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Sr Gen calls for review of death sentence on two migrant workers

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing yesterday sent messages of felicitations on New Year to Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister and also Defence Minister General

Prawit Wongsuwon and Chief of the Royal Thai Armed Forces General Sommai Kaotira.

In his messages, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing wished them good health and better services for their country,

calling for a review of the evidence concerning the two Myanmar young migrant workers who have been pronounced to serve a death sentence for the controversial murders of two British tourists on Koh Tao Is-

land last year.

The commander-in-chief expressed his respect for Thailand's judicial process while stressing the need to avoid a situation in which the innocent rather than the convicted were

wrongly punished.

He also expressed his belief that justice will be done under consideration of mutual respect and and bilateral friendly relations between the two countries. —*Myawady*

Authorities refute Hpakant landslide death toll report

Aye Min Soe

AUTHORITIES refuted media reports on the death toll of a landslide in Hpakant around 5pm on 25 December, saying they were informed that just three people died.

"Relatives of the three people informed us that three people have not yet returned home since the accident happened. And, until this evening, we have not yet discovered anybody under the soil," said U Tin Swe Myint, the head of the Hpakant Township Administration Office, to The Global New Light of Myanmar over the phone.

With the use of five backhoes and firemen, local authorities and volunteers have been carrying out rescue work since yesterday morning.

"The accident happened at a time when migrant workers returned home. And there were no squatter huts in the area. This mound of dump soil is not as high and big as that of the previous incident. So it is impossible that about 40 or 50 migrant workers are feared dead in the accident," he added.

Shortcomings in following safety regulations by both mining companies and migrant squatters pose challenges for local authorities in preventing future landslides around jade mines in Kachin State.

To prevent landslides, local authorities have suggested that migrant miners squatting in at-risk areas relocate to safer areas and that mining companies dump their waste soil in accordance with technical safety rules.



File photo shows migrant workers searching jade stones from discarded soil in Hpakant. PHOTO: THAUNG NYUNT

When miners began using heavy machinery to extract jade from mines in Myanmar in 2005, migrant workers across the country flowed into the area to scavenge small jade stones from discarded soil.

There are currently around

200,000 squatters in Hpakant Township.

Following the deadly landslides last month, the authorities relocated 108 migrant miners living in at-risk areas to safety sites about 3,000 feet away from the nearest mounds of dump soil.

According to data collected up to 30 November 2015, 627 mining companies have been allowed to mine on 7,714 plots, while another 231 companies are mining through a win-win business system on 311 plots. Mining areas constitute a total area

of more than 22,558 acres in the township.

As of 2000, the government has practiced a production-sharing system with mining companies, collecting 25 per cent of the incomes from the sales, apart from tax.

“Missionaries through metropolitan cities”

— Union Minister for Religious Affairs



Union Minister for Religious Affairs U Soe Win receives pitaka canon texts donated by wellwishers. PHOTO: YE HTUT

THE holders of the bachelor's, master's and doctorate's degrees should not be complacent with the graduate studies. They ought to be well-versed in pali, atthakatha and tikas because repetitive recitation or reading of Buddha's teachings can make the recitalist or reader worth receiving homage.

As a consequence, such a person's body does not decay and/ or decompose upon death. Shwezedi Sayadawgyi from Yenangyaung has been a strong case in this re-

gard,” said Ye-Oo Sayadaw at the convocation of State Pariyatti Sasana Universities held yesterday. Union Minister for Religious Affairs U Soe Win said that certain degree holders are not very much willing to go to far-flung areas to act as missionaries and that they tend to throng big cities like Yangon and Mandalay.

He continued to say that he would like to remind the degree holders of Buddha's instructions given to sixty arahats upon the

lapse of First Buddhist Rain Retreat in Migadawun (Deer Park) just before their departure for missionary journey.

Gotama Buddha's instruction, he said, was “Monks, go on your missionary journey. But, the same place must not be visited by two monks. You can go and preach now.” It can be seen from His instruction that he wanted monks to go up to remote areas which lagged behind, pointed out by the Union minister.

Alotawpyae Pagoda holds 24th annual festival, wish-vowing ceremony



Traditional offertories are seen at Buddha Pujaniya event at Alotawpyae Pagoda. PHOTO: YE THURA AUNG

THE Alotawpyae Pagoda in Bagan in Mandalay Region is holding its 24th annual pagoda festival from 19 December to 9 January.

The wish-vowing ceremony, presided over by Venerable Alotawpyae Sayadaw, was held yesterday, which was the Full Moon Day of the month of Nadaw, in the

pagoda precinct.

Fruits, flowers, cups of water and candles were offered to Buddha images, and the wish-vowing ceremony that followed was overseen by the Sayadaw. The devotees vowed and made one wish while counting beads and reciting prayers.

Afterwards, 528 members of the Sangha from all over Bagan,

including the Alotawpyae Sayadaw, received stationary, rice, various gifts and cash from devotees.

That night hot air balloons were released to mark the day.

Many shops were opened, and free entertainment shows were staged for visitors from far and near, at the pagoda festival.—Ye Thura Aung



A golden umbrella is being hoisted atop historic Issa Punna (Lotaya) Pagoda in Mingaladon on 26 December 2015. Yangon Region Chief Minister U Myint Swe and devotees attended the ceremony and donated alms to Members of Sangha to mark the ceremony. Photo: MNA

400 participates in 12th Special Olympics Myanmar National Games

MORE than 400 participants across the country joined 12th Special Olympics Myanmar National Games at Thuwana Youth Training Center, yesterday.

Myanmar Disabled Sports Federation has organized this National Games since 2004.

Children with autism across the country have been participating in the event through the trainings which take the whole year long.

The 12th Special Olympics Myanmar National Games will run till 27th of December. —GNLM

Environmental conservation at gold mines in Sagaing

NO 2 Mining Enterprise of the Ministry of Mining in collaboration with private mining companies, aims to increase production, to least damage the environs, for safety at work sites, and to plant trees for environmental conservation at the gold mines of Sagaing Region, said an official of the regional government.

The 42 private gold mining companies working at 55 mining plots on 95.2412 acres in Homlin, Banmauk, Wintho, Pinlaebu and Kawlin townships have planted 74695 saplings.

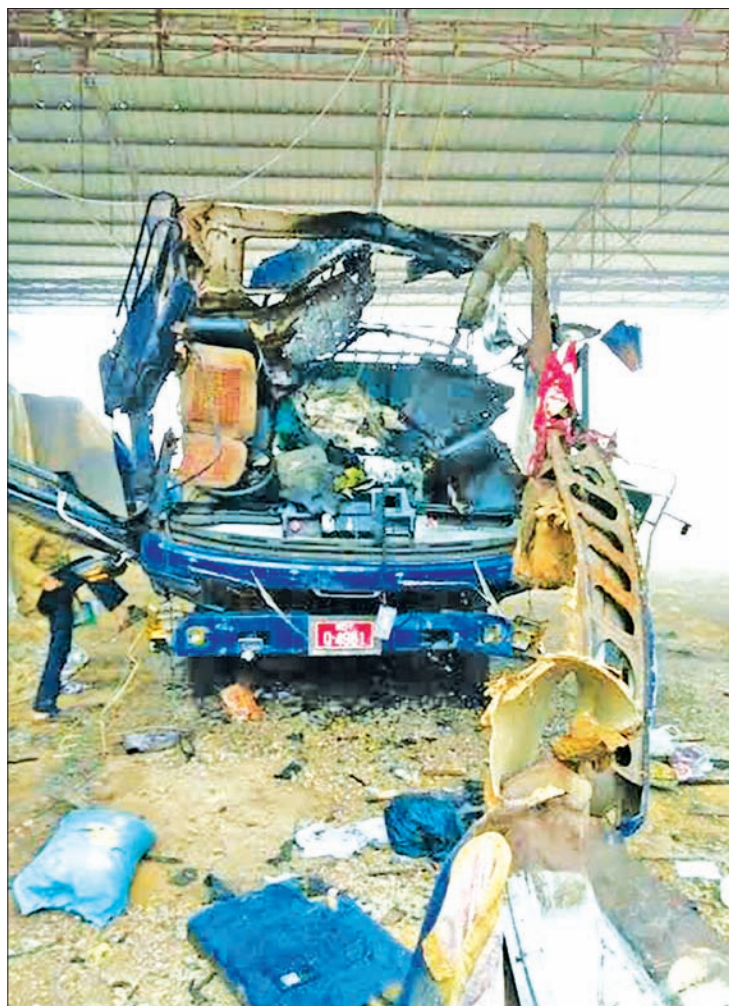
Sagaing Region has produced 130140.56 troy ounces of gold in 2011-2012 financial year, 11181.93 troy ounces in 2012-2013,

19585.94 troy ounces in 2013-2014 and 11569.62 troy ounces in 2014-2015 financial year, said the official. (1 troy ounce = 31.1035 gm)

The enterprise and the private companies have worked under the production sharing agreement, since 2004-2005 financial year. The cooperation is aimed to create opportunities for the locals and to increase gold production.

Altogether 88 private gold mining companies in Sagaing Region have spent K 1.22 million on education, health, transportation, electricity supply, potable water supply, and local development works, according to the official.

(Myo Win Tun - Monywa)



12-wheeled truck struck by blast. PHOTO: INFORMATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT

Explosion claims three lives, injures three, engulfed truck

AN explosion hit a twelve-wheeled truck in Chinshwehaw, Laukkai Distirct, yesterday killing three and leaving three injured.

The explosion occurred at 2.15 pm Saturday, engulfed the vehicle loaded with peas bags and parked at a local terminal, damaging other five trucks.

Authorities confirmed that the dead were U Tun Kyaing, 55, Daw San San Win, 57, and Maung Kyaw Myat Thu, 22, from Kyaukme.

The three wounded are Ye Zaw Htaik, 24, U Min Thu (Alias) Pho Htaung, 26, and U Ko Lin, 37, and they are being hospitalized at Chinshwehaw Peo-

ple's Hospital.

The police also discovered an improvised mine attached with am 10-inch by 4-inch pack of gun powder at the site.

The police assumed that the blast was a time bomb attack and are conducting a probe into the accident. —*Myanma News Agency*



A pack of gun-powder sealed in green tape and accessories of improvised mine. PHOTO: MYAWADY

Book of medical history hits bookstores

A book entitled “The History of Medical Education in Myanmar” has come out as part of enabling the new generations to understand the country’s medical education.

Professor Dr Daw Myint Myint Khin, Dr U Ko Ko and Professor Dr U Aung Than Batu compiled the book with the in-

attention of conveying to posterity the message of their struggle in medical education in the history of the country.

The introductory book sales took place at the University of Medicine 1 in Yangon yesterday, with Union Health Minister Dr Than Aung commenting that the book portrays a series of devel-

opments in the world of medical education from 1886 to 2010.

“The book is expected to be used as a reference in the ASEAN region and the developing world as well,” he said.

The 500-page book is published by the Myanmar Medical Association. —*Myanmar News Agency*

Fourth-week mass walk activity in Yangon

YANGON Region Government conducted fourth-week mass walk activity at the Sports and Physical Education Institute in Tamwe Township, Yangon yesterday morning.

The activity was led by Yangon Region Chief

Minister U Myint Swe and members of the regional government.

More than 5000 people participated in the activity. After the walk, the participants did physical exercises collectively.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Time is up to make big money from property investment, realtor says

Ye Myint

DESPITE optimistic predictions of a resurgence in the country’s property market next year, it is impossible to turn much profit with real estate from 2016 onwards, said an experienced realtor at a property expo in Yangon yesterday.

The time is up to make a lot of money by investing in a plot or an apartment, said U Aye Min from Aung Thamardi Real Estate Co., Ltd, adding that the housing market is forecast to rebound in 2016.

The realtor also pointed out that despite the situation in which there is a large number of properties with no people living in them many people dream of owning their own home during his talks on the 2016 real estate outlook.

