Tourism, driving engine for economic growth

By Aye Min Soe

KYEE CHAUNG (Aye-ayawady Delta), 26 Jan — Poor farmers from Kyee Chaung Village in Bogale Township in the Ayeyawady Delta who suffered from under the onslaught of Cyclone Nargis more than six years ago may have found a silver lining freeing themselves from the poverty trap.

“I want to borrow 450,000 kyat to grow a further 300 betel plants,” Daw Ohn Myint Kyi, 57, told a loan officer of Pact Global Microfinance Fund (PGMF) as she stood alongside the four other members of her lending group.

About 50 other women at the meeting of the members of the fund unanimously agreed to grant the proposed loan to Daw Ohn Myint Kyi when the loan officer sought agreements from them in three votes.

Daw Ohn Myint Kyi guaranteed the loan officer that she would pay back K27,000 every two weeks to the fund until she settles the agricultural loan in a year.

It means she agreed to borrow money to do business from the fund with an interest rate of 2.5 per cent a month or 30 per cent a year.

The interest rate for social affairs loans is 2 per cent per month from the fund, which is very low compared to the interest rate they paid to private money lenders, according to local farmers. While some well-to-do families and those who were mostly unaffected by Nargis can avoid borrowing from the fund, 52 women from the 124 households in Kyee Chaung Village have registered as members of the microfinance fund and they are divided in groups comprising five to six members so they can guarantee each other when a member borrows money from the fund in accordance with fund rules.

According to the fund, out of 585 villages in 86 village-tracts in rural areas, and 10 wards in urban in Bogale in the Ayeyawady Delta, credit components of the fund have reached to 429 villages, attracting 33,086 clients and 18,132 active borrowers.

So far, the fund has already loaned more than K10 million to women in the village of Kyee Chaung, said Khai Khaing Oo, a loan officer for the fund.

PGMF is supported by the multi-donor Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT), which works in Myanmar to alleviate poverty and hunger.

Before and after Nargis, the villagers, including Daw Ohn Myint Kyi, had no ways to do business as they had no capital and were burdened with debt.

When the rice harvest is low due to disease and

INSDIE

Vice President Dr Sai Maik Kham attends reception to mark 66th Anniversary of Republic Day of India

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing delivers speech at Tatmadaw Central Organizing Committee

ASEAN plus 3 Tourism Ministers Meeting held in Nay Pyi Taw

(See page 3)

(See page 9)

President U Thein Sein delivers speech at opening of the ASEAN Tourism Forum 2015.— MNA

Photo: Aye Min Soe

President U Thein Sein, 26 Jan — President U Thein Sein attended the opening of the ASEAN Tourism Forum 2015 at Myanmar International Convention Centre-II, on Monday evening.

Before the opening ceremony, the President received tourism ministers from ASEAN countries, the secretary general of the UN World Tourism Organization and officials.

The president delivered an address at the opening ceremony. He said: I am delighted to officiate the opening of the 34th ASEAN Tourism Forum which is the most important annual meeting in the context of tourism cooperation of ASEAN.

In the last year, 2014, Myanmar had successfully taken ASEAN Chairmanship and hosted the 24th and 25th ASEAN Summits and Related Summits in Nay Pyi Taw. Myanmar has worked together with other member countries and dialogue partners towards the realization of a politically cohesive, economically integrated and socially responsible ASEAN Community.

During this period of strategic political and economic reforms, there have been remarkable progresses in the respective sectors of the country. In particular, the tourism and the telecommunication sector have achieved significant progress.

In the same year, Myanmar has attained a new milestone in its cultural identity and history by the UNESCO’s World heritage List, as an outcome of the 30th Session of the UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee held in Doha, Qatar.

The ASEAN Tourism Forum 2015 takes place at an important juncture as the year 2015 marks an important milestone for the ASEAN Economic Community which will be celebrated at the end of this year.

This year’s theme for the ASEAN Tourism Forum “ASEAN: Tourism towards Peace, Prosperity and Partnership”, captures the important elements that the ASEAN Tourism Sector can bring in for the ASEAN Economic Community.
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw discusses 2015 Union Budget Bill

NAY PYI TAW, 26 Jan—Pyidaungsu Hluttaw convened its fifth-day meeting Monday, with keeping records on separate funds of development projects in the message sent by President under 2014 Union Budget Bill, and discussing 2015 Union Budget Bill submitted by Ministry of Finance.

President U Thein Sein’s message to Pyidaungsu Hluttaw included the use of K12,044 billion from separate funds for 12 projects—each one by Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Border Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development, Ministry of Construction, Mandalay region government, and Rakhine region government; together with two projects of Shan state government and three projects of Ayeyawady region government.

U Win Shin, Union Minister for Finance, submitted 2015 Union Budget Bill that emphasized on taxation policy.

The proposed bill suggested to promote tax-to-GDP ratio, expansion of basic tax, systematic scrutinizing on tax exemption and tax reduction processes.

Regarding government expense policy, the bill mentioned increasing expenses in education and education, prioritizing the immediate effective projects for public, systematic appointment of civil service staff, suspension of less-effective projects, salary increment for government employees, rural development programmes, power supply and water for households and agriculture.

Finance minister also submitted the estimated Union Budget for 2015-2016 fiscal year, based on incomes of union-level departments, as well as foreign grants and loans.

He discussed salary increment for government staff and K37,492 billion for free medical treatment for them, with suggestion of K290,763 billion for the salaries of civil service employees in 2015-2016 fiscal year.

The bill also elaborated macroeconomic situations of the State for 2015-2016 fiscal year, targeted rates for national production and service sectors, economic development, inflation, export volume, import volume, total trade volume, trade deficit and exchange rates.

The chapter of Public Finance and Management Reform System explained collaborations among Ministry of Finance, Hluttaw Public Accounts Committee, Office of Auditor-general of the Union, Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and Asia Development Bank, as well as development partner organizations from the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Republic of Korea and Australia.

The National Planning Bill for 2015-2016 fiscal year, including projects and budgets under 2015 Union Budget Bill were discussed by officials from President’s Office, Union Government’ Office, Office of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, Office of Amyotha Hluttaw, Ministry of Defence Services, Union Election Commission, Office of Auditor-general of the Union, Office of Union Civil Services Board, Nay Pyi Taw Council and Nay Pyi Taw Development Committee.

Pyithu Hluttaw

Plan to improve Myanmar Agricultural Development Bank Law

Deputy Minister for Information U Picky Htway—MNA

NAY PYI TAW, 26 Jan—The Pyithu Hluttaw held the sixth day session on Monday.

With regard to the question on implementation of Sarpay Beikman’s vision raised by U Soe Paing of Wanthis Constituency, Deputy Minister for Information U Picky Htway replied that Sarpay Beikman publishes books in translation and on technology to serve the interest of readers and to improve Myanmar literature standard.

U Myint Oo of Thanatpin Constituency asked whether or not there is a plan to disburse medium-term and long-term agricultural loans to the farmers for mortgaging farming rights certificate at any bank. Deputy Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation U Ohn Than replied that Myanmar Agricultural Development Bank disbursed loans to farmers in Bago Region by taking original certificates of farming rights. As there no instruction to take original certificates in disbursment of loans, the bank delivered loans to farmers in remaining regions and states by taking copies of certificates. The bank disburses loans to the farmers who really carry out farming works with endorsement of local authorities.

Disbursement of agricultural loans will be improved under the farming rights protection and interest promotion law and rules.

U Khin Maung Shwe of Tamu Constituency asked how to apply for vacant and virgin lands on a manageable scale and whether or not there is a plan to ease disciplines of application. The deputy minister replied that anybody may apply for farming rights on less than 10 acres of vacant and virgin lands on a manageable scale at region or state vacant land management work committee.

The disciplines are aimed at scrutinizing the financial situation of entrepreneurs to do cultivation on over 50 acres of land. Scrutiny of financial situation will be waived for rural farmers and families on manageable scale works and there is no separate form for applying farming rights.

U Thein Tun of Kyaukpyu Constituency submitted a proposal calling for disbursement of annual, short-term and long-term loans to farmers. The Hluttaw put it on record.

The deputy minister replied that amendment for existing Myanmar Agricultural Development Bank Law are submitted to the office of Attorney-General of the Union to improve the loan system for farmers.

NAY PYI TAW, 26 Jan—Amyotha Hluttaw representatives were divided on the religious conversion bill on its sixth day session on Monday, with Representative U Khin Maung Latt of Rakhine State Constituency (6) saying enacting the bill will contribute to reduction of conflicts, stability and national interests while Representative U Aung Kyi Nyunt of Magway Region Constituency (4) was of the view that special care and enough time should be taken for enactment of an unbiased and meaningful law as the bill will force people to convert religion as its side effects and stoke the worry of national races instead of protecting the freedom of worship.

However, Representative Dr Banya Aung Moe of Mon State Constituency (7) said that the bill will not affect the freedom of worship and will encourage people of different religions to live in unity. Similarly, Defence Services Personnel Representative Lt-Col Thein Lwin believed that the bill is in accordance with the state constitution and meets the international legal standards without preventing freedom of religious conversion. He said the bill summarizes the conversion of religion.

