Yandana Hninsi Housing complex opens

THE Yadana Hninsi Housing complex, the new government’s first public housing development project in Yangon, was opened yesterday by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the State Counsellor.

The project, which started on 1st June, is a model project for future housing complexes in Dagon Seikkan Township, with its five 18-storey buildings.

As part of public housing development, the Yangon Region Government has adopted a five-year plan from the 2016-17 fiscal year to the 2020-2021 fiscal year to build 180,000 apartments.

Under the plan, 8,000 apartments will be constructed in two years from the 2016-2017 fiscal year to 2017-2018 fiscal year in the Yangon Region, and the apartments would be sold on an installment plan for K10 million, according to the Ministry of Construction.

To implement the project, the Ministry of Construction established the Construction and Housing Development Bank in 2014 and is planning to sell low-cost apartments worth under 10 Ks million with a 30 per cent down payment, with the remaining 70 per cent payable monthly for periods of eight, ten, twelve and 15 years.

Speaking on the occasion, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi urged the people and private businessmen to assist in implementing the public housing development projects, calling it a “public-private partnership” model.

She also requested the people to work together with the government in restoring the city’s former glory of “the most beautiful country in the eastern region,” expressing the Union Government’s commitment to upgrade Yangon, which can be accessed not only by road but also by waterway in the future.

The State Counsellor also pledged that the Union Government would assist the Yangon Region Government in bringing glory back to the city.

As she discussed the current traffic congestion in the city, the State Counsellor said the government had a vision of the city in which people do not need to spend time on the road unnecessarily.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi planted a Maha Hlaygar tree in the complex to mark the opening ceremony, while Union Minister for Construction U Win Khaing and Yangon Region Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein also planted commemorative trees.

About 2,200 apartments will be sold to the public on installment system in the near future under the arrangements of the Ministry of Construction and the Yangon Region Government.

The housing complex was formally opened by Union Minister U Win Khaing, Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein, Superintending Engineer of the Ministry of Construction Daw San San Aye and Managing Director of Shwe Taung Company U Aung Than. — Myanmar News Agency

Aid flows to villages in northern Rakhine

EMERGENCY aid from local and international organisations reached 12 villages in Maungtaw Township, northern Rakhine State, yesterday.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and the organization MAUK distributed 250 rice bags to 12 villages which are experiencing food shortages following the 9 October attacks.

Officials of the ministry and responsible personnel of MAUK delivered the aid to Sapegon, Ya-yin yaw, Ngakhaya, Myothit, Ahlet Pyupa, Pyuma Kanyintan, Kapatang, Ya-myinwaung, Sabepinyin, Chanpyin, Ywu-yin and Thuyato villages.

The organisation MAUK also delivered 250 rice bags to Nwayontaung, Thahokyaung, Aung Bala and Pyarhar and Thukha Myan villages in northern Rakhine on Friday.

UN and international organizations also delivered humanitarian aid to 17 villages in Maungtaw District on 19 and 20 December.

The move comes as the Rakhine State Government is stepping up efforts for sending aid to the conflict areas. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has delivered aid to villages in northern Rakhine since 7th December and the World Food Programme, the IAI, Care, UNICEF, the International Organization for Migration and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) also began their efforts on 19th December.

After the violent attacks on border guard outposts, the WFP has been delivering aid to local residents through local staff since 4th November. — Tin Maung Lwin
Government troops clash with KIA/TNLA/MNDAA forces

Columns of government troops, while conducting area clearance operations in Kutkai, Shan State (North), engaged in clashes with members of the KIA, TNLA and the MNDAA on Friday morning.

At about 7.20 in the morning, government troops came under heavy fire from some 40 members of the armed groups about 3,500 metres away from Panfake Village in the township and also from about two-miles away from Korgyu by approximately 50 members of the armed groups. The government troops exchanged fire with the armed groups in both clashes until they retreated to the west and the northwest. One of the government troops was injured in the clashes.

Pursuing the armed groups, the government troops seized 185 grams of a pink-coloured stimulant powder worth K 3.3 million in a heap of dry grass at an old farmhouse about two miles away from the town.

This project aims to improve traffic and logistics network on both sides of the bridge, which is expected to contribute to increasing direct investments in Thilawa SEZ and the development of Myanmar economy.

The loan will be provided with an interest rate of 0.01 per cent per annum, with 40-year repayment period (including a 10-year grace period).

The Embassy of Japan believes the ODA Loan project will contribute to the social and economic development of Myanmar, thereby improving people’s livelihood.—GNLM

IDPs scrutinized and admitted in Mongko

Internally displaced persons who left their homes due to fighting in Shan State (North) are being scrutinized and re-admitted into Mongko as regional stability is restored.

The IDPs, who abandoned their homes due to attacks of KIA, the TNLA, the MNDAA, and the AA, have been returning to their homes since 9th December as government troops, police, staff of the Township Administration Department and other government agencies scrutinized them and admitted them back into the towns. Yesterday morning, a total of 14 people, including 10 males and 4 females, were admitted into the town. Altogether 10,248 residents from 2,260 households have been admitted into the town so far, according to authorities.

—Myanmar News Agency

Palaung residents flee amid fears of conscription, extortion by SSA (Wanhaing)

Frequent conscription and extortion by the SSA (Wanhaing) group forced 13 Palaung nationals, including six men and seven women to abandon their homes in Pandham and Wanmaing Villages in Monghso Township, Shan State (South).

The families arrived at a monastery in Yephyu Village in Yakswak Township on Thursday.

Local battalion and a mobile medical team visited the Palaung IDP families and attended to their needs, providing rice, edible oil and healthcare.

—Myanmar News Agency

Japan provides ODA loan up to JPY 31,051 million for Bago River Bridge Construction Project

Mr. Tateshi Higuchi, Ambassador of Japan to Myanmar and H.E. U Maung Maung Win, Deputy Minister for Planning and Finance, signed the Exchange of Notes for ODA loan project on Friday.

The project amounts to 31,051 million Japanese Yen (approximately 264 million US dollars).

This ODA project is announced by Prime Minister Abe to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, State Counsellor, at the time of Summit in Vientiane, Laos, in September this year.

This project will assist in constructing a new bridge to connect Yangon City side with Thilawa SEZ. This project aims to improve traffic and logistics network on both sides of the bridge, which is expected to contribute to increasing direct investments in Thilawa SEZ and the development of Myanmar economy.

The loan will be provided with an interest rate of 0.01 per cent per annum, with 40-year repayment period (including a 10-year grace period).

The Embassy of Japan believes the ODA Loan project will contribute to the social and economic development of Myanmar, thereby improving people’s livelihood.—GNLM

Weapons, ammunition seized

Columns of government troops, while conducting area clearance operations in Mongko, Shan State (North) and adjacent areas yesterday, seized various weapons, ammunition and a 0.22 caliber firearm and 15 rounds of ammunition that had been wrapped in a groundsheet hidden in a bush.—Myanmar News Agency

Five civilians injured in random KIA heavy weapon fire

About five KIA troops opened fire using heavy weapons on vehicles traveling on the Union Highway in Kutkai Township in Shan State (North) yesterday, injuring five civilians near Monglwe Village.

Columns of government troops provided first aid to the injured and have been conducting area clearance operations in the area.—Myanmar News Agency

Mr Tateshi Higuchi and U Maung Maung Win exchange the notes for the Bago River Bridge Construction Project.

Photo: Supplied

The injured civilians receive medical care at the hospital. Photo: State Counsellor’s Office Information Committee

Photo: supplied

St. Mary’s Cathedral, at the corner of Bogyoke Aung San Road and Bo Aung Kyaw Street in Botataung, the largest Catholic church in Yangon, is illuminated by holiday lighting on Christmas Eve, 24th December.

Photo: Zaw Min Latt

Photo: Zaw Min Latt

Photo: Zaw Min Latt

Photo: SuPPlied
U Kyaw Tin attends 2nd Mekong-Lancang Foreign Ministers’ Meeting

MINISTER of State for Foreign Affairs U Kyaw Tin attended the 2nd Mekong-Lancang Cooperation (MLC) Foreign Ministers’ Meeting held in Siem Reap, Cambodia on 23 December 2016.

The meeting was co-chaired by Mr. Prak Sokhonn, Senior Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Kingdom of Cambodia and Mr. Wang Yi, Foreign Minister, People’s Republic of China. It was also attended by Mr. Saleumxay Kommasith, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mr. Pham Binh Minh, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand.

At the meeting, the Ministers adopted the Joint Press Communiqué, Matrix of the follow-ups to the 45 outcome projects endorsed at the 1st MLC Leaders’ Meeting held in Sanya, People’s Republic of China in March 2016 and the General Principles for the Establishment of the Joint Working Groups on the five MLC key priority areas, namely Connectivity, Production Capacity Cooperation, Cross-border Economic Cooperation, Water Resources, Agriculture and Poverty Reduction.

During the meeting, China officially announced the launch of Mekong-Lancang Special Fund with 300 million US Dollar capital to implement the cooperation projects to the benefit of all the people in the Mekong region. It was also decided to convene the next Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in China in 2017 and the 2nd MLC Leaders’ Meeting in Cambodia in 2018.

Mekong-Lancang Cooperation (MLC) is a sub-regional mechanism between China and Mekong countries namely, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Viet Nam and Thailand.

MLC was initially proposed during the 17th SEAN-China Summit held in Nay Pyi Taw.

Under this mechanism, China and Mekong countries have been cooperating based on three pillars namely, the Political and Security, Economic and Sustainable Development and Social, Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges.

While in Siem Reap, Minister for Foreign Affairs met with Mr. Wang Yi, Foreign Minister of the People’s Republic of China and discussed matters on Mekong subregional cooperation and bilateral relations.

—Myanmar News Agency

Daw Su Su Lwin, President’s wife, presented CELD’s Global Inspirational Leadership Award 2016

DAW Su Su Lwin, wife of the President and Pyithu Hluttaw representative, has won the Global Inspirational Leadership Award 2016 presented by the Centre for Economic and Leadership Development (CELD) for her effort for the development of education sector and women and children, according to the Amazons Watch Magazine.

