Disaster preparedness for states and regions

WITH the pre-monsoon season approaching in February, region and state governments are being urged to draw up year-end planning for disaster preparedness, emergency response and recovery, reviewing the disasters that occurred in their regions in 2017.

Vice President U Henry Van Thio, chairman of the Natural Disaster Management Committee (NDMC), made the remark at the NDMC meeting 2/2017 held in the meeting hall of Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday morning.

At the meeting, U Henry Van Thio said NDMC had managed matters relating to natural disaster management starting from May 2016 for nearly two years and had much experience in handling various disasters. With this experience, disaster management works are to be conducted to reduce the damages that can be caused by natural disasters. SEE PAGE-6

Freezing temperatures hit hilly areas

MYANMAR has been experiencing unseasonably cold weather, with evening and early morning temperatures of minus 2 degrees Celsius recorded in some areas of Chin and Shan states.

The hill areas of Myanmar in particular have been experiencing sub-zero weather over the past several days.

“In fact, extreme cold weather hit the whole country. The temperatures dropped below zero in hilly areas of Chin and Shan States because a cold wave came over Myanmar two days ago,” said U Kyaw Lwin Oo, Director of Mandalay Region Meteorology and Hydrology Department. “The temperatures are expected to rise again in two or three days,” he added.

The freezing areas in Barus Village, about 20 miles from Mogok in Mandalay Region, are presently attracting about 30 visitors daily who come to see the ice that has formed in some lakes.

“We have to make a fire in our home and battle with the cold weather at night. In the day time, we have to dress in layers,” said Ko Byar Sai from Barus Village. More than 20 townships in Loilem, Taunggyi and Linkhae Districts, in southern Shan State are also experiencing extreme cold weather. Meanwhile, Kayah State also saw record-breaking cold weather on Thursday.—Myanmar Digital News

Local women demonstrate making life-saving flotation devices with empty water bottles and string at a ceremony to raise awareness of disaster preparedness in Yangon’s southern area of Kungyangon, where Cyclone Nargis struck in 2008. FILE PHOTO: AYE MIN SOE
Vice President U Myint Swe attends coord meeting to hold 2018 Union Day

U Myint Swe, Vice President and Chairman of the 2018 71st Anniversary of the Union Day Convening Central Committee attended and addressed the co-ordination meeting held at the Office of the President yesterday.

The Central Committee Chairman Vice President U Myint Swe said the present first co-ordination meeting was being held for the successful organizing and holding of the 2018 71st Anniversary Union Day with full political essence. The 2018 71st Anniversary Union Day Convening Central Committee was formed with 14 members including the Vice President under order no. 92/2017 dated 7-12-2017 of the President’s Office. A management committee and 14 sub-committees were formed to hold the Union Day event according to the national aims.

All need to work together for the success of the event and the main aims are to hold the event for national unity and peace. All ethnic nationals are to work together in unity said the Vice President.

Leaders of ethnic nationals led by Bogoke Aung San met and held the Panglong Conference, signed the Panglong Agreement on 12 February 1947 and achieved independence. The day shows the firm unity of the ethnic nationals and Union Day was celebrated every year to reach the 71st Anniversary this time.

Due to armed conflicts after independence, the country was left behind in development compared to neighboring countries. Once peace yearned by everyone is achieved in the country, it can stand proudly in the world for sure.

Development of a country is linked to both politics and economy and the most important foundation stone based on economic policy is national reconciliation. To form a democracy federal union the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong had been held twice already. The essence of the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong is the establishment of a single unified democratic federal union and union spirit is most important for a federal union. Having a firm union spirit that is thriving and alive is very important. All are urged to work together with the Government, Hluttaw, Tatmadaw, ethnic national organizations, armed groups, political parties, civil society organizations in national reconciliation and peace process and form a democratic federal union.

Myanmar is a union that has many ethnic nationals, languages, culture, traditions and beliefs. Ethnic nationals living in different geographical locations are to maintain their cultural heritages and traditions so that it is not lost. That is why the cultures and traditions of ethnic nationals were shown on Union Day for future generation to know and study.

The coming Union Day will be held in two parts like past years. The morning session will include a flag hoisting ceremony and reading of messages and the evening session will be a dinner party in honor of the event. Relevant management committee and sub-committees are urged to take lessons from weaknesses of the previous years and work together to make this year the best, concluded the Vice President.

Next, Union Day Convening management committee Nay Pyi Taw Council Chairman Dr. Myo Aung and committee joint secretary Nay Pyi Taw municipal committee permanent secretary U Myo Aung explained about forming of sub-committees, status of work conducted in previous years, preparations made for flag hoisting ceremony and dinner.

Afterwards, Union Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, and officials from sub-committees explained about their respective works.

The Vice President listened carefully to their reports and gave his comments after which he delivered a concluding speech.

The meeting was attended by Union Ministers U Win Khaing, Dr. Myo Thein Gyi, Dr. Myint Htwe, Nai Thet Lwin, Nay Pyi taw Council Chairman Dr. Myo Aung, Deputy Ministers Maj-Gen Aung Soe, U Win Maw Tun, and U Maung Maung Win, Nay Pyi Taw Council members and officials.—Myanmar News Agency

Notification of disbursement of loan to SMEs

As small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are in the main sector of national economic development, the government is encouraging their development. Accordingly, the State-owned Myanma Economic Bank (MEB) will disburse loans to entrepreneurs who are actually running the businesses and in need of capital investments under this special programme.

Loan eligible enterprises
The businesspersons who want to apply for a loan must be an SME recognised by the Directorate of Industrial Supervision and Inspection (DISI), Ministry of Industry. The MEB will grant loans to export sector businesses, import-substitute businesses, technical-based production businesses, service businesses which directly help economic development, and organisations and individuals that have been recommended by regional, state or union governments. The loans will be disbursed to the SMEs which are eligible in accord with the prescribed rules and regulations.

Interest Rates and Periods
Interest rate is 9 per cent, and periods are from 3 to 5 years.

Loan Volume
Maximum loan volume will be Ks100 million for an individual SME or an organization’s SME, and MEB would grant 50 per cent of a loan to SMEs as working capital and the rest as fixed capital.

Collateral
Borrowers can give fixed assets such as land and buildings, movable assets such as machineries, vehicles, gold wares and gold bullion, money, treasury bills, treasury bonds, stocks, debentures, bank insurance, government insurance and Credit Guarantee Insurance as surety and collateral for the loan. Currently, the loans with the Credit Guarantee Insurance (CGI) will only be disbursed at a maximum of Ks20 million.

