THE President’s Office announced yesterday that the Union Peace Conference has been scheduled to take place on 12 January 2016 as part of the peaceful solution to national reconciliation, ending armed conflict and solving political disputes through diplomatic means. President U Thein Sein held out the olive branch to ethnic armed groups on 18 August 2011, an initiative that resulted in the signing of the nationwide ceasefire agreement with eight ethnic groups on 15 October this year.

The ceasefire truce required the signatories to pave a way to political dialogue. Accordingly, the framework for political dialogue was finalised on 15 December, thereby setting a date for the Union Peace Conference.—Myanmar News Agency

Aye Min Soe

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

To prevent landslides, local authorities have suggested that migrant miners squatting in at-risk areas relocate to safer areas and that mining companies dump their waste soil in accordance with technical safety rules, said U Tin Swe Myint, the head of the Hpakant Township Administration Office, to The Global New Light of Myanmar over the phone.

“We issued an order to evict the squatters. We erected warning signboards in the at-risk areas, but they have not fully cooperated with us,” he said.

“Meanwhile, mining companies are dumping waste soil day and night. But they do not follow our suggestions for safe dumping from a technical point of view,” he added.

When miners began using heavy machinery to extract jade from mines in Myanmar in 2005, migrant workers across the country flowed into the area to scavenge small jade stones from discarded soil. There are currently around 200,000 squatters in Hpakant Township.

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

Since the beginning of Hpakant’s jade business boom, migrant miners have formed their own villages.

Among 120 villages in the township, only 54 are official villages, according to inspection teams. The rest are unofficial squatter villages.

In an interview with Myanmar News Agency, U Aung Nyunt Thein, the managing director of the Myanma Gems Enterprise, said those who received official permits for mining are obliged to follow the rules of the Myanmar Gemstone Law for their mining, keeping, transportation and selling of gems stones.

According to data collected up to 30 November 2015, 627 mining companies have been allowed to mine on 7,714 plots, while another 231 companies are mining through a win-win business system on 311 plots. Mining areas constitute a total area of more than 22,558 acres in the township.

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

Companies must submit environmental and health impact assessments to the Ministry of Mines when they are granted permits for mining, and the ministry has been supervising and monitoring whether they follow these procedures or not, said U Aung Nyunt Thein.

Maung Pho Zaw (Kalay) also contributed to this story.
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw convened in Nay Pyi Taw.

Photo: MNA

COMMANDER-in-Chief of the Defense Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing delivered a speech at the graduation parade of the 17th Intake of the Defence Services Medical Academy on Friday.

In his speech, the senior general said that the military medical academy has produced 4,535 medical doctors so far and over 1,600 of them acquired master’s and doctorate degrees from international universities.

Medical personnel of the defense services are also providing healthcare services to local people in fur-flung areas, he added.

In conclusion, the senior general urged graduating cadets to try to become responsible military officers as well as good physicians. After the graduating parade, the senior general met with two outstanding cadets and their parents to honour them.

Present at the ceremony were wife of the senior general Daw Kyu Kyu Hla, the Joint Chief of General Staff (Army, Navy and Air Force) and Commander-in-Chief (Air) General Khin Aung Myint and his wife, Commander-in-Chief (Navy) Vice Admiral Tin Aung San and his wife and senior officers.

In the evening, the senior general and party attended a graduation dinner.—Myanma News Agency

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing greets cadets of the 17th Intake of the Defence Services Medical Academy at dinner. Photo: MYANADY

Customs duties decrease because of FTA agreements, fewer vehicle imports

MYANMAR collected less customs duties this year, in part because the country imported 28,000 fewer vehicles than in the previous year, and in part because certain taxes were exempted under free trade agreements, Deputy Minister for Finance Dr Lin Aung explained at Friday Pyidaungsu Hluttaw session at which MPs recorded one bill, discussed another bill, explained two reports and sought comments on the findings of the report of the Public Account Joint Committee and the Bill Committee.

Deputy ministers for the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development replied to queries raised by representatives at the session.—Myanma News Agency

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing delivers speech at graduation of 17th Intake of DSMA
President meets with French delegation

PRESIDENT U Thein Sein met with a delegation led by Mrs. Elisabeth Guigou, President of the French National Assembly’s Foreign Affairs Committee, at the Presidential Palace yesterday. They discussed Myanmar’s transition to Democracy, stability in the country during the post-election period and the peace making process.

Also present at the meeting were Union Ministers U Wunna Maung Lwin and U Soe Thame, and other officials as well as the French Ambassador to Myanmar Mr. Oliva Richart.—Myanma News Agency.

President receives MBA delegation from Stanford University

PRESIDENT U Thein Sein received a Master of Business Administration delegation led by Professor Dan Ianca of Stanford University, USA, at the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. The MBA trainees of the delegation questioned the president on political and economic reforms and the measures being taken to ensure peace and socio-economic development in Myanmar.

Also present at the meeting were Union ministers U Wunna Maung Lwin, U Soe Thame, U Ye Htut, U Zeyar Aung, Dr Daw Khin San Yi and Dr Kan Zaw and officials.

The 32-member delegation visited the Ministry of Energy in Nay Pyi Taw on Thursday. The delegation attended a meeting there with U Zeyar Aung, Union Minister for Energy, Communications and Information Technology and the Chairman of the Myanmar Investment Commission. They discussed investment policies, reforms aimed at attracting foreign investment to the country and the nature of doing business in Myanmar.—Myanma News Agency

Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham visits poultry farms in Lashio

VICE President Dr Sai Mauk Kham yesterday visited poultry farms in Man Ai village, Lashio, northern Shan State, urging the farmers to exert more effort for the development of their livelihoods.

The large-scale farm in Lashio keeps nearly 130,000 chickens and produces more than 80,000 eggs per day. The eggs are distributed to townships in Shan State as well as Mandalay.—Myanma News Agency

Vice President U Nyan Tun attends Int’l Migrants Day event in Nay Pyi Taw

INTERNATIONAL Migrants Day 2015 was observed at a ceremony at the Myanmar International Convention Centre-2 in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday, with a speech by Vice President U Nyan Tun.

In his speech, the vice president said that the observance of the day is to raise public awareness of migrants and speed up our efforts to respect and protect their human rights in accordance with international laws and standards.

He described the event as an occasion to remember the important contribution of migrants to the economic development of their host countries, calling for greater cooperation in protecting the labour rights of migrant workers. The 21st century has witnessed massive human mobility in countries of both origin and destination, with the vice president saying that the issue of migration should be included in national development plans. He pledged the enhanced cooperation with international organisations in safeguarding the interests of Myanmar citizens.

U Aye Myint, Union Minister for Labour, Employment and Social Security, spoke briefly on the measures being undertaken to protect migrant workers.

Mr. Kieran Gorman-Best, representative of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), read out messages sent by the secretary general of the United Nations and the director general of the IOM.—Myanma News Agency
No plans to invite more shareholders for Zone-B at Thilawa SEZ

Khaing Thanda Lwin

THE Myanmar Thilawa SEZ Holdings Public Ltd said it has no plans to invite new shareholders for Zone-B at the Thilawa SEZ project.

“Shares will be sold to public if necessary,” U Win Aung, Chairman of MTSH, replied to shareholders and media at the company’s second annual general meeting yesterday.

He added, “Currently the company has no plans to invite new shareholders to the Zone-B project at Thilawa SEZ in south-eastern Yangon, which covers an area of 500 to 700 hectares. We will implement the Zone-B project with the use of current investment levels.”

U Min Naing, who owns 30 shares of MTSH, said the share value of Myanmar Thilawa SEZ Holdings Public Ltd has gone up fivefold within two years. “It is expected to go on rising.”

Since its establishment in January, 2014 the MTSH’s share price has risen from K10,000 (US$7.67) per share to K50,000 ($38.35).

The 396-hectare Zone-A project of Thilawa SEZ, which is located 25 kilometers southeast of Yangon, will be completed in two phases. Initiated in late November 2013, the first phase comprising the development of 211 hectares was put into operation in September.