The award presentation ceremony was held at South America-Africa-Middle East-Asia Women Summit (SAMEAWS) convened on 13th December, 2016 at Shangri-La Hotel in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, and Myanmar Ambassador to Kuwait HE U Aye Khaing, received the award on behalf of Daw Su Su Lwin.

Similarly, the Amazons Watch Magazine published by CELD presented the Global Women Leaders 2016 Award of CELD for her effort for educational development in addition to a news report in its magazine which mentions her as one among the Top 100 Most Influential Women in Emerging Economies.

Centre for Economic and Leadership Development (CELD) is a non-profit organization, which has achieved Special Consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission (ECOSOC).—Myanmar News Agency

Civilian injured by a landmine planted by KIA

A CIVILIAN was injured when he stepped on a landmine planted by the KIA while he was picking vegetables in a forest about 800 metres from Bawzarde, his village, in Long-khin Village-tract in Hpakant on Friday.

Columns of government troops provided necessary first-aid to U Je Yawsa, and then rushed the injured man to Limg-khin Hospital.

Government troops visited him and presented cash assistance.—Myanmar News Agency
**Commissioning ceremony of new naval vessels for marking the 69th anniversary Myanmar Navy Day held**

Commissioning ceremony of new vessels for marking the 69th anniversary Myanmar Navy Day in progress.

**Myanmar Navy commissioned its new vessels at the No 3 jetty in Yangon yesterday for marking the 69th anniversary Day of Myanmar Navy.**

A Commissioning ceremony of new vessels for marking the 69th anniversary Day of Myanmar Navy was held at the No 3 jetty in Yangon yesterday.

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, wearing Myanmar Navy Uniform as a mark of honouring Myanmar Navy Day, attended and delivered a speech at the ceremony.

Then, he cordially greeted all the retired Commanders-in-Chief (Navy) who attended the ceremony.

After Chief of Staff (Navy) Rear Admiral Moe Aung declared the new vessels as the commissioned vessels, raising National Flag, Myanmar Navy Flag and Commissioning Flags and striking bell in line with the step-by-step commissioning process.

The Senior General and party inspected the commissioned vessels.

The Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing took the salute by the frigates namely Kyaw-Sit-Thar, Sin Phyoo Shin led by Aung Zeya frigate, corvette missile carrier Bayintnaung, Fast Attack Crafts in the Single Line Formation.

At the ceremony the Senior General said that number of navy vessels was not enough in the past, and so there were weak points in defending the Myanmar coastal area. Now, as Myanmar Navy has been upgraded, resulting in higher capacity. This being so, our territorial waters is now duly respected.

Next, the Senior General and party inspected the Naval Dockyard Command Headquaters.

In the evening, Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and his wife formally cut the ribbon to open the booths to mark the 69th anniversary Myanmar Navy Day.

The Myanmar Navy commissioned a personnel carrier ship, corvette missile carrier ship and six Coastal land craft utility ships at the Commissioning ceremony of new vessels for marking the 69th anniversary Myanmar Navy Day. —Myanmar News Agency

**Action taken against another landlord who illegally rented house to six Chinese**

**LEGAL** action was taken against a landlord in Mandalay on 22 December by the Immigration and National Registration Department for renting his house to six Chinese people without informing the Immigration department, it is learnt.

The landlord rented the house to six foreign Chinese, including Mr. Chen Fu Xing, for Kyat 4 million per month. The landlord is said to have been dealing with the foreigners for a year.

“...The landlords and hotel owners in Mandalay will face penalties if they rent rooms or apartments to foreigners without informing to the Immigration and National Registration Department,” said an official from the immigration department on Friday.

Despite the action taken against the landlord, the six foreigners are legally working for “Run Together Advertising” and are staying in Myanmar in accordance with the Immigration rules and regulations, it is learnt from the Immigration and National Registration Department.

Currently, the landlord from Chan Aye Thar San township is now on trial under section 5 (1) of the Foreigners Registration Act. There have already been eight landlords and owners of two hotels who have had legal action taken against them by the Mandalay region Immigration and National Registration Department,—Myitmakha News Agency

**Repair of sixty pagodas completed in Bagan**

MINOR repair of 60 pagodas in Bagan has been completed as of the third week of December, it is learnt from Archaeology, National Museum and Library Department.

“Following the earthquake, we have been repairing the pagodas both minor and major, and minor repair of 60 pagodas has already been finished as of third week of December,” said U Thein Lwin, a high-ranking official from Archaeology, National Museum and Library Department.

The Archaeology, National Museum and Library Department has been conducting emergency repair of over 80 pagodas as well.

Over 300 pagodas were damaged by an earthquake of 6.8 magnitude on 24 August, 2016. The government has been conducting the repair and renovation of the pagodas with the assistance of Thai, Japanese, Chinese and UNESCO experts.

Major repairs will be conducted with the expertise of expatriate professionals in the first week of January, 2017. —Myitmakha News Agency

**Myanmar chili growers and suppliers association to form in January**

MYANMAR chili growers and suppliers association will be formed officially next month to produce high-quality chilies in Myanmar, it is learnt.

“We will apply for the license soon. We will form the association in January 2017. Our Myanmar Chili Growers and Suppliers Association will be under the Myanmar Consumers Association,” said U Than Lwin, chairman of Myanmar Chili growers and suppliers association (temporary).

“Chilis mainly need to be kept dry. The chili growers need to know about Aplatoxin B1,” he added.

The Myanmar Chili Growers and Suppliers Association has been formed with 14 members. The members were invited on 20 December from state-owned newspapers. Over 50 applications have been received from chili growers and chili powder producers from regions and states.

Chili is mainly grown in the Mandalay region and Ayeyawady region and Shan state. The Skyntet agriculture channel is telecasting awareness programmes on chili drying and storage methods. They will also go on field trips to discuss the technology.

The chili growers and chili powder producers have requested the the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) to support the technical assistance to be able to grow the high-quality chili in Myanmar.—Myitmakha News Agency

---

**POEM:**

**X’mas done**

* Every Christmas I recollect
    To ones of long ago;
    I see our mentalpiece deck
    With stockings in a row.

* Every Christmas finds me conjure
    Of days that used to be
    When we hid present here and there,
    For all the family.

* Every Christmas I keep in mind
    The fragrance in the air,
    Of days that used to be
    And cookies everywhere.

* Every Christmas finds me pray
    For Christmases now past
    And I am back in schooldays
    As far as memories last.

* Yin Nwe Ko (Linn)
23-12-2016
How India lobbied Moody’s for ratings upgrade, but failed

NEW DELHI — India criticised Moody’s ratings methods and pushed aggressively for an upgrade, documents reviewed by Reuters show, but the US-based agency declined to budge citing concerns over the country’s debt levels and fragile banks.

Since storming to power in 2014, Modi has unveiled measures to boost investment, cool inflation and narrow the fiscal and current account deficits, but his policies have not been rewarded with a ratings upgrade from any of the “big three” global ratings agencies, who say more is needed.

Previously unpublished correspondence between India’s finance ministry and Moody’s shows New Delhi failed to assuage the ratings agency’s concerns about the cost of its debt burden and a banking sector weighed down by $136 billion in bad loans.

In letters and emails written in October, the finance ministry questioned Moody’s methodology, saying it was not accounting for a steady decline in the India’s debt burden in recent years. It said the agency ignored countries’ levels of development when assessing their fiscal strength.

Rejecting those arguments, Moody’s said India’s debt situation was not as rosy as the government maintained and its banks were a cause for concern, the correspondence seen by Reuters showed.

Moody’s and one of its lead sovereign analysts, Marie Diron, declined to comment on correspondence, saying ratings deliberations were confidential. India’s finance ministry did not respond to requests for comment.

Aviraj Mayaram, a former chief finance ministry official, called the government’s approach “completely unusual”. “There was no way pressure could be put on rating agencies,” Mayaram told Reuters. “It’s not done.” India has been the world’s fastest growing major economy over the past two years, but that rapid expansion has done little to broaden the government’s revenue base. At nearly 21 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), India’s revenues are lower than the 27.1 per cent benchmark for Baa-rated countries.

India is rated at Ba3 by Moody’s, the agency’s lowest notch for debt considered investment grade.

Rupee notes of different denominations are seen in this picture illustration taken in Mumbai. Photo: Reuters

Thousands flee coastal villages as typhoon approaches Philippines

MANILA — Philippine authorities on Saturday evacuated thousands in coastal villages in the country’s central region where a category 4 typhoon is expected to make landfall later this weekend, bringing strong winds and heavy rains.

The weather bureau said typhoon Nock-ten, locally known as Nina, had earlier packed winds of 130 km (93 mph) but has since slowed to 15 km, moving west-northwest and was on target to hit Camarines Sur province in the Bicol peninsula.

“Families in Albay’s coastline have started fleeing to safer and higher grounds,” Mina Marasigan, a spokeswoman for the national disaster agency, told reporters, adding coastal villagers in both Camarines Sur and Camarines Norte provinces were also told to move to temporary shelters.

Albay is a province south of Camarines Sur.

Storm surges and flooding were also expected in low-lying and coastal areas and landslides were feared in mountain slopes, the disaster agency said.

Marasigan said authorities have raised typhoon alert levels in nine provinces along the eastern seaboard, suspending land, sea and air travel until after Sunday to avoid accidents.

Thousands of holiday travellers were also stranded in transport terminals. Several flights have been canceled for the weekend in the central and northeastern parts of the country.

DHAKA — Four people including wife of a slain militant commander surrendered to police as Bangladesh law enforcers on Saturday morning conducted a raid on a hideout of banned Islamist outfit Jamaat Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) in capital Dhaka.

JMB Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia told journalists that the four surrendered to the police along with a pistol and several bullet. He said the suspected militants include Jebunnahar Shila who was earlier identified as the wife of slain Major (ret’d) Jahidul Islam, militant commander of Neo-JMB (an offshoot of the banned militant outfit Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh) blamed for 1 July attack on the Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka’s diplomatic quarter.

Shila had earlier managed to escape another drive in Dhaka couple months earlier.

Mia said the raid is still underway as three more militants wearing suicide vests are inside the three-story building.

He said the militants have been asked to surrender but they are threatening to detonate grenades tied to their bodies. A team of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police cordoned off the building near Bangladesh’s premier airport in capital Dhaka Saturday suspecting presence of militants there.