Loan repayment period
For three-year loans, the first year is a grace period and the repayment is in four installments over the last two-year period. For four-year loans, the first one year and six months is a grace period and the repayment is in five installments in the last two and a half year period and for five-year loans, the first two years is a grace period and the repayment is in six installments over the last three-year period.

Regions and states Manager Offices will scrutinise the loans below Ks100 million and the headquarters of Myanma Economic Bank (MEB) will scrutinise loan applications above Ks100 million. Businesspersons who would like to apply for a loan can receive detailed information and can apply for the loans at the nearest branches of the Myanma Economic Bank (MEB).

—Myanmar Economic Bank
President U Htin Kyaw accepts credentials from Ambassador of Ukraine

H.E. Mr. Andrii Beshta, the newly-accredited Ambassador of Ukraine to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, presented his Letter of Credence to U Htin Kyaw, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, at Presidential Palace, Nay Pyi Taw at 2:30 pm yesterday. Present on the occasion were Union Minister for International Cooperation U Kyaw Tin and Director-General U Thant Sin of the Protocol Department.—Myanmar News Agency

President U Htin Kyaw accepts credentials of Ambassador of Peru

H.E. Mr. Fernando Julio Antonio Quiros Campos, the newly-accredited Ambassador of the Republic of Peru to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, presented his Letter of Credence to U Htin Kyaw, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, at Presidential Palace, Nay Pyi Taw at 3:05 pm yesterday. Present on the occasion were Union Minister for International Cooperation U Kyaw Tin and Director-General U Thant Sin of the Protocol Department.—Myanmar News Agency

President U Htin Kyaw and First Lady attend Christmas ceremony

President U Htin Kyaw and First Lady Daw Su Su Lwin attended the Christmas Ceremony and Ceremony for Praising the Virtues of Jesus Christ held at the residence of Vice-President U Henry Van Thio yesterday.

U Htin Kyaw and First Lady Daw Su Su Lwin, Vice President U Myint Swe and his wife Daw Khin Thet Htay, Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw U Win Myint and his wife Daw Cho Cho, Speaker of the Amyotha Hluttaw Mahn Win Khaing Thian and his wife Daw Nant Kyin Kyi, Chairman of the Constitution Tribunal U Myo Nyunt, Union Election Commission Chairman U Hla Thein, Deputy Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw U T Khun Myat, Deputy Speaker of the Amyotha Hluttaw U Aye Tha Aung, Union Ministers, Chief Ministers of Regions and States, the Union Attorney-General, Deputy Ministers and their wives, Chairmen of Hluttaw Affairs Committees, departmental officials, bishops from Christian Churches and invited guests were welcomed by Vice President U Henry Van Thio and his wife Dr. Shwe Hlwan.

The ceremony was opened by Bishop Dr. Zothan Mawia with Christmas prayers, with Vice President U Henry Van Thio giving Christmas greetings to the guests and Sang Pi praising the virtues of Jesus Christ with psalms.

Afterwards, President U Htin Kyaw extended his Christmas greetings, followed by the reading of a Christmas message from State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi by Union Minister U Kyaw Tin Swe.

At the ceremony, Jesse Van Bawi and Jennifer Ngun Sui Pau sang Christmas psalms, whereas Reverend Fathers Dr. Aye Min and Mahn Palmerston sent prayers for Myanmar citizens and State Leaders.

Mr. Steven Thant Myint U, Chief of Churches in Myanmar explained about the essence of Christian teachings from the Holy Bible, with Dr. Samuel Ngun Ling reading aloud from the Holy Bible. The President and those present at the ceremony then enjoyed the friendship dinner feast given in honour of the birth of Jesus Christ, during which the vocalists entertained with Christmas carols.

President U Htin Kyaw and First Lady Daw Su Su Lwin, Vice President U Myint Swe and wife Daw Khin Thet Htay and Vice President U Henry Van Thio and wife Dr. Shwe Hlwan lit the Christmas candle, after which Reverend Father Dr. J Ra Buai sent Christmas prayers.—MNA
Poultry farmers face difficulties with rising price of poultry feed

POULTRY farmers are facing difficulty with the rising price of duck eggs although the price of duck eggs has declined in the Thahton Township, Mon State, according to a report in the Myawaddy Daily yesterday.

“We don’t get good price for the duck eggs because the eggs from Thailand are entering into the local market these days. Thailand duck eggs are big. But it cannot keep for long time. Also, the duck feed is likely to increase. Therefore, we are facing difficulty to increase the duck egg price,” said U Win Naing, a duck breeder for eggs as a manageable scale farmer.

“Ducks bred for eggs are fed broken rice and shrimp powder. Last year, the price for broken rice was Ks11,000 per bag, and the price of shrimp powder was Ks28,000 per bag. This year, the price of broken rice is Ks14,000 per bags and the price of shrimp powder is Ks29,000 per bag. The price of duck eggs was Ks130 per egg last year. But, the price of chicken has declined to Ks 125 per egg this year,” he added.

About 40 people are breeding the duck eggs for an manageable scale in Thahton Township. Currently, some of the duck breeders suspended their business, it is learnt.—GNLM

Fire breaks out in three Yangon townships

THREE separate fires broke out in Dawbon, Ahlone and Dala townships of the Yangon Region around 8:30 pm last night, one of them resulting in a fatality, according to the Yangon Region Fire Brigade.

At about 8:30 pm yesterday, a fire was reported at a home on Myna Lay New-2 Road, Nwe Aye ward in Dawbon Township. According to the police investigation, the house started to burn when an electric panel being pushed beyond its capacity emitted a spark. The fire caused over Ks200,000 in damages. At the time of the electric spark at the house, homeowner U Ba Aye, a father, was alone in the house. He suffered severe injuries to his face, back and arm and was rushed to the hospital by Fire Brigade department. He died from his injuries at about 4 am, it is learnt.

Earlier on the same evening, a fire broke out at about 8:40 pm at a house on Bayintnaung-1 Road, Ahlone Township. The fire was believed to have started from a candle. The blaze spread to the house of Daw Ann Ja Mar.

The fire caused damages estimated at Ks5,000. No one was injured in the accident.