As one of the factors to reverse the current trend of the deflating market, it is required

to develop new affordable housing construction by local builders in cooperation with foreign developers so that the sector will be able to show its ability to bounce back.

According to realtors and builders, the market has attracted not only businesspeople but also individuals investing in the sector boasting immense potential for significant profit since early 2013, but the drop in both sales and rentals has become evident since early this year.

As a result of seeing increased interest in the booming property market, the overheated property market has cooled with sales slumping, leaving the real estate sector in a holding pattern.

They added that investors and developers as well as potential buyers of homes tend to hesitate for an appropriate amount of time, preferring to adopt a ‘wait-and-see’ approach.

Hoping for healthy growth



Expo visitors examine a housing display at a property expo in Yangon yesterday. PHOTO: YE MYINT

of the country’s property market, real estate companies have gathered at a three-day property expo set to run until today in

Yangon, showcasing apartments and condos for sale.

“Stakeholders in the sector want to turn the property

market, which is in a wait-and-see mode, into an active one through this event”, said a participant to the expo.

South Korea mulls relocation of girl statue symbolising comfort women

SEOUL — South Korea is considering relocating a statue of a girl symbolising the issue of so-called comfort women from in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, if Tokyo offers conditions acceptable to Seoul in talks to settle the long-standing row, South Korean government sources said yesterday.

South Korean Foreign Min-

ister Yun Byung Se and his Japanese counterpart Fumio Kishida are set to discuss the issue when they meet on Monday in the South Korean capital.

Seoul is also planning to accept Tokyo's request that South Korean President Park Geun-hye refrain from criticising Japan over the women, including those from the Korean Peninsula, who

were procured to work at wartime Japanese military brothels, when she holds talks with leaders of third countries, the sources said.

The bronze statue was erected by a South Korean civic group in December 2011, on the occasion of the organisation's 1,000th day of protest in front of the embassy. The protests have been

held every Wednesday since 1992.

It remains uncertain whether the South Korean government can convince the civic group to accept the statue's relocation. The body demands that the Japanese government offer an apology and compensation to Korean former comfort women. —*Kyodo News*



A statue of a girl symbolising the issue of "comfort women" in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

Bangladesh signs \$12.65bn deal with Russia for nuclear power plants

DHAKA — Bangladesh's state-run Atomic Energy Commission signed a deal with Russia on Friday to set up two nuclear power plants, each with 1,200 megawatt capacity, an investment totalling \$12.65 billion, a government official said.

Work will begin early next

year at Ruppur in Iswardi, 160 km (100 miles) from Dhaka, said Kamrul Islam Bhyian, spokesman for the ministry of science and technology.

"Russia will finance up to 90 per cent of the total cost as credit with an interest rate of Libor plus 1.75 per cent," Bhyian told Reu-

ters. Bangladesh will clear the total loan within 28 years with a 10-year grace period.

Bangladesh finance minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith said it would be the country's biggest power project.

The first power plant is expected to begin operating by

2022 and the second by 2023.

The official said the plant would use a new generation reactor that has a lifespan of 60 years with an option of extending it for 20 years.

The reactor contains improved safety features, and its passive safety system can work

for 72 hours in any critical or emergency situation, it said.

Rosatom will maintain the plant for the first year of its commercial operation before handing over to the Bangladesh authorities, and will bear fuel costs for the first year of operation.

—*Reuters*

THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

Chief Executive Officer -

Nakagawa Kiyoshi
gnlmdaily@gmail.com

Chief Editor - Khin Maung Aye
khinmaungaye@hotmail.com

Deputy Chief Editor - Aye Min Soe
koayeminsoe2006@gmail.com

Chief Reporter

Ye Myint, uyemyint76@gmail.com,

Consultant Editors

Jacob Goldberg
jgold.news@gmail.com

Alec Wilmot
alec.wilmot.gnlm@gmail.com

Editors

Ye Htut Tin
mryehtuttin@gmail.com

Kyaw Thura, kthura.spk@gmail.com,
Myint Win Thein

journalist.sss@gmail.com

International news

Tun Tun Naing
tunyunaing@gmail.com

Reporters

Khaing Thanda Lwin
juniorlwin25@gmail.com

Tun Aung Kyaw
tunaungkyaw.31@gmail.com

Translators

Ma Than Htay,
Hay Mar Tin Win
haymarfat@gmail.com

Proof reader

Nwe Nwe Tun

Computer Team

Tun Zaw, Thein Ngwe,
Zaw Zaw Aung,

Ye Naing Soe, Nyi Zaw Moe,
Hnin Pwint, Kay Khaing Win,
Sanda Hnin, Zu Zin Hnin

Circulation & Advertising

San Lwin (+95) (01) 8604532
Ads and subscription enquiries:
adv.gnlm@gmail.com

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More than 100 homes lost in Australia's Christmas Day bushfires



Smoke rises from a fast-moving bushfire near the Great Ocean Road in Victoria, Australia, on 25 December.

PHOTO: REUTERS

MELBOURNE — More than 100 homes burned down in a leading Australia tourist area as Christmas Day bushfires remained out of control and dangerous yesterday, with officials predicting more blazes to come in the hot southern summer.

While around 150 firefighters battled the flames along parts of Victoria state's picturesque Great Ocean Road, teams moved in to assess damage from fires

that had lit up the night sky along the coast on Christmas evening.

A spokeswoman for the state's emergency services said 85 homes had been confirmed burned in the community of Wye River and another 18 in nearby Separation Creek, for a total of 103 in the two townships located about 120 kilometres (75 miles) southwest of Melbourne.

Top emergency officials warned that dry conditions posed

a threat of more fires for the Great Ocean Road area and the rest of Victoria.

"This fire doesn't go away. This fire is a fire that will remain with potential to burn in January and February this year," Craig Lapsley, the state's emergency services commissioner, told a news conference.

"We will be back into hot, windy weather in January without a doubt. Everything's availa-

ble to burn." The Great Ocean Road is one of Australia's biggest tourist draws with its spectacular scenery and bizarre rock formations just offshore in the Southern Ocean. It remained mostly closed to traffic yesterday during what is typically one of its busiest times of the year.

Although an evacuation alert was lifted for the popular tourist town of Lorne and rain overnight had helped the firefighting operation, officials said the fires were far from out.

State Premier Daniel Andrews surveyed the area from the air and commended emergency services, noting that there had so far been no loss of life.

Meetings were held on Saturday for hundreds of victims urgently moved out of affected towns on Friday, many spending Christmas night in hurriedly organised shelters.

Some of the buildings destroyed were holiday homes. Andrews said financial grants had already been issued to help those who had lost their homes.

The fires started with a lightning strike on 19 December and, fanned by winds, have already burned more than 2,000 hectares.

Walking tracks in the nearby Great Otway National Park have been closed to the public as the fires reached the park itself.

The disaster is the latest of a string of bushfires to hit Victoria and other states in recent weeks.

In 2009, Victoria witnessed Australia's worst ever bushfire, since dubbed "Black Saturday". —*Reuters*

A hug and high tea: Indian PM makes surprise visit to Pakistan

ISLAMABAD — Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a surprise stopover in Pakistan on Friday to meet his counterpart, Nawaz Sharif, the first time an Indian premier has visited the rival nation in over a decade.

The visit, requested by Modi just hours earlier before he flew back home from Afghanistan, raised hopes that stop-and-start negotiations between the nuclear-armed neighbours might finally make progress after three wars and more than 65 years of hostility.

Sharif hugged Modi after he landed at the airport in the eastern city of Lahore and the two left by helicopter for Sharif's nearby family estate.

"So, you have finally come," Sharif told Modi, according to a Pakistani foreign ministry official who was at the meeting.

"Yes, absolutely. I am here," Modi replied, according to the official.

Modi phoned Sharif earlier in the day to wish him on his birthday and asked if he could make a stop in Pakistan on his way home, Pakistan's top diplomat, Foreign Secretary Aizaz Chaudhry, told reporters.

"And the PM said to him, 'Please come, you are our guest, please come and have tea with

me,'" he said.

It was Sharif's 66th birthday and the family home was festooned with lights for his grand-daughter's wedding on Saturday. Modi and Sharif talked for about 90 minutes and shared an early evening meal before the Indian leader flew back home.

"Among the decisions taken was that ties between the two countries would be strengthened and also people-to-people contact would be strengthened so that the atmosphere can be created in which the peace process can move forward," Chaudhry said.

The next step will be for the two countries' foreign secretaries to meet in the middle of next month, he added.

Modi was on his way back from a visit to Russia. He stopped off in the Afghan capital Kabul earlier on Friday, where he inaugurated a new parliament complex built with Indian help.

The Lahore visit comes after India and Pakistan resumed high-level contacts with a brief conversation between Sharif and Modi at climate change talks in Paris late last month, part of efforts to restart a peace dialogue plagued by militant attacks and long-standing distrust.

A spokesman at Sharif's office earlier told Reuters the two



Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif shakes hands with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi after his arrival in Lahore, Pakistan, on 25 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

leaders were to discuss a range of bilateral issues, including the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir, the most contentious issue dividing the nuclear-armed rivals.

A close aide to Modi said the visit was a spontaneous decision by the prime minister and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, and that it should not be seen as a sudden shift in India's position.

"But yes, it's a clear signal that active engagement can be done at a quick pace," the aide

said, declining to be identified.

Mistrust between India and Pakistan runs deep. Modi's visit is the first by an Indian prime minister to Pakistan since the 2008 Mumbai attacks in which 166 people were killed in the Indian city by militants trained in Pakistan.

The two countries were born out of British colonial India in 1947, divided into Hindu-majority India and Islamic Pakistan.

Modi, a Hindu nationalist,

came to power in 2014, and has authorised a more robust approach to Pakistan, giving security forces the license to retaliate forcefully along their disputed border and demanding an end to insurgent attacks in Indian territory.

In Afghanistan, many believe that Islamabad sponsors the Taliban insurgency to weaken the Kabul government and limit the influence of India.

Pakistan rejects the accusation but it has struggled to turn around perceptions in Afghanistan, where social media users sent out a stream of glowing commentary on Modi's visit, contrasting the parliament building with the destruction wrought by Taliban suicide bombers.

Nalin Kohli, a spokesman for Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party, said in New Delhi that India was ready to take two steps forward if Pakistan took one to improve ties.

The opposition Congress Party called Modi's visit irresponsible and said that nothing had happened to warrant warming of ties between the rivals. Scheduled high-level talks between the two were canceled in August after ceasefire violations across the border. "If the decision is not preposterous then it is utterly ridiculous," Congress leader Manish Tewari said.—Reuters

37 injured as 6.9 magnitude earthquake hits Pakistan

ISLAMABAD — At least 37 people were injured when an earthquake measuring 6.9 at the Richter Scale jolted Pakistani capital Islamabad and parts of east Punjab and northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces in the wee hours of Saturday morning, local media and officials said.

Urdu TV channel Geo said that the capital city Peshawar of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province was the worst-hit area from where the all 37 casualties were reported.

The hospital authorities said that most of people got injuries in the head and limbs after being hit by the bricks of the collapsed houses.

The provincial authorities have imposed a state of emergency in all the three major hospitals in Peshawar and also in neighbouring Nowshera district to facilitate the injured people.

The tumbler also caused land sliding at Karakoram Highway in north Gilgit Baltistan area, blocking it from various places.

Ghulam Rasool, the Director General of Pakistan met office said that the quake's focal depth was determined at a focal depth of 197 km in the Hindukush mountain ranges along Afghanistan-Tajikistan border.

He said that the earthquake's

duration was 59 seconds in parts of the country, adding that several mild to moderate aftershocks hit the country in the next few hours.

Meanwhile the United States Geological Survey (USGS) said that the earthquake's magnitude was 6.2 and its focal depth was 203 km in Ashkasham area of Afghanistan.

