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INVESTMENT DIVIDED

Stock exchange poses alternative to real estate

Aye Min Soe



Real estate agents in Yangon predict that real estate sector will remain stable, but the prices of land plots will decline a little. PHOTO: AYE MIN SOE

THE Yangon Stock Exchange, the first of its kind in Myanmar, is poised to challenge the real estate sector as the primary destination of investment when trading on the exchange begins next year.

With the construction sector in Yangon expected to recover next year, the sector will compete with the Yangon Stock Exchange to draw investment from the people, according to the country's leading developers.

However, whether the investments of Myanmar citizens will flow into the Yangon Stock Exchange or into the real estate sector next year depends on the caliber of the people who are leading in the sectors, said U Ko Htwe in an interview with Mizzima broadcast media, which was also broadcast by the state-run Myanmar Radio and Television yesterday.

Myanmar real estate experts have predicted that the prices of condominiums and apartments would fall by 10 to 20 per cent next year when the Yangon Stock Exchange begins its operations.

About 50,000 condominiums and apartments will emerge in Myanmar's commercial city in 2016.

Tour operators gear up for opportunities, challenges from AEC

Ye Myint

A PANEL discussion bringing together tour operators in preparation for next year's ASEAN Economic Community took place in Yangon yesterday with panelists stressing the need for financial support and building capacity and competitiveness for the advent of the regional economic integration.

As business success depends on successful marketing, a careful marketing budget is imperative to business success, said U Phyo Wai Yan, chairman of the Myanmar Tourism Marketing committee.

He cited research by the

Tourism Authority of Thailand saying that the agency plans to spend 124 million bahts on its marketing campaigns to attract 7.74 million high-end tourists in ASEAN next year.

"It is time to set up a budget for our country's tourism marketing by the government," he said.

During his call for a tourism promotion fund, Daw Khin Mi Mi Tun, a director from the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, replied that budgets have been allocated to the private sector for tourism marketing since last year.

On the role of tour guides in enabling the industry to com-

pete with regional counterparts, U Zar Ni Htwe, managing director of Adventure Myanmar, expressed his candid view of them.

"Travel guides need to be professional at work, rather than seeking praise from tourists for their hospitality," he said.

U Moe Kyaw, central executive committee member of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, also pointed out that the onus is on the industry stakeholders to protect their own business through its unity while facing service liberalisation.

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Tour operators gather at Novotel Hotel Max in Yangon yesterday to have a panel discussion on tourism challenges resulting from the ASEAN Economic Community. PHOTO: YE MYINT

Tourists can visit Bagan in local currency starting new year

Ye Myint

GLOBETROTTERS visiting the Bagan Archaeological Zone will be paying in Myanmar kyat instead of US dollar for admission as of 1 January next year, according to the Myanmar Tourism Federation yesterday.

A notice stating that visitors will pay K25, 000 instead of US\$20 starting this January has been received from the ministry, said a representative of the federation.

Although the Ministry of Culture originally set 1 November 2015 as the date for switching to local currency the deadline for the policy was changed to 1 January next year.

According to sources, the change aims to be in compliance with the Central Bank of Myanmar's directive encouraging the use of domestic currency in all transactions inside the country to



Dhammayangyi Temple in Bagan which is home to a collection of temples and pagodas dating back to centuries.

PHOTO: MYANMAR TOURISM FEDERATION

reduce dollar demand and prevent dollarisation.

Another reason to make the switch is to avoid collecting old, creased, ink-stained or stamped USD notes, sources added.

In Myanmar, only pristine, unmarked, unfolded and no-crease dollar notes are accepted at exchange changer booths.

Bagan, home to the largest and densest concentration of

Buddhist temples, pagodas, stupas and ruins in the world with many dating back to the 11th and 12th centuries, is one of popular tourist destinations in Myanmar.

According to the ministry's

data, more than 240, 000 tourists visited the archaeological site in a 12-month period ending 31 March 2015. The ministry introduced the dollar entry fee in January of this year.

MPT's vanity number fetches K22m at auction

A LEADING telecommunications operator in the country auctioned its vanity mobile numbers for charity at the Park Royal Hotel in Yangon yesterday, with one number receiving the highest bid just an hour into the auction.

Myanmar Posts and Tel-

communications (MPT) held an auction of its serial and individual vanity numbers totalling 120.

The highest bid was for the SIM card with the same eight digits in a row, netting K22 million (US\$16,874).

The winning bidder is to

pay for it either in cash or by cheque at the Myanmar Economic Bank in seven days from 21 to 28 December.

The proceeds of the auction will go to a charity for contributing solar lamps to village monasteries in Mandalay Region. —*Myanmar News Agency*

Farmers in Katha Township choose mechanical harvesters over labourers

FARMERS in Katha Township, Sagaing Region, are currently using mechanical harvesters instead of hiring field workers to harvest their paddy fields. The mechanical harvesters have proven more cost-effective than

hiring labourers. The switch is part of a wider movement of the mechanisation of agriculture in Myanmar.

"We do not have to search for and hire field hands, which reduces the expense. Using har-

vesters is also quicker than manual labor," said one farmer in the township.

The harvesters are reportedly easy to use and are powered by petroleum.—*Ngwe Oh (Katha)*

Jivitadana Sangha Hospital's annual fun fair kicks off

THE Jivitadana Sangha Hospital (Yangon) held its 26th fun fair, establishing 24 food stalls in the compound of the hospital in Bahan Township yesterday.

The annual fun fair has been held since 1990 when the hospital celebrated the golden jubilee of its founding.

Traditional food and medicines were sold to visitors.

Those who set up shops donated their profits to the hospital, said U Maung Maung, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the hospital.

The fun fair was formally opened by the chairman, Vice Chairman-1 U Win Lwin and Second Vice-Chairman Thiri Pyanchi U Aung Kyi.—*Min Thit*



Jivitadana Sangha Hospital celebrates the 26th fun fair in Bahan Township. PHOTO: MIN THIT

Science Expo- 2015 held at Yangon University

THE opening ceremony of the Science Expo- 2015 was held at Yangon University's Arts Hall on Friday. It was attended by Yangon regional ministers, the Myanmar Arts and Science Scholars Association, senior officials of the Department of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education, faculty members, students, locals and international companies.

Yangon Regional Minister for Health Dr Myint Thein delivered an address. There was a dance show by students of the University Culture Association. The expo was to promote the students' interest in science, research in sci-

ence and cooperation between universities and industries.

The Expo was formally opened by DHE Director General Dr Thein Win, the university's Rector Dr Po Kaung and pro-rector Dr Tun Khin.

The Expo showcases teaching appliances and research works of the Yangon and Dagon universities, the Yangon City Development Committee, private schools, 28 technical companies and the Myanmar Media Development Centre-MMDC. The expo is open from Friday to Sunday 20th. There will be paper readings on the sidelines of the exhibition.

South Korean firms receive 2015 Korea-Myanmar CSR Excellent Awards

Khaing Thanda Lwin

SAMSUNG Electronics and the Industrial Bank of Korea won the 2015 Korea-Myanmar CSR Excellent Awards because of their humanitarian assistance.

The awarding ceremony took place on Thursday in Yangon.

It was jointly organised by Korea's Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, Myanmar's Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development and the Korea Trade Investment

Promotion Agency.

The purpose of the awards is to develop socially responsible business management and encourage Korean companies in the country to participate in CSR activities.

The first Korea-Myanmar CSR excellence awards went to DAEWOO International and LG Electronics last year.

There are over 200 South Korean companies in Myanmar.—*GNLM*

Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham visits Lashio

VICE President Dr Sai Mauk Kham visited Lashio, Shan State, to inspect its 500-bed general hospital yesterday.

At the hospital, the vice president and his party inspected the progress of the hospital's upgrading project, which is being implemented with the assistance of the Japanese International Co-operation Agency.

Dr Sai Mauk Kham met with healthcare providers and urged them to put more effort into the project, as it plays a vital role in providing quality healthcare ser-

vice to locals.

The vice president and his party also attended a ceremony marking the handover of utility vehicles to rural villages. The vehicles were donated by New Star Light Co., which transferred documents related to an 800-gallon fire engine and an ambulance to Nanmabawda Village, an 800-gallon fire engine to Einine Village and an ambulance to Hopaik Village.

They inspected the donated vehicles after the event.—*Myanma News Agency*



Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham inspects fire engines donated by by New Star Light Co. PHOTO: MNA

'Dhammanupassana' papers read at 4th Int'l Buddhist Conference



Participants at 4th International Conference on Dhammanupassana. PHOTO: MNA

THE International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University (ITB-MU) under the Ministry of Religious Affairs yesterday organised its Fourth International Conference on Outlook on Self-identity Beyond the Concept called "Dhammanupassana" at the university.

State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee Chairman Sayadaw Dr Bhaddanta Kumarabhivamsa, ITBMU Rector Sayadaw Dr Bhaddanta Nandamalabhivamsa and Thitagu World Buddhist University Chancellor Sayadaw Dr Bhaddanta Nyanissara delivered speeches at the event.

Union Minister U Soe Win said that the conference was aimed at sharing the Buddhist insight meditation practices that would contribute to the propagation and promotion of Buddhism and the peace of mankind.

International experts would read out their papers on 'Dhammanupassana', the union minister said, adding that the event was an honour to the country.

The conference drew over 250 learned monks and lay disciples and will continue until 22 December. —*Myanma News Agency*

University of Veterinary Medicine holds graduation ceremony



Degrees conferred on students at 30th graduation ceremony of the University of Veterinary Medicine. PHOTO: LFRD

THE 30th graduation ceremony of the University of Veterinary Medicine was held at the Diamond Jubilee Hall of the University in Yezin, Nay Pyi Taw, on Sunday.

On behalf of the union minister for Livestock, Fishery and

Rural Development, Deputy Minister Dr Aung Myat Oo presented prizes to outstanding students.

The rector of the University conferred degrees on a total of 272 students. —*Myanma News Agency*

New cardiac and chest ward opened at North Okkalapa Hospital

THE opening ceremony of a new five-storey cardiac and chest ward donated by Tawwin Development Foundation was held at the North Okkalapa General and Teaching Hospital on Sunday.

Present at the ceremony were Union Minister for Health Dr Than Aung, chairman of Tawwin Development Foundation U Ko Ko Htway, permanent secretary of the Health Ministry Dr Thet Khaing Win and CEO of the Tawwin Company Daw Wutyi Htway.

The union minister and the chairman pushed the button to unveil the signboard of the new ward and inspected the ward. The new ward was built at a cost of K5.5 billion (US\$4,230,769).—*Yi Yi Myint/Ohmar Thant*



Union Minister for Health Dr Than Aung formally opens the new ward at North Okkalapa General and Teaching Hospital.

Tour operators gear up for opportunities, challenges from AEC

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In his presentation introducing AEC, the CEC member questioned who will benefit from the AEC; will they be ASEAN's six developed countries— Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia,

Singapore, Thailand and Philippines— or CLMV nations, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Viet Nam. "We plans to hold more talks on separate sectors following the results of this panel discussion", said U Thet Lwin Toe, chairman of

the association.

In Myanmar, tourist arrivals this year have reached 4.2 million with the ministry estimating that the number will increase up to 5 million by April next year and top 7 million by 2020.

