14 violent attackers, 17 terrorist trainees arrested in Maungtaw

SEVENTEEN people suspected of being violent attackers were arrested as they were allegedly preparing to attack the government troops, which are conducting their area clearance campaign in Maungtaw Township, in the northern Rakhine State.

While undertaking the clearance operation in Myazin village at about 7:45am, the combined team of the government troops and the border guard police found 14 people armed with wooden clubs and machetes at the home of Adul Harmi.

The armed men are Adul Harmi, Marmat Tarlaung, Marbarlaung, Ali Ruma, Saudu Armaung, Bawyi Husaung, Nu Arlaung, Bawshi Ahmed, Mutstar Kama, Idris, Sweyaw Tusaung, Shaw Ahli, Marmad Islam, Arbu Arlaung and Nu Husaung. The seized weapons include five machetes three-feet in length, eight knives about 18-inches long, and one three-and-half-foot long wooden club.

Similarly, the team, acting on a tip-off, conducted its clearance operation in Yedwinkyun village in Maungtaw Township yesterday and arrested 17 suspected attackers who had recently completed the terrorist training, authorities said.

They are Muhi Eulah, Mummad Salam (son of Barsarmyar), Mummad Saulein, Zaw Phaw Ahlaung, Ramauk Dullah, Artu Eulilah, Rawphi, Swe Thuram, Mummad Salam (son of Mummad Siti), Abu Husaung, Mawlawi Peyu Armauk, Duodena Tamaw, Mikarsein, Rawshi Tarmauk (son of Phwezar Maak).

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Violent attackers set fire to 60 homes

ABOUT 60 houses in a village in Maungtaw Township, which were in evidence at the deadly attacks on the border outposts by the violent armed aggressors on 9th October, were torched by the attackers on 13th November.

During clearance operation on 13th November, the combined team comprising the government troops and the border guard police discovered the arson attack that destroyed 60 houses in Darzyar village.

The attempt is aimed at sowing a seed of misunderstanding between the government troops and the people and international communities, and tarnishing the image of the troops, officials said. — Myawady

A Buddha monk takes a photo of the moon with his mobile phone at Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon last night. The full moon last night is called a super moon, meaning that the moon last night appears to be larger because of its closer proximity to the earth. This full moon will be not only the closest and brightest supermoon of 2016 but also the largest since 1948. PHOTO: PAECE KAWAR

SEE PAGE 2

Myanmar’s river catfish to penetrate Russia’s market

Mandalay’s famed U Bein Bridge to be renovated next month
C-in-C of Defence Services concludes working visit to Italy

A Myanmar military delegation led by Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing arrived back Yangon yesterday after participating in the European Union Military Committee-EUMC Meeting. The goodwill delegation was seen off at the Fiumicino International Airport in Rome, Italy, on 13 November by Myanmar Ambassador to Italy U Myint Naung and officials.

The Senior General and party arrived at Yangon International Airport via Thailand at 8.50 am yesterday. They were welcomed at the airport by Adjutant-General Lt-Gen Hsan Oo, Quartermaster-General Lt-Gen Nyo Saw, Yangon Region Command Commander Maj-Gen Myo Zaw Thein and senior military officers. —Myanmar News Agency

Mandalay’s famed U Bein Bridge to be renovated next month

WITH the advice of the Myanmar Architect Council, U Bein Bridge, which is a major tourist draw in Mandalay, will be renovated starting next month, said U Myo Thit, Mandalay Region Minister for Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation. The two German experts invited by the MAC recently arrived in Myanmar to take part in the renovation project. According to the new scheme, old wood will be replaced with new teak-wood, which will be done without damaging the bridge’s original features, he said.

U Myo Thit explained the suspension of the renovation of the bridge in the past, saying that the authorities temporarily stopped the repair of the bridge while they were waiting for suggestions from the Myanmar Architect Council for the project.

In cooperation with the Department of Archaeology and the National Museum (Mandalay), the project will be implemented with the use of funds contributed by the Myanmar Teak Wood Company.

Located in Amarapura Township in Mandalay Region, the 1.2 kilometer-long U Bein Bridge was built in the 1850s over the Taungthaman Lake using traditional methods. It has become one of the most scenic places in Amarapura, with beautiful landscapes and authentic social life of the residents. —Aung Thant Khaung

Myanmar to share cane ball technique with Philippines

THE MYANMAR Cane Ball Federation is arranging to provide both financial and technical assistance to the Philippines next month with the aim of developing Chinlone, a traditional sport of Myanmar which was first introduced internationally at the 27th Southeast Asian Games in 2013.

The assistance aims to promote the continuous participation of neighbouring countries in Chinlone contests in the Southeast Asian Games, a regional multi-sport competition. The federation plans to leave for the Philippines on 12 December and has already shared playing techniques with Laos as well as Cambodia between 7 and 11 November, MCBF’s General Secretary U Ko Ko Aung said. This is part of the federation’s efforts for successfully holding traditional sports at the 29th SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia next August.

At least five countries will be granted to take part in the cane ball competition. U Kyaw Lin Oo, a sports fan, said that he warmly welcomes the federation’s efforts to promote the role of traditional sports in foreign countries. —Myitmakha News Agency
Military’s information team refutes fabrication about massive destruction in Rakhine

THE True News Information Team of Defence Services refuted the fabrications of the Bangkok Post and the RB News Website that said 430 houses, most of which are farm huts, including 245 houses in Kyetopyin Village and about 100 houses in Warpat Village, were burnt down. In addition, the team at Defence Services that vets media allegations also refuted statements that about 700 houses in Daygisar Village were damaged and about 80 people killed in a firefight on 12 November.

It has been discovered by the Union Government that there were six villages torched by members of the violent attackers in northern Rakhine, but some media members have accused government troops of arson. As a result of the terrorists’ violence act, a total of 105 houses in Warpat Village, five houses in Kyetopyin Village, three shops in Ngakhuya Village, three empty police posts in Myintlut Village, a dormitory for teachers at the middle school in Myintlut West Village, 60 houses in Dargyisar Village, 50 houses in Owaungs Village, 50 houses in Pwintphyuchaung Village, totaling only 227 buildings were burnt down. Several News Media including the military owned Myanwady Newspaper released news about the fighting on 12 November on the same day and next day issues. In addition, there were only nine fightings, 61 arrests, 10 seizures of weapons and ammunition, 9 shootings to detain, three attacks, three roadside bomb attacks leading to the death of 69 violent attackers and the arrest of 234 violent attackers between 9 to 14 November. The suspects were handed over to the Myanmar Police Force for necessary interrogation, 29 of whom have been sentenced in accordance with the law and 23 have been released as they did not related with the violent attacks.

In the area clearance operations, seven soldiers including one column commander sacrificed their lives for the country and five got injuries, and 10 police sacrificed their lives for the country and six were injured in the operations.

The measures are being taken to scrutinize the number of houses covered by The Bangkok Post in its 14 November issue and posted by RB News Website whether it was correct or not, the military information team will timely release the information related to the houses destroyed by fire in villages.

The military’s information team is releasing information related to area clearance operations by the government troops in Maung-taw for guarding the country’s sovereignty, for restoration law and order and community peace, —Tatmadaw True News Information Team

Myanmar celebrates Tazaungmon

Shwedagon was crowded with devotees on Full Moon of Tazaungmon, (Samaraphala Day). Buddhist devotees and local residents performed meritorious deeds on the Full Moon of Tazaungmon in townships of Yangon Region. They offered Matho robes to Buddha images at famous pagodas and monasteries, donated Kathina robes to Buddhist monks, held lighting festivals and paid respect to senior citizens. Photo: MNA

Sea-water dikes essential for agriculture in coastal areas on Rakhine State

Maung Sein Lwin

RAKHINE State Irrigation and Water Resources Management Department is planning to start maintenance work on Chanpyintar Sea-water Dike as soon as possible as we have been permitted to do so by the Rakhine State Government. Funds for the work have also been allocated but we have to work according to the security situation as it is located at the border. We requested the government to do maintenance of the dike because it is very important for us,” Daw Nwe Bunaw, a farmer in Yedwingyan Village said.
Discussion with my uncle (Ba Gyi) about the law

Maung U Pa De

Being a tenderfoot lawyer, I had to call on my uncle who is a retired magistrate to discuss the telecommunications law that is very popular among the public these days. I intend to get legal expertise from a veteran like Ba Gyi.

Neo-lawyer: Ba Gyi, are you feeling well? I’d be much obliged if you explain to me about the telecommunications law.

Ba Gyi: Under the telecommunications law promulgated by the Pyithu Hluttaw on 8 October 2013 it is definitely prescribed below.

The objectives of this Law are as follows:
(a) to enable to support the modernization and development of the nation with telecommunications technology;
(b) to enable to bring out Telecommunications Services that will be able to provide high quality and worthy services to the users by allowing fair and transparent competitions from domestic and abroad in the telecommunications sector which is developing;
(c) to enable to give more opportunities to the general public to use Telecommunications Service by expanding the Telecommunications
(d) to enable to protect the Telecommunications Service providers and users in accord with law;
(e) to enable to supervise Telecommunications Service, Network Facilities and Telecommunications Equipments which require license for national peace and tranquility and for public security.

Listen to me to be more convinced.

Offences and penalties are prescribed in section 66, chapter 18 of the telecommunication law.