Shila’s husband Bangladesh Army’s sacked Major Jahid was killed in a raid in Rupganj on the outskirts of Dhaka on 2 September months after of the deadly cafe attack.

Tamim Chowdhury, a Bangladeshi-Canadian and Sarwar Jahan, identified as Neo-JMB chief who was also killed during a raid on 8 October, have been blamed as the mastermind of the brutal attack on the Spanish cafe.

Chowdhury was also killed in a police raid on 27 August morning.

JMB carried out a series of bombings in 63 out of the country’s 64 districts, including capital Dhaka on 17 August, leaving two people dead and 150 others injured. Hundreds of JMB leaders and activists were rounded up while six top leaders of the group, including Shaikh Abdur Rahman, were hanged in 2005. —Xinhua

6,000 people spend night at airport as heavy snow hits Hokkaido

SAPPORO — Around 6,000 people were forced to spend Friday night at New Chitose Airport in Hokkaido after about 280 flights were canceled as the northern Japanese prefecture was hit by its heaviest December snowfall in 50 years, the airport operator said on Saturday. The number of people stranded overnight at the airport’s passenger terminal building was the most since its opening in 1992, the operator’s public relations division told the Asahi Shimbun newspaper.

“Almost everyone was forced to stay in the terminal,” said Chitose airport Toshihiro Hayashi, a spokesman for the airport.

“Many people had nothing to eat,” he said.

SAPPORO — Around 6,000 people were forced to spend Friday night at New Chitose Airport in Hokkaido after about 280 flights were canceled as the northern Japanese prefecture was hit by its heaviest December snowfall in 50 years, the airport operator said on Saturday. The number of people stranded overnight at the airport’s passenger terminal building was the most since its opening in 1992, the operator’s public relations division told the Asahi Shimbun newspaper.

“Almost everyone was forced to stay in the terminal,” said Chitose airport Toshihiro Hayashi, a spokesman for the airport.

“Many people had nothing to eat,” he said.

SAPPORO — Around 6,000 people were forced to spend Friday night at New Chitose Airport in Hokkaido after about 280 flights were canceled as the northern Japanese prefecture was hit by its heaviest December snowfall in 50 years, the airport operator said on Saturday. The number of people stranded overnight at the airport’s passenger terminal building was the most since its opening in 1992, the operator’s public relations division told the Asahi Shimbun newspaper.

“Almost everyone was forced to stay in the terminal,” said Chitose airport Toshihiro Hayashi, a spokesman for the airport.

“Many people had nothing to eat,” he said.

SAPPORO — Around 6,000 people were forced to spend Friday night at New Chitose Airport in Hokkaido after about 280 flights were canceled as the northern Japanese prefecture was hit by its heaviest December snowfall in 50 years, the airport operator said on Saturday. The number of people stranded overnight at the airport’s passenger terminal building was the most since its opening in 1992, the operator’s public relations division told the Asahi Shimbun newspaper.

“Almost everyone was forced to stay in the terminal,” said Chitose airport Toshihiro Hayashi, a spokesman for the airport.

“Many people had nothing to eat,” he said.

SAPPORO — Around 6,000 people were forced to spend Friday night at New Chitose Airport in Hokkaido after about 280 flights were canceled as the northern Japanese prefecture was hit by its heaviest December snowfall in 50 years, the airport operator said on Saturday. The number of people stranded overnight at the airport’s passenger terminal building was the most since its opening in 1992, the operator’s public relations division told the Asahi Shimbun newspaper.

“Almost everyone was forced to stay in the terminal,” said Chitose airport Toshihiro Hayashi, a spokesman for the airport.

“Many people had nothing to eat,” he said.

SAPPORO — Around 6,000 people were forced to spend Friday night at New Chitose Airport in Hokkaido after about 280 flights were canceled as the northern Japanese prefecture was hit by its heaviest December snowfall in 50 years, the airport operator said on Saturday. The number of people stranded overnight at the airport’s passenger terminal building was the most since its opening in 1992, the operator’s public relations division told the Asahi Shimbun newspaper.

“Almost everyone was forced to stay in the terminal,” said Chitose airport Toshihiro Hayashi, a spokesman for the airport.

“Many people had nothing to eat,” he said.

SAPPORO — Around 6,000 people were forced to spend Friday night at New Chitose Airport in Hokkaido after about 280 flights were canceled as the northern Japanese prefecture was hit by its heaviest December snowfall in 50 years, the airport operator said on Saturday. The number of people stranded overnight at the airport’s passenger terminal building was the most since its opening in 1992, the operator’s public relations division told the Asahi Shimbun newspaper.

“Almost everyone was forced to stay in the terminal,” said Chitose airport Toshihiro Hayashi, a spokesman for the airport.

“Many people had nothing to eat,” he said.

SAPPORO — Around 6,000 people were forced to spend Friday night at New Chitose Airport in Hokkaido after about 280 flights were canceled as the northern Japanese prefecture was hit by its heaviest December snowfall in 50 years, the airport operator said on Saturday. The number of people stranded overnight at the airport’s passenger terminal building was the most since its opening in 1992, the operator’s public relations division told the Asahi Shimbun newspaper.

“Almost everyone was forced to stay in the terminal,” said Chitose airport Toshihiro Hayashi, a spokesman for the airport.

“Many people had nothing to eat,” he said.

SAPPORO — Around 6,000 people were forced to spend Friday night at New Chitose Airport in Hokkaido after about 280 flights were canceled as the northern Japanese prefecture was hit by its heaviest December snowfall in 50 years, the airport operator said on Saturday. The number of people stranded overnight at the airport’s passenger terminal building was the most since its opening in 1992, the operator’s public relations division told the Asahi Shimbun newspaper.

“Almost everyone was forced to stay in the terminal,” said Chitose airport Toshihiro Hayashi, a spokesman for the airport.

“Many people had nothing to eat,” he said.

SAPPORO — Around 6,000 people were forced to spend Friday night at New Chitose Airport in Hokkaido after about 280 flights were canceled as the northern Japanese prefecture was hit by its heaviest December snowfall in 50 years, the airport operator said on Saturday. The number of people stranded overnight at the airport’s passenger terminal building was the most since its opening in 1992, the operator’s public relations division told the Asahi Shimbun newspaper.

“Almost everyone was forced to stay in the terminal,” said Chitose airport Toshihiro Hayashi, a spokesman for the airport.

“Many people had nothing to eat,” he said.

SAPPORO — Around 6,000 people were forced to spend Friday night at New Chitose Airport in Hokkaido after about 280 flights were canceled as the northern Japanese prefecture was hit by its heaviest December snowfall in 50 years, the airport operator said on Saturday. The number of people stranded overnight at the airport’s passenger terminal building was the most since its opening in 1992, the operator’s public relations division told the Asahi Shimbun newspaper.

“Almost everyone was forced to stay in the terminal,” said Chitose airport Toshihiro Hayashi, a spokesman for the airport.

“Many people had nothing to eat,” he said.
**South Korean president’s friend at heart of scandal summoned for questioning**

SEOUL — A South Korean special prosecutor probing a corruption scandal engulfing impeached President Park Geun-hye summoned a friend of hers at the centre of the crisis for questioning on Saturday on charges including bribery and embezzlement, an official said.

The questioning of Choi Soon-sil, whom Park has described as a lifelong friend, came ahead of a ninth straight weekend rally in central Seoul demanding the immediate ouster of Park.

Choi and other former presidential aides were charged in November with abuse of power and fraud, but Park has immunity from prosecution as long as she is in office even though her powers are suspended.

“The charges in the indictment are but a very small part of the 14 points under investigation by the special prosecutor,” said Lee Kyu-chul, a spokesman for the team of investigators probing the scandal.

Choi will be questioned on charges of bribery and transferring embezzled assets abroad, Lee told a briefing.

Choi, wearing a grey prison uniform and a surgical mask, was taken to the special prosecutor’s office from detention, pushed by a throng of correctional officers through a media scrum.

She did not answer journalists’ questions about the charges.

The special prosecutor has up to 100 days to investigate allegations that Park colluded with Choi and her aides to pressure big conglomerates to contribute 77 billion won ($64 million) to foundations set up to back her policy initiatives.

Park has denied wrongdoing but apologised for carelessness in her ties with Choi.

The friendship dates back to the 1970s when Park served as acting first lady after her mother was killed by an assassin’s bullet intended for her father, then-president Park Chung-hee.

Five years later, in 1979, Park’s father was murdered by an assassin’s bullet. 

Choi’s friendship with the president is in office even though her powers have been suspended.

Another large crowd is expected in central Seoul later in the day calling on Park to step down. A group of 1,000 young people are scheduled to dress up as Santa Claus and march to the presidential Blue House to deliver handouts.—Reuters

---

**Laboratory works to help improve nutrition, food security in Laos**

VIENGTRIANE — The European Union (EU) has made available 22.6 million euros and called for project proposals to improve nutrition and food security in Laos.

The move aims to help Laos accelerate implementation of National Nutrition Strategy 2025 and Plan of Action 2016-2020, which will help to improve food and nutrition security among rural households and create sustainable agricultural wealth at the village and household levels, the state-run Vientiane Times reported on Friday.

“Food access to sufficient and affordable food remains a challenge in itself. Beyond this crucial question, ensuring that food, once obtained, is being utilised and provides adequate nutrition is another key challenge, according to the EU.”

Nutrition is interlinked with agriculture, food security, social protection, health, education, water and sanitation. The devastating consequences of “hidden hunger” as wars and conflicts need to scale up interventions to tackle this challenge are undeniable.—Xinhua

---

**Talks on Indonesia-Japan medium-speed railway project intensified**

JAKARTA — Talks between Indonesia and Japan regarding a medium-speed railway project between Indonesia’s two largest business hubs have been intensified and may become one of the main topics to be discussed during a visit by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Jakarta next month.

The project will be a part of efforts to revitalize the existing 725-kilometre railway between Jakarta and Surabaya, after Japan lost out to China in September last year in bidding to construct a high-speed railway between Indonesia’s capital and the West Java provincial capital Bandung.

The railway will be developd into a medium-speed one with a capacity of 160 kilometres per hour and an end-to-end duration of five hours, down from the current nine hours, with fares of between 50,000 to 90,000 rupiah ($37) and 600,000 rupiah.

Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs Luhut Pandjaitan told reporters Friday that the Ministry of Transportation and the Technology Assessment and Application Agency, or BPPT, had completed an early survey on the project and decided to use an electric system.

The Indonesian government, in its proposal to Japan submitted during Pandjaitan’s visit to Tokyo this week, also picked a public-private partnership to finance the project.

The option was taken because the project “will be costly” and according to the country’s law, railways belong to the state, the close aide of President Joko Widodo said.

Pandjaitan said that, based on Japan’s calculations, the project will cost 102 trillion rupiah, while Jakarta calculated that it may cost less than 80 trillion rupiah.

“We try to combine (the financing from the government and private sector) so the project will not put a heavy burden on our state budget,” Pandjaitan said.

“Apparently, the Japanese side has also agreed with us, so we hope that (negotiations) will be finalised (soon),” he added.

A feasibility study on the railway project will be carried out by BPPT, state-owned railway company PT Kereta Api Indonesia and representatives from Japan.

“The feasibility study, which will be jointly financed by Indonesia and Japan, may be completed by the end of next year, so hopefully the project will start soon after that,” Pandjaitan’s deputy Airif Havas Oegroseno told a small group of journalists.

Further details on the project are expected to be discussed during a visit by Japanese Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Keiichi Ishii to Jakarta on Wednesday and Thursday to prepare for Abe’s visit.

The railway network will be integrated with some dry ports, where goods are loading from Japan’s Tanjung Priok Port will be cleared by customs and quarantined before being transported onward.

Tanjung Priok Port, as well as a new port that will be developed by Indonesia and Japan in Pattimban on the northern coast of West Java Province, is expected to be a hub for loading and unloading goods from ships to be sent to dry ports by train.—Kyodo News

---

**China uncovers 500,000 food safety violations in nine months**

SHANGHAI — China, rocked in recent years by a series of food safety scandals, uncovered as many as half a million illegal food safety violations in the first three quarters of the year, an official said.

Chinese officials have unearthed a series of recent food health scandals, including rice contaminated with heavy metals, the use of recycled “gutter oil” in restaurants as well as the sale of baby formula containing lethal amounts of the industrial chemical melamine in 2008.

Bi Jingquan, the head of China’s Food and Drug Administration, told the Standing Committee of National People’s Congress on Friday that while significant progress had been made in the food sector, “deep-seated” problems remained.

According to a transcript of Bi’s report published on the official website of the National People’s Congress (www.npc.gov.cn), Chinese food safety departments conducted more than 15 million individual inspections in the first three quarters of the year and found more than 500,000 incidents of illegal behavior, he said.

Among the offences were false advertising, the use of counterfeit products and ingredients and the sale of contaminated food products, Bi said. One case in the northeastern province of Jilin involved the use of industrial gelatine in food, while several cases in southwestern Guizhou Province involved the use of counterfeit and low-quality salt.—Reuters
Trump’s nuclear remarks test bid to improve Russia ties

WEST PALM BEACH, (Fla.)/ MOSCOW — US President-elect Donald Trump upped the stakes on Friday in a back-and-forth exchange with President Vladimir Putin over nuclear weapons that tested the Republican’s promises to improve relations with Russia.

Offering a glimpse of how he might conduct diplomacy after taking office on 20 January, Trump reportedly welcomed a nuclear arms race with Russia and China and boasted that the United States would win it.

MSNBC host Mika Brzezinski said Trump told her in an off-air phone call: “Let it be an arms race. We will outmatch them at every pass and outlast them all.” The television station did not play his comments on air. It was the second brusque comment about atomic weapons in two days from the New York businessman that alarmed nuclear non-proliferation experts worried about fueling global tension.

The broadsides from Trump’s resort in Florida appeared to be aimed mostly at Putin even though the two men have vowed to patch up relations between their countries once the Republican enters the White House.

Trump tweeted unexpectedly on Thursday that, “The United States must greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capability until such time as the world comes to its senses regarding nukes,” but gave no further details.

That comment appeared to be a response to Putin who said earlier on Thursday that Russia needed to “strengthen the military potential of strategic nuclear forces.”

Russia and the United States are at odds over Syria’s civil war and Ukraine but Cold War-style nuclear tensions have greatly eased in recent years. Moscow and Washington signed the New START nuclear treaty in 2010 which reduced strategic weapons and delivery systems.

Russia’s Putin discusses killing of ambassador with Erdogan

MOSCOW — Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan gave an update on the investigation into the killing of the Russian ambassador in Ankara in a phone conversation with President Vladimir Putin on Friday which also covered the Syrian crisis, the Kremlin said.

The envoy, Andrei Karlov, was shot dead on Monday by an assassin who shouted “Allahu Akbar” and “Don’t forget Aleppo”. He was buried with military honours in Moscow on Thursday.

“The President of Turkey informed Vladimir Putin about how the investigation of the murder of the Russian ambassador to Turkey was going,” the Kremlin said in a statement.

“The close cooperation between Russian and Turkish law enforcement and special services was noted,” it said.

On the Syrian crisis, the two men expressed satisfaction with the end of the operation in Aleppo.

“This has meant that favourable conditions have been created to start the peace process, assuming there will be a cessation of hostilities across the whole territory of Syria and a transition to a political settlement,” it said.

Russian news agencies reported earlier on Friday that one Russian military police battalion, fully staffed with contract service members, had been deployed from the Hmeimim air base in Syria to Aleppo.

The battalion will help local officials with law enforcement, the defense ministry was quoted as saying by RIA news agency.

Russian President Vladimir Putin (L) and his Turkish counterpart Tayyip Erdogan arrive for a news conference following their meeting in Istanbul, Turkey, on 10 October 2016. Photo: Reuters

Kerry, after UN vote, calls for Israel, Palestinians to advance two-state solution

WASHINGTON — US Secretary of State John Kerry called on Israel and the Palestinians to advance prospects for a two-state solution after the United States abstained in a UN Security Council vote on Friday condemning Israeli settlements.

Kerry said in a statement that the United States did not agree with every aspect of the resolution. But he said the UN measure “rightly condemns violence and incitement and settlement activity and calls on both sides to take constructive steps to reverse current trends and advance the prospects for a two-state solution.”—Reuters

Vucic: Serbia committed to good-neighbourly ties with Croatia

BELGRADE — Serbian PM Aleksandar Vucic met in Belgrade on Friday with Milorad Pupovac, president of Croatia’s Serb National Council, reiterating Serbia’s commitment to good-neighbourly relations with Croatia.

Vucic and Pupovac, who is also an MP in the Croatian parliament, discussed the position of ethnic Serbs in Croatia and possibilities for Serbian government assistance to institutions of the Serb community there. They discussed ways in which the Serbian government can help to solve the difficulties facing Serbs in Croatia and improve their position, the government said in a statement.

The Serbian government will help the institutions of the Serb community in the strengthening of their programming capacities, in particular in education and culture, the statement said. They also discussed the state of the relations between Serbia and Croatia. —Tanjug

Fresh Saudi-led airstrike kills seven children in Yemen

SANAA — At least seven children and two women were killed when a Saudi-led airstrike hit their home in Yemen’s southwestern province of Bih in the early morning.

The airstrike took place around midnight, killing an entire family and destroying their home. Rescuers and residents said on Saturday that it took them about one hour to pull out the bodies. Dozens of adjacent houses were also damaged.

Separately, the Saudi-led coalition launched seven air strikes overnight on the provinces of Saada, Hodeidah and Taiz, targeting Houthis fighters, according to residents and local officials. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

On 23 November, a Saudi-led coalition airstrike killed twelve Yemeni civilians and wounded six others when they were traveling in a pickup truck toward a local public market in Hayran in the northwestern province of Hajja. Saudi Arabia has been leading a mostly Arab military coalition to intervene in the Yemeni conflict since March 2015 via an air campaign. —Xinhua

Turkey-backed rebels kill 68 IS fighters near Syria’s al-Bab

ISTANBUL — Turkey-backed rebels killed 68 Islamic State militants in clashes in northern Syria overnight, Turkish state media reported the military as saying on Saturday, as intense fighting around the town of al-Bab continued.

Syrian rebels supported by Turkish troops have been laying siege to the Islamic State-held town for weeks, as part of the “Euphrates Shield” operation launched by Turkey nearly four months ago to sweep the Sunni hardliners and Kurdish fighters from its Syrian border.

Fighting around al-Bab has escalated this week with Turkish soldiers and 138 jihadists killed in clashes on Wednesday in the deadliest day since the start of Turkey’s Syrian incursion.—Reuters

29 wounded in Mexican fireworks-market blast released from hospital

MEXICO CITY — Some 29 people wounded in Tuesday’s explosion at a central Mexican fireworks market have been released from the hospital, authorities said on Friday.

Another 24 victims remain hospitalized at 13 different hospitals in and around Tultepec, the town in the State of Mexico where the San Pabloito market is located.

Around 3 pm (2100 GMT) on Tuesday, a series of explosions — six major blasts possibly from stored gunpowder kegs, and hundreds of smaller rockets and firecrackers going off in all directions — destroyed the market at the height of the annual shopping season. —Xinhua
Sexual offences In Myanmar, Singapore and India

U Mya Thein, B. A., B.L.
(Continued from 24-12-2016)

(a) sexually penetrated the vagina or anus of a woman (B) with a part of A’s body (other than A’s penis) or anything else; or
(b) penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of a woman (B) with his penis, with or without B’s consent where B is to A’s knowledge A’s grand-daughter, daughter, sister, half-sister, moth- er or grandmother (whether such relationship is or is not traced through lawful wedlock), shall be guilty of an offence.

(2) Any woman of or above the age of 16 years who, with con- sent, permits her grandfather, fa- ther, brother, half-brother, son or grandson (whether such relationship is or is not traced through lawful wedlock) to penetrate her in the manner described in sub- section (1)(a) or (b), knowing him to be her grandfather, father, brother, half-brother, son or grandson, as the case may be, shall be guilty of an offence.

(3) Subject to subsection (4), a man who is guilty of an offence under subsection (1) shall be pun- ished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 5 years.

(4) If a man commits an of- fence under subsection (1) against a woman under 14 years of age, he shall be punished with imprison- ment for a term which may ex- tend to 14 years.