Commenting on the difference of the magnitudes, the DG said that the USGS monitor the earthquake situation from mainland America as they do not have any station in Pakistan.

He said that Pakistan lies on the earthquake fault line due to which the local met office keep a close check on the seismic activity and has its bases in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province which enable them to give a more accurate report about the earthquake as compared to the USGS.

The disaster management authority of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province said that they are contacting their sub-offices in various districts to check possible damages caused by the quake.

The National Disaster Management Authority's spokesperson said that they are checking with the disaster management authorities of all the provinces to make an estimate of losses and damages.—Xinhua

11 lifted from east China collapsed mine, 18 still trapped

JINAN — Eleven people have been lifted from a collapsed gypsum mine by Friday evening in east China's Shandong Province, but 18 others remain trapped, local authorities said.

A total of 29 people were working underground when the collapse occurred at about 8am in Pingyi County, a county spokesman said. Four people escaped.

The accident at the mine

owned by the Yurong trade company was likely caused by another collapse that hit a neighbouring gypsum goaf, he said.

Rescue work is difficult as part of the underground tunnel has been blocked, one rescuer told Xinhua.

The State Administration of Work Safety has sent a team of experts to the site.

According to the official

microblog of China Earthquake Networks Centre, the collapse caused a 4-magnitude earthquake on the Richter scale in Pingyi County.

The shock affected local rail service, with 10 freight trains halted and eight passenger trains delayed on Friday morning. All trains had resumed service by 12:15pm, the Jinan Railway Bureau said.—Xinhua



A trapped miner is rescued from a collapsed gypsum mine in Pingyi County, east China's Shandong Province, on 25 December. PHOTO: XINHUA

Obama says 6 US troops killed in Afghanistan attack were 'outstanding'



US President Barack Obama, with first lady Michelle Obama, delivers remarks at a Christmas reception with service members at Marine Corps Base Hawaii in Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, on 25 December.

PHOTO: REUTERS

KANOEHU BAY — President Barack Obama called the six US troops killed in Afghanistan on Monday “outstanding” and “brave” as he thanked American service members on Friday during a Christmas Day visit to Marine Corps Base Hawaii in Kaneohe Bay.

“Even though we have been able to reduce the number of folks we’re deploying to places like Iraq and Afghanistan, there are still folks over there every single day and it’s still dangerous as we saw this past week with the outstanding, brave men and women who

were killed,” Obama said.

The six American troops were killed when a suicide bomber on a motor bike struck their patrol near Bagram air base, marking the deadliest attack on US forces this year.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack.

The Christmas Day remarks were the first time Obama had addressed the attack. He did not mention it when he made an appearance for reporters while playing golf the day of the attack.

Obama and his wife Michelle made their annual visit to

the US Marine base’s Anderson Hall dining room to deliver Christmas wishes to troops and their families.

“So many families are serving tirelessly and it’s not just those of you in uniform who serve,” Obama said in a brief address to the troops, noting that spouses and children of service members also make sacrifices.

Obama uses the workout facilities at the base during his family’s two-week vacation in Hawaii.

“The only problem I’ve got when I’m here is that I’ve got to work out next to Marines in the gym,” Obama joked. “I generally feel like your commander in chief is in pretty good shape. Then I get next to some guy curling 100 pounds and it makes me feel small.”

The president and first lady then spent time talking to the troops individually and taking pictures with them and their families.

The White House said the Obamas spent Christmas morning opening presents and singing carols.

On Wednesday, Obama called military service members from the Army, Navy and Air Force who are stationed around the world to thank them for their service, the White House said.—*Reuters*

German foreign minister calls for better control of EU’s borders

BERLIN — Europe needs to regain control of its borders, Germany’s foreign minister was quoted yesterday as saying, after reports that forged Syrian passports are in the hands of Islamic State militants.

More than a million refugees, many fleeing war and violence in the Middle East, have arrived in Germany this year. Since last month’s Paris attacks, concern has grown that Islamist militants may enter undetected among the influx.

On Tuesday, German media quoted Bavaria’s Interior Minister as saying that refugees with fake Syrian passports have disappeared in Germany and there are grounds for suspicion that they may have had contact with Islamic State militants. Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier warned against lumping refugees in the same category as suspected terrorists and said many militants came from Europe.

“However, irrespective of this, it is important that we have more control again over who is



German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier speaks to reporters following a meeting of Foreign Ministers about the situation in Syria in the Manhattan borough of New York in December 2015.

PHOTO: REUTERS

entering and leaving Europe,” Steinmeier said in an interview with newspapers in the Funke Medien Group.

He added that a suggestion by the European Commission to expand the powers of the EU’s Frontex border agency, and an EU agreement offering incentives to Turkey to help

stem the flow of refugees, were important building blocks towards better frontier control.

Earlier this month, the European Union said it would nearly treble its spending on frontier defence and create a new 1,500-strong rapid reaction force under proposals to tackle the migration crisis.—*Reuters*

NEWS IN BRIEF

Top Syrian rebel leader killed in air strike in Damascus suburb

BEIRUT — A top Syrian rebel leader and head of the most powerful insurgent group in the eastern suburbs of Damascus was killed in an aerial raid that targeted the group’s headquarters, rebel sources and the Syrian army said on Friday.

The death of Zahran Alloush, 44, head of Jaysh al Islam, is a big blow to rebel control of the rural eastern suburban area of Damascus known as al Ghouta, the rebels said.

Defence experts say the disarray among the rebel forces could also consolidate Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s control over the rest of the area. Several rebel leaders have been killed since Russia began an aerial campaign on 30 September in support of its ally Assad, although Moscow has insisted that it is concentrating its attacks on Islamic State.—*Reuters*

Palestinian killed, 9 wounded in clashes with Israeli soldiers in Gaza

GAZA — A Palestinian young man was killed and nine injured on Friday afternoon during clashes with Israeli soldiers stationed on the border between eastern Gaza Strip and Israel, medics said.

Medical officials in Gaza said that Hani Wahdan, 22, was killed after Israeli soldiers shot him during the clashes east of al-Shuja’eya neighbourhood in east of Gaza. The officials also said that nine other young men were shot and wounded in various parts of their bodies, three of them were moderately injured. Since the outbreak of the violent wave of tension between Israel and the Palestinians, every Friday, dozens of young Palestinians head to the borderline area between Israel and the Gaza Strip and clash with the Israeli soldiers.—*Xinhua*

Nepal expects more Chinese tourists in coming years

KATHMANDU — Nepali officials expressed their hope yesterday that waiving visa application fees for Chinese tourists will be helpful to boost tourism of the Himalayan country after a devastating earthquake in April.

According to the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Nepal received 150,000 Chinese tourists in 2014 while the number stood at 46,000 in 2010. Dinesh Chandra Thapaliya, secretary of the ministry, said the new policy of waiving visa fees to Chinese nationals visiting Nepal will come into effect from early 2016.

He also thanked the Chinese government for lifting a travel advisory issued to Chinese citizens visiting Nepal. During a meeting between Nepal’s Deputy Prime Minister Kamal Thapa, who is also in-charge of foreign affairs, and his Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing on Friday, the two countries pledged to boost tourism cooperation.—*Xinhua*

US reports 31 strikes against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

WASHINGTON — The United States and its allies conducted 31 strikes against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria on Thursday, the coalition leading the operations said in a statement on Friday.

In Syria, a dozen strikes using fighters and drones near five cities included eight strikes near Mar’a and Manbij that struck seven tactical fighting units, destroyed several vehicles and wounded three Islamic State fighters.

In Iraq, the coalition staged 19 strikes near nine cities, including seven strikes near Mosul and three near Ramadi that destroyed 16 fighting positions, several tunnels, vehicles and bunkers.—*Reuters*

Afghan military kills 35 insurgents

KABUL — The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have killed 35 suspected Taliban insurgents since early Friday, the Defence Ministry said yesterday.

“In past 24 hours, the ANSF carried out cleanup operations in Paktika, Wardak, Faryab, Takhar and Helmand provinces, killing 35 armed insurgents and injuring five others,” the ministry said in a statement. The joint forces also discovered and confiscated rounds of light and heavy ammunition, the statement said.

The ministry also confirmed the loss of five army personnel during clashes in the operations and as a result of separate attacks across the country over the same period.

The Taliban militant group has yet to make comments.—*Xinhua*

Iraqi troops close in on last Islamic State foothold in Ramadi

BAGHDAD — Iraqi troops have pushed deeper into the heart of the last remaining district held by Islamic State in the city of Ramadi, an army spokesman said yesterday.

Recapturing Ramadi, which fell to the militants in May, would be one of the most important victories achieved by Iraq's armed forces since Islamic State swept across a third of the country in 2014.

Soldiers advanced overnight in the Hoz neighbourhood that houses the provincial government compound, the target of an attack that started on Tuesday, joint operations command spokesman Brigadier Yahya Rasool said.

"The counter-terrorism forces are within 800 metres (0.5 mile) from the government complex," advancing by about 1 km in the past day, Rasool said. "Air strikes helped detonate explosive devices and booby-trapped houses, facilitating our advance," he added.

Information about the situation on the ground is hard to verify. There was no confirmation of a claim by Islamic State on Friday that it had shot down an army helicopter. Ramadi is a provincial capital in the fertile Euphrates River valley, just two hours drive west of Baghdad. Most remaining civilians in the IS-held central district have taken shelter in the city's hospital, knowing that the army will not target it, Rasool said. He declined to give a time frame for the final onslaught to dislodge the mili-



Iraqi security forces gather to advance towards the centre of Ramadi city, on 25 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

tants. "The campaign's priority is to avoid casualties among civilians and the troops, no matter how long it takes," he said. Military officials had said on Wednesday the offensive to retake the central district should take several days.

The Iraqi government forces are backed by air support from an international coalition led by the United States. Shi'ite militia units backed by Iran, which have played a major part in other government offensives, have been kept away from the battlefield in Ramadi to avoid angering Sunni Muslim res-

idents. The city is the capital of mainly Sunni Muslim Anbar Province. The government said it would be handed over to the local police and to a Sunni tribal force once it was secured. Ramadi was Islamic State's biggest prize of 2015, abandoned by government forces in May in a major setback for Baghdad and for the Iraqi troops that have been trained by the United States since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

After Ramadi, the army plans to move to retake the northern city of Mosul, the biggest population

centre under Islamic State control in Iraq and Syria.

Dislodging the militants from Mosul, which had a pre-war population close to 2 million, would effectively abolish their state structure in Iraq and deprive them of a major source of funding, which comes partly from oil and partly from fees and taxes on residents.

"The liberation of dear Mosul will be achieved with the cooperation and unity of all Iraqis after the victory in Ramadi," Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said on Friday.—Reuters

AU assures Burundi no hidden motive in troop deployment plan

ADDIS ABABA — The African Union sought to reassure Burundi on Friday that a plan to send peacekeepers there is meant to bring a peaceful end to eight months of violence, and is not part of any "other agenda."

Earlier this month, the AU said it was ready to send 5,000 peacekeepers to Burundi to protect civilians caught up in the country's worst crisis since it emerged from civil war a decade ago. It would be the first time the bloc has invoked powers to deploy troops to a member country against its will. Burundi has said the proposed force is a violation of its sovereignty and that no troops will enter the country without its permission.

The AU said its head, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, had contacted President Pierre Nkurunziza to make clear that "the AU has no other agenda than to assist the government and people of Burundi at their hour of need, consistent with its commitment to promote African solutions to African problems".

It said in a statement that Dlamini-Zuma had "expressed the AU's readiness to rapidly initiate discussions with the government of Burundi to devise the best ways and means of facilitating the deployment of the mission, in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation".