66. Whoever commits any of the following acts shall, on conviction, be liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years or to a fine or to both.
(a) Accessing and disturbing a Telecommunications Network, altering or destroying the determination of technical standards or the original form without the permission of the owner or a person who has the administrative right.
(b) Releasing a virus or using any other means with an intention to cause damage to the Telecommunications Network.
(c) Stealing, cheating, misappropriating or mischievous of any money and property by using any Telecommunications Networks.
(d) Extorting, coercing, restraining wrongfully, defaming, disturbing, causing undue influence or threatening to any person by using any Telecommunications Network.
Under section 80/A of the telecommunications law, these offences shall be deemed as cognizable offence.

Telecommunications Network means a network of telecommunications facilities, telecommunication equipments, computers, devices similar to computers, peripherals used in conjunction with them by means of wire or wireless communication technology.

Neo-lawyer: Please explain to me about section 500 of the Penal Code.

Ba Gyi: Defamation is defined in section 499 of the Penal Code as follows.

Section 499—
Impugnation of truth which public good requires to be made or published.

Public conduct of public servants.
Conduct of any person touching any public question.

Publication of reports of proceedings of Courts.

Merits of case decided in Court, or conduct of witnesses and others concerned.

Accusation preferred in good faith to authorized person. Imputation made in good faith by person for protection of his or other’s interests.

Accusation intended for good person to whom conveyed or for public good.

There are some exemptions.
Under section 500, punishments will be two-year imprisonment or fine or combination of sentence. I think you already knew it.

Neo-lawyer: What is the difference, Ba Gyi?

Ba Gyi: No need to explain an article of Telecommunications Law and Section of the Penal Code seem to be similar but totally different in punishment and time of promulgation.

Besides, their objectives are also not the same. You need to read the law on definitions of statements, 1973. In section 3(g), if there is a difference between the prescription of the previous law and that of the recent one, it is described that the recent one must be regarded to be valid.

Neo-lawyer: You mean if it is prescribed to arrest under section of the telecommunications law, the accused must have action taken under that law as a priority, with penal code to be considered as a second thought?

Ba Gyi: It is up to the desire of the plaintiff. But the judge can decide as to which law will be applied?

Neo: Isn’t the legal advice of the legal officer before suing.

Ba Gyi: Important. Before the suit, legal officers at different levels are able to suggest openly.

Neo: They can distinguish volume of the sections and punishments as to whether it can be concerned with any kinds of laws. Can a case be built depending on love or hatred, anger or bias?

Ba Gyi: As we are not in the anachronism, it is not possible. We must act under the law.

Neo: Some point out that section 66 (A) should be amended, showing its weakness. What about your opinion?

Ba Gyi: As regards this part, parliamentarians can think and submit their assessments to the Pyithu Hluttaw. They are discussing the laws which are not suitable for situations of the present time. We welcome that.

Neo: News Media is defined differently. What about your opinion?

Ba Gyi: The meaning of the media is defined in section 2/A of the New Media Law as follows:

Media means getting, collecting and acquiring information, keeping them in documentation, analyzing and publishing etc, which shall be performed by Print Media, Broadcasting Media, Internet Media whose responsibilities are taken by the media or public information and communication services conducted by any other alternative ways by means of various transmission forms such as texts, voice, picture, audio and visual transmission, statistical data, and graphic designs.

Neo: What about rules and regulations of the news media?

Ba Gyi: News is defined as data, text, image, code, computer-program software and data base.

Neo: According to you, definition of the telecommunications law and that of the penal code can be studied in comparison with each other. As for the media council, what can they mediate between two parties?

Ba Gyi: In section 9 of the news media law, duty and ethics are prescribed. It is to mediate over complaints and accusations with a mediatory committee formed. It is not prescribed that the accused can claim.

Neo: Give me a clear explanation.

Ba Gyi: Any defendants can complain openly. Firstly, police station must accept the complaint and investigate. After that, he must suggest it is implied with which section of the respective law. Then he must file the case at a court. What I want to say is that the defendants are liable to complain of the true process of the case as per their desire. It depends upon the duty of judges, police officers and legal officers to decide as to which section is concerned.

They will carry on the proceeding according to section 9/A rights and ethics for media men to follow are prescribed in which it includes accuracy and scrutiny of facts.

Neo: Media men are void of freedom, being oppressed by the government. Tell me about this.

Ba Gyi: Freedom of expression is within our reach to a considerable extent. And Media Council has emerged and Promulgation of Right to Information is also underway.

Neo: Give your opinion about whether section 500 and section 66/A of the telecommunications should be abolished.

Ba Gyi: One-sided opinion is not good. Whatever it is we must consider from various points of view. Suggest and criticize over existing laws and rules with consultation. We need to amend where necessary. Public desire and the country’s benefits should be prioritized.

Neo: Thank you very much, Uncle. See you next week.

Emerald green project promises to improve lives of fishermen

AS PART OF its efforts to reduce rural poverty, an Emerald Green Project is being implemented in Thaton District, Mon State by the Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development, with plans to spend Ks60 million to improve the economic status of local fishermen.

Under the programme, loans will be offered this year to residents living in target areas, including two villages from Thaton Township, two from Paung Township, three from Kyakhto Township and three from Bilt Township, said U Soe Win Zaw, head of Thaton District Fisheries Department.

There are approximately around 60 fishing villages across Thaton District.

The authorities are now providing training related to the project to locals with the aim of promoting public understanding about the loan programme.

Loans with very low interest rates will be disbursed in the project areas through newly formed committees in the villages, said U Soe Win Zaw, who added that the project will help families increase their incomes, aid the village in maintaining and upgrade the livelihoods of fishermen.

The government selects villages for the programme under its rules, which gives priority to needy fishing villages with good transport facilities and with enough households. A local fish catcher who resides in Budinchaung Village said the villagers have different plans to promote their livelihood through the new loans, which will have an interest rate of between Ks6.5 and Ks1.5.—Myitmakha News Agency

Two men found dead in burnt car in Paung Tsp

TWO unidentified men were found dead in a burnt car on the road between Yangon and Mawlamyine in Paung Township in Mon State on Sunday, police said.

A car containing a driver and a passenger heading from Mawlamyine to Yangon crashed into a lamp post and caught fire in front of a filling station in Kyeneka Village at around 3pm on Sunday.

The collision killed both people and badly damaged the front of the car.

According to investigators, the cause of death was from a battery explosion before the car burst into flame, said U Soe Win Zaw, head of the Paung Township Fire Services Department.

Police are still investigating the case to identify the deceased.—Myitmakha News Agency
**Myanmar’s river catfish to penetrate Russia’s market**

**Myanmar’s river catfish (Silonia children) will reportedly soon become available on the Russian market.**

Catfish is inexpensive and popular among low-income people in Myanmar.

About 2,000 tonnes of sliced river catfish will be exported to Russia every month starting from March, 2017. However, exporters might be faced with difficulties in fulfilling the demand at the start. Only 200 tonnes of sliced river catfish can be exported in the first month, it is learnt.

Nevertheless, producers will try to meet the demand, said U Toe Naing Lin, who is engaged in fish farming.

Catfish farmers who operate their farms in Myanmar’s rivers planning to expand their production so that they can fulfill the requirements of demand from Russia. It takes 10 months for a fish farm to produce a yield of catfish.

If the large volume of river catfish is exported, the price will go up. The export of river catfish might impact negatively on the fish consumption of low-income people, said fish merchants.

River catfish is favorite among low-income people because of its taste and price, which is cheaper than rohu, said U Soe Shwe, a fish breeder. The minimum price is Ks2,500 per viss of rohu, sturgeons, river catfish and catfish, while the maximum price of fish is Ks4,500 per viss. Over 80 per cent of the population consumes cheap farmed fish and saltwater fish, according to the fishery department.

**About 100,000 tonnes of pulses to be sold to India under G to G agreement**

About 100,000 tonnes of pulses will be sold to India per year under a government-to-government (G to G) agreement, according to the Commerce Ministry.

Preparations to sign a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) about the export of pulses are being made. The Myanmar Pulses, Beans and Sesame Seed Merchants’ Association will cooperate with the commerce ministry for the pulses export. Over 600,000 tonnes of mung beans and over 200,000 tonnes of pigeon peas were yearly produced before 2015. The yield has been on the decline since. Therefore, pulse merchants are concerned that they will not be able to meet the demand of India, it is learnt. During the recent visit of the president of Myanmar to India, the government proposed to increase its annual demand by 25,000 tonnes for Myanmar’s mung beans and pigeon peas starting in 2017.

About 240,000 tonnes of various pulses are yearly exported on average to foreign countries. India is the major export market, but the pulses are also exported to Japan, China, Indonesia and the countries of the European Union, according to the Myanmar Pulses, Beans and Sesame Seeds Merchants’ Association.

—Mon Mon

**Myanmar’s pomelo planned to export to China market**

Myanmar’s pomelo is being planned to be exported to China, according to the Myanmar Pomelo Producers and Exporters Association.

Over 12 tonnes of pomelo were exported to Singapore in the 2014-2015 fiscal year. The vast market of China is expected to create space for Myanmar’s pomelo. Myanmar’s mangoes have already influenced China market. Efforts will be similarly be exerted for Myanmar’s pomelo to penetrate the international market, said U Win Shwe, the chairman of the aforementioned association.

Pomelo growers will be offered courses to receive a Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certificate so that the pomelo export market expand to the European Union and European countries, it is learnt.