Representatives U Nyan Lin of Ayeyawady Region Constituency (3) and U Phone Myint Aung of Yangon Region Constituency (3) proposed redrafting the bill while Representatives U Zonhle Htan of Chin State Constituency (2) and U J Yaw Wu of Kachin State Constituency (12) objected to it. Debate on the bill will continue on the seventh day session of the Amyotha Hluttaw. —MNA

ASEAN tourism ministers meet media

NAY PYI TAW, 26 Jan—ASEAN tourism ministers held a press conference at Myanmar International Convention Centre-I in Nay Pyi Taw on Monday, attended by tourism ministers from China, Japan and Republic of Korea and officials of ASEAN Secretariat.

Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism U Htay Aung said that over 99 million tourists visited ASEAN region in 2013, increasing 3% more than last year. According to the statistics of the World Tourism Organization, Globetrotters may browse the guidelines for visiting ASEAN through www.asiantourism.org. On behalf of ASEAN tourism ministers, he thanked China, Japan and Korea for promotion of ASEAN tourism sector.

The ASEAN Tourism Forum is being held in Nay Pyi Taw from 22 to 29 January.

The union minister and officials replied to questions raised by local and foreign media.—MNA
Tourism, driving . . .

(from page 1) According to the UN-WTO Tourism highlights, the international tourist arrivals in 2013 grew by 5% with 1.08 billion arrivals and international tourism receipts of US$1159 billion in 2013. This contributed to 9% of worldwide GDP, 1 in 11 jobs and 6% of the world’s exports which has highlighted the importance of tourism to global economic prosperity and stability.

With regard to ASEAN tourism performance in 2013, the total international arrivals to the region was 99.2 million with a growth of 11.73%. The intra-ASEAN Travel accounted for 45.6 million arrivals which was 46% of international arrivals. This illustrates how significant ASEAN is for both inbound and outbound tourism.

I am pleased to note that the ASEAN Tourism Sector has seen considerable positive growth in the consecutive years. This intra-regional travel growth is significant and also supports the theme of “ASEAN for ASEAN”.

When we look at the Myanmar Tourism Sector, 2012 marked a tourism milestone for Myanmar as the country welcomed over 9 million visitors in 2012 marking a tourism milestone for Myanmar as the country welcomed over 9 million visitors in 2012. We saw another milestone for Myanmar as the country welcomed over 2 million visitors in 2013 with an increase of 51%. In 2014, we can expect to receive nearly 4.5 million visitors in 2015. If we continuously maintain the existing growth rate, we can expect to receive nearly 4.5 million visitors in 2015. If we can promote more peace, stability, and relaxation for travel restrictions for both international and regional tourists, the arrivals in 2015 can increase up to 5 million.

As you all know, tourism is a driving engine for economic growth. It has also been associated with various negative impacts on culture, nature and socioeconomic conditions of the host country.

Therefore, “Myanmar Responsible Tourism Policy” and “Policy on Community Involvement in Tourism” have been successfully adopted with the close collaboration of International Development Partners to achieve equitable economic growth and environmental and cultural sustainability.

The Ministry of Hotels and Tourism is responsible for overseeing the systematic development of tourism has adopted the “Myanmar Tourism Master Plan (2013-2020)” with assistance from the Government of Norway and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). It is a road map for the sustainable development of Myanmar tourism.

As a result of the public-private-people collaboration, Myanmar has now become an emerging tourist destination in the world and received “Best in Travel AEC Country Award 2014” presented by Lonely Planet Traveller.

During this forum, I believe, through the meetings and consultations in the past few days, you had fruitful and productive outcomes and also great networking opportunity among the members and Dialogue Partners.

Secretary General of UNWTO Dr Taleb Rifai made a speech. The Editor in Chief of Lonely Planet Traveller presented Best in Travel AEC Country to Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism U Htay Aung and Vice Chairman Ms Du Yyi of China National Tourism Authority jointly presided over the meeting.

In his opening speech, the union minister said that members of the ASEAN are actively engaging in tourism conferences, workshops, exhibitions and promotion activities with China, Japan and Korea and arrangements are underway to invite the three countries to such events of the ASEAN.

The union minister added that the assistance of the ASEAN-China, ASEAN-Japan and ASEAN-Koreas centres are of great benefit for the regional association. Cooperation for tourism with the three countries, enhancement of qualities of tourism services, marketing, information sharing, human resources development in tourism sector, signing MoUs with the three countries, joint declaration of the ASEAN and the three countries and future cooperation were discussed at the meeting.

After the meeting, the participants viewed round the tourism exhibition at the centre.

Pyithu Hlutaw Committee chairman receives British guests

Nay Pyi Taw, 26 Jan — On behalf of the Speaker of Pyithu Hlutaw, Chairman of Pyithu Hlutaw International Relations Committee U Hla Myint Oo and Chairman of Bill Committee U T Khan Myat received Professor Sir Jeffrey Jowell QC, Director of Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law of the United Kingdom and party at the hall of Hlutaw Complex, here, on Monday.

They discussed legal affairs and parliamentary affairs.

Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham attends reception to mark 66th Anniversary of Republic Day of India

Yangon, 26 Jan — Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham attended a reception to mark the 66th Anniversary of Republic Day of the Republic of India at Sedona Hotel on Kaba Aye Pagoda Road, on Monday evening.

It was also attended by Lt-Gen Myint Soe and Lt-Gen Kyaw Swe of the Office of the Commander-in-Chief (Army), Commander of Yangon Command Maj-Gen Tun Tun Naung, deputy ministers, ambassadors and military attachés of foreign missions in Yangon, resident representatives of UN agencies and guests.

The vice president posed for documentary photo together with those present at the reception.

The guests were entertained with dances and songs by the cultural troupe from Manipur State of India.

ASEAN plus 3 Tourism Ministers Meeting held in Nay Pyi Taw

Nay Pyi Taw, 26 Jan — The 14th Ministers Meeting of ASEAN, the People’s Republic of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea was held at the Myanmar International Convention Centre (1) in Nay Pyi Taw on Monday.

Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism U Htay Aung and Vice Chairman Ms Du Yyi of China National Tourism Authority jointly presided over the meeting.

In his opening speech, the union minister said that members of the ASEAN are actively engaging in tourism conferences, workshops, exhibitions and promotion activities with China, Japan and Korea and arrangements are underway to invite the three countries to such events of the ASEAN.

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Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham poses for documentary photo with ambassadors and officials of UN agencies at the reception to mark 66th Anniversary of Republic Day of India.—MNA

The vice president poses for documentary photo together with those present at the reception.

The guests were entertained with dances and songs by the cultural troupe from Manipur State of India.

MNA
Old students hold 7th respect paying ceremony

NAY PYI TAW, 26 Jan—The seventh respect paying ceremony took place at No 1 Basic Education High School in Pyinmana on 25 January. Patron of the organizing committee Chairman of Pyithu Hluttaw International Relations Committee U Hla Myint Oo and chairman U Hla Myint elaborated on arrangements made for holding the ceremony. Former students performed dances to the audiences. The former students donated K17.5 million to over 90 retired teachers. On behalf of the teachers, Sayagyi U Kyaw Nyunt gave words of advices. Ko Gyi Kyaw (Pyinmana)

Writers share knowledge about literary affairs

NAY PYI TAW, 26 Jan — A literary talk was given at Shweintaung Mahasi meditation centre in Ward 6, Lewe, on 24 January. It was organized by former students who pursued education at Basic Education High School No 1 in Lewe from 1985 to 2008. Writers Ledwinthar Saw Chit, Maung Sein Win (Padeegon) and Nyi Min Nyo gave talks on literary affairs to the audiences.

Health staff vaccinate children under 15 against infectious diseases

NAY PYI TAW, 26 Jan—The mass immunization of measles and German measles commenced on 19 January across the nation.

On 24 January, the vaccination was given to students at Central Basic Education Middle Schools in Lewe. Medical Superintendent Dr Daw Su Su Tun of Lewe Township Hospital (100-bed) and health staff gave vaccination to the students and educative talks on infectious diseases of measles and German measles.

The first immunization will be given up to 27 January and the second immunization to the children under 15 from 19 to 28 February, midwife Daw Hla Win Maw told reporters.

Likewise, health staff of Myingyan Township Health Department vaccinated children against two diseases at basic education schools and monastic education schools in Myingyan, Mandalay Region.

Sacred tooth relic of Buddha conveyed to 22 townships of Ayeyawady Region

MYAUNGYA, 26 Jan—Under the instructions of the Ayeyawady Region chief minister, a sacred tooth relic from Shwemuhthaw Pagoda in Pathein is being conveyed to 22 townships in the region from 22 January to 6 March.

On arrival at Myaungmya from Labutta, the tooth relic was welcomed by local people at Pinlelay suspension bridge. The local people paid homage to the sacred tooth relic and made donations.

After going round downtown in Myaungmya, the sacred tooth relic is being kept at the temporary pavilion on the platform of Shwethalyaung reclining Buddha Image in Myaungmya for two days.

In the evening, local people recited religious verses at the tooth relic. According to the schedules, the tooth relic proceeded to Einme at 7 am on 26 January.