The crisis began in April when Nkurunziza announced he would seek a third term, sparking a failed coup and months of street protests. The United Nations says at least 400 people have been killed and hundreds of thousands have fled the country. The violence has unnerved a region that remains volatile two decades after the genocide in neighbouring Rwanda. Dlamini-Zuma called on Burundi's feuding sides to cooperate with peace talks, which are scheduled to resume in Uganda on 28 December.—Reuters

Buses to ship out 2,000 besieged Syrian Islamist fighters

BEIRUT — Two thousand Syrian Islamist fighters are expected to be evacuated soon from besieged, rebel-held areas of southern Damascus in a deal brokered by the United Nations, a Hezbollah TV station said on Friday.

The deal marks a success for the government of President Bashar al-Assad, increasing its chances of reasserting control over a strategic

area just 4 km (2.5 miles) south of the centre of the capital. It also highlights the increasing efforts of the UN and foreign governments to bring about local ceasefires and safe-passage agreements as steps toward the wider goal of ending Syria's civil war, in which more than 250,000 people have been killed in nearly five years of fighting. The besieged militants include

fighters of Islamic State and the Nusra Front, al Qaeda's offshoot in Syria. Hezbollah's Manar TV said 18 buses had arrived to start taking them and 1,500 family members to areas under the control of IS and other rebel groups. It was not clear whether the buses were provided by the UN or by the Syrian army.

The rebels' capitulation was forced by a government siege

over several years that squeezed the flow of food and humanitarian aid, starving many people to death in what rights group Amnesty International has described as war crimes.

Manar said the fighters would also be handing in their heavy weapons to the Syrian army under what it said was a multi-party deal under UN auspices.—Reuters

Ethiopian opposition figures arrested over land protests

ADDIS ABABA — Ethiopian police have arrested two senior opposition members on suspicion of inciting weeks of protests against government plans to set up a new economic zone near the capital that would displace farmers, their party leader said on Friday.

The Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) says 87 protesters have been killed by police since demonstrations broke out this month in Oromiya region, in the country's worst civil unrest for a decade.

On 15 December, a govern-

ment spokesman said police had a list of five people who had died during the protests, but casualties could be higher. Officials have yet to announce an updated number.

OFC chairman Merara Gudina said police rounded up his deputy Bekele Gerba and the party's assistant secretary Dejene Tafa on Thursday, and both remained in custody.

"They suspect that our party and some of our members are part of the protest movement, that we have been inciting the demonstrations," he told Reuters, denying

that the OFC had incited violence. "We do not know when Bekele and Dejene will be released or be charged for anything."

Government officials were not immediately available for comment, but Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn told parliament on Friday that "anti-peace forces" had incited violence by spreading false information about the so-called "Addis Ababa Integrated Development Master Plan" to create an investment and industrial zone near the capital.

He said members of "terrorist

groups" had infiltrated protesters and that the government would take "unflinching measures" against them.

Addis Ababa has accused the secessionist Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and opposition group Ginbot 7 of involvement in the protests. It labels both groups as terrorist organisations.

Oromiya is Ethiopia's largest region by size and population. Dissident groups such as the OLF, which is waging a low-key rebellion, accuse the ruling EPRDF coalition of marginalising ethnic

Oromos. The second most populous nation in Africa with 90 million people, Ethiopia has long been one of the poorest countries in the world per capita, but has made startling strides towards industrialisation, recording some of the continent's strongest economic growth rates for a decade. But reallocating land for new uses is a thorny issue in a country where the vast majority of the population still survives on smallholder farm plots. The opposition says farmers have often been forced off land and poorly compensated.—Reuters

OPINION

Turning the ambitious nationwide ceasefire agreement into reality

Kyaw Thura

The framework for political dialogue was finalised on 15 December in a bid to transform into action the terms and outlines of the nationwide ceasefire agreement, which was signed by the government and eight ethnic armed organisations on 15 October.

The framework has paved the way for bringing an end to internal armed conflict and seeking solutions to political differences in a peaceful way so as to ensure national reconciliation.

Thus, the Union Peace Conference, scheduled to start on 12 January 2016, will represent a triumph of multilateral cooperation and a clear signal that all the stakeholders are coming together to react earnestly to the chronic challenges the country faces. For the first time ever, the conference is expected to establish a national commitment to change the course of the country's history and exhibit a unity in a common political cause.

However, there still remains much more work ahead of us, which is why the representatives to the Union Peace Conference must continue to play a vital role in achieving its lofty ambitions.

In other words, now is the time for them to take pride in the role they play in unison and with renewed hope. Most importantly, the essential components of the nationwide ceasefire agreement are essential to spurring action to ensure a lasting peace across the country.

Write for us

We appreciate your feedback and contributions. If you have any comments or would like to submit editorials, analyses or reports please email thantunaungnlm@gmail.com with your name and title.

Due to limitation of space we are only able to publish "Letter to the Editor" that do not exceed 500 words. Should you submit a text longer than 500 words please be aware that your letter will be edited.

The 68th Tipitaka Exam of 2016 to be grandly held starting from 27th December 2015

Ba Sein
(Religious Affairs)

It is known that Myanmar has been a predominantly Theravada Buddhist nation in the world for nearly one thousand years, and about ninety per cent of nation's population has taken faith in Theravada Buddhism since then. Furthermore, Myanmar has been recognized as a permanent higher learning centre of genuine Theravada Buddhism not only in the Buddhist world but also throughout the world. According to historical records of Buddhism, the Fifth and the Sixth Great Buddhist Councils (Synods) were successfully convened in Myanmar with a view to purification, perpetuation and propagation of Buddha Sasana (Buddha's teachings) all over the world. The Sixth Great Buddhist Council, which was attended and participated by Maha Theros from Five Theravada Buddhist Nations: Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, was successfully held in Myanmar in 1954.

In order to carefully preserve genuine Theravada Buddhism, a

great number of Buddhist Monastic Institutions and learning Centres of Buddhist Scriptures have been established in our country for years. For the time being, the two Pariyatti Sasana Universities, one in Yangon and the other in Mandalay have been so far established to promote and propagate the Theravada Buddhism throughout the world. At present, Buddhist monk students are attending these two universities, and if they have got through the prescribed examinations held by these Universities, they will be conferred Takkasila Dhammacariya Degree (Bachelor of Arts) in Buddhism and Takkasila Maha Dhammacariya Degree (Master of Arts) in Buddhism respectively. And now, the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University, the very first one in the Buddhist world, has already been established in order to propagate and promote genuine Theravada Buddhism throughout the world, and to share the knowledge of Buddhism both in theory and practice with the people of the world to promote their happiness and moral well-being.

According to the Pariyatti

(learning canonical Texts) Education System of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, there are seven kinds of religious examinations including the Sacred Tipitakadhara Tipitakakovida Selection Examination yearly held by the Ministry of religious Affairs. The seven kinds of Religious examinations are as follows:

- (1) Tipitakadhara Tipitakakovida Selection Examination
- (2) Dhammacariya Examination
- (3) Pathamagyi Examination
- (4) Pathamalat Examination
- (5) Pathamange Examination
- (6) Abdhimma/Visuddhimagga Examination (only for Laymen and Nuns)
- (7) Five Nikaya Examination

Out of these seven kinds of religious examinations, the Sacred Tipitakadhara Tipitakakovida Selection Examination has been separately held by the Ministry of Religious Affairs since sixty five years ago. Buddhist monk candidates who wish to appear for this Sacred Tipitakadhara Tipitakakovida Selection Examination must have passed at least the Pathamagyi Examination. In fact, the Sacred Tipitakadhara

Tipitakakovida Selection Examination is quite different from other religious examinations because the candidates have to take 33 days to sit for this examination. They have to take both oral examination consisting Pali Texts, 8026 pages of Tipitaka canons and the written examination consisting of Pali Texts Athakatha (Commentaries) and Tika (Sub-Commentaries) of 9934 pages of Tipitaka canons respectively. Only the candidates who have got through both oral and written examinations will be presented the Title of Tipitakadhara Tipitakakovida (the Title of religious Heroes). Up to now, only thirteen outstanding members of Sangha (Bhikkhus) (Religious Heroes) were presented the Title of Tipitakadhara Tipitakakovida within over 67 years' duration of the Sacred Tipitakadhara Tipitakakovida Selection Examination.

It is learnt that many more and more members of Sangha throughout the country have appeared for the Sacred Tipitakadhara Tipitakakovida Selection Examination from year to year. However, most of them were not successful. In fact, the

Sacred Tipitakadhara Tipitakakovida Selection Examination is the most difficult of the religious examinations which are yearly held in Myanmar. Such Sacred Tipitakadhara Tipitakakovida Selection Examination can be held only in Myanmar which has carefully preserved the genuine Theravada Buddhism for nearly one thousand years. It is learnt that such examination cannot be held in other Theravada Buddhist nations.

Members of Sangha, multifarious Buddhist people and the government of Myanmar, hand in hand, are striving to propagate and promote the genuine Theravada Buddhism not only in homeland but also abroad. We all Buddhists know that the Sasana is of the three kinds, viz (1) Pariyatti Sasana (Learning the Buddha's teachings), (2) Patipatti Sasana (Practical application of the Buddha's teachings) and (3) Pativedha Sasana (Realization of the Buddha's teachings). Out of them, the pariyatti Sasana is the most important one which mainly leads to the purification, perpetuation and propagation of the Buddha Sasana (the noble teachings of the Buddha).

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

I read your editorial on the newspaper dated 21.12.2015 and after reading it a number of thoughts came into my head.

These days we have read and watched the issues of migrant workers on newspaper or tv. People know that migrant workers are those who leave their own country for another one to search for well-paid job. However, there are also mi-

grants within some countries who abandon their region and move to another region of the country to search for greener pasture in it. Most migrant workers are from rural areas. They move from their native village or town to the cities or capitals. Their migrations are the problems not only for them but also for local people in respective cities or capitals.

There appear housing problems for migrants. The authorities concerned have to solve the problems. There are many reasons why they migrate. Of all the reasons, poverty is most obvious.

To reduce the issues rising from migration the development gap between rural and urban areas should be narrowed. Better job opportunities should be created for the rural people. It is advisable to set up businesses in rural areas for creating job op-

portunities. Infrastructures such as electricity supply, water supply, roads and bridges etc should be built for the factories or workplaces in rural areas. The rural people should be encouraged to produce their own commodities. More vocational education or vocational training schools should be established in eligible villages or towns. If more Vocational schools or institutes can be opened, more skilled workers can be produced.

Creating job opportunities

and producing skilled workers can reduce poverty.

Poverty alone is not the main reason for immigration. It is true. There are some mediocrities who do not need to worry about their basic needs. They also leave their country for foreign country to fulfil their growing desire to be rich. Man's discontent cannot be limited. It is he himself only who can limit if he wishes to.

U Han

uhannyunt.hn29@gmail.com

Contemporary art exhibition features diverse range of works

Nearly 60 artworks are being presented at River Ayeyawady Gallery during the five-day exhibition

Khaing Thanda Lwin

A COLLECTIVE art exhibition is being held at River Ayeyawady Gallery, with a focus on showcasing the artists' selected contemporary works that reflected the country's traditional arts and culture.

"Great White" opens 26 December and runs until 30 December, featuring 59 works by the four local artists—Nandar Hlaing, Zay Latt Khaing, Thit Nay San and Kaung Thit—in a wide range of styles and media.

Visitors can enjoy diverse range of artworks highlighting lives of grassroots people, beauties of landscapes and traditional umbrellas, and images of Buddha with lotus flowers, River Ayeyawady Gallery founder U Nay Min Latt said.

All paintings are available for sale during the event with

prices ranging from US\$114 to \$500.

This is the first time the four artists have gathered in the same group with the aim of gaining greater exposure for them, said Nanda Hlaing who created 18 acrylic works for the event, with plans to exhibit his fourth solo show next year.

Zay Latt Khaing, a prominent tattoo artist, who created 20 works for the show, said he has a plan to hold an abstract art exhibition next one or two months in Yangon in cooperation with his friends and teachers from the National University of Arts and Culture (Yangon).

