Local bank staff to get chance to pursue globally recognized financial courses

Yangon, 21 Dec — Staff from local banks will get opportunity to level up their skills through banking courses that will begin next month at the Myanmar Institute of Finance, according to the institute.

MIF, the first private professional institute in Myanmar, was founded in October with the aim of enhancing the country’s financial industry by raising the standards of education in the area of economics. It is scheduled to conduct both certificate and (See page 2)

By Khaing Thanda Lwin

In addition, the leaders placed an emphasis on developments in the regional and global context and acknowledged that increasing regional and sub-regional cooperation has greatly accelerated connectivity and integration while recognizing that the ASEAN member countries are making steady progress towards realization of the ASEAN Economic Community with many measures of the AEC Blueprints now under implementation.

Similarly, the declaration also recognized that maturing trade and investment frameworks between ASEAN and other key countries in the region including the Free Trade Area between ASEAN and the People’s Republic of China have led to substantial tariff reductions and increased flows of goods, investment and services across borders.

As for Myanmar, the declaration said that the opening up and integration of Myanmar into the regional economy has accelerated since the Fourth GMS Summit in Nay Pyi Taw three years ago, providing tremendous opportunities for closer cooperation with the GMS and this cooperation can translate into increased cross-border (See page 2)

Fifth GMS Summit issues joint declaration

Nay Pyi Taw, 21 Dec — Heads of States of Greater Mekong Sub-region, President of the World Bank, ministers and senior officials from the countries of Greater Mekong Sub-region attended the Fifth GMS Summit in Bangkok, Thailand, on 20 December and issued a joint declaration.

The leaders committed to inclusive and sustainable development in the Greater Mekong Sub-region, according to the declaration.

The leaders placed an emphasis on developments in the regional and global context and acknowledged that increasing regional and sub-regional cooperation has greatly accelerated connectivity and integration while recognizing that the ASEAN member countries are making steady progress towards realization of the ASEAN Economic Community with many measures of the AEC Blueprints now under implementation.

Similarly, the declaration also recognized that maturing trade and investment frameworks between ASEAN and other key countries in the region including the Free Trade Area between ASEAN and the People’s Republic of China have led to substantial tariff reductions and increased flows of goods, investment and services across borders.

As for Myanmar, the declaration said that the opening up and integration of Myanmar into the regional economy has accelerated since the Fourth GMS Summit in Nay Pyi Taw three years ago, providing tremendous opportunities for closer cooperation with the GMS and this cooperation can translate into increased cross-border (See page 2)

INSIDE

Minimum wage must set in line with agreement between employers and employees

Union Energy Minister on tour of Kyaukpyu Tsp

Religious Affairs Union Minister attends Christmas Dinner
Local bank staff to get . . .

(from page 1)

diploma level of banking, insurance, finance and accounting courses.

U Zin Tun Win, the institute’s CEO, said it is now holding discussions with three foreign institutes to open globally recognized advanced financial courses for local youths, with Dr. Hla Nyunt, Deputy Managing Director of Global Treasure Bank, advising the body to include a financial risk management course in the future.

He welcomed the founding of the institute, saying it may become an important organization to promote country’s human resources, and urged youth graduates to learn from the banking courses that may help them to get more job opportunities.

Nowadays, the country sees a massive influx of foreign investment thanks to the government’s economic and political openings. Experts estimated that youth graduates may flock to the banking sector in the future.

Local experts estimate that about 5,000 professionals from local banks may move to the foreign banks which have got a green-light from the Central Bank of Myanmar. Now, local banks are seeking ways to prevent an exodus of skilled workers, he added.—GNLM

Kayin ethnics join New Year festival at Union National Races Village

YANGON, 21 Dec — The 2nd Yangon East Kayin New Year festival was held at the Pyidaungsus Hall in Union National Races Village in Thakayta Township, here, on Sunday.

Well-wishers including Union Minister U Aung Min donated cash to the festival. Vocalists and dance troupes presented traditional songs and dances to the audiences.

Traditional equipment on history of Kayin ethnics were displayed at the festival for public observation.

Over 2,000 Kayin ethnics from Yangon Region, Ayeyawady Region and Kayin State joined the Kayin New Year festival.—MNA

Religious Affairs

Union Minister attends Christmas Dinner

NAVPY TAW, 21 Dec — Union Minister for Religious Affairs U Soe Win on 20 December attended a dinner jointly hosted by the Myanmar Catholic Bishops Association and the Myanmar Council of Churches in commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ, sources said.

In his season’s greetings, the union minister said the world is celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, adding that Christ recognizes the descent of Christ into the realm of human abode to save sinners.

Christianity values peace, stability, forgiveness, forbearance, love, kindness, sympathy, compassion, justice in all social relationships, he noted, calling for followers of different religions to adhere to their religious instruction and maintain harmony.

MNA

Kayin national races perform Don dances at Kayin New Year Day at Union National Races Village in Thakayta.—MNA
Plan underway to open polytechnic schools and institutes

NAW PSI TAW, 21 Dec — Local people need to participate in undertaking reform process for development of respective townships, Union Minister at the President Office U Soe Thane told departmental officials and bamboo and rattan producers at Saya San Hall in Thayawady, Bago Region, on 21 December.

The union minister explained the government is increasing the budgets year by year for implementation of rural development, education, health and regional development issues.

President U Thein Sein back from... (from page 1)

Present at the call were Union Ministers U Winna Maung Lwin, U Soe Maung, U Ohn Myint, U Khin Maung Soe, Dr Kan Zaw, U Kyaw Lwin and U Ye Htut, Lt-Gen Khin Zaw Oo, Myanmar Ambassador to Thailand U Win Maung and officials.

At 11.45 am, President U Thein Sein and wife Daw Khin Khin Win, together with delegation members, met staff families of the Myanmar embassy and the military attaché office at the residence of the Myanmar Ambassador in Bangkok.

The president presented gifts to staff families of the two offices and Myanmar students.

The ambassador hosted a luncheon in honor of the president.—MNA

Union Energy Minister on tour of Kyaukpyu Tsp

NAW PSI TAW, 21 Dec — Union Minister for Energy U Zeyer Aung explained the project of the ministry, socio-economic development for the people and electrification tasks to the local people at the hall in Kyaukpyu, Rakhine State, on 20 December.

Chief Minister of Rakhine State U Maung Ohn urged the local people to join the public-centred system for implementation of development projects.

Deputy Minister U Aung Htoo discussed exploitation tasks of Shwe offshore natural gas project, installation of machinery, laying gas pipelines, safety of oil pipelines, and environmental conservation.

The union minister and party inspected the Shwe natural gas distribution camp in Kyaukpyu. They viewed an oil port and tanks on Made Island.

SEA Oil and Natural Gas Pipeline Company donated US$ 420,000 for installation of 709 electric meter boxes and erection of a communication tower for development of Made Island. The union minister and the chief minister also donated K1 million each to education and health sectors of the local people.

Union Minister for Labour, Employment and Social Security U Aye Myint highlights designation of minimum wage.—MNA

YANGON, 21 Dec — The minimum wage law as Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Law No. 7 was enacted on 22 March 2013, Union Minister for Labour, Employment and Social Security U Aye Myint told employers at the office of Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Lammawad Township, here on Sunday.

With the assistance of the Union government, the minimum wage rules were issued on 12 July 2013, he added.

The union minister said a national committee on minimum wage designation has been formed with participation of 27 members. The minimum wage designation committees have been set up at the local level. Government organizations have conducted the meetings and seminars with participation of employers and employees in regions and states. The Myanmar Development Research Institute and International Labour Organization jointly conducted surveys on basic needs for designating the minimum wage in Yangon, Mandalay and Bago regions.

He continued that in fact, the minimum wage must be designated in line with the agreement of employers and employees, and the government will approve their agreement. Conducting the survey in regions and states is no waste of time, for designation of the minimum wage should be in a win-win situation for employers and employees.

Entrepreneurs, Pyithu Hluttaw representative Daw Tin Nwe Oo and ILO Liaison Officer Mr Steve Marshall discussed infrastructure requirements for the minimum wage, market situations, political stability and challenges.

In conclusion, the union minister said that the minimum wage should not be a burden on either employer or employees, and that the process is very important for economic development of the nation.

The ministry, employers and employees held the meetings 27 times in regions and states on designation of minimum wage. The national committee has also organized five meetings on the same subject.—MNA

Minimum wage must set in line with agreement between employers and employees

Union Energy Minister at the tour of Kyaukpyu Tsp

Present U Thein Sein greets Dhanin Chearavanont, Chairman and CEO of Charoen Pokphand (CP) Group in Bangkok.—MNA

Photo shows oil port and tanks on Made Island in Rakhine State.—MNA
PyinOolwin Township Health Dept turns out midwives

PyinOoLwin, 21 Dec — The midwifery course No. 1/2014, jointly conducted by Health Department and Maternal and Child Welfare Association, concluded at PyinOoLwin Township People’s Hospital (300-bed) on 19 December.

Head of Mandalay Region Health Department Dr Than Win, Chairperson of Mandalay Region Maternal and Child Welfare Supervisory Committee Daw Su Su Lwin and officials presented medicine kits, completion certificates and prizes to respective trainees.