“The Ministry of Planning and Finance will provide the necessary assistance to be able to export our vegetables and fruits cultivated under good agricultural practices”, said U Soe Than Mindin, the chair of the Myanmar Fruit, Flower and Vegetable Producers and Exporters Association (MFVP).

Pomelo plantations need to expand to meet the market’s demand. There are over 3,000 acres of pomelo plantations in Myanmar. The pomelo is mainly grown in Mon State and also in Kayin State, Bago, Yangon, Ayeyawady and Mandalay regions, it is learnt.

—Myanmar News Agency

**Bulk volume of watermelon and muskmelon planned for export to China**

WITH the demand from China increasing, 600,000 tonnes of watermelons and 150,000 tonnes of muskmelons are planned to be exported, according to the Myanmar Watermelon and Cucumber Growers and Exporters Association.

The watermelon market was ruined in previous months because of unpredictable weather and a mismatch between demand and supply. There was an excessive supply of watermelon in the market from lower Myanmar. Additionally, watermelon was cultivated in Shan State as crop substitution for opium poppy, it is learnt.

The market recovered, however, thanks to demand from China. The number of watermelon growers has risen this year because watermelon was sold at a good price last year. This has resulted in excessive supply in market. It is normal for the market to decline when the supply exceeds demand.

Over 570,000 tonnes of watermelon and over 100,000 tonnes of muskmelons were exported last year. During this year, 600,000 tonnes of watermelons and over 100,000 tonnes of muskmelons are expected to be exported.

From the 22nd to the 28th October, 8,429 tonnes of watermelons worth US$0.868 million were exported to China through the Muse 105th mile border trade camp, according to the statistics of the border gate. About 100 12-wheeled truckloads of watermelon are exported to China a day. Sometimes, over 200 truckloads of watermelons enter China in a single day. The export volume is likely to increase in December, said an exporter.

Myanmar’s watermelons and muskmelons mainly flow into China through the Muse border trade, while they are also exported to Singapore and Malaysia, according to the association.

—Ko Htet

**Highly inflow of CP chicken to Kyaukpyu adversely effects indigenous chicken husbandry**

THOSE engaged in traditional poultry farming are facing difficulties due to the high inflow of CP chicken into Kyaukpyu’s retail and wholesale markets, with some of them shutting down their businesses, indigenous chicken breeders said.

Some locals in Kyaukpyu Township are involved in family chicken farming on a manageable scale so that they earn a living and pay for education and health expenses. Starting in late 2015, the C.P Group based in Kyaukpyu invested in poultry farming and providing feedstuff, medicines, capital and an incubation process. As a result, CP chicken farming has grown in the villages.

“The entry of CP chicken resulted in the suspension of traditional chicken husbandry on a manageable scale. Indigenous chicken breeders are not able to turn to CP poultry farming due to a lack of technical know-how in husbandry and capital. If the company provides the locals with necessary assistance, we can change the business”, said U Tun Aung Kyaw who suspended his traditional chicken farming from Kyaukpyu.

The price of CP chicken ranges from Ks6,000 to Ks8,000 per head on the basis of the size. CP poultry farming has become widespread in the villages because CP chickens grow rapidly, allowing farmers to more easily earn a profit.

The price of traditionally raised chicken is between Ks8,000 to Ks12,000 per head. The stall in traditional chicken farming is attributed to the expensive price, the small number of consumers and the length of time it takes to raise a marketable chicken, it is learnt.—Myitma News Agency
Malaysia jails opposition MP for leaking audit details at scandal-hit 1MDB

KUALA LUMPUR — A Malaysian court on Monday sentenced an opposition lawmaker to 18 months in prison for releasing confidential information related to a scandal-hit state fund, 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), keeping up a crackdown on critics of the government.

The verdict comes just days ahead of a massive rally planned on Saturday by pro-democracy group Bersih, calling for Prime Minister Najib Razak to step down over his alleged involvement in the 1MDB scandal.

Rafizi Ramli, a member of the People’s Justice Party (PKR), was found guilty of violating the Official Secrets Act (OSA), by possessing and disclosing a page from the auditor-general’s report on 1MDB without permission earlier this year.

The audit was carried out last year following allegations of mismanagement and graft at 1MDB and has yet to be declassified.

The court allowed a stay on the execution pending an appeal of the verdict. Rafizi said on his Twitter account that he would appeal the verdict.

“This is a sad day for Malaysian democracy, when a democrat has been brought to court for daring to speak up to protect the rights and interest of the people,” PKR chief Wan Azizah Wan Ismail said in a statement.

Wan Azizah’s husband, charismatic opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, is serving a five-year prison sentence after being found guilty in a case that supporters and many independent observers regarded as politically motivated.

He was convicted in 2015, just as as the pressure on Najib began to mount over the financial scandal at 1MDB.

Founded by Najib, who chaired its advisory board, 1MDB is currently the subject of money laundering investigations in at least six countries, including Switzerland, Singapore and the United States.

Najib has denied any wrongdoing.

The government has clamped down on anti-government rally organizers, opposition leaders, activists and media groups who have raised the 1MDB issue. It has also proposed amendments to the Malaysian media law and Legal Profession Act.

Phil Robertson of Human Rights Watch said in a statement that Rafizi’s conviction under the OSA was “unprecedented” and the act was used to “intimidate whistle-blowers into silence”.

Responding to the verdict, Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department Abdul Rahman Dahlan said Rafizi had been repeatedly warned that he would be breaching the Official Secrets Act if he disclosed content from the audit.

“He tried a cheap stunt for personal political gain but he knowingly committed a serious crime in doing so. It is right that he pays the price, and he only has himself to blame,” he said in a statement.

—Reuters

Duterte says if Islamic State comes to Philippines, forget human rights

MANILA — Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte warned on Monday that Islamic State militants driven out of Syria and Iraq could set up in his country, and if that happened he would forego human rights obligations to keep his people safe.

Duterte said the southern Philippine province of Mindanao was already a hotbed of rebellion and banditry and he was worried about “looming terrorism” and an influx of extremists who could exploit the insecurity.

“Once the terrorists of the Middle East are deprived of the land area, the real estate area where they can sleep … they will wander to other places and they will come here and we believe me. I will not just simply allow my people to be slaughtered for the sake of human rights, that’s bullshit.”

Human rights have been a touchy subject for Duterte, who has vented daily fury at activists and Western governments that have shown concerns about his war on drugs and the high death toll.

A native of Mindanao and mayor of Davao City for 22 years, Duterte said there was a “very strong” Islamist rebellion there and Abu Sayyaf rebels were taking hostages almost every day.

“Abu Sayyaf holding 21 captives, most of them foreign, and despite an ongoing military offensive to wipe them out, its piracy and kidnappings continue unabated. Duterte said the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia were working closely to keep foreign extremists at bay.—Reuters

All 4,300 makeshift homes completed in quake-hit Kumamoto

KUMAMOTO — The construction of temporary housing units was completed Monday in southwestern Japan’s Kumamoto Prefecture, devastated by powerful earthquakes in mid-April, paving the way for affected residents to rebuild their lives.

The plan to construct 4,303 temporary houses in a total of 16 municipalities was achieved as the last 42 homes were finished in the town of Mifune. Shown to the media Monday were six barrier-free houses built for physically disabled people in the town of Masuki, one of the communities hit hardest by the series of strong quakes.

The first makeshift homes with barrier-free functions in the prefecture boast flat entrances and wide bathrooms, allowing easy access for wheelchair users and their helpers, according to the prefecture.

In addition to the construction of temporary homes, the prefectural government is earmarking a budget to secure 14,600 rented homes for affected residents. An official of the prefecture said, “From now on, we want to support residents to secure permanent homes.” The two powerful earthquakes struck Kumamoto Prefecture and neighboring areas in April, killing a combined 50 people and forcing hundreds of thousands of people to evacuate at one point.—Kyodo News
China’s Xi tells Trump cooperation is only choice

BEIJING/WASHINGTON — Chinese President Xi Jinping told US President-elect Donald Trump on Monday that as the world’s largest developing and developed economies, there were many areas where China and the United States could cooperate.

“The facts prove that cooperation is the only correct choice for China and the United States,” China Central Television (CCTV) cited Xi as saying.

Xi’s remarks were a reiteration of phrasing typically used by Beijing to describe bilateral relations, with China's state media saying Xi told Trump in a telephone call on Monday that as the world’s largest developing and developed economies, there were many areas where China and the United States could cooperate.

During the call, the leaders established a clear sense of mutual respect for one another, and President-elect Trump stated that he believes the two leaders will have one of the strongest relationships for both countries moving forward, a statement from Trump’s presidential transition office said.

The two agreed to maintain close communications and meet soon, CCTV said. Xi had congratulated Trump in a message delivered shortly after his surprise election victory last week.

There is intense speculation over the impact of Trump’s win on issues facing the two countries, from climate change and global trade to the security balance in the Asia-Pacific.

Trump’s criticism of US allies, including Japan, for free-riding on US security guarantees, has deepened anxiety among Washington’s allies about its commitment to post-war security arrangements in the face of a rising China and volatile North Korea.

Australia PM says asylum seekers to be resettled in US after Trump takes office

SYDNEY — Australia’s prime minister said on Monday resettlement of many of the 1,200 asylum seekers held in detention camps on Papua New Guinea and the Pacific island of Nauru will begin after President-elect Donald Trump’s inauguration in January.

Whether Trump honours the deal Australia reached with the outgoing Obama administration, and announced earlier this month, will provide an early test of Trump’s anti-immigration stance.

