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CAROLERS SING AT PR PALACE

Christian youths pray for president on Christmas Eve

THE Music Band of Ethnic Christian Youths for Peace, led by Reverend Saw Shwe Lin, the general secretary of the Myanmar Council of Churches, recited prayers for President U Thein Sein, his wife Daw Khin Khin Win and their family at the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw on Christmas Eve.

The band, led by Nawtar Haynyaul and U Lin Htet Htet Oo, sang hymns. After that, Reverend Saw Doe Doe War and Reverend Saw Shwe Lin recited prayers for the family of the president and the country.

Then, the president wished the band, which later presented Christmas gifts to the family of the president.

The president and his family greeted the band warmly and presented gifts to them before posing for documentary photographs.—*Myanma News Agency*



President U Thein Sein exchanges gifts with Christian youths. PHOTO: MNA

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Eight Naval Ships launched, Myanmar Navy aims to become Blue Water Navy

THE Myanmar Navy aims to become a Blue Water Navy as said proudly by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing at a ceremony held yesterday to launch eight new naval vessels.

The naval vessels sailed past the Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services in a single line formation.

The launching ceremony coincided with the 68th Anniversary

Defence Services (Navy) Day. The naval vessels include a rocket carrying frigate and a seagoing hospital ship, which is an equivalent of a 25-bed hospital on shore inclusive of a CT scan room, a minor eye

operation room, a minor operation theatre and a major operation theatre in addition to an intensive care unit (ICU). There are also a delivery room and a dental chair aboard the ship.—*Myanma News Agency*

Disaster victims in Haka get new housing

LOCAL authorities in Haka began on 22 December to relocate people who lost their homes in landslides around Chin State last rainy season to affordable houses.

An initial 33 households from two villages moved into new homes allotted to them by the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry.

More households will receive new housing when it becomes available in near future.

Families were selected for relocation through a lottery system.

More than 400 houses are now under construction by the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry, and

the construction is targeted to be completed within the next few months.

Landslides and flash floods caused severe damage in western Chin State earlier this year, leaving more than 1,000 homes damaged or destroyed, affecting 7,670 people and killing five.

The nationwide death toll from the landslides and floods between June and late August reached 120. Most of the deaths occurred in Rakhine State, where 56 people were killed, followed by 23 in Sagaing and 12 in Mandalay Region, according to data from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement.—*Haka IPRD*



A family arrives at their new home in Haka. PHOTO: HAKA IPRD

Appeal to be sought on verdict in Koh Tao murder case

Ye Myint

AN appeal will be brought against the death penalty given to two Myanmar citizens found guilty of a British duo's murder in Koh Tao, Thailand, according to a statement revealing the steps to be taken posted by a director at the Myanmar President's Office yesterday.

Further efforts will be made diplomatically without harming Thailand's sovereignty, independent judgment nor friendship and amity between the two governments and two peoples, the director wrote on his Facebook page "Hmu Zaw". As for Ko Win Zaw Tun and Ko Zaw Lin, the director presented five steps to be taken in accord with the

law and legal system of Thailand. Appeals against the verdicts will be filed with the High Court. The sentences will be amended if the appeals against their convictions are successful, the director wrote, adding that they must appeal within one month.

Committing to the first steps prior to appealing the sentences, the Lawyers Council of Thailand and the Myanmar Embassy and Myanmar Civil Society Organisations in Thailand will have coordination meetings. A 21-member legal committee provided by the Council is set to meet on 11 January, said the director. It is planned that an appeal will be sent to the Supreme Court of Thailand and the Privy Council of Thailand, if necessary, in the hope of further legal action, he added.

On his Facebook page, U Ye Htut, Union Minister for Information as well as presidential spokesperson, also wrote hoping the accused two are able to prove they are innocent of the murder during an appeal process after reviewing the evidences related to the case. The Union minister stated that the government will assist the appeal process in accordance with the law of Thailand while the Myanmar Embassy in Thailand will be in cooperation with Thailand-based Myanmar CSOs.

The two workers were sentenced to death by the Koh Samui Provincial Court for the 2014 murder of the two British tourists—Hannah Witheridge and David Miller—on the island of Koh Tao.

Myanmar Gazette

NAY PYI TAW The President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has appointed the following persons as heads of service organizations shown against each on probation from the date they assume charge of their duties.

Name	Appointment
(1) U Sein Oo Deputy Director-General Consular and Legal Affairs Department Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Director-General Consular and Legal Affairs Department Ministry of Foreign Affairs
(2) U Myint Thu Deputy Director-General ASEAN Affairs Department Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Director-General Strategic Studies and Training Department Ministry of Foreign Affairs
(3) U Soe Thein Deputy Director-General Posts and Telecommunications Department Ministry of Communications and Information Technology	Director-General Posts and Telecommunications Department Ministry of Communications and Information Technology
(4) Daw Nwe Nwe Win Deputy Director-General Budget Department Ministry of Finance	Director-General Budget Department Ministry of Finance

34th Pearl Sale event earns more than K4.2 billion

THE 34th Pearl Sale earned more than K4.2 billion (US\$3,195,822) for the sale of 347 pearl lots yesterday through a tender system.

The sale, organised by the Myanma Pearl Enterprise under the Ministry of Mines, put a total of 276 pearl lots on sale during the three-day event, which started on 22 December.

More than 120 pearl lots were sold on the last day, and more than 220 pearl lots were sold in an open tender on the second day.—*Myanma News Agency*



A gems trader evaluates pearls at 34th Pearl Sales. PHOTO: MNA

Hteik Tan labour dispute to be settled

NEGOTIATIONS to settle a labour dispute between Hteik Tan Myanmar Garment Factory and its employees were held today at Insein Township General Administration Office, according to the Factories and General Labour Laws Inspection Department.

The negotiations were sponsored by the Yangon Region Labour Dispute Settlement Arbitration Council.

More than 200 workers from the factory took to the streets yesterday demanding governmental departments assist in settling the labour dispute as soon as possible. The disagreement arose over workers' November salary and the provisions of the 1936 wages law.—*Zaw Moore*



A new naval ship being launched at 68th Anniversary Defence Services (Navy) Day. (See story page 1) PHOTO: SENIOR GENERAL MIN AUNG HLAING'S FACEBOOK



A church in Yangon decorated with lights for Christmas Festival. PHOTO: ZAW MIN LAT

Bills signed into laws

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Office announced yesterday that the President signed the following bills into law.

- (1) The Bill Amending the Myanmar Mining Law (2015 Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Law No. 72)
- (2) The Bill Amending the Myanmar Evidence Act (2015 Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Law No. 73)—*Myanma News Agency*

Vegetable market planned in Insein

DAGON International Co Ltd. is planning to establish a new vegetable and flower market of international standard in Insein township, Yangon Region, according to the Yangon City Development Committee.

The market will be furnished with warehouses, cold storage facilities, guest houses, truck terminals, fuel stations,

restaurants, banks, laboratories and stalls for processed meat, seafood, frozen food, seasonal fruit and nursery plants.

The company won the bid for the contract to build the market in Insein with the aim of encouraging the consumption of organic agricultural produce at reasonable prices and to help raise the living standards of

farmers who account for 70% of the country's population. The market will provide its own generators to ensure 24/7 services. In accordance with the terms and conditions of the tender, Dagon International Company established a public company, called Myanmar Agro Public Company on 14.9.2015.—*Yi Yi Myint and Ohn Mar Thant*



New vegetable and flower market under construction. PHOTO: ZAW MIN LAT

Enabling the disabled

THE disabled are unemployed and thus unable to earn an income and contribute to society, said Nay Lin Soe, the director of the Myanmar Disabled Income Generation Programme, at a media briefing held yesterday at the Central Hotel in Yangon.

“Our main objective is for a society to emerge in which the

entire mass of the disabled are free from dependence and are able to enjoy equality. Our aim is to provide the disabled with a chance to make full use of their capacity. We have been able to convince private enterprises that the disabled are also capable of working to earn a living. They have found job positions that suit

the disabled. For example, Blue Ocean and the Myanmar Apex Bank have offered suitable positions to 36 and 9 persons respectively. They have also promised to create more job opportunities for the disabled in the future,” he added.

The programme has already opened 29 branch offices in oth-

er states and divisions to help the disabled achieve freedom, mobility and employment, it is hoped. A total of more than 2,000 people have already registered with these branch offices. The year 2016 will witness up to 30 branch offices operating throughout the country.

Another director from the

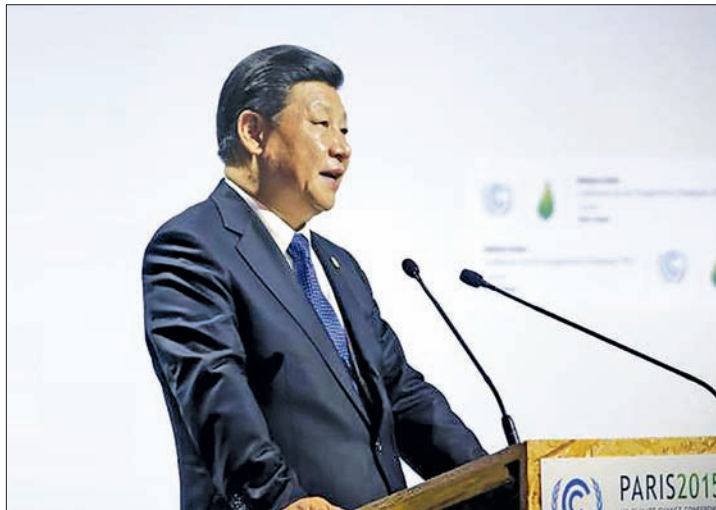
same programme, Ms Yu Ya Thu said, “We have provided scholarship awards to 24 persons for them to pursue tertiary education. We intend to increase the awards up to 100 next year. The thing is that the applicants are few and far between. We aim to increase our coverage in 2016.”—*Myat Sandi Thin Zaw*

Philippine poll body bars female senator to run for president

MANILA — The Philippine Commission on Elections (Comelec) en banc has upheld the disqualification of a female senator to run for president in the 2016 elections, a poll official said Wednesday. Senator Grace Poe has been disqualified to run for president for failing to meet the constitutional requirements of a candidate, being a natural-born Filipino and a resident of the Philippines for at least 10 years on the day of the elections, said Comelec chairman Andres Bautista.

But Poe, whose qualification as a senator is also being questioned, can appeal the Comelec's decision before the Supreme Court. The female senator is a founding and was adopted only by famous actor and actress couple in the country. She was an American citizen before she decided to run and won in the Philippine Senate in 2010.—*Xinhua*

China will not waver from 'one country, two systems' in Hong Kong — Xi Jinping



Chinese President Xi Jinping. PHOTO: REUTERS

SHANGHAI — Chinese President Xi Jinping has said China will stick steadfastly to the "one country, two systems" model used to administer Hong Kong, the official Xinhua news

agency reported.

Hong Kong, a former British colony, returned to Chinese rule in 1997 under the "one country, two systems" formula that gives it substantial auto-

my and freedoms, with universal suffrage promised as an "ultimate goal".