Sri Lanka hopes to have strong defence ties with China, India: PM

COLOMBO — The Sri Lankan government said yesterday that it needs to have strong defence ties with countries like China and India.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, speaking at an event to mark the recruitment of a new batch of soldiers to the military, said that the Sri Lankan army needs to modernize to be on par with the developing world.

He said that in order to improve the standards of the army, Sri Lanka needs to maintain good ties with China, India and Pakistan as well as the United States and Britain.

“It is because of the relationship that we have with these countries that the army was able to develop.” The prime minister said that Sri Lanka hopes to launch a program through the Ministry of Defence on future warfare to ensure the army is geared to face any situation in future.

The Sri Lanka army defeated the Tamil Tiger rebels in



Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. PHOTO: REUTERS

May 2009 after 30 years of war which saw thousands killed on both sides.

Wickremesinghe, however, said that situations have now changed around the world and the Sri Lankan military must adapt to face those changes.

He added that with the end of the war, the wounds from the conflict must heal and efforts must be taken in that regard.

“When you have a wound it is not easy to heal,” he said.

The prime minister said that Sri Lanka will ensure the name of the military is protected as the country moves forward to heal the wounds of the past. The army has been accused of being involved in human rights abuses during the final stages of the war, an allegation the former government denied.—Xinhua

Bangladeshi mobile operators add over 11.65m new users

DHAKA — The total number of Bangladesh’s mobile phone subscribers reached nearly 132 million at the end of October with addition of 11.65 million new users in the first 10 months of the year, statistics of the country’s telecom regulator showed yesterday.

According to Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), the number of subscribers in the country reached 131.996 million in October.

The number of subscribers of the six mobile operators, Grameenphone, Banglalink, Robi Axiata, Airtel, Teletalk and Citycell at the end of September stood at 55.896 million, 32.599 million, 28.288 million, 9.982 million, 4.141 million and 1.089 million respectively, the BTRC data showed.

The total number of Bangladesh’s mobile phone subscribers reached nearly 120.350 million at the end of December 2014, showed the BTRC data.—Xinhua

Seven saved, 41 missing in industrial park landslide in S China

SHENZHEN — Seven people have been pulled out of debris and 41 remain missing after a landslide hit an industrial park collapsing 22 buildings yesterday in Shenzhen city of south China’s Guangdong Province, rescuers said.

Three of the four people saved suffered minor injuries, the other was not hurt, according to officials from the rescue headquarters set up by the Guangming New District in northwest part of

the city, where the landslide occurred.

Police received the report of the landslide at the Liuxi Industrial Park at 11:40 am.

More than 1,500 people including firemen, police and health workers are involved in the rescue operations.

By 5 pm, rescuers have evacuated more than 900 residents from the site. The damaged buildings were housing 15 companies, rescuers said.—Xinhua

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Twelve Malaysian tourists, guide killed in Thai bus crash

BANGKOK — Twelve Malaysian tourists and a Thai guide were killed after their bus crashed in northern Thailand yesterday, police said.

The bus, carrying 23 people, hit a car and ran off a curve in the road in the Doi Saket district, near the northern city of Chiang Mai, provincial police chief Major General Montri Sambunyanon told Reuters. The ten other people on the bus, including the Thai driver, were also injured in the crash and are being treated in hospital in Chiang Mai city, Montri said.

Two people from the other vehicle were injured as well. Thailand has one of the highest road accident death rates in the world, according to its public health ministry, with reckless and drunk driving among the top reasons for road accidents.

Malaysians are the second largest group of visitors to Thailand. More than 293,000 arrived in November, accounting for 11.5 per cent of tourist arrivals, according to the tourism ministry.—Reuters

Indonesian police foil ‘jihad’ attacks, arrest six suspects

JAKARTA — Counter-terrorism police have arrested six people suspected of planning attacks in Indonesia, seizing bomb-making materials and ‘jihad manuals’ from the men they said included Islamic State members and supporters, the Jakarta Globe reported yesterday.

“Six individuals rounded up in a series of counter-terrorism raids that began on Friday and ran into late Saturday reportedly planned to bomb Shiite communities in Java and Sumatra,” the daily said on its website.

It cited National Police Chief General Badrodin Haiti as saying

that raids to round-up the suspects were prompted by intelligence from the US Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Australian Federal Police.

“This terrorist network was preparing for bombing attacks in various locations in Indonesia,” Badrodin said, referring to one of the acronyms of the Sunni militant group Islamic State. “Some are ISIS members and others are sympathisers.”

Badrodin said the counter-terrorism operation was still ongoing. “That’s why we’re calling on the public to be vigilant and report an-

thing suspicious,” he said.

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 country’s military chief said 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.—Reuters



Children ride a bike past a house with police tape around it, following a raid by anti-terror police in Mojokerto, East Java, Indonesia on 20 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

Nepal climbers face ruin after quake, blockade hits Everest industry

KHUMJUNG — Phurba Tashi Sherpa, the most accomplished high-altitude climber in history, holds a bucket and crowbar as he claws through the rubble of his home seven months after Nepal's earthquake shattered the country.

Despite years of guiding wealthy foreign clients up Mount Everest, something he has done 21 times — a joint record — the 44-year-old has been left penniless.

Phurba Tashi's predicament is shared by many Sherpas, whose homes, lodges and restaurants were destroyed in the April disaster and who complain of a slow response from the government despite billions of dollars of Western aid.

Some retired guides must return to the peaks to earn money. Others are pulling their children out of schools in Kathmandu and hotel owners are firing staff.

To make matters worse, bookings so far point to a sharp drop in foreign mountaineers heading for Nepal in 2016, deterred by ruined infrastructure and an economic blockade along its border with India that threatens supplies of fuel and equipment.

"Everything I worked for was destroyed in a minute," said Phurba Tashi, standing in his village of Khumjung, a cluster of 80 stone houses perched on a plateau surrounded by breathtaking 23,000-foot (7,000-metre) mountains. The earthquake that killed almost 9,000 people destroyed his eight-bedroom trekking lodge, badly damaged his house and caused a deadly avalanche nine miles away on the world's tallest peak.

The remote villages under Everest, which prospered in recent decades thanks to the boom-



A general view of hotels and houses at Namche in the Solukhumbu district, also known as the Everest region on 30 November 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

ing climbing business, suffered some of the heaviest destruction in Nepal's deadliest disaster.

The Everest industry is in a state of upheaval following avalanches in 2014 and 2015 that killed 35 people, in the two most deadly incidents since climbers began ascending.

In 2013, there was an unprecedented mass brawl between Sherpas and climbers that exposed deep-rooted frustrations over a lack of recognition of the risks local guides take to get foreigners up and down the fabled summit.

They want a bigger slice of Nepal's \$360 million-a-year adventure travel industry, of which Everest is the cornerstone. Bookings to scale the world's tallest mountain in 2016 have been a

third to half lower than previous years, according to interviews with 18 of the largest climbing firms.

This would be the biggest drop since commercial climbing began on Everest in the early 1990s, and could leave hundreds of struggling Sherpas without work." It has been two terrible years for Everest: we have had no summits and lots of fatalities," said Garrett Madison, who runs Seattle-based Madison Mountaineering.

The team doctor died this year on the mountain and three Sherpas working for him were killed in 2014. "It will take time to restore confidence."

In the past, deadly accidents have done little to dent Everest's popularity, with risk being part of

the allure. But next year could be different, as threats to the industry take on a political dimension.

An economic blockade of Nepal's border with India could disrupt expeditions and deter would-be climbers, who typically pay a non-refundable fee of \$35,000 to \$100,000 for a chance to scale the peak.

Nepal has been facing an acute fuel crisis for three months since protesters in the lowland south, angered that a new constitution fails to reflect their interests, prevented supply trucks from entering from India.

This is crippling the landlocked Himalayan nation as it tries to recover from the earthquake that displaced millions in the central and eastern regions.

Mountaineering firms say

the blockade threatens the climbing season because there may be a shortage of fuel to airlift equipment, operate emergency rescue flights or provide enough cooking gas cylinders to survive for two months on the mountain.

"It is a crisis at the moment. It is going to be a catastrophe if this embargo continues," said Phil Crampton, the owner of the New York-based Altitude Junkies. Near the warren of royal palaces and temples in central Kathmandu's bustling old town, Gobinda Bahadur Karki, the director of Nepal's tourism department, is more upbeat.

He predicts the blockade will be over before the spring and says he is "expecting a good number of climbers" next year, because mountaineers used to assessing risks will not be discouraged by a rare natural disaster.

Back in Khumjung, the resentment is not just about the blockade tripling the cost of building materials that need to be carried from an airport three days' walk away.

In a rural community where nine of 10 homes were damaged or destroyed by the earthquake, anger is rising over the government's failure to spend \$4.1 billion of reconstruction money donated by foreign governments six months ago."

We hear the politicians in Kathmandu are eating the money," Phurba Tashi said. Yuba Raj Khatriwada, vice chairman of Nepal's planning commission, is in charge of spending the money and understands the frustration over the delays, but says the blockade has absorbed attention and prevented aid work.

"It has put us back in the relief rather than reconstruction stage," he said.—Reuters

At least three died, 77 missing after ship sinks off Indonesia

JAKARTA — Seventy-seven people are missing, and at least three have died, after a passenger ferry sank off Indonesia on Saturday, although 38 people have been rescued from the sea, the Indonesia transport ministry said yesterday.

The ship, with 118 passengers and crew members on board, sank after hitting rough seas off the island of Sulawesi, which lies to the east of Borneo.

Alamsjah, of the local disaster mitigation agency, said the survivors and the dead were picked up after being spotted in the sea wearing life jackets.

"It is still difficult to know what happened, because the survivors' conditions are still weak," an agency official said.

A search and rescue mission is under way, and a number of those people rescued were found clinging to a fish trap by local fishermen, according to Reuters.

The ferry was travelling from Kolaka, in the southeast of Sulawesi, bound for Siwa, in the south of the island, according to the National Search and Rescue Agency.

The agency said the ship reported engine failure on Saturday morning, and then lost radio contact at 2:14 pm. It is thought the ship may have sunk less than an hour later. Efforts to find survivors and bodies have been hampered by bad weather, with waves reaching as high as 5 metres.—Kyodo News

Abe, ex-Osaka Mayor Hashimoto discussed constitution, security

TOKYO — Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and former Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto discussed the Constitution, diplomacy and national security during their meeting Saturday night at a Tokyo hotel, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said yesterday.

Speaking on a TV programme, Suga, who was present at the Abe-Hashimoto talks along with Osaka Gov. Ichiro Matsui, said the meeting was a courtesy call from Hashimoto, who left office as mayor Friday. The contents of their over three hours of discussions were not immediately available.

"Mr. Hashimoto was asking various questions about national security and diplomacy and the prime minister was giving replies," Suga said without elaborating.

He said they also exchanged

views on the issue of amending the Constitution.

Asked whether the Abe administration will collaborate with Hashimoto on constitutional reform, Suga only said, "I have no idea," citing Hashimoto's stated intention to retire from politics.

Hashimoto provisionally headed the political party "Initiatives from Osaka" when he launched it in October with Matsui after both left the Japan Innovation Party.