A total of 18 trainees from villages in PyinOoLwin Township attended the six-month course.—Tin Maung (Mandalay)

Mandalarians participate in mass walk activity

MANDALAY, 21 Dec — Chief Minister of Mandalay Region U Ye Myint and wife joined a traditional mass walk activity in the third week of December together with departmental officials, teachers, students, social organization members and local people, totaling over 20,000 on 20 December.

They walked from the Min-gala Bridge at Mandalay royal city to 19th street.

Deputy Director U Wai Zin of Sports and Physical Education Department launched the walk. The participants walked along 26th, 66th and 19th streets.

Tin Maung (Mandalay)

Checkpoint at Muse trade zone should be expanded: trade director

MUSE, 21 Dec — As the area of checkpoint at Muse 105th-Mile trade zone does not balance with the number of vehicles carrying exported products, the export and import checkpoint yard needs to be expanded, Director of the zone U Tin Ye Win told media recently.

He remarked that the existing export and import checkpoint should be designated as an export checkpoint yard, and new import checkpoint should be built on the 92 acres of land near Asia World Toll Gate.

He continued to say that as the Union Highway between the trade zone and Muse urban area faces traffic congestion daily, a detour should be constructed.

Increasing volume of trade and trucks with commodities are in imbalance with the 48.56 acres checkpoint area. As a consequence, the Union Highway between the trade zone and Manwein gate faces traffic congestion daily.

About 1,400 trucks and buses including motorcycles pass the Union Highway daily. Therefore, the motorway is blocked with various sizes of vehicles.

Over 600 vehicles with the loads of fruits use an over 12-mile long road section from the trade zone to Kyukok (Pangsai) to export the products to China daily.

“Due to traffic congestion, vehicles take three hours to drive the road section from the trade zone to Kyukok-Pangsai,” said the director.

The muse trade zone’s trade volume reached US$3.609 billion from April 2013 to March 2014. From April to August in 2015, trade volume has reached US$2.061 billion.

Min Htet Aung (Mandalay Sub-printing House)

Myanmar to host AFF Championship (Suzuki Cup) 2016

YANGON, 21 Dec — President of Myanmar Football Federation U Zaw Zaw attended the 13th ASEAN Football Federation (AFF) Council Meeting in Malaysia on 20 December and discussed hosting the AFF Suzuki Cup 2016, systematic activities of ASEAN football arena, marketing and financial issues.

The council approved Myanmar’s bid to host the AFF council meeting in Yangon on 27 February 2015. The MFF President pledged to host the meeting successfully.

The meeting agreed to designate Myanmar as the host for 2016 AFF Suzuki Cup. According the new rules and regulations of the cup, the football teams from the first to seventh positions in the previous cup will have the opportunities to take part in the final stage of the coming cup together with one qualified team.

Cambodia will host the qualifier rounds for Cambodia, Brunei, Timor-Leste and Laos. Myanmar stood at the seventh position in the previous cup, so it will have the opportunity to take part in the final stage of the coming cup.—MFF
Radioactive waste transportation in Fukushima to be delayed

Tokyo, 21 Dec — The government has given up on an earlier plan to start transporting in January radioactive soil and other waste from decontamination work following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster to nearby towns, sources close to the matter said on Sunday.

The move came as the decontamination work has been slow and negotiations with landowners in Futaba and Okuma towns in Fukushima Prefecture on the construction of interim waste storage facilities have been protracted, the sources said.

Under the government plan, construction of the interim facilities to be kept in the interim facilities will be permanently disposed of outside the prefecture within 30 years, as requested by the prefectural government in accepting the storage.

The site for final disposal of the radioactive waste has yet to be decided.

Kyodo News

Philippines faces challenges in job creation in coming years: expert

Manila, 21 Dec — The Philippine government still faces challenges in job creation in the coming years despite a recent drop in the unemployment rate, the president of the Employers Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP) said on Sunday.

The country’s unemployment rate in October fell to 6 percent from 6.4 percent recorded in the same period a year ago, statistics from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed.

The confederation is concerned that not enough jobs are created due to a slowdown of the country’s economy, said Edgardo Lacson, president of ECOP.

Philippines’ gross domestic product grew 5.3 percent year-on-year in the third quarter of 2014, slower than 6.4 percent in the second quarter of 2014 and 7.0 percent in the third quarter of 2013.

High electricity cost and higher income tax rate are among the factors that deter job-generating investments in the country, Lacson added.

“What we need is (investment in) manufacturing and agribusiness which are biggest generators of jobs. Tourism helps as well,” he said.

In the 12 months to October, the economy has created around 1.05 million jobs, while the labor force increased by 1.072 million during the same period, according to the PSA.

Xinhua

Bangkok, 21 Dec — Thailand is talking to Japan with a view to building three rail routes in the Southeast Asian country, a Thai minister said on Saturday, the latest move by its military government to kick-start long-delayed plans to modernise its aging rail network.

Thailand wants three new lines connecting the capital, Bangkok, with cities in the east, west, north and northeast and Japan had expressed interest in understanding with the taking the work, said Thai Transport Minister Air Chief Marshal Pranit Junthong.

His announcement comes a day after Thailand signed a memorandum of understanding with China to construct two separate lines of 867 km (542 miles) in the kingdom, starting in 2016.

“We’re still in the process of talks (with Japan). It will be clearer after the Japanese government has finished its election and discussion will be made with both sides,” Pranit told reporters on the sidelines of a regional summit in Bangkok.

An overhaul of Thailand’s rail network was proposed long ago but has yet to materialize. The junta wants to start the ball rolling as part of its big infrastructure plans to try to revive an economy blighted by weak spending and exports.

Thailand has proposed Japan builds two separate east-west lines, one from Moe Sot at the Myanmar border to Mukdahan near the border with Laos and another connecting Kanchanaburi with the industrialised province of Rayong. A third route would run from Bangkok to the northern city of Chiang Mai, Pranit said. The three routes combined would cover roughly 1,500 km, according to Reuters calculations.

Thailand agreed to use China’s high-speed trains for the project.

Japan has long been Thailand’s biggest investor, mainly in car manufacturing and high-tech industries. Like China, Japan has substantial economic interests in the region, in particular, Vietnam, Myanmar and Thailand.

Reuters

Pakistan hangs 4 militants involved in attacking former president

Islamabad, 21 Dec — Four militants involved in attacking former Pakistan’s military president Pervez Musharraf were executed in the country’s east Faisalabad city on Sunday, local media reported.

The militants, whose death sentences were signed by the country’s Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif, were hanged to death in a prison in Faisalabad, a main city in the country’s east Punjab province.

Musharraf, the then president, narrowly escaped when two suicide car bombers rammed their vehicle into his motorcade on 25 December, 2003, in Rawalpindi.

Fifteen people including soldiers were killed in the attack which was the second attempt on Musharraf’s life that month.

Following the attack, several militants including the four hanged Sunday were arrested.

The four militants were sentenced to death earlier by the military court, however, the government was keeping a moratorium on death penalty since 2008, due to which their execution could not take place earlier.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Wednesday announced the lifting of the 2008 moratorium on executions in Pakistan.

The decision came in the wake of a Taliban attack on an army school which killed 132 schoolchildren and nine staff members, a Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif approved implementation of the executions in terrorism-related cases, the federal government has reportedly asked all provincial governments to collect details of all convicts on death row.

Officials say that security has also been tightened in other prisons in Pakistan in view of the possible hanging of the convicted militants.

Xinhua

Tremor felt in NE India as quake hits Myanmar-India border

New Delhi, 21 Dec — Tremor was felt in northeast India after a 4.8 magnitude quake hit the Myanmar-India border on Sunday, said seis­mologists of the regional seismological centre in Shillong, the capital city of Meghalaya state in northeast India.

The epicenter, with a depth of 11.08 km, was located in the Mizoram district of the state, the official said.

-Xinhua

Thailand looking to Japan for railways revamp

A passenger waits for a skytrain during rush hour at a station in Bangkok on 8 July, 2013.— Reuters

Chinese firms and technology to build a 734-km standard-gauge dual track railway from Nong Khiaw on Thailand’s border with Laos, to its ports and industrial zones in the east. Another line would link Bangkok with the central province of Saraburi about 108 km away.

A modern rail network would boost Thai trade and tourism and strengthen China’s strategic foothold in a country with traditionally strong ties with Japan and the United States. Relations with Washington have soured since a coup in May.

Japan has long been Thailand’s biggest investor, mainly in car manufacturing and high-tech industries. Like China, Japan has substantial economic interests in the region, in particular, Vietnam, Myanmar and Thailand.

Reuters
China builds first high-speed railway through karst region

GUIANG, 21 Dec— Construction of China’s first high-speed railway running through the country’s southwest karst regions was completed on Sunday.

The 857-km railway linking Guiyang, capital of landlocked mountainous province of Guizhou, with south China’s economic powerhouse Guangzhou, is expected to become operational on Friday.

Construction has the world’s most typical karst plateau landscape, which was inducted as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2007. Karst topography is a landscape formed from the dissolution of soluble rocks such as limestone.