Central Command team champions in senior event of invitational volleyball tourney

MANDALAY, 26 Jan — The prize presentation for winners in Mandalay Invitational Volleyball Tournament was held at the sports ground in the provost unit in Mandalay Royal City on 24 January. Central Command’s senior team beat Mandalay City Development Committee 3-2 in the final match.

The chairman of Mandalay Region Volleyball Subcommittee and officials presented prizes to the winning teams.

It was also attended by secretary of the subcommittee U Myint Swe, umpires, coaches and managers of volleyball teams and enthusiasts.
Shopkeepers join hands with FSD personnel in fire drill

MYINTYANG, 26 Jan—Shopkeepers and personnel of Fire Services Department jointly organized the fire drills at Myoma market in Myintyang, Mandalay Region, on 23 January.

Head of Township FSD U Kyaw Thura and personnel together with shopkeepers used fire trucks, fire engines and extinguishers.

“Thanks to the fire drill, shopkeepers will have experiences of fire preventive measures,” said a member of the market committee.

It was supervised by District’s deputy commissioner U Myint Thin Aung, Commander of District Police Force Police Lt-Col Maung Win, township level officials and shopkeepers.—Zaw Min Naing (Myintyang)

Private school founders discuss reform process in education sector

MANDALAY, 26 Jan — Under the arrangements of MBA graduates association (Mandalay), an educative talk on perspectives of international experts and private school founders over reform process in Myanmar’s education sector was held at Mandalay Swan Hotel on 25 January.

“Our country is undertaking reform process in education sector. We held talks with the aim of sharing knowledge how to apply techniques and methods in the reform of education sector,” joint secretary Ko Win Aung of MBA Association told reporters.

The talk was opened with an address by Phaungdaw-U monastery Sayadaw U Nayaka, Mr Ewald Roeland Baumann-Farkas of Germany, Daw Hnin Hnin Maw (founder of CAE private school), Dr Hla Moe (education columnist Ko Gyi Thaung) and Daw Kyi Kyi Myint (Thamadi private school founder) of Meiktila gave talks on reform process in education sector.

Min Htet Aung (Mandalay Sub-printing House)

Region minister presents certificate, cash assistance to the aged

YINMIN, 25 Jan—A ceremony to present a certificate of honour given by the President and cash assistance to grandma Phwar Nyein residing in Ward A of Yinminbin, Sagaing Region, was held at her residence on 24 January.

Sagaing Region Minister for Forestry and Mines U Than Htaik and officials presented K200,000 and certificate of honour given by the President in addition to K100,000 provided by Region Government to the grandma.

The older person who turned 100 on 7 September 2014 lives in Yinminbin together with her family.

Tan Ko Ko

Local and foreign experts discuss reform process in education in Myanmar.

ShinpinthadunU Pagoda’s Pujaniya commences in Natogyi

NATOGYI, 26 Jan — Under the permission of the pagoda’s board of trustees, over 600 shops and 100 plots for vendors are under construction as of 23 January to organize the Buddha Pujaniya of ShinpinthadunU Pagoda in Natogyi, Mandalay Region.

Chairman of the pagoda’s board of trustees U Thein Htuk told media that arrangements have been made for holding entertainments to the pilgrims and people at the 57th Anniversary Buddha Pujaniya.

This year, a better plan has been adopted for allotment of plots for shops.

The pagoda festival is held in Natogyi from 1st waxing day of to the fullmoon day of Tabodwe yearly. This year, it will be held from 20 January to 3 February.

Hiaw Myint Maung

Local youths study hotels and tourism services

NVANGSHWE, 26 Jan — The basic regional tour guide course No. 11/2015, jointly organized by Ministry of Hotels and Tourism and Shan State government, concluded at the hall of Intha literature, culture and regional development association in Nyaungshwe, Shan State, on 23 January.

Shan State Minister for Planning and Economy U Aung Kyaw Nyunt made a speech. He together with Intha National Race Affairs Minister U Win Myint presented prizes to outstanding trainees. Director of the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism U Than Win gave certificates to the trainees.

Altogether 118 trainees studied various subjects on hotels and tourism services.

The regional tour guide courses were conducted in various regions ten times to turn out 1,070 trainees.

Nay Myo Tharain

Vets to broaden horizon of local people in livestock breeding field

MOHNIN, 26 Jan — Livestock breeding is to be carried out through correct techniques so as to development meat sector of the nation, Deputy Director Dr Win Oo of Mohnин District Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department told the opening ceremony of Community Animal Health Workers course at the office of Mohnин Township LBVD on Monday.

Similar courses were opened in 200 townships including six townships of Kachin State simultaneously. Deputy Director U Aye Naing of District Department of Rural Development, Staff Officer of Township LBVD Dr Wai Mon Htet and departmental officials were in attendance.

Training course enhances capacity of IPRD staff and officers

NAY PYI TAW, 26 Jan — The office work management course, concluded at the hall of Nay Pyi Taw Information and Public Relations Department on 25 January. The course was aimed at enabling staff of the departments in Nay Pyi Taw Council Area to have higher office work management skills.

Deputy Director of the department Daw Thin Thin Zin made a speech and awarded outstanding trainees.

Assistant Director U Soe Paing presented completion certificates to the trainees.

Altogether 26 staff officers, heads of township departments and staff attended the course.

Tam Tun Win (Pyinmana)
**Philippines says deadly clash a mistake, hopeful peace not derailed**

**Ex-Thai PM’s party vows calm, US calls for inclusive politics**

**‘We have a deal’: insurance may unlock India-US atomic trade**

**Deputy of Indonesia’s anti-graft body to resign: agency official**

**Global New Light of Myanmar**

**REGIONAL**

**Manila, 26 Jan — The Philippines said on Monday a clash between security forces and Muslim rebels in which dozens of people were killed was a mistake and both sides said they were hopeful the violence would not spark a peace deal the rebels are negotiating. Security forces said about 50 policemen and eight rebels were killed in what a top police officer described as a “misunderstanding” during an operation on Sunday to arrest two militants who had taken refuge with Moro Islamic Liberation Front fighters.

**‘We expect that naturally there will be impact and attacked us, what are we going to do?’ he asked. ‘What happened was self-defence.’ Iqbal said he was confident the peace deal would not be affected because both sides were committed to it.

**Deputy of Indonesia’s anti-graft body to resign: agency official**

**Bangkok, 26 Jan — Former Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra’s Puea Thai Party vowed on Monday it would not retaliate a five-year political ban imposed on the ousted leader, and a leading party figure said their movement could survive without the powerful family.

**Russo told students at a law school in Jakarta that Bambang would submit his resignation letter today,” Johar Budi, KPK’s deputy for corruption prevention, told Reuters.

**Ex-Thai PM’s party vows calm, US calls for inclusive politics**

**US President Barack Obama stands next to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (R) as they leave after giving their opening statement at Hyderabad House in New Delhi on 25 Jan, 2015.— Reuters**

**Deputy of Indonesia’s anti-graft body to resign: agency official**

**Jakarta, 26 Jan — The deputy chief of Indonesia’s anti-graft agency will submit his resignation letter on Monday, days after the police named him a suspect in a false testimony case, an agency official said.

**Deputy of Indonesia’s anti-graft body to resign: agency official**

**Bambang will submit his resignation letter today,” Johar Budi, KPK’s deputy for corruption prevention, told Reuters.

**Indonesia’s deputy chief of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), for a case dating from 2010, fuelling tension between two law enforce-**

**Deputy of Indonesia’s anti-graft body to resign: agency official**

**Westinghouse Electric Co praised the developments on Sunday, and said it looked forward to further negotiations and discussions, including a planned “insurance semi-**

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**We have a deal’: insurance may unlock India-US atomic trade**

**New Delhi, 26 Jan — Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Barack Obama unveiled a plan centered on insurance on Sunday that they hope will convince US companies to build nuclear power stations in India, but stopped short of demands to soften a liability law.

**The US administration said Monday it would proceed with criminal charges against his predecessor, Bambang Widjaja, who is one of four KPK commissioners.

**We have a deal’: insurance may unlock India-US atomic trade**

**We have a deal’: insurance may unlock India-US atomic trade**

**We have a deal’: insurance may unlock India-US atomic trade**
India’s Republic Day: history, pomp and a parade

NEW DELHI, 26 Jan — Barack Obama is the first US president to be guest of honour at India’s annual Republic Day parade, a flamboyant display of the South Asian nation’s military might and cultural diversity in the heart of the capital, New Delhi.

Despite intermittent rain, large crowds flocked to see the show on Monday morning and catch a glimpse of the US president and his hosts, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Pranab Mukherjee.

HISTORY
India won independence from British rule on 15 August, 1947, but it was not until 26 January, 1950, that the nation declared itself a sovereign republic state with the adoption of its constitution. On that day, Rajendra Prasad, India’s first president, unfurled the national flag, and thereafter 26 January became a national holiday, Republic Day.

A SHOW OF MIGHT
India’s military forces go on full display during the two-hour parade, with troops, rows of tanks, missiles and formations of horses and camels manoeuvring down the wide Rajpath (King’s Way) boulevard. During the event, bravery awards are given to military personnel, civilians and children for showing “daring courage in the face of adversity”. The event is presided over by the president, commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

DIVERSE NATION
Throughout the morning, children from across the country perform in the parade and in past years, “tableaux”, or floats, from different states and ministries have shown off everything from India’s agriculture to its research in the Antarctic.

