President U Thein Sein concludes his western Myanmar trip

NAY PYI TAW, 27 Dec—President U Thein Sein arrived back here Saturday after a three-day visit to Rakhine State.

On early 27 December, President visited Thandwe, a major seaport in Rakhine state, together with union ministers, chief minister of the western state, deputy ministers and senior military officials.

President discussed regional development programmes with local authorities, departmental officials, dignitaries, members of political parties and social network groups.

At the meeting, U Maung Maung Ohn, Rakhine state’s chief minister, explained achievements and future plans of state government for stability and socio-economy of the state.

U Khin Maung Soe, Union Minister for Electric Power, clarified electricity supply projects in the state.

President then said to the locals about his government’s reform processes in four years of term and welfare benefits for the civil service employees.

Western Myanmar state, with a long coastal line with abundant of natural resources and fertile lands, now has possessed better infrastructures, including upgraded airports and roads, with a wider range of telecommunication sector.

Kyaukphyu special economic zone will be set up in the state, and the 404 hectare SEZ at the coast of the Bay of Bengal off Rakhine State will help provide job opportunities for the people.

U Thein Sein noted the importance of education for human resource development, rule of law and security measures, urging effective use of natural resources, investments and technologies as the country is expected to include in lists of middle-income countries by 2020. The government has emphasized on public administration during the democratization process.—MNA

Myanmar celebrates Academy Award Presentation ceremony for 2013

YANGON, 27 Dec—Myanmar’s Academy Award Presentation ceremony for 2013 was held at Myanmar Event Park in Yangon this evening, graced by the presence of Vice-President Dr Sai Mauk Kham and wife Daw Nann Shwe Htoo.

First, Union Minister for Information U Ye Htut gave an opening speech and U Lu Min, chairman of Myanmar Motion Picture Association, reported on development of Myanmar film industry on the occasion.

Among the awards presented to outstanding artists for 2013, the best music award went to Piano Tin Win Hlaing won for “Kyal-sin-maw-kunn”; the best supporting female actor award to Khine Thin Kyi for Sone-pyu”; the best supporting male actor award to Min Oo for “Nin-say-yin”; the best director award to Wyne for “Say- tan-ye-ka-chae-the”; the best female actor award to Wut Hmon Shwe Yi for for “Nin-say-yin”; and the best male actor award to Pyay Ti Oo for “Nin-say-yin”.

After the ceremony, the Vice-President and Union ministers greeted Academy award winners.—MNA

Yangon hosts first municipal polls in six decades

By Ye Myint

Despite low public interest in Yangon City Development Committee elections, Yangon, the former capital and biggest commercial hub in the country, held municipal polls on Saturday for the first time in six decades. A total of 1,086 voting stations at designated schools opened across the city’s municipal areas early Saturday morning for 401,634 voters who were (See page 9)

China to send news crews to countries in Asia-Pacific Region to collect views on 21st Century Maritime Silk Road project

By Aye Min Soe

SHENZHEN, CHINA, 27 Dec—The government of the People’s Republic of China is planning to gather views from countries in Asia-Pacific region on its 21st century Maritime Silk Road project which is in blueprint stage.

As part of the plan for collecting views from the countries, Shenzhen Press Group in southern China is planning to send its news crews to Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Sri Lanka next year to interview commerce and trade ministers from those countries, said Mr Lu Yantar, Director of the Shenzhen Media Group, recently at the meeting with a media delegation from south east Asian countries in the city.

Local correspondents of China’s Xinhua News Agency in the remaining countries in the region will conduct interviews with ministers concerned of those countries for the (See page 9)
Thaton dwellers join Charity Fair at Shwesaryan Pagoda

Thaton, 27 Dec — A Charity Fair took place in the precinct of Shwesaryan Pagoda in Thaton, Mon State, on 26 December.

Township Administrator U Tun Tun Naing and Chairman of the Charity Fair organizing committee U Nyi Nyi Naing formally opened the ceremony.

Mon, Kayin, Pa-O and ethnic dancing troupes presented chorus dances to the audiences. The people from four corners happily participated in the charity fair.

“As of 23 December, Buddhist associations recited religious verses. Wellwishers donated various items of goods at the charity fair. I think it may be the largest one in Thaton Township,” Chairman of the Moningyan Pagoda Board of Trustees U Maung Oo told media.

Over 80 wellwishers groups served the people with foods and snacks.

Myitsone-Mandalay Express down-train launched maiden trip from Myitkyina, Kachin State on 22 December

Myitkyina, 27 Dec—Myitsone-Mandalay Express down-train launched its runs at Myitkyina railway station, Kachin State on 22 December morning.

The train stops over at Mogaung, Hopin, Naba, Kawlin and Shwebo stations along its route. Train tickets are available three days in advance of departure at ticket selling booths at each station. There will be no VIP tickets. The train officials do not allow passengers without seats.

Clean and fresh foods are sold at a restaurant on board.

The Mandalay-Myitsone express up-train run by Kachin State Public Company Ltd. departed Mandalay station at 10 p.m. the same day.—GNLM-001

Police on patrol to reduce crime in urban area

Myingyan, 27 Dec—Police of Myingyan Township are on patrol in urban areas every day and night.

Thanks to their strenuous efforts, the number of crimes has declined in the township.

Police use bicycles while patrolling among the people day and night.


Ow Min Naing (Myingyan)

1st MB students join fresher welcome ceremony

Mandalay, 27 Dec—The welcoming ceremony to fresh students was held at University of Medicine in Mandalay on 26 December. Rector Professor Dr Tin Maung Han extended greetings to the first MB students.

On behalf of faculty members, Dean of English Department U Aung Thein Tun gave words of advice.

After the ceremony, the rector cordially greeted students and parents.

In the 2014-15 academic year, the university admitted 346 first year students from the upper Myanmar region.

Tin Maung (Mandalay)
Dr Sai Mauk Kham says university degrees inadequate to prepare students for employment

Nay Pyi Taw, 27 Dec — A university degree can provide graduating students only with elementary skills necessary to enter real life and they still have a lot to learn at work to gain more experience, Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham said at the Yezin Agricultural University on Saturday.

Located in Yezin about 18 km north of Pyinmana in Nay Pyi Taw, the university is the only institution of higher learning in agriculture in Myanmar.

Speaking in honour of the 90th anniversary of the university, the vice president recalled that the agricultural university started life in 1924, urging faculty members to preserve and promote its near-centenary-long good reputation.

He cited educationists and industrialists as describing graduates these days as unfit for employment and suggesting a review of the curricula in use.

He called for comprehensive discussions to address the weaknesses, which he blamed have taken the country’s agricultural sector nowhere on a par with the international standard.

He pointed out that Myanmar still fails to maximize the use of its rich land and water resources, while countries in desert are found to be agriculturally successful as a result of their ability to utilize their available water sources.

Farmers are trapped in the vicious circle of poverty, with the vice president describing lack of modern farming techniques as main culprits. He said the government has been striving to reduce poverty and developing rural areas in the belief that the social mobility for farmers will help Myanmar graduate out of at least developed countries.

He called for ministries and regional governments to render agricultural techniques and machinery and develop necessary infrastructure for farmers to ensure high yields.

According to the vice president, the Yezin Agricultural University has now established links with countries in Asia, Europe, South America and Australia.

Vice President Dr. Sai Mauk Kham, together with union ministers, planted trees in honour of the 90th anniversary of the university. — MNA

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing opens mobile telecom service in Cocokyun

Nay Pyi Taw, 27 Dec — Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing launched CDMA 800 MHz mobile telecommunications service at Cocokyun Township, Yangon, on Saturday.

Myanmar Economic Corporation set up the telecom station with the investment of more than 300 million kyat at the township near Adman islands in eastern Indian Ocean.

Senior General mentioned contributions of Tatmadaw in the development programmes of Cocokyun Township, with an expansion of airfield runway at the township which is under the administration of Yangon region government.

The opening ceremony was attended by Yangon region’s chief minister, senior military chiefs, government officials and locals.

Commander-in-Chief also said that mobile telecom services at the island township is aimed for the development of the area, including internet access and mobile monetary system.

Yangon region’s chief minister U Myint Swe said at the ceremony that his government is focusing on the development of Cocokyun Township as it is a small area, acknowledging the contributions of Tatmadaw in this township which is about 260 kilometre south of former capital.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing then handed over cement bags and galvanized iron sheets to township development committee.

Tatmadaw has operated 23 times of aircrafts and 22 times of navy boats to Cocokyun Township up to December this year for free transportation.

Commander-in-Chief and chief minister inspected expansion of runway at the township’s airfield.

—Myawady

Macroeconomic stability, sustainable development discussed

Yangon, 27 Dec — A discussion on ‘macroeconomic stability and sustainable development’ took place at the National Archives Department in Dagon Township here on Saturday, with an opening speech delivered by Union Minister U Soe Thane, officials said.

Topics that came under discussion were concerned with reform of financial policies and taxation policies, management of public revenues and debts, state budget, pay rises for government employees, and gross national product.

Experts discussed relationships between wage and employment and inflation and its consequences, while ministries suggested monetary and banking policies to improve trade.

All discussions were found to focus on laying down policies that will favour macroeconomic stability and sustainable development. — MNA
Japan proposes resuming maritime hot line talks with China in January

TOKYO, 27 Dec — Japan has proposed resuming talks with China in January aimed at setting up a hot line to avert unforeseen tensions between the two countries, government sources said on Saturday.