River Ayeyawady Gallery is located on 35th Street (Middle Block) in Kyauktada Township in downtown Yangon. The gallery will host a group event next month, according to the gallery founder.



Contemporary works being displayed at River Ayeyawady Gallery. PHOTO: KHAING THANDA LWIN

Crime News

Police seize drugs dealers

AUTHORITIES could arrest the two men for narcotic drugs smuggling that occurred in Phakant on 24 December, but one suspect is on the run.

Maung Naing, 42, and Aung Zin Phyo, 30, were seized while members of No. 2 Anti-Drug Squad (Myitkyina) searched a house owned by Tin Myint and discovered 0.165 kilogram of heroin and 540 yabba pills from the jacket of Maung Naing and a bag being hang on the wall of the house.

Actions were taken against all suspects involved in those cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law.— *Police Force*



Maung Naing and Aung Zin Phyo. PHOTO: POLICE FORCE

Yabba pills seized in Sittway

A woman who carried yabba pills (a synthetic-amphetamine based narcotic) was seized by the police at Kitsapanadi highway terminal in Sittway on 25 December.

Acting on a tip-off, a combined team involving members

of No. 47 Anti-Drugs Squad searched a Mandalay-Sittway highway bus and found 5,970 yabba pills from the 45 year old Aye Kham Aung. The suspect is charged under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law.— *Police Force*



Aye Kham Aung. PHOTO: POLICE FORCE

More than 15,760 yabba pills seized in Laukkai

POLICE seized 15,760 yabba pills (a synthetic-amphetamine based narcotic) at the check point of Laukkai on 23 December.

Acting on a tip-off, a combined team comprising members of Laukkai Myoma Police Force searched a motorbike, which was en-route from Laukkai to Chinshwehaw, driven by the 19 year old Tarli and found those pills from the 55 year old passenger Mashouthwan in his jacket. Charges have been filed against the two suspects under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law.— *Police Force*

Leprosy patients in Loilem, Namsan in need of treatment

MANY leprosy patients in Loilem and Namsan townships are in need of treatment for the diseases, according to a local non-governmental organisation.

Some members of the community suffering from the disease have already received treatment, but treatment ended when multi-drug therapies (MDT) became unavailable to them.

Meanwhile, some have not

received any treatment yet.

Many local ethnic minority people live below the poverty line and lack knowledge about health, said a local NGO staffer who visited the area to investigate the situation among leprosy patients.

Loilem and Namsan are located about 70 miles from Taunggyi, the capital city of Shan State.— *GNLM*

Cow gives birth to twins

A COW in Tegyigon Village, Zabuthiri Township, gave birth to twins on 17 December.

This is the birth of the third calf of the cow. It has been breed-

ing under the supervision of a farmer in the village since 2012.

The twins, one male and one female, are in good health.— *Thant Maung*



Cow gave birth to twins. PHOTO: THANT MAUNG

Apple asks court to make Samsung pay \$180m more in patent dispute

NEW YORK — Just over a week after Samsung paid Apple more than \$548 million for infringing the patents and designs of the iPhone, Apple has asked a US court to force its biggest smartphone rival to cough up even more.

In court papers filed on Wednesday, Apple Inc (AAPL.O) said Samsung Electronics Co Ltd (005930.KS) owes nearly \$180 million in supplemental damages and interest.

These further damages relate to five Samsung devices that infringed Apple's patents and were sold after a 2012 jury verdict finding Samsung liable in the dispute.

Representatives for Samsung and Apple could not immediately be reached for comment.

The long-running dispute dates back to 2011, when Apple sued Samsung alleging the South Korean electronics company violated its patents and copied the look of the iPhone. After the 2012 verdict, Samsung was ordered to pay \$930 million

to Apple. In May a US appeals court stripped about \$382 million from that total, saying Cupertino, California-based Apple could not protect the phone's appearance through trademarks. Samsung paid Apple the bulk of the judgement, \$548.2 million, on 14 December.

In a case that has come to epitomize the global smartphone war, Apple and Samsung have more battles ahead. Another trial over remaining damages related to the appeals court decision is set to go ahead next March in San Jose, California federal court.

Samsung has also appealed the case to the US Supreme Court. The company said Apple was compensated far more than it deserved for patents on designs of the iPhone's front face, bezel and application icons. The high court must first decide whether or not to accept the case for review.

The case is Apple Inc v. Samsung Electronics Co Ltd in the US District Court for the Northern District of California, No. 11-cv-1846.—Reuters

Panasonic may build automotive battery plant in China

OSAKA — Panasonic Corp is considering building a plant in China to make automotive batteries, including products for electric vehicles, sources familiar with the matter said yesterday.

The Japanese electronics maker conceived the plan in light of anticipated growth in demand in China, where the government is promoting eco-cars to curb environmental pollution, they said.

Panasonic eyes constructing the plant in Dalian, north-eastern China, with the amount of investment expected to be tens of billions of yen (hundreds of millions of dollars), according to the sources.

The company plans to manufacture lithium-ion batter-

ies for EVs and plug-in hybrid vehicles destined for the Chinese market at the factory, they said.

Local, European, US and Japanese automakers have recently introduced new more environmentally friendly models in China to take advantage of the government's policy promoting purchases of such vehicles.

Panasonic hopes to expand sales in China, not only in the United States, where the company and US EV maker Tesla Motors Inc. have jointly been constructing a major lithium battery plant, the sources said. The Osaka-based company already operates a factory in China to produce batteries for personal computers.—Kyodo News

Alibaba agrees to invest \$1.25bn in Chinese online food delivery service



Richard Liu, CEO and founder of China's e-commerce company JD.com, crosses a street on an electric tricycle as he delivers goods for customers to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of the company, in Beijing. PHOTO: REUTERS

SHANGHAI — Alibaba Group Holding Ltd has agreed to invest \$1.25 billion in Chinese online food delivery service Ele.me, leading business weekly Caixin reported on Friday.

The report, citing unidentified sources, said Alibaba will obtain a 27.7 per cent stake in Ele.me, becoming its biggest shareholder.

Alibaba and Ele.me both declined to comment.

Ele.me, which roughly translates as 'Hungry Now?', is part

of a trend in China for what is known as online-to-offline (O2O) services. These include taxi hailing and restaurant review apps that link smartphone users with offline businesses.

Earlier this year, the food delivery service firm raised \$350 million from investors including CITIC Private Equity, Tencent Holdings Ltd, Alibaba rival JD.com Inc, Dianping and Sequoia Capital.

As more Chinese use their phones for everything from shop-

ping to booking restaurants, China's internet giants Alibaba, Tencent and Baidu Inc are increasingly investing in these services to attract more users to their own platforms.

Alibaba, the world's biggest e-commerce company, and social networking and video games titan Tencent together spent more than \$8 billion last year alone backing sometimes strikingly similar ventures, such as taxi hailing apps Kuadi Dache and Didi Dache.—Reuters

Ukraine approves state budget for 2016

KIEV — The Ukrainian parliament adopted on Friday the state budget for 2016, setting a deficit target of 3.7 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), in an obvious attempt to secure financial aid from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The adoption of the budget plan, which was backed by 263 lawmakers in the 450-seat assembly, was one of the key requirements set by the IMF to continue

financial assistance to the cash-strapped country.

Ukraine's budgetary revenues will increase by 15.1 per cent next year to about 25.9 billion US dollars, while expenditures will grow by 14.5 per cent to 29.8 billion dollars, the parliament said in an online statement posted on its website.

It also predicted a 2-per cent economic growth and an inflation of 12 per cent in the coming year.

The budget was passed over-

night after several weeks of negotiations between the government and the parliament, which had opposite views on the taxation and austerity measures aimed at closing a budget gap.

Before the budget vote, Ukrainian lawmakers had approved a series of laws, increasing the license duties on alcohol, tobacco and fuels while reducing the tax on employers and unifying the tax rate on personal income.—Xinhua

Hon Hai proposes to buy struggling Sharp for around 300bn yen

OSAKA — Taiwan's Hon Hai Precision Industry Co. has proposed buying Sharp Corp for around 300 billion yen (\$2.5 billion) on condition that the struggling Japanese electronics maker's top management be revamped, sources close to the matter said Friday.

Under the proposal, Hon

Hai, the world's largest contract supplier of electronics products, known for the Foxconn brand, is calling for the Sharp management team, including President Kozo Takahashi, to step down, and for Sharp's new leader to be someone from its group, the sources said.

The proposed amount repre-

sents an approximately 50 per cent premium to Sharp's current market value. Hon Hai is seen as willing to shoulder Sharp's interest-bearing debt of around 760 billion yen as of the end of September, according to the sources.

The Innovation Network Corp of Japan, a public-private fund, is also considering invest-

ing in the Osaka-based electronics company, but it will likely take until early next year to finish drawing up its own proposal.

The fund, which is financed in part by the Japanese government, is studying a plan to spin off Sharp's unprofitable liquid crystal display business and integrate it with Japan Display Inc.,

sources familiar with the matter have said. The fund has a stake in Japan Display, which makes small and medium-sized LCDs.

Sharp has been exploring ways to get back on its feet, taking a series of restructuring steps that include job cuts and the sale of its head office building in Osaka.—Kyodo News

Public hospital in Chiba removes patient's breast by mistake



Matsuo Nagata (R), head of the Chiba Cancer Centre, at a press conference on 25 December. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

CHIBA — A public hospital in Chiba Prefecture said Friday it removed the right breast of a female patient in her 30s by mistake based on data belonging to a

patient with more aggressive breast cancer.

The prefecture-run Chiba Cancer Centre in Chiba city said the woman's cancer was in its

early stage and it did not have to remove the entire right breast immediately. It offered apologies to her.

Hospital staff conducted a biopsy on the woman in mid-October, and her data got mixed up with that of a female patient in her 50s at the hospital, it said. The latter woman had undergone an examination the same day and was later diagnosed with aggressive breast cancer.

Early this month, the hospital removed the right breast of the woman in her 30s. But when her tissue was examined on 15 December, it realised the mistake had occurred, according to the hospital.

"We wish to offer our deep apologies to the patient and her family for causing such an accident," hospital head Matsuo Nagata said at a news conference. —Kyodo News

Chinese, Chilean scientists to launch joint research in Antarctica

SANTIAGO — Scientists from China's Polar Research Institute and Chile's Antarctic Institute will launch a series of joint research projects in the South Pole region, local media reported Friday.

The researchers will carry out studies on Antarctic oceanography and marine biology, and on the effects of climate change.

"We are taking a leap forward in scientific cooperation," said Edgardo Vega, deputy director of the Chilean institute.

Scientists from both nations will also meet for the second time in mid-2016 in Shanghai, he said, to determine in what other ways they can collaborate.

The two countries currently cooperate, but only in the area of logistics, with Chile providing services and assistance from a base in Punta Arenas, the country's southernmost city and the one closest to Antarctica.

"While we have long had logistical cooperation, it's key for Chile to be not just a departure point for the Antarctic, but to undertake scientific research in association with China's research policy," said Jorge Flies, the mayor of Chile's southern Magallanes Region.

The first bilateral meeting of scientists included three Chinese researchers: Meng Zhou and Yiwu Zhu, from Shanghai Jiao Tong University, and Yushang Zhang, from Shandong University. China's Polar Research Institute manages four polar research stations and operates the icebreaking vessel Xue Long, or Snow Dragon.

The state-run institute, overseen by Chile's foreign affairs ministry, said the Chinese researchers are expected to arrive soon at Punta Arenas aboard the icebreaker to take their Chilean counterparts on board. —Xinhua

No need to avoid 'happy baby pose' in prenatal yoga?

TORONTO — Even though women are often advised to steer clear of certain yoga poses late in pregnancy, many of these moves might not be a problem for women or their babies, a small US study suggests.