The second phase of the Zone-A project comprising 150 hectares has been under construction and is scheduled to be completed by mid-2016.

Essential infrastructure developments to support the Thilawa SEZ with Japan’s ODA loan is also on track, U Win Aung said. “Construction of a 50 MW power plant and gas pipeline are on schedule. Road expansion works from Thanlwyn Bridge to Thilawa SEZ, sea port construction and water supply pipeline construction are expected to be carried out next year.”

A building is under construction in the Thilawa Special Economic Zone. Photo: Ye Myint

Fund to be established to ease burden on SMEs

A FUND will be established in Myanmar to provide the country’s small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with loans at low interest rates.

The plan comes as established small and medium enterprises in Myanmar are often forced to put up their properties as collateral for bank loans, according to Mr. Edward Clarence Smith, a resident representative of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization.

His comments were made during a workshop which focused on the opportunities and constraints of boosting responsible and sustainable investments and the development of youth and female-led enterprises in Yangon yesterday. He advised that small and medium enterprises in Myanmar join hands with SMEs in foreign countries in order to overcome their current challenges and constraints.

More than 120 experts and representatives from both the Myanmar public and private sectors, international financial institutions and development partners participated in the workshop.

Daw Aye Aye Win, Director-General of the Directorate of Industrial Supervision and Inspection under the Ministry of Industry suggested providing SMEs in Myanmar with capital and modern technology in order to make them more competitive in preparation for when the ASEAN Economic Community plan takes effect.—Min Thu

Fishery sector including crab farming needs to be provided with loans with low interest rate to compete with others in the regional market. Photo: Ye Htut

SLCM ties up with Myanmar Apex Bank

Mr. Anubhav Sengar (L) and Mr. Kyaw Soe Min (R). Photo: SLCM

SLCM Group (Sohan Lal Commodity Management) — SLCM Ltd has signed an MoU with Myanmar Apex Bank for collateral financing in Myanmar.

SLCM is the only Agri Logistics Group which has presence in Myanmar to provide Warehouse Management and Collateral Management Services through its wholly owned subsidiary.

The step is aimed at strengthening the network for providing collateral management solutions to processors, traders, exporters, farmers & importers across Myanmar. Mr. Anubhav Sengar, Country Head, SLCM Ltd and Mr. Kyaw Soe Min, Deputy Managing Director, Myanmar Apex Bank signed the MoU yesterday. The signing commitment states that rate of interest for loan disbursement remains fixed at 13%. With this, SLCM Ltd. becomes the only warehousing & collateral management services provider in Myanmar & has tie-ups with four leading local banks including Yoma Bank, C B Bank, United Amara Bank and now with Myanmar Apex Bank.

Myanmar Apex Bank will offer financial solutions to both individuals and corporate customers, in accordance with their needs, while maintaining excellence in customer service at all times.—GNLM

Bureau Veritas Ramps Up Operations in Myanmar

BUREAU Veritas, a global leader in laboratory testing, inspection and certification services listed on Euronext Paris, announced yesterday that it expects to increase its headcount of engineers and certification professionals in Myanmar by about three times within the next two years.

Starting afresh barely three years ago in Myanmar, Bureau Veritas Myanmar expects to expand its current strength of 15 qualified professionals, after relocating to its new premises at Hledan Center in November, according to its press release.

The strategic intent is for the Myanmar operation to grow into a fully independent unit with the ability to deliver its testing, inspection and certification services that meet international standards in a seamlessly and real-time manner.

The company, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Bureau Veritas parent group, also aims to expand beyond its current focus on agricultural inspection & testing services to include new emerging sectors like infrastructure development and the oil & gas sector in Myanmar.—GNLM
A-bomb museum to be built in South Korea region where survivors live

HIROSHIMA — Construction will begin next year of a museum in South Korea dedicated to showing the horror of the August 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Hiroshima Mayor Kazumi Matsui said Thursday.

The museum is in southern Hapcheon county, where many survivors of the blast live, will be the first such public museum in South Korea, according to its consulate general in Hiroshima.

The consular general has asked the Hiroshima city government for assistance in providing items that can be displayed at the museum, the mayor said at a press conference.

“We have been asking the United Nations and other organisations to display materials related to the atomic bombing, so we areunfting in lending our support,” Matsui said, expressing hope as well for future cooperation between the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and the South Korean museum. —Kyodo News

Australian PM Turnbull in Japan, eyes stronger technology cooperation

TOKYO — Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull arrived in Japan yesterday on a one-day visit to meet Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and strengthen cooperation in the field of science and technology.

Before the meeting, the Australian prime minister said, “We’ll discuss innovation. We’ll discuss obviously the important strategic collaboration we have.”

“This might be our fourth or fifth meeting, so we have got to know each other already,” Turnbull added.

The two leaders will discuss “a point of difference” as Australia disagrees with Japan’s whaling in the Antarctic Ocean this year, he said. “If we can’t resolve it then we will obviously keep talking, but we should not allow it to erode the goodwill in the rest of the friendship,” Turnbull said.

Shortly after arriving, Turnbull visited the National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation, known as Miraikan, in Tokyo, as he aims to seek cooperation in pursuing scientific advancement required for economic revitalization, and technology innovation to support business entrepreneurs.

Turnbull met Honda Motor Co.’s Asimo humanoid robot with whom he took a picture using his phone.

Later, he attended a luncheon hosted by the Australia-Japan Business Cooperation Committee and said that a strong Japan and a strong Australia will be important for the Asia-Pacific region. —Kyodo News

Chinese drones prove mettle in Tianjin disaster

BEIJING — When an explosion devastated parts of China’s Tianjin port in August, one insurance company turned to Chinese-made drones to help analyse the rubble and estimate the damages.

Comparing satellite photographs of the site ahead of the blast with high-resolution images taken later by drones, the People’s Insurance Company of China (PICC) was able to determine how many vehicles had been destroyed and total the losses for German automaker Volkswagen (VOWG_p.DE).

“There was nothing left but a big hole in the ground,” Lin Changying, a deputy general manager at PICC Property and Casualty Co told Reuters. With the government maintaining a one kilometre exclusion zone around the site, an accurate loss assessment would have been “mission impossible” without un piloted aircraft, he added.

Chinese drone developers are raking up an impressive list of aerial solutions for a growing variety of demands, from police surveillance to agricultural mapping and traffic management. Already well established as a world leader in drone manufacturing, China is slowly emerging as a world-class innovator, not just a duplicator of foreign designs.

“People have been calling China ‘copy cats’ for a long time. That’s still true in a lot of industries, but when it comes to drones China is not copycat,” said Joe Tymczyszyn, a senior adviser and former executive director for the US-China Aviation Cooperation Programme.

Chinese firm SZ DJI Technology Co, the world’s biggest consumer drone maker, will open its first flagship retail store in Shenzhen on Sunday. The company claims 70 percent of the commercial market worldwide and a larger portion of the consumer market.

Others are lining up to replicate SZ’s success. Wuhan Airbird UAV Co Ltd designs and maintains drones for government, corporate and private users. But its traffic monitoring micro-drone — so small it can be launched from a car window — is proving a hit with the car-driving public.

The privately-held manufacturer expects revenue to rise 50 percent this year to 18 million yuan (2 million pounds), and employs about 45 engineers and mechanics.

Research firm Taibo Intelligence forecasts Chinese drone industry revenue to more than double to 2.5 billion yuan ($388 million) this year and grow by as much as eight fold to 20 billion yuan by 2020.

With revenues booming and commercial and private users more accountable and control where commercial and private unmanned aerial vehicles may fly.

The rules, which are less severe than regulations being considered by the US and Europe, came after a series of security breaches, including an incident where a civilian drone photographed a Chinese fighter jet as it prepared to land.

While some choke at the government scrutiny, other industry players welcome the attention.

“It’s like saying traffic rules have hurt the development of the car industry,” said Ke Yubao, executive secretary-general of the government-backed China Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association.

Wuhan Airbird Chief Executive Wang Xiaobo said tighter regulation was needed to improve industry safety. “Once a major accident happens it will be too late,” he said.