Tokyo hopes the hot line between the two countries’ defence authorities will be launched next year, while China said it will make arrangements over the proposal, according to the sources.

The proposed “maritime liaison mechanism” is aimed at easing tensions stemming from a standoff over the sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea.

Japan made the proposal following the first summit between Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Chinese President Xi Jinping in November in Beijing, at which they confirmed that senior officials of the two countries would start working toward the early establishment of a crisis management mechanism to avert such incidents, they said.

The countries previously held the talks three times through June 2012. The talks were suspended after China protested against the Japanese government’s purchase of some of the islands in the Senkaku group in September 2012.

Kyodo News

Aboard Sri Lanka’s tsunami train, an anguished hope of reunion

KUALA LUMPUR, 27 Dec — The number of people evacuated due to Malaysia’s worst-ever floods jumped to more than 160,000 on Saturday, as Prime Minister Najib Razak reached the worst-hit state after cutting short a vacation in the US.

Najib arrived in Kelantan, which has the biggest problems among eight affected states, following his return from Hawaii on Friday after public criticism he had been absent as the force of war rushing in from the sea.

Many of the 1,270 who perished had jumped on the roof of the train or sought protection behind the carriages in a bid to avoid being swept away by the powerful swell.

But the rush of water picked up the carriages and crushed many of those who had sought shelter behind it against the train’s buildings. Passengers trapped inside were drowned.

Among the passengers back then, and again on Friday, was 55-year-old receptionist Gallage, for whom the memories are vivid, and closure is elusive.

“I think my husband is dead but I still believe my younger daughter is still living,” said Gallage, who survived with her eldest daughter.

“I came to see if she also had come here. I think she would have suffered memory loss due to the tragedy.”

The train stopped at the same place in Perelaya, two hours from Colombo, where it was forced off the rail line that hugs the jungle-clad coast.

Wanigaratne Karunatilake, the 58-year train guard, said lives could have been saved but those on board were unaware of what was happening and stayed inside the train.

“It just got out of the train through a window and got on to the roof and tried to save as many as I could,” he said.

“Then the train started to float on the water.”

Reuters

Number of Malaysians displaced by worst-ever floods reaches 160,000

On Saturday, Najib announced an additional 500 million ringgit (£91.9 million) will be spent to aid victims after the flood subsides, following an initial government allocation of 50 million ringgit two days ago. The number of people evacuated topped 160,000 on 0700GMT on Saturday, according to the New Straits Times newspaper, a sharp increase from 100,000 a day before.

The prime minister attended briefings with the National Security Council, the National Disaster Management and Relief Committee, state government and local emergency responders, a statement on Friday said.

Najib said eastern peninsular Malaysia, which is worst affected part of the country, is regularly hit by flooding during the annual “northeast monsoon”, but this year’s rains have been particularly heavy.

Reuters

Nepal’s peace, stability, unity and development common aspirations of countries in the region: Chinese FM

KATHMANDU, 27 Dec — Visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has said Nepal’s peace, stability, unity and development are the common aspirations of the countries in the region.

The Chinese foreign minister made the remarks on Friday while addressing a reception hosted by the Chinese Embassy to Nepal.

Wang said Nepal has undergone a lot of changes in the past years but the friendly relations between China and Nepal have not changed.

Nepal parties may hold different political views but all of them have expressed the hope to boost the friendly ties with China, pursued friendly policies toward China and made their contributions to the development of bilateral ties, Wang said.

Nepal is now devoted to the goal of removing itself from the list of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) by 2022, and China believes that Nepal will attain the goal by that time, the Chinese foreign minister said.

To realize the goal, Nepal, first of all, needs politically and socially stable environments, and China, as a friend of Nepal, hopes that the constitutional process in the country will be pushed forward smoothly, Wang said.

China also hopes that all political parties in Nepal will seek common ground while respecting differences and hammer out an agreement through friendly consultations at an earliest possible date so as to serve the fundamental and the long-term interests of the country, he added.

AFP
China’s premier voices support to HK, Macao development

Beijing, 27 Dec — Premier Li Keqiang on Friday pledged continued support to the government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) and Macao SAR when meeting with leaders of the two regions.

Leung Chun-ying, Hong Kong SAR chief executive, and Chui Sai On, Macao SAR chief executive, were in Beijing to report their work in 2014 to the central government.

Premier Li said that the central government will continue to uphold “one country, two systems” and the principles of “Hong Kong people administering Hong Kong,” “Macao people administrating Macao” with a high degree of autonomy.

In the past year, Leung and the Hong Kong SAR government were unfazed by difficulties, maintained the region’s overall stability and achieved new development, Li said, adding that the central government “fully endorses the work of Leung and the SAR government.”

The premier also called on Hong Kong people to preserve the achievements of the city as an important international financial hub, trade and navigation center.

When meeting with Chui Sai On separately, the premier praised what the SAR government has done in the past 15 years and urged them to seize new opportunities and promote moderate diversification of the Macao economy.

Leung said the Shanghai-Hong Kong Stock Connect scheme enhances Hong Kong’s connection with the mainland and boosts Hong Kong’s financial sector. He vowed to develop the economy, improve the quality of people’s lives and push forward the development of the region’s political system.

Chui also thanked the central government for its support of his administration and vowed to improve the livelihood of Macao people and work hard for an appropriate diversification of Macao’s economy.—Xinhua

Russian test-fires Yars ICBM successfully

Moscow, 27 Dec — Russian Defence Ministry said the army has successfully test-fired an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) Yars on Friday.

“The RS-24 Yars ICBM was launched at 11:02 Moscow Time (0802 GMT) and hit the target in the Kura testing range in Kamchatka Peninsula (in the Far East),” Interfax news agency quoted the ministry spokesman for Strategic Missile Force (RVSN) Igor Yegorov as saying.

The multiple-warhead missile’s test, carried out by joint efforts of the RVSN and Aerospace Defence Forces, aimed to check reliability of its equipment, he said.

The Yars will gradually replace the elder-generation Topol (RS-12M) and Stiletto (RS-18) missiles. Currently, 15 Yars mobile missile systems are deployed at the divisions in Novosibirsk and Tomsk in Siberia. Russia planned to arm two more divisions with Yars and conduct 16 launches of the two more divisions with Yars missiles. Currently, 15 Yars mobile missile systems are deployed at the divisions in Novosibirsk and Tomsk in Siberia. Russia planned to arm two more divisions with Yars and conduct 16 launches of the two more divisions with Yars missiles.

US police struggle to uncover threats on social media

San Francisco/Los Angeles, 27 Dec — US law enforcement agencies are a long way from being able to effectively track threats of the kind a gunman posted on Instagram before his execution-style murder of two New York City policemen last weekend. Police need more data analytics and mining software to monitor social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as trained personnel to make sense of what could be a deluge of data, say law enforcement officials and security experts.

“You can buy all the technology you want, but you need to figure out clever stuff, you better have smart people able to use it,” said Christopher Ahlberg, co-founder of Recorded Future, which helps clients analyze social media feeds. The company is mostly backed by In-Q-Tel, a venture capital firm that serves US intelligence agencies.

According to the New York Police Department, Ismaaayil Brinsley posted anti-cop slurs on the Instagram photo-sharing site hours before walking up to two officers in a parked squad car in Brooklyn and shooting them dead on Saturday, Baltimore police said. Last month in London, a gunman posted on Instagram before his execution-style murder of two New York City policemen last weekend. Police need more data analytics and mining software to monitor social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as trained personnel to make sense of what could be a deluge of data, say law enforcement officials and security experts.

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UK’s Labour faces wipe-out in Scotland despite change of leader

London, 27 Dec — Britain’s opposition Labour Party could suffer a wipe-out in Scotland in a UK-wide parliamentary election in May, scuppering its overall chances of supplanting Prime Minister David Cameron’s Conservatives, a poll suggested on Friday.

The poll is not the first to suggest that Labour is in trouble in what for decades was a traditional stronghold but comes just two weeks after it replaced the leader of its Scottish chapter and underlines the scale of the challenge it faces to turn the party’s fortunes around.

The Guardian/ICM online poll suggested Labour would get just 26 percent of the vote, down from 42 percent in 2010, while the pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP) is on course to capture 43 percent of the vote, up from just 20 percent last time.

That could see the SNP win 45 of Scotland’s 59 UK-wide seats in the British parliament, up from just six seats, with Labour scraping only 10 seats, down from 41.

The SNP lost a historic independence referendum in September by 55 to 45 percent but has since staging a strong comeback and could now become a serious player in the politics of the United Kingdom, a political construct it wants to destroy.

“We are prospectively looking at the collapse of citadels that have always been Labour since the 1920s,” Professor John Curtice, a polling expert from Strathclyde University, told the Guardian newspaper.

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Iran expands ‘smart’ Internet censorship

Dubai, 27 Dec — Iran is to expand what it calls “smart filtering” of the Internet, a policy of censoring undesirable content on websites without banning them completely, as it used to, the government said on Friday.

The Islamic Republic has some of the strictest controls on Internet access in the world, but its blocks on US-based social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are routinely bypassed by tech-savvy Iranians using virtual private networks (VPNs).

Under the new scheme, Tehran could lift its blanket ban on those sites and, instead, filter their content.

The policy appears to follow President Hassan Rouhani’s push to loosen some social restrictions, but it was not clear if it would mean more or less Internet freedom. Iranians on Twitter expressed concern that, as part of the new policy, the government would try to block VPN access to such sites.