But he stepped down, with Matsui chosen as new leader, at a party convention 12 December, and is expected to serve as its legal adviser.

Matsui has said his party will support constitutional reform. The support of two-thirds or more of all lawmakers of each house is required to initiate amendments to the supreme law.—Kyodo News



Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (C) leaves a Tokyo hotel on 19 December 2015, after meeting with Toru Hashimoto, who completed his term as Osaka mayor a day earlier. The two spoke for over three hours. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

Spaniards vote in unpredictable national election

MADRID — Spaniards voted yesterday in a parliamentary election in which newcomer parties are expected to make big gains against the once-dominant conservatives and Socialists, ushering in a new and potentially volatile era of compromise politics.

With many people saying they want to shake up a political system they consider corrupt and unable to resolve Spain's economic woes, the outcome is the most uncertain in decades.

About one in three of the 36.5 million eligible voters said they would decide whom to support only at the very last minute. "I would like things to change and for no party to get a majority so none of them will be able to do whatever it wants without listening to others," said Agustin Aduriz, a 30-year-old engineer who voted in the Tribunal neighbourhood in Madrid.

Aduriz said he had voted for upstart anti-austerity party Podemos, though he added he had voted in the past for other parties, on both the left and the right. "My main hope is for Spain to end up with four main parties instead of two. That would be a good outcome."

Since the end of Francisco Franco's fascist dictatorship and the return to democracy in the 1970s, Spain has always enjoyed stable parliamentary majorities at the national level, with the centre-right People's Party and the centre-left Socialist Party alternating in power.

But a more splintered political landscape could now complicate efforts to form a government.



Spain's Prime Minister and Popular Party (PP) candidate Mariano Rajoy holds his ballot before casting his vote in Spain's general election in Madrid, Spain, on 20 December 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

Opinion polls suggest the ruling conservative People's Party (PP) of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy will win the vote but fall well short of an absolute majority.

The Socialists are expected to come second, while anti-austerity party Podemos ("We Can") and a second significant newcomer, the liberal Ciudadanos ("Citizens"), vying for third place which would make them kingmaker in post-election talks.

That prediction makes any of four outcomes possible — either a centre-right pact between the PP and Ciudadanos, a centre-left alliance between the Socialists and Podemos, a coalition between the Socialists and Ciudadanos or a minority administration. Rajoy said on Wednesday he would consider a cross-party pact to ensure a stable administration over the scheduled four-year term, but all

the other main parties have come out against joining the PP in a coalition.

That points to a stalemate that analysts agree would probably disrupt an economic reform programme that has helped pull Spain — the fifth-largest economy in the 28-nation EU — out of recession and dented a still sky-high unemployment rate.

"If there is no majority and many parties have a say, that could be a bit of a mess," said Josefa Robledillo, 50, a housewife from the Aluche district of Madrid who voted for the PP. "I hope that now that the economy is going a little better, things will stay on track."

Ciudadanos and Podemos insiders say both parties are looking beyond Sunday's vote and aim to keep poaching voters from the PP and the Socialists, giving them no incentive to agree on a pact unless they win major concessions.—Reuters

Venezuela food company Polar slams detention of local Pepsi workers

CARACAS — Several employees of Pepsi-Cola Venezuela have been detained in an "arbitrary" manner after halting operations at one plant for lack of raw materials, according to food company Empresas Polar, which owns the local Pepsi operation.

President Nicolas Maduro has routinely accused Polar, the country's largest food and beverage producer, of slowing production or hoarding goods to spur product shortages in the OPEC nation's struggling economy. Polar denies that.

The company said via Twitter that labour ministry inspectors arrested workers and ordered the reactivation of its plant in the town of Caucagua in the central state of Miranda.

"We denounce the detention of workers at the Pepsi-Co-

la Vzla Caucagua plant," the company said via its Twitter account, promising to launch a legal defense of its workers. "In the case of the Caucagua Plant, we do not have sufficient raw materials."

The company said those production lines are halted because of delays in the country's currency control system that have left it unable to import the necessary raw materials. It did not offer further details. Reuters was unable to immediately obtain comment from the government.

Venezuelan media have reported that labour ministry inspectors along with local police ordered the arrest of the manager, two human resources workers and a lawyer at the plant.

Maduro has described the country's chronic product

shortages as the product of an "economic war" led by opposition leaders and private companies.

His critics say currency controls have left companies unable to obtain imported machine parts and raw materials while price controls have made it unprofitable to produce many basic consumer goods.

The decaying state-led model created by late socialist leader Hugo Chavez has also suffered heavily from last year's collapse in the price of oil, which provides nearly all of the country's export revenue.

The ruling Socialist Party lost control of congress for the first time in 16 years in a sweeping opposition victory this month that was driven largely by anger over the economic crisis.—Reuters

NEWS IN BRIEF

Air France flight makes emergency landing in Kenya after suspicious object found

NAIROBI — An Air France flight from Mauritius diverted and safely made an emergency landing at Kenya's port city of Mombasa after its crew alerted its captain to a suspicious device in one of its toilets, Kenya's head of police said yesterday.

Police Inspector General Joseph Boinnet said on his Twitter account that the Boeing 777 aircraft — headed to Paris — with 459 passengers and 14 crew was safely evacuated after it landed at Moi International Airport at 12:37 am on Sunday (2137 GMT Saturday).

"Bomb experts from the Navy and DCI (Directorate of Criminal Investigations) have retrieved the device and are determining whether the components contained explosives," Boinnet said.—Reuters

Explosion in the Philippines injures 12 soldiers

MANILA — A powerful explosion injured 12 government soldiers in the south of the Philippines yesterday, a military spokesman said.

Army Maj. Filemon Tan, of the military's Western Mindanao Command, said the improvised explosive device went off at around 5:40 am, wounding the 12 soldiers who were sent to an area used by Abu Sayaff Islamist rebels in the town of Al Barka in Basilan province.

Tan said the soldiers were conducting a clearing operation when they accidentally triggered an improvised bomb apparently left behind by fleeing extremists.

He added the military had seized the rebel's camp after a weeklong military operation.

Tan claimed that at least 25 rebels were killed in the operation. However, he added that the fighters had dragged their dead comrades away, making it impossible for the military to accurately account for the bodies.—Kyodo News

Two pilots killed in air show crash in Indonesia: media reports

JAKARTA — Two pilots have been killed after their military plane crashed during an air show in Indonesia yesterday, media reports said.

Reports said the aircraft, a T50 training plane, crashed near an airport in Yogyakarta city on the island of Java, at around 9:50 am local time.

The plane had been involved in an air show, during which its pilots performed a series of maneuvers in the sky, when it hit the ground at speed. The cause of the crash was not immediately known.—Kyodo News

Chinese gas pipeline explodes near site of Shenzhen landslide: state TV

BEIJING — China's West-East natural gas pipeline exploded near the site of a landslide yesterday in the southern city of Shenzhen in Guangdong Province, state television said.

The official China Central Television (CCTV) broadcaster said 27 people were missing and three were injured after the landslide hit yesterday morning, burying 22 buildings.—Reuters

Putin says Moscow will not abandon Russians in Ukraine to nationalists: RIA

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin said Moscow would not abandon Russians living in southeast Ukraine to Ukrainian nationalists, RIA news agency quoted him as saying in a documentary due to be broadcast later yesterday.

More than 9,000 people have been killed in fighting in eastern Ukraine between Russian-backed separatists and Ukrainian troops since April 2014.

Moscow says Ukrainian nationalists pose a threat to ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians in the region.

According to RIA, Putin also said Russia would continue to improve its nuclear arsenal, but added that it would not wield the "nuclear big stick".—Reuters

Afghan official warns Helmand Province may fall to Taliban

KABUL — Afghanistan's Helmand province could fall to the Taliban after months of heavy fighting, with 90 members of the security forces killed over the past two days, the deputy governor of the volatile southern province warned yesterday.

Mohammad Jan Rasulyar said unless President Ashraf Ghani took urgent action, the province, a centre of opium production and a Taliban heartland that British and American troops struggled to control for years, would be lost.

"Your Excellency, Helmand is standing on the brink and there is a serious need for you to come," he wrote on Facebook.

The highly unusual public plea from a serving official painted a picture strikingly similar to the situation that led up to the fall of the northern city of Kunduz in late September, when Taliban fighters seized and held on to for several days before government troops regained control.

If Helmand were to fall, it would deliver a blow to government claims that Afghan security forces, fighting largely alone since international troops ended combat operations last year, are controlling the insurgency, in spite of setbacks such as the fall of Kunduz.

Army spokesman Mohammad Rasool Zazai said he had no comment on the post, but said Helmand would never collapse, while police chief Abul Rahman Sarjang said: "We have strong forces in Helmand. In some places, we leave areas for tactical reasons, but all forces are working together well and very soon we will have major achievements to report."

Ghani's government, backed by billions of dollars in international aid and training assistance from thousands of NATO troops still stationed in Afghanistan, is pushing to re-open talks with the Taliban.

Over the past six months, Helmand has been the scene of battles between insurgents and security forces that have complained of being abandoned by the US-backed government.

"We don't provide food and ammunition to our forces on time, do not evacuate our wounded and martyred soldiers from the battle field, and foreign forces only watch the situation from their bases and don't provide support," Rasulyar wrote.

Since Thursday, there had been 90 casualties near Gereshk, a junction on Highway 1 near the provincial capital Lashkar Gah, and in Sangin district to the north,

a level of losses which was "an everyday issue", Rasulyar added.

He said Sangin was "on the verge of collapse" with 44 casualties overnight.

The Taliban, which has not let a bloody internal leadership battle interrupt its campaign in Helmand, posted statements on its website detailing attacks on checkpoints as well as other operations including a suicide attack against the Gereshk police chief.

With army and police units badly weakened by desertions and lack of supplies, the Taliban has seized the districts of Musa Qalah and Now Zad in the north of the province and has threatened Lashkar Gah.

Government forces said they had recaptured the district of Khanishin on Friday, but by Sunday, the Taliban said it had won back the centre.

Underlining the gravity of the situation, US Special Forces have been reported to have taken part in fighting in Helmand in recent weeks. NATO headquarters in Kabul has not confirmed the reports.

A Pentagon report to Congress last week highlighted major shortcomings with Afghan security forces, despite billions of dollars of foreign aid and training.—Reuters

Britain eyes legal protection for gun police after Paris attacks

LONDON — British armed police could get greater legal protection if they shoot suspected criminals after Prime Minister David Cameron ordered a review of current laws in the light of mass shootings in Paris last month, the *Sunday Times* reported.

Following the attacks by Islamist militants in Paris which killed 130 people, London police have said they could deal with a similar style of assault but that they are looking to increase the number of armed officers on patrol.

Unlike most forces around the world, British police are not routinely armed and currently just over 2,000 of London's 31,000 officers are able to carry guns.

The *Sunday Times*, citing a senior government source, said Cameron was prepared to change current laws to give those armed officers greater protection against prosecution.

"Terrorist incidents both at home and abroad have shown very clearly the life-and-death decisions police officers have to make in split-second circumstances," the source said, according to the newspaper.