Stretching through the complicated karst clusters, the railway had half of its length run through 238 tunnels, two of which are more than 14 km long, said Zhang Jingbo, general manager of the Guiyang-Guangzhou High-Speed Railway Co.

It took builders four years to drill through the two longest tunnels. Construction was often disrupted by breaking rocks, rupture of strata and water infiltration, Zhang said.

The construction company applied for six national patents covering their shockproof technology which was adopted to reduce the vibration that occurs when a train travelling at 250 km/hour runs through mountain tunnels.

Wang Mengshu, a tunnel expert with the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said the technology and machinery engineering developed for building the Guiyang-Guangzhou high-speed railway represents the country’s new-generation innovation in tunnel engineering.

Xinhua

Australian PM Abbott reshuffles cabinet to focus on jobs, families

SYDNEY, 21 Dec — Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, battling a slide in public support, reshuffled his cabinet on Sunday, promoting the overseer of a tough immigration programme and shuffling out his gap-prone defence minister.

Abbott said the shake-up was for jobs and families and stressed a focus on financial issues as he deals with the fallout of an unpopular belt-tightening budget.

“It is a sign that this government wants the economy to be front and center in the coming year,” he told reporters in Canberra.

Abbott is nearing the end of his first full year in office hobbled by missteps and a souring economy that have dragged his popularity and a slide in public support, according to an opinion poll.

He is a very tough and competent political operator,” Abbott said of Morrison. “He is also a very decent human being.”

Defence Minister David Johnston lost his job in the reshuffle which occurred a month after he embarrassed the government with comments critical of government-owned ship-builder ASC, saying he did not trust it to “build a canoe”.

The comment fueled expectations that most of the work in an A$40 billion submarine programme will go offshore. Reuters reported in September that Australia was leaning toward buying up to 12 off-the-shelf stealth submarines from Japan.

Morrison will be replaced by Peter Dutton, a former police detective, in the new portfolio as Minister for Immigration and Border Protection. John- ston will be replaced by Kevin Andrews.

Reuters

Rice firms seek new sales strategies to counter drop in consumption

TOKYO, 21 Dec — Rice producers and suppliers are turning to unconventional sales strategies that are less dependent on long-established brand names or regions in an effort to boost rice consumption, which has been decreasing over recent years.

An online shop operated by a Tokyo-based company lets buyers choose lesser-known rice brands from across Japan based on ratings by “rice sommeliers”.

“Products from this shop are assessed based on objective figures and it is easy to choose,” said 38-year-old tax accountant Takashi Koizumi, a resident of Sakai, Osaka Prefecture.

“People from this shop are not produced in popular and shiny even though they are not produced in popular rice production sites like the Hokuriku region or Niigata Prefecture,” Koizumi said.

Upfarm Solutions Co started operating the online shop in the fall of 2014.

The company sells rice brands that have received certain scores at a contest for newly harvested rice organized every year by an Osaka-based association of rice sommeliers.

The scores are decided by measuring the amount of four ingredients — water, protein, amylase and fatty acid, which are said to determine the quality of rice, with special evaluation equipment.

The score, the name of the variety and that of the producer, as well as the cultivation method are labeled on the package of each product. Mafudo currently sells brands produced by some 40 producers across Japan. The price is set based on the ratings.

Products that were cultivated in a special method and won 85 or higher scores, for instance, carry a suggested retail price of 2,160 yen for 2 kilograms regardless of the brand or production site, with the exception of award-winning brands.

Upfarm Solutions President Ryuzo Takahashi said, “We aim to enable consumers to judge on their own the value of rice based on objective figures.”

“Fair evaluations also boost the enthusiasm among rice farmers to improve the quality of their rice,” Takahashi said.

In the meantime, some companies let customers buy rice in small portions at a time when the number of single and elderly households is increasing.

Kitoku Shinyo Co, a major wholesaler based in Tokyo, sells a 900-gram package of rice for less than 500 yen in four different brands including “Koshihikari” produced in Niigata Prefecture. The company also sells 450-gram packages.

Each package has a zipper to keep the rice fresh and can be stored in a fridge.

Iris Ohyama Inc based in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, also deals with 450-gram packages of fresh rice.

In July, the company started operating a rice milling plant in the prefecture with an annual production capacity of 100,000 tons, using six top-quality brands from such places as the Tohoku region and Hokkaido.

At the factory, all the operations from milling and packaging are controlled at 15 C or lower temperature to preserve freshness.

A deoxidizer is also contained in each package to prevent the rice inside from oxidizing.

Kyodo News

Two South Korea’s Navy ships have arrived in Russia’s port city Vladivostok on a four-day visit on 18 Dec, 2014.—XINHUA

Photo taken on 24 Oct 2014 shows Kitoku Shinyo Co.’s rice product lineups including series of small-amount packages such as 900-gram ones.

KYODO NEWS
Cuba says US must respect its communist system

HAVANA, 21 Dec —

President Raul Castro demanded on Saturday that the United States respect Cuba’s communist rule, the two countries work to restore diplomatic ties, and warned that Cuban-American exiles might try to sabotage the rapprochement.

US President Barack Obama this week reset the rapprochement between the United States and Cuba, and announced plans for the two countries to reset diplomatic ties, and restore human and political rights as they negotiate over the coming months.

Castro said he is open to discussing a wide range of issues but that they should also cover the United States and the Cuban-American exiles will attempt to “substitute the process”.

Obama has pledged to remove economic sanctions against Cuba but he still needs the Republic-controlled Congress to lift the embargo.

Castro confirmed he will take part in a Summit of the Americas in Panama in April, potentially setting up a first meeting with Obama since they shook hands at Nelson Mandela’s funeral a year ago.

That brief encounter drew wide attention. Unbeknownst to the world at the time, the United States and Cuba were already six months into secret talks set up with the help of Pope Francis and the Canadian government.

Castro’s elder brother and retired leader Fidel Castro, 88, has not been seen or heard from since Obama’s announcement and he was not at the National Assembly on Saturday. Raul Castro ended his speech with an energetic “Viva Fidel!”

The Assembly gave a long standing ovation to Cuba’s five “anti-terrorist heroes,” intelligence agents who spent between 14 and 16 years in US prison for spying on Cuban exiles.

Two had been released after serving their terms and the United States freed the final three on Wednesday as part of a prisoner swap.

In return, Cuba freed US aid subcontractor Alan Gross, who had been held for five years for bringing in banned telecommunications equipment, plus a Cuban who had spied for the United States and dozens of other unidentified prisoners.

—Reuters

UN’s Ban hails Obama for ‘courageous’ Cuba move

BAMAKO, 21 Dec —

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon praised US President Barack Obama on Saturday for what he called courage and vision in renewing ties with Cuba and said he had asked Washington to pursue such a course.

Cuban President Raul Castro also demonstrated leadership in reciprocating the opening, Ban said.

Obama announced on Wednesday that the United States would re-rupt diplo-matic relations it severed 50 years ago, and expand commercial ties with the communist-ruled island.

The move has been criti-cized by a string of Republican lawmakers but welcomed abroad, including by the European Union.

“I highly commend President Obama’s very courageous visionary decision to address this issue. At the same time I really appreciate President Raul Castro. He has shown great humanity and leadership this time,” Ban told Reuters.

Ban visited Cuba earlier this year and said he had been trying to advocate for an opening with Cuba to authorities in Washington over the issue.

“I am very glad that they have finally decided to agree,” said Ban.

He also praised Cuba’s humanity in sending hundreds of healthcare workers to West Africa to fight the worst outbreak of the Ebola virus on record.

The UN chief was speaking in Mali during a trip to West Africa aimed at thanking healthcare workers of the countries at the heart of the epidemic.—Reuters

Russian truck convoy with relief aid for Donbas heading for Russian border

MOSCOW, 21 Dec —

A Russian relief convoy bound for Donbas is heading for the Russian border with Ukraine, a Russian Emergency Ministry source told TASS.

“A relief convoy consisting of more than 180 trucks left the Donetsk rescue centre of the Russian Emergency Ministry’s southern Rostov region and is heading for the Russian border,” the ministry’s representative said.

The relief cargo includes New Year presents, building materials for restoration of damaged socially significant buildings, including schools and kindergartens, as well as food and medical supplies for people suffering from cardio-vascular diseases and diabetes as well as anti-influenza drugs.

“Dozens of public organizations and thousands of Russians who are not indifferent to other people’s trouble had collected the relief aid. They brought in New Year presents, food products and building materials,” Drobyshevsky said.

Russia had notified the Ukrainian side and international organizations in advance of its intention to dispatch the 10th relief cargo to Donetsk.

“We invited them to inspect the cargoes at border crossing points,” the Emergency Ministry spokes-person said.

A day earlier, journalists had been shown the trucks’ content. They could choose and inspect any vehicles. According to TASS, the journalists found Christmas trees lapped in fabric, cedar, cypress and rubberwood.

“All the trucks have undergone maintenance and repairs. All the drivers have been instructed how to drive in extreme conditions. Almost all of them have already delivered relief cargoes to the Donetsk and Lugansk regions,” the Russian Emergency Ministry said.