Campaigning for the presidency, Trump had started by advocating a blanket ban on Muslims entering the United States, but later adjusted his stance to propose that the ban should apply to people from nations that had been “compromised by terrorism”. Australia’s Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said on Sunday that the United States had agreed to take a “substantial” number of those held on Manus Island and Nauru. Many of them are Muslims who have fled conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Police said the attacker had been imprisoned on terrorism charges in the past and had links to existing radical networks.

Indonesian police arrest five after church attack

JAKARTA — Indonesian police on Monday arrested five people in connection with a suspected militant attack on a church that killed one infant and injured three.

Police said they were investigating possible links to the Islamic State extremist group.

Sunday’s attack in the parking lot of a church in East Kalimantan province on the island of Borneo was the latest in a series that has raised concerns over rising militancy in the world’s largest Muslim-majority nation. An Islamic State-linked assault in the capital Jakarta in January killed four people.

Police said the attacker, who had been imprisoned on terrorism charges in the past and had links to existing radical networks, was investigating possible links to the Islamic State extremist group.
The importance of principles

Mint Win Thein

PRINCIPLES are moral rules derived from a strong belief that guides an individual’s actions. The strong belief also shapes a person’s vision. Therefore, a person’s actions always reflect his or her principles, belief and vision. In addition, every action of a person is important for the achievement of that person’s vision. Therefore, a person’s principles form the foundation for achievement of a personal vision as they guide the course of actions for individuals. People, especially those who are in organisations, tend to lay out their visions and plans publicly. Later, their actions turn out to be completely opposite to their self-declared visions and commitments. They are considered to be people without principles, or invertebrates, because their actions will never result in achievement of their visions. Principles are of individual- uals, whereas policies are of organisations. Policies guide the activities of an organisation as they are a plan of action agreed by all members to achieve a particular vision. Activities of an organisation should always be a reflection of its policies and the vision. Or else it will not achieve its vision. If activities of an organisation are completely contrary to its policies and vision, there is a need to make adjustments between the vision, policies and activities of an organisation. Without such adjustments, vision and policies of the organisation will be just empty words to trick its members.

Moreover, actions of all members of the organisation should also be in line with its vision, policies and activities. Otherwise, the organisation will be in disorder and lose sight of its principles. Principles of utmost importance for success of individuals, as well as organisations, to achieve a vision.

Festivals of the month “Tazaungmon” Part II

Maha Saddhamma Jotika dhaja Sithu, Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt

THERE are other religious and socio-cultural festivals named Tazaungmon due to the loke offering of Tazaung mon. In the life time of Lord Buddha, his foster mother Gotami marked a robe for him with her own. Lord Buddha skillfully wove at the palace by master weavers. Gotami herself participated in the weaving. It was finished overnight. The robe came to be known as Matho-Thin gan, which literally means non-stale robe, because it was woven to the finish within the period of night. With pomp and ceremony Gotami took the Matho-Thin gan to offer to Lord Buddha at Niporda Vihara. Myanmar Bud- dhists following that precedent, perform the festival of weaving Matho-Than gan on the full moon night of Tazaungmon Myanmar Kings held this festival without fail and Myanmar Buddhists till today hold Matho-Thin gan weaving competitions on the full moon day of Tazaung mon.

There are also two other types of robe offering either to Buddha Images or monks in Tazaungmon namely “Pant Tha Ku” robe and “Kya Thangian”. Pant Tha Ku is a Pali word meaning clothing for money or anything discarded on the ground for anyone to take. During the first twenty ordained days of Lord Buddha there was no donor of robe. Lord Buddha and his disciple monks had to collect cloths discarded on the ground for making robe by themselves. Such robes were called Pant Tha Ku robes making robes made out of old cloths discarded on the ground. Later Pant Tha Ku came to acquire a wider meaning—any offering by an anonymous donor to an anonymous recipient. Greater merit is gained by making Pant Tha Ku offering for making personal attachment is involved as both the donor and the recipient are anonymous and unknown to each other. The full moon night of Tazaung mon robe or any priestly utensil, or dry ration, or money is placed by the donor on the ground in the neighborhood of monastery or monasteries. The monk or nun who finds it takes it to the superior monk who decides whether it is a Pant Tha Ku offering or lost property. Usually the donor attached a letter card “Pant Tha Ku offering” to his offering. The monk or nun who finds Pant Tha Ku offering is entitled to use it.

Kya robe is lotus robe wove with threads made out of lotus stems. Lotus flower is the symbol of Buddhism. Four lotus blooms represent four Buddhas already revealed and one Lotus bud represents the 5th upcoming Buddha. Lotus robe is fine and light, making the wearer cool in summer and warm in cold season. Lord Bud- dha had worn lotus robe in his life time. In the Shan State, Mon State and Rakhine State Mon lotus robes are made for offering to Buddha statues and reputedly learned head monks on the full moon night of Tazaung mon.

Shin Ma Lei festival is another religious event commemorated on the full moon night of Tazaung mon. This event and festival originated in post-Buddha’s time. Shin Ma Lei was a great monk who resided in a village monastery in Ceylon [Sri Lanka]. Legend has it that by means of supernatural power he gained through intense concentration of mind [Samatha meditation] he went up to Tavatimsa the Celestial Kingdom] to worship Sulamani Pagoda in which the hairs of the head of Prince Siddhartha and the sacred tooth relic of Lord Gotama Bud- dha were enshrined. There, he met a deva who was the future Met- teya Buddha. The deva request- ed Shin Ma Lei to preach to the people the Vessassanta Jataka [The story of the last human life of the future Gotama Buddha on every full moon day of Tazaung mon. Shin Ma Lei consented and when he returned to earth he preached the said Jataka with one thousand Pali poems to the people on every full moon day of Tazaung mon.

To commemorate this event, one thousand fruits, one thousand lotus blossoms, one thousand fistfuls of cooked rice and one thousand light of oil lamps placed on a Hlaw Ka boat are offered to Shin Ma Lei. One thousand represents his one thousand Pali poems, and the Hlaw Ka boat represents the ferry boat [the Dhamma or the Teachings of the Buddha] to sal- vage the sentient beings from the whirl pool of rebirths [Samsara] to the Land of Nirvana [the end of all suffering].

There are two traditional practices Myanmar people perform on the full moon night of Tazaung mon. They are Me Zali Salad feast and Kyi Ma No Pwe. Both are associated with Net Khat Tabin Pwe [The festival of con- stellation Kyanika which is also Fire god, used to come down to earth and stayed in a ground god of Me Zali tree. The guardian gods of all medicinal herbal flora gathered at Me Zali tree to pay respects to Kyatika god. So it is believed on this full moon night of Tazaung mon, all medicinal and curative powers and properties of herbal flora are concentrat- ed in Me Zali tree. Me Zali tree grows in any part of Myanmar. Its leaves, buds and flowers are edible Myanmar Treatises on herbal medicine. It is said that Me Zali is medicinal. This is the reason why Myanmar people eat slightly bitter but appetizing Zali salad made out of its buds boiled and seasoned with ingre- dients like pea nut, fried garlic, sesamum, fresh peeled onion, cooking oil, salt and fresh lemon juice. You are cordially invited to Me Zali salad eating party on full moon night of Tazaung mon.

Kyi Ma No festival is in fact a customary prank played by youths. Lateral meaning of Kyi Ma No festival is that it is a performance held before crows wake up. It is sometimes and at some places, called “Noon’s Night”. On the full moon of Tazaung mon when all heavenly bodies appear, Sawya Net Khat or Thier’s constellation also ap- pears, which exercises its in- fluence upon the youths who thus suffer temporarly from klepto- mania on that night. Kleptomani- a is a kind of personal madness- irresistible desire to steal anything. So at midnight of Tazaung mon’s full moon, youths play their pranks. Indi- vidually or in group they “steal” anything found in the house compound [not from inside the house]—pots pans, clothings, baskets, skirts, women’s under wears, braziers, chamber pots etc. and leave them at the pub- lic places, road crossings. Skirts, under wears, braziers and cham- ber pots are hung up on tall trees. The following morning everyone is amused and moved to laugh- ter to see the owners looking for their missing properties only to find them at public places. Male youths laugh heartily when old ladies come out to reclaim skirts, under wears or braziers on behalf of their real owners who being young are inhibited by their fem- inine modesty.

Whether picnic is held on full moon night of Tazaung mon. It is famous for its chicken curry cooked by male youths. In My- annmar it is called Kyat Tha Kala Tha Chet [Chicken curry cooked by male youths]. Live chicken pinched from any house compound is killed and cooked with any vegetable easily available mostly gourd. No oil no spices, just water salt and green chilly. Cooked in a big pot and male youths by turn eat with cooked rice directly from the pots. No plate, no spoon. They use any long wooden ladles. Communal cooking and eating having been a part of Myanmar culture and traditional food preparation since time immemorial. As a result, Myanmar cuisine was highly influenced by the local cultures of neighboring countries including India. Today, with the booming of Tourism, Kyet tha kalatha chet is becoming the favorite of foreign tourists. They would like to join the serenade as well.

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Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Union Election Commission
Notification  26/ 2016
15th Waxing Day of Tazaungmon 1378 ME
(14th November 2016)
Six Defence Services Personnel Pyithu Hluttaw Representatives substituted

ACCORDING to request made in accordance with Article 33 of the Pyithu Hluttaw Law to substitute six Defence Services Personnel Representatives who are parliamentarians, the Union Election Commission scrutinized and substituted the following six Defence Services Personnel Pyithu Hluttaw representatives under the Notification 1/ 2016 of the commission dated 18-1-2016.