Yoga can have many benefits during pregnancy, including helping women maintain flexibility and muscle tone and develop breathing techniques that may be useful during labour. But late in pregnancy women are often warned against poses that require them to lie on their backs, such as "happy baby pose" or "corpse pose," and inversions such as "downward facing dog" that might reduce circulation to the fetus and contribute to a spike in fetal heart rate.

To see how much caution might be warranted, researchers monitored fetal heart rate while a group of 25 healthy women in the final weeks of pregnancy tried 26 common yoga poses.

Fetal heart rate remained normal through all of the poses, and none of the women reported decreased fetal movement, contractions, fluid leakage or vaginal bleeding in the 24 hours after their yoga sessions, researchers report in the journal *Obstetrics and Gynecology*.

"Though this is a preliminary study, I found there were no adverse changes in maternal or fetal wellbeing in the 26 studied poses," said lead author Rachael Polis, who conducted the research at Jersey Shore University Medical Centre and is currently with Kosair Children's Hospital Gynecology Specialists in Louisville, Kentucky.

"Postures suspected to be contraindicated — e.g. down-

ward facing dog, child's pose, happy baby and corpse pose — were also well tolerated," Polis added by email.

None of the women in the study had a history of hypertension or other complications during pregnancy, and none of them had any medical conditions that required them to avoid exercise.

The women were near the end of their third trimester, at about 35 to 37 weeks pregnant. Ten of the 25 participants did

yoga regularly, while eight were familiar with yoga and seven had never done it before.

Each woman completed a one-on-one yoga session with a certified yoga instructor, with an obstetrician and a medical resident in the room. They had stress tests before going through the poses and again afterward.

Given the size of their bellies, they didn't do any yoga poses lying on their stomachs. They also avoided complete inverted poses such as

hand stands or head stands. To avoid falls or other injuries, they could modify poses by using blocks, chairs or the wall for support.

Beyond the small size of the study, other limitations include yoga sessions that might not match the duration or intensity of a typical community yoga class, the authors concede. The women in the study were typically of a normal healthy weight, too, while more than half of pregnant women tend to be

overweight or obese.

It's also possible that women might encounter poses not covered by this experiment that could cause problems during pregnancy, noted Kathryn Curtis, a researcher at York University in Toronto who wasn't involved in the study.

"I encourage pregnant women to seek out studios that offer specialised prenatal yoga classes that are taught by teachers who have prenatal yoga training," Curtis said by email. —Reuters



Pregnant women practice yoga as they attempt to break the Guinness World Record for the largest prenatal yoga class, in Changsha, Hunan Province in 2014. PHOTO: REUTERS

Pope calls in Christmas message for unity against militant atrocities



Pope Francis waves during the 'Urbi et Orbi' (to the City and the World) Christmas message from the balcony overlooking St. Peter's Square at the Vatican, on 25 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis urged the world in his Christmas message on Friday to unite to end atrocities by Islamist militants that he said were causing immense suffering in many countries.

Security was tight at the Vatican as Francis, marking the third Christmas since his election in 2013, read his traditional Christmas Day "Urbi et Orbi" (to the city and the world) address from

the central balcony of St Peter's Basilica. Tens of thousands of people had to have their bags checked as they entered the Vatican area and then go through airport-style screening if they wanted to enter St Peter's Square.

Counter-terrorist police with machine guns discreetly patrolled the area in unmarked vans with dark windows.

After calling for an end to the civil wars in Syria and Libya,

the pope said:

"May the attention of the international community be unanimously directed to ending the atrocities which in those countries, as well as in Iraq, Libya, Yemen and sub-Saharan Africa, even now reap numerous victims, cause immense suffering and do not even spare the historical and cultural patrimony of entire peoples."

He was clearly referring to

Islamic State militants who have carried out numerous attacks in those countries and destroyed many cultural heritage sites. In October, Islamic State militants blew up the Arch of Triumph, a jewel in the exquisite collection of ruins in the Syrian oasis city of Palmyra.

The pontiff condemned recent "brutal acts of terrorism," including the 13 November attacks by Islamist militants that killed 130 people in Paris, and the downing of a Russian plane over Egypt's Sinai peninsula that killed 224 people on 31 October. Both were claimed by Islamic State.

"Only God's mercy can free humanity from the many forms of evil, at times monstrous evil, which selfishness spawns in our midst," he said. "The grace of God can convert hearts and offer mankind a way out of humanly insoluble situations."

He called for peace between Israelis and Palestinians in the area where Jesus was born.

"Where peace is born, there is no longer room for hatred and for war. Yet precisely where the incarnate Son of God came into the world, tensions and violence persist, and peace remains a gift to be implored and built," he said.

He asked God to bring consolation and strength to Christians who are being persecuted around the world and called for

peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, South Sudan and Ukraine.

Francis said the human dignity of far too many people around the world was trampled on, including that of refugees and migrants.

"Even today great numbers of men and women are deprived of their human dignity and, like the child Jesus, suffer cold, poverty, and rejection," he said.

"May our closeness today be felt by those who are most vulnerable, especially child soldiers, women who suffer violence, and the victims of human trafficking and the drug trade."

The Pope's words were echoed by the Archbishop of Canterbury in his Christmas Day address, in which the leader of the world's 80 million Anglicans said Christians in the Middle East faced extinction at the hands of Islamic State.

Archbishop Justin Welby said IS was "igniting a trail of fear, violence, hatred and determined oppression." He branded the group "a Herod of today", in a reference to the ruthless king of Judea at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ.

"They hate difference, whether it is Muslims who think differently, Yazidis or Christians, and because of them the Christians face elimination in the very region in which Christian faith began," he said.—Reuters

French reporter's press card declined for speaking for terrorism

BEIJING — A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson yesterday confirmed that China has refused to renew press credentials for a French journalist for her comments regarding terrorism.

Spokesman Lu Kang said Ursula Gauthier had offended the Chinese people with an article published on 18 November in which she overtly voiced support for terrorist activities.

In the article, she blamed government policy in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region for terrorist attacks.

Gauthier is a Beijing-based correspondent for French news

magazine L'Obs. Lu said Gauthier failed to apologize to the Chinese people for her wrong words and it is no longer suitable for her to work in China.

China ensures the legal

rights of foreign media organizations and journalists covering China stories, but will never tolerate the "freedom" of speaking for terrorism, said the spokesman.—Xinhua

Monju reactor sodium leak alert put down to instrument glitch

FUKUI — The operator of the Monju fast-breeder reactor said yesterday it suspects instrument malfunction is responsible for a sodium coolant leakage alert that was issued the previous night.

The Japan Atomic Energy Agency began looking into the cause of the apparent false alarm, saying no sodium was detected in a filter installed to absorb the substance in case of a leakage.

The alert sounded on one of the instruments used to detect airborne sodium leakage four times between 7:35pm and 9:15pm Friday at the Monju reactor. Other detectors at the site were not triggered.

The operator suspects either a glitch in the instrument's electric circuit or other systems occurred or the detector reacted with a substance other than sodium, agency officials said.

The alert prompted local firefighters to rush to the trouble-prone reactor in Fukui Prefecture. But they returned to base after receiving an explanation about the situation.

The fast-breeder reactor has experienced a series of safety problems following a major fire two decades ago caused by a sodium leak.

The fire resulted in the suspension of operations at the reactor until May 2010. It was halted again in August that year after a fuel replacement device for the reactor was accidentally dropped, leaving it inoperable.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority urged the science minister last month to appoint a new entity to run Monju within approximately six months to bolster safety management operations.—Kyodo News

Environment agency warns of significant flooding in England

LONDON — Heavy rain will sweep across the northern parts of Britain later on Christmas Day and continue over the weekend, the Environment Agency warned on Friday.

The Environment Agency warned that communities in the north of England need to prepare for flooding later today and the Boxing Day, as more rain is expected to hit these areas.

It said Cumbria is the area most at risk from further river and surface water flooding, while parts of Lancashire and Yorkshire also at risk. There is also the potential for some flooding along parts of the River Severn in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and Worcestershire over the weekend and into Monday.

Additional sandbags, de-

mountable barriers and pumps have been prepared for potentially more flooding and to help affected local communities, the Environment Agency said.

"People are working round the clock, and through Christmas Day, to help communities prepare. We have over 700 Environment Agency staff ready to respond. The military have been deployed, working alongside Environment Agency," said Environment Secretary Elizabeth Truss, who chaired a meeting of British government's COBR committee on Friday.

Troops from the area's local regiment, the Duke of Lancaster Regiment, were busy building flood defences as local rivers threatened for the third time in weeks to burst their banks in the worst hit areas,

Cockermouth, Keswick and the county capital city, Carlisle. As well as erecting flood defence gates the soldiers were also positioning sandbags to hold back floodwaters, according to the Ministry of Defence.

British meteorologic department confirmed that in the worst-hit county in northwest England, Cumbria has undergone the wettest December on record since records began in 1910. Many roads and properties have been inundated for several times since December 1.

Meanwhile, the Environmental Agency also said that high tides are expected around Christmas in parts of the south and west coast of England. It advised people to take special care near coastal paths and promenades.—Xinhua

Nepal quake-reconstruction body finally cleared to start working

KATHMANDU — Eight months after a devastating earthquake hit Nepal, its government has finally opened the way for a reconstruction agency to spend \$4.1 billion pledged by foreign donors to help the massive number of people rendered homeless.

Two separate earthquakes in April and May killed 9,000 people, injured more than 22,000 and damaged or destroyed nearly 900,000 houses, forcing many to live in shelters built with tarps and iron sheets, even in freezing temperatures.

It took until September for Nepal to create the National Reconstruction Agency (NRA).

On Saturday, a minister said that the cabinet on Friday named a chief for the agency, giving it the green light to begin its work.

The delays were due to wrangling between political parties, which frustrated many international donors.

Sherdhan Rai, minister for information and communication technology, said the NRA “will finalize the models for homes to be reconstructed and give financial assistance to people to rebuild their homes.” He also said the agency “will be responsible to rebuild schools, hospitals, monuments, roads and office



A man clears debris to rebuild a damaged lodge after the earthquake earlier this year in Solukhumbu district, also known as the Everest region, in November 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

buildings in five years”.

UNICEF says more than 200,000 families affected by the tremors are still living in temporary shelters, at an altitude above 1,500 metres (4,920 feet) where harsh winter conditions will continue through February.

The earthquake prompted squabbling Nepalese politicians to united and in September adopt a

new constitution, which they had failed at doing for seven years. But the charter triggered protests by ethnic Madhesi groups who blocked key trade crossings with India, causing severe fuel shortages. Aid agencies say the shortages disrupted efforts to send essential relief items such as blankets and clothing to earthquake survivors in mountainous areas.

“Clothes get wet with dew dropping from iron sheets at night and we cannot sleep,” Kanchhi Pahari, an earthquake victim told the *Kantipur* daily.

The government has handed only \$150 for each of the affected families in emergency aid but is yet to provide the second, promised tranche of \$2,000 for rebuilding homes.—*Reuters*

Discoverer of atomic element 113 to be confirmed in January

TOKYO — An international body of chemistry and physics is set to announce in late January whether a Japanese or joint US-Russian team will be handed naming rights of atomic element 113, a synthetic element which is provisionally named ununtrium, Japanese scientists said Saturday.

A joint working group set up by the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry and the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics will announce which team was able to conclusively identify the super heavy element after creating it, thus securing the right to name it, in a scientific paper to be published in a journal next month, they said. Synthetic elements do not occur naturally on Earth and are produced artificially through experiments, 24 such elements have been created and all are unstable. The most well known of the synthetic elements due to its use in the creation of the atomic bomb, plutonium, was later found to occur naturally.

The US-Russia team first discovered the element in 2003, earlier than the Japanese team, but data recorded by Japan's Riken institute in 2012 is considered to be conclusive, according to the scientists. If Riken wins the naming rights, it would be the first time scientists from an Asian country are given the right to name an atomic element. The artificially synthesized element has 113 protons in its nucleus. A Riken team led by Kosuke Morita, who now serves as professor at Kyushu University, succeeded in creating the element three times by having zinc ions collide with a thin bismuth layer — in 2004, 2005 and 2012.

