was geared to fight the issue in court.

A moratorium on repayments would be in place "until the acceptance of our restructuring proposals or the adoption of the relevant court decision ... We are prepared for court action from the Russian side," he said.

The finance ministry in Kiev said it was still committed to negotiating

a restructuring agreement in good faith with Russia, but the Kremlin said the moratorium sent a clear message.

"This is the recognition of their default," Dmitry Peskov, spokesman for Russian President Vladimir Putin, told reporters on a conference call. "Effectively, there are only legal prospects now."

The Eurobond in ques-

tion was issued by the government of former President Viktor Yanukovich just two months before he fled in the face of bloody street protests triggered by him seeking to halt Ukraine's swing toward European integration in favor of closer economic ties with Russia.

After he fled, Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimea in March 2014 and threw its backing behind a rebel-

lion by separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Russian Deputy Finance Minister Sergei Storchak said Ukraine's decision on the moratorium was not a surprise.

"We have expected these actions — looking at the line of conduct that the Ukrainian authorities have exercised in the last six months," Storchak told journalists.—Reuters

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Cuba's Castro says US can do more to normalise relations



Cuba's President Raul Castro gestures after the departure of his Chinese counterpart Hu Jintao at Havana's Jose Marti airport on 19 November 2008. PHOTO: REUTERS

HAVANA — Cuba is willing to keep improving relations with the United States even though Washington has failed to meet its key demands for normalisation, Cuban President Raul Castro said on Friday, a day after the anniversary of de-

te. Castro, 84, the younger brother of retired leader Fidel Castro, spoke to top government and party leaders in an address broadcast on state TV without prior

notice. He hailed advances the two countries have made since 17 December last year when he and US President Barack Obama announced they would seek to normalise ties and set aside decades of Cold War-era hostilities.

But he said they had "not made any progress" on issues Cuba considers necessary for normal relations, such as ending the US trade embargo of Cuba and US withdrawal from the naval

base at Cuba's Guantanamo Bay. He also said Obama could exert more of his executive authority on Cuba.

"The government of Cuba is fully willing to continue advancing in the construction of a kind of relation with the United States that is different from the one that has existed throughout its prior history, that is based on mutual respect for sovereignty and independence," said Castro, dressed in his four-star general's uniform.

Cuba and the United States restored diplomatic ties in July and have reached agreements on restarting direct mail service and environmental protection. On Thursday they struck a deal to re-establish scheduled airline flights.

Obama's administration embarked on rapprochement after concluding that decades of US isolation of Cuba had failed. But even as the two countries draw closer, Washington continues to criticise the Communist, one-party political system.

Obama told Yahoo News in an interview released on Monday about the anniversary that he hopes to visit Cuba in 2016, but only if he is able to meet with political dissidents and if he can possibly "nudge the Cuban government in a new direction."

Human rights, Castro said, was one area "on which we have profound differences and about which we are having an exchange on the basis of respect and reciprocity."

Castro also reiterated Cuba's commitment to socialism and bemoaned US programmes aimed at undermining the Cuban government, such as support for dissidents.

"No one should expect that, in order to normalise relations with the United States, Cuba will renounce the principles and ideals for which several generations of Cubans have struggled throughout more than half a century," Castro said.—Reuters



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Katy Perry launching app to help upcoming singing talent

LONDON — Pop star Katy Perry is coming up with an app through which aspiring singers can get career advice from her.

The 31-year-old “Roar” hit-maker has titled the app “Katy Perry Pop” and it will allow users to create their “own pop star persona,” reported *Mirror*.

An animated version of Perry will be available to give advice to the users. According to the official description, the game lets players “feature in their own interactive journey from aspiring

artist to pop stardom with Katy Perry in the fun and whimsical world of Katy Perry Pop.

“Get discovered by Katy Perry and chart your course to music stardom by recording songs, making music videos, and performing for thousands of fans around the world.”

Users can also customise their pop star look with various outfits to choose from and can create their own music and music videos to further their career.—PTI



PHOTO: REUTERS

Marc Anthony to honour Bill Clinton



PHOTO: REUTERS

LOS ANGELES — Singer Marc Anthony will honour former US President Bill Clinton for his philanthropic efforts next year.

The American politician will receive the 2016 Global Humanitarian Award from Anthony’s The Maestro Cares Foundation at a gala in New York on 16 February, when Anthony will perform with his La Gozadera collaborators Gente de Zona, reported *Billboard* magazine.