Presently, the smart filtering plan is implemented only on one social network in its pilot study phase and this process will continue gradually until the plan is implemented on all networks,” Communications Ministry Mahmoud Vaezi said, according to official news agency IRNA.

He appeared to be referring to Instagram, the photo-sharing site owned by Facebook, which is already being filtered, but not blocked.

Instagram was initially available uncensored in Iran but some user accounts were subsequently blocked, notably @RichkidsofTeheran, a page full of photos of young, rich Iranians flaunting their wealth.

In a cat-and-mouse game, another account dedicated to the same pursuits quickly appeared under the name @RichkidosTeh.

“Implementing the smart filtering plan, we are trying to block the criminal and unethical contents of the Internet sites, while the public will be able to use the general contents of those sites,” Vaezi told a news conference.

The policy would be fully in place by June 2015, he said.

Iranian authorities are not only concerned about what might be considered morally dubious content, which in Iran could be anything from pornography to relatively innocuous images of women not wearing the mandatory Islamic dress, but also material that might be politically damaging.

Social media were widely used in the anti-government protests of 2009 to organize and spread news about a movement that was eventually crushed by security forces.

Under former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Teheran floated the idea of replacing the Internet with a national intranet that would not be connected to the worldwide web and would be controlled by Iranian authorities, a plan than appears to have fizzled out.

Joint table top exercise between armies of China, Malaysia ends

Kuala Lumpur, 27 Dec — The joint table top exercise (TTX) held in Malaysia from May 19 to 21, named “Peace and Friendship 2014,” between the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) and Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) wrapped up here on Friday at the Malaysian Armed Forces Joint Warfare Centre.

This is the first time for the two sides to host the joint TTX, which involves 22 personnel from MAF and 21 from PLA.

During the five-day exercise, the two sides focused on subjects such as navy and air force projection, combined joint escort, combined joint search and rescue, combined joint rescue of hijacked vessel and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), etc. They also shared experiences on the mechanisms of the involvement of military in the actions of HADR.

Both sides spoke highly of the TTX, saying it has reached the intended purpose of promoting mutual understanding, friendship and trust.

The TTX was believed to be a positive trial on the joint exercise and training between the two sides, laying solid foundation for their future cooperation in HADR and opening a new chapter for their security cooperation.

The two sides said that they would like to take this opportunity to continue to promote their friendly cooperation, maintain close coordination and interactions, push forward bilateral relationship, and enrich the content of the China-Malaysia all-round strategic partnership.

Chinese Ambassador to Malaysia Huang Huikang, Deputy Director of the Foreign Affairs Office of the Chinese Ministry of National Defence Major General Hu Changming, and Malaysian Joint Forces Commander Lieutenant General Akbal Abdul Samad attended the closing of the TTX.

The Chinese participants of the TTX will return to China on Friday.

Erdogan tells Europe to stop criticising Turkey

istanbul, 27 Dec — Turkish police earlier this month raided media outlets close to US-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom Erdogan accuses of forming a “parallel state” to undermine his rule and orchestrating a graft scandal targeting his inner circle.

The European Union, which considers Erdogan a key as an example of a successful Muslim democracy, but more recently critics have accused Erdogan of intolerance of dissent.

Erdogan also repeated his determination to forge a new constitution, saying the result of next year’s general election could help speed up the process.

“Together with our nation and civil society institutions, the results of 7 June elections will pave the way for the swift preparation of a new constitution,” he said.

Erdogan, who became Turkey’s first popularly elected head of state in August after 12 years as prime minister, has made no secret of his ambition to change the constitution and bolster the powers of the presidency, a move opponents fear will herald increasingly authoritarian rule.

The outcome of June’s parliamentary election will therefore be key. If the ruling AK Party can control a two thirds majority, it could introduce reforms without opposition support, including the creation of the strong executive presidency Erdogan seeks.

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Turkey’s President Tayyip Erdogan speaks during the opening of an extension to an oil refinery near Istanbul on 15 Dec, 2014. — Reuters

Erdogan. On Friday, the President repeated his discontent, with a visibly sharper tone.

“We are not Europe’s scapegoat,” Erdogan told a symposium of civil servants. “We are definitely not a country that Europe can point its finger at and scold.

Instead of criticising us, Europe should find a solution to increasing racism and Islamophobia.”

He made reference to an incident in the German city of Dormagen, where ultra nationalists drew Nazi signs on the walls of a mosque construction, according to reports in Turkish local media earlier this week.

Erdogan, whose AK Party was elected in 2002, introduced many democratic reforms in his first years in power and curbed army involvement in politics.

NATO allies often cited Turkey as an example of a successful Muslim democracy, but more recently critics have accused Erdogan of intolerance of dissent.

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The outcome of June’s parliamentary election will therefore be key. If the ruling AK Party can control a two thirds majority, it could introduce reforms without opposition support, including the creation of the strong executive presidency Erdogan seeks.

Dubai, 27 Dec — Erdogan is to expand what it calls “smart filtering” of the Internet, a policy of censoring undesirable content on websites without banning them completely, as it used to, the government said on Friday.

Turkey’s President Tayyip Erdogan speaks during the opening of an extension to an oil refinery near Istanbul on 15 Dec, 2014. — Reuters

Erdogan. On Friday, the President repeated his discontent, with a visibly sharper tone.

“We are not Europe’s scapegoat,” Erdogan told a symposium of civil servants. “We are definitely not a country that Europe can point its finger at and scold.

Instead of criticising us, Europe should find a solution to increasing racism and Islamophobia.”

He made reference to an incident in the German city of Dormagen, where ultra nationalists drew Nazi signs on the walls of a mosque construction, according to reports in Turkish local media earlier this week.

Erdogan, whose AK Party was elected in 2002, introduced many democratic reforms in his first years in power and curbed army involvement in politics.

NATO allies often cited Turkey as an example of a successful Muslim democracy, but more recently critics have accused Erdogan of intolerance of dissent.

Erdogan also repeated his determination to forge a new constitution, saying the result of next year’s general election could help speed up the process.

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UN Security Council strongly condemns attack on AU base in Somalia

SOMALIA forces transport blind-folded suspects detained on their pick-up truck after attackers from the militant group Al-Shabaab seized the African Union’s Halane base on the edge of the Mogadishu international airport compound in Somalia’s capital Mogadishu on 24 Dec, 2014. — REUTERS

UNITED NATIONS, 27 Dec — The UN Security Council on Friday strongly condemned an attack on the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which has caused numerous deaths including three AMISOM soldiers and a civilian contractor.

The members of the Security Council deplored Al-Shabaab’s actions against a base of AMISOM, which is working alongside the Federal Government of Somalia and the Somali National Army, to protect the Somali people and to assist in the reconstruction and stabilization of Somalia.

The AMISOM base camp inside Mogadishu Airport was infiltrated by Al-Shabaab militants dressed in Somali army uniforms, UNSOM in the Horn of Africa country has confirmed.

The special representative of the secretary-general for Somalia (SRSG), Nicholas Kay, who also heads the UNSOM, confirmed in another statement that all UN staff are safe and sound.

The airport also hosts the UN Headquarters for Somalia.

US-led strikes kill 40 IS fighters in Syria: activists

DAMASCUS, 27 Dec — At least 40 fighters of the Islamic State (IS) militants were killed over the weekend by the strikes of the US-led anti-terror coalition on Syria’s northern province of al-Raqqa, the de facto capital of the IS, a monitoring group reported on Friday.

The strikes at dawn Wednesday targeted housing compounds of the IS in al-Raqqa and a place for manufacturing explosive devices in the eastern part of the city as well as a training camp in the al-Manakhir area in the countryside of al-Raqqa, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Thirteen of those killed were Syrians while the rebels were from different nationalities, said the Observatory, adding that there is information about the killing of family members of the IS fighters.

The US-led anti-terror coalition has been pounding the IS positions in Syria since late last September, killing over 1,000 IS fighters so far.

On Wednesday, a Jordanian F16 was downed over al-Raqqa and its pilot was captured by the IS. The incident marks the first downing of a foreign war jet by the IS over Syria.

Separately, the Observatory said it had documented 474 air strikes carried out by the Syrian air force over the past three days on different rebel-held areas across Syria. It said at least 115 civilians were killed.

Sudan defends decision to expel two United Nations officials

KHARTOUM, 27 Dec — Sudan defended on Friday its decision to expel two senior UNDP officials and urged the world body to respect Sudanese sovereignty in a worsening tensions with the United Nations.

Sudan ordered Ali Al-Za’atari, resident coordinator at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and Yvonne Helle, the UNDP’s country director, to leave the country, the UN said on Thursday, a move condemned by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Last month, President Omar Hassan al-Bashir called for peacekeepers from UNAMID, the joint UN-African Union Mission in Darfur, to leave. On Friday, foreign ministry spokesman Yousef al-Kordofani said the government decided to expel Za’atari, a Jordanian, because of comments he made in an interview with a Norwegian newspaper that appeared to criticise the Sudanese people.

Helle was expelled for several reasons, Kordofani told Reuters, including what the government saw as her high-handed manner and for cutting programmes without due consultation.

“The Khartoum government calls on the UN Secretary-General to revive his hasty condemnation of the decision to expel the officials,” he said, noting that the United Nations should ensure its representatives respect Sudan’s sovereignty.