(5) A woman who is guilty of an offence under subsection (2) shall be punished with imprison- ment for a term which may extend to 5 years.

Sexual penetration of a corpse Section 377. (1) Any man who penetrates, with his penis, the vagina, anus or mouth, as the case may be, of a human corpse, shall be guilty of an offence.

(2) A person who is guilty of an offence under subsection (1) shall be punished with imprison- ment for a term which may ex- tend to 14 years, or with fine, or with both.

(3) Any person (A) who causes any man (B) to penetrate with B’s penis, the vagina, anus or mouth, as the case may be, of a human corpse, shall be guilty of an offence if B did not consent to the penetration.

(4) A person who is guilty of an offence under subsection (3) shall be punished with imprison- ment for a term which may ex- tend to 20 years, and shall also be liable to fine or to caning.

According to Indian Penal Code

Section 375. A man is said to commit “Rape”, if he -
(a) penetrates his penis, to any extent, into the vagina, mouth, urethra or anus of a woman or causes her to do so with him or any other person; or
(b) inserts, to any extent, any object or a part of the body, not being the penis, into the vagi- na, mouth, urethra or anus of a woman or makes her to do so with him or any other person; or
(c) manipulates any part of the body of a woman so as to cause penetration into the vagina, urethra or anus of a woman or makes her to do so with him or any other person; or
(d) applies his mouth to the vagina, anus, urethra of a woman or makes her to do so with him or any other person, under the cir- cumstances falling under any of the following seven descriptions:-

First.- Against her will.
Secondly.- Without her con- sent.
Thirdly.- With her consent, when her consent is obtained by putting her or any other person in whom she is interested, in fear of death or of hurt.
Fourthly.- With her consent, when a man knows that he is not her husband and that her consent is given because she believes that he is another man to whom she is engaged herself to be lawfully married.
Fifthly.- With her consent, when, at the time of giving such consent, by reason of unsound- ness of mind or intoxication or the administration by him personal- ly or through another of any stupefying or unwholesome sub- stance, she is unable to under- stand the nature and consequenc- es of that to which she gives consent.
Sixthly.- With or without her consent, when she is under eight- teen years of age.
Seventhly.- When she is una- ble to give consent.

Explanation 1.- For the pur- pose of this section, “vagina” shall also include labia Majora.

Explanation 2.- Consent means an unequivocal voluntary agreement when the woman by words, gestures or any form of verbal or non-verbal communica- tion communicates willingness to participate in the sexual act.

Explanation 3.- Provided that a woman who does not physically resist to the act of penetration shall not be reason- only of that fact be regarded as consenting to the sexual activity.

Explanation 1.- A medical pro- cess of intervention shall not constitute rape.

Exception 2.- Sexual inter- course or sexual acts by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under fifteen years of age, is not rape.

Section 376. (1) Who- ever, except in the cases provided for in sub-section (2) commits rape, shall be punished with rig- orous imprisonment of either de- scription for a term which shall not be less than seven years, but which may extend to imprison- ment for life, and shall also be li- able to fine.

(2) Whoever,- (a) being a police officer, commits rape; (i) within the limits of the police station to which such office- ler is appointed; or (ii) in the permission of any station house; or
(b) commits rape on a woman incapable of giving con- sent; or
(c) being in a position of control or dominance over a woman, commits rape on such woman; or
(d) commits rape on a woman suffering from mental or phys- ical disability; or
(m) while committing rape causes grievous bodily harm or maims or disfigures or endangers the life of a woman; or
(n) commits rape repeatedly on the same woman, shall be pun- ished with rigorous imprisonment of either description for a term of not less than ten years, but which may ex- tend to imprisonment for life, which shall mean imprisonment for the remainder of that person’s natural life, and shall also be lia- ble to fine.

Explanation.- For the pur- pose of this sub-section,- A’s “armed forces” means the naval, military and air force and includes any member of the Armed Forces constituted under any law for the time being in force, including the paramilitary forces and any auxiliary forces that are under the control of the Central Government or the State Government;

To be continued
ALLENTOWN, Pa. — A cargo plane emblazoned with “Prime Air” descended from an empty sky at Lehigh Valley International Airport on Tuesday, ninety minutes from the bustle of New York City, loaded with crates of goods during the peak holiday shopping season.

It’s one of 40 jets leased by Amazon.com Inc for a new cargo service to meet delivery demand from the retail giant’s customers. Exclusive payload data reviewed by Reuters and interviews with airport officials around the country show that Prime Air planes are flying nearly full, but with lightweight loads, taking away valued business from FedEx Corp and United Parcel Service Inc.

Expanding into transportation, from trucks to planes, is one of Amazon’s most important endeavors as it strives to lure new customers with fast shipping while keeping costs under control. The world’s largest online retailer is sending more packages, more often, and later in the day to serve its estimated 35 million to more than 50 million US members of Amazon Prime, a service that promises two-day shipping for $99 per year.

Bulky boxes with goods once purchased in stores, like toilet paper, are a revenue driver at UPS and FedEx. That’s in part because they now are charging customers increasingly by boxes’ volume rather than weight. Shipping its own big, light packages is helping Amazon dodge those rising fees.

To date, Amazon has only said it leased the planes to speed up shipping and to backstop cargo partners during the holiday season. FedEx and UPS have delivered items late for Christmas in recent years.

“Our own delivery efforts are needed to supplement that capacity rather than replace it,” Amazon spokesman Kelly Cheeseman told Reuters. She declined to comment on pending cargo airline fees.

“Amazon’s planes fly to at least 10 airports across the United States, supplying its warehouses nearby. Officials at four airports said Amazon’s flights are operating near capacity but landing with lower-than-average weight — meaning it is placing low-density shipments inside the jets.”

Amazon aircraft on a monthly basis handled only between 37 per cent and 52 per cent of their maximum loads by weight, according to an analysis of cargo, capacity and landing data from nearby airports, with supplementary information from tracking website FlightAware. By contrast, FedEx and UPS were at 53 per cent and 56 per cent capacity, respectively, according to US Transportation Department data for the year ended September 30, 2016, excluding weight carried for free.

“You’re dealing with cargo that’s big in dimensions, but in pure weight it’s light,” said an airport manager in California.

Airports in Tampa and Charlotte reported similar payload data for the carriers contracted by Amazon, but they were not specific whether the flights were full by volume or whether they were operated on Amazon’s behalf. A seventh airport outside Chicago said the planes were not full, though daily flights only started in October 2016, and Amazon likely is learning the market, transport experts said.—Reuters
Aleppo sees shelling, air strikes again as Assad urges peace talks

BEIRUT — Syrian rebels shelled Aleppo and air strikes resumed around the city on Friday as Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his allies said the insurgents’ withdrawal from the city could pave the way toward a political solution for the country.

A day after the last rebels left their remaining pocket of territory in the city, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights — a war monitor based in Britain — said about 10 shells fell in its southwestern al-Hamdhaniya district.

The Observatory said six people, including two children, were killed. State television said at least three people died.

Insurgents seeking to oust As- sad have shelled government con- trolled areas of Aleppo throughout the conflict, which began in 2011. The destruction in those parts of the city has been far less than in eastern districts rebels held until this month.

Air strikes resumed in re- bel-held areas of the countryside near Aleppo on Friday for the first time since the end of the evacu- ation operation.

Strikes hit to the west, south- west and south of the city, areas which had not been hit for at least a week. The Britain-based Ob- servatory had no information on casu- ailities yet.

After months of bombardment and a final few weeks of intense air strikes and Syrian army advances on the besieged, rebel-held part of Aleppo, a local ceasefire was reached on 15 December which allowed thousand of civilians and then fighters to leave.

The last left the city late on Thursday for countryside immedi- ately to the west. The International Committee of the Red Cross said about 35,000 people, mostly civil- ians, had departed.

Many of those who left are living as refugees in the areas to the west and south of Aleppo, in- cluding in Idlib province where bulldozers were used to clear heavy snowfall on Friday morning, the opposition Orient television showed.

On Friday, the army and its allies, including Lebanese group Hezbolah, searched districts aban- doned by the rebels, to clear them of mines and other dangers, the Observatory reported.

State television showed empty streets lined with apartment blocks smashed by air strikes in the al-An- sari district.

In the capital Damascus, the water authority has been forced to cut supplies coming into the Syr- ian capital for a few days and use reserves instead after rebels pollut- ed the water with diesel, it said on Friday.

The al-Fijaa spring which sup- plies Damascus with water is in the rebel-held Wadi Barada valley northwest of the capital in a moun- tainous area near the Lebanese border. The government controls much of the surrounding territory and on Friday carried out aerial attacks and shelled the rebel-held area, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

A military news outlet run by Hezbolah said the rebels in the valley had refused to leave the area and the Syrian Arab Army began an offensive against them on Fri- day morning.

Through a series of so-called settlement agreements and army offensives, the Syrian govern- ment, backed by Russian air pow- er and Iran-backed militias, has been steadily suppressing armed opposition around the capital.

—Reuters

FBI warns of possible Islamic State-inspired attacks in US

WASHINGTON — US federal authorities cautioned local law enforcement on Friday to be aware that supporters of Islamic State have been calling for their sympathizers to attack holiday gatherings in the United States, including churches, a law en- forcement official said.

The warning, issued in a bulletin to local law enforce- ment, said there were no known specific, credible threats.

The notice from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and De- partment of Homeland Security was issued out of an abundance of caution after a publicly avail- able list of US churches was published on pro-Islamic State websites.

“The FBI is aware of the recent link published online that urges attacks against US church- es. As with similar threats, the FBI is tracking this matter while we investigate its credibility,” the FBI said in a statement.

Islamic State sympathiz- ers “continue aspirational calls for attacks on holiday gath- erings, including targeting churches,” CNN quoted the bulletin as saying. The notice describes different signs of suspicious activity for which police should be alert, it said.

—Reuters

Malta hijack ends peacefully as Gaddafi loyalists surrender

VALLETTA — Hijackers armed with what were probably replica weapons forced an airliner to land in Malta on Friday before freeing all their hostages unharmed and surrendering, having declared loy- alty to Libya’s late leader Muam-mur Gaddafi.

Television pictures showed two men being led from the aircraft in handcuffs. The prime minister of the tiny Mediterranean island, Jo- seph Muscat, tweeted: “Hijackers surrendered, searched and taken in custody.”