The military continues to control about 70 percent of China’s airspace, and demands that all drone flights receive approval before entering controlled areas.

Even so, the vast majority of drone operators in China are untrained and fly without licences.

“Unlicensed flights need to be addressed sooner or later,” said Yan Jianqiao, marketing chief at Shenzhen AEE Technology Co Ltd, which supplies high-performance drones for police in Europe and the US military. “It will become a liability for manufacturers otherwise.” —Reuters
China warns of widespread smog, Beijing issues second ‘red alert’

BEIJING — China warned residents across a large part of its north yesterday to prepare for a wave of choking smog arriving over the weekend, the worst of which is expected over Beijing, prompting the capital to issue its second ever “red alert”.

The National Meteorological Centre said the smog would stretch from Xian, home to the world-famous Terracotta Warriors, across part of central China, through Beijing and up into Shenyang and Harbin in China’s frigid northeast.

The air pollution would begin rolling in from about Saturday evening and last until Tuesday, with visibility in the worst affected areas such as Beijing likely to fall to less than 1 km (0.6 mile), it said.

The pollution index would probably exceed 500 in Beijing and parts of Hebei Province, which surrounds the capital, it said. Residents are encouraged to remain indoors at levels higher than 300, according to government guidelines.

The Beijing city government issued its first “red alert” last week following criticism that previous bouts of smog had failed to trigger the highest warning level.

Beijing’s second red alert comes after a landmark climate agreement was reached in Paris earlier this month, setting a course to move away from a fossil-fuel-driven economy within decades in a bid to arrest global warming.

A red alert is triggered when the government believes air quality will surpass a level of 200 on an air quality index that measures various pollutants for at least three days. The US government deems a level of more than 200 “very unhealthy”.

In Beijing, a red alert means around half the vehicles are removed from the roads with an odd-even license plate system enforced. Schools are recommended to close and outdoor construction is banned.

“I am very concerned about the pollution, I think the government needs to put more effort into solving this,” said Cheng Xianke, a 34-year-old Beijing software developer.

The Beijing environment bureau said the red alert would last from 7 am Saturday to midnight on Tuesday. The official Xinhua news agency said the smog would be worse than last week.

“Parts of north China will see the worst smog so far this year from Saturday,” it said, citing the National Meteorological Centre.

Beijing is not the only city to have a coloured alert system, and the restrictions rolled out in the most severe cases are broadly similar.

Beijing’s neighbouring city of Tianjin also aims to remove about half of all cars from the road in the event of a red alert.

Hebei’s environment protection bureau said it was issuing an orange alert, the second-highest, starting from Friday.

Schools will not close and there will be no vehicle restrictions but it recommends no outdoor activities and that people use public transport.

Shenyang said it was issuing a yellow alert, the third-highest level.

After decades of unbridled economic growth, China’s leadership has vowed to crack down on severe levels of air, water and soil pollution, including the heavy smog that often blankets major cities. City residents have previously criticized authorities for being too slow to issue red alerts for heavy smog.

Shanghai schools banned outdoor activities and authorities limited work at construction sites and factories earlier this week.

Environmental Protection Minister Chen Jining vowed this month to punish agencies and officials for any failure to implement a pollution emergency response plan quickly.—Reuters

India lowers 2015/16 growth estimate to 7-7.5pc

NEW DELHI — India slashed its full-year economic growth forecast yesterday, weighed down by weak global demand and a drought that has created risks for farm output, but reiterated its commitment to narrow the fiscal deficit to an eight-year low.

Asia’s third-largest economy is now expected to grow 7-7.5 per cent in the fiscal year ending in March 2016, the finance ministry said in its mid-year economic review, down from an estimate of 8.1-8.5 per cent announced in February.

The downgraded came after the economy grew 7.2 per cent in the first half of the 2015/16 fiscal year.

Still, if it meets the government’s estimate, the South Asian nation will remain the world’s fastest growing major economy as China’s GDP is struggling to maintain the near-7 per cent pace promised by its leaders.

Slowing demand for Indian merchandise in overseas markets has hit growth as exports, that account for about a fifth of India’s S2 trillion economy, have tumbled for the past 12 months.

“Declining exports seem to be predominantly determined by a decline in the world demand,” the report said. “Regardless of the causes, the effect has been a drag on growth.”

Growth in 2016/17 is unlikely to be significantly higher, the report said.

The finance ministry said it will stick to its budgeted fiscal deficit target of 3.9 per cent of GDP for the current fiscal year.

But the fiscal outlook for 2016/17 looks challenging and the government will need to reassess its commitment to cut the deficit further by 0.4 per cent of its GDP in the financial year that begins in April, the report cautioned.—Reuters

Okinawa to sue state early next year to stop US base transfer

NAHA — The Okinawa prefectural assembly yesterday passed a bill to file a lawsuit early next year to block the central government’s plan to relocate a key US military air base within the southern island prefecture.

The assembly also approved a supplementary budget of around 13 million yen ($106,750) to cover the costs of the lawsuit to prevent the transfer of the US Marine Corps Air Station Futenma from a crowded residential area in the city of Ginowan to the less populated Henoko coastal area of Nago.

The Okinawa government plans to bring the case to the Naha District Court in early January. With the passage of the bills, two lawsuits related to the relocation of the Futenma base, filed by the central and prefectural governments, are set to proceed simultaneously.

Hearings started on 2 December for the suit filed by the central government, which is seeking to overrule Okinawa Gov. Takeshi Onaga’s move to block landfill work for the relocation of the US base.

The central government lodged the suit last month after Onaga revoked his predecessor Hirokazu Nakaima’s permission for the landfill work and rejected the land minister’s instruction to reinstate the approval.

The Okinawa assembly in its suit will seek the retraction of the land minister’s decision to invalidate Onaga’s move.

Japan and the United States struck an accord in 1996 on the return of the Futenma air base to Japanese control.

The Japanese government subsequently decided to transfer the base to the Henoko coastal area of Nago but progress has been slow due to strong local opposition.

Onaga and many residents of Okinawa want the base moved outside the prefecture to reduce the burden from hosting the bulk of US forces in Japan.—Kyodo News
BRUSSELS — Centre-left governments should join forces to counter German influence in the European Union, Italy’s Prime Minister Matteo Renzi told socialist leaders on Thursday, according to a source who attended the meeting.

In the past months, Rome’s relations with the EU have soured over how to deal with Europe’s migration crisis and on new rules to increase the euro zone’s financial stability, issues where Germany has played a prominent role.

At a meeting of EU socialist leaders, hours before an EU summit began in Brussels, Renzi urged his colleagues to work together to offset German power in Europe, approving concerns about Berlin’s plans to import more Russian gas despite EU sanctions, the source said.

Renzi’s party has the biggest centre-left contingent in the European Parliament but has so far commanded little influence in the EU, where German-led conservative forces prevail.

In EU politics, national interests often take priority over political affiliations. France’s socialist president Francois Hollande, for example, has often found himself closer to German Chancellor Angela Merkel than to Renzi.

Hollande declined to attend the meeting of socialist parties. The German president of the European Parliament Martin Schulz was among the participants, together with the leaders of Austria, Portugal, Sweden, Malta and Slovakia. At the meeting, Renzi raised concerns about Berlin’s plans to double the capacity of the Nord Stream, the pipeline that brings gas to Germany through the Baltic Sea from Russia.

Renzi argued that the German plan was at odds with EU economic sanctions on Russia, which have already caused the collapse of plans for South Stream, a pipeline that was supposed to carry Russian gas to Southern Europe.

Italy has requested a debate at the EU summit on plans to extend economic sanctions against Russia to mid-July.

Russia has pressed its case for a deal to restore ties with Turkey for helping curb migration to Europe. A spokesman for President Muhammadu Buhari said on Thursday.

On Tuesday, Saudi Arabia announced a 34-nation Islamic military coalition, a move welcomed by the United States, which has been urging regional efforts to push back Islamic State, now in control of large parts of Iraq and Syria.