“It’s a privilege to officially announce this year’s honourees and celebrate their tangible and meaningful contributions to our society,” a statement from Anthony reads.

“I am honored to have the opportunity to recognise their leadership and their commitment to help and empower disadvantaged children around the world.”

Anthony’s announcement comes two months after he showed his support for Clinton’s wife, US presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton, by bringing her onstage at a gig in Florida in October.—PTI

Rekha to receive Yash Chopra Memorial Award

NEW DELHI — Veteran Bollywood actress Rekha is set to be honoured with the Yash Chopra Memorial Award in recognition of her talent and contribution to the film industry.

The award has been instituted by the TSR Foundation of T Subbarami Reddy in the memory of the producer-director, who died in 2012.

The Foundation annually honours a distinguished senior film personality for outstanding contribution to film industry with a Gold Medal and a cash prize

of Rs 10 lakh. A jury consisting of Hema Malini, Jaya Prada, Simi Garewal, Boney Kapoor, Pam Chopra and Reddy declared Rekha’s name for this edition of the award, a statement read.

Rekha, 61, who worked with Chopra in 1981 romance “Silсила”, will be given the honour on February 2 next year by the Governor of Maharashtra in a glittering ceremony in Mumbai.

Previous recipients include Melody Queen Lata Mangeshkar and megastar Amitabh Bachchan.—PTI

‘Star Wars’ sales surge toward opening weekend record

LOS ANGELES — “Star Wars: The Force Awakens” hurtled toward \$125 million in US and Canadian ticket sales on Friday and a potential record-breaking \$225 million through Sunday, giving the long-awaited movie a shot at the biggest opening weekend of all time.

The projections from Walt Disney Co (DIS.N) late Friday indicated the film could eclipse the \$208.8 million record set by dinosaur adventure film “Jurassic World” in June. Disney said theaters were adding showtimes to meet “unprecedented demand.”

Fans eager to see the first “Star Wars” movie in a decade came dressed as Stormtroopers or Jedi. Ticket sales Thursday night and Friday surpassed previous records set by the final “Harry Potter” film in 2011.

The movie has opened in 44 countries outside North America, earning \$72.7 million in total through Thursday.

At the White House, R2-D2 and two Stormtroopers surprised reporters with a quick appearance in the briefing room. First lady Michelle Obama hosted a screening for children of families that lost members to war.

The new “Star Wars” film is the seventh installment in the series created by George Lucas in 1977. Disney bought “Star Wars” producer Lucasfilm for \$4 billion in 2012 and spent more than \$200 million to produce “Force Awakens.”

The company’s shares dropped 3.8 percent on Friday, however, after BTIG analyst Rich Greenfield cut his rating on Disney to “sell” from “neu-

tral.” Greenfield said the success of “Force Awakens” would not offset the impact of subscriber losses at ESPN.

Nomura Securities analyst Anthony DiClemente, who rates Disney a “buy,” said he was more confident after seeing the movie that it could become the top-grossing film of all time. The record is held by “Avatar” with \$2.8 billion.

Critics lavished praise on “Force Awakens,” which features newcomers Daisy Ridley, John Boyega and Oscar Isaac alongside original stars Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford and Carrie Fisher.

The movie scored a 95 percent positive rating on review aggregation website Rotten Tomatoes. Audiences awarded an “A” rating in polling by survey firm CinemaScore, Disney said.

—Reuters

Vanessa Hudgens launches lifestyle website

LOS ANGELES — Vanessa Hudgens has become the latest celebrity to launch her own lifestyle website. The former “High School Musical” star is joining the ranks of actresses such as her co-star Ashley Tisdale, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Shay Mitchell, who have all founded popular blogs, reported E!Online. Hudgens’ site, Astral & Opal, focuses on topics including beauty, music, fashion, and health.