The paper reported that the government would review whether existing laws go far enough to support officers. Currently armed police can defend their use of weapons if they "honestly and instinctively" believe that doing so is reasonable. "We must make sure that when police take the ultimate decision to protect the safety of the public they do so with the full support of the law and the state — there can be no room for hesitation when lives are at risk," the source told the newspaper.

Last week police launched a murder investigation and arrested a firearms officer after the fatal shooting of a 28-year-old man in north London.—Reuters

"We must make sure that when police take the ultimate decision to protect the safety of the public they do so with the full support of the law and the sta..."

The Sunday Times

Lebanese militant Samir Qantar killed in Israeli raid

BEIRUT — Lebanese militant leader Samir Qantar was killed in an Israeli strike that hit a building in the Damascus district of Jaramana in the early hours yesterday, the Lebanese Hezbollah group and Syrian government loyalists said.

The powerful Lebanese Hezbollah group said Qantar was martyred in an Israeli aerial raid on a residential district of the Syrian capital Damascus but gave no details. An Israeli cabinet minister welcomed yesterday the killing of Qantar but stopped short of confirming allegations that Israel was responsible.

Israel released Qantar, a Druze, in 2008 as part of a prisoner swap with the Lebanese Shi'ite Hezbollah group and he is believed to have joined the group since.

He was welcomed as a hero in Beirut and he married a Lebanese Shi'ite woman from a Hezbollah family.

Israel has struck Syria several times since the start of the war five years ago, mostly destroying

weaponry such as missiles that Israeli officials said were destined for Hezbollah, Israel's long-time foe in neighboring Lebanon.

After his release, Qantar kept a low public profile. But it is believed that he had become a commander in Hezbollah, which has sent hundreds of its members to fight alongside forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad.

However, it was not immediately clear what role Qantar, born in 1962, plays in the fighting in Syria.

His brother Bassam Kantar had earlier mourned him on his Facebook page without giving details about his death, but said his brother was a martyr.

"With pride we mourn the martyrdom of the leader Samir Qantar and we are honoured to join families of martyrs," Bassam Kantar said on his Facebook page.

Syria's state media, which did not mention Qantar, blamed "terrorist groups" for the attack and said it caused casualties.



A general view shows a damaged building that was hit by an Israeli strike, killing a Lebanese militant leader Samir Qantar, in the Damascus district of Jaramana, Syria in this handout picture provided by SANA on 20 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

But government loyalists said the explosions were an Israeli strike believed to have killed Qantar, who is reviled in Israel for a 1979 attack that killed four people.

The National Defence Forces in Jaramana, which are part of a nation wide grouping of loyalist Syrian militias under the umbrella of the army, mourned Qantar and one of its commanders on its Face-

book page. "His(Qantar) body has been sent to a Damascus hospital moments ago," it said.

In January, an Israeli strike in Syria killed six members of Hezbollah, including a commander and the son of the group's late military leader Imad Moughniyah in the province of Quneitra, near the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

Syrian government loyalists

blamed Israel for the attack yesterday. "Two Israeli warplanes carried out the raid which targeted the building in Jaramana and struck the designated place with four long range missiles," the NDF in Jaramana Facebook page said.

Jaramana is a bastion of government support and is the home of many of Syria's Druze minority as well as Christians.—Reuters

OPINION

Time to translate our shared vision into action

Kyaw Thura

MANY people see migrant workers as a problem of poverty that should be addressed without any further delay. However, poverty alone cannot be blamed for immigration. It is easy to understand that no person would immigrate for no reason. Immigrants risk being exploited and abused by human traffickers and expose themselves to a number of other dangers.

The number of international migrants this year has hit 232 million, up from 175 million in 2000, according to the United Nations' statistics. People from the developing world find it hard to resist the temptation of well-paid jobs in developed countries. In fact, immigration is something that neither can nor should be solved, given its contributions to the economic growth of countries of origin as well as those of destination.

This year has witnessed thousands of migrants risking their lives in search of safer, greener pastures. Migration being an unavoidable issue, the only course of action left to us is to make a difference in the lives of millions of migrants across the world.

It is reasonable to assume that our world is a multicultural society. It is, therefore, time for all of us to translate our shared vision into action by calling for the respect of human rights and inter-

national labour rights while condemning manifestations of racism and intolerance. It is neither too late nor too early for the world to come together to address the root causes of migration and find solutions to what keeps driving people out of their homes.

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.

Should Bhutan be taken as an Example?

Khin Maung Myint

ALTHOUGH significant outcomes from the United Nations Climate Change Conference convened in Paris are yet to be seen in the media, a very interesting piece of news caught my attention. It is about the achievement of the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan in combating the climate change. During the climate change conference, Bhutan emerged as the underrated and unlikely champion of the climate change; it is considered as the leading carbon negative nation.

As we all know, Bhutan is a tiny country high up in the Himalayan range close to the glaciers on the nearby mountain peaks. Thus it is situated in a vulnerable position if the predictions of the experts about the temperatures rising above 3°C and their consequences become a reality. According to the experts if the temperature rise reaches 4°C, all the glaciers at the poles and elsewhere in the world would disappear and the rain forests would become deserts. I think it would not be necessary to point out that if such a situation arises, Bhutan would be devastated. We had witnessed what happened to some places on the Tibetan Plateau in Western China, where there were lush green grasslands where sheep, yaks and other animals once roamed. Due to the severe climate change, the rivers and streams had disappeared and most of the grasslands had turned into deserts, depriving the grazing grounds for the those animals that thrive on grass. The same scenario could soon emerge in Bhutan, if the dramatic climate change it is facing cannot be checked.

Those who are familiar with geography, would realize that our country, too, would face the same fate as Bhutan. The extension of the Himalayan Mountain Ranges

runs through our country and the terrain in the northern part of our country is similar to that of Bhutan. Should the glaciers on the Himalayas that are starting to retreat totally disappear, the ice caps atop mountains in our country too would disappear and cause the Ayeyarwady and the other rivers in our country to become shallow and eventually dry up. That would cause devastating water crisis. I wonder if any concerned persons have ever taken notice of the fact that we are as vulnerable as Bhutan. Thus we should take precautionary measures like Bhutan, not only by growing more trees, but also by other means to reduce the emission of the menacing greenhouse gases.

The eminent danger of the climate change must have been realized by Bhutan long ago. The present King of Bhutan had taken much interest in battling the climate change since he was the Crown Prince. I had noticed the young prince's fore-sightedness over a decade ago. Every year he used to attend the Thai Monarch's birthday ceremonies in Bangkok. Everytime he went there, he studied with profound interests, the sustainable projects carried out with the directions of His Majesty the King of Thailand. As far as I know, among the many royal projects, the young prince was greatly interested in the reforestation method invented by the King of Thailand. He requested the King for permission to use that method, which he was duly granted. Since then, I had followed the progress they are making in Bhutan as much as possible and came to know that their reforestation programme is well underway.

However, I was awed by the rapid progress they had made in reforesting their country to such an extent and had managed to attain the carbon negative nation status. According to the news, two third of that country is already covered with forest and

had further pledged to reforest the whole country. That made it the first country in the world to do so. According to the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit's (ECIU) report, even at the present, the conditions in Bhutan can absorb three times the carbon dioxide (CO₂) emitted by its population of 700,000, turning the country into a carbon sink. Here, I think I should explain briefly what a carbon sink is, for those who are not familiar with this term. It is a natural or artificial reservoir that absorbs and retains the carbon containing compounds for an infinite period, thus making the atmosphere free from CO₂ gases.

They had achieved that by growing trees extensively and having only a few industries. In 2014, Bhutan broke the world record in tree planting by growing 50,000 trees in a single day. It is aiming to break another record by reforesting the whole country. They are doing it because the climate change had been affecting it for sometimes and are well aware of the necessity to control the climate change by growing more trees. The fact that the glaciers in their region are retreating, causing disruptions in water supplies, encountering extreme climates, and their impacts on the ecosystem are so great that it must have made them necessary to fight the climate change urgently.

The fact that they had grown 50,000 trees in one day indicates their urgency and determination to combat the climate change in earnest and rapidly. It also shows that they had carried the reforest-

ation to a higher level than that of the Thai method. What I had known before was that they introduced the Thai King's reforestation method, which the young Bhutanese King had taken much interest in, when he was the Crown Prince. Some readers who had read my article, titled "Reforestation Made Easy", which appeared a few months ago in the GNLM daily, may recall that method, which was explained in detail. As that method is to initiate the self-propagation of the trees in a natural way by planting only a few saplings atop barren hills and mountains and let the nature do the rest, it could take longer to reforest large areas in a short time. Thus, Bhutan must be in a dire situation to be in such a hurry to grow 50,000 trees in one day, a feat that would be difficult even for more populous nation than theirs'.

Credit should be given to the Bhutanese for their awareness and contribution towards the reduction of the CO₂ gases, which are the main culprits of the climate change. Every nation, especially the large emitters of the CO₂ gases should take the example of Bhutan and do whatever is in their capacity to curb the climate change and endeavour to maintain the temperature rise under 2°C. By saying thus I do not mean that every nation must grow trees, but there are many ways to reduce the emission of the greenhouse gases.

The most effective way would be to reduce the industries that use fossilized fuels by substituting with renewable or green

energy. Reduce productions of fossilized fuels by divesting themselves from those industries by the wealthy companies, as the Rockefellers had done. The actions of the Rockefellers to stop investing in the fossilized fuel industries to contribute towards fighting the climate change is admirable. It was a very considerate move and a noble deed, which I hope more would follow suit. Abstain from trading in carbon credits, which is a ridiculous practice created for the benefit of the large industrialized nations who are the great emitters of the greenhouse gases. The large emitters of the greenhouse gases should be humane enough to have considerations for others, who have to suffer because of their greed. They should endeavour to drastically cut down the emissions of the troublesome gases.

Before concluding, I would like to draw your attention to the recent incidents that are related to the climate change. One is the unprecedented floods in Chennai, India, which was recorded as the worst in a hundred years. The other one is the flooding in the UK that followed in the wake of the first one. In my opinion, although these two catastrophies occurred far from one another and seem not to be related, they are in fact the consequences of the same culprit: the climate change. Thus in conclusion, I would like to emphasize, once again, that if **the climate change** cannot be reined in, no country would be spared. The apocalypse would be a certainty.

"They had achieved that by growing trees extensively and having only a few industries. In 2014, Bhutan broke the world record in tree planting by growing 50,000 trees in a single day".

Marionette festival aims to raise public interest in traditional folk arts

Puppetry has traditionally been one of Myanmar's most popular folk arts and is commonly performed at pagoda festivals.

Khaing Thanda Lwin

THE Myanmar-International Marionette Festival will be held in Mandalay next April with the aim of raising public interest in the traditional folk arts. The festival will feature a variety of educational and entertainment programmes, an organiser said.

The event is scheduled to run on 2 and 3 April at the National Theatre in Mandalay and will be implemented by Myanmar Upper Land and its partner organisations.

The festival also supports the development of marionette troupes around Myanmar through information exchanges with international puppeteers, said U Kyaw Myo Ko, managing director of Myanmar Upper Land.

He added that the festival is a part of the Myanmar Marionette Development Programme, which is primarily funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-

operation. He said there are plans to hold a similar event in Yangon concurrently with the Mandalay event.