However, there has been confusion over the initiative, with some of the countries named as members of the coalition caught unawares by the announcement. — Reuters

Russia and Britain discuss avoiding airspace, naval ‘incidents’

MOSCOW — The Russian Defence Ministry said late on Thursday that senior British military officials had met with their Russian counterparts in Moscow to discuss how best to avoid incidents between the two countries’ armed forces at sea and in the air.

Britain has complained of increasingly having to scramble fighter jets to see off Russian bombers flying close to its airspace in episodes which at times have disrupted commercial flights. Russian warplanes which have sailed close to British territorial waters have also needed escorting away. — Reuters

Nigeria yet to decide on joining Saudi-led anti-Islamic State alliance

ABUJA — Nigeria has yet to decide whether to join a Saudi-led alliance to fight the militant group Islamic State, a spokesman for President Muhammadu Buhari said on Thursday.

On Tuesday, Saudi Arabia announced a 34-nation Islamic military coalition, a move welcomed by the United States, which has been urging greater regional efforts to push back Islamic State, now in control of large parts of Iraq and Syria.

However, there has been confusion over the initiative, with some of the countries named as members of the coalition caught unawares by the announcement. — Reuters

Israel and Turkey reach preliminary deal to restore ties

JERUSALEM — Israel and Turkey have reached a preliminary agreement to normalise relations, including the return of ambassadors to both countries, an Israeli official said on Thursday.

The deal was reached during a recent meeting in Switzerland between the incoming head of Israel’s Mossad intelligence agency, Yossi Cohen, Israeli envoy Joseph Ciechanover and Turkish foreign minister under-secretary Feridun Sinirlio glu, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

A spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declined comment. A Turkish official confirmed that talks had taken place but denied any agreement had been reached, adding that normalisation relations were continuing.

Under the preliminary agreement, Israel will establish a compensation fund to address the killing by Israeli marines of 10 Turks aboard a pro-Palestinian activist ship that tried to break Israel’s blockade of the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli official said Turkey would then drop all claims against Israel. — Reuters

California shooters’ ex-neighbour charged with supporting terrorists

WASHINGTON — A former neighbour accused of supplying assault rifles to the couple who massacred 14 people in San Bernardino, California, appeared in court on Thursday charged with conspiring to provide material support to terrorists.

Enrique Marquez, 24, a friend of Syed Rizwan Farook, 28, who launched the Islamic State-inspired rampage on 2 December, was arrested last month.

Marquez is accused of buying the firearms and giving them to the couple. He is charged with supporting the Islamic State and conspiring to provide material support to terrorists.

US Attorney Eugene Decker said the two men conspired to commit “vicious” assaults on targets including a California community college and a state highway during rush hour. — Reuters

Cambodia’s Central Bank issues silver coins to mark founding of ASEAN Community

PHNOM PENH — The National Bank of Cambodia (NBC), or Central Bank, has issued ASEAN Commemorative Coins to mark the establishment of the ASEAN Community on 31 December 2015, according to its statement yesterday.

“The NBC, together with the Royal Government of Cambodia, would like to express our congratulations to the ASEAN member states for successfully moving another step forward in the process of regional integration,” the statement said. “This significant achievement will be beneficial to all ASEAN nations.” — Xinhua
Why do our children need so much extra help with their school lessons?

Myo Myint

WHY do our children need so much extra help with their school lessons? Do people still ask this question, or has it become so commonplace that people do not bother with asking this question and simply do not bother with finding an answer, and do what they have to do? Do also teachers think about it? As everyone accepts that education is the basis for individual as well as national development, children from poor families are to be complacent with what is taught at school but parents who have the means seek help outside the school to supplement what is taught to their children at school. For many students, gradually what is taught in class is being replaced by what is taught outside the school as the main instruction.

Those who have an interest in the quality of education, the government, education authorities, school heads, teachers, parents and community leaders all should be greatly concerned that many schools are neither performing well nor giving serious attention to their main responsibilities of teaching and competent with one another. Teachers and schools are beginning to lose their influence on many students, and the confidence in and respect that students and their parents have for them are also rapidly waning. Many feel that this needs to be redressed quickly, because a large number of schools are competing with one another, day care centres for children of working parents, and not as centres of learning that provide knowledge, life skills, good citizenship and all-round development.

Without much profound thinking and research, one can identify many of the causes of the decline in the role of schools in the education of students, just by listing (without imitating the habits of parents). They point to unprincipled teachers as one of the main reasons. But before we discuss the harm being caused to this unscrupulous teachers (the ones who adorn themselves with huge diamond earrings, lockets and rings to show off their extra income, success and status in the growing loss in confidence in schools and teachers by parents and students, we need to acknowledge and express our profound appreciation to the hard work and personal sacrifices of many dedicated teachers who with worn-out slippers and shabby clothes unfailing turn up to teach their students (my former teachers toting the list). They make great efforts to get to their schools on time, rain or sunshine, using various means of cheap public transport, hitchhiking, riding rickety bicycles, or walking for hours. In ramshackle schools with few teaching aids, they use whatever skills they possess to disseminate what is presented in the textbooks to their students. In addition to their main responsibilities, these teachers are conscientious by education and local authorities into giving so called voluntary service ranging from welcoming dignitaries, serving as part of the audience at opening ceremonies, and taking part in local as well as national development activities such as elections, referenda and literacy campaigns, because they are quite happy to participate in.

What are some of the underlying reasons related to the general decline in teacher quality? One reason is the attitude of some teachers towards their profession. Unlike three or four decades ago, some became teachers not for the love of teaching but because there was no other job available. Some became teachers drawn by the extra income from tuitions than from the love for the profession. Some became teachers because they felt that the poor quality of the teaching materials, lack of attention to methodology, and inadequate facilities and teaching aids at training institutions. Another reason is the quality of instruction at teacher training institutions. Many of the instructors, knowingly or unknowingly, do not exert the amount of effort, interest and creativity needed in lesson preparation and training their students. In addition, poor management of teacher training institutions adds to the woes. Managing a teacher training institution, be they colleges, or universities, requires much ability, experience, interest, dynamism, creativity, dedication and the right qualifications, and at some teacher training institutions, administrators lack such qualities, and as a result both the institution and trainees suffer. Moreover, some leaders of departments, the heads, devote their time more to getting promotion, showing off their authority, with the incorrect idea that they are being promoted rather than to improving the quality of their departments, staff and trainees, thereby setting a bad example. They are taking it for granted that they are quite happy to participate in.

At the same time, one must say, with great sadness and anxiety that another reason for the deteriorating quality of teacher is the decline in the quality of the education of the teachers. The quality of the education of the teachers is not apparent because many of the teachers have poor qualifications, and at some teacher training institutions, the lack of attention to methodology, and inadequate facilities and teaching aids at training institutions. Another reason is the quality of instruction at teacher training institutions. Many of the instructors, knowingly or unknowingly, do not exert the amount of effort, interest and creativity needed in lesson preparation and training their students. In addition, poor management of teacher training institutions adds to the woes. Managing a teacher training institution, be they colleges, or universities, requires much ability, experience, interest, dynamism, creativity, dedication and the right qualifications, and at some teacher training institutions, administrators lack such qualities, and as a result both the institution and trainees suffer. Moreover, some leaders of departments, the heads, devote their time more to getting promotion, showing off their authority, with the incorrect idea that they are being promoted rather than to improving the quality of their departments, staff and trainees, thereby setting a bad example. They are taking it for granted that they are quite happy to participate in.

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Local police have filed charges against the man.

Myanmar’s oldest classical artist U San Hlaing has passed away at 93. He died at 7 pm on Tuesday, 15th December.

The venerated artist had just recently concluded a solo art exhibition that was seen as a success as celebrities from various fields, fellow artists, enthusiasts and tourists visited it and paid respects. The exhibition showcased the artist’s masterpiece paintings featuring Myanmar rural traditions, ancient pagodas and historical heritage, the life story of the Buddha and the struggle for independence in Myanmar.

Mr. Wayne Roger Keagle of Canberra, Australia, said that the paintings reflected the life styles, rural traditions, history and exciting images of Myanmar people. He added that he liked Myanmar paintings as they presented the truth concerning.