The business hub was hit by 79 days of protests last year, when activists streamed on to highways to demand full democracy in what amounted to the biggest political challenge to Beijing's Communist Party leaders in years.

The protests failed to persuade China to allow a fully democratic vote for Hong Kong's next leader in 2017. Beijing says voters have to choose from a list of pre-approved candidates.

"New situations have arisen in the practice of the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle in Hong Kong in recent years," Xinhua reported Xi as saying late on Wednesday.

He was speaking during a meeting with Hong Kong Chief

Executive Leung Chun-ying in Beijing.

Xi said China's central government "fully endorsed" the work being carried out by Leung in Hong Kong, and said he hoped the city's leadership could "unite all circles in Hong Kong" to maintain social and political stability, Xinhua said.

In a separate meeting with Macau Chief Executive Chui Sai On, President Xi repeated calls for an "appropriate diversification" of Macau's economy, Xinhua said. Macau's casino business makes up more than 80 per cent of government revenue.

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

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India closing in on Westinghouse deal to build six nuclear reactors

NEW DELHI — India expects to seal a contract with Westinghouse Electric Co LLC to build six nuclear reactors in the first half of next year, a senior government official said, in a sign its \$150 billion dollar nuclear power programme is getting off the ground.

The proposed power plant in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state of Gujarat will accelerate India's plans to build roughly 60 reactors, which would make it the world's second-biggest nuclear energy market after China.

India wants to dramatically increase its nuclear capacity to 63,000 megawatts (MW) by 2032, from 5,780 MW, as part of a broader push to move away from fossil fuels, cut greenhouse gas emissions and avoid the dangerous effects of climate change.

The United States signed a pact with India in 2008, opening the way for nuclear commerce that had previously been stymied due to New Delhi's nuclear weapons programme and shunning of the global Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

But hopes that reactor makers would get billions of dollars of new business evaporated after India adopted a law in 2010 giving the state-run operator Nuclear Power Corp of India Ltd (NPCIL) the right to seek damages from suppliers in the event of an accident.

Indian officials have been trying to assuage suppliers' con-



The logo of the American company Westinghouse is pictured at the World Nuclear Exhibition 2014. PHOTO: REUTERS

cerns, including by setting up an insurance pool with a liability cap of 15 billion Indian rupees (\$226.16 million). A final hurdle — ratification of the International Atomic Energy Agency's Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage (CSC) — is expected within weeks, the Indian government official said.

The CSC requires signatories to shift liability to the operator and offers access to relief funds.

In a statement, Westinghouse said it expected India would move towards a framework that satisfies the CSC and channels accident liability exclusively to the operator.

The statement made no reference to ongoing negotiations.

Shares of Westinghouse's parent, Toshiba Corp (6502.T), jumped as much as 3.3 per cent on Thursday after the news, before slipping back. A Toshiba spokesman declined to comment on the report, but noted that Westinghouse has been confident of winning orders from India.

A deal with Westinghouse could also put pressure on General Electric Co (GE.N), whose nuclear energy venture with Hitachi (6501.T) was offered a site six years ago to build reactors.

GE has still not decided

whether it would move ahead with the plan, the official said, adding that India was keen for a decision from the company soon. GE Hitachi Nuclear Energy said it had strong interest in India, and that the CSC would be "a sustainable solution to concerns about India's existing domestic nuclear liability law".

India's plans for ramping up nuclear capacity have in the past fallen far short of targets and industry officials say that the aim to lift the share of nuclear power to a quarter of its energy mix, from barely 3 per cent now, is very ambitious.—*Reuters*

Reliance signs pact with Russian arms firm as Modi visits Moscow

NEW DELHI — India's Reliance Defence said yesterday it had signed a manufacturing and maintenance deal potentially worth \$6 billion with Russia's Almaz-Antey, the maker of an air defence system that sources said the Indian military was poised to buy.

The partnership between the Indian firm controlled by billionaire Anil Ambani and the Russian firm was announced as Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi began a trip to Moscow aimed at strengthening defence ties.

Earlier this week, Indian defence ministry sources said the government had cleared the purchase of five S-400 air defence systems that are estimated to cost about \$4.5 billion in a bid to modernize the country's defences against airborne attacks.

"The two sides identified the air defence missile systems.... radars and automated control systems as areas of partnership.... as well as offset policies of the Indian Ministry of Defence," Reliance said in a statement.

Under the offsets policy, global defence contractors are required to invest a percentage of the value of any deal in India to help it build a defence industrial base and reduce imports for a military that has emerged as the world's biggest buyer of arms in recent years.



Russia's President Vladimir Putin (L) and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi exchange presents during a meeting at the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia, on 23 December 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

India is forecast to spend \$250 billion over the next decade to upgrade its military and Modi's government wants a greater role for Indian state and defence firms.

Reliance is forging close ties with Russia to jumpstart its ambi-

tions to develop a defence business from scratch. It said it had also discussed joint implementation of modernization, repair and overhaul of Almaz-Antey systems already in service in India.

The company also plans to bid for contracts for local man-

ufacture of helicopters, submarines and ships. Earlier this month, Ambani's Reliance Infrastructure took sole management control of Pipavav Defence and Offshore Engineering Co which has built patrol vessels for the Indian navy.—Reuters

Cambodia's capital airport hits 3m passenger mark

PHNOM PENH — The Phnom Penh International Airport achieved a new milestone yesterday by breaking the 3 million passenger mark a year for the first time in its history, according to a statement from the Cambodia Airports.

The 3 millionth passenger was Cambodian woman Kong Naleap, who flew back home from China's Hong Kong on a flight operated by Dragonair, the statement said.

To celebrate the event, the airport staged a series of special features upon the arrival of the flight. One of them was a water cannon salute when the aircraft headed to its parking lot.

Naleap marveled at the particular souvenir given to her, the statement said.

The 3 million passenger figure is obtained by tallying all international and domestic passengers arriving at and departing from the airport since the beginning of 2015.

"Today's achievement reflects the airport's passenger traffic momentum which should report a nearly 16 percent growth on a year-on-year basis," it said.—Xinhua

China waste site firm 'urged to stop work' days before landslide

BEIJING — The firm managing a waste heap which collapsed and buried dozens of buildings in southern China was urged to stop work four days before the disaster, an executive with a government-appointed monitoring agency said yesterday, citing safety concerns.

Two people died and more than 70 people were missing after Sunday's landslide at an industrial park in Shenzhen, a boomtown near Hong Kong, in China's latest industrial disaster. A man was pulled out alive from the rubble on Wednesday.

The man-made disaster has raised questions about China's industrial safety standards and lack of oversight. On Tuesday, police raided offices of Shenzhen Yixianglong, the company managing the dump site.

Executives from the Shenzhen J-star Project Management Consultant Co., a consulting company which was hired by officials in Shenzhen to supervise engineering projects, had first

recommended that Yixianglong "stop all work" and repeatedly requested that they do so in the next few months, Bian Yuxiang, J-star's deputy general manager, told Reuters by telephone.

Bian said that J-star highlighted five issues about the dump site to government investigators, questioning quality inspection and saying Yixianglong had failed to carry out tests on slopes around the area and did not meet safety standards such as the wearing of helmets. In a 16 December meeting that was attended by officials from the Guangming New District Urban Management Bureau and the Shenzhen Keyu Engineering Consultant Co. Ltd, an engineering consulting firm, J-star urged Yixianglong to suspend all operations, Bian said.

"All the parties present agreed to it," Bian said, adding that the work should have stopped then. Bian said J-star "did not have the right" to order Yixianglong to stop the work.—Reuters

Japan gov't mum on whether missing journalist held hostage in Syria

TOKYO — The Japanese government declined to reveal yesterday if it has confirmed whether a Japanese journalist reportedly kidnapped in Syria is being held by an armed group, saying only that it is dealing with the latest information.

"Ensuring the safety of Japanese nationals is the government's key responsibility. We are doing our utmost to make use of various networks of information and take necessary actions," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said at a news conference.

Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida also made similar remarks, but neither would acknowledge whether the government confirmed that Jumpei Yasuda, reportedly kidnapped in July, has been detained.

Kishida told reporters separately at his ministry that while the government is "aware of the report," further information cannot be revealed due to the sensitivity of the situation.

The Paris-based Reporters Without Borders said Tuesday it "calls on the Japanese govern-



Japanese freelance journalist Yasuda Jumpei (L) and human rights activist Nobutaka Watanabe speak at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan in Tokyo, in April 2004. PHOTO: REUTERS

ment to do everything possible to obtain the release of Yasuda."

"Those holding Yasuda have started a countdown for the payment of a ransom, failing which they are threatening to execute him or sell him to another terrorist group," the organisation said, based on information it had obtained on Monday.

The 41-year-old journalist went missing after entering Syria in late June from Turkey to cover the civil war in the Middle Eastern country.

Japan was earlier this year rocked by a hostage crisis that resulted in the beheading of two Japanese by Islamic State militants in Syria.—Kyodo News

US plans raids to deport families who surged across border

WASHINGTON — The US Department of Homeland Security has begun preparing for a series of raids that would target for deportation hundreds of families who have flocked to the United States since the start of last year, *The Washington Post* reported on Wednesday.

Citing people familiar with the operation, the *Post* said the nationwide campaign to deport the illegal immigrants by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement could start as soon as early January.

It would be the first large-scale effort to deport families who have fled violence in Central America, the newspaper said.

More than 100,000 families with both adults and children have made the journey across the southwest border since last year, the *Post* reported.

The operation would target only adults and children who have already been ordered removed from the United States by an immigration judge, the newspaper said.

The *Post* said the operation has not been given final approval by DHS. The number of people targeted is expected to be in the hundreds and possibly greater, the newspaper said.—*Reuters*

Kosovo court rules some parts of EU-brokered deal are illegal



People gather in a peaceful protest called by Kosovo's opposition against the EU-brokered accord between Kosovo and Serbia in the capital Pristina, in November 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

PRISTINA — Kosovo's highest court ruled on Wednesday that parts of an European Union-brokered agreement with Serbia violated its constitution, after weeks of violent protests against the deal.

The August accord has given rise to Kosovo's worst political crisis since the troubled young Balkan state declared independence from Serbia in 2008. Police have arrested 13 opposition party members for repeatedly releasing tear gas in parliament in protest at the deal, and their supporters have

clashed with police in the capital Pristina.

Under the deal, minority Serbs would be granted greater local powers in the ethnic Albanian-majority Balkan country and the possibility of some financing from Serbia.

The deal was an outgrowth of EU efforts to ease tensions between Serbia and its former province, but many Kosovo Albanians oppose any concessions made to Belgrade.

Opposition leaders say the agreement will destabilise Kosovo

by dividing the small Balkan country along ethnic lines.

In its ruling on the accord, the Constitutional Court said some of its "principles are not entirely in compliance with the respective constitutional standards". The questionable provisions had to do with the creation of an association of Serb municipalities, a longtime demand of local Serbs who bitterly opposed secession from Serbia.

But opposition Kosovo Albanians had said this step would enshrine significant local auto-

my for Serbs resembling post-war Bosnia, which is split between autonomous, nationalist Serb and Bosniak-Croat entities.