Marionette troupes from Myanmar, Germany and Indonesia will take part in the event, with the organisers planning to invite marionette troupes from other ASEAN countries.

Puppet shows, workshops, panel discussions, art exhibitions and a photo gallery will also be open during the two-day festival.

String puppets, which are popular souvenirs among foreigners, will be on sale during the event, said U Kyaw Myo Ko, who plans to publish a book about the history of puppetry in Myanmar in the coming months.

Once a popular form of entertainment around Myanmar, puppetry is practiced by very few people in the country today. At present, around 20 professionals remain in the field.



Marionette troupes perform at traditional puppet show in Mandalay.

Photo: supplied by Daw Ma Ma Naing

IKBZ wins two global insurance awards

THE World Finance Group, a London-based organisation, awarded two global insurance awards to IKBZ Insurance Company at the London Stock Exchange on 4 December.

IKBZ won "Best Life Insurance Company in Myanmar 2015" and "Best General Insurance Company in Myanmar 2015".

U Aung Ko Win, patron of the KBZ Group of Companies, and Daw Nan Kham Nyunt, chairperson of IKBZ Insurance attended and the ceremony. U Nyo Myint, Vice Chairman of IKBZ accepted the awards.

According to the World Finance Group, IKBZ's quick expansion of insurance throughout the country over the past three years merited Myanmar's first private insurance company these



U Nyo Myint, Vice Chairman of IKBZ accepts "Best Life Insurance Company in Myanmar 2015" in London. PHOTO: KBZ

two awards.

IKBZ started its insurance operation in September 2012 and now has 14 branches across the country.

The insurance company aims to provide effective and quick services for its clients and has secured 35 per cent of the insurance market in the country.—GNLM

Flooded villages face scarcity of cow feed

SEVERAL villages in Monywa Township that were flooded by heavy rains earlier this year are now facing a scarcity of cow feed, said a local farmer.

The huts where cow feed used to be stored were destroyed when the Chindwin River overflowed in July and August.

Farmer U Thet Moe Tun

of Bonmano Village said: "We had enough cow feed last year because there were no floods. We now have to feed the cows the grass. Only the storage huts of cow feed on high ground were left unspoiled."

He added that farmers in the area now have to hire field workers to cut grass to feed their cows, which costs be-

tween K500 and K2,000 per day, depending on the volume of grass cut.

But the farmer noted that although there is scarcity of cow feed, the plantation of crops on alluvial soil has been favourable this season. He hopes that after the cold season harvest in March there will be enough cow feed.—Poe Chan

China to manufacture train coaches for Yangon-Mandalay line

A PROJECT for the production of new train coaches with loans from China is expected to be completed in November 2016.

Out of 60 coaches to be manufactured by the project, 39 will be constructed by Si Fang factory in China while 21 will be constructed at the Myitnge Railway Locomotive Station.

18 coaches from China recently arrived and are on trial runs at the Myitnge railway

Locomotive Station. The new coaches are equipped with facilities like water supply, electricity, fans, toilets and basins.

"The new coach Myanmar and Chinese engineers and they will operate on the Yangon-Mandalay line," said U Tin Maung Thant, General Manager of Myitnge railway Locomotive Station.—Maung Maung Soe (Myitnge)



A railway locomotive of Myanmar Railways being seen at a station. PHOTO: MAUNG MAUNG SOE (MYITNGE)

Internet of Things is the best business opportunity

BEIJING — The Internet of Things is the best business opportunity in the next five years, said Zhou Hongyi, chairman of Qihoo 360 Technology Co Ltd, at a sub forum of the Second World Internet Conference in Wuzhen, Zhejiang Province on Friday.

The Internet of Things (IOT) predicts the arrival of the real big data era, said Zhou, “It is estimated that China has 1.5 to 2 billion phones on use today. In the future, there will be 30 to 50 billion devices connected to shape our life from quantitative changes to qualitative changes.”

He also proposed a different idea about how to perceive IOT.

“It is wrong to believe that the smart phone is the central hub of IOT,” he said, adding that IOT does not rely on smart phones to remotely control other devices from cars to household appliances.

Instead, the devices themselves, if they have an intelligent system, will be able to differentiate or substitute parts of the phone’s function, Zhou said.

China has witnessed a rapid development of its Internet industry over the past two decades. The Internet has profoundly affected almost every facet of Chinese people’s lives including communication, transportation, and entertainment.

The Second World Internet Conference, the most high-profile Internet related event in China, is taking place in the picturesque water town of Wuzhen, Zhejiang Province, 16 to 18 December.

The conference, with a goal of “building a cyberspace community of shared destiny”, has gathered together more than 2,000 participants, including state leaders, government officials, business leaders, Internet titans, and experts from more than 120 countries and regions.—Xinhua

Tech giants predict future where sci-fi will merge into reality

BEIJING — Imagine a journey in which you can travel to destinations while asleep behind the steering wheel because your self-driving car can “talk” to other such vehicles to maintain a safe distance.

Without using any devices, you can send an e-mail to a friend in no time simply through brain-to-brain communication.

This is not science fiction — this is the future predicted by China’s technology giants, and it is closer to reality than you think.

Senior executives at the tech companies said on Thursday that the Internet of Things — a network of physical objects or “things” embedded with electronics, software, sensors and network connectivity — will further change lives in China.

They were discussing future technology trends at the 2nd World Internet Conference in Wuzhen,

Zhejiang Province.

Robin Li, chief executive officer of Baidu Inc, China’s largest online search company, said he is betting on the future of artificial intelligence.

Li, whose company has applied artificial intelligence technology to vehicles, said self-driving cars will be quite common on the roads in three to five years.

“More important, cars will be more like a computer on wheels,” he said, adding that people are expected to be able to connect with each other through their cars.

For Baidu’s Internet rival Tencent Holdings Ltd, there is even the possibility of people communicating through retina or virtual reality technology.

“Even brain-to-brain communication via an electroencephalogram may be possible by wearing some devices,” said Ma Huateng,



PHOTO: XINHUA

chief executive officer of Tencent.

Zhou Hongyi, chief executive officer of Qihoo 360 Technology Co Ltd, said that by connecting more than 1 billion people via smartphones, many innovative business models have been mushrooming and drastically changing people’s lives in China.

“But in the future — be it cars or wearable devices — all things can be connected to each other via the Internet. The more people we have, the more devices can be connected to the Internet, and the stronger and more powerful our Internet industry will be,” he said.—Xinhua

India cuts growth outlook, calls for review of fiscal, monetary targets

NEW DELHI — India slashed its full-year growth forecast on Friday, citing weak global demand and lower farm output, and called for speedier reforms as well as a review of fiscal and monetary policies to resuscitate economic activity.

In a mid-year review, Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government said the economy would likely expand by 7-7.5 percent in the fiscal year ending in March 2016, sharply lower than an 8.1-8.5 per-

cent growth estimated in February.

Still, the South Asian country will remain the fastest growing major economy as China’s gross domestic product (GDP) is struggling to maintain the near-7 percent pace promised by its leaders.

While India is finally emerging from China’s shadow in the global growth stakes, it’s still not firing on all cylinders.

The government said Asia’s third-largest economy is being hobbled by weak corporate spend-

ing, tepid global demand and two successive droughts that have hit farm output and a significant improvement was unlikely unless pending tax and financial sector reforms were carried out.

“The improvement in growth has been uneven, powered only by private consumption and public investment,” it said.

“To move India rapidly to its medium-term growth trajectory, supply side reforms and demand management will be essential.”

Indian markets extended losses after the government’s review was presented to parliament, with the 50-share NSE index falling more than 1 percent. The benchmark 10-year bond yield rose 2 basis points to 7.72 percent.

Profit growth at India’s top companies was the slowest in two-and-a-half years in the quarter ending in September, hampering efforts to cut debt in one of Asia’s most leveraged corporate sectors.

Slowing profit growth is weighing on corporate spending

as companies are utilising the majority of their operating profit to service interest costs. The government offered no hope for a quick turnaround in corporate balance sheets, which it expects to recover slowly and remain a drag on fresh capital investment. It, hence, argued for further stepping up public spending on roads, bridges and rail as well as a recalibration of fiscal and monetary targets to help spur demand.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has pledged to trim the fiscal deficit to an eight-year low of 3.9 percent of the GDP in 2015/16 and 3.5 percent next fiscal year. While the government remains confident of meeting this year’s target, the report said commitments to raise government salaries and military pensions next year will make it tougher to stick to the committed fiscal consolidation roadmap.

“Both fiscal and monetary policy stances will need to be carefully re-assessed,” the government said in the review.—Reuters



Farmers sprinkle fertilizer on a wheat field on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, on 15 December 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

China to keep economic stimulus in 2016: Bloomberg

BEIJING — China is expected to keep its stimulus measures including interest rate cuts in 2016 to underpin economic growth, Bloomberg economists has said.

“The central bank will likely make two 25 bp cuts in the loan rate and multiple cuts in the reserve requirement ratio in the first half,” said the economists in

a report called “China’s Economy in 2016” reached Xinhua reporters late on Friday.

However, “space for rate cut is limited as the deposit rate approaches zero,” according to the Bloomberg report.

Benchmark interest rates for one-year lending and deposits stand at 4.35 percent and 1.5 percent respectively after a 0.25

percentage point cut in this October.

To combat a economic slowdown, China’s central bank has cut benchmark interest rates five times since last November and lowered banks’ reserve requirement ratio three times since February.

The Ministry of Finance has accelerated public spending and

rolled out a 3.2 trillion yuan (494 billion US dollars) debt swap for in-the-red local governments, the Bloomberg report said.

“Most recently the yuan has fallen 2.4 percent to 6.4726 in mid-December from 6.3174 at the end of October,” said the report.

To add liquidity, the Bloomberg report forecast that

China’s reserve requirement ratio will come down from the current 17.5 percent level next year.

The Bloomberg economists expected more pro-growth exchange rate and fiscal policy adjustments next year, adding that China has “enough policy space to keep GDP growth “close to 7 percent, but not for much longer.”—Xinhua

3D video games may be good for your memory

IRVINE — Playing three-dimensional video games just 30 minutes a day might mean new memories are less likely to fade away, a small US study suggests.

For two weeks, researchers asked 69 novice gamers to devote a half-hour daily to playing either the two-dimensional “Angry Birds” game, “Super Mario 3D World,” or nothing at all. Based on tests taken at the start and end of the experiment, only the 3D players had memory improvements, the study found.

“The 3D games have a lot going for them that the 2D ones don’t,” study co-author Craig Stark, a neurobiologist at the University of California, Irvine, said by email.

“There’s the issue of perspective, the amount of spatial information in there, the ‘self’ or ‘immersive’ aspect of them — you feel like you’re in there — or just the total amount of stuff you can incidentally learn,” Stark added. “When the viewpoint is relatively static, in a 2D game, you don’t get exposed to nearly as many spatial relations.”

While the study wasn’t designed to show how 3D video games might improve memory, it’s possible playing these games stimulated the hippocampus region of the brain, Stark and co-author Gregory Clemson, also of UC Irvine, note in the *Journal of Neuroscience*.