Sudan has already shut UNAMID’s human rights office in Khartoum and called on the mission to prepare an exit plan. It has also denied peacekeepers permission to pay a second visit to the site of alleged mass rapes by Sudanese soldiers in Darfur.

The head of the UN peacekeeping forces has said UNAMID was unlikely to bow to Sudan’s request to leave when the situation there appears to be worsening. UN sources said that Helle, a Dutch national, had been told to leave Sudan by 29 December, and Za’atari would go by 2 January.

North Korea holds US responsible for Internet disruptions

BEIJING, 27 Dec — North Korea on Saturday held the United States responsible for recent outages and sporadic disruptions to the isolated country’s major Internet services, as tensions between them grew over the hacking of Sony Pictures Entertainment Inc.

North Korea’s National Defense Commission released a statement saying that “the United States, a big country, started disturbing the Internet operation of major media of our country, not knowing shame like children with runny noses playing a tag.”

The statement, carried by the official Korean Central News Agency, also said US President Barack Obama is “the chief culprit who forced” Sony Pictures to release “The Interview,” a comedy film depicting a fictional assassination plot against North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

“Obama always goes reckless in words and deeds like a monkey in a tropical forest” and undermined “the dignity of the supreme leadership,” the statement by an unnamed spokesman of the Policy Department of the powerful commission said.

Sony Pictures initially canceled the Christmas release of the film following threats of violence against movie theaters that planned to screen it. But the US subsidiary of Sony Corp eventually decided on a limited release online and at mostly independently owned theaters.

Prior to that, Obama criticized the company for caving in to pressure from North Korea and said his decision to pull the movie was a “mistake.”

The United States has blamed North Korea for last month’s cyberattack on Sony Pictures.

North Korea, however, again denied involvement in the attack in the statement and urged the United States to provide “evidence without fail, though belatedly.” After Obama’s warning that the US government stood ready to respond “proportionally” to the hacking, major North Korean websites went offline on Tuesday for more than nine hours.

Since then, North Korean websites such as those of the official news agency and the country’s leading RodongSinmun newspaper have been experiencing intermittent disruptions.

The United States has already rejected a North Korean proposal to conduct a joint investigation into the hacking.

But North Korea presented a counterproposal Saturday saying the probe could be conducted privately if the United States finds it too difficult to disclose sensitive information publicly. — Kyodo News

A Ukrainian soldier (1st R) supervises the exchange process of prisoners of war near Donetsk, eastern Ukraine, on 26 Dec, 2014. Ukrainian troops and independence-seeking insurgents have swapped prisoners of war under the framework of Minsk ceasefire protocol, local media reported on Friday.

According to Interfax news agency, Ukrainian government forces released 222 rebel fighters in exchange for 150 Ukrainian troops during the swap that took place on the neutral territory. — Xinhua
The Middle Way (Majjhima-pātīdaṁ)

Kyi Mun

* Practice of Self-Power

The Middle Path or the Middle Way is the Way that is free from the errors both of the Right Extreme and of the Left Extreme. The Middle Way is the PRACTICE that relies on SELF-POWER of WISDOM & COMPASSION and avoids relying on OTHER-POWER of HEAVENLY CREATOR.

* The Eightfold Path: The Middle Way as a Practice

The "Tathāgata," the Buddha continued, "does not seek salvation in austerities, but neither does he for that reason indulge in worldly pleasures, nor live in abundance. The Tathāgata has found the middle path.

There are two extremes, O bhikkhus, which the man who has given up the world ought not to follow — the habitual practice, on the one hand, of self-indulgence which is unwise, vain and fit only for the worldly-minded and the habitual practice, on the other hand, of self-mortification, which is painful, useless and unprofitable.

Neither abstinence from fish or flesh, nor going naked, nor shaving the head, nor wearing matted hair, nor dressing in a rough garment, nor covering oneself with dirt, nor sacrificing to Agni, will cleanse a man who is not free from delusions.

"Reading the Vedas, making offerings to priests, or sacrifices to the gods, self-mortification by heat or cold, and many such penances performed for the sake of immortality, these do not cleanse the man who is not free from delusions.

"Anger, drunkenness, obstinacy, bigotry, deception, envy, self-praise, dispersing others, superciliousness and evil intentions constitute uncleanness; not verily the eating of flesh.

"A middle path, O bhikkhus, avoiding the two extremes, has been discovered by the Tathāgata — a path with opens the eyes, and bestows understanding, which leads to peace of mind, to the higher wisdom, to full enlightenment, to Nirvana.

"Birth is attended with pain, decay is painful, disease is painful, death is painful. Union with the unpleasant is painful, painful is separation from the pleasant; and any craving that is unsatisfied, that too is painful. In brief, bodily conditions which spring from attachment are painful, painful is separation from the pleasant, and any craving that is unsatisfied, that too is painful.

"Verily, it is the destruction, in which no passion remains of this very thirst; it is the laying aside of the, being free from, the dwelling no longer upon this thirst.

"The Tathāgata has found the middle path.

He who fills his lamp with water will not dispel the darkness, and he who tries to light a fire with rotten wood will fail. And how can anyone be free from self by leading a wretched life, if he does not succeed in quenching the fires of lust, if he still hangs after either worldly or heavenly pleasures? But he in whom self has become extinct is free from lust; he will desire neither worldly nor heavenly pleasures, and the satisfaction of his natural wants will not defile him. However, let him be moderate, let him eat and drink according to the needs of the body.

"But to satisfy the necessities of life is not evil. To keep the body in good health is a duty, for otherwise we shall not be able to trim the lamp of wisdom, and keep our mind strong.

"Water surrounds the lotus-flower, but does not wet its petals.

"This is the middle path, O bhikkhus, that keeps aloof from both extremes.

And the Blessed One spoke kindly to his disciples, pitying them for their errors, and pointing out of the uselessness of their endeavours, and the ice of ill-will that chilled their hearts melted away under the gentle warmth of the Master's persuasion.

Now the Blessed One set the wheel of the most excellent law rolling, and he began to preach to the five bhikkhus, opening to them the gate of immortality, and showing them the bliss of Nirvana.

"The spokes of the wheel are the rules of pure conduct: justice is the uniformity of their length; wisdom is the tree; modesty and thoughtfulness are the hub in which the immovable axle of truth is fixed.

"He who recognizes the existence of suffering, its cause, its remedy, and its cessation has fathomed the four noble truths. He will walk in the right path.

"Right view will be the torch to light this way. Right aspirations will be his guide. Right speech will be his dwelling-place on the road. His gait will be straight, for it is right behavior. His refreshments will be the right way of earning his livelihood. Right efforts will be his steps; right thought his breath; and right contemplation will give him the peace that follows in his footsteps.

"This, then, O bhikkhus, is the noble truth concerning suffering.

"Verily, it is the destruction which causes the renewal of existence, accompanied by sensual delight, seeking satisfaction now here, now there, the craving for gratification of the passions, the craving for a future life, and the craving for happiness in this life.

"Verily, this is the noble truth concerning the origin of suffering.

"Now this, O bhikkhus, is the noble truth concerning the destruction of suffering:

"Verily, it is the destruction, in which no passion remains of this very thirst; it is the laying aside of the, being free from, the dwelling no longer upon this thirst.

Just as there who think that the Buddha is really teaching a True Self behind all denial (an example of the view of eternalism; Pali: sasatavadana; Sanskrit: sasvatavada); there are sometimes those who think the Buddha intends to deny that we exist at all. This is a version of the view of annihilism (Pali: Sasvatavada; Sanskrit: ucchedavada).

Another sense of "middle way" when used of Buddhism is dualistic, between eternality and annihilationism.

Thus instead of identity and difference, and instead of eternality and annihilationism, the Buddha substitutes dependent origination in the sense of causal dependence. Thereby dependent origination becomes another meaning of the ‘Middle Way’. Buddhism from the beginning had referred to itself as a Middle Way. For a Madhyamika, however the principal significance claiming to be the follower of the Middle way par excellence is an understanding of emptiness (sunyata) as the middle between eternalism and annihilationism. This understanding undoubtedly can be traced back to universalisation of the idea of the dependent origination (paticcasamuppada/pratityasamutpadā) as the middle between those who hold to the eternal existence of an unchanging Self, and those who hold to annihilation at death. Thus it should come as no surprise to find in Madhakusa sources emptiness equated with dependent origination Madhakusa (MMK) 24:18. Because even dharmas originate due to causes and conditions they too must be empty of primary, substantial existence.

Ref: • The Wisdom of India by Lin Yu Tim • Buddhist Thought by Paul Williams

Sunday, 28 December, 2014

Balancing act is vital for unbalancing situations

By Aung Khin

Plummeting price of oil has been spreading both pain and gain across the globe since June this year, making oil consumer countries happy, but it has pushed the economics of many major oil exporters.

The fall of fuel prices has resulted in a decline of currency at fuel exporters. However, it is a different story for fuel importing countries. They all benefit from lower oil prices. As the situation coincides with the New Year season, there have been remarkable discount for commodity prices in many countries.

Some regional countries are making plans to take this advantages from this downfall by reducing commodity prices at surprising rate to boost their tourism industry.

The price of a barrel has decelerating by about half since. The statistics show that the global price of oil traded near US$61, declining 47 percent from its peak of the year $115, and losing nearly $5 billion revenue from the global oil industry as costs for consumers in oil importers. Experts have estimated that a $10 fall in the price of oil transfers the equivalent of 0.5 percent of world GDP from oil producers to oil consumers.