The third fire occurred at about the same time at a house owned by U Khin Maung Win on the fifth floor of Royal Yaw Min Gyi Condominiums in Dagon Township. The fire started with an electric short circuit caused by an overheated electric curry pot. Property losses were estimated to at over Ks180,000. No one was injured in the accident.

The fire was controlled by the fire staff within 10 minutes. — Zarni Maung

No injuries in Hopong Town kitchen fire

NO injuries were reported from a fire that broke out in Hopong, a town in Pa-O Self-Administered Zone in Shan State on Friday morning, according to a police report.

Located in Katonkham Ward in area-4 of the town, a two-storey house owned by U Myat Lin, 26, and his wife Daw San Nu was badly burnt in the blaze at around 10.30 p.m. on 22 December.

According to a police investigation, the fire started in the kitchen because someone was careless with cooking equipment. A firefighter said the majority of kitchen fires begin with cooking equipment.

Thanks to the assistance of residents and police, the blaze was brought under control by firefighters within 30 minutes. Action is being taken against the house owners by township police under the existing Penal Code.—Township IPRD

Fire destroys a hut in Hopong Town in Shan State. PHOTO: NYI ZAW MOE

Fire outbreaks decline this year but losses are high

A total of 1,681 outbreaks of fire were recorded across the country from January to November, which a significant drop compared to the previous three months, according to a report in the Myawaddy Daily yesterday.

Even though there were fewer fires, Myanmar had record-high losses due to the fires this year. Most of the outbreaks of fire were based on negligent acts of users.

As of October, fire destroyed 2,778 buildings, six factories and 30 warehouses. An estimated Ks46 billion worth of properties were lost to fire, according to Myanmar Fire Services Department.

One of the most costly and high-profile outbreaks of fire this year was the Kandawgyi Palace Hotel fire in October. Major financial losses from the Kandawgyi Palace Hotel fire made 2017 one of the costliest years for losses due to fire. In 2015, about Kk2,301,508,975 worth of properties were damaged by fire throughout the country while about Ks 41,640,648,560 worth were damaged in 2016.—GNLM

Write for us

We appreciate your feedback and contributions. If you have any comments or would like to submit articles, analyses or reports, please email co@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com with your message.

Due to limitation of space we are only able to publish “Letter to the Editor” that do not exceed 500 words. Should you submit a text longer than 500 words please be aware that your letter will be edited.
Border exports of watermelon to China increase

THE sales volume of domestically-produced watermelon through border gates during the week ending 8 December increased significantly, according to border trade authorities.

According to ministry statistics, the country exported over 25,000 tonnes of watermelon to China, earning more than US$2 million. The exports included 23,100 tonnes from Muse (105-mile) trade zone and 22 tonnes from Kanpaitee cross-border gate. Local exporters sent 19,256 tonnes of watermelon from Muse, Lwejei and Chinshwehaw border gates in the previous week before 2 December. Border merchants say that the prices of fruit were between Yuan 2,600 and Yuan 3,000 last month in Muse. It decreased to Yuan 1,700 and Yuan 1300 at the end of November. The prices are mainly based on the quality and freshness of the fruits. Watermelons, rice, maize, sugar, fruits, vegetables, marine products and fuel have been exported to Myanmar’s largest neighbouring country from broders. Bilateral exports between Myanmar and China through border trade stations were worth $3.412 billion till the end of this October, according to the ministry’s monthly trade report.—Khine Khant

External trade with international countries tops $22.6 billion in current FY

MYANMAR'S external trade with foreign countries valued at US$22.615 billion as of mid-December, increasing $3.784 trillion in comparison with the same period of last year, according to the Commerce Ministry’s weekly report.

Despite increase in value of foreign trade this financial year, a $3.1 billion trade deficit was reported, which is over $2650 million more than that of the similar period last FY.

From April to mid-December, the country exported local products amounting to $9.755 billion to the international trading partners, including about $3.445 billion from cross-border points and $6.3 billion from normal trade. This year’s imports of foreign-made commodities exceeded $12.8 billion, consisting of $1.944 billion through border gates and $10.9 billion from normal trade.

Myanmar predominately imports capital goods, intermediate goods and consumer goods whereas it chiefly exports six groups of commodities, covering agriculture products, animal and fisheries products, forest products and manufacturing goods.—Swe Nyein

About 700 tonnes of condensed milk imported in early December

MYANMAR imported US$889,612 worth of different brands of condensed milk weighing over 679 tonnes from foreign trade partners by sea, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

The imports of condensed milk by sea between 3 and 9 December increased by 320 tonnes compared with the previous week ending 2 December. However, the country reduced its imports of milk powder during the aforesaid week. According to the ministry, more than 160 tonnes of milk powder were imported from New Zealand, Malaysia and Poland, a decrease of over 180 tonnes against last week.

For the time being, Myanmar imports dairy products mostly from Malaysia, Singapore, United Kingdom, New Zealand, the Philippines, the Netherlands, Australia, Ireland, Poland, Indonesia, Germany and Thailand.—Shwe Khine
Disaster preparedness for states and regions

FROM PAGE-1

“Natural disasters will definitely occur. Lately, the frequency of natural disasters occurring has risen, as well as its destructive power. If the level of disaster management remains the same while the power or strength of natural disaster rises, there’ll be an increase in damages and losses. Therefore, we are striving for better and more effective disaster management as the strength and power of natural disaster increases. Not only individuals, but the whole world is being threatened by national disasters and the world’s countries need to work together as well as individual country to put emphasis on the works of mitigating and reducing (the effect of) natural disasters”, said the Vice President.

At the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in Sendai, Japan from 14 to 18 March 2015, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction was set. The four priorities for action to prevent new and reduce existing disaster risks of Sendai framework are understood disaster risk, strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk, investing in disaster reduction for resilience and enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

“Our country is following the Sendai Framework and the priorities of Sendai Framework are to be considered in the management stages of national level, state and region level, district level and township level”, remarked the Vice President.

At the national level, the Myanmar Action Plan on Disaster Risk Reduction (MAPDRR) is drawn according to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR). As the 23 work projects included in MAPDRR are the responsibility of relevant ministries, States and Regions governments there is a need for the relevant ministries, states and regions governments to take responsibility and work together.