Kosovo government sources said that as a result of the court's ruling, parts of the deal might have to be renegotiated with Serbia and it was hard to forecast Belgrade's reaction.

President Atifete Jahjaga, who asked the court for a ruling, has called on governing coalition and opposition parties alike to respect the decision and "use this moment to restart political dialogue and restore normality to the country".

Some opposition parties welcomed the ruling but did not say whether they would cancel a mass demonstration set for 9 January.

The opposition has also been protesting against a border demarcation deal with Montenegro, saying that the government had ceded some sovereign Kosovo territory to its neighbour. The embassy of the United States, Kosovo's biggest patron, said this week Washington saw no problem with the demarcation line as it closely mirrored the border defined by Kosovo's 1974 constitution when it was part of federal Yugoslavia.

Kosovo seceded from Serbia in 1999 when NATO carried out 11 weeks of air strikes to halt the killing and expulsion of ethnic Albanians by Serbian security forces bent on crushing a guerrilla insurgency.—*Reuters*

NEWS IN BRIEF

Suspected bomb kills one at Istanbul airport

ISTANBUL — One person was killed when an explosion hit an Istanbul airport overnight and damaged five planes, a Turkish minister said, adding that it was still too early to confirm whether the blast had been caused by a bomb. The blast at Sabiha Gokcen, the city's second airport and located on its Asian side, occurred shortly after 2:00am (midnight GMT), local budget carrier Pegasus said, fatally wounding a cleaner on one of its planes. "There was damage to five airplanes in total due to the impact of shrapnel. Weakness in the airport's security is out of the question. All international security standards are being implemented," Transportation Minister Binali Yildirim told reporters.—*Reuters*

Syria ready to take part in Geneva peace talks

BEIJING — Syria is ready to take part in peace talks in Geneva and hopes that the dialogue will help the country form a national unity government, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem said yesterday. The UN Security Council last Friday unanimously approved a resolution endorsing an international road map for a Syrian peace process, a rare show of unity among major powers on a conflict that has claimed more than a quarter of a million lives.

The UN plans to convene peace talks in Geneva towards the end of January. Moualem, who spoke to reporters in English, said he had told Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi that Syria was "ready to participate in the Syrian-Syrian dialogue in Geneva without any foreign interference". He said that "our delegation will be ready as soon as we receive a list of the opposition delegation".—*Reuters*

Severe storms kill 6 in Southern US

WASHINGTON — Severe storms unleashing tornadoes, heavy rain and hail across the southern and central United States left at least six people dead and dozens injured while snarling traffic as holiday travel began in earnest for the Christmas holiday weekend.

The stormy weather scrambled winter getaway plans in Florida even as dreams of a white Christmas melted in northeastern swaths of the country where unseasonably warm temperatures prevailed.

A large tornado raked a 100-mile stretch of northern Mississippi in the late afternoon, demolishing or heavily damaging dozens of homes and other buildings in a six-county area before plowing into Tennessee, authorities said.—*Reuters*

Ninth person arrested in Belgium over Paris attacks

BRUSSELS — Brussels police have arrested a man in connection with the 13 November militant attacks in Paris which killed 130 people, federal prosecutors said yesterday, bringing the total number of arrests in Belgium to nine.

The man was arrested earlier this week but prosecutors kept it quiet in order not to alert potential accomplices, a spokesman for federal prosecutors said. More details will be released later yesterday, he said.

Belgian newspaper *DH* reported that the man arrested had been contacted by Hasna Ait Boulahcen, who gave shelter to the presumed ringleader of the Paris attacks, Abdelhamid Abaaoud. Boulahcen and Abaaoud were both killed in a police raid days after the attacks.—*Reuters*

Russia issues Crimea banknote in move likely to irk Ukraine

MOSCOW — Russia on Wednesday issued a new banknote dedicated to Crimea, the Ukrainian peninsula it annexed last year, in a move likely to anger Kiev which says it wants the territory back.

Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine in March last year in a military operation denounced by the West which imposed retaliatory sanctions on Moscow that remain in place.

The new banknote, worth 100 rubles (\$1.41), depicts a memorial to sunken ships in the port of Sevastopol, where Russia keeps its Black Sea Fleet, and the Swallow's Nest, a cliff top castle near Yalta.—*Reuters*

Sombre Christmas for Iraq's Christians under threat from Islamic State

BAGHDAD — With Christmas falling this year a day after Prophet Mohammad's birthday, the city of Baghdad is holding Christmas celebrations in a sign of brotherhood with Iraq's hard-pressed Christian community.

Fireworks will illuminate the Tigris river every night of the week and a 25-metre (82 feet) Christmas tree has been set up in Zawraa public park. In Zayuna camp, in the east of the city, children listened to Christmas carols on Wednesday and danced with Santa Claus to Iraqi songs.

But, though grateful, many Christians say the gesture comes too late to improve their lot in Iraq, their homeland for nearly 2,000 years, but where Islamic State is making their future increasingly bleak.

"I saw some nice gestures from many people on Facebook and this made me happy, to be honest, that people are celebrating Christmas together with us in defiance of Daesh," said Mariam, a 29-year-old school teacher in Baghdad, referring to Islamic State.

"But is it real? I don't think

so," she said.

"Christians who left Iraq don't wish to return and some of them are even nagging us to leave, saying that even if we make it through this ordeal, the next one will be the end of it," she added, asking to be identified only by her first name. Islamic State, which swept through a third of Iraq in 2014 in its drive to build a caliphate, has displaced more than 200,000 Christians from the northern region of Nineveh, the cradle of the eastern Assyrian church, according to Iraqi Christian MP Imad Yohana.

So uncertain has become the fate of Iraq's Christians that some reminisce about days of Saddam Hussein, the dictator whose rule of a quarter century ended in 2003, when a US-led coalition invaded the country.

"There wasn't any discrimination back in the previous regime, things changed afterwards," said Abu Fadi, a 51-year-old father of three who works in Zayuna camp set up especially for Christian refugees fleeing Islamic State.

A key figure of Saddam's regime, Tariq Aziz, who was his foreign minister, was a Christian.



Displaced children who fled Islamic State listen to a Christmas carol service at Zayuna camp in Baghdad on 23 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

He died in prison in June. Saddam was hanged at the end of 2006.

"The toppling of the regime allowed the previously suppressed extremists to surface, from both sects," added Abu Fadi, referring to Shi'ite Muslims who rose to prominence after Saddam's removal, and Sunni Muslims to whom the dictator belonged and who now feel marginalized.

While the persecution by IS is the worst since the modern Iraqi state was created in the last century, scores of Christians have

been kidnapped or killed, or had their churches bombed and been forced to leave their homes since 2004. Iraq's Christian population has dropped from 1.3 million people in the 1997 census to about 650,000 now, said lawmaker Yohana. Their number ought to have been around 2 million by now under normal circumstances, he said. Western countries make it easier for Christians in the Middle East to obtain visas on human rights grounds, unwittingly contributing to depletion of their numbers, he

said. The Women of Baghdad Association, a multi-religious organisation focused on fighting abuse against women, on Wednesday organised a gift distribution in Zayuna camp, where the children listened to a Christmas carol service.

"Christmas is in our hearts religiously, but I am depressed because it is not the same socially," said Said Jalal, 31, a volunteer worker at the camp. "Most of my family and acquaintances are either displaced or have left."—Reuters

UNSC backs Libya peace deal, no Western air strikes sought

UNITED NATIONS — The UN Security Council (UNSC) on Wednesday endorsed a UN-brokered agreement among Libya's warring factions to form a national unity government, a deal Western powers hope will bring stability and help to combat a growing Islamic State presence.

Libya's UN ambassador, Ibrahim Dabbashi, said Libyan authorities have no plans to request Western air strikes against Islamic State militants anytime soon, if at all. He dismissed media reports citing him as saying the resolution would lead to a swift Libyan appeal for Western military intervention.

The unanimously adopted resolution, drafted by Britain, made clear that Libya's future unity government should be the sole representative for the North African country, where competing governments have long vied for power.

Four years after Muammar Gaddafi's fall, Libya is deeply fractured, with a self-declared government in Tripoli and an internationally recognised one in the east, each backed by coalitions of former rebels and militias. Hardliners in both Libyan factions reject the peace deal.

The resolution said the council welcomed the formation of the so-called Presidency Council in Libya



General view of damage at the scene of an explosion at the Mislattah checkpoint near Khoms, on the coast road between Tripoli and Misrata Libya in November 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

and urged it to form a unity government within 30 days as called for in last week's agreement.

It also urged the Presidency Council to finalise interim security arrangements necessary for bringing stability to Libya and called on UN member states to "respond urgently to requests for assistance" from Libya's unity government.

This did not mean Libya wanted US, British, French or other countries conducting bombing sorties against Islamic State militants in Libya.

"No one is thinking about re-

questing foreign intervention at the moment," Dabbashi told Reuters before the vote.

"We are willing to fight ISIS ourselves," Dabbashi added, using an acronym for Islamic State.

Dabbashi said Libya may eventually want air support from Western countries in the fight against Islamic State but suggested that such a request, if it comes, was not imminent. The priority was strengthening Libyan security capabilities with Western training and lifting the UN arms embargo, he said.—Reuters

Fire at Saudi hospital kills 25, injures 107

DUBAI — A pre-dawn fire at a hospital in Saudi Arabia's southwestern port city of Jazan yesterday killed 25 people and injured 107, the Saudi civil defence agency said in a statement.

The fire at Jazan General Hospital broke out on the first floor, in the intensive care unit and the maternity ward, the agency said.

The injured were transferred to private and general

hospitals in the area. The fire was brought under control and an investigation into its cause was under way, the agency added.

Photographs published on Twitter by the agency showed intense black smoke and an intense blaze which appeared to have severely damaged the interior of the hospital, a white-walled building of about three storeys.—Reuters

UN Security Council alarmed by Yemen ceasefire violations

UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations Security Council on Wednesday voiced alarm at breaches of a ceasefire in Yemen that was introduced alongside UN-brokered peace talks aimed at ending a civil war between the exiled government and Iranian-allied Houthi rebels.

The 15-nation council issued a statement noting its "deep concern at the number of violations of the cessation of hostilities committed during the talks."

The unanimously approved declaration came out of Tuesday's council meeting on Yemen, the first public session on the con-

flict since it began nine months ago. The statement also "emphasized that the cessation of hostilities and compliance with related Security Council resolutions should lead to a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire."

A first round of peace talks adjourned on Sunday and the UN's envoy to Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, said the two sides would meet again on 14 January. Warring parties in Yemen agreed to a renewable seven-day ceasefire under UN auspices that started 15 December, but it has been repeatedly violated.—Reuters

OPINION

A conspiracy of silence

Kyaw Thura

A wave of public protest came together in front of the Thai embassy in Yangon following the announcement of the death sentence handed down by a Thai court on Thursday to two young Myanmar migrant workers for the murders of two British tourists on a beach on the island of Kho Tao in September last year.

The trial of the two men ended on 11 October amid controversy over the police's handling of the case, a dispute over DNA tests and allegations of confessions under duress.