The Airbus A320 had been on an internal flight in Libya on Friday morning when it was diverted to Malta, 500 km (300 miles) north of the Libyan coast, after a man told the crew he had a hand grenade.

Muscat said the grenade and two pistols the hijackers were also carrying appeared to be replicas, according to an initial forensic ex- amination.

A Libyan television channel reported it had spoken by phone with a hijacker who described him- self as head of a pro-Gaddafi party. Gaddafi was killed in an uprising in 2011, and Libya has been racked by factional violence since.

With troops positioned a few hundred meters (yards) away, buses were driven onto the tarmac at Malta International Airport to car- ry away 109 passengers, as well as some of the crew. Television footage showed no signs of strug- gle or alarm. After the passengers had left the plane, a man briefly ap- peared at the top of the steps with a plain green flag resembling that of Gaddafi’s now-defunct state.

Libya’s Channel TV station said one hijacker, who gave his name as Moussa Shala, had said by phone he was the head of Al- Fateh Al-Jadid, or The New Al- Fateh. Al-Fateh is the name that Gaddafi gave to September, the month he staged a coup in 1969, and the word came to signify his coming to power.

In a tweet, the TV station later quoted the hijacker as saying: “We took this measure to declare and promote our new party.”

Lawmaker Hadi al-Saghir told Reuters that Abdulsame Mra- bit, a fellow member of Libya’s House of Representatives on the plane, had told him the two hij- ackers were in their mid-20s and were from the Tebu ethnic group in southern Libya.

After the standoff ended peacefully, Muscat told a news conference there had been talks be- tween Maltese authorities and the Libyan hijackers.

The men had asked for two Maltese negotiators to board the aircraft, but this was rejected.

—Reuters
Summer may be the most fattening time of year for kids

NEW YORK — Children are more likely to become overweight or obese during summer vacation than during the school year, a US study suggests.

The national study of more than 18,000 school children found that from the autumn start of kindergarten to the spring semester of second grade, the prevalence of obesity increased from 8.9 to 11.5 percent. During that same period, the proportion of overweight kids climbed from 23.3 to 29.7 percent.

None of these gains in numbers of obese or overweight kids happened during the school year, however. All of the increases in what’s known as body mass index (BMI) — a measure of weight relative to height — occurred during summer vacations.

“The structured nature of the school day, with its scheduled exercise periods and limited opportunities to eat, helps students maintain a healthy BMI,” said study co-author Paul von Hippel, a health policy researcher at the University of Texas, Austin.

“By contrast, we speculate that many non-school environments are relatively unstructured, and, unsupervised, allowing children to indulge in sedentary activities and excessive snacking,” von Hippel added by email.

To assess the influence of school attendance on child obesity, researchers examined data on kids’ height and weight at the beginning and end of each academic year from the fall of 2010 until the spring of 2013. At the start of kindergarten, 23.7 percent of the children were overweight and 9 percent were obese, researchers report in the journal Obesity.

During each of the two summers in the study, the proportion of overweight and obese kids increased by approximately one percentage point per month.

There were no meaningful increases in the numbers of overweight or obese kids during the academic year. This doesn’t prove that summer vacations cause obesity or that school attendance prevents it, but the findings do suggest major risk factors for putting on too much weight during childhood exist outside of schools, the authors conclude.

During vacations, risk factors for weight gain include getting less sleep, watching more television and exercising less than during the school year, the researchers speculate.

“When comparing weekends to school days, studies have often reported that children sleep less and have more variable sleep, are less physically active, more sedentary and consume unhealthier diets on weekends,” said Dr. Paul Collings of the Bradford Teaching Hospitals Foundation Trust in the UK. “If summer vacation can be considered a very long weekend, then this will take its toll,” Collings, who wasn’t involved in the study, added by email.

Although the study doesn’t offer evidence of problems like excessive snacking or insufficient sleep and exercise during the summer, it still makes sense for parents to keep an eye on these things, said Dr. Jonathan Mitchell of the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. “Parents should be thoughtful about the potential for rapid weight gain to occur during the summer,” Mitchell, who wasn’t involved in the study, said by email. Because just aranging child care during the summer can be a struggle, other problems may seem less pressing, said Dr. Elaina Perrin of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

“That being said, if there’s ways to find routine, decrease calorie-dense and nutrient poor foods for children, help children get better sleep, help them avoid screen time, get out and be active — even if the weather is hot — that would be great,” Perrin, who wasn’t involved in the study, said by email.

Ideally, parents can promote healthy habits throughout the year, said Dr. Inyang Isong of Boston Children’s Hospital.

“This can include encouraging kids to get at least an hour of exercise a day, limiting screen time to less than two hours a day, and keeping televisions and computer devices out of kids’ bedrooms,” said Isong, who wasn’t involved in the study.

“Collectively adopting these healthful lifestyle behaviors, as a family, can go a long way, as parents are role models for their children,” Isong added by email. “As the saying goes, your children will become who you are; so be who you want them to be.” -Reuters
Corruption probe clouds survival of Brazil’s transition leader

Brazilia — Corruption allegations implicating Brazilian President Michel Temer and his party are casting doubt on his ability to remain in office and causing the first cracks in his coalition amid growing calls for early elections.

Allegations that Temer and members of his inner circle solicited illegal funds for his 2014 vice presidential campaign threaten to undermine a solid majority in Congress that put him in office by impeaching leftist Dilma Rousseff in August.

Losing that majority would dismantle the two goals Temer set himself as caretaker president through 2018: to restore fiscal discipline and revive Brazil’s flagging economy.

Key allies are still with Temer, for now.

But there are signs some are ready to break ranks, and others are divided over getting burned by association with his deeply unpopular government.

Senator Ronaldo Caiado, whose Democrats Party is one of the strongest backers of Temer’s austerity measures before Congress, said this week the president lacked enough support in the country for the measures and should consider stepping down to allow elections next year.

In the centrist PSD party, which fully backs Temer’s fiscal reform programme as it eyes its own presidential bid in 2018, party leader Aecio Neves confirmed his support for Temer this week, as long as he sticks to the austerity agenda.

Temer is trying to strengthen his base by offering the PSDB, Brazil’s third-largest party, a fourth Cabinet post, the ministry in charge of relations with Congress. —Reuters

UN General Assembly backs resolution on nuke abolition talks

NEW YORK — The UN General Assembly on Friday adopted for the first time a resolution calling for the start of negotiations to outlaw nuclear weapons, marking a major step toward landmark talks on disarmament.

The resolution calls for talks to be held twice next year — the first round from 15 June through 27 to 31 March and the second from 15 June through 7 July in New York — to negotiate a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons. Because the meetings will be held at UN headquarters there were financial implications that had to be approved before it could finally be adopted in a plenary session.

One hundred and thirteen countries backed it, and 35 — including the United States, Britain, France, Russia and Japan — voted against it. Thirteen, including China, abstained.

“Negotiation of a nuclear weapons ban treaty is the first step in finishing the major piece of unfinished business within the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which requires nuclear-armed states to disarm,” Matthew Bolton, associate chair of Pace University, said in an e-mail exchange with Kyodo News.

“The passage of this resolution sends a clear message that the vast majority of the world sees nuclear weapons as illegitimate and inhumane weapons. The successful negotiation of a treaty would represent the most significant shift in nuclear politics since the end of the Cold War and represents a much-needed victory for multilateral diplomacy.”

The decision to endorse the resolution at the General Assembly follows the 27 October resolution that was adopted by a UN committee charged with overseeing disarmament issues.

The motion was initially put forward after a UN working group on nuclear disarmament in August adopted a report recommending to the General Assembly that negotiations begin in 2017 to make nuclear weapons illegal.

Austria introduced the draft along with Brazil, Ireland, Mexico, Nigeria and South Africa as the first stage in the process at the committee level. Once endorsed there, the final step is the adoption by the General Assembly. —Kyodo News

Activity logs of Japanese peacekeepers in South Sudan discarded

TOKYO — Daily activity logs compiled by Japanese troops deployed to South Sudan as UN peacekeepers have been discarded, Defence Ministry officials said Saturday, likely making it hard to examine some of their activities, including those around the time of a large-scale clash in the fledgling nation in July.

The logs, compiled by members of the Ground Self-Defence Force in South Sudan, were discarded entirely, including in digital form, because they “ended their useful purpose,” an official of the ministry’s Joint Staff said, adding that information in the logs has been relayed to superiors.

The news comes amid concerns over the security situation in the African country has so deteriorated that it is no longer meeting the conditions set by the Japanese government for participation in a UN peacekeeping mission.

Internal ministry rules stipulate that records related to UN peacekeeping operations must be stored for three years, but those which “arise on an unscheduled basis” and whose purposes within a short period time” can be discarded, a senior ministry official said.

The official of the Joint Staff said information in the discarded daily activity logs has been reflected in documents for newly arriving troops to some extent.

Japan began sending members of the Self-Defence Forces to South Sudan in November 2011. The GSDF civil engineering corps has been deployed in the capital Juba since January 2012. Today its 11th batch is in the country with an additional task of protecting the UN staff and UN staff even if they themselves are not directly targeted. —Kyodo News

Evacuation advisory for area hit by massive fire lifted after 2 days

NIIGATA, (Japan) — A municipal government lifted Saturday afternoon an evacuation advisory for residents in the areas hit by a massive fire that broke out Thursday morning, destroying some 150 buildings and injuring 11 people in a city on the Sea of Japan coast.

Ahead of the lifting of the advisory, the municipal government of Itoigawa, Niigata Prefecture, allowed residents of most of the affected areas back in to check on their homes and buildings. But the government kept the areas near the origin of the blaze — a ramen noodle restaurant — as no-entry zones for which broke out at 10:30 am Thursday, forcing hundreds of residents to evacuate their homes and prompted the dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces. It was not totally extinguished until Friday afternoon, about 30 hours after it started.

The Itoigawa city government had advised 744 people from 363 households to evacuate, and more than 30 were still taking shelter at two locations as of Saturday morning.

The fire burnt 40,000 square meters, according to the municipal government.