(1) BC 27485  BC 24311
Lt-Col Myint Zaw  Lt-Col Myint Swe
(2) BC 25161  BC 21899
Lt-Col Naing Zaw Min  Col Than Aung
(3) BC 27972  BC 33593
Lt-Col Myat Min Moe  Maj Win Min Tun
(4) BC 29709  BC 32394
Maj Hnin Aung Kyaw  Maj Hla Nyi Nyi
(5) Air 2879  Air 1773
Maj Ye Thida Tun  Brig-Gen Oo Kyaw
(6) Air 2896  BC 17287
Maj Myo Min Maung  Brig-Gen Win Maung

By Order
(Tin Tun)
Secretary
Union Election Commission

Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Union Election Commission
Notification  27/ 2016
15th Waxing Day of Tazaungmon 1378 ME
(14th November 2016)
Ten Defence Services Personnel Ahmyotha Hlutaw Representatives substituted

ACCORDING to request made in accordance with Article 33 of the Pyithu Hluttaw Law to substitute ten Defence Services Personnel Representatives who are parliamentarians, the Union Election Commission scrutinized and substituted the following ten Defence Services Personnel Ahmyotha Hlutaw representatives under the Notification 2/ 2016 of the commission dated 18-1-2016.

(1) BC 27389  BC 27430
Maj Soe Naing  Maj Thein Zaw Oo
(2) BC 32377  BC 34702
Maj Hein Lin Kyaw  Maj Win Min Lwin
(3) BC 32349  BC 34866
Maj Hein Maung Myint  Maj Lin Tun
(4) BC 31366  BC 53865
Maj Thein Htoo  Capt Nyan Tun
(5) BC 35782  BC 36638
Maj Kyaw Thura Win  Maj Zaw Myo Yee
(6) BC 39000  BC 38809
Maj Nyan Min Maung  Maj Thet Win

By Order
(Tin Tun)
Secretary
Union Election Commission

Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Union Election Commission
Notification  28/ 2016
15th Waxing Day of Tazaungmon 1378 ME
(14th November 2016)
Thirty Defence Services Personnel Region and State Hlutaw Representatives substituted

ACCORDING to request made in accordance with Article 33 of the Pyithu Hluttaw Law to substitute thirty Defence Services Personnel Representatives who are parliamentarians, the Union Election Commission scrutinized and substituted the following thirty Defence Services Personnel Ahmyotha Hlutaw representatives under the Notification 3/ 2016 of the commission dated 18-1-2016.

Kachin State Hlutaw
(1) BC 28398  BC 27430
Maj Soe Naing  Maj Thein Zaw Oo
(2) BC 32377  BC 34702
Maj Hein Lin Kyaw  Maj Win Min Lwin
(3) BC 32349  BC 34866
Maj Hein Maung Myint  Maj Lin Tun

Kayan State Hlutaw
(1) BC 28398  BC 27430
Maj Soe Naing  Maj Thein Zaw Oo
(2) BC 32377  BC 34702
Maj Hein Lin Kyaw  Maj Win Min Lwin
(3) BC 32349  BC 34866
Maj Hein Maung Myint  Maj Lin Tun

Sagaing Region Hlutaw
(1) BC 31366  BC 53865
Maj Thein Htoo  Capt Nyan Tun
(2) BC 35782  BC 36638
Maj Kyaw Thura Win  Maj Zaw Myo Yee
(3) BC 39000  BC 38809
Maj Nyan Min Maung  Maj Thet Win

Taninthayi Region Hlutaw
(1) BC 27519  BC 34836
Maj Swe Lwin Aung  Maj Ko Min

Bagan Region Hlutaw
(1) BC 29699  BC 24050
Lt-Col Tin Myo Naung  Maj Hla Moe Thein
(2) BC 30083  BC 25174
Maj Soe Myint  Maj Saw Sein Kyaw
(3) BC 31366  BC 31366
Maj Thein Htoo  Maj Thein Htoo
(4) BC 35652  BC 30064
Maj Kyaw Kyaw Wai  Lt-Col Tin Myo Naung
(5) BC 35936  N 564
Maj Yee Mon  Maj Daw Hnin Yu Kyaw

Mawng Region Hlutaw
(1) BC 27185  BC 30083
Maj Myint Thida  Maj Ye Maung
(2) BC 29564  BC 32571
Maj Ye Myint  Maj Myint Naing

Mandalay Region Hlutaw
(13) BC 24231  BC 20573
Maj Kyaw Thu Lwin  Maj Soe Myint Oo
(14) BC 35631  BC 20304
Maj Nyan Phyo Khine  Maj Tin Tun

Mon State Hlutaw
(15) BC 20573  BC 21384
Maj Soe Myint Oo  Maj Soe Thu Myint
(16) BC 24050  BC 38464
Maj Hla Moe Thein  Maj Myo Zaw Aung

Rakhine State Hlutaw
(17) BC 28064  BC 39414
Lt-Col Naing Win Aye  Capt Lu Maw Myint
(18) BC 32571  BC 37960
Maj Myint Naing  Maj Tun Ko Ko Latt

Yangon Region Hlutaw
(19) BC 30064  BC 28521
Maj Soe Myint  Maj Maw Thu Rein
(20) BC 20304  BC 25303
Maj Tun Tin  Maj Win Han
(21) N 564  N 721
Maj Daw Hnin Yu Kyaw  Maj Daw Maw Maw Than

Shan State Hlutaw
(22) BC 21384  BC 27185
Maj Soe Myint  Maj Myint Thida
(23) BC 25174  BC 37254
Maj Saw Sein Kyaw  Maj Ye Myint Tun
(24) BC 25303  BC 38947
Maj Win Han  Maj Aye Min Htak
(25) BC 27430  BC 28398
Maj Thein Zaw Oo  Maj Soe Naing
(26) BC 28242  BC 29069
Maj Myint Oo  Lt-Col Tin Myo Naung
(27) BC 35652  BC 30064
Maj Kyaw Kyaw Wai  Lt-Col Zaw Myo Tun
(28) BC 35936  N 564
Maj Yee Mon  Maj Daw Hnin Yu Kyaw

Ayeawady Region Hlutaw
(29) BC 28521  BC 37364
Maj Maw Thu Rein  Maj Tun Tin
(30) BC 53865  BC 37961
Capt Nyan Tun  Maj Ko Ko Maung

By Order
(Tin Tun)
Secretary
Union Election Commission

Festivals of the month “Tazaungmon” Part II

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It would not be complete if the most important commemorative day of Myanmar National Day in Tazaungmon is left out. It was on the 10th waxing moon of Tazaungmon in Myanmar Sakarit year 1282 (1920) that the Yangon University Boycott broke out. The immediate cause of the Boycott was the passing of the Yangon University Act by the British Government regardless of the public demand for some amendments of the Act. But the principal motivating force behind it was Myanmar dislike of colonial education which trained the youths only to become servants of the British colonial administration. Myanmar people wanted national education which would nurture Myanmar youths in national culture, history and literature and train them in vocational subjects.

The boycotters set up their headquarters on Shwedagon Pagoda platform and formed the council of National Education to open a National College and National Schools throughout the country. The British Government gave in and later recognized national schools by granting them financial aid. The success of this Boycott was so important and its effects were so far-reaching upon Myanmar struggle for national freedom that the date of the Boycott was chosen as National Day which Myanmar people have been commemorating annually ever since.

Tazaungmon light festival in Taunggyi Southern Shan State is the tourist attraction. You can enjoy spectacular displays of fire works—lanterns of all sizes, balloons and rockets of local make flying in the sky and Satuditha feast given gratis to all corners to eat glutinous rice seasoned with coconut cream, sugar and peanuts plus fresh orange juice and to participate in communal singing and dancing.

No other month of Myanmar calendar has more festivals than Tazaungmon. * * * * *
Trump hires Republican insider, conservative firebrand for White House

WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald Trump on Sunday picked Reince Priebus, a Washington insider who heads the Republican National Committee, as White House chief of staff, signalling a willingness to work with Congress to advance his agenda when he takes office in January.

But while giving the influential post to the low-key Priebus, Trump handed another senior White House job to rabble-rousing conservative media figure Stephen Bannon, his campaign chairman who helped engineer his surprise victory on Tuesday over Democrat Hillary Clinton.

Priebus is a friend of US House of Representatives Speaker Paul Ryan, who distanced himself from Trump during the campaign but embodies the president-elect's agenda when he takes office.

Priebus' appointment could signal a willingness to engage in brutal political tactics when he instigates proceedings, a Reuters photographer said.

Trump’s statement announcing the appointments said Bannon and Priebus would be “working as equal partners to transform the federal government,” with Bannon serving as chief strategist and senior counsellor to the president.

The White House chief of staff serves as a gatekeeper and agenda-setter for the president, but Trump’s statement mentioned Bannon’s job first.

“I am thrilled to have my very successful team continue with me in leading our country,” Trump said in a statement. “Steve and Reince are highly qualified leaders who worked well together on our campaign and led us to a historic victory. Now I will have them both with me in the White House.”

Before joining Trump’s team, Bannon spearheaded Breitbart’s shift into a forum for the “alt-right,” a loose online con-federation of neo-Nazis, white supremacists and anti-Semitism.

Bannon’s hiring by Trump’s campaign this year signalled the businessman’s dedication to operating outside the norms of Washington.