U San Hlaing was the son of U Khant and Daw Tint, born in Pyapon on 24 December 1923. He was the fifth of seven children. His parents were poor, he could not afford pencils, brushes, paper or paints and had to draw pictures on the ground with a stick in his childhood, according to sources who knew him.

He later studied the art of painting under Saya Hmartz, U Thein Nyunt, U Ngwe Giang, U Hla Maung Gyi, U Khin Ohn, U Ba Nyan, U Ba Zaw, U Ba Lone, U Tun Kywe, U Saw Maung and U Phone Lwin.

As a teenager, he earned a living from painting but had to do various jobs to support his parents.

He joined the Burma Defence Army during the Second World War and he was later awarded the second order of independence medal.

He later lived at 27th Street in downtown Yangon and became a professional artist by drawing paintings for advertisements, cinema posters, newspapers and periodicals. His first solo exhibition was held at Jubilee Hall in 1956.

He drew historic paintings and created a design for the state flag during the era of Burma Socialist Programme Party.

He was known for his honesty and humble life style and strong traditional painting techniques among fellow artists. His death is mourned by millions of Myanmar art lovers and patriots.—Maung Maung Htwe (MNA)
GENEVA — The number of people forcibly displaced worldwide is likely to have “far surpassed” a record 60 million this year, mainly driven by the Syrian war and other protracted conflicts, the United Nations said yesterday.

The estimated figure includes 20.2 million refugees fleeing wars and persecution, the most since 1992, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said in a report.

Nearly 2.5 million asylum seekers have requests pending, with Germany, Russia and the United States receiving the highest numbers of the nearly one million new claims lodged in the first half of the year, it said.

“2015 is on track to see worldwide forced displacement exceeding 60 million for the first time in more than the same time in 2014. Yemen, where civil war erupted in March, reported the highest number of newly uprooted people at 933,500.”

“Never has there been a greater need for tolerance, compassion and solidarity with people who have lost everything,” Antonio Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, said in a statement.

Developing countries bordering conflict zones still host the lion’s share of the refugees, the report said, warning about growing “resentment” and “politicisation of refugees”.

The report, based on official figures of as mid-year before the influx of refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean to Europe peaked in October, extrapolates from trends to estimate the global total.

Syria’s civil war that began in 2011 has been the main driver of mass displacement, with more than 4.2 million Syrian refugees having fled abroad and 7.6 million uprooted within their shattered homeland as of mid-year, UNHCR said.

Together, nationals of Syria and Ukraine, where a separatist rebellion in the east erupted in April 2014, accounted for half of the $300,000 people who became refugees in the first half of 2015, it said.

Violence in Afghanistan, Somalia and South Sudan sparked large refugee movements, as well as fighting in Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Iraq.

Voluntary returns — a measure of how many refugees can safely go back home — are at their lowest levels in more than three decades, with only 84,000 people returning by mid-year against 107,000 at the same time a year before, the UNHCR said.

Many refugees will live in exile for years to come, it said. “In effect, if you become a refugee today your chances of going home are lower than at any time in more than 30 years.”— Reuters

Big powers struggle to agree UN resolution ahead of Syria talks

UNITED NATIONS — The five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council were struggling to agree on a draft resolution endorsing an international bid to end the five-year-old civil war in Syria ahead of ministerial talks taking place in New York yesterday. The US ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, told reporters that the five veto-wielding members did not yet have an agreed draft to present to the 15-nation body for approval yesterday.

Origin, “Western powers hoped the council would rubber-stamp a resolution endorsing a two-year road map for talks between Syria’s government and opposition on a unity government expected to begin in January and eventual elections. Council diplomats said they hoped agreement on a text could be clinched.”

The road map, which also calls for a nationwide ceasefire that would not apply to Islamic State, Nasrud Front and some other militant groups, was worked out in two rounds of ministerial talks in Vienna. Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin suggested there were significant disagreements among the five powers.

“I’m not sure it’s going to happen because there are some unfortunately deliberate, or not deliberate, attempts to undercut the Vienna document and we don’t want to see that,” he told reporters without elaborating.— Reuters

UN Security Council adopts resolution to cut off Islamic State funding

UNITED NATIONS — The UN Security Council on Thursday unanimously adopted a resolution to cut off funds for the Islamic State the extremist group, in a firmer move by the international community to fight terrorism.

Measures such as asset freeze, travel ban and arms embargo will be taken against the Islamic State, also known as the ISIL and Daesh that controls large swathes of Syria and Iraq, including oil and gas fields, according to the resolution.

The resolution was adopted by the 15-nation UN body at an open meeting chaired by US Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew, whose country holds the rotating council presidency for December.

The resolution decided to “freeze without delay the funds and other financial assets or economic resources of the ISIL and Daesh and all persons or entities that own, control or exercise power over those financial assets or economic resources.”

The resolution noted that ISIL is a splinter group of Al-Qaeda and said that “terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality or civilization.”

The resolution also recognized that terrorism poses a threat to international peace and security and that countering this threat requires concerted efforts on national, regional and international levels on the basis of respect for international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

The Security Council reaffirmed that “terrorism and should not be associated with any religion, nationality or civilization,” the resolution said.

The resolution called upon member states to move vigorously and decisively to cut the flows of funds and other financial assets and economic resources to individuals and entities on the ISIL (Daesh) & Al-Qaida Sanctions List, while condemning the frequent, recent terrorist attacks perpetrated by ISIL around the world resulting in numerous casualties.

“The Security Council calls upon member states to move vigorously and decisively to cut the flows of funds and other financial assets and economic resources to individuals and entities on the ISIL (Daesh) & Al-Qaida Sanctions List, while condemning the frequent, recent terrorist attacks perpetrated by ISIL around the world resulting in numerous casualties.”

The UN Security Council unanimously adopting a resolution to cut off funds for the Islamic State the extremist group, in a firmer move by the international community to fight terrorism, in UN headquarters in New York, on 17 December. Photo: Xinhua

A Syrian refugee holding a baby swims towards the Greek island of Lesbos, on 12 September. Photo: Reuters

The UN Security Council unanimously adopting a resolution to cut off funds for the Islamic State the extremist group, in a firmer move by the international community to fight terrorism, in UN headquarters in New York, on 17 December. Photo: Xinhua

The UN Security Council unanimously adopting a resolution to cut off funds for the Islamic State the extremist group, in a firmer move by the international community to fight terrorism, in UN headquarters in New York, on 17 December. Photo: Xinhua

Terrorist have forged destructive and very profitable links with drug and criminal networks — among others, said Ban. “And they abuse charitable causes to trick individuals to contribute. They are war criminals who can be so successful in obtaining resources for their heinous acts.”

“Terrorists continue to adapt their tactics and diversify their funding sources,” the secretary-general said. “Today, Daesh runs a multi-million dollar economy in territories under its control.”— Xinhua

A Syrian refugee holding a baby swims towards the Greek island of Lesbos, on 12 September. Photo: Reuters

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A general view of Shanghai’s financial district of Pudong is seen from the top of the Shanghai Tower, which is undergoing construction, on 2 August. Photo: Reuters

China’s modest housing recovery continues in Nov, more stimulus likely

BEIJING — China’s home prices rose for the second straight month in November in on-year terms, signalling further stabilisation in the country’s largest urban housing markets, although oversupply continues to plague smaller cities.

Average new home prices rose 0.9 per cent in November from a year earlier, Reuters calculated from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) data released on Friday, continuing October’s 0.1 per cent rise.

The two months of on-year increases follow 13 consecutive months of declines, providing tentative signs of an improving property market and easing fears of a sharper slowdown in the broad economy, which is heading for its weakest growth in 25 years this year.

Analysts say the mild recovery is likely to continue in 2016 with the government expected to unveil more measures to reduce high inventories in small- and medium-sized cities.

“Top policymakers have made it clear that the next step will be focussed on destocking in the housing market. We think the policy stance will be more supportive,” said Xia Dan, property analyst at Bank of Communications in Shanghai.