Japan convenes 150-day Diet session amid hostage crisis

TOKYO, 26 Jan — Japan convened a 150-day regular Diet session on Monday, as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe continues to grapple with a hostage crisis that will likely spur debate about Tokyo’s fight against terrorism.

Since the apparent killing of one of two Japanese hostages being held by a group thought to be Islamic State, Japan has been trying to secure the release of the other captive — freelance journalist Kenji Goto — through every channel.

The Diet session comes amid Abe’s repeated calls for raising Japan’s security profile abroad by making “proactive” contributions to global peace and security. Japan pledged $200 million in “humanitarian and nonmilitary support,” including providing aid to countries helping refugees from Syria and Iraq, before the hostage crisis.

Abe has portrayed the Diet session through 24 June as one to push for bold reform in various sectors such as agriculture, labor, energy and medical care. One feature of Abe’s growth strategy is to streamline Japan’s powerful agricultural cooperatives.

“It’s going to be an extremely important Diet session,” Abe told a meeting of ruling Liberal Democratic Party lawmakers for both houses of chamber. “We will seek passage of bills to reform bedrock regulations in areas including medical care and agriculture,” he added.

Unified local elections are scheduled for April, when the prime minister’s handling of the government and the hostage crisis could be tested. Despite a convincing victory in the 14 December general election, candidates supported by the LDP have lost in multiple gubernatorial races since last year.

The government is expected to seek passage by early April of a 3.12 trillion yen supplementary budget for fiscal 2015 and a record-high 96.34 trillion yen annual budget for fiscal 2016, after Abe put off a second sales tax hike until 2017 following a recession triggered by the previous increase last April.

Currently, the government plans to submit around 70 bills to the Diet, officials said. In addition, it plans to submit more than 10 bills to loosen restrictions on the Self-Defence Forces as the ruling coalition of the LDP and Komeito is expected to step up talks on security in early February.

Legislative work is needed for Japan to put into effect a Cabinet decision made in July to ensure a “seamless” response to various security threats, which includes the country’s potential exercise of the right to collective self-defence, or defending an ally under armed attack even when Japan is not.

Opposition lawmakers are expected to grill Abe over how he intends to compile a statement for the 70th anniversary of Japan’s surrender in World War II. The statement will likely be scrutinized by Asian neighbors like China and South Korea.

The prime minister signaled on Tuesday that wording of a landmark 1995 apology for the country’s wartime aggression in Asia, or the Murayama statement, could be changed, saying he wants to reflect how his administration sees the issue.

“The prime minister indicated he may not stick to keywords in the Murayama statement, which could mean Japan sending the wrong message,” Democratic Party of Japan leader Katsuya Okada told fellow lawmakers, as he expressed determination to face off with Abe, who heads the LDP. The 1995 statement was issued by then Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama.

It will be the first Diet session for Okada since he was elected leader of the country’s main opposition party, which is struggling to rebuild itself and win back public support.

Australia knights Prince Philip, sparking national outrage

PERTH, 26 Jan — Conservative Prime Minister Tony Abbott has awarded Australia’s highest honour to Prince Philip, husband of Queen Elizabeth, sparking a barrage of criticism across the country on its national day of celebration.

Prince Philip was made a Knight of the Order of Australia, awarded as part of the country’s honours system announced on Australia Day, with Abbott saying it paid “tribute to an extraordinary life of service for Australia.”

The award grated with republicans who want to see sovereign status for the country. “It’s a time warp where we’re giving knighthoods to English royalty,” Opposition leader Bill Shorten told Australian radio.

Commentator and associate editor of the national daily, The Australian, Chris Kenny tweeted, “Just another own goal and an embarrassment for Austral- ia on our national day”.

Australia is a constitutional monarchy, with the British monarch its head of state who acts in a predominantly ceremonial manner but has the power to approve the abolition of Parliament, which happened in 1975 topping the then government.

Any Australian can nominate a fellow citizen for other honours. Abbott’s surprise reintroduction of knighthoods and dames in the country’s honours system last year drew criticism that he was out of touch with national sentiment. At the time he said they were intended to recognize “pre-eminent Australians”.

The popularity has fallen sharply in recent months, said he stood by the decision to award the knighthood to 93-year-old Prince Philip because “the monarchy has been an important part of Australia’s life since 1788.”

Photo taken on 26 Jan, 2015, at the House of Councillors chamber in Tokyo shows of Emperor Akihito. The session was convened as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe continues to grapple with a hostage crisis. — Kyodo News
Terrorism and Extremism: Two Separate Concepts

(The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author.)

Aung Zin Phyo Thein

Pursuing last week’s edition of the Global New Light of Myanmar, I had come across a highly entertaining article which, though informative, had a number of minor drawbacks. Of these, the statement of how terrorism and extremism ‘cannot be split up’ was of particular note. In truth, there are several marked differences between the two entities. Simultaneously, though, they are united in a number of senses—the most obvious being the fact that both are exceedingly hard to define.

A dictionary definition of terrorism would refer to it as the use of violence to achieve a political aim. This definition fails to consider the intrinsic term of the entity and merely scraps the surface. Terrorism in all sense is a liquid concept—a concept which is constantly evolving and transforming. In The Globalization of World Politics, a de facto Bible for international studies, Baylis and Owen refer to the term as contextual, and subjective to interpretation. Personal definition would state it as the usage of tools such as bombing, hostage taking, and at times murder in order to draw attention to a particular cause or to evoke a response from a certain authority, i.e. government.

As mentioned, terrorism is an evolving entity. Deeming it thus, there have been two main waves of terrorism. The first wave was focused primarily on ideology-ranging from anarchism to Marxism and spanned from the late 1950s to the early to mid 1990s. The Japanese Red Army, Irish Republican Army, the Italian Red Brigade and the Baader Meinhof in Germany were characteristic of this era. These groups followed different ideological causes, yet one element was uniform—struggling for legitimacy in the eyes of the world. This would be an expletory of their attacks, the majority of which were designed to minimize civilizational casualty. These groups targeted individuals, such as Carlos the Jackal’s infamously hostage-taking of OPEC delegates in Vienna in 1976, the Entebbe Hijacking in the same year or Lord Mountbatten’s 1980 assassination by the IRA.

Towards the nineties, three highly disturbing trends emerged. The first was how attacks got increasingly indiscriminant, with more civilian lives being lost. In addition, terrorist networks became more complex and sophisticated, as evidenced for instance by the vast number of Al-Qaeda affiliates throughout the world, ranging from the Middle East to North Africa (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) to South Asia (Lashkar-e-Taiba) to Southeast Asia (the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines).

This in turn is further assisted by globalization, easein air travel and laws rendering borders almost non-existent, despite the beefed up security measures worldwide following 9/11. What characterizes this second wave of terrorism is the trend ‘religion-as-a-fuel’. Though tracing its roots to the Middle Ages, religion-inspired terror took hold following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Terror-leaning radicals saw their advantage, and used religion as a means to both justify their actions and lure vulnerable individuals into their cause. The modern terrorist has been aided by the increasing prominence of social media—employing it as a platform for recruitment. The ISIS terror group, for example, has excelled in this area, revolutionizing traditional radicalization through their expertly edited albeit graphic videos, available widely through the ‘dark web’. The State Department attempted to reverse this through its own ‘counter-radicalization’ media, but this has so far proven a failure. Every month, hundreds of Westerners (from Europe and the US) flock to Syria via Turkey to join ISIS, and more disturbingly, the age group is slowly widening to include teenagers, some as young as 14. Westerners now make up the third largest number of foreign fighters, behind only Tunisia. From this point, a movement to extremism is necessitated. Extremism is an even more difficult term to define than terrorism, as it encompasses an even wider reach. Extremism is regularly seen to relate to ideas—yet likewise this is highly subjective. For example, the majority of us would view self-inflicted pain for religious and cultural purposes (such as the honor killings in India) as extreme, i.e. they espouse an extremist nature. But this is not shared by adherents, who regard their actions as a customary testament of their faith and a celebration of their tradition.

The primary distinction is that extremists do not necessarily take up violence. Basically, terrorists are extremists, yet not all extremists are terrorists. According to Barry Buzan, extremism represents a delicate crossroads for an authority-to act, or not to act; this action being determined by a number of variables. We cannot, for example, equate ISIS to extremist right wing political groups. UKIP, The British National Party (BNP) and the Golden Dawn Party in Greece are examples of such, yet I highly doubt that these parties behead kidnapped foreign journalists on camera. These extremist entities are also legal-to the point that in the most recent EU elections, two-thirds were won by such groups—a highly discomforting fact.

In conclusion, the disparities between these two terms should be kept clear in mind, though admittedly they tend to overlap in a number of respects, such as in how both are subjective. What is most important, however, is how we approach extremism—extremism should be under close monitoring, and not be allowed to foster violence in any sense, at which point it needs to be pacified and eradicated. Neo-Nazi groups provide such an example—the racial hate crimes they commit are not on the level of terror, yet must be reacted to and dismantled. Additionally, Australia had made this mistake in regards to Man Haron Monas, until the lives of two hostages were lost at his hands, and so had the US with the Tsarnaev brothers two years prior. 2014 has shown us the level to which terror can gain the upper hand. It is time to make 2015 the year we tackle them head on, together, in full force.