Zinc has 30 protons in its nucleus, while bismuth has 83.

The US-Russia team claims the naming rights, saying it produced the element 113 earlier than Japan with a different method.—*Kyodo News*

Japanese group holds 2004 tsunami remembrance event in Thailand



People strew flowers over a grave at a mass graveyard where thousands of the 2004 tsunami victims are buried during the commemoration of the 11th anniversary of the devastating tsunami at Uleelheue in Aceh, Indonesia, on 26 December 2015. PHOTO: XINHUA

PHUKET — A Japanese group held a remembrance event for the deadly 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami disaster yesterday in the southern Thai province of Phuket.

The event organised by Plaja, a group of Japanese residents in Phuket, was among a number of 11th anniversary commemoration events for the disaster held in affected countries also including Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

More than 220,000 people were killed or went missing after a massive earthquake struck Indonesia's Aceh and triggered tsunami on 26 December, 2004.

In Phuket where many foreign tourists died in the disaster,

Japanese residents, Japanese Embassy representatives, local authorities and others attended the ceremony at a memorial that was erected at Kamala Beach in 2005 to remember the victims.

They offered prayers while three Buddhist monks from Japan read the sutras.

Fumio Nishioka, head of the Japanese group, said that while Phuket has recovered from the disaster, holding a ceremony once a year provides him an opportunity for internal reflection. This year, the bereaved families of Japanese victims of the disaster did not take part in the commemorative event.—*Kyodo News*

World's most obese man dies 2 months after weight-loss surgery

MEXICO CITY — A man believed to be the world's most obese passed away Friday in north Mexico, barely two months after undergoing weight-loss surgery.

Andres Moreno, 38, died of a heart attack and peritonitis (inflammation of the abdominal lining) in Ciudad Obregon, in northern Sonora state, his family said.

Moreno, who at one time tipped the scales at 450 kilos, had bariatric surgery on 28 October, in central Guadalajara, Jalisco state in midwestern Mexico, in hopes of shedding the excess weight and

leading a normal life.

The surgery involved removing three-fourths of his stomach and reshaping what was left into a tube to “prevent him from eating too much,” the *Medical Daily* reported in October. While the operation was considered a success, the ex-policeman complained of feeling ill on Christmas Eve, “and his family called on firefighters to help stabilise him,” state news agency Notimex reported.

Early Christmas Day, he was having difficulty breathing and family members decided to have

him taken to the hospital in an ambulance, but he died on the way.

The “Most Obese Man in the World” had shed 100 kilos to be able to undergo the surgical procedure in October.

On 19 November, Moreno had emergency surgery at the local State General Hospital (HGE) in Ciudad Obregon, due to severe peritonitis. He then returned to Guadalajara to convalesce under the supervision of the same medical team as before, and had returned home a few days ago, Notimex said.—*Xinhua*

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Jennifer Lawrence visits children's hospital in hometown

LOS ANGELES — Actress Jennifer Lawrence paid a surprise visit to Kosair Children's Hospital in her hometown in Kentucky.

The 25-year-old Oscar-winning actress remained low key in gray T-shirt during her visit, reported Aceshowbiz.

The hospital took to Facebook to share pictures of the "Hunger Games" star meeting her young fans.

"Jennifer Lawrence stopped by Kosair Children's Hospital today! Thank you for bringing many smiles to the patients before the holidays," read the caption of a photo album showing Lawrence's visit to the hospital.

The hospital also retweeted some photos from Twitter users, who managed to click the actress during her hospital.

It is not the first time Lawrence paid a visit to the hospital. Last year, she visited the hospital on Christmas Eve. Earlier this year, she made a surprise visit to Shriners Hospitals for Children in Montreal, where she was filming for her upcoming movie "X-Men: Apocalypse".—PTI



Actress Jennifer Lawrence. PHOTO: REUTERS

National Award to Oscars, emergence of Marathi cinema in 2015

MUMBAI — While Bollywood continued to make splashes at the box office with its Khans and Kapoors, Marathi film industry rose to prominence and delivered yet again with its content and storytelling.

Some of the Marathi films which stood out this year were "Court", "Killa", "Katyar Kaljat Ghusali", "Highway", "Mumbai Pune Mumbai 2" and "Double Seat".

The most successful and critically acclaimed of the lot was the National award winning "Court". The courtroom-drama was director Chaitanya Tamhane's debut effort in examining the Indian legal system through the trail of an ageing folk singer.

Bagging the maximum number of national and international awards by an Indian film — so far 18 — "Court" was also India's selection to the 88th Academy Awards in the best foreign language film category.

Coming close to the massive critical acclaim was debut director Avinash Arun's "Killa". Continuing with the theme of adolescents in its cinema (many Marathi films are based on children, much like the Iranian films) "Killa" was a warm, mesmerising journey about a 11-year old boy who has a difficult time coping with the death of his father.

"Killa" bagged the Nation-

al Award for best feature film in Marathi. Interestingly, Avinash was also the cinematographer of "Masaan", another film which did wonders at international film festivals, including winning two awards at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival.

While both "Court" and "Killa" were slightly on the artistic side, another debutante director, Subodh Bhawe, gave perhaps one of the biggest blockbusters of Marathi cinema, "Katyar Kaljat Ghusali".

The Diwali-release, starred Sachin Pilgaonkar and marked the acting debut of popular musician Shankar Mahadevan. "Katyar Kaljat Ghusali", based on a 1967 play of the same name, enthralled the audience with the performance and music (by Shankar Ehsaan Loy).

In an interview with PTI, Sachin Pilgaonkar had said he was overjoyed with the phenomenal success of Marathi films, which was just the beginning of greater glory ahead.

"Marathi cinema is destined to go to the next level and achieve greater heights. It's about time for Marathi films to make a global mark. Not that it wasn't doing good earlier but right now it is in an excellent phase."

The film set the cash registers ringing, despite facing competition from a big budget Bollywood film "Prem Ratan Dhan Payo" starring Salman Khan and Sonam Kapoor.

The musical-drama also faced competition from another

Marathi film released on the same date- "Mumbai Pune Mumbai 2".

Sequel to the 2010 super-hit film, "Mumbai Pune Mumbai 2", made a place for itself despite a Bollywood blockbuster and popular Marathi drama.

If "Katyar Kaljat Ghusali" marked Shankar's foray into acting, another film "Highway" saw the Marathi acting debut of Bollywood actress Huma Qureshi and Tisca Chopra and musical debut of composer Amit Trivedi.

"Highway" was one of the most talked about films this year owing to its original, out-of-the-box idea of an entire movie being set on the Pune-Mumbai expressway where the lives of the ensemble cast intersects when the traffic comes to a grinding halt.

"Highway" comes from the terrific director-writer combo of Umesh Kulkarni and Girish Kulkarni, who earlier gave critically acclaimed films like "Vihir" (produced by megastar Amitabh Bachchan) and "Deool".

Apart from these, Ravi Jadhav struck gold again with the highly popular sequel of his super hit "Timepass". The 2015 romantic-comedy-drama "Timepass 2" not only earned rave reviews but also proved to be a success at the box office.

Ankush Choudhary and Mukta Barve starrer "Double Seat" too met with both, box office and critical acclaim, with its story of a married couple trying to find their place in Mumbai. Even the Marathi superhero film "Baji" found its audience.—PTI

Tyga buys 200K car

LOS ANGELES — Rapper Tyga has bought himself a USD 200,000 Christmas gift. The 'Rack City' hitmaker — who recently reconciled with girlfriend Kylie Jenner — was seen leaving a Lamborghini dealership driving a top-of-the-range Lamborghini Aventador super car, reported TMZ.

The vehicles usually retail at around USD 200,000 so Tyga was clearly keen to splurge ahead of the festive season. However, his new purchase may raise some eyebrows as it has been rumoured the rapper has money troubles. It was recently revealed he had failed to close on the purchase of his new home three times.

The "Ayo" hitmaker, 26, has been in escrow on a USD 10 million, eight-bedroom property in the Calabasas home close to where Kylie and various members of her family live, but has reportedly come up with excuses every time the deal has been due to complete.—PTI

'Star Wars' breaks Christmas day box office record!

LOS ANGELES — "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" continues to add feats to its list of box office records and now has the biggest Christmas Eve domestic gross with USD 27.5 million, defeating previous record holder "Avatar" which took in USD 11.2 million in 2009.

The seventh installment of the "Star Wars" saga also broke the opening week domestic box office record, earning USD 391.1 million after seven days in theatres, reported Ace Showbiz.

The film beat out previous record holder "Jurassic World", which took in USD 296.2 million during its first week at North America box office in May.

The "Star Wars" movie is now the 22nd highest domestic grosser of all time. It outpaced "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part II" (USD 381 million), "Finding Nemo" (USD 380.8 million) and "Star Wars: Episode III — Revenge of the Sith" (USD 380.3 million).

"The Force Awakens",



A man dressed as Darth Vader from Star Wars walks through Times Square during unseasonably warm weather on Christmas eve in the Manhattan borough of New York on 24 December 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

which stars Daisy Ridley, John Boyega, Oscar Isaac, Adam Driver and Harrison Ford, could earn USD 35 million-USD 47 million on Christmas Day, which would

easily surpass the USD 24.6 million opening of "Sherlock Holmes" on 25 December, 2009 to nab the biggest Christmas Day revenue of all time. So far, the J.J.

Abrams-directed movie has earned USD 422.4 million overseas and USD 391 million at domestic box office, pushing its worldwide total to USD 813.4 million.—PTI

Eastern US sees warm Christmas, winter storm looms for Plains

SAN FRANCISCO — Much of the US East Coast basked in unseasonable warmth on Christmas Day with record high temperatures set or tied in several cities, including New York, even as a tornado hit Alabama and a major winter storm loomed for the southern Rockies and Great Plains.

The twister in Birmingham, Alabama, late on Friday afternoon damaged several homes, uprooted trees and caused a handful of minor injuries, police and weather officials reported.

National Weather Service meteorologist Jody Aaron said the tornado damage appeared limited to the southwestern end of the city, the state's largest in a region of the South that has been hit hard by three days of thunderstorms and torrential rain.

The most noteworthy weather phenomenon for most of Eastern Seaboard, meanwhile, was a continuing pattern of temperatures about 20 degrees above normal.

The temperature in Manhattan's Central Park climbed to 66 degrees Fahrenheit, the highest Christmas Day mark in at least 146

years, while Philadelphia topped out at a record-tying 68 degrees F, according to the National Weather Service. Temperatures around Washington, reached the upper 60s and low-70s F, just a few degrees shy of record highs despite cloudy, damp weather. Both New York and Washington posted record warmth on Thursday, as well.

Above-average temperatures were expected to linger along the Eastern seaboard through the holiday weekend, with heavy rains falling across much of the South and mid-Atlantic region raising the possibility of flash floods.

Parts of Alabama were deluged by more than a foot of rain Wednesday evening through Friday afternoon, while Georgia also was soaked with nearly 5 inches of precipitation measured at Atlanta's airport, according to the Weather Service.

But even as soggy conditions in the South begin to abate, a powerful winter storm was forming across the southern Rockies and Plains, threatening blizzard conditions for parts of New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma on Saturday,



Young boys play in a park during an unusually warm winter day in Brooklyn, New York. PHOTO: REUTERS

forecasters said. As much as 2 feet (61 cm) of snow was possible in areas of New Mexico and northern Texas, they said.

Snow already was falling on Friday in parts of Nebraska, South Dakota and Minnesota, a region bisected by heavily travelled Interstate 90.

"This is coming at a bad time for travel," said Richard Baan, a meteorologist for the Weather Prediction Centre in College Park, Maryland. Heavy rain, and possible flooding, was expected

from the same system on Saturday in eastern Oklahoma, Arkansas, north-central Texas and Louisiana, Baan said.