The victims David Miller and Hannah Withridge were found bludgeoned to death on the beach, with reports stating that an autopsy revealed the woman had been raped.

Forensic scientists and lawyers defending the alleged murderers Ko Win Zaw Tun and Ko Zaw Lin have made a convincing argument for police incompetence in managing the crime scene for the collection of evidence, calling the trial and investigative procedures a complete shambles.

Whether or not the two Myanmar men committed the murder, it is absolutely necessary for

the Myanmar government to step in through diplomatic channels and, in cooperation with Thailand's Lawyers Council, to demand that the Thai government reconsider the case until their innocence or involvement is proved.

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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.

A Visit to the Day Care Center for the Aged

Khin Maung Myint

ON the 15th of December, 2015, I had an opportunity to visit and learn first-hand, how a day care center for the aged is being run. The visit was made possible by an acquaintance of mine who is enjoying the services of that center. He mentioned about the center during a conversation and urged me to seek the services of that center, as I am in the seventy ninth year of my life and is living alone on myself, without any helper or companion, which made me eligible to get admitted.

I thank him for his advice, but I have no intention to enter the day care center as I am still able to take care of myself and still in a healthy state of mind and body, I am not yet in need of such help at present and do not want to deprive other needy persons. However, I may unavoidably need assistance one day, so I was curious to learn about that day care center. Also, I have an idea to write an article about that center so as to make the public aware of how much that center is contributing to the society.

I had heard about the existence of that center before, but I have no idea of how effective and efficient are the services it is providing to the elderly people. So this opportunity afforded me a chance to learn first-hand from the administrator, the services they are providing. From the discussions with the administrator and from the brochures detailing the activities and other informations given to me, I came to know many interesting points.

The center is under the charge of the Department of Social Welfare, one of the departments under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. It is a non-residential care center: meaning there is no provision for overnight stays. It provides the services totally free of charge to the needy elderly, an undertaking,

which is almost rare in other countries in the world. Even the developed countries like the United States and Australia and other wealthy Asian and European countries charge some amount of fees, which are deducted from the elderly persons' pensions that are customarily granted to the senior citizens in those countries. Their governments only subsidize when an individual's pension is short of the total cost of the services rendered. So our day care center is a very unique one, which is an indicator of the generosity of the government. Of course there are donors but the government is the main provider of the essential funds.

The center is located at No.64, Kabaye Pagoda Road, Mayangon Township (Near Chawdwingon Junction), on a very spacious plot of land. It is housed in a considerably large building. There is a spacious and tidy worshipping place with an image of the Buddha on the altar, where the elderly can worship and meditate in a peaceful environment. A physical exercise room where light physical exercises and yoga training sessions are carried out is quite spacious and clean. Two separate air conditioned dormitories, one for the males and the other for the females with beds for taking naps during the day are also quite comfortable looking. As provisions for recreations, there is also a library, computers with access to Internet are at the disposal of the elderly persons to use free of charge, an art room where painting enthusiasts can pursue their hobby is also provided and a saloon where hair cuts, hair shampooing and manicures are available is also provided. A music room complete with television set and karaoke and a games room, where the elderly can play caron-board, chess, bingo etc, is also there.

In respect to the health care, there is a dental clinic to provide oral health and medical

examination room to check the vital signs and provide treatments for minor ailments. Physiotherapy is provided for those who need it. Personal hygiene is also looked after by the care-giver staffs. Traditional medicine and massages are also provided as necessary. For major ailments, referrals are made to other appropriate hospitals and/or clinics.

Judging from the above care services and facilities, it is quite evident that the elderly are well provided to make their stay there pleasant, happy and welcoming to keep them willing to come back. In the waning years of their lives, such services and loving cares would definitely make them stress and depression free and diminish the loneliness and dejections that the elderly often feel in their old age. This is the main objectives of almost every day care centers I had studied on the Internet. So I give credit to the administrator and the staff for providing superb services, with the limited resources they have, which I must say is not inferior to those in most countries. Above all, the polite manners, compassion and the hospitality of the care-givers are great assets for the center, which would benefit the elderly very much.

At present, as there are some limitations in funds, facilities and trained medical staff, certain services such as: care for the disabled, seriously sick persons and those suffering from chronic diseases cannot be provided. Hopefully, the situations may improve and eventually the center will become a fully dependable place for the elderly in the near future. Those situations are also the ultimate requirements that the staff must be hoping for, to make their work more efficient and effective. Even now, I think there is not much more to be desired, as the services covered every aspects to make the stay at the center very pleasant and desirable.

The points discussed so far

are mostly related to the physical care, so I would like to divert the attention to the mental care. The individual, or, group counsellings that are dramatically helpful in nurturing strong mental conditions are also provided as necessary. Socializing and interacting with different age groups, occasionally, are also required to break the feeling of monotony, the feeling of being neglected and aid in fighting loneliness. Thus the center arranged the elders to meet the pre-school children and also the youths for them to share experiences and knowledge with the new and up-coming generations. The center encourages establishing social networks among the elderly, and has also made arrangements to meet and socialize with other elderly from the homes for the aged. Also occasional visits or excursions to places of interests provided are beneficial to their mental health. There are religious and cultural activities and ceremonies on the auspicious days. All these are good contributors to the mental well-being of the elderly persons from psychological aspect.

A total of 184 elderly persons have registered at the center since it was inaugurated on the 20th November, 2013. Today, about seventy elderly persons on the average came to the center every day. Their day starts at 9 AM and ends at 4 Pm. The day begins with a light exercise. Then breakfast is served. They are served three meals: breakfast, lunch and tiffin in a clean and decent mess. I learned that the center allots one thousand five hundred Kyats per head per day for the meals. On the day I went there, I learned that there was a donor for their meals for that day. Such donations are welcome and they would significantly ease the burden on the budget of the center. There are also other expenses, which I will not go into detail, but I am sure they would be very large in amount. I also learned that do-

nations of cash and kind are also accepted. I would like to solicit for donations, of my own free will, on their behalf. Prospective donors, who are interested can contact the center's administrative office at the above address or by calling phone numbers: 95-1-657914 and 95-1-657013 (Fax), during office hours, except on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays.

This article wouldn't be complete without mentioning who are eligible for admission. A person must be of age seventy and above; must possess a minimum considerable health to manage the basic personal needs on one's own; must have a home to go back to in the evenings. Priority would be given to the most needy in considering for admission.

In conclusion, I would like to explain briefly what the day care centers for the elderly in other countries generally provide, so that the readers would appreciate how well and efficiently our center is running. Generally, the day care centers provide health, nutrition, social and daily living needs for the elderly persons in professionally staffed, group environs. Most day cares provide social care as well as medical care. Some served as rehabilitation centers for physically disabled and some give care to mentally deteriorated elderly persons suffering from alzheimer or dementia. At present, although our daycare center is providing social care to the fullest extent within their capacity and the medical care is still in need of improvements due to the shortage of skilled and trained staffs in the medical field, the work they are doing is really impressive and admirable, which they should be proud of. I am sure that, both the staff and the elderly alike, would be looking forward to the day when their day care center would be able to stand shoulder to shoulder with the others around the world.

Alaungkawthapa pilgrimage season postponed



Pilgrims ride elephants on their way to Alaungkawthapa Cave. PHOTO: PO CHAN-MONYWA

THE opening of the Alaungkawthapa pilgrimage season for devotees have been moved forward from the previously announced 23 December, according to an official of the Alaungkawthapa National Park. The much revered Alaungkawthapa religious area with its many pagodas is located in

the Yinmabin District of Sagaing Region.

There are more preparations needing to be made for the coming pilgrims and foreign tourists, the opening date has therefore been postponed. We expect to open on about 27 December.

“This year with the guidance of the deputy minister for Envi-

ronmental Conservation and Forestry, we are going to add more elephants from the Department of Forestry to the pilgrimage site” said the official. Before, only elephants from the national park were used to carry the pilgrims to the pagoda site but as pilgrim and visitor numbers are expected to increase this year, more ele-

phants have to be added to the menagerie, he added.

Elderly pilgrims and children are prioritised to take the elephant rides which are between 6 am and 11:30 am and 3 pm and 6 pm everyday, during the season. The roads have also been improved, said the official.—*Po Chan-Monywa*

Solar panels must be used correctly

SOLAR panels used for electricity supply in remote and rural areas of the country must be used correctly, says an electronic shop owner in Magwe, Magwe Region. He noted that the use of solar panels can be expensive if the user does not know how to maintain the panels properly.

“The surface of the panels must not become damaged. The battery must not be overcharged. The wires of the battery and the panels must also be correctly connected. The solar panels should be bought by a person who knows about the panels and the users must be able to operate the panels effectively,” he added.

The price of the panels depend on the watt, brand and quality, he said. A 130-watt panel would cost K 73,000.

Solar panels have been used widely in rural areas since 2012 since they were deemed to be more cost effective than using candles and kerosene. The panels also offer obvious benefits for the environment and prevention of fires.—*Kyawswa-Magwe*



A model plot in Kwatnge Village Tract, Meiktila District, yielded more than 150 baskets of Paletwe paddy strain per acre. Government-appointed farmers harvested the 7-acre model field, which has been planted during the rainy season. PHOTO: CHAN THAR (MEIKTILA)

Fuel tanker, motor boat collide on Ayeyawaddy River near Thabeikyin

A MOTOR boat sank after it collided with a fuel tanker on the Ayeyawaddy River near Thabeikyin town, Mandalay Region.

The collision occurred on Sunday evening about 7 miles from the township police station.

The “Aung Htet Lin” fuel tanker, carrying 240000 gallons of diesel, was sailing to Katha from Yangon.

The motor boat loaded with firewood was going to Mandalay from Thabeikyin. The motor boat had switch off its engines and was sailing

freely when it crashed into the fuel tanker.

The boat sank with four passengers, two men and two women aboard who survived without serious injury.

The boat skipper U Kyaw Win was injured.

The K 10-million boat was carrying K 1.2-million worth firewood, according to a local.

The skippers of the fuel tanker and motor boat, U Thet Khine Win and U Kyaw Win, have been charged under section 280/277 of the Criminal Law.—*Soe Naing Win- Thabeikyin*

Myanmar Apex Bank opens new branch in Dawei

THE Myanmar Apex Bank (MAB) opened a new branch in Dawei yesterday.

The bank’s branch is located on Bogyoke Street, Dawei, Taninthayi Region. The banking services of MAB include deposits, loans and cash management services between banks and different branches in Myanmar. The opening ceremony was attended by the Speaker of the Taninthayi Region Hluttaw U Htin Aung Kyaw, members of the Taninthayi Region government, chairman of MAB bank U Chit Khaing, and departmental officials.—*U Sein Win (Dawei)*

Crime News

Buddha image stolen from monastery in Tada-U Tsp

A BUDDHA Image was stolen from the Shwe Si monastery in Tada-U Township, Mandalay on Sunday. A monk from the monastery found that the Buddha Image, which was donated 50 years ago to the monastery, was lost when he was cleaning. Village administrator U Thein Swe Latt informed police. The police are still investigating the case.—*Maung Pyi Thu (Mandalay)*

Rape in Magway

POLICE have arrested a man for raping a woman at knife point in Nga Phae township, Magway on Saturday, according to the Minbu Police station.