The fire was first noticed at the same restaurant, as no-entry zones were which broke out at 10:30 am Thursday, forcing hundreds of residents to evacuate their homes and prompted the dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces. It was not totally extinguished until Friday afternoon, about 30 hours after it started.

The Itoigawa city government had advised 744 people from 363 households to evacuate, and more than 30 were still taking shelter at two locations as of Saturday morning.

The fire burnt 40,000 square meters, according to the municipal government.

Police and firefighters have finished investigating the area surrounding the restaurant, they said.

The police believe the fire started at the ramen restaurant at once set outside after turning on a stove burner.

The Itoigawa prefectural government has sent a team of seven officials to support the city government in reconstructing the damaged areas. Those officials will assess the city government’s needs before the prefectural government sends a full-fledged support team, it said. —Kyodo News

Invitation for 4th Annual General Meeting and Gathering Dinner

You are cordially invited to attend 4 th Annual General Meeting and Gathering Dinner of Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation as a member of agencies. The meeting’s program will be held as mentioned below:

Date: 8-1-2017 (Sunday)
Time: Meeting Time (10:00am) to (12:00pm) and Dinner Time (06:00pm) to (09:00pm)
Place: Western Park Restaurant 7 th Floor, Polo Club (Asia) Residence Corner of East Horse Race Course Road & Laydauntkan Road (Near Sky Star Hotel), Tamwe Township

Executive Committee
Japanese
woman missing
in France, man
being sought in
connection
PARIS — A 21-year-old Japanese university student
is missing in France, with local police trying to as-
certain the whereabouts of another foreign student in
connection with her disappear-
ance, local authorities and media said Friday.
Narumi Kurokasi, a Tokyo-born student at the
University of Tsukuba in Japan’s Ibaraki Prefecture,
beginning attended the Uni-
versity of Franche-Comte
in Besancon in eastern
France in September to
study language, according
to the authorities and other
sources.
Kurokasi disappeared
around 4 December and
could not be reached on her
phone thereafter, they
said. Her credit card has
also been suspended. On
the night of 4 December,
just before her disappear-
ance, she had a meal with
acquaintances at a local
diner, including the man
der police are now trying to
locate.—Kyodo News

Mongolia’s nomad herders facing winter disaster as temperatures plunge

ULAANBAATAR — Mongolia’s traditional nomads are facing a nat-
ural disaster known as “dzud”, where frigid tem-
peratures and heavy snow cause widespread livestock
deaths, threatening herders’ livelihoods.
Mongolians are already struggling with an
economic crisis which has seen the currency, the
tugrik, depreciate rapidly, making household goods
more expensive.
Weather forecasts for next week are predicting temperatures as low as be-
tween minus 40 and minus 50 degrees Celsius (minus
40-58 degrees Fahrenheit) in northern and eastern
Mongolia.
Government official-
s have yet to declare a “dzud”, but the current
climate is ideal for the nat-
ural disaster, said Lamjav
Oyunjargal, the director for
forecasting at the Informa-
tion and Research Institute of Meteorology, Hydrolo-
gy and Environment.
“Officially, condi-
tions are very difficult in
Mongolia. Mostly we talk
about livestock because it’s
the main income of herder
people in Mongolia, but
it’s also dangerous for hu-
mans,” Oyunjargal said.
Dulaamsuren, who
works at the National
Emergency Management
Agency in Bulgan prov-
ince in remote northern
Mongolia, said more than
3,000 local herders did not
have enough supplies to
last through the winter.
“We have enough hay
until February or March,
but we really should stock
up more,” he said, adding
that the region was now
under 40 centimetres (11
inches) of snow, four times
the usual level.
The “dzud” of 2009-
2010, one of the most se-
vere in history, saw a total
of 9.7 million livestock
deaths.
As many as 1.1 mil-
lion head of livestock died
last winter.
Winter began early
when Mongolia was hit
by a “cold surge” in No-
vember, plummeting tem-
peratures to around minus
47 degrees Celsius (minus
56.2 degrees Fahrenheit),
she said.
By 11 December,
about 70 per cent of the
country was under snow.
“Already affected are-
as will get even more snow
and colder temperatures,”
Oyunjargal said, adding the
east and north of the
country, an area the size of
Egypt, were most vulnera-
ble.
Mongolia is one of the most sparsely populat-
ed countries in the world, and the extreme cold and
snow storms of a “dzud” is a no stranger for herders
traveling between far-
flung towns.
Amid the worst eco-
omic conditions since the
global economic crisis,
the capital Ulaanbaatar is
working with international
organisations to get assis-
tance for the herders.
The government has
stockpiled hay and fodder
for distribution, but re-
sources are stretched thin
as it negotiates with the In-
ternational Monetary Fund
for relief money.
Two EU fostering
foreign flights from
emissions scheme
BELGIUM— The European Union is
set to extend the exclusion of
foreign airlines from its emissions trading sys-
tem to give a United Na-
tions-brokered global deal
time to come into effect,
two EU sources said.
The move would be
welcomed by the airline
industry which wants a
single, global emissions
trading system (ETS) for
aviation as opposed to a
patchwork of national and
regional schemes.
The European Union had
ordered foreign carri-
ers to buy credits under its
ETS in 2012 but back-
tracked when countries
said it violated their sov-
ereignty and might threat-
ened to cancel plane orders
to Airbus Group SE.
It granted airlines op-
erating flights into and
out of the EU an exemption
until 2016 to give the Inter-
national Civil Aviation Or-
ganization (ICAO) time to
create a global system.
The United Nations
body clinched a deal in
October, raising hopes that
the EU executive would
prolong the extension be-
yond the end of this year
when it automatically
expires unless the law is
changed.
“Expectation is it will be
extended,” one of the
sources said.
The proposal by the
European executive, the Eu-
er Commission, will be
adopted at the end of Jan-
uary, two sources said.
Another EU source said
the proposal was very
sensible and would create
predictability for opera-
tors.
The ICAO deal will be
voluntary from 2021 to
2026 and mandatory from
2027 for states with
larger aviation industries,
prompting criticism from the
European Parliament who
had called for some-
thing more ambitious.
The extension for foreign
carriers could be extended
until it is clear the
ICAO system is work-
ing, one of the sources said.
Another said ex-
tending it to 2020-2021
would be a “good start”.
—Reuters

People load coal into a car in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia as the wave of extreme cold hits the country December 22, 2016. Picture taken on 22 December 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE
MV ANDAMAN STAR VOY. NO ( )
Consignees of cargo carried on MV ANDAMAN STAR VOY. NO ( ) are hereby notified that the ves-
sel will be arriving on 25.12.2016 and cargo will be
discharged into the premises of M.I.P where it will lie
at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to
the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.
Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am
to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim’s Day
now declared as the third day after final discharge of
cargo from the Vessel.
No claims against this vessel will be admitted af-
after the Claims Day.

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY AGENT FOR: M/S MCC TRANSPORT (STPORE) PTE LTD
Phone No: 2301185

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE
MV MATHU BHUM VOY. NO ( 1029W )
Consignees of cargo carried on MV MATHU BHUM VOY. NO ( 1029W ) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 25.12.2016 and cargo will be
discharged into the premises of M.I.P where it will lie
at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to
the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.
Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am
to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim’s Day
now declared as the third day after final discharge of
cargo from the Vessel.
No claims against this vessel will be admitted af-
after the Claims Day.

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY AGENT FOR: M/S MOL (STPORE) PTE LTD
Phone No: 2301185

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE
MV HUNSA BHUM VOY. NO ( )
Consignees of cargo carried on MV HUNSA BHUM VOY. NO ( ) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 25.12.2016 and cargo will be
discharged into the premises of M.I.T/T/A.I.P.T where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to
the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.
Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am
to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim’s Day
now declared as the third day after final discharge of
cargo from the Vessel.
No claims against this vessel will be admitted af-
after the Claims Day.

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY AGENT FOR: M/S REGIONAL CONTAINER LINES
Phone No: 2301185

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE
MV WEST SCENT VOY. NO ( 135N )
Consignees of cargo carried on MV WEST SCENT VOY. NO ( 135N ) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 25.12.2016 and cargo will be
discharged into the premises of A.W.P.T where it will lie
at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to
the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.
Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am
to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim’s Day
now declared as the third day after final discharge of
cargo from the Vessel.
No claims against this vessel will be admitted af-
after the Claims Day.

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY AGENT FOR: M/S INTERASIA LINES
Phone No: 2301185

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE
MV MATHU BHUM VOY. NO ( 1029W )
Consignees of cargo carried on MV MATHU BHUM VOY. NO ( 1029W ) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 25.12.2016 and cargo will be
discharged into the premises of M.I.P where it will lie
at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to
the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.
Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am
to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim’s Day
now declared as the third day after final discharge of
cargo from the Vessel.
No claims against this vessel will be admitted af-
after the Claims Day.

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY AGENT FOR: M/S MOL (STPORE) PTE LTD
Phone No: 2301185

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE
MV MATHU BHUM VOY. NO ( 1029W )
Consignees of cargo carried on MV MATHU BHUM VOY. NO ( 1029W ) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 25.12.2016 and cargo will be
discharged into the premises of M.I.P where it will lie
at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to
the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.
Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am
to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim’s Day
now declared as the third day after final discharge of
cargo from the Vessel.
No claims against this vessel will be admitted af-
after the Claims Day.
Matthew McConaughey faked Australian accent for women

LONDON — Oscar-winning actor Matthew McConaughey faked an Australian accent for women, he was just 14 years old, eventually becoming a drug kingpin in the city in the 1980s, reported Deadline.

If things workout McConaughey would play Wershe’s blue-collar father, who watches his teenage son receive a life sentence for his place in the drug trade.

Yann Demange is set to direct the film, with Logan and Nolan Miller penning the script.—PTI

SMAP opts for signature variety show for final appearance, shuns NHK

TOKYO — SMAP has turned down a request from NHK to appear on the public broadcaster’s famous year-ending music programme as they opt for their signature variety show aired by a commercial broadcaster for their final appearance before breakup.

The group, popular, often referred to as “Summertime Boys” or “Summertime Girls,” have worked with its staff for the past 31 years and now plans to take a break from films. Photo: PTI

Actress Carrie Fisher suffers medical emergency on London-to-L.A. flight

LOS ANGELES — Hollywood actress and writer Carrie Fisher, best known for her role as Princess Leia in the “Star Wars” movies, suffered a cardiac episode on Friday during a flight from London to Los Angeles, where she was rushed to a hospital after landing.