“Annual projects need to be drawn for natural disasters, states and regions-wise. All round the year, we know the time, place and the type of disasters that could occur in our region, and we should be prepared for what to do. We also need to be prepared on response programmes and follow up programmes after the disaster happens. If things like required human, material, financial and technological resources to implement the programs are sourced and ready, arrangements to communicate and cooperate on requirements and CBOs and as laterally are made, there’ll be readiness to respond to and face natural disaster in a region and further requirements will be known”, he said.

The NDMC is leading one of the natural disaster preparedness works of building cyclone shelters. A total of 85 will be built – 56 in Ayawaddy Region, 26 in Rakhine State, two in Chin State and one in Shan State. States/Regions Governments members have selected the locations. Each work committee and States/Regions Government members need to follow global agreements and policies set by the nation in conducting natural disaster management works in the region and work sector where each are responsible for and implement programs that are appropriate to their respective region. All need to suggest good ideas and discuss together on requirements for the natural disaster management work to be effective. There is a need for all to work and coordinate together with an aim to prevent and reduce the damages and losses caused by natural disasters to the people said the Vice President.

The NDMC Vice-Chairman Dr. Win Mat Aye, Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, said by setting up and conducting effective disaster management work programmes, the ministry is ensuring that the society becomes one that could withstand and respond to natural disasters.

When the evolution of natural disaster management is observed, it was first conducted with a view to managing works programmes after a disaster has occurred. But in later years, based on the experience gained, preparations were toward readiness to face a natural disaster, and a policy of response to natural disaster was made.

Now the preparation works focus on prevention, preparedness, and emergency response works while preparation on recovery works were also being made.

In conducting recovery or reconstruction works, it is conducted not only to make normal recovery or reconstruction works but also include programmes to prepare and withstand against future natural disasters. Furthermore, cooperation with the people in the natural disaster management has progressed from a normal process to a Community-Based Disaster Risk Management process.

Preparations against earthquakes, erosion of river banks and landslides are high capital, high-cost works. But as per the saying, “Invest today for a safer tomorrow,” prevention is better than responding and investing in natural disaster preventive/preparation works not only reduces damages and losses but the cost of reconstruction and redevelopment will also be lower, explained the Union Minister.

NDMC received nearly Ks122 billion in funding, out of which Ks14 billion was used, leaving Ks18 billion left. Funding received in US dollars was about 1 million, out of which 817,711.15 was used and 188,166.19 remains in balance according to the committee. —Myanmar News Agency

Muse police searching for Myo Ma Pawn Shop attackers

AUTHORITIES in Muse are searching for two suspects in a shooting in front of a pawn shop in Shan State that resulted in one death.

Three men shot two security guards at Myo Ma Pawn Shop on Thursday evening. One security guard was killed and the other guard was wounded. Police were able to apprehend one culprit, but two remain at large.

The shooting occurred in front of the Myo Ma Pawn Shop at around 8:30 am on Thursday in Kaung Naung Ward, Muse Township, northern Shan State.

Three people arrived in front of the Myo Ma Pawn Shop by car and were urinating in front of the shop. They were told by security guards to stop. The three men became furious and threatened to kill the security guards. After departing, the three men returned and shot Yan Yin Chan, 18, and Aik Aung, whose age could not be determined. The gunman then ran away.

Yan Yin Chan suffered four gunshot wounds, two under his left armpit and two more under the right armpit. Aik Aung was wounded in the thigh. Yan Yin Chan died of his injuries at 10:45 p.m. at Muse Hospital.

Police searched for the attackers and were able to apprehend one of the culprits, Myo Aung, 30, in his car in Taung Ward, Muse.

As a result of Myo Aung’s confession, police are continuing their search for the remaining culprits, identified as Man Kyaw Hein and Ah Hope. It was learnt that a Glock pistol was used in the shooting. —Myanmar News Agency
Establishment of Kanyinchaung Economic Zone in Maungtaw tsp

Merchants from Maungtaw region and Rakhine State Government planned for establishment of Kanyinchaung Economic Zone in Maungtaw in October 2015.

Two concrete jetties, a 420 ft. long earth approach road, a single storey reinforced concrete warehouse and 20 sales rooms have already been completed so far.

Kanyinchaung Economic Zone is about 2 miles north-west of Maungtaw Town where Kanyin creek flows into Na River. A port in Bangladesh is only about 4 miles away. The jetty of Kanyinchaung Economic Zone can handle vessels of about 1000 tons.

When it was started as the trade zone, 40.6 acres was earmarked for it and it is currently being expended to an economic zone on 100 acres.

Murder, theft cases in Maungtaw and Buthidaung

Authorities have opened a murder investigation after a villager from Buthidaung Township was found dead with a rope around his neck on 15 December.

Laung Shwi, 65, of The Ni (Mro) village in Buthidaung, left his village on the morning of 13 December to collect cows that had been left grazing about four furlongs east of the village. When he didn’t return for two days, his son Chache, 30, and another villager went to search for Laung Shwi. He was found dead with an 8-feet long nylon rope tied around his neck.

He was apparently dragged along by the rope and possibly died of asphyxiation. Authorities were called and the body was sent to Buthidaung Hospital to conduct a post mortem. A case has been opened in the Taung Bazar police post and an investigation is underway.

In another incident on 13 December, authorities were conducting security measures in Maungtaw Township and found Saw Thein Maung and San Aung, both of Aung Zeya Village, in possession of prawns and fishing nets they took from a prawn pond at the edge of Thatkepyin Village. A case was opened against the two for theft.—Myanmar News Agency

Cash donation ceremony held in Rakhine State

A cash donation ceremony organised by a group of young people working in Busan, South Korea, was held in Sittway yesterday morning.

At the ceremony, the chairman of UEHRD U Min Aung received the cash donations, in the amount of Ky1,000,000 and awarded certificates of appreciation to them.

On behalf of the donors, U Htin Lin and U M M M Win, who live in Ponna Kyun Township, handed the cash donations to the committee.

The donation aims at providing assistance and rehabilitation to the locals who were attacked by the terrorist group ARSA on 25 August.—Myanmar News Agency

Enjoying peace and stability in Mro ethnic villages

Four months after the terrorist attacks in Maungtaw, it is witnessed that residents of Mro ethnic groups are enjoying peace and stability in their villages. Moreover, they can settle in their villages and lead a normal life. The authorities concerned are making concerted efforts to restore the normal lives of the residents.

The following are excerpts of interviews with local Mro ethnic people.