It is alleged that on 18 December Maung Htun Set, 20, followed the 24-year old victim into Lay Thar village where he pulled a knife and threatened to kill her if she did not submit.

A local police station has filed charges against Maung Htun Set.—*Kyaw Zayya*

Yabba seized in Maha Aungmyay

AN Anti- drug squad discovered 2950 yabba tablets weighing 295 kg in the possession of a passenger on a bike in Maha Aungmyay township on Sunday. Action has been taken against one Kyaw Swe Win, 34, the passenger, and Ye Shine Aung, 31 the motorcycle driver.

When interrogated, Kyaw Swe Win admitted to selling it to one Tin Tun from Muse town for K250,000. Three men are being charged under the anti- Narcotic law.—*Maung Pyi Thu (Mandalay)*

Gold edges up after 2-day drop in pre-holiday trade

SINGAPORE — Gold rose in thin pre-holiday trade yesterday, after two days of losses, on a softer dollar and as oil prices extended a recovery from multi-year lows.

Spot gold rose 0.3 per cent to \$1,073.50 an ounce by 0358 GMT, after losing 0.7 per cent in the last two sessions.

Many financial centres around the world will shut early on Thursday and stay closed on Friday for the Christmas holidays. Some will remain shut on Monday.

“Gold prices will be determined more by trading volume, than any monetary or fundamental development over the holiday period,” HSBC analyst James Steel said. “Low trading volume leaves prices open to sharp movements one way or another on relatively little buying or selling.”

“If oil continues to rally we think this would eventually feed into real gains for gold prices,” he said.

Gold is positively correlated to oil as the metal is seen as a hedge against oil-led inflation.

US crude prices rose for a fourth straight session yesterday, after hitting their lowest since early 2009 on Monday. The benchmark is set for a more than 8 per cent weekly gain in the lead-up to Christmas as the US market tightened on falling sup-



A salesman poses with a gold necklace at a jewellery shop in Jammu on 11 July 2008. PHOTO: REUTERS

plies and looming exports.

The dollar index, a measure of the greenback's strength against a basket of major currencies, slipped on Thursday for a fourth session out of five after recent mixed US data.

New orders for US manufactured capital goods fell in November and the prior month's increase was revised sharply lower, while other data showed

consumer sentiment at a five-month high in December and personal income rising for an eighth straight month in November. A softer greenback boosts demand for dollar-denominated commodities such as gold.

However, the outlook for gold remains largely bearish with many predicting a drop below \$1,000 in the next few months. Bullion prices have

shed 9 percent so far this year, a third year of losses, mostly due to expectations the US Federal Reserve would raise interest rates, which it did this month.

With the first US rate increase in nearly a decade out of the way, the focus is now on the pace of future hikes. Investors believe higher rates would dent demand for non-interest paying gold. —Reuters

Currencies subdued in Christmas holiday lull, dollar steady

SYDNEY — The dollar, euro and yen got off to a subdued start yesterday in what is likely to be a languid session with much of the Western world already shuttered for the Christmas and year-end holidays.

The dollar index .DXY was slightly firmer at 98.377 early in Asia, but still well off last Thursday's peak of 99.294. It was back at levels seen before the Federal Reserve delivered a highly anticipated hike in interest rates a week ago.

A mixed bag of US data on Wednesday gave the market no real steer. New orders for US manufactured capital goods fell in November, but personal income rose for an eighth straight month. Consumer sentiment hit a five-month high in December.

Yet, analysts at BNP Paribas see potential for further upside in the greenback.

“If US data remains broadly in line with the Fed's expectations, we suspect the USD will be off to a positive start in 2016 as there is plenty of scope for rates markets to price in



A picture illustration shows a 100 Dollar banknote lying on one Dollar banknotes, in Warsaw, in 2011. PHOTO: REUTERS

more Fed hikes,” they wrote in a note to clients.

Currently the market is pricing in less than 10 basis points of hikes by the end of March and only 50 basis points for 2016 as a whole, compared to the Fed's own median projection of 100 basis points.

“We exited our cash USD trade recommendations this

week but will be looking to re-establish longs early next year,” said BNP.

The euro traded at \$1.0907 EUR=, nursing a small 0.4 percent fall overnight. Against the yen, the greenback was in familiar territory at 120.93 JPY= having been stuck in a slim 120.72-121.51 range this week.

The Japanese currency has

well and truly gotten over last Friday's move by the Bank of Japan to fine tune its massive stimulus programme.

The Canadian dollar was a notable outperformer, thanks to a rebound in oil prices. The loonie traded at C\$1.3854 per USD CAD=D4 after gaining 0.5 per cent. It was off a near 12-year trough of C\$1.4003 set last week.

The Australian dollar was steady at just above 72 US cents AUD=D4, while its New Zealand counterpart was also little changed near 68 US cents NZD=D4.

Both Antipodean currencies have rallied from last week's lows of \$0.7097 and \$0.6688 respectively, underpinned by heavy buying interest from real money accounts, suggesting the hunt for yield is still in play for some.

Many financial centres around the world will shut early on Thursday and stay closed on Friday for the Christmas holidays. Some will remain shut on Monday. — Reuters

Japan FY 2016 defence budget totals record 5 trillion yen

TOKYO — Japan approved yesterday a 5.05 trillion yen (about \$42 billion) defence budget for fiscal 2016, up 1.5 per cent from the initial budget for fiscal 2015 and marking the highest level on record.

The increase for the fourth straight year reflects the government's resolve to beef up security around the Nansei Islands chain covering Okinawa and the Japanese-administered Senkaku Islands in the face of an increasingly assertive China.

Excluding costs related to the realignment of US forces in Japan and spending for Japanese government planes, defence-related outlays total 4.86 trillion yen for the year starting 1 April, up 0.8 per cent. With the outlay, the government plans to procure equipment including 17 SH-60K antisubmarine helicopters, an E-2D early warning plane and four V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor transport aircraft. The defence budget increase came after the enactment in September of security laws that expand the scope of overseas operations of the Self-Defence Forces, a move that the government says is intended to better respond to the severer security environment surrounding Japan. Of the fiscal 2016 defence budget, spending on projects related to the realignment of US forces in Japan totals 179.4 billion yen, up from 147.2 billion yen in the initial fiscal 2015 budget. —Kyodo News

Chinese TV station 'employs robot' as weather reporter

SHANGHAI — Shanghai Dragon TV has “employed” an artificial intelligence (AI) robot as a weather reporter on its live breakfast show.

“I'm happy to start my new work on the winter solstice,” said “XiaoIce” during her debut on Tuesday morning.

“XiaoIce” is actually a piece of software developed by Microsoft using smart cloud and big data. In the first two days of her work, “XiaoIce” has impressed many with her cute voice. She also comments on big news events. According to Microsoft, breakthroughs in text-to-speech AI have helped “XiaoIce” to score high points for linguistic naturalness, and hers is closer to the human voice than other speech synthesizers. Through unique emotional technology, she can make comments instantly based on weather data. —Xinhua

New blood thinner 'antidote' to help doctors move past warfarin

NEW YORK — A new class of blood thinners that competes with widely used warfarin should get a boost next year when an "antidote" that can reverse the medications' effects in an emergency is expected to enter the market, according to top US heart doctors and investors.

Xarelto, from Bayer AG and Johnson & Johnson, and Eliquis, sold by Bristol-Myers Squibb and Pfizer, were approved as safer and more convenient alternatives for preventing blood clots and strokes than warfarin.

But there was one hitch: there was no way to quickly restore normal clotting for patients in need of emergency surgery or to stop a major bleeding episode, leading many doctors to hold off on prescribing the drugs. "It may be uncommon, but they're memorable when they happen," Dr. Charles Pollack, an emergency physician at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia, said of major bleeding events.

"We didn't have a specific reversal strategy for these drugs, and I think that left people feeling a bit insecure," added Pollack, who has done clinical work on a recently approved antidote to Boehringer Ingelheim's rival blood clot preventer Pradaxa.

That is about to change.

Small drugmaker Portola Pharmaceuticals this month applied for US approval of a drug called andexanet alfa that rapidly reverses the effect of Xarelto and Eliquis. It is expected to enter the market in 2016.

"It will make a big difference," said Dr. Mariell Jessup, a

cardiologist at the University of Pennsylvania Medical Centre. "I have many physicians, particularly surgeons, who hate these drugs. They're frightened of them because they've had to deal with the consequences of somebody coming in with trauma," while using the new blood thinners.

The new drugs cause fewer major bleeding episodes than warfarin and do not require dietary restrictions or constant monitoring as with the decades-old medicine. But major bleeding remains the most worrisome risk of all anti-coagulant therapy as it can be fatal or cause debilitating, long-term problems.

Bristol-Myers reported \$466 million in global third-quarter sales of Eliquis, which won US approval at the end of 2012, about 18 months after Xarelto. J&J posted US Xarelto sales of \$461 million in the quarter, while Bayer reported about \$509 million in international sales.

There is still a lot of room to grow as warfarin, also prescribed under the brand name Coumadin, commands some 60 percent of the blood thinner market. Morningstar expects annual sales for Xarelto and Eliquis could reach \$8 billion for each.

The treatments are about 70 times more expensive than pennies-a-day warfarin, according to Express Scripts Holding Co, the largest US pharmacy benefits manager. But given the superior safety and convenience, Express Scripts said in a statement that "the overall value is likely justified." Health insurer



Patient Eileen Corrigin has blood drawn at an anti-coagulation clinic at the Staten Island University Hospital in Staten Island, New York in 2012. PHOTO: REUTERS

Aetna Inc expects approval of the Portola drug to gradually increase use of Xarelto and Eliquis, said Edmund Pezalla, Aetna's national medical director for pharmaceutical policy and strategy.

Xarelto and Eliquis are approved to treat patients with a type of irregular heartbeat called atrial fibrillation that significantly increases stroke risk, as well as to prevent blood clots following hip or knee replacement, and to treat deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism.

Paul Burton, vice president of medical affairs for Johnson & Johnson's Janssen unit, stressed Xarelto's safety but said availa-

bility of Portola's drug would enhance doctor comfort levels.

The Xarelto partnership is seeking additional approved uses, with trials underway in patients with acute coronary syndrome, and for reduction of major adverse cardiovascular events in patients with heart failure or peripheral artery disease. Bristol and Pfizer have a direct-to-consumer television ad campaign to increase Eliquis awareness.

"We believe that a reversal agent could be an important consideration for physicians when initiating Eliquis and switching appropriate patients from warfarin to Eliquis," Bristol and Pfizer said in a joint

statement. Portola's reversal drug "will certainly help sales. Anybody who was waiting on the sidelines will not be fence-sitting anymore," said Les Funtleyder, healthcare portfolio manager for E Squared Capital Management, which holds Pfizer shares.

The drug would become Portola's first product on the market. Cowen and Co forecast \$355 million in sales by 2020 for the antidote. Portola is also developing a drug to rival Xarelto and Eliquis.