Aung Zin Phyo Thein (Undergraduate Student of International Relations at the School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University, United Kingdom)
**NATIONAL**

**Senior General Min Aung Hlaing delivers speech at Tatmadaw Central Organizing Committee**

NAV PAY TA, 26 Jan—As carrying out organizing tasks is unifying forces, it is necessary for defence services personnel to build internal unity of the defence services and unity between the defence services and the people, Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who also chairs the Tatmadaw Central Organizing Committee, said at the 1/2005 meeting of the committee at the meeting hall of the Office of Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services (Army) on Monday.

Defending the nation together with people’s power, defence services personnel are required to perform their duties not only from the military point of view but also from the administrative, political and economic points of view, the senior general added. The senior general continued to say that welfare of personnel and their families including food, clothing, housing, transportation, carrying out manageable level farming, healthcare and education enhancement programs should be carried out for the internal unity of the defence services while defence services personnel are required to abide by code of conducts for personnel and laws, rules and regulations. For the unity between defence services personnel and the people, it is necessary for the personnel to engage in regional development tasks, offer aids as soon as possible in the event of natural disasters, provide healthcare for the needy people in remote areas and participate in promotion of life standards of rural people, the senior general said. In addition, the senior general pointed out that defence services personnel are also required to help departments in immigration issues like infiltration of people who are not nationals.

The Tatmadaw has appointed over 500 female officers including 14 colonels, two of whom are performing duties as commanders, and 14 lieutenant colonels to reveal the power of women who make up over 50 percent of the population and plans are underway to appoint more female officers, according to the senior general. In addition, the Tatmadaw is inviting ethnic armed groups to the path for peace and is necessary to take measures for stability and the rule of law for the success of 2015 elections.— Myanmar

**Student protesters charged for taking down state flag**

A protest group led by Aung Hmaing San from Ba Ka Tha (All Burma Federation of Student Unions) and some local people marched around Myingyan Township in the afternoon.

A combination of 275 protesters arrived at Myingyan Degree College, and entered the campus, although the principal of college and academics tried to stop them.

In front of the main building, they replaced the State flag with the one of student union, ignoring the request not to do so by college security personnel.

A group of protest students who marched against the National Education Law reached Myingyan on Monday after a night-stay in Ngahtagyi Township.

Five Buddhist monks led by U Vinadhita from the Young Monks Union of Chauk Township and one from Pakkoku Township joined with about 65 students in Natogyi Township, according to witnesses.

The protesters are using four vehicles carrying campaign team, campaign stage, loudspeakers and foods. Some weary protesters are carried by some cars. They marched through Myingyan Township around 6:00 p.m. together with some groups before staying the night at Sunlungu Buddhist monastery.— 040

**Poor farmers in Ayeyawady . . .**

After struggling for three or four years, she tackled her debts with high interest rates owed to private money lenders and was able to send her three children to school until they completed their high school education. “I can pay 27,000 kyat every 14 days to the (PGMF),” says Daw Ohn Myint Kyi with confidence, “because I have 500 betel plants and other vegetable plantations and I have earned 5,000 to 6,000 kyat every three days.”

Besides, she will earn income from her new betel plants every 15 days once they are mature.

Luu Daw Ohn Myint Kyi, other women from the village have also gained benefits from the microcredit scheme.

Daw Ei Khin, 45, is farming 100 ducks while planting rice in her family-owned rain-fed eight acre field. She borrowed K300,000 from the (PGMF) last year to raise ducks and to establish vegetable plots. However, some households, including families of old couples who have no women, cannot borrow money from the fund because the fund loans only to women because women have earned the trust of the fund, she added.

The microfinance design for agricultural and livestock loans of the Pact Global Microfinance Fund has given priorities to women because it is a majority of women who can participate in microfinance meetings during day while their husbands are working the farmland, according to the PGMF.

“However, men are not excluded,” said U Myint Kyaw, LIFT’s Microfinance and Business Development Officer. “PGMF provides microfinance services in villages where other NGOs are implementing development projects with LIFT funding. Among those villages, men’s membership in microfinance is around 2.3 %,” he added.

PGMF has also given social loans and loans to vulnerable households with very low interest rates. In addition, it has set up a fund for beneficiary welfare that provides lump sum compensation for economic loss resulting from natural disaster, and client death benefits, he added. To qualify for loans from the fund, members have to participate in the non-formal business education programme of PGMF to learn about business, including profit, loss, weaknesses and strengths of the small businesses that relates to both agriculture and non agriculture.

“We are out of debt. We don’t need to borrow money with high interest rates from private lenders. We have no worries for our future,” said Daw Ei Khin.

**Student protesters taking down State Flag in front of main building at Mingyan Degree College in Myingyan Township.**
Greek leftist leader Tsipras claims victory over austerity

ATHENS, 26 Jan — Greek leftist leader Alexis Tsipras promised on Sunday that five years of austerity, “humiliation and suffering” imposed by international creditors were over after his Syriza party swept to victory in a snap election on Sunday.

With about 92 percent of votes counted, Syriza was set to win 149 seats in the 300-seat parliament, taking 36.3 percent of the vote, 8.5 points ahead of the conservative New Democracy party of Prime Minister Antonis Samaras. Samaras conceded victory but only the final result, expected in the early hours of Monday will show whether Syriza has won the 151 seats that would allow it to rule alone.

Nevertheless, the 40-year-old Tsipras is on course to become prime minister of the first euro zone government openly opposed to the kind of severe austerity policies which the European Union and International Monetary Fund imposed on Greece as a condition of its bailout. “Greece leaves behind catastrophic austerity, it leaves behind fear and authoritarianism, it leaves behind five years of humiliation and anguish,” Tsipras told thousands of cheering supporters at the streets of Athens, some shedding tears of joy, Greece’s Bundesbank warned Greece it needed reform to tackle its economic problems. Syriza’s campaign slogan “Hope is coming!” resonated with voters who had been in power budget cuts and heavy tax rises during six years of crisis that has sent unemployment over 25 percent and pushed millions into poverty. “We hope our expectations will be fulfilled,” said 47-year-old teacher Eleftheria Avgoustakopoulou. “On Monday in class, we’re not allowed to comment and take sides but we will be smiling.” Tsipras said he would cooperate with fellow socialist leader for a “fair and mutually beneficial solution” but said the Greek people came first. “Our priority from the very first day will be to deal with the big wounds left by the crisis,” he said. “Our foremost priority is that our country and our people regain their lost dignity.” He has promised to keep Greece in the euro and has toned down some of his rhetoric but his arrival in power would mark the biggest challenge yet to the approach adopted to the crisis by euro zone governments.

Syriza’s victory is likely to encourage other anti-austerity parties which are winning support across Europe, such as the Podemos movement in Spain.

But it might also strengthen the hand of mainstream leaders including French President Francois Hollande and Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi who argue that orthodox austerity policies have failed to produce the economic growth which Europe needs to recover fully from the global financial crisis.

Hollande expressed in a statement his “desire to pursue the close cooperation between our two countries in service of growth and the stability of the euro zone”.

 Finnish Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja was more forthright, saying he believed the result would change the debate in Europe and put more emphasis on growth and employment. “This is a slap at what I see as a very right-wing economic policy in Europe,” Tuomioja, a Social Democrat, told the website of the Helsingin Sanomat newspaper.

However with Greece’s economy unlikely to recover for years, Tsipras faces enormous problems and his victory raises the prospect of tough negotiations with European partners including German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Greek bailout deal with the euro zone is due to end on 28 February and Tsipras’ immediate challenge will be to seek double over the next installment of more than 7 billion euros in international aid. EU finance ministers are due to discuss the issue in Brussels on Monday. If Syriza falls short of a majority, Tsipras will have to try to build a coalition with smaller parties or form a minority government with ad-hoc support from others in parliament. “It’s a history-changing moment,” said Athens-based political analyst John Loulis, adding that Tsipras would have to form a coalition to prevent renewed instability. “He has no other option, the last thing the country needs would be another round of elections Negotiations are expected to be very tough, and both the small Independent Greek party and centrist To Potami party, said they would be willing to support an anti-bailout government. If Syriza requires support to govern, it may find itself hostage to its partners’ demands over how durable a Tsipras government would prove.

Reuters

Head of radical leftist Syriza party Alexis Tsipras waves while leaving the party headquarters after winning the elections in Athens on 25 Jan, 2015 — Reuters

Dacic: Serbia wants better ties with African Union states

Former Yugoslav president Tito, one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement, “had a major role and significance for African countries and we want to continue that tradition,” Dacic said, adding that, for this reason, Serbia will attend future African Union meetings.

There is a long-standing friendship between Ethiopia and Serbia, and Serbia wants those relations to be as good as possible and develop fast, Dacic said. “We want to have as many political visits and consultations as possible and develop economic cooperation, which can be better than it has been so far,” the foreign minister said.

“I have come here as a friend to friends,” Dacic noted. As announced earlier, while in Addis Ababa, Dacic will meet with Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, and other senior officials of the Commission, including Deputy Chairperson Erastus Mwencha and Commissioner for Peace and Security Smal Chergui.