Most of China’s unsold homes are in third- and fourth-tier cities, which have been hit by emigration to larger centres and where cash-strapped local governments rely on land revenues as their main income. Some analysts estimate it could take at least two years to clear the glut.

Chinese leaders said at Monday’s Politburo meeting that the government will take more steps next year to tackle property inventories, including helping migrant workers to buy homes in cities.

The NBS data showed previous government policies continued to gain traction, with on-month price rises seen in 33 of 70 major cities tracked by the NBS, up from 27 in October.

Following a year-long slump, China’s home sales and prices have increased in bigger cities over recent months, helped by a barrage of government measures, including reduced downpayments for home buyers and scrapping home purchase restrictions.

A Reuters poll shows China’s home prices are expected to rise 2.0 per cent in 2016 from a year before, with the government likely to unveil more measures to support the struggling sector.

Analysts expect local governments will roll out more detailed stimulus measures, including financial and interest subsidies, tax reduction and downpayment cuts, to encourage rural residents to buy homes in small cities.

Already, local authorities in central Henan Province vowed to allocate at least 300 million yuan ($31.06 million) annually to encourage farmers to buy first home by cutting transaction fees, the official Xinhua news service reported last month.

China’s central bank said in a working paper on Wednesday that it would take more than three quarters for improved sales to be felt in property investment, with stabilisation likely in the second half of 2016.

Property investment, a crucial driver of the economy, grew 1.3 per cent in the first 11 months of 2015 from a year earlier, slowing from an increase of 2.0 per cent in January-October, official data showed on Saturday, the lowest rate since early 2009.—Reuters

Apple to launch Apple Pay in China, take on Alibaba, Tencent

SHANGHAI — Apple Inc (AAPL.O) said it will launch its payment service in China as soon as 2016, pitting it against entrenched Chinese rivals Alibaba Group Holding (BABA.N) and Tencent Holdings (0700.HK).

Apple will partner with China’s main bank card and payment firm UnionPay, a state-controlled consortium that has a monopoly on all yuan payment cards issued and used in the country.

The move will see Apple Pay take on Tencent’s WeChat Payment and Alipay, the crown jewel of ecommerce king Alibaba’s affiliate Ant Financial ANTFIN.UL, the top player in China’s fast-growing online payments market.

Eddy Cue, Apple’s senior vice president of Internet software and services, said the tie-up with UnionPay and leading local banks would help Apple Pay give Chinese shoppers a “convenient, private and secure payment” option.

“China is an extremely important market for Apple,” he said.

China, the world’s second-largest economy, is one of Apple’s most important markets for iPhone and tablet sales, but until now the firm has been kept out of its online payments market.

Online transactions are booming in China, boosted by the proliferation of hundreds of millions of smartphones that are being used for everything from paying for taxis and meals to buying goods at High Street stores.

In July, China proposed regulations to shake up the online payment services sector, where companies which own payment systems can reap huge profits by charging transaction fees.

UnionPay said in a statement on Friday it also planned to tie up with Samsung Electronics Co Ltd’s (005930.KS) payment system, Samsung Pay, which was launched earlier this year.—Reuters

Yelp, OpenTable part ways amid heightened competition

SAN FRANCISCO — Review site Yelp Inc and restaurant reservation service OpenTable have quietly ended a long-running partnership, the companies confirmed on Thursday, as the onetime allies increasingly eye each other’s businesses.

The companies parted ways in April under mounting competition, with OpenTable facing new rivals to its reservation business and Yelp dogged with questions about stalling growth. Both companies are trying to take charge of the entire customer experience, said analyst Ben Barajar of Creative Strategies.

“They have to share that customer with someone else, it threatens their long-term viability,” he said.

The companies halted a deal that since 2010 had allowed users to make OpenTable reservations through Yelp, home to a trove of reviews from diners.

The move, long speculated by industry watchdogs, underscores the growing rivalry between the companies, said Kerry Rice, a senior analyst at Needham & Company.

“We expect two companies to be more head-to-head competitors,” he said.

While the deal was not a big revenue source for either company, Yelp drove traffic to OpenTable, a former OpenTable employee said. But business has been hummed, OpenTable spokesperson Lisa Singh wrote in an email.

“This did not have a material impact on our business or the millions of diners who find and book great restaurants on OpenTable,” she said.

Yelp touted its progress in reservations. "We've been excited about the more than 18,000 restaurants that have chosen Yelp’s reservation products for their reach, flexibility and affordability,” a Yelp spokeswoman said in a statement. The spokeswoman confirmed OpenTable paid Yelp for referrals.

But Yelp had the standard referral relationship with OpenTable that they have with others, and it was immaterial to Yelp," she said. While OpenTable is best known for bookings and Yelp for reviews, the companies have gradually encroached on each other’s territory.

OpenTable, which was acquired by Priceline Group Inc last year, has expanded its reviews. And Yelp in 2013 acquired rival reservation firm SeatMe, which offers restaurants similar services at a lower price, sparking speculation that the deal with OpenTable was in jeopardy.—Reuters
Panel blasts UN over handling of Central Africa peacekeeper abuse

UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations and its agencies grossly mishandled allegations of child sexual abuse by international peacekeepers in the Central African Republic, an independent review panel said in a report released on Thursday.

At least 13 French soldiers, two from Equatorial Guinea and three Chadian troops were implicated in the alleged abuse of children between December 2013 and June 2014, according to a UN report leaked in April. The peacekeepers were not under United Nations command at the time, but the UN has come under fire for its handling of the allegations, including its investigation of the UN official who alerted French authorities to the charges.

The UN only began speaking openly about the year-old charges after media organisations began reporting on them in April. At that point, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon ordered an independent investigation of the UN treatment of the allegations.

In its findings, the three-member review panel harshly criticised the way the UN and its agencies dealt with the alleged abuse, calling it “seriously flawed” and a “gross institutional failure.” It said three senior UN officials had abused their authority by failing to take action.

Ban said he accepted the report’s findings.

“The report depicts a United Nations that failed to respond meaningfully when faced with information about reprehensible crimes against vulnerable children,” he said. “I express my profound regret that these children were betrayed by the very people sent to protect them.”

US Ambassador Samantha Power said in a statement that the report painted a “troubling picture of a woefully inadequate response by the UN to credible allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. We are horrified by the panel’s findings of inaction around these crimes.”

British Ambassador Matthew Rycroft said on Twitter that the “UN has failed to protect most vulnerable — this is unacceptable.”

The panel said investigations into sexual abuse by peacekeepers, whether or not those troops have a UN mandate, is obligatory because such actions can constitute a “serious human rights violation.”

But the allegations were “passed from desk to desk, inbox to inbox, across multiple UN offices, with no one willing to take responsibility.” The panel was particularly harsh about the head of the Human Rights and Justice Section (HRJS) of the UN mission and the head of the mission itself, saying they had abused their authority. Neither of them was available for comment, and it was not immediately clear where they were.

“HRJS obscured the allegations by only reporting them in the context of broad, thematic reports that also included violations by other international troops,” the panel said. — Reuters

MYANMAR DAEWOO LIMITED

Notice Of Members Voluntary Winding Up Under Section 203 (2)

The following Special Resolutions were unanimously passed at the Extraordinary General Meeting of the shareholders of MYANMAR DAEWOO LIMITED held at 11:00 a.m 18 December 2015 required under Section 203 (2) of the Myanmar Companies Act:-

Special Resolution No.1

Resolved that the Company be wound up as “Members’ Voluntary Winding Up” with effect from December 18, 2015.

Special Resolution No.2

Resolved that U Maung Maung Aung, C.P.A, be hereby appointed as Liquidator of the Company with effect from December 18, 2015, for the purpose of such winding up and is authorized to carry on the business of the Company to such extent and for such period as may be necessary only for the beneficial winding up thereof and is granted such other powers as may be deemed fit and proper and to finally wind up the Company.