Nine Russian relief convoys have delivered about 12,000 tonnes of relief cargos, predominantly medical supplies and building materials, to Donetsk and Lugansk since 11 August.—TASS

Art student Arthur Butka, 15, takes a nap at his home beside his painting of Cuba’s former president Fidel Castro, in downtown Havana on 28 Nov, 2014. From bus drivers to bartenders and ballet dancers, many Cubans are already imagining a more prosperous future after the United States said it will put an end to 50 years of conflict with the communist-run island. Picture taken on 28 Nov, 2014.—Reuters

Photo credit: Reuters

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon speaks with his first vice-president Miguel Diaz Canel during a session of the National Assembly in Havana, on 20 Dec, 2014. —Reuters

Photo credit: Reuters
Minimum wages should be a cure rather than a curse

By Kyaw Thura

The establishment of minimum wages is aimed at preventing employees from being exploited by employers, enabling them to secure a socially acceptable standard of living and alleviating poverty, according to a report published by the International Labour Organization in 1992.

Experts have suggested two kinds of considerations — social and economic — should be borne in mind when setting minimum wages.

Let’s Revive the “Death Railway”

By Khin Maung Myint

Legend or History
Most people of our generation knew or heard of the “Death Railway.” The number of those who knew or ever heard of that name will gradually decrease among those who were born a few decades later. As for me, I came to learn about that notorious railway line since I was in my pre-teen years, near the end of the Second World War. It was like a legendary tale when I first heard of it from some adults of my small native town in Upper Burma (Myanmar), who claimed they escaped from the construction site of that rail line. They were among the few survivors of the hardships — deadly diseases, malnutrition, starvation, exhaustion, and brutality of the conquerors. They were from the dreadful labour forces, the notorious “Chway Tats” as they were called in Burmese (Myanmar), which is “Sweat Armies” in English. They were forced by the conquering Imperial Japanese Army, into hard-labourers to assist in the building of a railway line passing through dense rain forest, over rugged mountains of the Taninthayi Range between Stam (Thailand) and Burma (Myanmar). The god-forsaken places along the routes were infested with malaria and rampant with cholera, dysentery and diarrhoea diseases, where many Allied prisoners of war (POWs) and the civilian forced labourers perished.

However, the stories they told were not always of hardships, diseases, tortures or deaths. There were many interesting accounts of their daring and adventurous escapes, interspersed with the stories of finding discarded or hidden treasures, which they hid in caves somewhere. Of how they drew up sketchy maps of those hidden treasures and how they split the map into pieces and kept a piece each among those who escaped together, with promises of going back to that place when the situations permitted. Those were the stories we cherished, and never tired of listening as youngsters, that made us forget the horrors of the war and the mightily bombing raids.

The Bridge on the River Kwai

After the war, when normalcy returned, schools reopened and the fears and worries were things of the past, so did those interesting stories, too, were forgotten. Though, the memories of the interesting accounts of the railway line were rekindled in nineteen generations, and in the epic Hollywood movie “The Bridge on the River Kwai,” the backbone story of that movie was built around the construction of a wooden bridge across a river, along the route where the rail line passed through Thailand.

The movie was an Oscar award winner and was one of the best war adventure movies of that time and I had watched it again and again whenever it was screened. Even today I was never tired of watching whenever it was reran on the satellite televisions. That movie made the bridge on the River Kwai and the railway line, which it was part of, become world-known. Until I had seen that movie, I had thought that those stories of that railway line, which I had heard as a child were just legends.

In 1997, I had an opportunity to go on a sight-seeing tour of that railway line, which was dubbed the “Death Railway” by the surviving Allied POWs. The bridge and the railway line, which was part of, became world-known. When I had seen that movie, I had thought that those stories of that railway line, which I had heard as a child were just legends. However, the stories they told were not always of hardships, diseases, tortures or deaths.

During the Second World War, as the advance of the Japanese Imperial Army was gaining momentum, they were urgently in need of a reliable and fast line of support to maintain their advancing army, which was already inside Burma (Myanmar). They were planning for an assault on India, the Head Quarters of the Commanders in Chief Far East (C-in-C Far East) of the allied forces. The Commander was no other than Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten of Burma.

The sea route from Japan to Burma (Myanmar) took many days to travel and had to pass through the Malacca and Andaman Sea, where their ships were vulnerable to submarine attacks. Thus their strategic plan was to build a railway line to connect Bangkok and Rangoon (Yangon) close to the border. The train service targets the throngs of tourists, both local and foreign, who arrive every day at Kanchanaburi, home of famous “The Bridge on the River Kwai.”

The movie was an Oscar award winner and was one of the best war adventure movies of that time and I had watched it again and again whenever it was screened. Even today I was never tired of watching whenever it was reran on the satellite televisions. That movie made the bridge on the River Kwai and the railway line, which it was part of, become world-known. Until I had seen that movie, I had thought that those stories of that railway line, which I had heard as a child were just legends.

However, the stories they told were not always of hardships, diseases, tortures or deaths. Though, the memories of the interesting accounts of the railway line were rekindled in nineteen generations, and in the epic Hollywood movie “The Bridge on the River Kwai,” the backbone story of that movie was built around the construction of a wooden bridge across a river, along the route where the rail line passed through Thailand.

The movie was an Oscar award winner and was one of the best war adventure movies of that time and I had watched it again and again whenever it was screened. Even today I was never tired of watching whenever it was reran on the satellite televisions. That movie made the bridge on the River Kwai and the railway line, which it was part of, become world-known. Until I had seen that movie, I had thought that those stories of that railway line, which I had heard as a child were just legends.

However, the stories they told were not always of hardships, diseases, tortures or deaths. Though, the memories of the interesting accounts of the railway line were rekindled in nineteen generations, and in the epic Hollywood movie “The Bridge on the River Kwai,” the backbone story of that movie was built around the construction of a wooden bridge across a river, along the route where the rail line passed through Thailand.

The movie was an Oscar award winner and was one of the best war adventure movies of that time and I had watched it again and again whenever it was screened. Even today I was never tired of watching whenever it was reran on the satellite televisions. That movie made the bridge on the River Kwai and the railway line, which it was part of, become world-known. Until I had seen that movie, I had thought that those stories of that railway line, which I had heard as a child were just legends.

The movie was an Oscar award winner and was one of the best war adventure movies of that time and I had watched it again and again whenever it was screened. Even today I was never tired of watching whenever it was reran on the satellite televisions. That movie made the bridge on the River Kwai and the railway line, which it was part of, become world-known. Until I had seen that movie, I had thought that those stories of that railway line, which I had heard as a child were just legends.

The movie was an Oscar award winner and was one of the best war adventure movies of that time and I had watched it again and again whenever it was screened. Even today I was never tired of watching whenever it was reran on the satellite televisions. That movie made the bridge on the River Kwai and the railway line, which it was part of, become world-known. Until I had seen that movie, I had thought that those stories of that railway line, which I had heard as a child were just legends.
Mandalay District to install new transformers, power lines

MANDALAY, 21 Dec—As summer will come in a few months, transformers are to be installed at the sub-power stations in Mandalay District and its townships, Mandalay Region Minister for Electric Power and Industry U Kyaw Myint told a coordination meeting at the office of the region electrical engineer on 20 December.

The minister stressed the need to supply electricity at full capacity to the resident.

Plans are under way to install transformers at Taiktaung, Bagaya, 65th street and Nyaungkwe sub-power station and to add one more transformer each at Hunton and Thunpangon sub-power stations.

The region minister urged the officials to substitute wooden lamp posts with concrete ones in Mandalay, Meiktila, Kyaukse and Myingyan districts.

According to the electrical officials, the authorities will spend K139.236 million on installation of transformers and power lines in Mandalay District.

Thiha Ko Ko (Mandalay)

Staff families’ sports meet marks 22nd anniversary of MCDC

MANDALAY, 21 Dec—Mandalay City Development Committee held its 22nd anniversary celebration at Maha Nwesin sports ground in Mahaungmye Township on 20 December.

Mandalay Region Minister for Development Affairs Mayor U Aung Maung and MCDC members attended the celebration.

Sanitation Department won over Factories and Vehicles Department while Parks and Playgrounds Department beat Markets and Slaughters Department in the semifinal matches of men’s tug-of-war contest.

In the women’s event, Markets and Slaughters Department and Parks and Playgrounds Department cruised to the final match.

Maung Pyi Thu (Mandalay)

Government, company staff to get driver licences

MANDALAY, 21 Dec—Directorate of Road Administration in Mandalay Region issues driver licences to government and company staff on Sundays in the second and fourth weeks every month.

The directorate issued licences to the government staff on 14 December and will issue the them to company staff on 28 December.

Those wishing to attend the driving course are to enlist at the directorate from 8 am to 9 am. The directorate admits 400 trainees per course batch. The staff must show the recommendations of departmental officials and staff IDs.

Thiha Ko Ko (Mandalay)

Production of petrified wood on decrease, freezing market

NATOGYI, 21 Dec — Production of petrified wood is on the decrease in Natogyi, Mandalay Region, freezing market demand.

Three of over 20 companies in Natogyi continue to export of petrified wood. Recently, entrepreneurs and merchants held a meeting on prospects of petrified wood trading in Mandalay. Production of the wood is also down due to shortage of workers.

An entrepreneur said the Ministry of Mines ensured as to the root cause of declining exports of petrified wood in Natogyi.