Also announced are Dacic’s meetings with the Ethiopian foreign minister, as well as with the foreign ministers of Algeria, Angola, Morocco, Kenya and other African countries, with which Serbia seeks to further improve bilateral relations and political dialogue, in particular economic cooperation, for which there are significant possibilities and a mutual interest.—Tanjug

Moscow, 26 Jan — Russia’s independent political course and restoration of its economic might were the real cause for Western sanctions against Moscow, while the conflict in neighboring Ukraine was an excuse to initiate the sanctions, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin said.

“The real cause was the assumed course towards the independent development of our country, the course towards the independent political policy, the course towards the restoration of the economic might of our country,” Rogozin said in an interview with Rossiya-1 television channel.

The deputy premier said that the United States and its President Barack Obama personally as well as the European Union are using the events in Ukraine as a tool to exert pressure on Russia.

“Ukraine is an excuse and the real cause is where [Russia] are heading,” Rogozin said adding that the European Union “unfortunately suppressed its will to independent thinking and obey NATO logic. The West started imposing sanctions on Russia since March 2014 over the events in Ukraine. First, an early EU summit stalled the talks on a visa-free regime and a new base agreement on Russia-EU cooperation.

Further, the sanctions were grouped into three categories — personal, corporate and sectoral. By the beginning of September, some 420 Russian individuals and 143 companies had been put on the EU blacklists of the European Union, the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, Switzerland and Norway.

The sectoral sanctions imposed for a term of one year include an embargo on the supply of arms to Russia and the importation of Russian weapons and related materials, a ban on the delivery of dual-purpose products and technologies to Russia, as well as innovative technologies for Russia’s oil extracting industry.

In mid-September, the European Union published new sanctions against Russia in its official journal.

Russia fully banned from July 8, 2014 the imports of meat, fish, cheeses, waving, vegetables, fruits and goods from western countries that had imposed economic sanctions against Russian citizens.

The countries that have slapped sanctions against Russia include the Europe- an Union member states, Norway, the United States, Canada, Australia and Japan. Russia’s food imports from these countries amounted to $9.1 billion in 2013, according to the Federal Customs Service, of which the EU accounted for 66%.—itar-Tass

Hoax caller impersonating spy chief put through to UK PM Cameron

LONDON, 26 Jan — The British government said it was reviewing security procedures after a hoax caller claiming to be the director of Britain’s GCHQ (Government Communications Headquarters) was put through to Prime Minister David Cameron on Sunday.

In a separate hoax call to GCHQ, also on Sunday, a mobile phone number for its director Robert Hannigan was given out.

The government said the number provided is not used for calls involving classified information.

“The Prime Minister ended the call when it became clear it was a hoax. In neither instance was sensitive information disclosed,” a spokeswoman for Cameron’s office, Number 10 Downing Street said in a statement.

“Both GCHQ and Number 10 take security seriously and both are currently reviewing procedures following these hoax calls to ensure that the government learns any lessons from this incident. All government departments have now put on alert for such calls, she added. — Reuters

Addis Ababa, 26 Jan — Serbia wants to develop good relations and economic and political cooperation with African Union member states, Serbian First Deputy Prime Minister Ivica Dacic, who is also foreign minister, said on Sunday.

The Serbian foreign minister, who will take part in the 26th session of the Executive Council of the African Union in Ethiopia on Monday, told reporters that Serbia, as the legal successor of Yugoslavia, wants to develop good relations with its traditional friends in Africa.
Assad seeks agreement over US air strikes in Syria

BEIRUT, 26 Jan — President Bashar al-Assad has said U.S.-led air strikes against Islamic State militants in Syria should be subject to an agreement with Damascus and Syrian troops should be involved on the ground.

Assad was speaking in an interview with the U.S.-based Foreign Affairs Magazine published on Monday.

“With any country that is serious about fighting terrorism, we are ready to make cooperation, if they’re serious,” Assad said, when asked if he would be willing to take steps to make cooperation easier with Washington.

Washington supports opposition forces fighting for the past four years to topple Assad, but its position has become complicated since Islamic State and other hardline groups emerged as the most powerful rebel factions.

Since Islamic State took over much of Syria and Iraq last summer, the United States has mounted regular air strikes against it. But it has rejected the idea of allying itself with the Syrian government despite them now having a common enemy.

When asked what he would like to see from the United States, Assad said Washington should pressure Turkey not to allow money and weapons into northern Syria and “to make legal cooperation with Syria and start by asking permission from our government to make such attacks”.

“The format we can discuss later, but you start with legal agreement? Is it a treaty? That’s another issue,” he said. Washington informed Damascus before it started strikes in Syria in September.

The power of the hardline Islamists, including Islamic State and the al Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front, makes it more difficult for the United States to find a suitable ally on the ground.

It plans to train and equip members of the mainstream Syrian opposition to fight Islamic State as part of its strategy to roll back the group’s gains in Syria.

A first group of about 100 U.S. troops will head to the Middle East in the next few days to establish training sites for Syrian opposition fighters.

Assad said the campaign should be backed up by the Syrian army on the ground. “The question you have to ask the Americans is, which troops are you going to depend on? Definitely, it has to be Syrian troops,” he said.

The United Nations says 200,000 people have been killed in the civil war, which started with pro-democracy protests that were violently repressed.

— Reuters

Nigeria repels suspected Boko Haram attack on Maiduguri city

MAIDUGURI, 26 Jan — Nigeria’s military repelled multiple attacks by suspected Boko Haram militants on Borno state capital Maiduguri in the northeast, security sources said on Sunday, but the insurgents captured another Borno town.

The assault on Maiduguri, with a population of around two million, began just after midnight. Sources at two hospitals said at least eight people had died and 27, mostly civilians, had been injured. A second attempt to take the city’s airport in the afternoon was also repelled.

A raid on Monguno, 140 km (80 miles) north, began later in the morning and the town fell under militant control by the late afternoon.

“An exclusive coordinated air campaign has taken over from ground forces in Monguno, as troops had to retreat from the location,” defence spokesman Major General Chris Olukolade said in an emailed statement.

The militiamen also simultaneously attacked another town, Konduga, which is 40 km (24 miles) from Maiduguri, but the military said it had thwarted the raid.

The army’s inability to quash the Sunni jihadist group is a major headache for President Goodluck Jonathan, who is seeking re-election in February and who visited the state capital on Saturday as part of his campaign. Opposition candidate Muhammadu Buhari had been due to arrive on Monday.

TheSelector-the ex-cabinet minister is expected to be the most hotly contested since the end of military rule in 1999, with many fearing violence in the aftermath.

— Reuters

At least 17 killed in protests on anniversary of Egypt uprising

CAIRO, 26 Jan — At least 17 people were killed on Sunday in Egypt’s bloodiest protests since Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was elected president, as security forces fired at protesters marking the anniversary of the 2011 uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak.

Gunture and siens could be heard in Cairo into the night as armoured personnel carriers moved through the centre of a city where security forces had once again used lethal force against dissenters. A Health Ministry spokesman said at least 17 people had been killed at protests across the country. The anniversary was a test of whether Islamists and liberal activists had the resolve to challenge a government that has persistently stood out dissent since the then-army chief Sisi ousted elected Islamist president Mohamed Mursi in July 2013 after mass protests against his rule.

Gunmen in a car opened fire on a security checkpoint near the pyramids, killing two policemen, and a bomb wounded two policemen outside a Cairo sports club, security sources said.

During the day, riot police backed by soldiers in armoured vehicles sealed off roads, including those leading to Cairo’s Tahrir Square, the symbolic heart of the 2011 revolt.

The heaviest death toll was in the Cairo suburb of Matariya, a Muslim Brotherhood stronghold. Security forces fired pistols and rifles at protesters, a Reuters witness said. Eight people, including one policeman, were killed, the Health Ministry said. People in Matariya chanted “down with military rule” and “a revolution all over again”. Some threw Molotov cocktails at security forces and fires raged in the streets.

In downtown Cairo, riot police with rifles and plain clothed men with pistols chased protesters through the streets.

Six people were killed in separate protests in Alexandria, Egypt’s second biggest city. Giza governorate outside of Cairo and the Nile Delta province of Beheira, security sources said.

Signs of discontent built up as the anniversary of the revolt against Mubarak approached, and a liberal woman activist, Shaimaa Sabagh, was shot dead at a protest on Saturday.

— Reuters
Experts to check ex-Okinawa governor’s OK to US base transfer

NAHA, 26 Jan — Okinawa Gov Takeshi Onaga said on Monday a panel of experts will be set up before the end of January to examine the validity of his predecessor’s approval of a landfill to relocate a US military base within the prefecture. — KYODO NEWS

Iranian Foreign Minister summoned to parliament over walk with Kerry

TEHRAN, 27 Jan — Iran’s foreign minister has to face scrutiny in parliament over his walk with US Secretary of State John Kerry during a conference on 26 Jan, 2015, in the prefectural capital of Naha. He said a panel of experts will be set up before the end of January to examine the validity of his predecessor’s approval of a landfill to relocate a US military base within the prefecture. — KYODO NEWS

AirAsia to scrap fuel surcharge on lower oil prices

KUALA LUMPUR, 27 Jan — AirAsia Group announced that it is abolishing its fuel surcharge effective on Monday for all group airlines following the drop in global crude oil prices. AirAsia Group Chief Executive Tony Fernandes said in a statement that the decision to end the surcharge was made in November 2014 in line with declining global oil prices. “We believe removing the fuel surcharge and reducing travel costs will be a huge boost to the tourism industry,” he said.