“I love surfing the web but nothing ever stuck with me,” Hudgens wrote in her first letter posted to the site. “So, I thought it was time to create the site I needed in my life. As for me, I

believe that life is as you make it. I want to feel good, look good and live a colorful life full of adventure. You are in the drivers seat, on an open road and only get one lifetime to make it count. We gotta live it to the fullest!” Hudgens’ launch comes nearly three months after “Gossip Girl” star Blake Lively shut down her own lifestyle website, Preserve, after one year, confessing it did not fulfill the potential she hoped it would.—PTI



Actress Vanessa Hudgens. PHOTO: REUTERS

London Santa says leap of faith is part of Christmas magic



Two-year-old Elijah Pham presents his wishes to actor John Field, dressed as Santa Claus, at a Christmas grotto at the Wetland Centre in London, Britain, on 5 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

LONDON — When Father Christmas is not at home with the reindeer preparing for his big sleigh-ride, he likes to play practical jokes on the children who visit him asking for presents.

In his grotto in the pine forest at the Wetland Centre in Barnes, southwest London, Santa also has a clear message for anyone who is not sure whether he really exists.

“Part of being a child is believing in magic,” says the ro-

tund figure who also appears on sightseeing cruise boats on the River Thames. “Father Christmas is part of that.”

His red and white outfit is custom-made. His beard is the real thing, not to be tugged at by the sceptics. A Reuters photo essay shows his festive operation in full swing.

More than 2,000 children visit in these London locations alone. “Talk to them like (you talk) to grownups... Never look down on them,” Father Christ-

mas says.

He offers a listening ear, and a mischievous wit. When one boy asks for a remote-controlled scorpion, Santa asks whether he might prefer a pink ballet dress instead.

He tells one girl he has wrapped up a tin of cat food for her, before the real presents arrive - a bird book, a toy duck and a candy stick.

The most wished-for gift this year is a hoverboard for boys and a Barbie doll for girls,

Father Christmas says.

John Field, 66, a former teacher turned actor, has taken on the role of Santa for the past 12 years.

“I’m playing a part but it is one of the most truthful parts I can play,” he says.

“Being a Father Christmas you have to make an agreement, a non-written agreement with both the parent and the child: to believe.”

Amid the excitement as Christmas approaches, Santa is often run off his feet and needs help sorting through all the letters he receives. Britain’s Royal Mail, which helps him process the wish-lists, says Lego, bikes and Play-Doh were the top three requests from children who wrote to Santa, with Peppa Pig in at number 10.

Santa’s job is not without its dangers, but after more than a decade of welcoming children, Santa says it’s rare for anyone to be sick or fail to make it to the bathroom on time.

The rewards of the job, chief among them thank-you messages, more than outweigh any downsides.

Last year a girl made a poster with photos of her visits over the last seven years. “Father Christmas,” she wrote, “thank you for being there every year for me. You make Christmas.” —Reuters

Chinese orchestra to stage two concerts in New York City

NEW YORK — To New Yorkers who are no strangers to all sorts of world-class music events, from Broadway shows to Radio City Rockettes, traditional Chinese music might sound less familiar, even exotic.

This week, the China National Traditional Orchestra is to stage two performances of traditional Chinese music in the city, providing a chance for the Western ears to enjoy a repertoire of classical oriental music.

“The two shows have different highlights,” said Xi Qiang, chair of the orchestra.

The first concert — “Splendor of Folk Music” — selects seven orchestral works that are mostly based on ancient poems and prominently feature traditional Chinese instruments to showcase the diversity of the Chinese folk music, Xi said.

Meanwhile, the “Rediscover Chinese Music” programme employs an innovative storytelling technique, with the help of the lighting and sets, to lead audience into the story behind the classical music, he said. The ensemble will play the concert version of the programme at Carnegie Hall on Sunday as the equipment required for the production’s multimedia elements cannot be used in concert halls, he added.

On Wednesday, an event featuring a live “trailer” of the two programmes at the Princeton University drew more than a hundred from the university and local communities. At the event, musicians from the orchestra performed several popular pieces with traditional Chinese musical instruments, such as erhu (a two-stringed bowed musical instrument), pipa (a four-string lute), and xiao (Chinese wind instruments similar to clarinets and flutes).

“The four pieces are all very good. Such a good opportunity does not come along that often,” said Keith Lane, a local resident.

He particularly mentioned the last piece played with yueqin (also called the moon guitar) accompanied with a narrative of an ancient poem. “That’s what I picked up on coz I can relate it to a lot of modern musics and the blues that I heard many years ago.”