Under Bannon’s leadership, the Breitbart site presented a number of conspiracy theories about Clinton as well as Republicans deemed to be lacking in conservative bona fides.

Critics have accused Bannon of harbouring anti-Semitic and white nationalist sentiments. In 2007 court filings during divorce proceedings, Bannon’s former wife accused him of making anti-Semitic comments on at least three occasions.

As head of Breitbart, he repeatedly attacked the Republican Party establishment including Ryan, alienating many veteran Republicans.

Bannon showed his willingness to engage in brutal political tactics when he instigated the appearance before a presidential debate of three women who said they had been sexually abused by his Democratic rival’s husband, former President Bill Clinton.

Trump, who will succeed Democratic President Barack Obama on 20 January, has been contemplating the candidates for top jobs in the White House and in various Cabinet positions since Tuesday’s victory.

Priebus’ appointment could anger some hardcore Trump supporters who were counting on Trump to keep his campaign pledge to “drain the swamp” of business-as-usual Washington insiders.

Priebus is a longtime Wisconsin political operative who was credited with marshalling party resources for Trump’s White House bid. The Republican National Committee stepped in and ran most of the party’s get-out-the-vote effort this year in the absence of such an operation by the Trump campaign.

While some Republicans fled from Trump during the campaign, Priebus was unwavering in his backing for the New York real estate developer.

Priebus frequently travelled with Trump on the campaign trail and was seen as a positive force who helped reinvigorate the president-elect's campaign in the closing weeks.

Trump made his high regard for Priebus known on election night when he pulled him to the microphone to take a bow for his campaign efforts.—Reuters

Russia says ready to move fast to fix ties with Washington — RIA

MOSCOW — Russia is ready to work fast to repair relations with Washington now that Donald Trump has been elected US president, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov was quoted as saying on Monday by RIA news agency.

But he said Russian authorities knew little of Trump’s policies plans, and recognised there was a difference between his election campaign pledges and the policies he would implement once in office.

Ryabkov said Russia’s support for the Iran nuclear deal was unchanged, despite Trump’s campaign statements that if elected his priority would be to dismantle the pact, Interfax news reported.—Reuters

Pakistan says seven soldiers killed by Indian shelling

ISLAMABAD — Seven Pakistani soldiers were killed by Indian shelling across the frontier in the disputed Kashmir region overnight, Pakistan’s military said on Monday, as tensions between the nuclear-armed neighbours simmer.

Pakistan’s military media wing, ISPR, said in a statement the seven soldiers were killed in the Bhera sector on the “Line of Control” de facto border in Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

An Indian Foreign Ministry spokesman could not be immediately reached for comment.

Relations between Pakistan and India have been strained for several months, while cross-frontier shelling has intensified in recent weeks leading to deaths of civilians and soldiers stationed along the disputed frontier. Tensions have been fraught since July when India-administered Kashmir was rocked by street protests after the killing of a militant leader there.—Reuters

Swedish prosecutor arrives at Ecuador’s embassy to question Julian Assange

LONDON — Swedish Chief Prosecutor Ingrid Isgren arrived at Ecuador’s London embassy on Monday to question Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, in connection with a rape investigation, a Reuters photographer said.

The interview, which will be led by an Ecuadorian prosecutor, could end a four-year deadlock since Assange took refuge in the embassy.

Swedish authorities want to question Assange over allegations that he committed rape in 2010. Assange denies the allegations.

The Swedish Prosecution Authority said last week that Ecuador had granted a Swedish request for assistance in criminal matters.—Reuters

Hungary’s Jobbik to resubmit constitutional amendment on migrants

BUDAPEST — Hungary’s radical nationalist opposition party Jobbik said on Monday it would resubmit to parliament a constitutional amendment banning the resettlement of migrants in Hungary.

Jobbik chairman Gabor Vona told reporters he planned to repeat verbatim an amendment submitted by Prime Minister Viktor Orban which fell short of the needed two-thirds majority in Parliament last week largely due to Jobbik’s resistance.

Vona said Jobbik’s own legislative proposal would contain one additional element, the scrapping of a scheme that allows foreigners to buy residency rights.—Reuters
Jihadists say Trump victory a rallying call for new recruits

KABUL/CAIRO — From Afghanistan to Algeria, jihadists plan to use Donald Trump’s shock US presidential victory as a propaganda tool to bring new fighters to their battlefields.

Taliban commanders and Islamic State supporters say Trump’s campaign trail rhetoric against Muslims—at one point calling for a total shutdown of Muslims entering the United States—will play perfectly in their recruitment efforts, especially for disaffected youth in the West.

“This guy is a complete maniac. His utter hate towards Muslims will make our job much easier because we can recruit thousands,” Abu Omar Khurasani, a top IS commander in Afghanistan, told Reuters.

Trump has talked tough against militant groups on the campaign trail, promising to defeat “radical Islamic terrorism just as we won the Cold War.”

The president-elect later toned down his call for a total ban on Muslim entry to say he would temporarily suspend immigration from countries that have “a history of exporting terrorism.”

But he has offered few details on his plans to combat various radical groups, including the Taliban and al Qaeda, which represent a wide spectrum of political views.

“He does not differentiate between extremist and moderate Islamist trends, and, at the same time, he overlooks (the fact) that his extreme will generate extremism in return,” Iraq’s powerful Shi’ite Muslim cleric Moqtada al-Sadr said in a statement.

Sadr’s political reform movement, which commands thousands of followers, is a staunch opponent of the radical Sunni movements IS and al Qaeda, and unlike them has not waged or promoted attacks in the West.

The United States has seen a handful of attacks inspired by Islamist militant groups, including the June massacre of 49 people at an Orlando nightclub by a gunman who called a TV station wearing allegiance to IS and the killing of 14 people at a San Bernardino, California, social services agency last December.

US officials have warned the country will likely face a higher risk of similar attacks as IS urges supporters to launch attacks at home instead of joining its fight in the Middle East.

“Our leaders were closely following the US election but it was unexpected that the Americans will dig their own graves and they did so,” said IS’s Khurasani, who described President Barack Obama as a moderate infidel with at least a little brain in comparison to Trump.

Al Qaeda, which has proven resilient more than 15 years after launching the 11 September attacks on New York and the Pentagon, has yet to comment on Trump’s victory.

The militant group will likely respond after Trump’s first speeches as president, anticipating they will be able to exploit his comments to win support, said Hisham al Hashemi, who advises the Iraqi government on Sunni jihadist movements.

“Al Qaeda is known for its recruitment strategy that heavily quotes speeches of the White House and other Western officials,” he told Reuters.

Trump’s office did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the statements from the militants.

Even if Trump tones down his anti-Muslim comments when he takes office in January, analysts say his statements during the campaign trail were enough to fuel the militants’ propaganda machine.

“Militants will still use those quotes,” said Matthew Henman, head of IHS Jane’s Terrorism and Insurgency Centre.

Iraqi troops aim to tighten noose on Islamic State in Mosul

BAWIZA (Iraq) — Iraqi soldiers fighting just north of Mosul, within sight of city neighbourhoods, said on Sunday they were ready to tighten the noose around Islamic State militants waging a brutal defence of their Iraqi stronghold.

Four weeks into the campaign to crush Islamic State in Mosul, the city is almost surrounded but the jihadists’ defences have so far been breached only to the east, where they have battled elite troops for control of around a dozen districts.

The battle for Mosul, the biggest city held by the ultra-hardline Sunni Islamist group in Iraq and Syria, is the largest military operation in Iraq in a decade of turmoil unleashed by the 2003 US invasion which toppled Saddam Hussein.

Iraq’s Shi’ite-led government, which has assembled a 100,000-strong coalition of troops, security forces, Kurdish peshmerga fighters and mainly Shi’ite militias, backed by US air power, says it will mark the end of Islamic State in Iraq.

But it says the fight will be a long one.

An army special forces officer on the northern front line said his men aimed to target Hadba, the first neighbourhood ahead of them within city limits. The district was visible from his position in the village of Bawiza.

Brigadier Ali Abdulla said Islamic State fighters had been pushed out of Bawiza and another village, Saada, although progress had been slowed by the presence of civilians he said were being used by the militants as human shields.

“Our approach (to Hadba) will be very slow and cautious so that we can reach the families and free them from Daesh’s (Islamic State’s) grip,” Abdulla said.

One man who escaped from Saada to Bawiza with his young son and daughter said they had to move from house to house and hide among sheep to avoid being caught by Islamic State fighters.

The timing of the decision to move on Hadba would depend on progress on other fronts, Abdulla said. Security forces are advancing towards the city’s southern border, targetting the city’s airport on the west bank of the Tigris river.

Abdulla said Islamic State was using suicide car bombs, roadside bombs, snipers and long range mortars to try to hold back the army advance in the north - all tactics it has used to lethal effect on the eastern front as well.

Another officer, Captain Oqba Nafaa, said the militants were still fighting in Saada, using a network of tunnels to carry out surprise strikes on the attacking forces. The urban warfare tactics were similar to those they have deployed to lethal effect in the east of the city against elite Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) forces and an armed division.

Turkish warplanes strike 15 targets in Syria’s al-Bab area — military

ISTANBUL — Turkish warplanes struck 15 targets in the al-Bab area of northern Syria on Sunday in an operation with Syrian rebels to drive Islamic State (IS) militants out of the border region, the Turkish military said on Monday.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said seizing control of al-Bab, around 30 km (19 miles) south of the border, is a goal of the operation before targeting Manbij, from which Kurdish-led forces recently drove IS, and the IS stronghold of Raqa.