With the removal of the fuel surcharge, customers are now required to pay only the air fare, the administration fee and airport tax.

AirAsia, the largest low-cost carrier in Asia, is currently struggling with its first fatal accident since it was founded in 1996. Flight QZ8501 crashed into the Java Sea during foul weather on 28 December while en route from Indonesia’s Surabaya to Singapore, killing all 162 people on board. — KYODO NEWS

JFE Engineering to construct sewage treatment plant in Sri Lanka

Tokyo, 27 Jan — JFE Engineering Corp said on Monday it has received an order to design and construct a sewage treatment plant in Sri Lanka to help improve the quality of water systems in the fast-growing South Asian country.

The plant will be set up in the city of Kandy, which continues to discharge wastewater directly into rivers and lakes without proper treatment, by the end of May 2019, JFE Engineering said.

The facility in Kandy, the second largest city in Sri Lanka and a UNESCO World Heritage site, will be able to treat 14,000 cubic metres of wastewater per day to meet the needs of the city’s roughly 70,000 residents, the firm said.

It will be the first time for Japan to use its official development assistance to construct a sewage facility in Sri Lanka, the firm said. — KYODO NEWS

Sales of surveillance cameras surge in South Korea after daycare abuse case

SEOUL, 26 Jan — Sales of surveillance cameras have surged in South Korea after a daycare centre worker was caught on camera earlier this month knocking a toddler to the floor, sparking calls for closer monitoring of schools and child care facilities.

Experts have kept their children at home amid angry demands for measures to protect children, including more cameras and tighter screening of staff, as subsequent footages of other daycare abuse incidents emerged.

Police arrested the worker on 15 January. Prosecutors have yet to charge her.

The education ministry said last week it planned to require that 90 percent of kindergartens install surveillance cameras by next year. Parliament has introduced a bill to require all daycare centers to install cameras, and is expected to pass it in March.

Auction cried the daycare abuse case and demand from child care centers, as well as rising camera use by hospitals and other public facilities, fuelling the rise in sales.

“It looks like there was a large impact with CCTV cameras because they are related to children’s safety,” said Kim Sun-seok, who manages the sale of digital products at Auction.

Lee Ki-sook of Ewha Women’s University, who teaches early childhood education, said daycare centers also need to tighten staff certification procedures and increase wages to address the problem of abuse. “Installing CCTV cameras won’t solve everything,” she said.

Dubai — On Friday, conservationists began a series of summons since 2011, the first public challenge against the Islamic Republic’s top diplomat, Husayn Abulhasan, who managed the sale of surveillance cameras.

They say they are relating to children’s safety.

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JFE Engineering to construct sewage treatment plant in Sri Lanka

Tokyo, 27 Jan — JFE Engineering Corp said on Monday it has received an order to design and construct a sewage treatment plant in Sri Lanka to help improve the quality of water systems in the fast-growing South Asian country.

The plant will be set up in the city of Kandy, which continues to discharge wastewater directly into rivers and lakes without proper treatment, by the end of May 2019, JFE Engineering said.

The facility in Kandy, the second largest city in Sri Lanka and a UNESCO World Heritage site, will be able to treat 14,000 cubic metres of wastewater per day to meet the needs of the city’s roughly 70,000 residents, the firm said.

It will be the first time for Japan to use its official development assistance to construct a sewage facility in Sri Lanka, the firm said. — KYODO NEWS
Turkey opens biggest refugee camp for 35,000 from Kobani

ISTANBUL, 26 Jan — Turkey opened its biggest refugee camp on Sunday to house 35,000 people fleeing fighting between Kurdish forces and Islamist militias in Syria’s Kobani, national disaster management agency AFAD said.

Located in the southeastern border town of Suruc, the tent city has two hospitals, seven medical clinics and enough classrooms for 10,000 children, AFAD spokesman Dogan Eskimat told Reuters.

He said months of fighting in Kobani had caused an influx of some 200,000 refugees into Turkey and that AFAD would see how the situation develops before deciding whether any more facilities should be constructed.

Turkey has some 24 camps housing 265,000 Syrian refugees with another set to open in Mardin next month, Eskimat said. More than 200,000 people have been killed and millions displaced in the Syrian civil war since March 2011.

The majority of Turkey’s 1.7 million refugees live outside camps, sometimes on the streets and in shanty towns, causing tensions with the local population. Authorities have begun to transfer those living on city streets to camps.

Islamic State militants attacked Kobani more than four months ago. Iraqi Kurdish forces were dispatched to help Syrian Kurds fight the advance and a US-led coalition has bombed Islamic State fighters and equipment to push the group east out of the city and surrounding villages. —Reuters

Childbirths in S Korea fall in November

SEOUL, 26 Jan — Childbirths in South Korea declined in November last year due to a fall in marriages and rising burden for rearing children, a government report showed on Monday.

The number of babies born in November 2014 was 32,300, down 4.4 percent from a year earlier, according to Statistics Korea. It marked the second-lowest since the statistical agency began compiling the data in 2000.

The record low was 31,972 tallied in December 2013.

The low birthrate came as couples refrained from having babies for rising costs to rear children amid delayed marriages caused by economic slowdown and growing living expenses.

The number of couples tying the knots in November was 23,600, tumbling 16.9 percent from a year earlier.

South Korea has struggled to raise the birthrate on worries that lower working population may drag down growth potential of the economy.

South Korea’s potential growth is estimated at 3.5 percent, and the Bank of Korea (BOK) cut its 2015 growth outlook to 3.4 percent from 3.9 percent.

The country’s childbirths and marriages are expected to hit a record low in 2014 given the fact that those figures tend to reduce further in December compared with November.

For the first 11 months of 2014, the number of births stood at 403,500, down from 404,500 in the same period of 2013.

During the January-November period, the number of marriages declined 5 percent from a year earlier to 271,300. —Xinhua
Los Angeles, 26 Jan — “Birdman,” a satirical film about acting in the unforgiving world of show business, won top honours from Hollywood’s actors on Sunday in an important show of support for its march toward the best picture Oscar.

The actors from “Birdman” won the best ensemble cast in a motion picture from the Screen Actors Guild the day after the film from Mexican director Alejandro G Iñarritu prevailed at the Producers Guild awards.

While the SAG award for the best ensemble cast does not always translate to a best picture win at the Academy Awards, it does indicate that actors, the largest voting bloc for the Oscars, favour it over another strong contender, the coming of age tale “Boyhood.”

Michael Keaton, whose own uneven career trajectory mirrors the travails of “Birdman” protagonist Riggan Thomson, said he was sure the 100,000 SAG members found a kindred spirit in the film.

“I think actors loved the movie for showing the courage the actors had, going out there and laying it out on the line,” Keaton said backstage. “I think that is why respectfully they thought as a group we deserved to win the prize.”

“Birdman” could cement its front-runner status for the 22 February Academy Awards if it takes the top Directors Guild Award in two weeks.

The individual acting Oscars appear to be sewn up after the SAG awards, which went to the four artists who won Golden Globes two weeks ago — Julianne Moore, Eddie Redmayne, Patricia Arquette and JK Simmons.

SAG members prized lead performances by two actors portraying extreme illness:

Moore won best actress for her role as a woman with early-onset Alzheimer’s in “Still Alice,” while British actor Redmayne took best actor for his portrayal of physicist Stephen Hawking, disabled by motor neuron disease, in “The Theory of Everything.”

Los Angeles, 26 Jan — Acting might have been in his blood, but the “Sherlock” star Benedict Cumberbatch says his parents didn’t want him to become an actor.

The 38-year-old actor said that his parents, esteemed theatre actor Timothy Carlton and Wanda Ventham who has appeared in episodes of ‘Only Fools and Horses’ and ‘The Saint,’ urged him not to follow their footsteps into acting and rather become a barrister.—PTI

Parents didn’t want me to become actor: Benedict Cumberbatch

Los Angeles, 26 Jan — “American Sniper” star Bradley Cooper will take his play ‘Elephant Man’ to London’s Theatre Royal Haymarket in May. The play will start from 19 May and run till 8 August after its Broadway run will conclude on 21 February, reported Aceshowbiz. The 40-year-old actor plays a man named John Merrick, who has some body deformities. Instead of using prosthetics, the actor contorts his face and limbs to portray the character.

“Never did we think we would have the privilege to perform this show on Broadway, let alone in London. I’m honoured that Alessandro Nichola, Patricia Clarkson, the entire company and I have the opportunity to continue to tell his story,” Cooper said in a statement. Nichola plays a surgeon, who is also Merrick’s friend while Clarkson plays an actress, who introduces Merrick to high class society.

Cooper is nominated in Best Actor category at the upcoming 87th Academy Awards for his performance in ‘American Sniper’. He is vying for the trophy against Benedict Cumberbatch (‘The Imitation Game’), Eddie Redmayne (‘The Theory of Everything’), Michael Keaton (‘Birdman’) and Steve Carell (‘Foxcatcher’).