Maung Zone, a village administrative officer

The village I live in is Thit Tone Nar Kwa Sone, which is composed of 300 households. The population of the village is about 1,696. As far as I know, Mandalay region and Kayahawaddy region governments are building new houses in the villages including Myauk Khaung Taung, Pan Chaung, Khayu Chaung and Auk Inn Chaung. I am sure that this can strengthen unity among us by merging many villages. I am much obliged to the government for this.

Ko Than Naing, resident of Thit Tone Nar Kwa Sone

Most of the villagers in this region are farmers and cultivators, and they mostly rely on cultivation and farming. For the time being now, the new families from Myauk Gaung Taung and Pan Chaung villages are building 45 makeshift tents made of bamboo.

U Tun Pone, a villager of Nan Yar Kine

I came from Nan Yar Kine village. The authorities have already approved to build 50 new houses and 3 bridges in my village. But the construction hasn’t started yet. That’s why I’d like to urge the authority concerned to resume these constructions before the rainy season.

Under the supervision of the Ministry for Border Affairs, a Mro ethnic village is under construction near Thit Tone Nar Kwa Sone village. According to the data, there are 16 Mro ethnic villages, and we can witness the scene of winnowing the paddy seeds in the farm, studying the lessons at the schools, building new houses and carrying out the new village plans respectively.—Myint Maung & Zeyar

Cash donation ceremony

An official receives cash donation from a donor. Photo: MNA

Mro ethnic men build their houses in Thit Tone Nar Kwa Sone Village. PHOTO: NAY WIN TUN

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Merchants from Maungtaw region and Rakhine State Government planned for establishment of Kanyinchaung Economic Zone in Maungtaw in October 2015.

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When it was started as the trade zone, 40.6 acres was earmarked for it and is currently being expended to an economic zone on 100 acres.
One who knows nothing can understand nothing

The top official was worried about the possible danger of those extremist terrorists, he completely neglected the atrocities of ARSA extremist terrorists.

The top UN human rights official reiterated that the Myanmar government's alleged cleansing and shaming contributed to the concern over the possibility of serious allegations that Myanmar Tatmadaw is committing crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Opposition MPs have demanded accountability with those people who profited from the looting, burning and killing in Rakhine.

Photo: Thiha Soe

By Maung Aung Mon
WASHED up, it is natural for youths to look for marriage partners. Mon national lords and ladies meet each other with both white and black hands or feet, depending on the ethnic group’s traditions and by visiting the heiress’s house to convey words of betrothal to the heiress’s parents, according to the traditional ethics.

Nowadays, all couples aim at the gentle ways of courting wooing Mon national youths in former ways. Ways of the then courting are totally different from the present situation. Though based on direct contact between youths, wedding wishes must be said to depend upon parents’ attitudes.

Photo: Thiha Soe

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Tourists visit Myanmar via Tachileik border gate

INTERNATIONAL tourists are visiting Myanmar through international gateways and cross-border points to observe Myanmar’s beautiful landscapes, scenery, tourist attractions, traditions, and social lifestyles.

In addition to traditional tourist destinations, there is now culture-based tourism, by which tourists can observe the traditions and cultures of ethnic people. Traveller statistics reveal this is an increasingly popular draw.

Day-trip tourists visited Tarlot market, Bayintnaung Statue, Maha Myatmuni Pagoda, Shwedagon Pagoda, the National Landmark Gardens, Arrikar Market, and the Chinese monastery, all of which are popular places in Tachileik.

Tourists who stayed overnight visited Buddha Footprint Pagoda, Maha Myatmuni Pagoda in Kyaing Tong, Soon Taung Pagoda, and other famous pagodas and attractions in Maing Phat.

From 1 April to 21 December, there were 703,419 day trip tourists who entered via the Tachileik border gate, 11,428 visitors of whom travelled to Maing Phat and Kyaing Tong. Tourist arrivals for those with a visa who traveled by air via Tachileik totalled 5,341.— GNLM

One attacker and three suspects arrested in Maungtaw, Rakhine

SECURITY personnel conducted law enforcement measures yesterday and caught one attacker who involved in terrorist attacks, and three suspects yesterday.

Security forces caught Zar Paw Ar Long (a) Zar Paw Ar lom, who lives in Oo Shay Kya village at 5 p.m., December 19, and Sharp (a) Bain Khu and Adu Shaw Yoe, who tried to enter illegally into Myanmar from Bangladesh.

Another incident took place in the Oo Shay Kya Creek, while police forces found a suspicious boat together with a handset with two Bangladesh SIM cards and two swords. Measures are being taken to expose the crime and to take action against those involved. — Myanmar News Agency

China increases imports of rice, corn, vehicle fuel against last year

CHINA increased its imports of rice, corn and vehicle fuel from Myanmar mainly through the Muse border trade camp in the current fiscal year, according to a report of the Myawady Daily’s Friday edition.

According to figures released by the Ministry of Commerce, this year’s exports of rice to China totalled 747,559 tonnes, increasing over 500,000 tonnes against the last year’s total of 232,721 tonnes.

The export of Myanmar’s corn also saw an increase in demand from the People’s Republic of China. The ministry’s data shows that more than 697,000 tonnes of locally produced corn went to the world’s populous nation this year, which is over 250,000 tonnes more than that of last year.

“The country’s corn market is currently active because of new production of fresh corn this winner season. We have a good export demand for rice and vehicle fuel too,” said one of wholesalers from Yangon’s Bayintnaung Wholesale Market.

Although the country saw an increased demand for rice, corn and fuel, this year’s re-export of sugar decreased to 550,386 tonnes compared with last year.

Myanmar mainly exports melons, rice, corn, fuel, fruits and vegetables and marine products to China and imports consumer goods, beverage, seafood, clothing, electronic devices, construction materials, IT-related products, agricultural equipment and motorbikes.—GNLM
Pence visits Afghanistan, says US will ‘see this through’

KABUL — Vice President Mike Pence made an unannounced trip to Afghanistan to meet its leaders and underscore US commitment to the country four months after President Donald Trump agreed to an open-ended war against insurgents here.

Pence arrived on a military plane at Bagram Airfield under the cover of darkness on Thursday night after leaving Washington on Wednesday night. He then flew by helicopter to Kabul, where he met President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah at the presidential palace.

Pence told the leaders he hoped his presence there was tangible evidence that the United States was “here to see this through.”

In a reversal of his campaign call for a swift withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, Trump in August pledged a stepped-up military campaign against Taliban insurgents and signalled the United States would send more troops to fight in what is the longest war in its history.