To see how the type of game might impact cognition, the researchers recruited people 18 to



A visitor plays with a ‘Playstation’ at an exhibition stand at the Gamescom 2009 fair in Cologne. PHOTO: REUTERS

22 years old who claimed not to have prior experience with the games and asked them to play in a testing facility each weekday for a total of 10 days.

Before and after the two-week period, the participants took memory tests that engaged the brain’s hippocampus, the region associated with complex learning and memory.

They were given a series of pictures of everyday objects to study. Then, they were shown images of the same objects, new

ones and others that differed only slightly from the original items and asked to categorize them.

Recognition of the slightly altered objects requires the hippocampus, Stark said.

The 12 percent improvement seen with the test scores for 3D gamers is roughly the same amount that memory tends to decline between the ages of 45 and 70, the researchers note.

Beyond the small size of the study, other limitations include the potential for variation in com-

plexity in the two games, rather than just the 2D versus 3D format, to explain at least some of the differences in memory test performance after playing, the authors concede.

It’s also possible that the tests done in young people might not yield the same results in older players, or that inexperienced players might not have the same results as seasoned gamers, noted Dr. Adam Gazzaley, a neurology researcher at the University of California, San Francisco who

wasn’t involved in the study.

“It is likely that the largest effects will be for novices and especially those that are suffering deficits in cognition,” Gazzaley said by email. “But, continued benefits may take place if the game continues to engage the player at a high level as they continue to improve.”

There’s at least a potential, though, that if more research confirms and explains the findings, 3D video games might benefit older adults suffering from memory loss, Alzheimer’s disease or dementia.

“If findings such as these are confirmed and extended, this could open the door to exploring a role for using 3D games clinically for patients with memory problems,” said Dr. Brian Primack, Director of the Centre for Research on Media, Technology and Health at the University of Pittsburgh.

But gaming probably isn’t a panacea for improving memory, Primack, who wasn’t involved in the study, said by email.

“There are many things that have been shown to improve outcomes such as quality of life among people with memory impairment — these include having plenty of social experiences in person with others and engaging in regular physical activity,” Primack said. “It would be a shame to push 3D gaming to the point of inadvertently negatively impacting these evidence-based treatments.”—Reuters

Chinese-led study finds different variants of MERS virus

WASHINGTON — The Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) coronavirus has become enzootic in dromedary camels in Saudi Arabia and diverged into five different variants, according to a Chinese-led study published in the Friday issue of the *Journal of Virology*.

In a second study published in the same journal, researchers designed a vaccine shown to be effective in protecting dromedaries against the virus.

Over the past three years, several MERS outbreaks have been reported in the Middle East and most recently in South Korea, with a fatality rate of roughly 35 per cent. Arabian camels are a common host for the MERS virus, and one of the most likely sources of human infection, the researchers said. The virus can diversify in the animals and then be passed to people, but little is known about its prevalence there and the route by which it is transmitted to humans.—Xinhua

Analysis of crickets’ jumps could lead to new, tiny robots

BOSTON — Researchers at Johns Hopkins University are dissecting crickets’ jumps, not with a scalpel, but with high-speed cameras to analyze their patterns of movement.

Professor of Mechanical Engineering at Johns Hopkins University, Rajat Mittal, says he now sees spider crickets as much more than pests. He says their design principles could aid in the development of small, nimble robots, with the ability to move across rough terrain such as earthquake rubble.

Spider crickets are said to leap a distance equal to about 60 times their body length. And so the question Mittal asked himself was: “How after jumping this really long distance, how do these animals manage to control their posture so that they can land on their feet?”

Mittal and Emily Palmer, an undergraduate research assistant in the department of mechanical engineering, have studied the intricacies of the critters’ jumps for more than eight months using high-speed cameras to capture their motion.

“Videos were taken at frame rates that were in excess of 300,

400 frames per second. So that really allowed us to really break down their entire jump and slow it down and really start to view every aspect from take-off to the flight and the landing,” said Mittal.

Not only was the photography a challenge, but Palmer said it was a challenge getting “good jumps” from their subjects. Poking crickets while they were in a plexiglass enclosure encouraged them to jump, but the details like

“Mars could be an example for instance where jumping could actually be much more effective than anything else.”

Rajat Mittal, Professor of Mechanical Engineering
Johns Hopkins University

distance and trajectory were inconsistent.

“We like to track the position of the center of mass which is pretty much the cricket’s stomach, their head and their tail for the entire jump. And then for one frame in the jump we, like to track those three points as well as every joint of the cricket’s body. So that’s a lot of points to track. And since the crickets are so

small, we need to have very accurate tracking software.”

The footage from three cameras was slowed down, and with the help of software called Matlab, they were able to track the crickets’ leaps and landings.

Mittal said he was surprised to see the insects’ jumps were similar to that of a ballet dancer, but more importantly, they managed to land on their feet.

He said they tend to pull

everything back in a very streamlined posture. “After that they go into a mode where they fling their limbs out. And they start to try to balance themselves in the air and try to affect the rotation in the air and kind of keep themselves stable. So all of those very nicely choreographed movements absolutely bring to mind kind of watching a beautiful ballet,” the professor said.

According to the researchers,

the slow-motion video showed that during flight, the crickets used their limbs to stabilise their posture and prepare for a safe landing.

Three-dimensional models were created with a software called Maya, depicting how each insects’ body parts move during a leap and touchdown.

“This kind of a jumping mode of locomotion is very effective when you’re trying to travel through very complicated terrains. For example, the aftermath of an earthquake where you have all kinds of rubble,” said Mittal, adding extraterrestrial terrain could benefit from such robots. “Mars could be an example for instance where jumping could actually be much more effective than anything else,” he said.

The team presented its findings recently at the 68th annual meeting of the American Physical Society’s Division of Fluid Dynamics in Boston.

Mittal said that with six to eight more months of research and a better understanding of crickets’ movements, his team may work with a roboticist to “try to harness some of the principles that we are finding here.”—Reuters

Culture talks held between Japan, S Korea and China in Qingdao

QINGDAO — Trilateral talks on culture were held between representatives of Japan, China and South Korea in the Chinese city of Qingdao yesterday, with three nations agreeing on an action plan for cultural exchanges.

Hiroiyuki Yoshiie, Japan's senior vice minister for education, culture, sports, science and technology, met with Luo Shugang and Kim Jong Deok, the culture ministers of China and South Korea respectively, and discussed matters surrounding the upcoming Olympic Games in the three countries: The Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea, Tokyo's 2020 Summer Olympics and Beijing's 2022 winter games.

The three also discussed plans for 2016's East Asian Culture Cities, which are the Chinese city of Ningbo, Nara in Japan and South Korea's Jeju province.

A plan to hold a trilateral talk on sport was agreed on, with Seoul being chosen for as the venue for the meeting in May next year, while all parties agreed to an action plan on deepening cultural exchange with members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and promoting youth exchanges.—*Kyodo News*

Asian tourists flocking to small Kyoto town with old farmhouses

KYOTO — Miyama in Nantan, Kyoto Prefecture, is set to adapt to a steep increase in Asian tourists tired of conventional sightseeing spots in Japan.

Chen Xiang-jun, a 32-year-old Taiwanese company employee from Tainan who visited the town on 1 December, was fascinated by water arches created over traditional Japanese farmhouses with thatched roofs in the "Kayabuki no Sato" village, during an event held by local volunteer firefighters twice a year.

"The scene was a different world unseen in daily life. I had a wonderful time," Chen said.

The northern part of the town has 38 thatched farmhouses dotted around the foot of a mountain, many of which were built during the Edo Period (1603-1868).

The area is often compared to Shirakawa-go, Gifu Prefecture, and neighbouring Gokayama, Toyama Prefecture, chosen as a UNESCO world heritage site in 1995, and to Ouchi-juku,



A throng of tourists watching water being sprayed over thatched roof houses at the "Kayabuki no Sato" village in Miyama, Kyoto Prefecture. The biannual event is a test of the fire protection system for the thatched village vulnerable to fire. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

Fukushima Prefecture, due to the presence of many thatched houses.

In all, 127.5 hectares of land, including rice paddies and mountain forests, was designated by the Japanese government in 1993 as an area with great historical value to be preserved.

Lured by photos on the Internet of Miyama's beautiful sights, Chen

traveled to the town by train and bus. "Poor access didn't bother me," she said.

Chen has visited many popular temples and shrines in Kyoto and Nara during 10 or so trips to Japan.

"I wanted to visit a quiet place in the countryside but saw lots of tourists today as always," she laughed.

Miyama is in a remote mountain area one and a half hours by car north of Kyoto Station.

While nearly 300,000 tourists per year visit the town, local residents still live in most of the old thatched roof houses, so many are not open to the public.

But a number of inns and cafes now occupy some farmhouses.

Although the number of foreign visitors to Miyama began to rapidly increase four to five years ago, the town has yet to take measures to cope with its booming popularity.

For example, local bus services are geared purely to local residents, with only one bus operating every two hours, and there is no rest station with a place to keep luggage for tourists.

But preparations to make the town friendlier to tourists are starting by stages, including a multi-language information board to be set up soon by the Nantan city government at the entry to the thatched village.

"While most of Asian visitors to the town are now from Taiwan, we expect tourists from China down the road," said Mamoru Koda, 61, of the Kyoto Miyama Tourism Association.

"We will promote tours designed for tourists to stay for a number of days and enjoy the scenery here at leisure."—*Kyodo News*



Job Vacancy Announcement

Construction and Housing Development Bank (Public Company Limited)

No. (60), Corner of Shwedagon Pagoda Road and Nawaday Street

Ph - 01 - 240109, Email - hr.chdb@gmail.com

1. Construction and Housing Development Bank invites application for the positions of Manager, Deputy Manager and Assistant Manager. (Male and Female).

The applicant has to meet the following requirements:

- One who has got Ph.D. in Economics, Management and Banking, must be under 35 years,
 - One who has got CPA, M.com, M.Econ (Economics), M.Econ (Statistics) M.Devs, MBA, MPA, M.C.Sc, M.I.Sc, M.C.Tech and M.A(Eng.), must be under 30 years,
 - Effective English communication skills,
 - Computer savvy
 - Excellent interpersonal and communication skills,
 - Outstanding ones, if necessary, may be sent to foreign countries for further study,
 - Willing to perform at our bank permanently.
- After initiative selection, candidates must take written exam, computer test and personal interview.
 - Résumés should be submitted with the following supplementary documents-
 - a copy of NRC,
 - copies of Educational documents,
 - Police Record Clearance Certificate,
 - Recommendation Certificate from township administration officer,
 - a copy of Labour Registration Card,
 - a copy of Family Registration Form.

4. Resumes and application letter must be sent to Construction and Housing Development Bank (Head Office) at No. (60), Corner of Shwedagon Pagoda Road and Nawaday Street, not later than 29.1.2016.

Human Resources Development Department
Construction and Housing Development Bank (Head Office)

WTO backs agricultural reforms, split on Doha



The Kenyan Foreign Affairs Cabinet Secretary Amina Mohamed (L) and the Director General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Roberto Azevedo attend the opening of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Summit in Nairobi, Kenya on 15 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

NAIROBI — The World Trade Organisation reached deals on agricultural export subsidies, food aid and other issues on Saturday, capping a ministerial conference in the Kenyan capital where rich and poor countries had been split over the path of trade reform.