Duke University's Dr. Jerrold Levy predicted that all hospitals will stock the Portola antidote. "It increases the safety margin," Levy said.—Reuters

Hyenas lived in SW China 4m years ago, research confirms

LHASA — A group of fossils discovered on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau have been confirmed as pliocene-era bone-crushing hyenas, which date back some four million years, a Chinese archaeologist said Wednesday.

The fossilized teeth and lower jaws were discovered in 2012 at an altitude of 4,195 metres in the Zanda basin, southwest of Tibet Autonomous Region in southwest China.

After years of research by Chinese and US scientists, both sides agreed that the fossils date from the Pliocene Epoch (five to three million years ago), making this discovery the first on Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, according to the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology (IVPP) under the Chinese Academy of

Sciences. "Pliocene hyenas were dog-like predators. Their bone-crushing teeth were perfect for tearing up prey," said Li Qiang, an IVPP researcher and member of the research team.

Apart from the hyenas, canids and Tibetan antelopes also lived on the Zanda basin during the early

"Pliocene hyenas were dog-like predators. Their bone-crushing teeth were perfect for tearing up prey."

Li Qiang

IVPP's researcher and member

Pliocene. Research on the fossils has proved that hyenas lived on the plateau, and as far as west Europe, during the early Pliocene.

"Pliocene hyenas belong to the Hyaenidae family, which has six species and first appeared during the late Miocene Epoch [11.6 to 5.3 million years ago]," said Li.

"They are likely to have originated from north China but disappeared 2.2 million years ago. No fossils have been found after then."

Most of hyena species, distributed mainly across Asia, Europe and Africa, became extinct 700,000 years ago. The African spotted hyena is the only hyena species to survive today. The research findings were published in the online edition of "Historical Biology," an international paleontology journal.—Xinhua

Baidu teams up with PUMC on cancer research

BEIJING — China's search engine giant Baidu said Wednesday that it would team up with Peking Union Medical College (PUMC) on esophageal cancer research.

PUMC will collect 1,500 tissue samples and 100 family blood samples of esophageal cancer patients in the coming two years, Baidu said in a statement.

Baidu will use big data and AI to help the top medical college to explore early warning signs.

Zhang Tong, vice president

of Baidu's Institute of Deep Learning, said the research will help screening and diagnosis, and open pathways to a possible cure. Liu Zhihua, deputy director of the Molecular Oncology Cancer Institute's State Key Laboratory, said middle and terminal esophageal cancer patients in China only have a 20 per cent chance of living more than five years.

Li Yanhong, chair and CEO of Baidu, donated 30 million yuan (4.6 million US dollars) for the research in his own name.—Xinhua

New Argentine government fires 'activist' media regulator

BUENOS AIRES — Argentina's new government fired the country's chief media regulator on Wednesday, saying the head of the AFSCA television and radio watchdog commission was openly acting against the country's new centre-right President Mauricio Macri.

Regulator Martin Sabbatella had led previous President Cristina Fernandez's crack down on then opposition media group Clarin. Early this month he claimed Macri, who was inaugurated on 10 December, was orchestrating a "mafia plot" to get rid of him.

His firing followed the forcing out of central bank chief Alejandro Vanoli. Both moves signaled Macri's determination to get Fernandez loyalists out of key positions and replace them with a team willing to implement his free-market policies.

"Sabbatella has shown himself at all times to be a political activist," Communications Minister Oscar Aguad told reporters



People gather outside the Federal Authority on Audio Visual Communications Services (AFSCA) headquarters in Buenos Aires, on 23 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

in announcing that AFSCA will be combined with the AFTIC telecommunications regulator under new leadership.

"The leaders of both organ-

isms have failed to respond to the hierarchy of the new government," Aguad said. "They have been in a kind of rebellion."

Speaking in a loud, defiant

tone, Sabbatella told reporters his firing was "an illegal act" that he will fight in court. He agreed with the new communications director that he was "a proud

political activist".

A populist who believed in heavy control of the economy, Fernandez left Argentina in default with scant central bank reserves, a yawning fiscal deficit and high inflation. She is nonetheless revered by millions who were helped by her expansion of welfare programmes after a devastating 2002 financial crisis.

Macri opposes a law signed by Fernandez in 2009 limiting the number of radio and television licenses a company can hold. Her critics say the law was aimed at hobbling media company Grupo Clarin, which had criticised Fernandez since a 2008 showdown with the farm sector over planned grains tax increases.

A judge ordered the police to raid AFSCA's offices on 4 December after Clarin filed a complaint against the regulator over the restructuring obligations called for by the 2009 law. "The media law will not be touched for now," Aguad said.—Reuters

Iran calls the new US visa law breach of the nuclear deal

DUBAI — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Wednesday a new US law putting visa restrictions on Iranians and those who had visited Iran would, if implemented, breach a nuclear deal Tehran had struck with world powers earlier this year.

The new measure passed by the US Congress will prevent visa-free travel to the United States for people who have visited Iran or hold Iranian nationality.

The measure, which President Barack Obama signed into law on Friday, also applies to Iraq, Syria and Sudan, and was introduced as a security measure after Islamic State attacks in Paris and an attack in San Bernardino, California.

Iran, a Shi'ite Muslim theoc-

racy staunchly opposed to Sunni radicalism espoused by groups like Islamic State, says its inclusion on the list is intended to undermine the nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA.

"If the Congress law is implemented as it is, it would definitely be a breach (of JCPOA)," Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif was quoted as saying by the Tasnim news agency, speaking at a joint press conference with his Mongolian counterpart, Lundeg Purevsuren.

Zarif said he had raised the issue with US Secretary of State John Kerry at their meeting in New York this month and also in several emails in the last 10 days, hoping that "these measures stop any obstacle in implementation of the JCPOA."

Citizens of 38 countries, most of them in Europe, are eligible for waivers under the US Visa Waiver Programme. Under the new restrictions, citizens who have visited Iran, Iraq, Syria or Sudan in the last five years, and those who hold dual nationality with one of those countries, are excluded.

In a meeting with French Senate President Gerard Larcher in Tehran on Monday, Zarif called the new US legislation discriminatory and asked Europeans to oppose the law that was "against their independence".

US Secretary of State John Kerry wrote to Zarif on Saturday to assure him Washington remained committed to the JCPOA, noting that the White House can waive the new requirements in individual cases.—Reuters

Israel reports record immigration of Jews from France in 2015



A Jewish immigrant from France arrives for a candle-lighting ceremony to mark the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, upon landing at Ben Gurion International Airport near Tel Aviv, Israel on 8 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

JERUSALEM — A record number of French Jews moved to Israel this year, an immigration official said yesterday, citing anti-Semitic violence and economic insecurity in the European country as causes. France has the largest Jewish population in Europe, having grown by nearly half since World War II to some 550,000. The community has been jarred by an increase in security threats and Islamist militant attacks such as January's gun rampage at a Paris kosher market that killed four Jews.

Israel's quasi-governmental Jewish Agency, which encourages immigration, said some 7,900 French Jews had relocated to Israel in 2015, a 10 per cent increase from the previous year.

"Each has his or her reason, including the economic crisis, personal security, terrorist attacks, and, in some places and times, an anti-Jewish mood," agency spokesman Yigal Palmor said. Though not final, the immigration figure falls short of Jewish Agency head Natan Sharansky's prediction after the kosher market attack following the Charlie Hebdo shootings in January that more than 10,000 French Jews would move to Israel this year.

Palmor said wider Jewish immigration to Israel reached a 15-year high in 2015, with around 30,000 new arrivals. He noted a high number of arrivals from economically troubled Russia and civil war-torn Ukraine.—Reuters

At least one dead, seven injured in fire near Mexican pipeline

MEXICO CITY — At least one person died in a blaze near a pipeline owned by Mexican state oil company Pemex, and seven others were injured late Tuesday night, local emergency services said on Wednesday.

The fire was controlled without the pipeline being affected, Pemex said via its Twitter account late on Tuesday, adding that none of the injured people were Pemex employees.

The blaze apparently started

in an area used to store stolen fuel, near the town of Huimanguillo in the southern state of Tabasco, Pemex said via its Twitter account late on Tuesday.

Ivan Martinez, the coordinator of emergency services in Tabasco state, told local television that they found a burned corpse at the scene. He added that the blaze was under control within a couple of hours. The oil company often has to deal with fires that start when its pipelines are tapped

illegally. Pemex has admitted that workers, former employees, drug cartels and business people have been involved in stealing its fuel and it has taken some measures to cut down on the costly thefts.

Pemex in November said it reduced its annual accident rate last year by more than 33 percent. However, a Reuters investigation earlier this year found that Pemex was reducing its accident rate by including hours worked by office staff in its calculations.—Reuters

Fight against palm snares unexpected users: New Zealand dairy farmers

WELLINGTON — The world's biggest dairy exporter, New Zealand's Fonterra, has found itself caught in the crossfire of an unexpected new controversy: a global environmental campaign against the destruction of rainforests.

The South Pacific island nation, which prides itself on its green image, has become a top buyer of palm kernel expeller or PKE, a by-product of the palm oil industry, which is under attack over deforestation, choking fires and habitat destruction in Southeast Asia.

For New Zealand dairy farmers palm kernel has been a "lifesaver" by boosting production when grass is sparse, said Chris Engel, who runs 400 cows in the Wairarapa region on the southern tip of the North Island.

"It has been a fantastic supplement for farmers facing a drought and you can just ring up and get a truck load when you need it," he said.

But environmentalists say the product — what's left of the palm kernel once the oil has been extracted — contributes to the profitability of the palm industry and have called on Fonterra to stop using PKE linked to environmental damage.

Unlike in Europe and North America, New Zealand dairy cows spend their lives outdoors, eating mostly grass.

But imports of PKE, a dry, gritty meal with a soapy smell, have risen 10-fold over the past decade as farming has become more intensified and the use of supplementary feed has surged to ramp up production.

"A third of all PKE that's traded in the world goes to New Zealand," said Russel Norman, executive director at Greenpeace New Zealand. "New Zealand is spending over NZ\$400 million (\$270 million) a year on PKE and so it's a significant profit center for the palm industry."

Recently Fonterra called on its 10,500 farmer shareholders to limit the use of palm kernel to 3 kg per animal per day. Farmers say cows can need up to 6kg of the supplementary feed per day when conditions are dry.

Fonterra said the suggested limit was not linked to international pressure to stop the use of palm products but rather a bid to protect a premium commanded by products from grass-fed animals.

"Consumers love New Zealand dairy products and we want to increase that



Cows are seen on a pastoral farm near Hamilton in 2013. PHOTO: REUTERS

value by ensuring our New Zealand milk comes from predominantly grass-fed cows," Miles Hurrell, managing director of co-operative affairs, said in a statement in September.

Fonterra declined to comment to Reuters on the use of PKEs.

However, the company, which was rocked by a botulism scare in 2013 which later proved unfounded, has also voiced concern about tropical deforestation and carbon emissions associated with palm oil plantations. It says its supplier, Wilmar International, has a "no deforestation, no exploitation" policy.

Wilmar told Reuters the New Zealand PKE business made up less one 1 per cent of group revenues.