Htay Myint Maung

Mandalay Region Hluttaw came to an end on 18 December. It started on 1 December, with approval of eight laws. MPs submitted two proposals and officials replied to 263 questions.

Maung Pyi Thu (Mandalay)

Rakhine State conducts workshop on human rights for government staff

SITWAY, 21 Dec — Chief Minister of Rakhine State U Maung Maung Ohn delivered a speech at the opening ceremony of the workshop on human rights for government staff in Rakhine State at U Ottama Hall in Sittway, the capital of Rakhine State, on 17 December.


Chairman of the commission U Win Mra explained the disciplines for the workshop. A total of 50 trainees from departments in Rakhine State attended the workshop from 17 to 19 December.

On 17 December, the chief minister received Deputy Chief of Mission Mr Matthew Hedges of the British Embassy and discussed victims at relief camps, the action plan of the state, border region security affairs, and peace and stability and development of Rakhine State.—Rakhine State IPRD

Rakhine State IPRD
US sends four Guantanamo prisoners home to Afghanistan

WASHINGTON, 21 Dec — Four Afghans held for over a decade at the US military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, have been sent home, the Pentagon said on Saturday, the latest step in a gradual push by the Obama administration to close the jail.

The men were flown to Kabul overnight aboard a US military plane and released to Afghan authorities, the first such transfer of its kind to the war-torn country since 2009.

With the repatriation of the four Afghans, Guantanamo’s detainee population has been whittled down to 132. Several more prisoners of “various nationalities” are expected to be transferred before the end of the year and a further unspecified number in succeeding weeks, according to a senior US official.

Obama promised to shut the internationally condemned prison when he took office nearly six years ago, citing the damage it inflicted on America’s image. But he has been unable to do so partly because of obstacles posed by Congress. The repatriation of the four Afghans, identified as “low-level detainees” who were cleared for transfer long ago and are not considered security risks in their homeland, had been in the pipeline for months. But in what one senior US official described as an expression of growing confidence in the new Afghan president, Ashraf Ghani, who took over from Hamid Karzai in September, Washington pressed ahead with the transfer after he formally requested it.

The continued detention of Afghans at Guantanamo — eight remain there — has long been deeply unpopular across the ideological spectrum in Afghanistan. The release comes at a time when most US troops are due to leave Afghanistan by year-end, even as Taliban insurgents are intensifying their bloody campaign to re-establish their hardline Islamist regime that was toppled in a US-backed military intervention in 2001. All four men — identified as Shawal Khan, Haji Ali Gul, Abdul Ghani and Mohammed Zahir — were originally detained on suspicion of being members of the Taleban or affiliated groups. But a second US official said: “Most if not all of these accusations have been discarded and each of these individuals at worst could be described as low-level, if even that.”

The Afghan government gave the United States “security assurances” for the treatment of the former prisoners and was expected to reunite them with their families, the official said. Guantanamo was opened by Obama’s predecessor, George W Bush, after the 11 September, 2001, attacks on the United States, to house terrorism suspects rounded up overseas, with Afghans originally the largest group. Most of the detainees have been held for a decade or more without being charged or tried.

Two weeks ago a US Senate report delivered a scathing indictment of the harsh Bush-era interrogation programme used on terrorism suspects. Obama banned the techniques when he took office in 2009.

Saudi says security forces kill four militants in Shi’ite village

Doha, 21 Dec — Security forces killed four militants in eastern Saudi Arabia on Saturday in a raid on a hideout used by gunmen who killed a policeman in the area last week, the interior ministry said.

The shootout was the deadliest incident in recent years in Awamiya, a village that has been the focal point of unrest among Saudi Shi’ite Muslims since mass protests in early 2011 calling for an end to discrimination and for democratic reforms in the absolute Sunni monarchy.

State news agency SPA quoted the interior ministry spokesman as saying the gunmen initiated shooting when security forces began the raid early on Saturday. “The situation was dealt with in the appropriate manner and as a result four of the terrorists were killed, including the main person responsible for opening fire on the soldier Abdelaziz bin Ahmed al-Assiri,” the spokesman said, referring to the 14 December attack.

Activists said a fifth person died of his wounds and that one of the dead was a 12-year-old boy and another a passerby.

More than 20 other people were wounded, they said. It was not possible to verify either version of events. Activists posted pictures of the aftermath of the raid, in which armoured vehicles were used, showing shattered shop windows, smashed car windshields, walls with bullet holes and a plate full of spent bullet casings collected by locals.

More than 20 people have been killed in the unrest since 2011, most of them local people shot in incidents that police have described as exchanges of fire. Shi’ite rights activists say some of those killed were shot dead while peacefully protesting, which the government denies.

Iraqi forces repel IS attacks in western Iraq

RAMADI, Iraq, 21 Dec — Iraqi security forces and allied tribesmen on Saturday repelled attacks by the Islamic State (IS) militant group in military airbase housing US advisors, in Iraq’s western province of Anbar, a provincial security source said. Iraqi security forces backed by Iraqi and US-led coalition aircraft repelled an attack by the IS militants on a major military airbase housing US military advisors, near the town of al-Baghdadi, some 200 km northwest of the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, a provincial security source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity.

The fierce battles which broke out in the early hours of the day resulted in the killing of numerous IS militants and destroying of their vehicles, the source said. The IS militants also attacked the town of al-Baghdadi and after hours of clashes, they were forced to retreat, the source added. — Xinhua

Yazidis cheer Kurds on Iraqi mountain for breaking Islamic State siege

Sinjar Mountain, Iraq, 21 Dec — Iraqi Kurdish fighters flashed victory signs as they swept across the northern side of Sinjar mountain on Saturday, two days after breaking through to free hundreds of Yazidis trapped there for months by Islamic State fighters.

A Reuters correspondent, who arrived on the mountain late Saturday, witnessed Kurdish and Yazidi fighters celebrating their gains after launching their offensive on Wednesday with heavy US air support. The Iraqi Kurdish flag fluttered, with its yellow sun, and celebratory gunfire rang out. Little children cheered “Barzani’s party”, in reference to the Kurdish region’s president, Masoud Barzani. “We have been surrounded the last three months. We were living off raw wheat and barley,” said Yazidi fighter Hasso Mishko Hasan.

It was the plight of those trapped on the mountain, together with Islamic State’s advance towards the Kurdish capital Arbil, that prompted US President Barack Obama to order air strikes against IS in Iraq in August. Thousands of members of the Yazidi religious minority were killed or captured by the militants.

Since then, Kurdish peshmerga forces in northern Iraq have regained most of the ground they had lost. But the war grinds on, as a weakened Iraqi army and Shi’ite militia volunteers join forces with Islamic State across central and western Iraq. The United States is also carrying out air strikes on IS in Syria.

— Reuters

Iraqi forces repel IS attacks in western Iraq

Ramadi, Iraq, 21 Dec — Iraqi security forces and allied tribesmen on Saturday repelled attacks by the Islamic State (IS) militant group in military airbase housing US advisors, in Iraq’s western province of Anbar, a provincial security source said. Iraqi security forces backed by Iraqi and US-led coalition aircraft repelled an attack by the IS militants on a major military airbase housing US military advisors, near the town of al-Baghdadi, some 200 km northwest of the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, a provincial security source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity.

The fierce battles which broke out in the early hours of the day resulted in the killing of numerous IS militants and destroying of their vehicles, the source said. The IS militants also attacked the town of al-Baghdadi and after hours of clashes, they were forced to retreat, the source added. — Xinhua

A Kurdish Peshmerga fighter stands guard in Zumar, Nineveh Province on 18 Dec, 2014. — Reuters

Saudi says security forces kill four militants in Shi’ite village

Doha, 21 Dec — Security forces killed four militants in eastern Saudi Arabia on Saturday in a raid on a hideout used by gunmen who killed a policeman in the area last week, the interior ministry said.

The shootout was the deadliest incident in recent years in Awamiya, a village that has been the focal point of unrest among Saudi Shi’ite Muslims since mass protests in early 2011 calling for an end to discrimination and for democratic reforms in the absolute Sunni monarchy.

State news agency SPA quoted the interior ministry spokesman as saying the gunmen initiated shooting when security forces began the raid early on Saturday. “The situation was dealt with in the appropriate manner and as a result four of the terrorists were killed, including the main person responsible for opening fire on the soldier Abdelaziz bin Ahmed al-Assiri,” the spokesman said, referring to the 14 December attack.

Activists said a fifth person died of his wounds and that one of the dead was a 12-year-old boy and another a passerby.

More than 20 other people were wounded, they said. It was not possible to verify either version of events. Activists posted pictures of the aftermath of the raid, in which armoured vehicles were used, showing shattered shop windows, smashed car windshields, walls with bullet holes and a plate full of spent bullet casings collected by locals.

More than 20 people have been killed in the unrest since 2011, most of them local people shot in incidents that police have described as exchanges of fire. Shi’ite rights activists say some of those killed were shot dead while peacefully protesting, which the government denies.