THE REPUBLIC OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR

MINISTRY OF ENERGY

MYANMAR OIL AND GAS ENTERPRISE

(INVITATION FOR OPEN TENDER)

(17/2015)

Open tenders are invited for supply of the following respective items in United States Dollars.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr.No</th>
<th>Tender No</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>IFB-059/15-16</td>
<td>Spares for HDD Rig Model 11-046 (HK 250 T) (3 Items)</td>
<td>USS</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>IFB-060/15-16</td>
<td>Spares for ZJ 70L SR - 2 Rig (5) Items</td>
<td>USS</td>
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<tr>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>IFB-061/15-16</td>
<td>Spares for Niigata Transmission and Reduction Gear Box Ex TM 3500 Drilling Rig (55) Items</td>
<td>USS</td>
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Tender Closing Date & Time - 11-1-2016, 16:30 Hr

Tender Document shall be available during office hours commencing from 16th December, 2015 at the Finance Department, Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, No(44) Complex, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar.

Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise
Ph: +95 67 - 411097 / 411206
Sri Lanka aims to expand air links to China to attract more tourists

COLOMBO — Sri Lanka is targeting more Chinese airlines to arrive in the island nation as the government looks to further expand its tourism industry next year, Senior Advisor to the Tourism Minister, Felix Sinimal Rodrigo said.

"Sri Lanka is an island which means tourists can only reach here by air transport. Establishing strong air links will boost our tourism industry," Rodrigo told Xinhua in an exclusive interview.

Presently the government is negotiating with the Chinese government to expand air links between the two countries, said Rodrigo. Sri Lanka’s national airline carrier, Sri Lankan Airlines is operating three weekly flights between the two countries.

“However we should have more Chinese airlines coming here. China is a big place. We want at least four to five more Chinese airlines,” Rodrigo noted.

Tourism had become the number one foreign exchange earner in Sri Lanka as the Chinese currency, Renminbi, had become the most used foreign currency, said Rodrigo.

"The export of Sri Lanka’s traditional products such as Ceylon Tea and Coconut is going down. Now we rely on tourism," Rodrigo said.

The island nation’s tourism industry has seen an upward trend since the end of the civil war in May 2009. This year Sri Lanka has been able to attract 200,000 Chinese tourists with the government maintaining that cooperation between China and Sri Lanka had recently witnessed “a very big development.”

“In 2016, we want to double the number of tourists. In the coming three years, Sri Lanka is going to depend on tourism," Rodrigo said adding that Sri Lanka’s target of 2 million tourists for this year has almost been achieved as 1.9 million tourists have already visited the country. The Sri Lanka government hopes to attract at least 3 million tourists next year and it has set a target of 4 million by 2020.—Xinhua

After half a century, US and Cuba to resume scheduled flights

WASHINGTON — The United States and Cuba have agreed to restore scheduled commercial airline service for the first time in more than five decades in a deal allowing 110 round-trip flights a day between the former Cold War foes.

Announced a year to the day after the two countries embarked on a process of normalizing ties, the latest accord will not go into effect immediately but should eventually increase tourism and business on the communist-ruled island.

Under the pact, US airlines will be able to sell tickets on their websites for flights to Cuba but they must first apply for permission from US regulators to fly specific routes. Charter flights operated by US carriers already connect the countries.

The United States and Cuba have agreed to allow 110 round-trip flights on US airlines to Cuba per day, according to Thomas Engle, deputy assistant secretary for transportation affairs at the US State Department.

That includes 20 flights to Havana and 10 to each of the other nine international airports in Cuba, he said, adding that no date has been set for final signing of the aviation pact but that nothing was expected to derail it.

There will likely be a 60- to 90-day process during which US-based air carriers will submit proposed routes, suggesting scheduled flights would not begin until the first few months of 2016 at the earliest.

The decision to restore ties, made by US President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro a year ago, in part reflected Washington’s judgment that its policy of isolating Havana politically, economically and diplomatically had failed.

While US officials still criticize Cuba for human rights, they now believe promoting political and other freedoms is more likely to be achieved through engagement.

Although the agreement will eventually make it easier to travel back and forth between the countries, the US ban on general tourism to the Caribbean island remains in force.

US travellers still must meet at least one of 12 criteria to visit, such as visiting family in Cuba or taking part in educational tours or journalistic activity.—Reuters

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Donnie Yen, Mike Tyson team up for new kung fu movie

HONG KONG — Actor Donnie Yen says boxer Mike Tyson was “very easy to work with” on the set of “Ip Man 3,” a kung fu movie inspired by the life of Bruce Lee’s trainer.

The movie is a mash up of east-meets-west — Tyson’s character tries to take over the city, prompting Yen’s kung fu master character to take a stand. “Working with Mike Tyson has been a pleasure and an honor. First of all I’m his boxing fan, a big fan,” Yen said at an event promoting the film. “He’s actually very professional and very easy to work with and we had a really good time.” — Reuters

It’s challenge to be role model: Kendrick Lamar

LONDON — Rapper Kendrick Lamar says he struggles to deal with the “power” of being a role model to so many people.

The 28-year-old recording artist knows he has been “chosen” as someone for young people to look up to but admits he is fearful of the “power” and responsibility that comes along with it, reported Female First.

“I know I’m chosen. I know I’m a favourite. I know in my heart there’s a whole other energy and leadership side of me that I have probably run from my whole life. How much power do I want? How much can I handle? That’s the question I keep asking myself.

“Cause when you are a voice for the youth, nothing can stop you. The youth is what changes things. Can I lead that? Should I? I get confused because people are championing me to be that vocal point and it’s a challenge for me to be that because I have some fear of that type of power,” he said.—PTI

Gigi Hadid to design collection for Tommy Hilfiger

LONDON — Supermodel Gigi Hadid is joining forces with top fashion designer Tommy Hilfiger to create her own clothing line.

The 20-year-old beauty had a breakout 2015, including her first gig as a Victoria’s Secret angel, and her memorable appearance at Hilfiger’s New York Fashion Week show in September, when she made a splash on the catwalk in her Caribbean-inspired bikini.

Now, Hadid is reuniting with Hilfiger to create Gigi by Tommy Hilfiger, which will incorporate both their personal style sense.

“Global ambassadorships are a bit overused and not too exciting. ‘Hello.’” — PTI

Going, going, gone; Adele US concert tickets sell in minutes

NEW YORK — Tickets for Adele’s first concert tour of North America in five years sold out within minutes for venues on the US East Coast on Thursday, leaving thousands of fans empty-handed and venting their frustration on social media.

The British singer’s 56-date tour, announced earlier this week, follows record-breaking sales of 5.2 million units in the United States alone of her new album, “25.” Fans reported getting stuck for 45 minutes or more on ticketing websites, only to find that seats were sold out for major cities on the tour that starts in July in St. Paul, Minnesota and ends in Mexico City on November 15.

Adele’s representatives said tickets for some shows were going on sale at 10 am local time in the relevant cities, but otherwise declined to comment.

Hashtags #adeletickets and #adelesoldout trended on Twitter, with fans posting memes, messages and GIFs inspired by the Grammy Award-winning singer’s lyrics and music video.

“He’s actually very professional but also culturally, it’s pretty cool – he’s a fun person to be with,” said Jake Gyllenhaal at the Dubai International Film Festival, in a twist on the lyrics to Adele’s hit single “Hello.”

Jake Gyllenhaal honoured at Dubai film festival

DUBAI — Hollywood actor Jake Gyllenhaal has been honoured at the Dubai International Film Festival with Variety Magazine’s International Star of the Year award.

“To be acknowledged in any way for what you do is always really lovely,” the “Southpaw” and “Everest” actor said. “And to be on the other side of the world having been acknowledged by not only by the international film community but also culturally, it’s pretty interesting thinking that people even know who I am over here, it’s amazing.” — Reuters

Disney’s ‘Star Wars’ rakes in $14.1 million in opening day sales

LOS ANGELES — Walt Disney Co’s “Star Wars: The Force Awakens,” billed as the biggest movie release of the year, raked in $14.1 million in ticket sales on its opening day in some international markets.

The movie opened at a number of European markets, including France, Italy, Sweden and Belgium, on Thursday.