Members said the Nairobi deal had drawn a line under years of stalemate over the direction of global trade negotiations.

"Our work in Nairobi

marks a turning point for the World Trade Organisation," US Trade Representative Michael Froman said in a statement. The negotiations "started a new phase in the WTO's evolution" and showed "what is possible when the multilateral trading system comes together to solve a problem."

The Geneva-based WTO, which invited Liberia and Afghanistan to become its 163rd and 164th members, has been trying and

largely failing to agree on a worldwide package of trade reforms since a meeting in Doha in 2001 hatched an ambitious plan for knocking down trade barriers.

The four-day Nairobi conference was extended by a final non-stop 24-hour negotiation between the major trading powers, who agreed on a package that included phasing out agricultural export subsidies and restricting agricultural export credits.

But they agreed to disagree about the potential for success in the Doha round of talks.

Both India, which had insisted on completing the existing Doha talks before any further negotiation, and the United States, which wanted to move on from Doha, had to give ground, an EU official said.

The compromise means that more issues can be loaded onto the negotiating agenda, the EU official said.

Trade experts greeted the deal on the talks, also known as the Doha Development Agenda (DDA), with scepticism.

"DDA = Doha Dead Again?," Richard Baldwin, professor of international economics at Geneva's Graduate Institute, said in a tweet.

Kenya's Foreign Minister Amina Mohamed, who had described the WTO's negotiating function as broken at the summit's opening, said she was confident that the Nairobi talks had actually "strengthened" the body over the week.

"For me, Nairobi will be remembered as having made that leap from a time when we were divided along this developed and developing divide," she said.

The meeting, the first ministerial meeting to be held in Africa, had earlier hailed an agreement to remove import tariffs on 201 information technology products, marking the first major global tariff-cutting deal in 19 years.

In addition, more countries signed on to the Trade Facilitation Agreement, which eases the passage of goods between countries.—*Reuters*

UMFCCI congratulates **KBZ BANK / KBZ GROUP** on the latter's receiving of international awards in 2015



The following awards are presented by World Finance, England.

- (1) Best Commercial Bank in Myanmar 2015**
- (2) Best Retail Bank in Myanmar 2015**
- (3) Banker of the Year in Asia 2015 (Mr. Aung Ko Win - Chairman, KBZ Bank, Myanmar, Asia)**



Business Initiative Directions from Spain has presented the following award in Geneva, Switzerland

- (4) International Star Award Geneva 2015, KBZ BANK - Myanmar**



The Banker from England has presented the award

- (5) Best Bank of the Year in Myanmar 2015**



ASEAN Business Awards (Winner for the whole ASEAN)

- (6) Woman Entrepreneur of the Year 2015 for Vice Chairman Daw Nan Than Htwe**



The Asian Banker

- (7) Best Core Banking Implementation Project for Emerging Bank**



United Nations
Global Compact

The Global Compact Asian Banker

- (8) A member of the United Nations Global Compact**



Asian Banking and Finance Institution from Singapore also presented

- (9) Best Domestic Retail Bank of the Year in Myanmar 2015**
- (10) Best Credit Card Initiative of the Year in Myanmar 2015**



Euromoney from England presented the following awards

- (11) Best Bank in Myanmar 2015**
- (12) Euromoney Achievement Award for CSR 2015**

UMFCCI takes great pride in **KBZ BANK / KBZ GROUP's** receiving of the aforesaid awards.



Chairman & CEC / EC
Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers
of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI)

Miss Spain crowned Miss World 2015



Miss Spain Mireia Lalaguna Royo (C) receives the crown from 2014 winner Rolene Strauss of South Africa (rear), as she is flanked by second-placed Miss Russia Sofia Nikitchuk (L) and third-placed Miss Indonesia Maria Harfanti, during the Miss World 2015 pageant in Sanya, Hainan Province, China, on 19 December 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

SANYA — Miss Spain was crowned Miss World 2015 on Saturday. Mireia Lalaguna Royo took the top prize in the 65th edi-

tion of the pageant held this year in Sanya, China.

The other 5 finalists were contestants from Russia, Leba-

non, Indonesia and Jamaica

Royo takes over the crown from the 2014 winner Rolene Strauss of South Africa. —Reuters

Music, digital art intersect in 'Day for Night' festival in Houston

HOUSTON — Sound, image and digital art installations collide in Houston this weekend for the Day for Night Festival, which brings together music giants including Kendrick Lamar and visual artists such as Casey Reas.

Walls of light, animations projected onto buildings and video installations created by award-winning artists connect three performance stages and multiple warehouse galleries.

"What we're trying to do is create an immersive experience where moving throughout the festival grounds is as engaging as standing and staring at the stage," said Omar Afra, the Day for Night festival producer.

Reas, whose software, prints and installations have been featured in galleries globally, will showcase a television signal collage that highlights the most watched shows on a local Los Angeles station projected onto a 20-by-25-foot (6.1-by-7.6-metre) canvas.

"The idea is to create something which is already a visual assault and make it more of a literal visual assault," Reas said.

On the musical side, New Order, one of the more influential British bands of the 1980s, will take the stage along with other headliners that include the Philip Glass Ensemble, known for its avant-garde symphonies and operas.

Vincent Houze created a structure of gauzy black screens that act as a container of fog and serve as canvases for lava-lamp-like animations of water meant to mimic brain activity after going under general anesthesia. The exhibit will be controlled from his smartphone.

"Millennials are engaged every moment with the screen on the phone, the screen on the computer, video games and we feel like this is a long time coming for the world of music production to catch up with the way young people engage art and music," Afra said. —Reuters

'Star Wars' movie's global sales reach massive \$250m

LOS ANGELES — "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" collected a galactic \$250 million of global ticket sales through Friday and headed toward a historic opening weekend in the United States and Canada as fans around the world reveled in the return of the beloved space saga.

The seventh "Star Wars" movie is expected to sell more than \$220 million of tickets at US and Canadian theaters through Sunday, beating the record \$208.8 million for "Jurassic World" in June, Walt Disney Co said on Saturday.

Fans embraced the new installment in the series: A clash between good and evil in a galaxy far, far away. Thousands gathered for a friendly light saber battle in downtown Los Angeles on Friday, and moviegoers in cities such as Berlin and Paris arrived at screenings wearing Stormtrooper costumes, Jedi robes and Darth Vader masks.

"Force Awakens" has already smashed several film industry records and won praise from critics and moviegoers. It pulled in \$120.5 million through Friday, its first full day in domestic theaters, the highest single-day ticket sales ever.

That includes a chart-topping \$57 million from fans who flocked to see the first showings on Thursday night. Saturday domestic receipts were expected to total \$60 million, Disney said.

"Force Awakens" began

rolling out in global markets on Wednesday. Through Friday, international ticket sales had reached \$129.5 million, as the movie set opening-day records in Britain, Germany, Australia, Brazil and other countries.

The new "Star Wars" film is the first installment in a decade of the series, which was 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 movie is now open in all markets except Greece and India, where it starts playing 24 December, and China, which has set a 9 January debut. China is the world's second-largest film market.

"Force Awakens" has a shot at becoming the highest-grossing movie of all time, according to some analysts. The current record holder is "Avatar," which generated \$2.8 billion worldwide after its December 2009 release.

Critics applauded "Force Awakens," which features newcomers Daisy Ridley, John Boyega and Oscar Isaac alongside original stars Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford and Carrie Fisher.

The movie, directed by J.J. Abrams, 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

Justin Bieber, Coldplay to perform at 2016 BRIT Awards

LOS ANGELES — Music sensations Justin Bieber and Coldplay have been announced as performers for the next year's BRIT Awards.

They will be joining previously announced performer Adele at the upcoming ceremony set to take place at London's O2 Arena on 24 February, reported Aceshowbiz.

"The BRITs are excited to welcome two of the biggest acts in the world right now to next year's awards — Coldplay, who

are undoubtedly one of our greatest music success stories, and pop sensation Justin Bieber, who will be coming to London for his first-ever Brits performance," said BRITs chairman Max Lou-sada.

"Next year's awards is shaping up to be a fantastic night of British and international music."

The 21-year-old Canadian star and British rock band Coldplay are currently promoting their respective new album.

Bieber's "Purpose" came out

last November and debuted at Number 1 on Billboard 200 before being dethroned in the next week by Adele's "25", which completely blocked Coldplay's "A Head Full of Dreams" from the same chart's top slot.

In addition to the BRITs, Coldplay is preparing itself for its gig at the 2016 Super Bowl. The Chris Martin-led band is headlining the big game's half-time show at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California on 7 February. —PTI



Chris Martin of Coldplay sings "Adventure of a Lifetime" during the 2015 American Music Awards in Los Angeles, California, on 22 November 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

Nuisance or nice? Florida family's holiday lights frazzle neighbours



People view Kathy and Mark Hyatt's house decorated with holiday lights in Plantation, Florida, on 30 November 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

PLANTATION — When it comes to holiday decorations, Kathy and Mark Hyatt go to extremes.

In December, they transform their home in Plantation, Florida, into a 200,000-light spectacle, with Santas, reindeer and candy canes blanketing the lawn, snowflakes and angels twinkling in the sky, and a sign over the garage beckoning visitors to "Believe in the Magic of Christmas."

The reaction of some neighbours and their city? Bah humbug!

"This is a war zone, all because of the ego of that guy," said neighbour Rafael Imbert, 65, who erects a plastic construction fence to keep the thousands of sightseers lured by the lights off his lawn.

Disputes over holiday displays go hand in hand with the annual tradition. One person's festive spirit can bring out the Grinch in others, leading to fines, strained relationships and — in rarer cases — lawsuits claiming that decorations have gone too far.

The Hyatts are the target of such a lawsuit: The city of Plantation, about 30 miles north of Miami, is seeking to shut down their display that it deems a public nuisance. The couple is not backing down.

"They believe it engenders goodwill and a bond between the community," said their Fort Lauderdale-based lawyer, James Helf.

In Ohio, a man has disregarded his critics by again erecting a nativity scene on his lawn portraying Jesus, Mary and Joseph as zombies.

A Maine homeowner used lights to spell out ISIS, prompting calls to police last week that the person might be a sympathizer of the Islamic State militant group. As it turned out, the display included a Santa appearing to urinate on the letters with a stream of white lights, local media reported.

The popular Osborne Family Spectacle of Dancing Lights display is ending its run this holiday season after two decades at Disney's Hollywood Studios in Orlando. More than 2 million lights that belonged to late Arkansas philanthropist Jennings Osborne found a home in Florida in 1995 after he was sued by neighbours and ordered by courts to take down most of his decorations.

In Plantation, Mark Hyatt, a mortgage banker and father of two, said he caught the decorating bug from his devout Catholic parents.

His family starts planning their "Hyatt Extreme Christmas" display in July, begins decorating in October and switches on the lights the day after Thanksgiving. On weekends in December, they welcome visitors inside the gates of their circle driveway for a close-up look at their collection,

including a miniature Ferris wheel Hyatt built.

"I have kids who came here when they were little and now are coming back with their own kids," he said. "That's the coolest thing of all."