Fisher, 60, was described by friends as being in critical condition, and his family and friends remained密切 impressed. Photo: Reuters

Michael Fassbender planning to take acting break

LONDON — Michael Fassbender says he has been working continuously since past five years and now plans to take a break. The film, a part of the film, was kickstarting in the summer. Fassbender said he met with director JJ Abrams for a part in last year’s record-breaking sequel, reported Digital Spy. “We talked about a role. We had a conversation,” the 39-year-old actor said.

“I’m pretty sure I was busy doing something else in the summer he was kickstarting that,” he added. Fassbender did not specify which role he had been in talks to play, but there are reports that he was considered for First Order heavyweights Kylo Ren or General Hux — played in the movie by Adam Driver and Donal Manns Gleeson respectively.—PTI

I was playing a trick,” McConaughey said.

“There’s a lot of my fraternity brothers out there now going, ‘you did fake that for a year.’ Yeah, I did.”

Meanwhile, Matthew McConaughey is in negotiations to star in White Boy Rick. The film will follow the true story of Detroit teenager Richard Wershe Jr. who became an informant for local and federal authorities when he was 14 years old, eventually becoming a drug kingpin in the city in the 1980s, reported Deadline.

If things workout McConaughey would play Wershe’s blue-collar father, who watches his teenage son receive a life sentence for his place in the drug trade.

Yann Demange is set to direct the film, with Logan and Nolan Miller penning the script.—PTI
Century-old warehouse becomes must-see for vintage car enthusiasts

KOBE — A nearly century-old red brick warehouse in the major western Japanese city of Osaka has turned into a mecca for enthusiasts of vintage and classic cars in Japan, enabling visitors to get up close to pieces of motoring history.

Glon Museum on the port of Osaka displays more than 100 heritage vehicles ranging from the Rolls-Royce Phantom II, the British carmaker’s 40/50 horsepowe model released in 1929, to late 20th century superscars, all iconic in their own way.

The museum, which is designed to make visitors feel as if they are strolling through the back streets of London or New York, was opened by Glion, a retailer of imported cars in nearby Kobe, in June 2015. It occupies some 10,000 square meters, and includes a steakhouse and café.

Examples from approximately 100 years of motoring history, from the early 1900s when gasoline-powered vehicles became prevalent to the present age, are exhibited in four sections laid out in chronological order. Technical information and data is available alongside the cars, with videos of the vehicles on the road in which their distinctive engine notes can be heard accompanying the museum pieces.

Separating the Glion Museum from similar displays is the fact that all cars are roadworthy, and for sale. “Classic cars are considered expensive but there are some priced at just 2 million yen,” Jun Uebara, 36, event director at the museum, said. Every Saturday and Sunday, 200 to 300 people visit the museum, Uehara said, adding about 150 vintage cars have been sold since its opening. “We want lots of people to get a feel for automobile history here and become interested in it,” he said.

The museum is “worth visiting as there are many cars I longed for when I was young as well as older cars I don’t know,” said Shinya Sagisaka, a 56-year-old, who came with his wife from Izu-misano in Osaka. “It takes me back to my childhood.”

The Rolls-Royce Phantom II was produced between 1929 and 1935 and the example on display in Osaka is one of the rarest.

Cars on display also include the Ford Model T, the world’s first mass-produced car released in 1908, and many iconic Japanese cars such as the sleek Toyota 2000GT and groundbreaking Nissan Skyline GT-R.

Toyota Motor Corp, manufactured only 336 units of the 2000GT sports car between 1967 and 1970 and it has become one of the world’s most highly sought-after vintage cars. —Kyodo News

Photo taken on 29 November 2016, shows a Toyota 2000GT sports car displayed at Glion Museum, a century-old warehouse-turned museum for vintage cars, in Osaka. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

Bassam Ghraoui, chairman and CEO of Ghraoui Chocolate speaks during an interview with Reuters in Budapest, Hungary, on 22 December 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Leaving war-torn Syria, luxury chocolatier finds new home in Hungary

BUDAPEST — Bassam Ghraoui’s Syrian confectionary became synonymous with the finest gourmet chocolates anywhere before war decimated his business, and he is starting anew in Hungary with a factory to be launched next year.

“It is a project which will put Hungary on the map of higher-than-average EU exporters of chocolate,” Ghraoui, 62, told Reuters in his downtown Budapest office with panoramic views of the ornate houses of parliament.

Ghraoui, scion of one of the oldest Damascus merchant families with business dating back to 1805, says he always had a “soft spot” for the Central European nation where he has been doing some non-sweets business since the early 1990s.

About three years ago, after Syria’s civil war erupted, he acquired Hungarian citizenship and bought a house in Budapest, moving with his family there in August 2015.

“I am very well treated, and I am not a refugee — I am a citizen. Ghraoui’s confectionary gained global renown; it won the “Prix Spécial d’Honneur” at the Salon du Chocolat trade fair in Paris in 2005. But Syria’s war slashed production at his factory in a Damascus suburb to less than 0.5 per cent of its peacetime level. His new chocolate factory taking shape in the town of Hatvan, about 60 km (40 miles) east of Budapest, will become operational towards the end of 2017, giving jobs to 540 people and producing about 7,500 tonnes of chocolate per year.

—Reuters
Donnarumma save wins Super Cup for Milan

DOHA — AC Milan lifted the Italian Super Cup after 17-year-old goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma’s save from Paulo Dybala secured a 4-3 penalty shootout win over Juventus on Friday.

Giorgio Chiellini put Juve ahead and Giacomo Bonaventura equalised, both in the first half, as a free-flowing match finished 1-1 after extra-time. Gianluca Lapadula’s first penalty for Milan was saved by Gianluigi Buffon.

Mario Mandzukic then fired a Juve effort against the crossbar before Donnarumma produced a superb one-handed save to stop their fifth attempt from Dybala. That left Mario Pasalic to convert the winner with ease.

Donnarumma, a Milan regular, had kept Juve at bay in the previous 120 minutes while Dybala could have won the game at the end of extra-time but sent a wild effort sailing over the bar.

The teenager, first given his chance as a 16-year-old last season under Sinisa Mihajlovic and already an Italian international, was speechless.

“I cannot describe what I’m feeling and I don’t even know what was going through my head,” he told state broadcaster Rai.

The match is traditionally played between the Serie A and Italian Cup winners.

Juve, league champions for the last five seasons and four points clear at the top this term, won both last term so Milan, showing signs of improvement after several mediocre campaigns, qualified as cup runners-up.

Donnarumma made early saves from Stefano Sturaro and Mandzukic before Chiellini turned the ball in from a corner in the 18th minute.

Milan, who beat Juve 1-0 in their last Serie A meeting and are fifth in Serie A, levelled when Bonaventura scored with a glancing header from Spaniard Suso’s cross seven minutes before halftime.

Donnarumma made another outstanding save in the second half to turn Sami Khedira’s long-range effort over the bar.

Opposite number Buffon, 21 years his senior, was not to be outdone, brilliantly turning Carlos Bacca’s header on to the woodwork.

“We lost on penalties but we just needed to be more lucid to win the match in extra-time,” said Juve coach Massimiliano Allegri.

“We did everything we could to avoid going to penalties. We played very well for the first half but then we dropped off too much.”

— Reuters

Pochettino not worried by Kane drought ahead of Saints trip

LONDON — Tottenham Hotspur striker Harry Kane has been backed to rediscover his scoring touch by manager Mauricio Pochettino ahead of Wednesday’s Premier League visit to Southampton.

Kane, the league’s top scorer last season with 25 goals, has seven for fifth-placed Spurs in the current top-flight campaign and has not scored in his last three appearances.

“I am not worried about him,” Pochettino told a news conference on Friday. “For me he is one of the best strikers in the world, for different reasons maybe he didn’t score in the last few games, but I have no doubt that it is only a few games.

“He is a fantastic player and a top scorer. I have no doubt he will start to score as soon as possible.”

Going by Kane’s record from last season, Pochettino is justified in not hitting the panic button just yet.

The 23-year-old got nine league goals up to Christmas last year before adding 16 to win the golden boot award ahead of Leicester City’s Jamie Vardy and Manchester City’s Sergio Aguero.

Tottenham trail leaders Chelsea by 10 points ahead of the trip to seventh-placed Southampton, but Pochettino is confident his team can close the gap in the second half of the season.

“I think it is realistic because there are a lot of games to play,” the Argentine said. “So I think we can achieve that and we can fight for the title at the end of the season.”

— Reuters

American Keys to miss Australian Open after wrist surgery

CARY (North Carolina) — World number eight Madison Keys will miss next month’s Australian Open after undergoing wrist surgery, the American said on Friday.

Keys, 21, who made the round of 16 at all four grand slam tournaments last year, had the procedure in early November and would not be ready for the season-opening grand slam that begins at Melbourne Park on 16 January.

“Three days after the year-end WTA Championships I had minor arthroscopic surgery on my left wrist,” she said on Twitter.

“The procedure was very short, did not involve any tendon issues and went very well. I don’t want to rush back and need to take my time to be fully ready to perform my best on the court.”

Keys, who plays right-handed, also revealed she was being coached again by former world number one Lindsay Davenport, having worked with Thomas Hogstedt for the last year.

“I am very excited about working with Lindsay again,” Keys added. “She’s helped me reach great results in the past and we make an excellent team!”

— Reuters

Federer expects injury layoff to prolong playing career

MUMBAI — Roger Federer believes his six-month absence due to a knee injury could help prolong his playing career, with the 17-times grand slam winner saying he has enjoyed the break.

The 35-year-old Swiss had surgery on his left knee in February and, after missing the French Open with a back injury, announced in July that he needed extensive rehabilitation and would be sidelined for the rest of the season.

Federer returns to action at the Hopman Cup, starting on 1 January, which he will play in for the first time since he teamed up with his now wife Mirka in 2002. He will partner compatriot Belinda Bencic, 19, at the international team tournament in Perth.

Federer said it was a tough call to take a six-month break and he looked at the bigger picture before deciding.

“I do believe that it could be very beneficial for the future of my tennis career,” he told reporters on a conference call. — Reuters