At the end of August, there were some 11,000 US troops in Afghanistan and more have since arrived.

Ghani expressed gratitude to the US government and said Afghanistan’s partnership with the United States was cemented in sacrifice.

Pence told reporters the strategy of increased troops on the ground and greater authorities for military leaders was paying dividends.

“The results are really beginning to become evident around the country,” he said, adding that Ghani and Abdullah had said “they’ve begun to see a sea change in the attitudes among the Taliban.” Pence said their hope was that “eventually the enemy will tire of losing” and be willing to talk peace.

Asked if more troops would be needed, Pence said that would be a decision for Trump in the days ahead.

Pence said he pressed the Afghan leaders for political reforms and Ghani assured him that an election commission was developing a framework for parliamentary elections in 2018.

Pence had originally planned to travel to Israel and Egypt this week, but he postponed that trip to remain in Washington while Congress passed legislation to overhaul US tax law.

The short visit to Afghanistan, originally part of the Middle East trip, was shrouded in secrecy for security reasons. Reporters travelling with the vice president were asked not to reveal his whereabouts until after the delegation arrived back at the air base from Kabul and Pence had addressed US troops. Pence almost did not make it to the presidential palace. The helicopters he and others were flying in came close to turning back to Bagram because of poor visibility, but the pilots were able to find a route in the end, a White House official said.

Pence, who coordinated the process that resulted in Trump’s new Afghanistan policy, has been one of the main interlocutors between the White House and the Afghan leadership since Trump entered office in January.

He repeated his promise of US commitment to the region during remarks to troops at Bagram.

“Under President Donald Trump, the armed forces of the United States will remain engaged in Afghanistan until we eliminate the terrorist threat to our homeland, our people once and for all,” Pence said.

—Reuters

UN General Assembly adopts resolution on status of Jerusalem

UNITED NATIONS — The General Assembly on Thursday adopted a resolution on the status of Jerusalem that will make US President Donald Trump’s decision to recognize Jerusalem as the Israeli capital have no legal effect.

In a rare emergency special session, the draft resolution tabled by Turkey and Yemen was adopted 128-9 with 35 abstentions.

The nine countries that voted against the text were Guatemala, Honduras, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Togo, as well as the United States and Israel.

The resolution “affirms that any decisions and actions which purport to have altered the character, status or demographic composition of the Holy City of Jerusalem have no legal effect, are null and void and must be rescinded in compliance with relevant resolutions of the Security Council, and in this regard calls upon all states to refrain from the establishment of diplomatic missions in the Holy City of Jerusalem.”

It further demands that all UN member states comply with Security Council resolutions regarding Jerusalem, and not recognize any actions or measures contrary to those resolutions.

Such a vote at the General Assembly is non-binding but a resounding “yes” reflects the collective will of the international community and carries much political weight.

Before the vote, US ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley repeated the threat to cut aid for the countries that would have voted in favor of the draft as well as US contributions to the United Nations.

She said her country will move its Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. “No vote in the United Nations will make any difference on that.”

However, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu showed defiance to US pressure.

“We will not be intimidated. You can be strong, but that doesn’t make you right!” Cavusoglu told the emergency special session in clear reference to US threats.

“Before this meeting, a UN member state threatened all the other members. We were all asked to vote ‘no’ or face consequences. Some were even threatened with development aid cut,” said Cavusoglu.—Xinhua

Iran denies British-Iranian aid worker might be released soon

LONDON — Iran’s justice ministry confirmed on Friday that authorities have opened a new case against British-Iranian aid worker Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who has been sentenced to five years in jail, and denied she might soon be released.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a project manager with the Thomson Reuters Foundation, was arrested in April 2016 at a Tehran airport as she was heading back to Britain with her two-year-old daughter after a family visit. —Reuters

Eight killed in car bombing attack on police station in S. Afghanistan

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — At least eight people were killed and many others wounded after a Taliban suicide car bombing struck a district police station in Afghanistan’s southern province of Kandahar, local police said Friday.

The attack occurred roughly at 04:30 am local time (0000 GMT) Friday, after a Taliban suicide bomber drove a hijacked explosive-laden military vehicle into the Maywand district police station, a local police official told Xinhua anonymously.—Xinhua

Japanese and South Korean representatives to the six-party talks on North Korea’s denuclearization reaffirmed Friday the need to continue to press Pyongyang.

TOKYO — Japanese and South Korean representatives to the six-party talks on North Korea’s denuclearization reaffirmed Friday the need to continue to press Pyongyang to abandon its nuclear and missile development programmes.

Kenji Kanasugi, director general of the Japanese Foreign Ministry’s Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, and Lee Do Hoon, special representative for Korean Peninsula peace and security affairs, also confirmed that denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is indispensable for peace and security in the region, according to the Japanese ministry.—Kyodo News

Photo: Pence arrives on stage to address troops in a hangar at Bagram Air Field in Afghanistan, on 21 December 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS
Catalan separatists win vote, thwarting Rajoy’s bid to solve crisis

BARCELONA/MADRID — Separatists looked set on Friday to regain power in Catalonia after voters rejected Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy’s attempt to defuse the independence movement, instead re-igniting the country’s biggest political crisis in decades.

Spanish markets recoiled at a surprise result that is also a setback for the European Union, which must now brace for more secessionist noise as it grapples with the disruption of Brexit and simmering east European discontent.

By risking an election in the wealthy region, Rajoy appears to have made the same mistake that leaders such as Greece’s Alexis Tsipras, Britain’s David Cameron and Italy’s Matteo Renzi have made in recent years: betting that voters would resolve their troublesome domestic conundrums for them.

With the count from Thursday’s Catalan parliament election almost complete, separatist parties had secured a slim majority, sending stocks down around 1 per cent on fears that the euro zone’s fourth-largest economy will be hurt by tensions with its richest region.

After several strained months that saw secessionists organise an illegal referendum on 1 October, and police confiscate urns to try to prevent it from taking place, the regional election has failed to produce a solution to the standoff.

Rajoy is weakened; the secessionists kept a majority, but it was reduced and they may have difficulty forming a government; and support for the unionist Ciudadanos has surged, but not enough to catapult them into power.

“Catalonia is back to square one,” said Marco Protopapa, an analyst at JP Morgan, forecasting that tensions would quickly return between Madrid and an “emboldened pro-independence camp eager to exploit the tactical advantage of a favourable election outcome”.