Ten Islamic State defensive positions, command centres and an ammunition store were destroyed in the strikes, the army said in a statement. Nine Syrian rebels were killed and five wounded during clashes in the region, it added.

The Turkish military launched the operation, dubbed ‘Euphrates Shield’, in cooperation with the United States in its fight against Islamic State. Ankara denounced the YPG as an affiliate of the PKK, which has fought the Turkish military in southeast Turkey for three decades and which is designated as a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.
New UN role needed to fight human trafficking in conflict — experts

LONDON — People displaced by war across the world are at heightened risk of human trafficking due to gaps in the United Nations’ response, campaigners said on Monday, calling for the creation of a new UN office to fight modern slavery.

Nearly 46 million people around the world are living as slaves, forced to work in factories, mines and farms, sold for sex, trapped in debt bondage or born into servitude, according to the 2016 Global Slavery Index published last month.

Refugees are considered particularly vulnerable as they often operate with impunity in conflict areas.

Almost half of migrants travelling to Italy from North Africa said they were forced to work against their will, explained many times that the Japanese-controlled, Diaoyu lands, which it calls Diaoyu, are not part of its applicant to the United Nations’ Heritage list, officials with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said.

The UN’s response to trafficking amid the global refugee crisis has been fragmented, according to a report by Freedom Fund, an international initiative to fight slavery.

Several agencies, including the UN’s refugee agency (UNHCR) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have taken steps to tackle different forms of trafficking, but with little coordination, the Freedom Fund said.

“There is a tendency for the agencies to their own thing and not be sufficiently aware of what other agencies are doing,” Freedom Fund’s CEO, Nick Grono, told Thomson Reuters Foundation in a phone interview.

In April, a Freedom Fund report said a growing number of children whose families fled the Syrian war to Lebanon were being forced to work for little or no pay.

Interviews with humanitarian workers in conflict zones revealed they often lack proper training on what to do when dealing with a potential trafficking victim, Grono added.

In the new study published on Monday, Freedom Fund said the appointment of a UN special coordinator on modern slavery could help ensure anti-trafficking efforts are coordinated and more effective.

The envisioned role would answer directly to the UN Secretary-General and have a wide mandate and resources than existing figures, Grono said.

Several Special Rapporteurs currently operate under the UN Human Rights Council with focus on modern slavery including a Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, a Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons and a Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery.

“They have minimum funding and are often effectively part-time positions,” said Grono. “We need a central responsibility”.

A spokeswoman for the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon stressed that the UN was committed to eradicating modern-day slavery.

“We must end the suffering of all victims of trafficking, including those subjected to slavery, servitude, forced labour or bonded labour,” she said in a statement. —Reuters

China worried over Japan’s bid to add remote islands to UNESCO list

BEIJING — China has told Japan through diplomatic channels that it is concerned about Tokyo’s attempt to add remote southwestern islands to UNESCO’s World Heritage list, officials with knowledge of the situation said Monday.

China’s worries stem from its belief that the designation of the Amami-Ryukyu islands, straddling Japan’s Kagoshima and Okinawa prefectures, could have a negative effect on its claim to a small group of islands in the East China Sea, a major source of tension between the two countries.

Although Japan has explained many times that the Japanese-controlled, Chinese-chained Senkaku Islands are not part of its application to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, Beijing has not changed its view, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity. China claims that the uninhabited Senkaku Islands, which it calls Diaoyu, are an integral part of its territory and Japan has no right to apply for the inclusion of the Amami-Ryukyu region, located not too far away from them, in the list, according to the officials.

Japan is hoping to include four areas — Amami-Oshima Island, Tokunoshima Island, the northern part of Okinawa’s main island and Irinomote Island — in the list in 2018.

Despite China’s opposition, Japan is expected to submit the necessary recommendation for inclusion to the UN body by 1 February. —Kyodo News

Lack of school drives girls into armed groups in eastern Congo: charity

DAKAR — Girls in conflict-ravaged eastern Democratic Republic of Congo are joining armed groups because they cannot afford to go to school, while former girl soldiers struggle to return to class amid stigma from their communities, a charity said on Monday.

Many girls in the region join militia groups to obtain food and money, to seek protection against violence, or because their families cannot afford to pay their school fees, according to a report by Britain-based Child Soldiers International (CSI).

Eastern Congo is plagued by dozens of armed groups that prey on locals and exploit mineral reserves. Millions died between 1996 and 2003 as a regional conflict caused hunger and disease.

“Despite the horrific abuse the girls go through while with armed groups, it is the rejection from their families and communities which distresses many of them the most,” Guitard told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone from London.

While civil society groups have had some success in getting boys out of armed groups and into reintegration programmes, this shame and fear of rejection back home has kept many girls in the bush, according to CSI’s report.

“If we leave the group, we’re going to be targeted... so many girls accept and continue to live with their husbands,” said one of the 150 former girl soldiers interviewed by CSI.

Most of these girls said going to school was the best way to regain acceptance from their communities, and that it helped them to deal with trauma suffered while with the armed groups.

CSI said it was working with local partners to help former girl soldiers go back to school, provide catch-up sessions and literacy classes for those who have never been educated or who are too old to start. —Reuters
‘Utter devastation’ after major quake, aftershocks hit New Zealand

WELLINGTON — A powerful 7.8 magnitude earthquake pummeled central New Zealand early on Monday, killing at least two people, damaging roads and buildings and setting off hundreds of strong aftershocks.

Emergency response teams flew by helicopter to the region at the epicenter of the tremor, which struck just after midnight some 91 km (56 miles) northeast of Christchurch in the South Island, amid reports of injuries and collapsed buildings.

“It’s just utter devastation. I just don’t know — that’s months of work,” New Zealand Prime Minister John Key told Civil Defence Minister Gerry Brownlee after flying over the coastal town of Kaikoura, according to Brownlee’s Twitter account.

He described landslips in the area as “just horrendous”. In a statement seen by Reuters, Key said of the likely damage bill: “You’ve got to believe it’s in the billions of dollars to resolve.”

Powerlines and telecommunication networks were down, with huge cracks in roads, land slips and other damage to infrastructure making it hard to reach the worst-affected areas.

A tsunami warning that led to mass evacuations after the original quake was downgraded after large swells hit New Zealand’s capital Wellington, in the North Island, and Christchurch.

Wellington was a virtual ghost town with workers ordered to stay away while the city council assessed the risk to buildings, several of which were damaged by the tremor. There were concerns that loose glass and masonry could be dislodged by severe weather hitting the capital, with 140 km per hour (85 mph) winds forecast.

Hundreds of aftershocks, the strongest a 6.2 quake at about 1.45 p.m. local time (0045 GMT), rattled the South Pacific country, fraying nerves in an area where memories of a deadly 2011 quake are still fresh.

Christchurch, the largest city on New Zealand’s ruggedly beautiful South Island, is still recovering from the 6.3 quake in 2011 that killed 185 people.

New Zealand’s Civil Defence declared a state of emergency for the Kaikoura region, centered on a tourist town about 150 km (90 miles) northeast of Christchurch, soon after Monday’s large aftershock.

Kaikoura, a popular spot for whale watching, appeared to have borne the brunt of the quake.

“Our immediate priority is ensuring delivery of clean water, food and other essentials to the residents of Kaikoura and the estimated 1,000 tourists in the town,” Brownlee said.

The Navy’s multi-role vessel HMNZS Canterbury was heading to the area, he said.

Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) said a 20-person rescue team and two sniffer dogs had arrived in the town. A second team was on standby in Christchurch, USAR said in a statement.

Police in the area around Christchurch reported 19 burglaries of homes and commercial properties after the quake as residents headed for higher ground.

“It is extremely disheartening that at a time when people are facing such a traumatic event and communities are coming together to support one another, there are others who are only interested in taking advantage,” Canterbury District Commander Superintendent John Price said in a statement.

Hours after the quake, officials said a slip dam caused by the quakes that had blocked the Clarence River north of the town had breached, sending a wall of water downstream.

A group of kayakers missing on the river was later reported safe.

New Zealand’s Geonet measured Monday’s first quake at magnitude 7.5, while the US Geological Survey put it at 7.8. The quakes and aftershocks rattled buildings and woke residents across the country, hundreds of kilometres from the epicenter.

A dam reported four faults that had ruptured, with one at the coast appearing to have slipped as much as 10 metres (33 feet).

Government research unit GNS Science said the overnight tremor appeared to have been two simultaneous quakes which together lasted more than two minutes.

New Zealand lies in the seismically active “Ring of Fire”, a 40,000 km arc of volcanoes and oceanic tectonic plates that partly encircles the Pacific Ocean. Around 90 percent of the world’s earthquakes occur within this region. — Reuters
Leon Russell, musician known for dynamic performances, dies at 74

NASHVILLE (Tennessee) — Leon Russell, who emerged in the 1970s as one of rock ‘n’ roll’s most dynamic performers and songwriters after playing anonymously on dozens of pop hits as a much-in-demand studio pianist in the 1960s, died on Sunday at age 74.

Russell, who was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2011, died in his sleep in Nashville, Tennessee, his wife said in a statement on his website.

Russell suffered health problems in his later years, having surgery to stop leaking brain fluid in 2010 and suffering a heart attack in July 2016.

“He was recovering from heart surgery in July and looked forward to getting back on the road in January,” said his wife, Jan Bridges.