Bradley Cooper’s play heading to London stage

Los Angeles, 26 Jan — Singer-actress Miley Cyrus says she would love to do a reunion of her hit musical-comedy ‘Hannah Montana’ provided she gets to play herself on the TV series. ‘Hannah Montana’ ran for four seasons from 2006-2011 on Disney channel. The series spanned a movie adaptation, ‘Hannah Montana: The Movie’, which was released in 2009, reported E! Online.

“One day she, like, has an alter ego and is actually me. Reverse it all the way around. It would be fun. People would want to see it. Everybody loves a reunion. People want to see a lot of things that I can’t do... on TV,” Cyrus, 22, said.—PTI

Miley Cyrus open to do ‘Hannah Montana’ reunion

Miami, (Florida), 26 Jan — A 22-year-old business student and model from Barranquilla, Colombia, was named Miss Universe on Sunday at the annual beauty pageant, beating out 87 other contestants from around the globe.

Paulina Vega, the granddaughter of tenor Gaston Vega, studies business administration at the Universidad Javeriana in Bogota and has been a model since she was eight years old, according to the pageant’s website.

Vega triumphed over first runner-up, Miss USA Nia Sanchez, a 4th degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do from Las Vegas, Nevada, who won the US title in June.

Contestants from the Netherlands, Jamaica and Ukraine rounded out the five finalists at the 63rd annual pageant, which was broadcast on NBC from Florida International University in Miami.

Vega is the fourth woman from South America to win the pageant in the past seven years, with contestants from Venezuela taking the title last year as well as in 2007 and 2008.—Reuters

Miss Colombia Paulina Vega poses after being named a top 5 finalist, on her way to be crowned Miss Universe at the 63rd Annual Miss Universe Pageant in Miami, Florida, on 25 Jan, 2015.—Reuters

Miss Colombia is crowned Miss Universe for 2015

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LONDON, 26 Jan — Premier League Arsenal, Aston Villa and West Ham United reached the fifth round of the FA Cup as calm returned to the competition on Sunday, ending a weekend, which reminded spectators that David can beat Goliath.

A day after Chelsea and Manchester City were stunned by Bradford City and Middlesbrough respectively, holders Arsenal beat second tier Brighton and Hove Albion 3-2, West Ham United overcame League One (third tier) Bristol City 1-0 and Aston Villa toppled Championship leaders Bournemouth 2-1.

Goals from Theo Walcott, Mesut Ozil and Tomas Rosicky helped Arsenal conquer an obdurate Brighton side and remain on course to defend the trophy they won last season after going nine years without silverware.

“It was hard work,” Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger told the BBC. “A typical cup tie where the other team never gives up.”

“We had to fight until the end but overall we were always leading and missed a few chances as well. I believe that is where we won the game (at the start). The results from yesterday maybe got us on our toes and we got off to a quick pace, and I think that surprised Brighton.”

West Ham United had substitute Diafra Sakho to thank for sparing their blushes against League One Bristol City as the Senegal international headed Andy Carroll’s cross home in the 81st minute to send the Ham-mers through to the fifth round. Aston Villa, hoping the FA Cup would provide welcome respite from their Premier League struggles, also secured their place in the next round thanks to a 2-1 victory over Championship (second tier) leaders Bournemouth.

Carles Gil, who signed from Valencia earlier this month, scored a stunning effort to put Villa in front on 51 minutes before Andreas Weimann added a second. Callum Wilson scored a late consolation for Bournemouth, but Villa stood firm to deny the visitors a replay.

Arsenal fans would have been forgiven for feeling a little uneasy at a trip to the south coast after watching Premier League rivals Chelsea and Manchester City fall in round four.

But their nerves were calmed just 89 seconds in when Walcott neatly converted Calum Chambers’s cross and fired a shot past David Stockdale to score his first goal in over a year after a lengthy spell on the sidelines with an ankle problem.

Arsenal continued to pin Brighton back in their own half and German World Cup-winner Ozil, making his first start since October, doubled the Gunners’ advantage when he collected Rosicky’s pass and slid the ball into the net.

Brighton gained a lifeline when Chris O’Grady held off Mathieu Flamini’s challenge and kept his composure to strike the ball past Wojciech Szczesny.

Rosicky restored Arsenal’s two-goal advantage with an exquisite volley from the edge of the box but Brighton striker Sam Baldock set up a nervy finish for the holders when he delicate-ly clipped the ball over the on-coming Szczesny. Reuters

Arsenal’s Mesut Ozil (R) scores a goal against Brighton and Hove Albion during their FA Cup fourth round soccer match at the Amex stadium in Brighton, southern England on 25 Jan, 2015.—Reuters

A snow shoveler crosses a street during a winter snowstorm in Cambridge, Massachusetts on 24 Jan, 2015.—Reuters

US East Coast braces for ‘historic’ blizzard on Monday

NEW YORK, 26 Jan — A swath of the US East Coast from Philadelphia to New York City to Maine braced for a potentially historic blizzard on Monday expected to dump as much as 3 feet (90 cm) of snow and snarl transportation for tens of millions of people.

The National Weather Service (NWS) on Sunday issued a blizzard warning for the northern section of the East Coast from Monday afternoon until Tuesday, placing states from New Jersey to Indiana under winter storm watch-es and advisories. Airlines canceled hundreds of flights ahead of the storm.

“This could be the biggest snowstorm in the history of this city,” New York Mayor Bill de Blasio told a news conference, saying the snowfall could reach up to 3 feet.

De Blasio told residents of America’s financial capital and most populous city to stay off the roads and “to prepare for something worse than we have seen be-fore.”

The biggest snowfall on record in New York City came during the storm of 11-12 February, 2006, dropping 26.9 inches (68 cm), accord-ing to the city’s Office of Emergency Management.

The NWS called the approaching system a “com-
South Korea beat Iraq 2-0 to reach Asian Cup final

SYDNEY, 26 Jan — South Korea moved a step closer to burying their 35-year Asian Cup hoodoo when they grabbed a goal in each half to beat Iraq 2-0 on Monday and set up a final against Australia or United Arab Emirates.

Lee Jeong-hyeop gave the Taeguk Warriors the lead with a 20th minute header and defender Kim Young-gwon lashed the second into the net five minutes after the break as the South Koreans reached the final for the first time since 1988.

Iraq, perhaps emotionally and physically drained by their dramatic quarter-final victory over Iran last week, played with plenty of passion but were unable to become the first side to breach the Korean defence in five matches in Australia.

Their hopes of another fairytale run to the title to match their 2007 triumph were washed away in the Sydney rain and it is twice champions South Korea who will return to Stadium Australia next Saturday in search of a first Asian Cup crown since 1960.

South Korea had looked the most likely to score in a cagey opening to the match with Son Heung-min, the two-goal hero of South Korea’s quarter-final victory over Uzbekistan, drawing a fingertip save out of Jalal Hassan with a long-range effort.

A minute later and the Koreans were in front, Kim Jin-su curling a free kick into the box and Lee rising above the Iraqi defence to head down and into the net.

Iraq skipper Younus Mahmoud was making his presence felt up front but the Koreans are not a side to be bullied at the back and he was more often than not battling alone in the first half.

Even the persistent rain that fell on Sydney all day was not able to dampen the spirits of a noisy crowd of just over 36,000, the South Koreans at one end with inflatable batons and the band of Iraqis at the other accompanied by drums and whistles.

The Koreans had more to shout about but Iraq gave their supporters a lift with a flurry of attacks just before the break when winger Amjad Kalaf’s raking drive forced Kim Jin-hyeon to get down low to push the ball across his goal.

The South Korea goalkeeper gave the Iraqis the sniff of an equaliser when he rashly charged out of his area three minutes after the break but another two minutes on and his team’s lead had been doubled.

The ball bounced around the area in an extended bout of aerial ping-pong from a Son corner before Lee Jeong-hyeop chested the ball down for Kim Young-gwon to hit it first time from the edge of the box past the despairing dive of Hassan.

Iraq were forced to press forward but clear-cut opportunities were still few and far between for them while Hassan had to be at his sharpest to deny long-range efforts from South Korean skipper Ki Sung-yueng and Son inside a minute.

Kalaf continued to cause problems with his pace but there always seemed to be a South Korean foot or head to cut out the final ball and prevent a scoring chance.—Reuters

Wawrinka exacts revenge on Garcia-Lopez

MELBOURNE, 26 Jan — Defending champion Stan Wawrinka avenged his early exit at last year’s French Open with a 7-6(2), 6-4, 4-6, 7-6(8) victory over Guillermo Garcia-Lopez on Monday to book his place in the Melbourne Park quarter-finals.

The fourth-seeded Swiss lost to Garcia-Lopez in the first round at Roland Garros in 2014 and did not have it easy against the 31-year-old Spaniard this time around either.

Wawrinka had to overcome a 5-0 deficit in the fourth-set tiebreak and saved five set points with some booming returns before setting up a clash with either Kei Nishikori or David Ferrer in the last eight.

There was a slightly embarrassing moment for organisers in the first set when the match had to be suspended for several minutes as water dripped from the roof of the refurbished Margaret Court Arena.

Court, the 24-times grand slam champion, had earlier attended the arena’s official opening ceremony.—Reuters