With Catalonia accounting for a fifth of its economy, Spain had already trimmed growth forecasts for 2018, and the prospect of prolonged uncertainty worries business leaders.

“More companies leaving, less economic activity there - and worse for everyone,” said the chief executive of a major listed Spanish company, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the tense climate of the independence debate.

More than 3,000 firms have shifted their headquarters out of the region since October’s referendum. —Reuters

Explosion outside Athens court shatters windows, no injuries

ATHENS — A makeshift bomb exploded outside a Greek court in Athens early on Friday after the court was shattering windows and damaging the facade of the building, police officials said.

Shots were also fired at a person guarding the Athens Appeal Court building, Justice Minister Stavros Kontonis told state TV. The Justice Ministry suspended the court’s operation for one day. There were no reports of injuries.

Two Greek media organisations received warning calls at 2:50 am (0050 GMT), before the explosion, one official said.

Police, who had cordoned off the area, later found a bag which contained the makeshift bomb outside the building.

Police were also investigating footage from cameras nearby, another official said, and reports of two people leaving the scene in a van.

Small-scale attacks on businesses, state buildings, police and politicians are frequent in Greece, which has a long history of political violence.

Public anger remains high after seven years of belt-tightening in a crisis that has cut thousands of jobs and eroded living standards.

Protesters have repeatedly tried to block foreclosures of homes at courts, a key condition of Greece’s international bailout. Electronic auctions started in November.

—Reuters

UN Security Council to vote on new sanctions against DPRK

UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations Security Council is expected to vote on a new draft resolution that would tighten sanctions against the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) in response to its ballistic missile launch last month.

A Security Council meeting has been scheduled for Friday at 1:00 pm EST (1800 GMT). The US-drafted resolution was circulated among council members on Thursday.

The draft, seen by Xinhua, seeks to ban nearly 90 per cent of refined petroleum product exports, including diesel and kerosene, to the DPRK, setting a ceiling of 500,000 barrels a year. It also caps crude oil exports to the DPRK at 4 million barrels a year.

The draft also demands the repatriation of overseas DPRK workers within 12 months.

In addition, the draft resolution bans DPRK exports of food products, machinery, electrical equipment, earth and stone, including magnesite and magnesia, wood and vessels. It bans the supply of industrial equipment, machinery, transportation vehicles, and industrial metals to the DPRK.

—Xinhua

South Korea willing to discuss issues of concern with DPRK without precondition

SEOUL — South Korea’s Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon said Friday that Seoul was willing to discuss the issues of concern with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) without precondition.

Choe told a meeting with local reporters that if South Korea can talk with the DPRK side, it was willing to frankly discuss several issues of concern to Pyongyang without any precondition. He did not elaborate on what issues could be on the possible dialogue table, according to local media reports.

South Korea will try to take several opportunities, including the upcoming PyeongChang Winter Olympic Games, in a more active manner to encourage the DPRK to come to a dialogue table. Seoul has asked Pyongyang to participate in the South Korea-hosted winter sports event scheduled to begin in February at PyeongChang in the country’s eastern region.

South Korea made dialogue overtures in July to the DPRK to hold dialogue of military authorities from both sides as well as humanitarian talks about the reunion of separated families. People from the two Koreas have been banned from exchanging letters and having phone calls since the 1950-1953 Korean War ended in armistice. —Xinhua
Australian PM says nine foreigners among those hurt when driver ploughs into crowd

MELBOURNE — Nearly half the 19 people injured when a driver with no known extremist links ploughed into pedestrians in the southern city of Melbourne were foreign nationals, Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said on Friday.

Police allege that the 32-year-old Australian man, a refugee from Afghanistan, had a history of mental illness and drove a car into Christmas shoppers on one of the busiest roads in Australia’s second-largest city on Thursday.

The incident was a chilling reminder of attacks using vehicles in cities around the world. Four people were killed in a similar incident in Melbourne in January.

Turnbull and police said the driver had no known ties to extremist organisations, although they also said he had spoken of the perceived mistreatment of Muslims after his arrest. Police have yet to interview, charge or identify the man.

Turnbull said nine of the victims were foreign nationals. He did not specify their nationalities but Australian media reported they included people from China, India, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, South Korea and Venezuela.

“That is a shocking incident to occur just on the eve of Christmas but we will not be cowed by it,” Turnbull told reporters in Sydney.

Four people were killed and more than 20 injured in January when a man deliberately drove into pedestrians just a few hundred metres away from Thursday’s attack. That was also not designated as a terror attack.

Police had cordoned off the area immediately after the incident but roads in central Melbourne were open and trams were operating as usual on Friday morning. Reuters witnesses reported a heavy police presence around exits from nearby Flinders Street train station, with trauma support and Red Cross workers in the area. Department store staff said foot traffic was down from the day before.

“It’s definitely quieter,” said a saleswoman at a beauty counter in the David Jones department store, who declined to give her name. “More people are coming in from the back entrance. I think they’re trying to avoid Flinders Street Station,” she said.

—Reuters

Philippines’ coast guard rescues 252 passengers from capsized ferry

REAL, (Philippines)—The Philippine coast guard said on Friday it had rescued 252 passengers and crew, including an Australian and his Filipino wife, who were rescued, said spokesman Captain Arm and Balilo.

“All the passengers and crew are accounted for but as I have said we will re-evaluate based on the claims of the families of the missing passengers,” Balilo told Reuters. The vessel was carrying 257 passengers and crew.

The boat left the port around 9 am and capsized an hour later due to strong winds and giant waves. A survivor said the passengers panicked when the boat started to take in water and went to one side, causing the ferry to tilt and capsize.

“The others waited on top of the ship while it was sinking, but I didn’t do that because I know the ship will break down and I want to avoid getting hurt by that,” Rene Ebuena, a rescued passenger told Reuters.

“That’s dangerous and the big waves can slam debris to your body.”

The ferry capsized and sank about 5 miles off Quezon province, east of the capital on the main northern island of Luzon. The Philippine Coast Guard said it will conduct an inquiry to determine the cause of the incident and to verify possible oil spills.—Reuters
Daniel Day-Lewis bows out with twisted romance ‘Phantom Thread’

LOS ANGELES — Director Paul Thomas Anderson calls his movie “Phantom Thread” a romance, but its star Daniel Day-Lewis said that filming it made him so sad he decided to quit acting.