But this year's El Nino weather pattern could drive up palm kernel use if pastures are significantly affected by drought, said Andrew Hoggard, dairy industry group chairman for industry lobby group Federated Farmers.

"If you don't have grass, you still have to feed the cows something," he said.

Dry weather is already affecting some key dairy areas and weather patterns associated with the current strong El Nino look set to continue into 2016.

Dairy represents around 25 per cent of New Zealand exports but weak international prices mean the central bank now estimates around 80 per cent of dairy farmers will have negative cash flow in the current season, posing a risk to the economy.

Weak dairy prices, however, may help the bid to curb the use of palm kernel. Agricultural consultants AgriHQ said imports are down 4 per cent in the year to October.

"Buying in supplementary feed has been a last resort for many" due to the low dairy prices, it said.— Reuters

Japan Coast Guard to control ship traffic in bays during tsunami

TOKYO — The Japan Coast Guard plans to introduce a new system allowing it to control maritime traffic in crowded bays in times of tsunami disasters to prevent collisions and chaos, coast guard sources said Wednesday.

The coast guard will seek revision of laws to set up a new traffic control centre in Yokohama, near Tokyo, by 2018 for ships sailing in Tokyo Bay. It also aims to strengthen controls at Ise Bay and Osaka Bay in central and western Japan for smooth evacuation of vessels and transport of relief supplies during disasters, they said.

In the wake of the massive earthquake and tsunami that hit northeastern Japan in March 2011, large vessels evacuated offshore from ports and concentrated in the central part of Tokyo Bay, heightening the risk of a severe accident, they said.

The coast guard is set to submit bills to amend the Maritime Traffic Safety Act and other laws covering navigation rules in busy waters during the next ordinary Diet session starting 4 January, they said.— Kyodo News

INVITATION FOR OPEN TENDER (TENDER NO. 5(T) MPE/CONDENSATE (1) / 2015-2016)

- Open Tender is invited for the Myanma Petrochemical Enterprise, the Ministry of Energy for the Conveyance of Yetagun Condensate 1.05 Million Barrels (±5%) from Yetagun Marine Terminal Offshore to No.(1) Refinery (Thanlyin).
- Tender Closing Date: **28-1-2016** at (12:00) noon.
- Tender Opening Date: **28-1-2016** at (13:00) hrs.
- Delivery Time: 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017
- Tender Documents and details information are available at the Department of Finance, Myanma Petrochemical Enterprise, Nay Pyi Taw, during office hours commencing **30-12-2015** on payment of the Myanmar Kyat One Hundred Thousand (Kyat 100,000) per set.
- Only bid from tenderer who has purchased tender document officially from Myanma Petrochemical Enterprise will be accepted for evaluation.

Managing Director
Myanma Petrochemical Enterprise
Contact Phone no. 067-411108/411193

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV BC SANFRANCISCO VOY NO (021W)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV BC SANFRANCISCO VOY NO (021W) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 25.12.2015 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.P where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

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MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S ORIENT OVERSEA
CONTAINER LINES

Phone No: 2301185

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Consignees of cargo carried on MV JIN HAI OU VOY NO (001) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 25.12.2015 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T.T where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

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'Neverland' is partly a hospital in new take on Barrie's Peter Pan

LONDON — A new Peter Pan movie shows Tinker Bell speaking in chime tones and Captain Hook as a “psychopath”, but its biggest innovation is being filmed in the London hospital that owns the rights to the children’s classic.

The reception area and a long corridor of Great Ormond Street Hospital are among the filming locations for “Peter & Wendy”, a low budget but high-spirited gloss on author J.M. Barrie’s story about the orphan boys led by Peter Pan who live in Neverland and fight the bloodthirsty pirates led by Hook.

“I think it’s probably the first time a film production company wanted to be so closely associated with Great Ormond Street, and have it included in the story itself,” said Christine De Poortere, the “Peter Pan Director” of the hospital’s charity wing.

The charity raises some 50 million pounds (\$75 million) a year to benefit the hospital and patients. Of that, she said, a small proportion comes from the Peter Pan rights the hospital holds in perpetuity, at least in Britain, thanks to Barrie’s bequest of 1929 being

renewed by Parliament.

Scriptwriter Adrian Hodges has reimagined Peter Pan as taking place in the imagination of a young woman named Lucy who is brought to Great Ormond for a life-threatening heart operation and enters into the story as she reads the book.

“I felt the time was right for a version that was in the classical tradition but also a bit different,” he said at a launch event for the film due to air on Britain’s ITV on 26 December.

Dublin actress Hazel Doupe, 14, who plays Lucy and becomes Wendy — “mother” to Peter Pan and his Lost Boys in Neverland — said the plot line might seem dark but could make the film of interest to all ages.

It includes, among other things, Lucy having a near fatal heart attack and undergoing an emergency operation by a heart surgeon played by Stanley Tucci, who doubles as Hook.

“Considering that my character is so ill but so imaginative and happy at the same time, it was complicated to portray all the emotions she

has,” said Doupe, who had to give her Dublin accent an English polish. “It was an emotional rollercoaster.”

Hospital theme aside, “Peter & Wendy” is Peter Pan with all the trimmings, including a pirate ship and singer Paloma Faith’s amorous Tinker Bell, who is jealous of Peter’s attention to Wendy and lets him know in speech made of chime tones.



The Peter Pan sculpture is seen outside Great Ormond Street hospital, central London. PHOTO: REUTERS

The versatile American actor Tucci, who is the unctuous game-show host Caesar Flickerman in “The Hunger Games” movies, said he leaped at the chance to play Hook.

“He’s a psychopath ... which is why I jumped at the chance — any actor who says they don’t want to play Captain Hook is lying,” Tucci said.

For Zak Sutcliffe, 14, of Bradford, England, playing Peter Pan was even more irresistible.

“There isn’t a single 14-year-old I know who doesn’t want to fly, ride a pirate ship and fight Stanley Tucci,” he said.—Reuters

Ludacris turns Santa for Children’s hospital

LOS ANGELES — Rapper Ludacris turned Santa for the little kids when he visited a Children’s Hospital in Atlanta.

The 38-year-old “Fast and Furious” star visited the hospital with gifts and spent time with the patients and their parents, reported People magazine.

He also shared pictures from the festivities on Instagram.

“Tis the season. #giving-back #childrenshospital #merryludacrismas @ludacrisfdtn,” he captioned a photo collage with the kids and stuffed toys.

He tagged his charity organization, The Ludacris Foundation, which he started in December, 2001.

“Making their day makes my day @ludacrisfdtn #merryludacrismas,” he captioned another photo.

“To all the parents my heart & prayers are with you. To all the children I admire your strength and perseverance. Love from the @ludacrisfdtn #childrenshospital #merryludacrismas,” he wrote along side a picture with the parents of the kids.—PTI

Steve Harvey to return as Miss Universe 2016 host?

LOS ANGELES — Steve Harvey will reportedly return as the host for Miss Universe 2016, despite his controversial flub at this year’s pageant.

Harvey declared the wrong winner of the Miss Universe 2015. Though he corrected the mistake after a few minutes, the incident became a major embarrassment for the pageant organisers and also for the host.

In an interview on “The Jim Rome Show”, Mark Shapiro, Chief Content Officer at WME | IMG, which acquired Miss Universe Organisation earlier this year, said that he wanted Harvey to return to the beauty pageant next year as a host.

Shapiro said the 58-year-old comedian was “very remorseful” about the goof-up and that was “absolutely” welcome back to host the event again.

The Chief Content Office said that Harvey “did a great job. He was funny, he was informative, he’s high energy, he’s got a great following.”

“I definitely want him back, and I would hate to see him not come back. He’s going to want a shot to redeem himself,” Shapiro added.

It was also reported that Har-

vey had received an invitation to return as the host of the 2016 Miss Universe pageant.

In a separate interview, one of the 2015 Miss Universe pageant judges, Perez Hilton, said that the idea of Harvey returning to the show was really good for ratings. “I think Steve Harvey should definitely come back,” Perez said. “It would be great for ratings.—PTI



Host Steve Harvey speaks to reporters after the 2015 Miss Universe Pageant in Las Vegas, Nevada, on 20 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

Miss Colombia opens up about Miss Universe goof-up

LOS ANGELES — Miss Colombia Ariadna Gutierrez, who was mistakenly crowned Miss Universe 2015 after event host Steve Harvey declared the wrong winner, has finally opened up about the major goof-up, on her Instagram page.

The beauty queen released a statement shortly after the USD 400,000 crown featuring 10 carats of diamonds was plucked from her head and awarded to Miss Philippines Pia Alonzo Wurtzbach.

“After the storm comes the calm. I want to thank each and everyone of you who have sent messages of support and strength. Every one of you has become an incredible human being in my book and I am the most fortunate and thankful for having the support not only from one country but from the whole entire world,” she wrote.

Gutierrez was basking in the moment when Harvey returned to correct the mistake and declared the real winner was Pia Alonzo Wurtzbach of Philippines.

The whole incident became a major embarrassment for the pageant organisers and also for the host.

The Colombian beauty, who went through a myriad of emotions before hundreds of thousands of



Miss Colombia Ariadna Gutierrez gives a thumbs up after initially being crowned as the winner during the 2015 Miss Universe Pageant in Las Vegas, Nevada on 20 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

audiences, has expressed her gratitude to fans, who supported her through the ordeal.

The Miss Universe runner-up also admitted that she believes in destiny and would cherish those few moments of glory when she was announced Miss Universe.

“Your destiny is written for you. And my destiny was this. I was able to bring happiness to my country after becoming Miss Universe for only a couple of min-

utes.... Today because of that Colombia and the Latin community are being talked about in every corner of the world.

“I also want to congratulate the Philippines for their new Miss Universe. The happiness that you must be feeling must be incredible. Life continues and in the future we will find out why things happen the way they happen. Thank you all for your love, support and kindness.”—PTI

Asleep in Jesus
U Maung Maung San (68)
(Old Student of UCHS)

Son of deceased parents (U Tun Yi/ Daw May May Lwin) of No.88A, Forest Road, Ahlone, Yangon, brother of Daw Yi Yi Lwin (Dr. Maung Maung Tun) (U.K), brother of Dr. Maung Maung Han/ Daw Khin San Myint, brother of U Aye Lwin/ Daw Nelar (Australia) and beloved husband of Daw Baby June had expired on 23-12-2015 (Wednesday) at Yangon General Hospital (500 beds). Funeral service will be held at Ye-way Christian Cemetery on 26-12-2015 (Saturday) at (10a.m) before burial. Buses will be arranged at the above address at (8:00a.m).