“Star Wars is expected to haul in between $180 million and $223 million in the United States and Canada from its Thursday night debut through Sunday, according to experts.” — Reuters

Photo: Reuters

Former heavyweight boxing world champion Mike Tyson and Hong Kong actor Donnie Yen arrive at the 18th Shanghai International Film Festival on June 13. PHOTO: REUTERS

Gigi Hadid to design collection for Tommy Hilfiger

PHOTO: REUTERS

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Hashtags #adeletickets and #adelesoldout trended on Twitter, with fans posting memes, messages and GIFs inspired by the Grammy Award-winning singer’s lyrics and music video. “Hello.” — PTI

Jake Gyllenhaal honoured at Dubai film festival

PHOTO: REUTERS

Disney’s ‘Star Wars’ rakes in $14.1 million in opening day sales
Mother Teresa to be made Catholic saint in September

NEW YORK — Facebook Inc is offering employees at its Silicon Valley headquarters at least $30,000 to move closer to the office, a reflection of the challenges many tech companies face in the increasingly expensive and congested San Francisco Bay area.

“A lot of local families are going to get hurt,” said John Lottii, chief executive officer of Silicon Valley on private buses and often displace lower-income residents.

But Silicon Valley has a housing affordability crisis of its own, and if Facebook’s programme gains traction it could further accelerate the gentrification of nearby communities, especially a high-income city of East Palo Alto.

“A lot of local families are going to get hurt,” said John Lottii, chief executive officer of Silicon Valley on private buses and often displace lower-income residents.

Facebook says the programme is not about social engineering, but allowing employees to move closer to work without encroaching on the existing community.

Facebook’s efforts, along with similar programmes at some other technology companies including investment management technology company Addepar, have offered employees the option to pay a one-off payment of $15,000 or more for housing costs.

Facebook’s spokesman said the programme aims to help people with families to support themselves and their families.

Cynics suggest the company might be looking to encourage employees to spend more time in the office while also cutting the cost of its luxury bus service, whose drivers recently unionized.

For Mark Shim, an engineer who worked at Addepar, living across the street from the Mountain View-based company earned him a $300-a-month bonus. But the money, which was a taxed benefit, wasn’t the reason behind his housing decision.

“When I live closer to work, I’m less worried about leaving at an exact time, and if you’re in the middle of solving a cool problem, you’ll spend the extra time to finish that up,” said Shim, who had worked at Addepar, a Mountain View-based company.

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Lissa Minkin, vice president of people at Addepar, said the perk was designed to help employees spend more time on personal interests or with their families.

“The program is not about social engineering, but allowing employees to move closer to work without encroaching on the existing community,” said Minkin, who had worked at Addepar, a Mountain View-based company.

Not having a long commute makes a huge positive impact on maintaining a healthy work-life balance,” she said.

Tech workers say the commute is getting worse. What would have been a one-hour commute each way three years ago has stretched to 90 minutes or more as the tech economy has boomed and more cars hit the road.

San Francisco-area drivers spend more time in gridlock than those of any city other than Washington, DC, and Los Angeles, according to traffic data service Inrix. Still, plenty of young techies are willing to endure it.

Take Nilesh Patel, a single technology worker who commutes from San Francisco to a large company about 40 miles (64 km) away so he can cultivate his rich social life in the city.

“I didn’t want to move into one of those depressing bachelor complexes,” he said about the generic Silicon Valley apartment buildings that often house people like him. Even for those who might consider a more suburban lifestyle, $10,000 doesn’t necessarily go very far in a city like Menlo Park, where the average rental is $3,600 a month, according to data from online real estate company Trulia.

Facebook puts a price on suburban living for employees
Suarez grabs hat-trick as Barcelona stroll into final

YOKOHAMA — Barcelona’s Luis Suarez got a hat-trick, including an exquisite second goal, as they strode into the Club World Cup final with a 3-0 win over Asian champions Guangzhou Evergrande on Thursday.

The Chinese side gave the European champions a couple of scares in the first half but they were utterly outclassed by the end of a match that often resembled an attack-versus-defence training session.

Zou Zheng, also suffered a horrific injury in the first half, appearing to break his leg as he fell awkwardly to the clear distress of his Guangzhou team mates.

Even without Lionel Messi, who was taken ill just hours before the game, and the injured Neymar, Barca enjoyed 75 percent of possession as they claimed a place in the final against South American champions River Plate.

Barca needed 39 minutes to break down the Guangzhou defence, Suarez pouncing to tuck in the rebound after goalkeeper Li Shan failed to hold Ivan Rakitic’s long-range drive.

The game was settled as a contest after 49 minutes when Andres Iniesta sent a beautifully-weighted pass into the area and Suarez caught it on his chest before volleying past Li in one movement.

The Uruguayan forward completed his hat-trick by converting a penalty in the 67th minute as Barca fired an ominous warning to the 15,000 Argentines who have made the trip to support River Plate.

“We played a very serious, very sharp game against a complicated opponent,” said Barca coach Luis Enrique.

“These games against opponents you do not usually meet always generate doubts, especially as they have Brazilian players with quality, and we have played a really good game.”

Barca’s dominance was almost embarrassing as they stroked the ball effortlessly around and not even Guangzhou’s contingent of three Brazilian players could stop them.

It was the Chinese team’s first defeat in 26 games under coach Luiz Felipe Scolari who took over in June. Scolari was returning to the stadium where he led Brazil to their fifth world title in 2002, although this time he was in search of redemption after last year’s 7-1 World Cup semi-final defeat to Germany on home soil in his second stint in charge.

“I want to thank the players for this fantastic year they have had,” Scolari told reporters. “Losing 3-0 to Barcelona is no different to what other big clubs have suffered.”

— Reuters

Jose Mourinho exit leaves Sunderland’s Allardyce in the dark

LONDON — Jose Mourinho’s sacking by Chelsea has left Sunderland manager Sam Allardyce uncertain what to expect from the struggling champions when his team visit Stamford Bridge on Saturday.

Allardyce was given his marching orders on Thursday after a dreadful run of results have left the club hovering a point above the Premier League relegation zone in 16th place, three points above Sunderland in 19th.

Chelsea attributed the dismissal to a “palpable discord” between the Portuguese and the players, and while Allardyce expects a reaction from the team, he is also intrigued by how the reaction from the fans might affect matters on the pitch.

“I’m not sure whether it’ll make my job harder or not to be honest,” Allardyce told the British media.

“Everybody expects a reaction when a manager gets sacked, and sometimes there is and sometimes there isn’t.”

“I always think it’s quite a sad state of affairs when a team actually plays better when their manager has been sacked.”

“I find it irresponsible from a players’ point of view, especially when they come out after the game and say: ‘We’ve done that for the old manager’.

“I think there will be a reaction from their players but also think what happens with the crowd could be interesting.”

Allardyce knows that inflicting a 10th Premier League defeat of the season on Chelsea could make a crucial difference to Sunderland’s campaign.

“It’s fair to say that if we were to win, it would put a huge amount of pressure on Chelsea because we’d end up on 15 points, the same as they are,” he said.

“That would take them further down the league and it would be a huge success for us. Their players haven’t seen this before. They have had huge pressure at the top but the pressure down here is different.”

— Reuters

Investigation commission formed to probe heavy machinery entering Kampaiti

AN investigation commission has been formed to probe into the issue of heavy machinery entering Myanmar through Kampaiti in the border area in Kachin State.

The commission, comprising four members, is led by the Union Minister for Environmental Conservation and Forestry.—Myanmar News Agency

Fustal coach training to be opened in Yangon

Ko Moe

A FUTSAL coach training course will be opened in Yangon this February. The training has been jointly organised by the Myanmar Football Federation and the Asia Football Federation.

The course will include theoretical and practical sessions as well as training by the Asia Football Federation. Upon opening, the course will be known as the Fustal Level 1 Coaching Course 2016.

Trainees must be 18 years of age and older, pass a fitness test and must attend every lesson in order to graduate.

Trainees who wish to attend the course must inform the Myanmar Football Federation not later than 9 January.