Every abnormal condition might have negative impacts. Spending in oil exporter countries has nosedived, resulting in lower imports from industrialized countries. Therefore, whether the price plunge actually boosts or bring down the global economy depends on how low oil prices decline, how long they remain low, and whether they trigger political upheaval that interrupts trade or spoils investors.

Balancing act is important to adjust unbalancing situations. There is no eternal winner or loser. Sensible policies are needed to keep relevant parties stable and viable for a peaceful world.

Write for us

We appreciate your feedback and contributions. If you have any comments or would like to submit articles, analyses or commentaries, please be aware that your letter will be edited.

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.

Sunday, 28 December, 2014
Chinese officials have urged participants from the countries in Asia-Pacific Region to cooperate with Chinese media, highlighting the role of media in building together opinions of people in the region.

YANGON hosts first municipal... (from page 1) listed as heads of household or an only person in a household who could vote for the candidates.

AASEAN and plus three countries are the front line for the cooperation of the region.

Mr Yang Zhenwu, the president of the People’s Daily which organized the forum, quoted the Chinese President Xi Jinping’s speech in the last APEC meeting in Beijing saying that China wants to grow along with ASEAN countries through the 21st century Maritime Silk Road.

He continued to say that China has proposed the new type of diplomatic relationships with other countries and cooperation, mutual benefits and opening up and inclusiveness are a new model of the silk road.

Mr Soeung Rahardojo, Ambassador to China, said in his keynote speech at the forum that Chinese president’s Xi Jinping’s initiative on 21st century Maritime Silk Road which will connect South East Asia, South Asia, West Asia and Africa will be an important contribution in the region.

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Lure of online sales cuts number of Boxing Day shoppers in UK

A woman walks past Selfridges department store after shopping on the first day of their sales, in central London on 26 Dec, 2014.—Reuters

Expectations for Christmas orders from its online clearance sale were up 16 percent in the first hour compared to last year and that online orders hit a record, rising 19 percent year-on-year on Christmas Day.

Seventy-two percent of traffic had come from mobile and tablet devices, it said.—Reuters

HIV infection linked to hearing problems

WASHINGTON, 27 Dec — Adults with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, may have poorer hearing than those without HIV infection, a US study said on Friday.

To determine if HIV and antiretroviral therapy are associated with hearing loss, Peter Torre III of San Diego State University, California, and colleagues evaluated the hearing of 302 men, of whom 117 were HIV positive, and 134 women, of whom 105 were HIV positive.

The men had an average age of 57 years and the women were an average age of nearly 48.

The study found people with HIV tended to have worse lower- and higher-frequency hearing compared with those without HIV.

The results, published online in the US journal JAMA Otolaryngology-Head & Neck Surgery, were independent of long-term exposure to antiretroviral medications, HIV viral load, current count of CD4+ cells, the immune cells that HIV attacks and kills.

“To our knowledge, this is the first study to demonstrate that HIV+ individuals have poorer hearing across the frequency range after many other factors known to affect hearing have been controlled for,” the study concluded.

Norovirus affects 104 kids in south China

Xinhua

A total of 104 students in a primary school in south China’s Guangdong Province have fallen ill with norovirus, local authorities confirmed on Friday.

Grade one to three students of Qiming Primary School in Jiangmen city started feeling unwell about 4 pm on Thursday, said Jiangmen city press office.

They were treated in local hospitals. By Friday noon, all but 21 of them had been discharged. This is the seventh outbreak of norovirus in Jiangmen this year.

Symptoms of the highly-contagious stomach virus include vomiting, diarrhea, fever and body aches. Usually patients recover within three days.

The local disease control and prevention center warned people that during the cold season, they should wash their hands frequently and carefully, and say no to raw or cold food.—Xinhua

 Shares rise in thin post-holiday trade; oil, natural gas slip

NEW YORK, 27 Dec — US stocks pushed higher on Friday, with the Dow and S&P 500 both closing at record highs, while oil and natural gas fell on worries of a supply glut and on mild US weather.

The three major US stock indexes notched their second straight weekly advance on Friday as the bright light of the S&P 500’s 10 primary sectors ended higher, and no sector ended more than 0.1 percent lower. Trading was light, however.

Europe, Canada, Latin America and a number of Asian markets were closed for a holiday the day after Christmas.

“The modest growth, modest inflation environment that we’ve been in looks to me like it’s going to continue, and that’s positive for stocks,” said Scott Wren, senior equity strategist at Wells Fargo Advisors in St Louis.

Oil prices slipped, pressured by a supply glut in top consumer the United States. A Department of Energy report on Wednesday showed crude inventories in the latest week rose to their highest December level on record.

US natural gas futures hit a two-year bottom below $3 after the worst week since February as disappointing weekly draws of the fuel raised worries about growing gas in storage.

NYMEX’s front-month gas settled a September 2012 low of $2.9783 per million British thermal units before settling at $3.007, about half a percent below the close on Wednesday. The contract had traded as high as $4.53 per mmBtu on 26 November due to colder weather then across the United States before collapsing as temperatures turned higher.

Brent crude settled down 79 cents at $59.45 a barrel. US crude settled down $1.11 at $54.73 a barrel. Spot gold prices were up $2.09 at 1,219.39 an ounce.

The Dow Jones industrial average closed up 0.33 percent at 18,088.77.

MSCI’s all-country world index was last up 0.22 percent at 421.33, boosted by the gains in US shares.

In Japan, one of the few major markets open on Friday, the Nikkei benchmark stock index closed up 0.1 percent in quiet trade.

European, Hong Kong, Australian, Canadian and Latin American stock markets were all closed for the day.

The US dollar climbed to a near 7-1/2-year peak against the yen and close to a 2-1/2-year high versus the euro on the view that the US economy is expanding enough for the Federal Reserve to hike interest rates in mid-2015.

The greenback hovered at nearly nine-year highs against a basket of major currencies; the dollar index was last up 0.06 percent at 90.02.

Treasury prices recovered slightly from an early week selloff in light trading. Benchmark 10-year yields fell 0.25 percent on Monday.

A woman walks past Selfridges department store after shopping on the first day of their sales, in central London on 26 Dec, 2014.—Reuters

LONDON, 27 Dec — Significantly fewer Britons went out to shop on Boxing Day this year, initial data showed, suggesting pre-Christmas online discounting led many to spurn what is traditionally a bumper day for retailers.

Retail data company Springboard said footfall for the first three hours of 26 December was down 10.3 percent year-on-year.

“While the unborn child is not yet in distress, it is facing into a ‘perfect storm’ from which it has no realistic prospect of emerging alive. It has nothing but distress and death in prospect,” the court said in its ruling.

But Springboard said many shoppers would be making their purchases online. “The scale of the drop this year falls outside of any ongoing retail trend,” said Springboard.

“On Boxing Day, a decision like this risks depriv-ing the unborn fetus of a chance of survival, a decision like this risks depriving the unborn fetus of a chance of survival in its Oxford Street branch.

A police officer is pictured though a wreath as he stands guard in the rain at the New York Stock Exchange on the last day of trading before Christmas in the Manhattan borough of New York, on 24 Dec, 2014.—Reuters

LONDON, 27 Dec — Ireland’s High Court ruled on Friday that a life support machine keeping a brain-dead woman alive could be switched off because her unborn fetus had no chance of survival, a decision likely to upset anti-abortion campaigners.

While the unusual case is unlikely to set a precedent, it has revived debate in the predominantly Catholic country about its abortion ban.

The pregnant woman, who has not been named to protect her privacy, was declared clinically dead on 3 December after damaging her head in a serious fall.

Doctors then refused her family’s plea to turn off her life support machine, citing fears they could be sued for negligence or even charged with murder for depriving her unborn fetus of life support.

The High Court ruled on Friday that the case raised issues of “great public importance” but said the 18-week fetus would not survive because of the deteriorating state of the woman’s body, meaning that continuing life support was futile.

“While the unborn child is not yet in distress, it is facing into a ‘perfect storm’ from which it has no realistic prospect of emerging alive. It has nothing but distress and death in prospect,” the court said in its ruling.

It held out the prospect however that it might rule differently in future cases if a fetus had a realistic chance of survival, stressing that the rights of an unborn child “must prevail over the feelings of grief and respect for a mother who no longer is living.”

Reuters

Kent said deep discounts were starting to filter down to the 18-week fetus would have no chance of survival, a decision like this risks depriv-ing the unborn fetus of a chance of survival, a decision like this risks depriv-ing the unborn fetus of a chance of survival, a decision like this risks depriving the unborn fetus of a chance of survival.

A spokesman for the Department of Health said the decision was “unprecedented in family law” and that it would be “very carefully considered.”

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Reuters

but it has now become a battle-ground for consum-ers with price and conveni-ence being the order of the day, she said.

Even so, some retailers reported record demand.

Bluewater centre in Kent said deep discounts were expected to draw enough shoppers to con-tribute to record annual results.

Retailers in London’s West End said they ex-pected customers to spend over 50 million pounds on 26 December, singling out Chinese, Nigerian and Middle Eastern buyers among top spenders.

Department store De-benhams said it expected “well over” 50,000 people in its Oxford Street branch alone.