Iraqi forces repel IS attacks in western Iraq

Ramadi, Iraq, 21 Dec — Iraqi security forces and allied tribesmen on Saturday repelled attacks by the Islamic State (IS) militant group in military airbase housing US advisors, in Iraq’s western province of Anbar, a provincial security source said. Iraqi security forces backed by Iraqi and US-led coalition aircraft repelled an attack by the IS militants on a major military airbase housing US military advisors, near the town of al-Baghdadi, some 200 km northwest of the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, a provincial security source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity.

The fierce battles which broke out in the early hours of the day resulted in the killing of numerous IS militants and destroying of their vehicles, the source said. The IS militants also attacked the town of al-Baghdadi and after hours of clashes, they were forced to retreat, the source added. — Xinhua

A Kurdish Peshmerga fighter stands guard in Zumar, Nineveh Province on 18 Dec, 2014. — Reuters

Saudi says security forces kill four militants in Shi’ite village

Doha, 21 Dec — Security forces killed four militants in eastern Saudi Arabia on Saturday in a raid on a hideout used by gunmen who killed a policeman in the area last week, the interior ministry said.

The shootout was the deadliest incident in recent years in Awamiya, a village that has been the focal point of unrest among Saudi Shi’ite Muslims since mass protests in early 2011 calling for an end to discrimination and for democratic reforms in the absolute Sunni monarchy.

State news agency SPA quoted the interior ministry spokesman as saying the gunmen initiated shooting when security forces began the raid early on Saturday. “The situation was dealt with in the appropriate manner and as a result four of the terrorists were killed, including the main person responsible for opening fire on the soldier Abdelaziz bin Ahmed al-Assiri,” the spokesman said, referring to the 14 December attack.

Activists said a fifth person died of his wounds and that one of the dead was a 12-year-old boy and another a passerby.

More than 20 other people were wounded, they said. It was not possible to verify either version of events. Activists posted pictures of the aftermath of the raid, in which armoured vehicles were used, showing shattered shop windows, smashed car windshields, walls with bullet holes and a plate full of spent bullet casings collected by locals.

More than 20 people have been killed in the unrest since 2011, most of them local people shot in incidents that police have described as exchanges of fire. Shi’ite rights activists say some of those killed were shot dead while peacefully protesting, which the government denies.

Iraqi forces repel IS attacks in western Iraq

Ramadi, Iraq, 21 Dec — Iraqi security forces and allied tribesmen on Saturday repelled attacks by the Islamic State (IS) militant group in military airbase housing US advisors, in Iraq’s western province of Anbar, a provincial security source said. Iraqi security forces backed by Iraqi and US-led coalition aircraft repelled an attack by the IS militants on a major military airbase housing US military advisors, near the town of al-Baghdadi, some 200 km northwest of the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, a provincial security source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity.

The fierce battles which broke out in the early hours of the day resulted in the killing of numerous IS militants and destroying of their vehicles, the source said. The IS militants also attacked the town of al-Baghdadi and after hours of clashes, they were forced to retreat, the source added. — Xinhua

A Kurdish Peshmerga fighter stands guard in Zumar, Nineveh Province on 18 Dec, 2014. — Reuters
UN’s Ebola mission should be closed once battle won

Ban Ki-moon, the top UN official in Africa, said the UN mission in Liberia should be shut once the battle against the virus is won. He visited treatment centers in the countries at the heart of the epidemic during a 36-hour tour to raise the profile of the struggle against the virus and encourage healthcare workers.

On Saturday, he also met Ibrahim Bozbach Keita, the president of Mali, a country that recently saw the last of eight Ebola cases released from hospital.

A deadly stop, health authorities took their temperature and ensured he washed his hands with chlorinated water in a sign that nobody is exempt from protection measures. In Guinea on Saturday, Ban urged countries to avoid discriminating against healthcare workers fighting the virus.

His comments followed a meeting at a treatment centre in Sierra Leone on Friday in which Rebecca Johnson, a nurse treating virus patients, recounted how she fell ill recovered and is now back treating Ebola patients.

Ban publicly embraced Johnson and repeatedly cited her as an example of heroism, not least because she said she still faced stigma as a survivor.
"There should be no discrimination for those who have been working or helping with Ebola. Those people are giving all of themselves," Ban said.

---

Last US holiday shopping weekend off to solid start

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has his temperature checked upon arrival at the Roberts International airport in Liberia’s capital Monrovia on 19 Dec, 2014.—Reuters

While limited mobility poses several challenges to the elderly and people with disabilities, the impact on their clothing choices is often overlooked.

“The desire to go out in particular clothes can be a key to get motivated,” said Kimiyo Iwanami, 66, who develops clothes that allow elderly people to move around with dignity to dress themselves. One person she has helped is Gentaro Shiihashi, a 49-year-old dentist who needed help from his family to wear a conventional waist bag. “I rode on a bus with a once battle won... UNIMF, was set up in September to coordinate policy and logistics for a campaign that includes governments, charities and healthcare workers from affected countries.

Ban said UNIMF differed from peacekeeping missions and should not outline its immediate purpose.

“There’s a tendency that missions go on because of continuing political instability and conflict. Ebola is a very urgent and unprecedented epidemic, therefore we cannot take too long in eliminating it,” he told Reuters.

“That is why I am sending a political message. It is not because we have made any decision on when UNIMF should end, but it should be a short-term mission,” he said.

More than 7,300 people have died of Ebola in the three worst-affected countries, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. Ban declined to name a target date for ending the outbreak, but said he was encouraged by the rate of new cases is declining.

---

ECB’s Coene supports government bond purchases

The European Central Bank should start buying government bonds to tackle poor investor confidence and low inflation in the euro zone, governing coun-

---

Business & health

Monday, 22 December, 2014

---
New Year countdown will be launched at Moscow’s Ostankino TV

Moscow, 21 Dec — A New Year countdown will start at Moscow’s Ostankino tower, Europe’s tallest TV tower, on Sunday. Father Frost, who will pay a special visit to the tower on Sunday, will set a clock mechanism, whose parameters have so far been kept secret, in motion.

Father Frost’s appearance is supposed to come as a real surprise for the tower’s visitors.

Father Frost and his guests will rise at an altitude of 337 metres to the top of the tower, visitors.

According to the event’s organizers, millions of Muscovites and guests of the capital will be able to count down days, hours, minutes and seconds remaining till the New Year.

New Year countdowns are traditionally launched at most famous architectural buildings in Europe and Asia during the last few days of an outgoing year. Such events usually attract millions of people from various parts of the globe.

But the Kremlin’s Spasskaya tower remains the main symbol announcing the arrival of the New Year in Russia. Though the tower is currently being renovated and is surrounded by scaffolding, the renovators will leave the clock mechanism untouched so that the Russians could hear the familiar chime at midnight on 31 December.

Gunman with possible revenge in mind kills two NYC police officers

NEW YORK, 21 Dec — A gunman ambushed and fatally shot two New York City police officers on Saturday and then killed himself, police said, and a social media post indicated it may have been in revenge for the police chokehold death of an unarmed black man.

If the killings do turn out to have been motivated by the death of Eric Garner, they could inflame tension over race and law enforcement that have dogged New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, sparked protests around the country and drawn in President Barack Obama and his attorney general, Eric Holder.

The officers were killed without warning and at close range as they sat in their squad car in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, Police Commissioner William Bratton told a news conference flanked by de Blasio.

“Although we’re still learning the details, it’s clear that this was an assassination, that these officers were shot execution style,” said de Blasio.

New York police have come under intense pressure in recent weeks. Protests erupted after a grand jury declined this month to charge a white police officer involved in Garner’s chokehold death during an arrest attempt in July in Staten Island borough.

Bratton identified the gunman in Saturday’s shooting as Ismaaiyl Brinsley, 28, and said he took an arrest attempt in July in nearby subway station and fled into a car, opening fire with a silencer-equipped gun. He then fled into a nearby subway station again and died there from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head, Bratton said.

The police chief identified the slain officers as Rafael Ramos, 40, and Wenjian Liu, 32. Liu had been married for two months. Ramos had a 13-year-old son.

The killings were the first time New York City police officers have been killed by gunfire since 2011 and sparked bitter anger among some police against de Blasio, who they see as not supportive enough in the face of public anger. The mayor has had a prickly relationship with law enforcement as he tries to balance regard for civil liberties with police concerns.

Patrick Lynch, head of the Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association that is the country’s largest municipal police union, said, “There’s blood on many hands tonight.”

“Those that incited violence on the street under the guise of protest, that tried to tear down what New York City police officers did every day,” Lynch told a news conference. “That blood on the hands starts on the steps of City Hall in the office of the mayor.”

Demonstrations over Garner’s death came on top of protests around the country over another grand jury’s decision in November not to indict a white police officer who fatally shot an unarmed black teenager in Ferguson, Missouri.

Obama was briefed on the killings while on vacation in Hawaii. He later said in a statement he unconditionally condemned the shootings, adding that police officers “deserve our respect and gratitude every single day.”
**Flood-caused damage to economy estimated at EUR 1.6 bln**

BELGRADE, 21 Dec — The damage to the Serbian economy caused by the May floods is officially estimated at EUR 1.6 billion according to the Recovery Needs Assessment Report of the Serbian government, compiled with assistance from the EU, the World Bank and the United Nations, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), which will also provide support for addressing infrastructure recovery needs, has said in a statement.