Russett’s period of stardom as a performer was relatively brief, but Elton John, who had once been Russell’s opening act, engineered a comeback for him in 2010 when they collaborated on an album titled “The Union.”

“He was my biggest influence as a piano player, a singer and a songwriter,” John told ABC News.

Russell recorded more than 35 albums and also excelled as a songwriter for other performers. His “A Song for You” was recorded by Joe Cocker, the Carpenters, the Temptations, Neil Diamond, Lou Rawls, Dusty Springfield, Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin and good friend Willie Nelson. The Carpenters, Helen Reddy, Shirley Bassey, Robert Goulet and George Benson all covered Russell’s “This Masquerade,” with Benson’s version winning the 1976 Grammy as record of the year.

Russell was known as “the master of space and time” in his 1970s heyday. He wore a cocked top hat, and with salt-and-pepper hair past his shoulders and a beard that reached his chest, created an iridescent image that was equal parts shaman, tent revival preacher and cosmic ringmaster. He ruled the stage like a ringmaster. He ruled the stage like a ringmaster. He ruled the stage like a ringmaster.

Russell was inducted to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2011, and in his speech, said, “I want to thank all the people that have encouraged me to believe in myself, to be my best self.”


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Population of endangered gazelles expands in NW China

XINING — There are now more than 1,400 Przewalski’s gazelle, a species even more endangered than the giant panda, living around a lake in northwest China’s Qinghai Province, its only habitat.

According to a survey by Qinghai Lake Natural Nature Reserve, there are 1,140 older gazelle, consisting of 445 males and 695 females.

“This is a record high since our surveys began,” said the survey, which was conducted in August, recorded 324 of Threatened Species.

“Endangered” to “endangered.” has set up watering places and supplied foraging food in the winter, and dismantled barbed wire fences across four counties around the lake from 2009 to 2015 and lowering the height of the remaining fences from 1.5 metres to 1.2 metres.

The provincial forestry authorities tore down 515,000 metres of fencing or barbed wire across the remaining fences from “critically endangered”.

The gazelle saw their population quadruple in the past 20 years and lowered its status on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species from “critically endangered” to “endangered.”

The local government has set up watering places and supplied foraging food in the winter, and dismantled barbed wire fences, once used to restrict the movement of livestock and mark ownership of the grassland. The sharp, barbed fences have killed many of the gazelle’s in the past, as the animals tried to jump them.

The park, which straddles Kumamoto and Oita prefectures in southwestern Japan, has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Aso-Kuju National Park, which straddles Kumamoto and Oita prefectures in southwestern Japan.

Gov’t aims to draw more foreign tourists to national parks

TOKYO — The Environment Ministry will introduce new measures to draw more foreign tourists to Japan’s eight national parks by 2020, when the country will host the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, ministry sources said Saturday.

The new measures include tours to areas that are currently off limits in Lake Akan in Hokkaido, known for its population of marimo balls of green algae, and improvements to cycling roads in the prairie of the Aso-Kuju National Park, which straddles Kumamoto and Oita prefectures.

The ministry currently does not allow tours to Akan National Park, where marimo can be found clustered in the lake. But the ministry plans to allow small groups for canoeing and trekking tours with a guide, according to the sources.

The ministry will also bury overhead power lines on cycling roads in the Aso-Kuju park so riders can have more beautiful views and allow tourists to observe colonies of rare flowers and watch terrain which has been affected by natural disasters such as major earthquakes in Kumamoto in April.

The plan to draw more tourists to the eight parks is part of the ministry’s efforts to take the number of foreign visitors to national parks to 10 million in 2020, more than double the present number.

It has earmarked a total of 20 billion yen ($187.4 million) in the second supplementary budget for fiscal 2016 through March, which was approved at parliament last month, and a draft full-year budget for fiscal 2017.

The ministry is also considering asking visitors to bear some of the cost of environmental conservation, the sources said.

— Kyodo News

UNESCO chief hails development of Chinese museums

SHENZHEN — A top UN official commended China’s museums, saying she was “very impressed” by the facilities and Chinese culture in general.

Irina Bokova, director-general of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), made the remarks in an interview with Xinhua on the sidelines of the inaugural UNESCO High Level Forum on Museums, which concluded Saturday in Shenzhen, south China’s Guangdong Province.

“Think it is very emblematic that we have this conference in Shenzhen and China, because in China there are more than 4,000 museums, and this is something that is still developing,” she said.

“There is much more thinking about the role of museums, and the achievement of this forum is precisely to give this modern vision about museums,” she said.

— Xinhua
Djokovic beats debutant Thiem after early scare

LONDON — Deposed world number one Novak Djokovic suffered a scare at the hands of Austrian debutant Dominic Thiem before launching his bid for a fifth successive ATP World Tour Finals title with a 6-7(10), 6-0, 6-2 victory on Sunday.

Knocked off the summit he had occupied for 122 weeks by Andy Murray last week, Djokovic must better his British rival’s performance at London’s O2 Arena to snatch back the top ranking, but things did not go entirely to plan.

The 32-year-old, one of the youngest of the eight qualifiers for the year-end event at 23, grew increasingly dangerous throughout the first set and blazed several stunning winners to pocket a gripping breaker on his seventh set point.

After that, though, the match was a procession as Djokovic raced up a 19th win in his last 20 matches at the tournament.

Even after sealing victory though, Djokovic’s mood was soured by a reporter asking him about an angry reaction to losing the opening set when the Serb slammed a ball into the ground and it bounced into the stands, prompting a warning from the umpire.

When it was suggested he could have found himself in hot water had the ball hit a spectator, a tepid Djokovic snapped: “It could have been yeah, but it could have been better in the O2 Arena as well, but it didn’t.”

Hiccups aside, including a cut finger that required treatment, the 12-times grand slam champion was happy to get a victory that now turns the spotlight on Murray who plays Marin Cilic in his opening match on Monday.

Djokovic, bidding to end the year ranked number one for the fifth time in six seasons, trails Murray by 405 points in the standings but Murray will lose the 275 points he gained for winning the Davis Cup for Britain last year.

That means they are virtually neck-and-neck and the 200 points Djokovic earned for beating Thiem edged him ahead in what is turning into a thrilling race for the year-end honour.

Djokovic’s Ivan Lendl group looks easier than Murray’s as well. As Thiem, the Serb will face Canada’s Wimbledon runner-up Milos Raonic and Gael Monfils.

He has never lost a match to any of them although Raonic was in ominously good form as he overpowered Monfils 6-3, 6-4 in Sunday’s late match — offering not a single break point in a dominant display.

Murray takes on former US Open champion Cilic in the John McEnroe group on Monday and also faces reigning US Open champion Stan Wawrinka and Japan’s Kei Nishikori, who beat the Scot at Flushing Meadows this year.

Without doing anything spectacular Djokovic was cruising throughout the first set against Thiem, dropping only four points on serve on the way to a 5-4 lead.

Thiem was not overawed though and forced Djokovic to save a break point at 5-5.

The tiebreaker was a classic.

Three sublime winners helped Djokovic into a 6-3 lead but he twice double-faulted as Djokovic clawed back to 6-5.

Thiem had three further set points to Djokovic’s one before nailing a forehand winner at 11-10 to huge roars from the sell-out crowd in the arena.— Reuters

Czech Republic down France to retain Fed Cup title

STRASBOURG (France) — The Czech Republic further established themselves as the dominant force in women’s team tennis as they claimed a 3-2 comeback win against hosts France to capture their fifth Fed Cup title in six years on Sunday, and 10th overall.

Karolina Pliskova and Barbora Strycova downed Kristyna Mladenovic and Caroline Garcia 7-5, 7-5 in the doubles to hand the visitors the decisive point.

The nation won five titles as Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 80s before dominating the women’s team competition in recent years.

Only the US have won more titles, having prevailed 17 times since the competition was created in 1963.

The Czech Republic further solidified their claim as the dominant force in women’s tennis when Pliskova and Strycova completed their win, giving the team their 10th title.

It was not easy that’s why we are so happy,” said Pliskova.

Against the pair who won the French Open, Strycova and Pliskova returned well and made the most of Mladenovic’s below-par performance to hand the Czech Republic victory.

Petra Kvitova, twice a champion at Wimbledon, had been expected to spearhead the Czechs’ charge towards victory but after her unexpected defeat in her opening singles, she was a no show on Sunday.

“Kvitova could not play today, we did not have many options, but Strycova played really well,” said Czech captain Petr Pala, who helped his side recover from a 2-1 deficit to become the first captain to win five Fed Cup titles.

“The girls never gave up, like the French, but there is only one winner.”

Rather than dwelling on Kvitova’s absence, her Czech teammates simply focused on the task ahead and their determination paid off as they became the first team to win three successive Fed Cup titles since Spain achieved the feat from 1993-95.

“It’s a wonderful day. It was not easy that’s why we are so happy,” said Pliskova.

“The secret was to go out there and fight for every point. We fought until the end,” added Strycova.

“It’s sad for the players but that’s sport. The players gave everything, they were brave and did their best. Congratulations to the Czech,” said French federation president Jean Gachassin.

Pliskova had put the visitors ahead on Saturday with an epic 6-3, 4-6, 16-14 win against Mladenovic after a nail-biting third set, the longest ever played in a Fed Cup final.

Garcia drew France level as she beat world number 11 Kvitova 7-6(6), 6-3 with an aggressive display, suggesting an upset was possible.— Reuters