And John Lewis said

A police officer is pictured though a wreath as he stands guard in the rain at the New York Stock Exchange on the last day of trading before Christmas in the Manhattan borough of New York, on 24 Dec, 2014.—Reuters

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Reuters
Purported “STAP cells” likely are embryonic stem cells

Haruko Obokata, then a researcher with the Riken research institute, announces the creation of the “STAP cells,” claimed to be capable of developing into any type of tissue, in Kobe, western Japan, in this file photo taken in January 2014. A panel under the government-backed institute said on 26 Dec, 2014, that the STAP cells that Obokata claimed to have created were likely cells generated from embryonic stem cells. Obokata left her job at Riken on 21 December.—Kyodo News

A Long March-4B rocket carrying the Yaogan-26 remote sensing satellite blasts off from the launch pad at the Taiyuan Satellite Launch Centre in Taiyuan, capital of north China’s Shanxi Province, on 27 Dec, 2014. Yaogan satellites are mainly used for scientific experiments, natural resource surveys, crop yield estimates and disaster relief.—Xinhua

Amazon launches remote sensing satellite

A Long March-4B rocket blast-off.

Sunday, 28 December, 2014

New York, 27 Dec — Amazon Inc said on Friday it drew more than 10 million new members to its Prime shipping and digital content service over the holidays and intends to offer one-hour shipping to more cities in 2015.

Amazon considers its $99 (64 pounds)-a-year Prime membership, which confers free two-day shipping and streaming of select movies and songs, essential to driving its growth and margins. It was unclear, however, how many of the 10 million new members were just taking advantage of a standing 30-day free trial offer.

The Internet retailer has never disclosed the precise number of Prime subscribers, except to say it is in the tens of millions. Analysts estimate it is growing at a rapid clip, and the company continues to try and spice it up with new content.

The company’s shares climbed 2.07 percent to $309.31 in midday Nasdaq trading.

Amazon said customers ordered more than 10 times as many items via same-day delivery this holiday season, compared with a year earlier. It did not reveal figures for Prime Now, the one-hour delivery option unveiled for parts of New York City’s Manhattan borough just this month.

“We are working hard to make Prime even better and expanding the recently launched Prime Now to additional cities in 2015,” CEO Jeff Bezos said in a statement.

Amazon also said nearly 60 percent of its customers shopped via a mobile device this holiday, and total holiday sales through its smartphone app doubled this year. That may reflect “showrooming,” when customers browse physical stores but make their purchases online.

“Mobile continues to accelerate the secular shift from offline to online purchases,” said RW Baird analyst Colin Sebastian. “Consumer use-cases for last-minute shopping, in-store purchases and price comparison continue to expand.”—Reuters

China launches remote sensing satellite

A Long March-4B rocket launch.

Tagay, 27 Dec — China launched the Yaogan-26 remote sensing satellite into the preset orbit at 11:22 am on Saturday Beijing Time from the Taiyuan Satellite Launch Centre in north China’s Shanxi Province.

The satellite will mainly be used for scientific experiments, land surveys, crop yield estimates and disaster relief.—Xinhua

Tokyo, 27 Dec — A panel under the Riken research institute, announcing the creation of the “STAP cells,” claimed to be capable of developing into any type of tissue, with global attention, with people hailing it as ground-breaking. But soon allegations of data falsification and fabrication emerged, leading to the retraction of the research papers.

Obokata, then a researcher at Riken’s Centre for Developmental Biology in Kobe, was their lead author.

Last week, Riken ended its work to see whether it could produce STAP, or “stem cell-like” cells, and concluded that Obokata too had failed in her recent experiments to produce them.

In its latest findings on Friday, the panel at the government-backed institute said that variations in the cell gene sequence purportedly made from STAP cells matched those of an ES cell more than 99 percent.

At the time the STAP cells were purportedly being created, anyone could have entered the laboratory because the room was left unattended for a week, the panel said in explaining why it could not specify what happened.

Obokata unequivocally denied involvement in introducing the ES cells when she was questioned by panel members, but she acknowledged the possibility that ES cells had become mixed up in the experiment, according to the panel.

The panel also pointed to fresh instances of misconduct related to the pair of papers written by Obokata and other researchers, which appeared in the British journal in January.

Panel members quoted Obokata as telling them that she manipulated a part of the data in her research after she was told by a co-author that her original data could not be used.

“Almost all the claims in the STAP papers were refuted,” Katsura said at the news conference in Tokyo.

The papers were earlier retracted and the 31-year-old scientist left her job at Riken on Sunday after failing to demonstrate in experiments that it was possible to generate STAP cells.

The seven-member panel of outside experts was launched in September and led by Katsura, director general of the National Institute of Genetics.

With Obokata failing to submit most of her records of the experiments, Katsura said the panel believes it is “extremely likely that there are no records.”

Mutsuhiro Arinobu, executive director of Riken, said at a separate news conference that Riken has done “the best it could possibly do” and has no plans to continue investigating the STAP cell issue.

The costs of the latest investigation into the STAP cell papers totalled about 14 million yen, the panel said.

According to Arinobu, the institute has not decided on whether to ask Obokata to shoulder STAP cell research expenses.

The institute also said it is working with Harvard University, where one of the co-authors in Obokata’s STAP cell papers is a professor, to withdraw its patent application on STAP cells.

Obokata’s lawyer, Hideo Miki, told reporters in Osaka City that he has not discussed the panel’s latest report with his client, who he says is suffering from poor health and is hard to reach now.

“It is unthinkable for Miss Obokata herself to mix the ES cells,” Miki said.

Obokata had said she successfully produced STAP cells more than 200 times using mice but other researchers were unable to do so.

At another press conference on Friday, science and technology minister Hakubun Shimomura said the panel’s findings “call into question the responsibility of the team” involved in STAP cell research.

Shimomura, who heads the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, said the institute is “responsible for explaining” its measures including preventing a recurrence of research misconduct.

Riken President Ryoji Noyori, a 2001 Nobel laureate in chemistry, vowed in a statement on Friday that the institute will “do its utmost to pursue reforms and regain trust.”

Kyodo News

Amazon draws 10 million new Prime members over holidays

A worker delivers orders to packing stations at the Amazon logistics centre in Brieselang, on 11 Nov, 2014.—Reuters

President Ryogo Noyori, who in 2001 won the Nobel prize for chemistry, vowed in a statement on Friday that the institute would “do its utmost to pursue reforms and regain trust.”

Kyodo News

China launches remote sensing satellite

A Long March-4B rocket carrying the Yaogan-26 remote sensing satellite blasts off from the launch pad at the Taiyuan Satellite Launch Centre in Taiyuan, capital of north China’s Shanxi Province, on 27 Dec, 2014. Yaogan satellites are mainly used for scientific experiments, natural resource surveys, crop yield estimates and disaster relief.—Xinhua

Taiyuan, 27 Dec — China launched the Yaogan-26 remote sensing satellite into the preset orbit at 11:22 am on Saturday Beijing Time from the Taiyuan Satellite Launch Centre in north China’s Shanxi Province.

The satellite will mainly be used for scientific experiments, land surveys, crop yield estimates and disaster prevention.

It was carried by a Long March-4B rocket, marking the 20th mission for the Long March rocket family.

China launched the first satellite in the “Yaogan” series, Yaogan-1, in 2006.

Xinhua
Venezuela’s Maduro moves foreign minister Ramirez to UN

CARACAS, 27 Dec — President Nicolas Maduro named powerful Foreign Minister Rafael Ramirez to a new post as envoy to the United Nations on Friday, saying the appointment would strengthen Venezuela’s voice on the world body’s Security Council from 1 January.

Venezuela’s socialist government sees its imminent two-year seat on the Security Council as a chance to raise its international profile and counteract US global influence.

Ramirez, a long-time former energy minister and head of state oil company PDVSA, has headed the Foreign Ministry since September and has continued to be Venezuela’s representative at the oil producers’ cartel OPEC.

Former Information Minister Delycy Rodriguez, a lawyer who stepped down from that post in October, will take over at the Foreign Ministry, the president said.

Ramirez’s appointment to the UN post likely will be interpreted by government opponents as a further demotion for one of the most powerful men in Venezuela.

He was moved from the twin oil posts and another position as vice president for the economy after proposing reforms — such as a unified currency rate and a multicentric world, and from the UN Security Council we are going to fight for a new 21st-century world,” said Maduro, who became president last year after Hugo Chavez died of cancer.

“With Chavez’s Bolivarian vision, we are going to fulfil our task of defending the right to peace and sovereignty for the peoples of the world,” he added, in a reference to Chavez’s inspiration, the Venezuela independence hero Simon Bolivar.

Foreign foes of the Maduro government, particularly US Republican politicians, say Venezuela should never have been awarded a UN Security Council seat given this year’s repression of opposition-led street protest.

Ramirez termed the protests — which sparked violence killing 43 people, including demonstrators, government supporters and security officials — a US-fanned coup attempt.

Venezuela was elected to the UN Security Council in October by the 193-member General Assembly with 181 votes. Malaysia, Angola, New Zealand and Spain were also elected to the Security Council. Chavez’s daughter, Maria Gabriela Chavez, is Venezuela’s deputy ambassador to the United Nations.

It was unclear if Ramirez would continue to exercise his OPEC role from his new UN position. “I accept with revolutionarity discipline President Maduro’s decision,” Ramirez tweeted. “From any place or position that the revolution decides, I will battle to defend our fatherland with honesty and firmness.”