The EBRD is restructuring several financial commitments with the city of Belgrade that are worth up to EUR 78 million.

“We are grateful for the support provided to us by the EBRD, which allows us to prioritise our interventions to repair the flood damage. This confirms the strength of our longstanding partnership with the Bank,” said Belgrade Mayor Sinisa Mali.

“It is of paramount importance for Serbia’s economic recovery after the devastation of the floods. The damage caused to the city of Belgrade is very serious and this is why the EBRD is stepping in to help the administration with its flood-recovery plan,” EBRD Director for Serbia Matteo Patrone said.

Since the start of its activities in Serbia, the EBRD has invested more than EUR 3.8 billion in 182 projects across the country, the statement said. – Tanjug

**WEATHER REPORT**

FORECAST VALID UNTIL EVENING OF THE 22nd December, 2014: Weather will be generally fair in Sagaing Region, Shan and Chin States and partly cloudy in the remaining Regions and States.

STATE OF THE SEA: Strong easterly winds with moderate to rough sea are likely at times Deltaic, Gulf of Motama, off and along Mon-Taninthayi Coasts. Surface wind speed in strong wind may reach (35) m.p.h. Seas will be moderate elsewhere in Myanmar waters.

**French police shoot dead knife-wielding man in police station**

PARIS, 21 Dec — French police on Saturday shot dead a man shouting “Allahu Akbar” (“God is the greatest”) who stabbed and wounded three officers in a police station, authorities said.

Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve, who rushed to the scene, said the man was killed after he attacked the policemen with a knife in a station in Joue-les-Tours, a suburb of the city of Tours in central France.

Cazeneuve confirmed the attacker had shouted “Allahu Akbar” during the attack, which he said was “extremely violent”.

The counter-terrorism section of the Public Prosecutor’s office has opened a probe for “attempted murder and criminal conspiracy in connection with a terrorist organisation”, the Paris Prosecutor’s office said.

“There are grounds to probe whether he acted alone, whether he followed orders, or whether it was a mindless action,” Public Prosecutor Jean-Luc Beck told BFM-TV.

The man was known to police for common crimes but was not on any watch list of the French intelligence services, Cazeneuve said, adding: “The probe is only starting.”

The three wounded officers were hospitalized but were out of danger, he added.— Reuters

**Announcement**

Farmers Development Public Bank limited

We are glad to announce the incorporation of our Farmers Development Public Bank Limited is permitted in Myanmar with the Certificate of Incorporation No. 4401, of 2014-2015 on 5th December 2014, under the Myanmar Companies Act by the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration, the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development.

Board of Director
Farmers Development Public Bank Limited
No.147(1st)Floor, Anawyathar Road, Botataung Township, Yangon.

---

**Advertisement with us!**

For inquiries to place an advertisement in the GNLM,
Please email wallace.tun@gmail.com
(+95) (01) 8604532
DIFF 2014 opens here, Subhash Ghai gets lifetime achievement award

NEW DELHI, 21 Dec — With director Subhash Ghai being given the prestigious lifetime achievement award, the third edition of Delhi International Film Festival (DIFF) opened here today amid much fanfare.

The eight-day long festival was inaugurated by Delhi BJP chief Satish Upadhyay among other dignitaries at the NDMC convention centre.

“Thanks to DIFF for honouring me with this award which is also known as Qutab Minar award. Thanks to all the guests present here,” Subhash Ghai said.—PTI

An audio-visual presentation of the ace filmmaker’s more than three decades of work was shown at the ceremony before Upadhyay gave away the award to Ghai.

“Thanks to DIFF for honouring me with this award which is also known as Qutab Minar award. Thanks to all the guests present here.”

“I went to Mumbai to become an actor but ended up making the movie ‘Kalicharan’ which was appreciated by the masses and from there I went on to produce films… Films are not about only entertainment but play an important role in creating awareness,” Ghai said after receiving the honour.

Upadhyay feels cinema should promote our culture.

“DIFF is an attempt to promote cinema, art and culture. Films are most important for everyone of us and it should be promoted in events like DIFF. We don’t need language to understand a movie. Films should promote our culture,” Upadhyay said in his speech.

The other guests who made it to the event are Noida Film City founder Sandeep Marwah, NDMC chairman Jalaj Srivastava, festival president Ram Kishore Pacha and commissioner of Income Tax Sangeeta Gupta.

Naghmeh Shirkan’s ‘The Neighbour, which chronicles the Iranian women’s life in migration, was screened this evening as the opening film.

With Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh being the focus countries, the film festival boasts an interesting line up of 250 films films across 45 nations.

Last year’s Pakistan’s official entry to Oscars ‘Zinda Bhaag’, co-directed by Meenu Gaur and Farjad Nabi and starring Indian actor Naseeruddin Shah in lead, will bring the curtains down on the film festival.

The festival will pay homage to departed talents Abdur Rashid Kardar and Chetan Anand.—PTI

Kim Kardashian becomes the most followed person on Instagram

LONDON, 21 Dec — Reality star Kim Kardas- hian has become the most followed person on Instagram by surpassing Justin Bieber, after he lost more than 3.5 million followers in a fake follower purge. Bieber, 20, originally had 23.8 million followers, which went down to 20.3 million losing his first place to the ‘Keeping Up With the Kar- dashian’ star and is now on third place after the singer Beyoncé Knowles, report- ed Ace Showbiz.

Kardashian, 34, also lost around 1.3 million followers after the purge, closing the day at 22.2 mil- lion followers. Knowles also lost around 866,000 followers and is currently on second place with 21.4 million followers.

Other celebrities who has a large number of fol- lowers on Instagram includes Akon, Tyga, Ariana Grande, Rihanna, Selena Gomez and P Diddy. Fa- mous 90s rapper Mase has reportedly deleted his Insta- gram account after losing 1.5 million followers in a short while. —PTI

Bradley Cooper’s ‘American Sniper’ new trailer released

LOS ANGELES, 21 Dec — A new trailer of Bradley Cooper-starring film ‘American Sniper has landed online, high- lighting his character as he juggles his roles as a sniper and a family man with a young child. The two-minute video sees Cooper’s character, US Navy SEAL Chris Kyle, getting emotional, reported Ace Showbiz.

The trailer starts with someone interviewing Kyle about his record as the most lethal sniper in US military. Scenes of his wed- ding, his days with family, his service in Iraq and him making difficult decision when a boy takes a grenade launcher and aims it at the US troops are also shown.


Aamir Khan’s ‘PK’ earns over Rs 26 crore on first day

Mumbai, 21 Dec — Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan’s comedy-drama ‘PK’ has earned Rs 26.63 crore on its first day at the box-office.

The film, directed by ‘3 Idiots’ director Rajku- mar Hirani and also star- ring Anushka Sharma, bagged the second highest non-holiday opening after Aamir’s last Christmas outing ‘Dhoom 3’.—PTI

‘Game of Thrones’ star Pedro Pascal in ‘Great Wall’

LOS ANGELES, 21 Dec — Actor Pedro Pascal, who played Prince Oberyn Mar- tell on ‘Game of Thrones’, is in talks to join Matt Da- mon starer ‘The Great Wall’. The historical pro- ject will be directed by famed Chinese director Zhang Yimou, reported the Wrap. The film, set in Chi- na, will mark Yimou’s Eng- lish-language debut.

The story revolves around an elite force mak- ing a last stand for humanity on the world’s most iconic structure. Damon remains in negotiations to star in the Great Wall movie, which is expected to be the largest film ever shot entirely in China. Production is set to begin in the early next year for a late 2016 release.

Pascal’s stars have risen since his breakout performance in the hit fantasy drama. He’ll next play Pontius Pilate in ‘Ben-Hur’ besides horror-comedy ‘Bloodsucking Bastards’.—PTI

PTI
Real Madrid beat San Lorenzo to lift Club World Cup

MARRAKECH, (Morocco) 21 Dec — Real Madrid won the Club World Cup for the first time by beating San Lorenzo 2-0 on Saturday with goals from Sergio Ramos and Gareth Bale after being forced into extra time by the feisty South Americans. Real scored in each half to cap off a 22nd successive win in all competitions in a bruising encounter which Guatemalan referee Walter Lopez just managed to keep under control. The Marrakech crowd gave the European champions fervent support and were expecting a gala exhibition, which San Lorenzo were not going to allow despite the obvious gulf in class.

“It’s a special day and this is a reward for all the effort and work that we have put in as a team,” said Ramos. Real nearly scored on their first attack when Karim Benzema just failed to connect with Ronaldo’s low cross from the right. After that, San Lorenzo did well to restrict Real to a couple of chances in the opening half hour only for their resistance to be broken at a corner when Ramos outjumped the defence in the 37th minute to break the deadlock.

Ramos had already been booked and could have been sent off for an ugly face-to-face ram at the referee as the game, which featured 40 fouls and numerous confrontations between players, threatened to get out of control.

Bale increased Real’s lead in the 51st minute when he was left unmarked to collect Isco’s pass and diving keeper Sebastian Torrico allowed the Welshman’s weak shot to slip under his arm.