“Music is music. It can take down language barriers. Through music, you can get what the musicians are trying to express,” he said, suggesting promoting the event on a larger scale so that “everybody can hear and understand the music.” The two programmes will be performed at Lincoln Center on Friday and Carnegie Hall on Sunday, respectively. “I will definitely consider going to the events,” Lane said. —Xinhua

Susan Sarandon spending Christmas with Syrian refugees

LOS ANGELES — Hollywood veteran Susan Sarandon is spending her Christmas in Lesbos to bring awareness to the Syrian refugee crisis.

The “Dead Man Walking” star travelled to the Greek Island to meet with refugees who are fleeing the war-torn country, but Saran-

don, 69, said she also has a personal reason for the visit, reported *People* magazine.

“I have come to Lesbos and will stay through Christmas, to listen and learn the stories of refugees who are fleeing from war and persecution,” she said.

“I also came to honour my grandparents, who were

immigrants.

The international community must see what is happening in this corner of the world. It must realise the size of the problem and understand it. These people should stop being somebody else and must become the refugees that we must stand by. —PTI



Entertainment Channel

(20-12-2015, Sunday)

<p>6:20 am • Myanmar Video</p> <p>7:55 am • Documentary</p> <p>8:45 am • Sing & Enjoy</p>	<p>9:30 am • Pyi Thu Ni Ti</p> <p>9:45 am • Fashion Music</p> <p>10:00 am • Myanmar Movie</p>
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Myanmar International

(20-12-2015 07:00 am ~ 21-12-2015 07:00 am) MST

<p>Today Fresh</p> <p>07:03 Am News</p> <p>07:26 Am Gardener: Rose Plantation</p> <p>07:33 Am Development Momentum Of Sittway</p> <p>07:50 Am Philatelic Pleasure</p> <p>08:03 Am News</p> <p>08:26 Am Myanmar Outstanding Lady “Thin Zar Phyo”</p> <p>08:39 Am Dhamma School</p> <p>08:52 Am One of the Useful Purposes of Bamboo</p> <p>09:03 Am News</p> <p>09:26 Am Cruising To Precious Islands (Part-1)</p> <p>10:03 Am News</p>	<p>10:26 Am A bike ride in pursuit of Mural Art (Epi- 2)</p> <p>10:44 Am Tigers, Lions and The Guardians</p> <p>10:55 Am Cosplayer</p>	<p>(11:00 Am ~ 03:00 Pm) - Saturday Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)</p> <p>(03:00 Pm ~ 07:00 Pm) - Today Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)</p> <p>Prime Time</p> <p>07:03 Pm News</p> <p>07:24 Pm My Travel In This Exceptional Place, Inle Lake</p> <p>07:45 Pm [Doctor] [Painter]</p> <p>07:50 Pm Today Myanmar: Yangon Stock Exchange</p> <p>08:03 Pm News</p> <p>08:26 Pm Bogalay Tint Aung: A Man of Versatility (Part- 4)</p> <p>08:53 Pm Myanmar Masterclass: Conceptual Art</p> <p>(09:00 Pm ~ 11:00 Pm) - Today Repeat (09:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)</p> <p>(11:00 Pm ~ 03:00 Am) - Saturday Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)</p> <p>(03:00 Am ~ 07:00 Am) - Today Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)</p> <p>(For Detailed Schedule – www.myanmaritv.com/schedule)</p>
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Tour organiser pulls races from 2017 calendar

PARIS —Tour de France organiser ASO is withdrawing its races from the International Cycling Union (UCI) calendar in 2017 because of a disagreement over the reform of the calendar and the selection of teams, it said on Friday.

ASO (Amaury Sport Organisation) said reform of the UCI's World Tour means that the 2017 season would be a closed circuit whereas it wants a system based on 'sporting criteria', meaning no team can be guaranteed a spot on the Tour de France and other top events.

The calendar changes, approved by the UCI, mean teams would be handed three-year World Tour licences from 2017 — rather than the current one-year licences until 2016.

"Amaury Sport Organisation has informed this day Union Cycliste Internationale it has opted for the registration of its events on the Hors Classe calendar for season 2017," ASO said in a statement.

"The UCI has actually recently adopted, from season 2017, a reform of the World Tour calendar characterised by a closed sport

system. "More than ever, ASO remains committed to the European model and cannot compromise the values it represents: an open system giving first priority to the sporting criterion."

Organisers cannot select more than 70 per cent of World Tour teams in a 'Hors Classe' race, or 15 teams in the usual 22-team lineup for the Tour de France, the most prestigious race in cycling.