A man repairs a 1957 Chevrolet car on a street in Havana on 23 Dec, 2014.—REUTERS

In Cuba’s sea of classic cars, the truly valuable are elusive

HAVANA, 27 Dec — Luis Abel Bango spent seven years searching for his dream car, a 1957 Chevy Bel Air. He finally found it on Cuba’s far western tip, buying it off the original owner for $7,000 (4,501 pounds).

“I went everywhere looking for what I wanted. Out in the provinces, central Cuba, I had to go to the end of the island to find this one,” Bango said.

The black-and-white four-door had been kept intact by the original owner, complete with all the chrome bits such as the rock-et-like hood ornaments that give a ‘57 Chevy its style and make it a collectors’ favourite.

The whole package was nearly complete,” said Bango, although he still needed take the car apart for a complete diagno-sis and new paint job.

Around 60,000 vintage cars have run on Cuba’s roads since before the 1959 revolution led by Fidel Castro, but finding a col-lectible of value is a challenge.

“For every hidden gem, there are thousands of beaten up clunkers, largely stripped of their original parts. Cuba and the United States agreed last week to restore diplomatic ties that were cut off after the revolution, when the tail fin was still a recent inno-vation in automotive design.

Under the rapprochement, US President Barack Obama plans to remove economic sanc-tions imposed against the com-munist-run island. In a land of chronic shortages made worse by those sanctions, Cubans kept the pre-revolution cars on the road, using makeshift parts and con-siderable ingenuity.

Still, American collectors who envision a wave of classic cars coming onto the market will need to temper their expecta-tions. Even if the US completely lifted its trade embargo, a 2010 Cuban law bans cars being taken off the island.

More importantly, most of the vintage cars, the backbone of urban transit, have suffered heavily on pothole-filled roads and the repairs, although inven-tive, would turn off any purist.

Convertible roofs are often replaced with sheets of plastic and many original motors have been replaced with diesel en-gines because they are cheaper to run.

“What you see are a lot of cars that are just kind of rolling hulks held together with duct tape and chicken wire,” said Lance Lambert, host of US television show Vintage Vehicles. Alejandro Torres, a Cuban mechanic, bought a '57 Chevy with only 74,000 miles on it from its original owner 10 years ago.

In what would be sacrilege in the United States, he put in a Mitsubishi diesel engine because the old gas guzzlers are just too expensive to run.

Torres said he has turned down $50,000 for it, although in the United States the listed value on that car in excellent condition is $28,100.

“Maybe I’d sell it if I could buy a modern diesel car at that price,” Torres said.

Under Cuba’s one-party sys-tem, the new car market is tightly regulated and a brand new sedan costs upwards of $200,000. For decades, only pre-revolutionary vehicles could be bought and sold freely, which is why so many have stayed on the road.

The early 1950s Chevys seem to be the most common, though there are Fords, Buicks, DeSotos, Plymouths and Olds-mobiles. Occasionally a gigantic late ‘40s or early ‘50s Cadillac can be spotted.—REUTERS
Sunday, 28 December, 2014 | 13

 Ministry of Construction
 Public Works
 (Invitation of Proposal for Yangon-Mandalay Expressway under BOT Scheme)
 1. Proposal for operating and upgrading the relevant sections of Yangon-Mandalay Expressway (366 miles 3 furlongs long) to the international and local Companies either individually or joint venture in line with the Master plan as well as under current Build-Operate-Transfer (B.O.T) Scheme is invited by Public Works, Ministry of Construction, Nay Pyi Taw, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

 Sr. | Name of Work | Type of Work
---|---|---
1. | Yangon-Mandalay Expressway (366 miles 3 furlongs) | • (8) lane asphalt concrete pavement
• Installation of road furniture and CCTV’s to meet the safety and security standard of expressway,
• Installation of fencing and service roads on both side of the expressway.
2. | Distribution period of Proposal Documents | - (5.1.2015) to (16.1.2015)
3. | Last Submission Date of Proposal Documents | - 12:00 noon on 31.1.2015
4. | Opening date of Proposal Documents | - 13:00 hours on 16.2.2015
5. | Proposal Documents can be purchased with fifty thousand kyats (50000 ks.) at the following address and for the detailed Information, please contact the office within office hours | Proposal Selection Committee, Public Works, Road Department, Office No.(11), Nay Pyi Taw
Contact number: 067-407468, 407578, 407603, 407583, 407380

Some 1,250 migrants rescued in Mediterranean over Christmas

Rome, 27 Dec — Nearly 1,250 migrants have been rescued in the Mediterranean over the Christmas period and five bodies have been recovered, Italian officials said on Friday. The migrants were rescued in four separate operations involving ships from Italy and other countries over the past four days in the waters between North Africa and Sicily. All were being taken to Sicily aboard Italian navy ships, about 900 of them abroad the ship Etna, the navy said. Four bodies recovered by a Cypriot ship and one by a Maltese ship were also taken to Sicily aboard Italian ships. It was not clear how they died.

Admiral Pier Paolo Ribuffo told RaiNews24 television from one of the ships that the condition of the migrants was generally good and that a Nigerian woman had given birth to a baby boy on the Etna on Christmas day. He said the rickety boats that had been carrying the migrants sailed from Libya. Most of the migrants were from central Africa. Some 3,200 migrants have died this year trying to reach Europe from Africa, the International Organization for Migration has said. — Reuters

China, Russia oil trade cooperation “mutually beneficial,” says FM spokeswoman

BEIJING, 27 Dec — China rebutted claims that high priced imported oil from Russia made the country the biggest loser from the sharp fall in global oil prices, saying its oil cooperation with Russia was “mutually beneficial.”

“China and Russia have conducted smooth cooperation on long-term oil trade in recent years,” said Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying at a daily press briefing. “The cooperation is mutually beneficial and based on the joint efforts of the two governments and relevant enterprises.”

Hua made the remarks in response to a question concerning reports saying that Russia exported oil to China in November at a price higher than the global oil price in the same period, which made China the biggest loser in the current round of global oil price turbulence.

“According to the deal signed by both sides, the formula of crude oil trade price between China and Russia is linked and fluctuated with global oil price,” Hua said. “The price of the oil exported from Russian to China the report mentioned does not conform to the fact,” she said.

China and Russia are comprehensive strategic partners of coordination, said the spokeswoman, adding that the energy cooperation between two sides is the key area of bilateral substantial cooperation.

The Chinese government supports both sides’ enterprises in further expanding and deepening energy cooperation in oil and gas as well as other areas, she said. —Xinhua

WEATHER REPORT

FORECAST VALID UNTIL EVENING OF THE 28th December, 2014: Isolated light rain is likely in Taninthayi Region, weather will be partly cloudy in Mandalay, Bago, Yangon and Ayeyawady Regions, Rakhine, Kayah, Kayin and Mon States and generally fair in the remaining Regions and States.

STATE OF THE SEA: Strong easterly winds with moderate to rough sea are likely at times Gulf of Mottama, 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.
Angelina Jolie’s ‘Unbroken’ to release in India this January


Being released by Universal Pictures India, the film is based on the true story of Louis Zamperini. ‘Unbroken’ retells his remarkable journey as an Olympian-turned-World War II fighter-turned-prisoner of war. The movie stars actors Jack O’Connell, Takamisa Ishihara and Dомнholl Gleeson in lead.

The movie is based on the 2010 non-fiction book by Laura Hillenbrand, ‘Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption’.

Emmy Rossum passed on ‘Twilight’ role due to script issues

LOS ANGELES, 27 Dec — Actress Emmy Rossum has revealed that she turned down ‘Twilight’ movie as she was not fond of the script.

The 28-year-old star landed a role in the vampire romance film — the adaptation of Stephenie Meyer’s book of the same name, which was then passed to Kristen Stewart, reported Ace Showbiz. “I passed on ‘Twilight’ because I didn’t like the script,” Rossum said. The ‘Shameless’ star starred in another novel adaptation of the same name by Kami Garcia and Margaret Stohl, a supernatural romantic film ‘Beautiful Creatures’.

“It’s very different. It’s empowering for women. A lot of the female characters were able to decide for themselves who they are going to be and what they are going to do with their lives,” said Rossum.

Sony’s “The Interview” grosses $1 million on limited US opening day

NEW YORK, 27 Dec — Sony Pictures Entertainment Inc’s controversial comedy about a plot to assassinate North Korean leader Kim Jong Un earned over $1 million on the limited US release Christmas Day, the company said on Friday.

“The limited release, in under 10 percent of the amount of theaters originally planned, featured numerous sell-outs and a first-day gross over $1 million,” Rory Brue, president of worldwide distribution for Sony Pictures, said in a statement, adding that the audience reaction to “The Interview” was “fantastic.”

The company said on Wednesday only about 300 movie theaters had planned to screen the movie, compared to the 2,000 to 3,000 venues typical for a large Hollywood release.

By comparison, Universal Studios Inc.’s “Unbroken” and The Walt Disney Company’s “Into the Woods” also opened on Christmas Day and each earned over $15 million, according to BoxOffice.com.

Rubin Carias holds a poster of the film “The Interview” starring actors Seth Rogen and James Franco as he attends the Christmas Day screening of “The Interview” in the Van Nuys section of Los Angeles, California on 25 Dec, 2014.—REUTERS

Sony scrapped plans for the movie’s nationwide release after hackers behind a massive cyberattack on the company in late November threatened movie theaters planning to screen it.

In a rare move, the company then made the movie available online on Wednesday in the US through video streaming services, such as Google Inc’s YouTube, for $5.99. Sony did not release online revenue or viewing figures.