Real stopper Iker Casillas had to wait until the 65th minute to be tested for the first time when he saved a low diagonal effort from Emanuel Mas. He then made more difficult stops to deny Juan Mercier and Enzo Kalinski, although Real also missed several chances to score a third on the break.—Reuters

Maradona renews contract with Venezuela’s Telesur network

CARACAS, 21 Dec — Argentine soccer great Diego Maradona renewed his contract with Venezuelan television station Telesur, which in April had invited him to be a commentator during the World Cup in Brazil, the station said on its website.

Maradona will also star in a movie that Telesur is preparing about the show “De Zurda” or “From the Left”, which he hosted in collaboration with Uruguayan journalist Victor Hugo Morales during this year’s soccer championship. Maradona visited Venezuela last week and appeared at an official event alongside President Nicolas Maduro, who replaced late socialist leader Hugo Chavez, before becoming a commentator on Telesur.

Maradona appeared at a ceremony at the national pantheon in Caracas on this Dec, 2014 handout photo provided by Miraflores Palace.—Reuters

Before becoming a commentator on Telesur, Maradona had been the coach of Argentina’s national squad and had a television show in Argentina.

Telesur is a regional station based in Caracas that was created by the late Chavez.—Reuters

US swimmer Phelps sentenced to 18 months probation for drunken driving

BALTIMORE, 21 Dec — American swimmer Michael Phelps, the most decorated Olympian of all time, pleaded guilty on Friday to driving under the influence of alcohol and received 18 months of supervised probation and a one-year suspended jail sentence.

The 18-time Olympic gold medalist was arrested for drunken driving early on 30 September after speeding and then crossing the double yellow lines inside a Baltimore tunnel, police said.

“The last three months of my life have been some of the hardest times I’ve ever gone through, some of the biggest learning experiences I’ve ever had,” Phelps, wearing a dark suit, white shirt and blue tie, told reporters.

“I’m happy to be moving forward. I’ll continue to grow from this.”

Phelps, 29, was clocked by radar at around 1:40 am travelling 84 miles per hour (135 kph) in a 45-mph (72-kph) zone, police said, adding that he blew a .14 on a Breathalyzer, nearly twice the legal limit of .08 in Maryland.

He faced up to a year in jail and a $1,000 fine.

“I hope we don’t have this conversation again and I’m optimistic that we won’t have this conversation again,” Judge Nathan Braverman told Phelps during his sentencing.

Messi double, Suarez hits first
La Liga goal in Barca rout

BARCELONA, 21 Dec — Lionel Messi scored twice and Luis Suarez struck his first La Liga goal as Barcelona crushed struggling Cordoba 5-0 on Saturday to finish the year a point behind Real Madrid at the top of the table.

In-form Pedro put Barca ahead after just 71 seconds, the second quickest goal in La Liga this season, with a clinical finish from a ball over the top of the defence by Ivan Rakitic.

The.spanish were ominous for Cordoba as they found themselves encamped in their own half, although Barca did not add to their lead until the start of the second half through Suarez.

The Uruguayan returned from a four-month ban for biting at the end of October and claimed his first goal in La Liga when he slotted the ball home from a Pedro pass.

“I am more relaxed now having got the goal. Perhaps we had something to prove going into the match as the draw (last weekend) against Getafe was a blow,” Suarez told reporters.

“We are candidates for La Liga and we want to turn things around at the top. For me personally to get a goal in the league is important but I knew with all the support I was getting that it would come soon.”

With the Cordoba players’ heads going down, Gerard Pique nodded in Barca’s third and then Messi fired in a late double.

Xavi came on as a second-half substitute in his 741st match for Barca, equalling the record of Real’s Raul for the number of games for a single club in Spanish football.

Barca have moved on to the shoulders of Real who are playing the Club World Cup final on Saturday against San Lorenzo and have played a game less than their arch-rivals.

Barcelona’s players celebrate a goal against Cordoba during their Spanish First division soccer match at Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on 20 Dec, 2014.—Reuters
Silva gives Man City win over Palace, United held

LONDON, 21 Dec — David Silva sparked a Manchester City with two goals in a 3-0 win over Crystal Palace that wiped out Chelsea’s lead at the top of the Premier League table on Saturday and added festive space to the title race.

Manchester United’s pursuit of the table-toppers stalled with a 1-1 draw at Aston Villa, their first dropped points in seven games, as local rivals City came through an encounter with Palace that threatened to turn into a frustrating occasion.

Silva eased an increasingly tense atmosphere at the Etihad Stadium when he broke the deadlock shortly after halftime and then put an emphatic victory to bed with his second goal soon after. Yaya Toure emphatically smashed home a late third.

The victory for City, who are having to cope without all their main strikers through injury, moved them level on 39 points with Chelsea, who visit Stoke City on Monday, and ignited a title battle that had looked to be a one-horse parade.

Champions City trailed Chelsea by eight points in November, but have cranked into gear heading into the busy festive period, taking 22 points from a possible 24 in their last eight games.

United are seven points adrift and one in front of a West Ham United side who will occupy a coveted top-four spot at Christmas after a 2-0 home win over bottom club Leicester City.

For Manchester City’s billionaire owners, who have lavished funds on the team since their arrival, the sight of workhorse midfielder James Milner playing up front on his own in the face of an injury crisis may have prompted quizzical looks. It seemed a largely fruitless tactic in a first half when the nearest City came to breaking the deadlock was a scooped effort from Pablo Zabaleta that bobbled wide, but the mounting tension was eased four minutes into the second half.

Zabaleta made a powerful burst into the area and cut the ball back for Silva, whose shot took a big deflection off a Palace defender before looping into the net. City, who failed to have a shot on target in the first half, then looked a completely different animal and found a second goal 12 minutes later as Silva arrived at the near post to finish sharply with his left foot. After Palace had a goal wrongly disallowed for offside, Toure ensured there would be no more nervy moments when he wallopped in a powerful finish.

That left City boss Manuel Pellegrini to sing the praises of a team stripped of strikers Sergio Aguero, Edin Dzeko and Stevan Jovetic. “It was a very good win,” he told BT Sport. “A very good performance. I enjoyed the way the team worked the whole week, to work in a different way without strikers.” Rivals United had their recent charge halted at Villa Park, where Christian Benteke combined his wrecking ball power with a refined finish, holding off Jonny Evans to curl a stunning shot past David De Gea to give the hosts the lead after 18 minutes.

United boss Louis van Gaal, who described the result as “very frustrating”, had handed striker Radamel Falcao a rare start and was rewarded eight minutes into the second half.

The on-loan Colombian headed home an Ashley Young cross, but Villa held the visitors at bay despite having Gabriel Agbonlahor sent off with 25 minutes to play.

Southampton beat Everton 3-0 to end a run of four successive league defeats, while Tottenham Hotspur kept up their pursuit of a top-four spot with a 2-1 home win against Burnley to move above Arsenal, who visit Liverpool on Sunday.

Queens Park Rangers striker Charlie Austin scored a superb hat-trick as they fought back from 2-0 down to win 3-2 at home to West Bromwich Albion, but second-bottom Hull City’s troubles continued with a 1-0 home defeat by Swansea City.

Boxing great Muhammad Ali hospitalized with pneumonia

LOUISVILLE, (Kentucky) 21 Dec — Boxing legend Muhammad Ali has been hospitalized with pneumonia and is expected to recover because the illness was caught early, a spokesman said on Saturday.

Ali, 72, was admitted to a hospital in an undisclosed location on Saturday morning and is being treated by a team of doctors and remains in stable condition, spokesman Bob Gunnell said. “Because the pneumonia was caught early, his prognosis is good with a short hospital stay expected,” Gunnell said in a statement.

He declined to give any further details of the boxer’s condition and said Ali’s family was asking for privacy.

The boxing great, who suffers from Parkinson’s disease, made a public appearance in September to attend a ceremony in Louisville, Kentucky, for the Muhammad Ali Humanitarian Awards.

A three-time world heavyweight champion, Ali was diagnosed with Parkinson’s about three years after he retired from boxing in 1981. —Reuters

Referee Tony Perez is shown as he orders Muhammad Ali (formerly Cassius Clay) and Joe Frazier to their corners during the latter part of round two of their heavyweight bout in New York in 1974.

XINHUA

Former heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali, pictured here in 2012 when he was crowned “King of Boxing,” has been hospitalized for a minor case of pneumonia.

XINHUA

JFA sends mission to Spain to gather info on match-fixing scandal

KYOTO, 21 Dec — Japan Football Association President Kuniya Dani said on Saturday he has sent a fact-finding mission to Spain following national team coach Javier Aguirre’s alleged involvement in a match-fixing scandal.

“I have sent (a mission) to Spain and from now on we will have information coming in,” Daini told reporters in Kobe. Aguirre is one of more than 40 individuals named in a report into the alleged rigging of a Spanish La Liga clash between Levante and his former club Zaragoza in May 2011.

Aguirre was manager of Zaragoza and the team won the match 2-1, avoiding relegation to the second tier as a result.

The Mexican could be asked to appear in Spain if the complaint is accepted by a Valencia court and a full-scale investigation is opened. The JFA on Thursday decided that Aguirre would remain in charge for the 9-31 January Asian Cup despite him becoming engulfed in the scandal.

Kyodo News