Family members



News Channel
in Brief

(25-12-2015, Friday)

6:00 am	4:35 pm
• Paritta By Venerable Mingun Sayadaw	• Weekly Sports Info
7:35 am	5:35 pm
• People's Talks	• Hyper Sports
8:35 am	6:35 pm
• Current Affairs	• The Farmer
9:35 am	7:15 pm
• Weekly Entertainment	• TV Drama Series
10:35 am	8:00 pm
• MRTV's Youth Programme	• News/International
11:15 am	• News/Weather Report
• Science and Technology Programme	8:35 pm
12:50 pm	• Documentary
• Super Book (Part-2)	8:45 pm
1:20 pm	• Documentary
• TV Drama Series	8:55 pm
2:20 pm	• Documentary (ASEAN Economic Community (AEC))
• TV Drama Series	9:00 pm
2:30 pm	• News
• Talk on old Film (Part-2)	• TV Drama Series
3:15 pm	• Amazing World
• Myanmar Traditional Boxing	• Channel Zero (Part-2)
3:35 pm	
• Clever	

Note/ Hourly News Bulletins (Local + International)



Myanmar International

(25-12-2015 07:00 am~ 26-12-2015 07:00 am) MST

Today Fresh

07:03	Am	News
07:26	Am	Discovering Tribes "Bwe"
07:53	Am	Human Right Human Dignity International Film Festival
08:03	Am	News
08:26	Am	Travelogue: A Tour in Korea (Ep-5)
08:43	Am	MONASTERY (Shwe In-Pin Kyaung)
08:54	Am	Guiding Star of Song Birds
09:03	Am	News
09:26	AmChanges
09:41	Am	Myanmar's Export: Mango
09:50	Am	A Day Trip To Thanlyin
10:03	Am	News
10:26	Am	Applied Myanmar Traditional Martial Art (Part-1)
10:50	Am	Kay Tu Mar Lar "The Decision"

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

Prime Time

07:03	Pm	News
07:26	Pm	A Journey To Southern Shan State (Ep-3)
07:41	Pm	Tea Leaves
07:49	Pm	Welcome to the Southern most part of Myanmar
08:03	Pm	News
08:26	Pm	The Stories Of The Great Souls (U Pyae Son)
08:57	Pm	Now in Yangon

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

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

South Korean 'superdads' on paternity leave break with tradition

SEOUL — It's a weekday morning and Chung Sang-hoon, 34, is at home with his two small children, classical music playing in the background.

Fathers like Chung, who has taken a year of paternity leave from his job in sales with a big foreign company, were once so rare in male-dominated South Korea that they are called "superdads". But their ranks are growing.

"Everything is definitely worth it, from preparing breakfast for the kids to doing the dishes, because I can live for the sake of values I find important," said Chung, whose wife is a teacher.

South Korean women have long believed employers punish them with lower wages and by passing over them for promotions because they're likely to take time off to have children.

That concern among women has contributed to

the lowest birth rate among countries in the OECD group of rich nations.

South Korea also ranks 115th of 145 in the World Economic Forum's gender equality index.

President Park Geun-hye has made paternity leave a priority to address the declining birth rate and give a boost to women's careers, and this month she unveiled a multi-billion plan to combat the grim demographic outlook.

Even though mothers and fathers are entitled to equal amounts of childcare leave, just 3,421 men took advantage of the right in 2014. Still, that was double the 1,790 in 2012 who put down the laptops to pick up the children on a full-time basis, according to the labour ministry.

"The entire economy is out of balance," Na Yeong-don, a senior labor ministry official, told Reuters.

"Women are highly educated and work

efficiently but take the whole burden of household chores and childcare while men work very long hours."

In the first half of this year, the number of paternity leave-takers surged 40 per cent to 2,212, but men still made up just 5 per cent of the parents taking leave in conservative South Korea.

The government has set a goal of increasing the ratio of men taking leave to 30 per cent by 2030, changing a culture in a country where men are notoriously aloof from child-rearing and housework. Reality television shows such as "Return of Superman" featuring male celebrities taking care of their children are credited with helping lure fathers into being more hands-on.

The government plan includes expanding incentives for stay-at-home dads and strengthening financial support for small- and me-

dium-sized enterprises in exchange for letting men take parental leave.

But it remains to be seen how much such incentives will help change thinking in a demanding, top-down, male-driven workplace culture that includes after-work drinking sessions.

"The culture of long work hours needs to be improved so as to allow more time for men to get involved with childcare and family," said Hong Seung-ah, a fellow at the Korean Women's Development Institute in Seoul.

The Korean Women's Development Institute found that 64 per cent of men were willing to take paternity leave but only 2 per cent had done so.

Chung said his manager needed convincing as he did not have a sick child or other emergency at home. His paternity leave was the first in his 100-person office.—Reuters

Whale carcass closes popular Cape Town beach amid shark concerns



Workers remove the carcass of a whale on Strand Beach, near Cape Town, on 23 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

CAPE TOWN — A South African beach popular with Christmas holiday-makers has been closed until the carcass of a beached whale is removed amid concerns its blood may attract sharks, the City of Cape Town said on Wednesday.

Local media described it as a humpback whale measuring over 14 metres (46 feet) in length and said two sharks had been spotted in the area.

"The immediate area around the whale carcass has been cordoned off and this area is closed to mem-

bers of the public ... The blood and debris from the carcass can attract sharks to the area," the city said in a statement.

The affected area was the Strand Beach, a stretch of sand east of Cape Town. Great whites, the largest predatory spe-

cies of shark, are common in the cool Atlantic waters off Cape Town and sometimes attack surfers or swimmers. They would not be expected to attack a whale and it was not immediately clear how the humpback had died. — Reuters

Van Gaal in need of cheer, Hiddink back at Chelsea



Manchester United manager Louis van Gaal looks dejected as he walks off at half time during Barclays Premier League at Old Trafford on 19 December 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

LONDON — Seasonal cheer has been scarce for Louis van Gaal after a six-match winless sequence for his Manchester United side intensified rumours that he will be sacked and Stoke City are unlikely to be offering any solace on Saturday.

While another Dutchman, Guus Hiddink, begins the job of rebuilding Premier League champions Chelsea's season at home to Watford, Van Gaal enters the hectic holiday schedule with his prospects about as bright as a Christmas turkey.

After consecutive 2-1 defeats by relegation candidates Bournemouth and Norwich City dropped United out of the top four, hot on the heels of their Champions League exit, Van Gaal can ill afford another defeat at Stoke.

Stoke manager Mark Hughes, a former United great, joined the debate about United's woes when he said Van Gaal's

assistant Ryan Giggs had an "outstanding chance" of taking the Old Trafford hot seat should Van Gaal depart.

Hughes has warned his players they will need to reach the level they achieved in outclassing Manchester City this month to withstand any United backlash.

"I have been asked whether this is a good time to play (United) but I am always wary of that because these type of clubs more often than not bounce back emphatically," he said.

"They will be desperate to get back on track at the weekend. Manchester United know themselves that they are in a period of transition and are in a different cycle.

"But we are fully aware as to how difficult a challenge they will pose to us on Boxing Day."

Hiddink will hope to carry on where he left off when he returns to the Stamford Bridge

dugout for the first time in six and a half years on Saturday.

Surprise leaders Leicester City, meanwhile, will just try to carry on as they have done all season, when they visit Liverpool at the start of Britain's annual Christmas feast of football that will see 30 Premier league games in nine days.

Hiddink eschewed the chance of a relaxing holiday, returning to help Chelsea out of a pickle after a calamitous start to the Premier League season which resulted in Jose Mourinho's sacking.

When he took on that challenge in 2009 after Luiz Felipe Scolari's departure, he lost only one of his 22 matches in charge and signed off triumphantly at Wembley Stadium with an FA Cup final victory over Everton.

His job looks tougher this time with Chelsea in 15th place, having lost nine of their opening 17 games.—Reuters

Tottenham lose striker Njie with knee injury

LONDON — Tottenham Hotspur's striking options have suffered a blow in the build-up to the hectic holiday fixture list with Clinton Njie expected to be out for up to three months with a knee injury.

Cameroon international Njie, signed from Olympique Lyon in the summer as back-up for Harry Kane, was injured in the recent Europa League match against Monaco.

"You never know because every day it's about how the knee responds but maybe two months or a little bit more (he will be out)," manager Mauricio Pochettino told reporters on Wednesday.

Tottenham moved into the

top four of the Premier League with victory over Southampton last weekend, with Kane bagging his ninth league goal of the season.

They face Norwich City at home on Saturday looking to consolidate their place in the Champions League spots.

Pochettino was asked whether Tottenham had a chance to win their first league title since 1961. "Can we win the title? In football, all is possible," he said. "The last 10 games are very important and it's how you arrive there to attack different objectives or achieve important things. It's important how we arrive in the last 10 games."—Reuters

Mourinho has no formal offer from United, says agent Mendes

LONDON — Manchester United has made no official offer to Jose Mourinho to replace Louis van Gaal at the Premier League club, according to the Portuguese manager's agent Jorge Mendes.

"There is nothing. We don't know what will happen in the future, but now there is no agreement. There isn't an official proposal either," British media quoted Mendes as telling Globo Esporte. Mourinho was sacked by Chelsea last week, just seven months after lifting the Premier League trophy with the Blues, following a run that left champions Chelsea one point above the relegation

zone. The three-times Premier League winner issued a statement insisting he will not be taking a sabbatical.

Pressure has been mounting on United's Dutch manager with a six-game winless streak that saw the club bow out of the Champions League in the group stages and out of the top-four in the Premier League.

Mourinho, who worked with Van Gaal during a successful spell at Barcelona, was previously linked to the Old Trafford job when former United boss Alex Ferguson retired in 2013. Van Gaal is scheduled for a routine press conference on Wednesday evening ahead of Saturday's trip to Stoke City. Two days later the club will host champions Chelsea.—Reuters



Former Chelsea soccer club manager Jose Mourinho walks near his home in London, Britain, on 20 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

London architects investigate 'similarities' of Japan Olympic stadium

LONDON — Following the announcement of the design chosen for a Japanese national stadium for the 2020 Olympic Games, the London-based architects' group who produced the original but later scrapped blueprint said Wednesday that they are looking into the similarities between theirs and the new design.

Architect Kengo Kuma's team was announced Tuesday as the winner of the competition for

the stadium design over architect Toyo Ito, after the original proposal from Zaha Hadid Architects was abandoned in July over rising costs.

A spokesperson for ZHA said, "The design team is currently reviewing the detailed designs and investigating similarities."

It is unclear whether they will take any legal action. ZHA had informed the Japan Sports Council in August that all of the original plan's design work was

the intellectual property of the architect.

ZHA had already issued a statement following the announcement on Tuesday, claiming there were "remarkable similarities" between their design and the new one, particularly in the detailed stadium layout and seating bowl configuration.

Architect Ito said Tuesday of Kuma's design, "I wonder if it is almost entirely based on Zaha Hadid's plan. Its appearance is

different, but if you look under the surface, there are details that seem almost unchanged."

ZHA's design was announced by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe this summer amid public outcry over its ballooning costs, projected to hit 265.1 billion yen (\$2.19 billion) or more than double the initial estimate.

Kuma's winning design will cost an estimated 149 billion yen, with a completion date set at November 2019.

The design was chosen based on an evaluation of nine categories associated with cost, construction period and execution plan.

The steel and wood architecture features a flat roof and sunken seating bowl that will accommodate 80,000 people.

Taisei and Azusa Sekkei, who are part of Kuma's design team, were also involved in the original design led by Zaha Hadid.—Kyodo News