“Considering the incredibly challenging circumstances, we are extremely grateful to the people all over the country who came out to experience ‘The Interview’ on the first day of its unconventional release,” Brue said. Meanwhile, filesharing news site TorrentFreak said there were more than 750,000 illegal downloads of the film around the world within the first day.—Kyodo News

My costumes in ‘Into The…’ played an important role: Meryl Streep

LONDON, 27 Dec — Meryl Streep may not have the most comfortable costumes on the set of ‘Into The Woods’ but she admits that her character couldn’t have been completed without the help of those unique dresses. Oscar-winning costume designer Colleen Atwood was behind the fairytale musical and she again teamed up with director Rob Marshall after ‘Chicago’ and ‘Memoirs Of A Geisha’, reported Contactmusic.

“Some of the most productive character work was working with Colleen. Finding what she was telling me about the character through the clothes. She thinks like an actor; so how the change would be for the witch was incredible, how she blended me into the gnarled…. everything. “It was certainly an effective accomplishment for Atwood, who designed both a ragged, black gown for the wrinkled old crone side of her character, and a tighter, flint number for when her magic makes her a little more glamorous,” Streep said.

Streep, 65, even admitted that so much detail went into designing the somewhat uncomfortable costume, that there were features on it that were barely noticeable. “There were things that you can’t even see really in the film but I knew about. Just where the costume stuck into me and made me miserable, that was all character,” she added.

PTI

Emmy Rossum passed on ‘Twilight’ role due to script issues

LOS ANGELES, 27 Dec — Actress Emmy Rossum has revealed that she turned down ‘Twilight’ movie as she was not fond of the script.

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Former Brazil striker Adriano set to join Le Havre

PARIS, 27 Dec — Former Inter Milan and Brazil striker Adriano is set to revive his troubled career at the oldest French professional club after second division Le Havre struck a deal to sign him.

The 32-year-old Adriano, whose career has fallen apart in recent years due to disciplinary problems, wished a “Merry Christmas to (his) new fans at Le Havre” on his Twitter feed.

The Ligue 2 club confirmed they had an agreement, adding that it would be effective only once the club’s takeover by French businessman Christophe Mol is completed.

“The deal is subject to the transfer of Christophe Maillol’s funds to Le Havre bank accounts and the validation (of the takeover) by the French financial body,” they said on their website (www.hac-foot.com).

Adriano was once one of Brazil’s most prolific strikers, recording 29 goals in 52 internationals and helping them win the Copa America in 2004 and the Confederations Cup in 2005, alongside Ronaldo, Ronaldinho and Roberto Carlos.

He won four consecutive Serie A titles with Inter Milan, earning the nickname “The Emperor” among Italian fans, but has struggled since, spending short spells at five different clubs since 2010 amid allegations of binge eating and drinking.

Ireland’s Stephen Kelly (R) tackles Brazil’s Adriano during their international friendly soccer match at Emirates Stadium in London on 2 March 2010. [Reuters]

Russia 2018 Organizing Committee in budget deficit

Russia’s Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko (L), President Vladimir Putin (C) and FIFA President Sepp Blatter (2nd R) listens to Moscow’s Mayor Sergei Sobyanin at the Luzhniki Stadium, which is under construction, in Moscow, on 28 Oct, 2014. — Reuters

Russia 2018 Organizing Committee President Vitaly Mutko (L) and FIFA President Sepp Blatter (2nd R) listen to Moscow’s Mayor Sergei Sobyanin at the Luzhniki Stadium, which is under construction, in Moscow, on 28 Oct, 2014. — Reuters

Aguirre to explain himself at Press conference

Tokyo, 27 Dec — Embattled Japan coach Javier Aguirre will hold a press conference at 6 pm on Saturday and is expected to offer an explanation regarding match-fixing charges that have been leveled at him in Spain, the Japan Football Association said the same day.

The Mexican coach has not spoken publicly about the charges since Spanish prosecutors named him among 41 individuals last Monday in a report into the alleged rigging of a 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. He 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 has decided that Aguirre, who has denied any wrongdoing, will remain in charge for the 9-3-1 January Asian Cup despite his alleged involvement in the scandal.

The association, which has sent a delegation to Spain to gather information on the scandal, had been looking to hold the press conference from Aguirre to speak about the matter before the team’s training camp ahead of the tournament begins in Chiba Prefecture on Monday.

Aguirre said he was “only going to focus on sport and the competition,” when asked at an Asian Cup squad announcement press conference on 15 December if the scandal would affect the team at the tournament. Spanish prosecutors alleged that the Levante players were reportedly paid a total of 965,000 euros to deliberately lose the game.

Zaragoza first made bank transfers to Aguirre and its players and officials, who then took the money from their accounts and passed it on to the Levante players, reports said citing the prosecutors. Former Zaragoza president Agasto Iglesias and players from both teams are cited as defendants in the complaint.

Aguirre, who has also coached the Mexican national team and has decided to remain in charge for the 9-3-1 January Asian Cup despite his alleged involvement in the scandal.

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Title rivals Chelsea and Man City pass West test

LONDON, 27 Dec — Chelsea overpowered West Ham United 2-0 and Manchester City outclassed West Bromwich Albion 3-1 as the Premier League title rivals flexed their muscles at the start of a hectic holiday programme on Friday.

With nine points available in less than a week the leading duo offered more proof that they appear to be in a mini-league of their own although third-placed Manchester United’s resurgence continued with a 3-1 defeat of Newcastle United.

Goals from John Terry and Diego Costa hardly illustrated leaders Chelsea’s superiority over a West Ham side that reached Christmas in the Champions League places.

The derby win briefly put them six points clear with 45 from 18 matches but City replied to close the gap to three with a seventh successive league win — Fernando, Yaya Toure (penalty) and David Silva on target before halftime at a snowy Hawthorns.

“Football is football, you never know and the only thing we can do to try to reduce the unpredictability of football is to do what we’re doing: playing very well,” said Jose Mourinho who is yet to lose a home derby in two spells as Chelsea manager.

United are 10 points off the pace but growing in confidence after Wayne Rooney scored twice and Robin van Persie once to see off Newcastle at Old Trafford.

Southampton’s return to form was underlined by a 3-1 win at Crystal Palace which lifted them back into the top four, Sadio Mane, Ryan Bertrand and Toby Alderweireld netting.

West Ham dropped to fifth, one point ahead of Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur who both enjoyed narrow wins.

Arsenal had striker Olivier Giroud sent off but held on to beat Queens Park Rangers 2-1 with goals from Alexis Sanchez, who also missed a penalty, and Tomas Rosicky.

Charlie Austin replied from the penalty spot for QPR.

Tottenham had goals from Harry Kane and Christian Eriksen to thank for a 2-1 win at bottom club Leicester City. Swansea City are eighth after beating Aston Villa 1-0. Raheem Sterling’s goal gave Liverpool a 1-0 victory at Burnley but Everton’s troubles continued as they lost 1-0 at home to Stoke City.

While plenty of clubs will enter the New Year eying a top-four place, Chelsea and City are set to scrap for the title. Chelsea produced a display full of power, pace and skill against a West Ham side that managed a 0-0 draw in the corresponding fixture last season, prompting Mourinho to accuse their opponents of 19th Century football.

The first half hour was one-way traffic and the surprise was that Mourinho’s men did not score before Terry turned the ball over the line after Costa flicked on a Cesc Fabregas corner.

It was the Chelsea captain’s second goal in successive league games.

Costa showed his eye for goal when he received a pass from the excellent Eden Hazard just past the hour and lashed a left-footer past goalkeeper Adrian.

Chelsea had numerous other chances to score with West Ham’s only flurry coming near the end when substitute Morgan Amalfitano hit the post.

Manchester City responded emphatically and were out of sight before halftime at West Brom.

Keeper Ben Foster dropped the ball at the feet of Fernando after eight minutes to gift the visitors their opener and Toure’s spot-kick made it 2-0. Silva stroked in the third after 34 minutes to end the game as a contest.

Van Gaal rewarded for Christmas offering at United

MANCHESTER, 27 Dec — Louis van Gaal’s carrot and stick approach worked wonders on Friday as his rapidly-improving Manchester United beat Newcastle United 3-1 to cement third spot in the Premier League.

A double from Wayne Rooney before halftime and another goal by Robin van Persie after the break earned United a comfortable three points and fully justified Van Gaal’s decision to give his players the day off with their families on Christmas Day.

“Is a fantastic Christmas because we dominated for 90 minutes, we didn’t give away many chances and we created plenty,” the Dutch coach told the BBC.

“I don’t think giving the players the day off was strange. It’s a very important day for families in England and it’s only one training session. Anyway, the substitutes are all doing a training session now.”

United’s seventh win in eight league games, the other was drawn, underlined their improvement since a sticky start to the season which often left Van Gaal looking grumpy.

He had lots to smile about on Friday although, just like Scrooge, he was not handing out too many Christmas presents. “No. Because we also did a lot of bad things, I have to say that,” the former Barcelona and Bayern Munich coach said with almost a smile.

“You saw their penalty. It was a throw for us. That’s not possible. We gave that goal away again so we can improve.”

Papiss Cisse’s consolation from the spot failed to take the shine off an impressive United display though.

Rooney, revelling in a rolling midfield role, put United in front from Radamel Falcao’s cross and added a second after good work by Juan Mata.