A separate winter storm in California's Sierra Nevada brought more welcome relief to ski resorts struggling through a four-year drought that has left the mountain snowpack badly depleted. The two largest ski destinations near Lake Tahoe — the Heavenly Mountain Resort and Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows — reported receiving 2 feet and 19 inches of snow, respec-

tively, on Thursday and Friday.

Facing delays stemming in part from severe weather this week, package delivery company FedEx Corp (FDX.N) said it was manning customer counters with volunteers on Christmas Day.

A storm system on Wednesday set off tornadoes that killed at least 15 people in Tennessee, Arkansas and Mississippi.

The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency said on Friday that two people were still missing.—Reuters



Entertainment Channel

(27-12-2015, Sunday)

- 6:00 am**
- Shwe Pyi Aye Music Troupe
- 6:25 am**
- Myanmar Video
- 8:00 am**
- Game For Children
- 8:30 am**
- Musical Programme
- 8:45 am**
- Sing & Enjoy
- 9:25 am**
- Myanmar Movie
- 12:00 noon**
- Close Down

Graduate plans extreme 'getaway' with solo Indian Ocean row

BERLIN — One graduate with a craving to get away from it all in 2016 intends to row solo across the Indian Ocean, quitting the Berlin start-up scene to seek freedom and listen to some audio books in peace.

Francesco Tomba, 26, is undeterred by his lack of significant rowing experience. He has already completed a lone six-month swim around an Indonesian island, a cycling expedition in the Himalayas and a winter living under a rock in the French Alps.

"There's no other getaway like this," he said of the row he plans to start from Australia in mid-2016,

probably in July.

"These days I don't have any time to read and I'm really looking forward to having hours and hours of 'reading time'," he said in his Berlin flat. "I'm going to audio book the hell out of it."

Others have rowed solo across the Indian Ocean before: Swede Anders Svedlund's 1971 crossing is the first on record.

However, Tomba aims to be the first to row alone from Australia to mainland Africa, arriving in Tanzania — unlike previous rowers who arrived in Madagascar or Mauritius.

Tomba, a British-Italian math-

ematics graduate, expects the journey to take around four months in a 7-metre (23 ft) boat that he is having purpose-built.

To prepare for the crossing, he is joining a six-man crew rowing across the Atlantic in January. Otherwise, his training is based on an intense one-hour daily 'cardio' workout of push-ups, sit-ups and other exercises using his own body weight. "There's a draw towards doing something where you have to deal with situations in the moment," he said. "You have to make decisions as quickly as possible, otherwise — well, there is no 'otherwise'. You just have to."

Tomba expects choppy conditions during his row across the Indian Ocean, the third largest after the Pacific and the Atlantic. He will have a satellite connection to stay in touch with friends and family, and an onshore route planner.

Is he afraid? "Of course. That is part of the draw. There is no way you can conquer the elements, you just have to deal with it."

Tomba says he is "the laziest person on earth" but adds: "This stuff is all about tricking yourself into doing it. You book your flight before you've come to terms with it. Then you have to do something about it." —Reuters

mitv Myanmar International

(27-12-2015 07:00 am ~ 28-12-2015 07:00 am) MST

Today Fresh

- 07:03 Am News
- 07:26 Am Myanmar Betels
- 07:42 Am Orchid Lover
- 07:51 Am Cultural Shows: Theatrical Art
- 08:03 Am News

- 08:26 Am Travelogue: A Tour in Korea (Ep-7)
- 08:36 Am Discovering Tibes: Akha- Their Life and Customs (Part-1)
- 09:03 Am News
- 09:26 Am Cruising To Precious Islands (Part-2)
- 09:47 Am Maha Myatmuni Buddha Image In Rakhine
- 10:03 Am News
- 10:26 Am MURAL PAINTING BAGAN
- 10:37 Am Lawka Nandar Wildlife Sanctuary And Its Rare Star Tortoises
- (11:00 Am ~ 03:00 Pm) - Saturday Repeat (03:00 Pm ~ 07:00 Pm)
- (03:00 Pm ~ 07:00 Pm) - TodayRepeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)

Prime Time

- 07:03 Pm News
- 07:26 Pm On the River
- 07:49 Pm Today Myanmar: Child Protection
- 08:03 Pm News
- 08:26 Pm Hanthawaddy U Win Tin "A Fearless Man" (Episode - 2)
- 08:43 Pm Myanmar Masterclass: Artist Zay Yar Aye
- (09:00 Pm ~ 11:00 Pm) - TodayRepeat (09:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
- (11:00 Pm ~ 03:00 Am) - Saturday Repeat (03:00 Pm ~ 07:00 Am)
- (03:00 Am ~ 07:00 Am) - TodayRepeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
- (For Detailed Schedule - www.myanmaritv.com/schedule)

Palace targeting Europe after new American owners come in

LONDON — Manager Alan Pardew is targeting a debut campaign in European football for Crystal Palace next season following the promise of a sizeable cash injection from new American owners, he said on Thursday.

The Londoners announced last week that Josh Harris, co-founder of the private equity firm Apollo Global Management, and business partner David Blitzler had agreed to take control alongside existing Palace chairman Steve Parish.

They are joined by a number of other investors in a limited partnership that will include current shareholders Stephen Browett, Jeremy Hosking and Martin Long.

All shareholders agreed an initial injection of 50 million pounds (\$74.64 million) for the development of their Selhurst Park ground with more to follow.

“It’s very difficult not to change the dynamics of a club running very well when new owners come in but I think David and Josh are keen for it to progress as it has been progressing,” Pardew told reporters on Thursday.

“We could become a bigger club because we’re in London, that gives us a massive advantage.”

“No disrespect to the rest of the country, it just does, location-wise for international players, for access to their families,” said Pardew ahead of sixth-placed Palace’s Premier League visit to Bournemouth on Saturday.

“We’ve got an opportunity that we’re going to try to grasp.”

Palace have rarely been as high in the top-flight as they are now and Pardew believes a first-ever appearance in Eu-

ropean competition is within reach.

“Nine wins (this season) speaks for itself,” he said. “Only three other clubs have done that. It’s a great achievement and we have a great set of players very focused on trying to do for the second part of the season what we’ve done all calendar year. “If we do that, then we’re going to find ourselves in Europe. This club has never reached Europe ... so that would be significant for the club, a fantastic achievement,” added Pardew, who joined Palace from Newcastle United in January.

“There’s a long, long way to go but I’m buoyed by the fact that it’s not just the first half of this season. We did it at the back-end of last season too.”—Reuters

Hanyu slips but leads nationals, Uno close in 2nd

SAPPORO — World and Olympic champion Yuzuru Hanyu made a dominant start at the national championships on Friday after topping the men’s short program, but with Shoma Uno close behind with a career-high score.

Hanyu, who set a record total of 330.43 points at the Grand Prix Finals in Barcelona on 13 December, fell on his opening quad salchow but regrouped to land a quad-triple toe loop combination to go on to score 102.63 at Makomanai Ice Arena.

“Honestly I’m really frustrated, but was rated highly with the score,” said Hanyu, bidding for a fourth straight title. “It feels as if I’m being told I can do better.”

“I don’t feel tired. In this string of events I was aiming to perform without mistakes under any circumstance, and that’s something I couldn’t achieve today,” he added.

Hanyu attributed his fall on his first jump to feeling too relaxed, the result of competing at home where he’s able to speak Japanese and not worry about communicating in a

foreign language.

“Compared to two seasons ago (when he scored 103.10), being able to score 102 despite making a mistake is huge. I wonder if that’s down to having two quad jumps.”

The 21-year-old fell short of his short-program-record 110.95 points marked in Barcelona, and although he remains the only skater to top 100, 18-year-old Uno has left himself in contention ahead of the free skate on Saturday by scoring 97.94.

“It wasn’t the same as in the training but I feel I put in a decent performance,” said Uno, skating on the senior circuit for the first time this season. “It hasn’t reached the level where I can pump my fist, but I could execute all my jumps and I can give pass marks for that.”

Uno, third in the Grand Prix Finals and last year’s runner-up at the nationals, landed all three of his jumps including a quad toe loop.

“I’m relieved as I had lots of mistakes in the short skate,” said Uno. “I got a score way higher than expected but there were

things I could have done more and I don’t feel I’ve given everything.”

Takahito Mura, 24, started off by nailing his quad-triple toe loop combination and placed third after a dynamic performance for a personal best score of 93.26.

“I’m glad I could give everything when I had no room for mistake,” said Mura, who skated second from last and after Hanyu and Uno.

“I’d like to keep up the pace with Yuzu (Hanyu) and carry this momentum to the free.” The first place finishers in both the men’s and women’s competition in Sapporo will qualify for the world championships in Boston in late March.

—Kyodo News



Yuzuru Hanyu. PHOTO: REUTERS

Messi leads Marca’s top 10 players of 2015, Ronaldo ranked 8th



Leo Messi. PHOTO: XINHUA

MADRID — Spanish paper Marca has released a top 10 players of 2015 list on Friday with Leo Messi being placed first and Cristiano Ronaldo 8th.

Rather than picking the players themselves, Marca left the ordering up to reader’s votes.

2015 was undeniably the year of FC Barcelona. Luis Enrique’s side finish the year as the best club team on the planet.

That accolade was locked up by five trophies — the Copa del Rey, European SuperCup, La Liga, the Champions League and the FIFA Club World Cup.

While Barca’s achievements were incredible, they seem to have skewed the results of Marca’s top 10 players of 2015 list.

According to the results, for example, Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo is eighth, while Barcelona’s generally

understated midfielder Sergio Busquets is sixth.

There were only two non-Spanish players picked in the top 10, while Barcelona had six players in the list.

The full Marca top 10 is as follows:

1. Leo Messi (Barcelona)
2. Neymar (Barcelona)
3. Luis Suarez (Barcelona)
4. Anders Iniesta (Barcelona)
5. Robert Lewandowski (Bayern Munich)
6. Sergio Busquets (Barcelona)
7. Claudio Bravo (Barcelona)
8. Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)
9. Antoine Griezmann (Atletico Madrid)
10. Paul Pogba (Juventus).—Xinhua

NZ bowling production line a concern for Sri Lanka

CHRISTCHURCH — Just when Sri Lanka thought batting would be easier without new-ball pair Tim Southee and Trent Boult after the test series, a more damaging New Zealand duo stepped up to the plate in the first one-dayer between the sides in Christchurch yesterday.

Matt Henry and Adam Milne reduced the visitors to 27 for five inside 10 overs at Hagley Oval in the opener of the five-match series as New Zealand cruised to a seven-wicket victory. Henry, who struggled in Australia last month and took just two wickets for 158 runs in the drawn second test in Perth, produced an outstanding opening six-over spell on Saturday with figures of 4-26. He finished with 4-49 from 10 overs. Both he and Milne regularly clocked in excess of 140 km per hour, with the fiery Milne exceeding 150 kph on several deliveries, a far cry from the 130-140 kph range that Southee and Boult delivered in the test series against Sri Lanka. What was most important for New Zea-

land captain Brendon McCullum, however, was that with test seamer Doug Bracewell, who impressed on Saturday with 3-37, and left-arm quick Mitchell McClenaghan, he now has a deep pace bowling unit to choose from.

“I think both Adam Milne and Matt Henry with the new ball back in their hands were outstanding for us,” McCullum said in a televised interview. “I thought Mitchell McClenaghan and Doug Bracewell were outstanding as well,” he added after McClenaghan picked up two wickets with his aggressive bowling rearing off a length on a pitch that was described as a “belter” by both captains. Southee and Boult have been rested for at least the first two matches, with left-armed Boult not available until the fourth match in Nelson on 2 January. McCullum, however, was not overly concerned. “We have two outstanding bowlers in Trent Boult and Tim Southee, who are vastly experienced and have been the kingpins for us for a long time,” he said.—Reuters