His neighbours are less enchanted. They say strangers knock on their doors asking to use the bathroom, cut through their property to see the display and leave trash in the street — complaints Hyatt contends are untrue or exaggerated.

Several residents on the cul-de-sac said they are forced to flee their homes when the crowds become unbearable.

The city of Plantation sued the Hyatts in 2014 on the grounds that the "carnival-like atmosphere" was incompatible with the neighbourhood. A trial has been set for April.

A city spokesman declined to comment.

Recent visitors were happy to see the lights still shining.

"It makes me feel like a kid again," said Chris Coburn, 37, of nearby Davie, Florida.

Dennis LaFrance, 40, who drove 30 minutes with his three kids to see the display, said he could understand the frustration of the Hyatts' neighbours.

"But to make it go away altogether is kind of Scroogy," he said.—Reuters

Palace Museum to open digital gallery

BEIJING — The Palace Museum in Beijing, also known as the Forbidden City, will launch its new digital gallery on 22 December, a curator said Saturday.

The digital gallery is located at Duanmen Gate, the principal entrance to the imperial palace grounds. The gallery hall features screens displaying and

explaining architectural features and cultural relics, some of which are too old and fragile for real display, said curator Shan Jixiang.

The gallery's first exhibition will introduce the palace through a digital architectural model and give visitors better access to the museum's treasures through virtual reality display.

Completed on Friday, the Duanmen digital gallery will be piloted from 22 December, 2015 to 17 January, 2016. Visitors can make reservations to visit for free on the official website of the Palace Museum.

The English version of the website of the Palace Museum was also launched Friday.—Xinhua

mitv Myanmar International

(21-12-2015 07:00 am~ 22-12-2015 07:00 am) MST

Today Fresh

07:03	Am	News
07:26	Am	The Rising Glory Of Myanmar Arts
07:55	Am	Myanmar Street Foods
08:03	Am	News
08:26	Am	Travelogue: A Tour in Korea (Ep-1)
08:43	Am	Gold from Garbage
08:53	Am	Art Students: Sculpture
09:03	Am	News
09:26	Am	Yangon Markets: Mingalar Wholesale Market
09:35	Am	A Worth Studying Site For Ancient Myanmar Heritages
09:53	Am	Parents' Day
10:03	Am	News
10:26	Am	Caves of Myanmar
10:50	Am	Next Weekend

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

Prime Time

07:03	Pm	News
07:26	Pm	Food Trip (Ep-5) (Part-1)
07:45	Pm	My Tour around Hopone City
08:03	Pm	News
08:26	Pm	Taste Of Myanmar (Rakhine Monte Ti)
08:49	Pm	Chef Life "Myo Min Soe Oo"

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

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

MRTV Entertainment Channel

(21-12-2015, Monday)

6:00 am	• Alinka Wut Yee Music Troupe	7:50 am	• TV Drama Series
6:20 am	• Pyi Thu Ni Ti	8:35 am	• Golden Music of Old Stars
6:40 am	• Fashion Show	8:50 am	• Documentary
6:50 am	• Musical Programme	9:50 am	• Myanmar Video
7:00 am	• TV Drama Series	12:00 noon	• Close Down

MRTV News Channel in Brief

(21-12-2015, Monday)

6:00 am	• Pritta By Venerable Min Gun Sayadaw	4:50 pm	• People's Talks
7:35 am	• People's Talks	5:15 pm	• Documentary
8:35 am	• Documentary (Women in Myanmar Society)	5:35 pm	• Documentary
9:50 am	• ASEAN Sports Light	5:35 pm	• Socio Economic Scenes
10:35 am	• Weekly Entertainment	6:35 pm	• Documentary
11:15 am	• Documentary	6:45 pm	• Documentary
11:35 am	• MRTV's Youth Programme	8:00 pm	• News/ International News/ Weather Report
12:35 pm	• TV Drama Series	8:35 pm	• Documentary
3:35 pm		9:00 pm	• News
			• TV Drama Series

Note/ Hourly News Bulletins (Local + International)

Chelsea restore order after Mourinho, Leicester march on

LONDON — Chelsea began the post-Jose Mourinho era with a 3-1 win over Sunderland at Stamford Bridge to ease away from the Premier League's bottom three on Saturday while Leicester City moved five points clear at the top.

Mourinho, sacked on Thursday after Chelsea's worst start to a season since 1978, had his name chanted by the fans while the likes of striker Diego Costa and midfielder Cesc Fabregas, who some supporters blame for the champions' malaise, were booed.

Some sense of normality was restored in west London with Branislav Ivanovic, Pedro and Oscar on target as Guus Hiddink, confirmed on Saturday as interim coach for the second time having performed the role in 2009, watched from the stands.

Chelsea, who began the day a point above the relegation zone, moved up one place to 15th.

Leicester's unlikely title challenge gathered momentum with a 3-2 victory at Everton that ensures they will spend Christmas top of the table, a year after occupying bottom spot heading into the hectic holiday schedule.

Only Norwich City (1987-88/1988-89) have achieved a similar transformation in top-flight history.

Two Riyad Mahrez penalties and a goal from Shinji Okazaki put Leicester on 38 points from 17 games, with chasing Arsenal and Manchester City, who clash at The Emirates on Monday, on 33 and 32 respectively.



Chelsea's Oscar scores a goal during Barclays Premier League at Stamford Bridge on 19 December 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

"I am very honest," said Leicester's former Chelsea boss Claudio Ranieri, who is now being quizzed on a weekly basis about his side's chances of staying top. "If there are two matches left I think of the title. Now I enjoy."

With Mourinho sacked, the managerial spotlight intensified on Manchester United's Louis van Gaal as his side suffered a third consecutive defeat, lowly Norwich City winning 2-1 for their first victory at Old Trafford since 1989.

Tottenham Hotspur took advantage of United's woes to move above them into fourth place on goal difference thanks to a 2-0 win at Southampton — Harry Kane

and Dele Alli scoring.

Mourinho spent the day watching Middlesbrough, coached by Aitor Karanka, his assistant at Real Madrid, playing at Brighton and Hove Albion in the second-tier Championship while 75km away his former charges finally produced a display worthy of champions, having lost nine of their first 16 league matches.

That did not stop the Chelsea fans displaying their loyalty to the Portuguese coach, who delivered three league titles and numerous other trophies in his two stints in charge.

"Delighted to get the three points today," captain John Terry

told Sky Sports. "There was pressure on us before the game but we brought that on ourselves.

"We are not used to being (in this position) but the fans will support us through this, and more performances like this will put smiles on their faces."

Those waiting for Leicester to falter were disappointed again as Ranieri's team displayed the kind of fast, incisive football that has earned 11 league victories.

Mahrez slotted home from the spot in the 26th minute after Okazaki was bundled over by Ramiro Funes Mori but Romelu Lukaku equalised soon after and has now scored in seven consecutive league

matches.

Algerian Mahrez converted his second penalty just past the hour before Okazaki struck and Kevin Mirallas's late replay proved in vain for the home side.

Mahrez now has 13 league goals this season, the same as Lukaku, and two behind team mate Jamie Vardy, who combined with Mahrez to earn the second penalty.

Manchester United were booed off at halftime and full time at Old Trafford where they trailed to goals from Norwich's Cameron Jerome and Alex Tettey before Anthony Martial replied for the misfiring Reds.

They are now without a win in six matches in all competitions.

"We know that it is not good enough for us, the players know that, I know that, the board knows that and the fans know that," Van Gaal told Sky Sports.

Sixth-placed Crystal Palace won 2-1 at Stoke City while promoted Bournemouth claimed a third consecutive league win to move above from danger with a late Charlie Daniels penalty sealing a 2-1 success at West Bromwich Albion.

West Brom had James McClean sent off in the first half and Salomon Rondon in stoppage time.

Bottom club Aston Villa claimed a point in a 1-1 draw at Newcastle United thanks to a fine Jordan Ayew goals but remain in deep trouble — 10 points adrift of the safety zone.—Reuters

Tabuena gets maiden Asian Tour win at Philippine Open

MUMBAI — Home favourite Miguel Tabuena made his decisive move on the back nine to secure a one-stroke victory, his first on the Asian Tour, at the weather-shortened Philippine Open yesterday.

The \$300,000 event teed off a day later than its scheduled Thursday start and was reduced to 54 holes due to persistent rain caused by Typhoon Melor, which hit central Philippines.

Tabuena, 21, holed five birdies after the turn for a six-under-par 66 and a three-round total of 14-under at the Luisita Golf and Country Club north of Manila to finish a shot ahead of Australian Scott Barr.

"I'm glad the Philippine Open is my first Asian Tour title," Tabuena told reporters. "I'm really happy that my name will be on this prestigious trophy alongside some of the legends in golf in Asia's oldest National Open. "I

gave myself a goal at the start of the day which was to shoot a 66 or lower. There are a lot of birdie chances and people can make a move.

"I was one-under after the turn and I thought I lost some ground. I knew I needed to go out with all guns blazing."

Barr's 68 was not enough to claim a first Tour win but his second-place finish ensured he retained his card for the next year by jumping 15 spots to 49th place on the Order of Merit.

India's Himmat Rai scorched the course with a blemish-free 63 to share third place alongside Thailand's Chinnarat Phadungsil (67), two strokes behind the winner.

Canadian Lindsay Renolds, who held the lead after the opening two rounds, suffered a Sunday meltdown, carding a 73 to finish in a tie for 10th place.—Reuters

Not good enough, says Van Gaal, as pressure intensifies

LONDON — Bookmakers were busy slashing the odds on Louis van Gaal to be replaced in the Manchester United hotseat by Jose Mourinho on Saturday after a 2-1 home defeat to struggling Norwich City in the Premier League.

That may be a knee-jerk reaction, but after going six games without a victory in all competitions and suffering a third defeat in a row, the spotlight is intensifying on Dutchman Van Gaal.

"We know we have to beat Norwich. We know that it is not good enough for us, the players know that, I know that, the board knows that and the fans know that," former Barcelona and Bayern

Munich manager Van Gaal told Sky Sports.

Asked if he would be given time to turn around United's season, he added: "It's not up to me I think to answer that question but we shall see.

"We've lost three matches in a row. We can't accept that and that's why I have to repeat, we have to stick together and believe in ourselves."

A week after tumbling out of the Champions League following a defeat to VfL Wolfsburg and losing to modest Bournemouth in the league, United were booed off at halftime and fulltime as Norwich won at Old Trafford for the first time since 1989.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Cameron Jerome put Norwich in front before halftime and when Alex Tettey made it 2-0 the atmosphere inside Old Trafford was mutinous. Anthony Martial did reply for United but Chris Smalling wasted a great chance to equalise meaning Van Gaal's side slipped out of the top four.

Mourinho, sacked by champions Chelsea on Thursday, issued a statement through his agent on Saturday saying he will not be taking a break from the game.

One leading bookmaker had the Portuguese at 8-15 favourite to replace Van Gaal who is 1-5 favourite to become the sixth Premier League boss to lose his job so far this season.

Van Gaal, who took United back into the Champions League this season after a fourth-placed Premier League finish in his first campaign in charge, has been criticised for his style of play by fans used to the kind of swashbuckling football served up for the past two decades.—Reuters