It means that three World Tour teams will be omitted from the 2017 Tour lineup as the elite group usually features 18 teams.

There is no risk of the Tour and ASO's other major races not taking place but they will do so outside the umbrella of cycling's main calendar, which could lead to a potentially damaging split.

ASO owns the Tour de France, La Vuelta, the top-tier classics Paris-Roubaix and Liege-Bastogne-Liege and the one-week Paris-Nice and the Criterium du Dauphine.

In 2008, then defending Tour champion Alberto Contador could not enter the Tour de France because ASO had not invited his Astana team following the doping scandals they were involved in the



Giant-Alpecin rider John Degenkolb (3rd R) of Germany and Trek Factory rider Fumiya Beppu (R) of Japan sprint to the finish line as spectators take pictures of them during the Tour de France Saitama Criterium cycling race in Saitama, north of Tokyo, Japan. PHOTO: REUTERS

previous year. Last year, 11 of the top-tier teams regrouped in a joint venture called VELON, seeking a bigger slice of the pie from organisers and a guaranteed three-year presence in the World Tour, which the UCI has now granted them.

ASO and the UCI were also at odds between 2005 and 2008 when Tour de France organisers refused, along with their counterparts at the Tour of Spain and Giro d'Italia, to be part of the UCI Pro Tour that later became the World

Tour. ASO's withdrawal is a massive blow for UCI president Brian Cookson as the governing body could lose its influence in top races.

The UCI, however, put on a brave face.—Reuters

Dutchman Hiddink returns to Chelsea as interim manager



Guus Hiddink. PHOTO: REUTERS

LONDON — Dutchman Guus Hiddink was named as Premier League champions Chelsea's interim manager for a second time yesterday following the sacking of Jose Mourinho, the club said in a statement.

Hiddink, 69, had a caretaker spell in charge at Stamford Bridge in 2009 following the sacking of Brazilian Luiz Felipe Scolari and Chelsea won the FA Cup under his care. He will take charge until the end of the season.—Reuters

Mourinho not ready to take sabbatical

LONDON — Sacked Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho will not be taking a sabbatical and remains proud of his two spells in charge at the west London club, a statement released by his sports management representatives said yesterday.

The 52-year-old Portuguese was fired by Chelsea just seven months after winning the Premier League title on Thursday following a dismal start to the campaign and a statement released by CAA Sports Management suggests he will be back in the dugout soon.

"He will not be taking a sabbatical, he isn't tired, he doesn't need it, he is very positive, and

is already looking forward," the statement said.

"Because of his love of football, you will see Jose at football grounds working and supporting friends. He will not be attending any high-profile games because he wants to discourage any speculation about his future."

Despite his dismissal, Mourinho was said to be happy about his decision to return to a club where he has won three Premier League titles over two spells in charge. "Jose Mourinho is pleased that he returned to Chelsea Football Club because he was able to give the fans another Premier League title,

which they had not won for many years," the statement continued. "He is immensely proud of his eight trophies at Chelsea (he also won one FA Cup, three League Cups and one Community Shield), and thanks the fans for all their support throughout his two spells at the club.

"During his career, Jose has sometimes chosen to leave a club, but only at Chelsea has the club decided that he should leave." The statement concluded that Mourinho would continue to live in London but had no plans to comment on his "current situation for the foreseeable future".—Reuters

China Hockey Team secures first place at Men's Asian Challenge



Deputy Minister U Thaung Htike presents prizes to China Team. PHOTO: KO MOE

Ko Moe

THE China Hockey Team secured first place after beating the Taiwan Team 12-2 at the final match of the 2nd Men's Asian Challenge. Myanmar placed third after winning against the Hong Kong Team 2-0.

The China Team also received the fair play award.

Myanmar has been hosting the tournament since 13 December at the Theinbyu Hockey Pitch in Yangon which also hosted the Asian U-18 Cup in

2009, the S.E.A Cup in 2011 and the 27th SEA Games in 2013.

Myanmar, Taiwan, China and Hong Kong participated in the tournament.

Tu Yu-Chuan of the Taiwan Team received the player of the tournament award while the best goalkeeper award went to Kyaw Soe Hlaing from Myanmar and the best player award to Sun Tianjun of the China Team.

The Myanmar Hockey Team secured second place at the first Men's Asian Challenge Cup in 2013.