Triple Oscar winner Day-Lewis plays fastidious 1950s London fashion designer Reynolds Woodcock whose self-centred life is disrupted when his latest muse, Alma (played by newcomer Vicky Krieps), falls in love with him and matters take an unexpected and sinister twist.

The movie, arriving in US theatres on 25 December, took two years to research and write in what Anderson says was a collaborative effort with Day-Lewis.

“IT was always my intention to make a romantic film. The kind of things we talked about are the classic gothic romances like Rebecca, ‘Gaslight’ and ‘Vertigo,’” Anderson said. “‘Vertigo’ is really about obsession and that fever that comes over you when romance comes your way ... (The movie) gets pretty complicated and peculiar, as love does,” he added.

British-born Day-Lewis, known for his meticulous preparation, threw himself into the project, studying for months with designers and making a couture dress himself.

“Everything in the House of Woodcock was so particular — what chair, what silverware, what teacup. You have to involve Daniel in every aspect of that. There isn’t a piece of furniture or wall covering that hasn’t been approved (by him),” Anderson said. Yet after filming was completed, Day-Lewis, 60, shocked the movie world in June by announcing, without explanation, that he was retiring as an actor.

In an interview with W magazine last month, the only man to have won three lead actor Oscars said the decision was directly related to shooting “Phantom Thread.”

“Before making the film, I didn’t know I was going to stop acting. I do know that Paul and I laughed a lot before we made the movie. And then we stopped laughing because we were both overwhelmed by a sense of sadness,” Day-Lewis told the magazine.

That sadness has stayed with him, he said. “That happened during the telling of the story, and I don’t really know why.”

Lesley Manville, who plays the fictional Woodcock’s co-dependent sister, said the movie’s driving theme is “the human condition, and how we all respond to and deal with love and the lack of love.”

“Phantom Thread” goes into Hollywood’s awards season with two Golden Globe nominations and more than 20 awards from film critics groups in North America.

Robot DJ puts the tech into techno for Czech clubbers

PRAGUE — These days artificial intelligence is so advanced that robots trade shares, make restaurants suggestions and diagnose diseases. But can a robot get a dance floor jumping?

It is a question that Prague’s Karlovy Lazne Music Club has endeavored to answer by employing a specially adapted former automotive industry robot as a DJ in the popular nightclub.

The robot is shaped like a giant arm capped with a pincer, and has shared deck duties at the club with its human programmer in an hourly rotation each night for the last three weeks.

“People are excited (about the robot), because they haven’t seen anything like this around Europe, and I am not sure if there is something similar in the world,” club manager Adam Lipsansky told Reuters.

The DJ robot was created after the club’s management challenged a robotics firm to the task.

Equipped with special software to help it choose songs and mounted on a stage above the club’s dance floor, the robot selects discs from nearby racks and puts them into one of three music players in front of it. It can scratch records and also dances.

While some clubbers told Reuters that they enjoyed the robot’s musical efforts, others remained unconvinced.

“I don’t like the robot,” said Marcia Lopes, 24, a tourist from America. “It can’t feel what the people want to dance to. There is no emotion behind the music. When there is a real person, they know, what fun is like.”

— Reuters

Release of ‘A Star Is Born’ pushed back to 2018 fall

LOS ANGELES — The release date of Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper starrer “A Star Is Born” has been pushed to October next year.

Cooper is not only starring but is also making his directorial debut with the film. The film, which was earlier scheduled to release on 18 May, 2018, will now hit the theatres on 5 October 2018, reported Variety.

The new release date means that the film will be pitted against Sony’s Spider-Man spinoff “Venom” starring Tom Hardy, and Fox’s “Bad Times at the El Royale”, written and directed by Drew Goddard and starring Chris Hemsworth. “A Star Is Born” is based on the 1937 film starring Janet Gaynor and Fredric March.

The story centres on a movie star, who helps an aspiring young actress find fame, even as age and alcoholism send his own career into a downward spiral.

Bill Gerber, Jon Peters, Todd Phillips and Lynette Howell Taylor are producing with Cooper. Basia Iwanyk and Ravi Mehta are executive producing.

Cooper also had a hand in crafting the script, with Will Fetters and Eric Roth also writing.—PTI

Los Angeles police said Stallone is alleged to have raping a woman 27 years ago.

Police in the California man had “filed a police report alleging a rape that occurred 27 years ago.”

“My client categorically disputes the claim,” Singer said in a statement emailed to media outlets. He said Stallone planned to file a claim that the accuser had filed a false police report.

Police in the California city of Santa Monica said on Thursday that they were investigating a complaint that was made in November against the “Rocky” actor.

“We got a complaint that was made in November of alleged sexual misconduct in the 1990s,” Santa Monica Police Department spokesman Saul Rodriguez told Reuters by telephone. “We are looking into it and will gather information and whatever we discover will be passed to the district attorney.”

Rodriguez did not provide details. Reuters could not independently verify the accusation.

Rodriguez said the accusation could fall within California’s complex statute of limitations for criminal prosecutions of sexual abuse. Offences must generally be prosecuted within 10 years.

Stallone, 71, skyrocketed to fame in 1976 with his Oscar-winning boxing movie “Rocky” and went on to become one of Hollywood’s biggest action stars through the “Rambo” and “Rocky” film franchises.—Reuters

Sylvester Stallone ‘categorically disputes’ claim of 1990s sexual assault

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Actor Sylvester Stallone waves at the premiere of “The Promise” in Los Angeles, California, US, on 12 April 2017. —Photo: REUTERS

Actor Daniel Day-Lewis poses as he arrives for the British Academy of Film and Arts (BAFTA) awards ceremony at the Royal Opera House in London, Britain, in 2013. PHOTO: REUTERS
Facebook, Universal Music strike multi-year licensing deal

NEW YORK — Facebook Inc (FB.O) and Universal Music Group on Thursday announced a global agreement that will enable users to upload videos featuring music from Universal’s library across the social media network as well as Instagram and Oculus.

Through the agreement, which is Facebook’s first with a major record label, the social media company will no longer have to require users to take down videos featuring music from Universal’s catalog due to copyright infringement. Terms of the deal were not disclosed.

Facebook’s deal with Universal Music Group comes as the world’s largest social media site is making a big push into video to keep users on its site and attract advertisers.

Earlier this year it launched its Watch video service, which features shows from the likes of Buzzfeed, Discovery Communications (DISCA.O) as well as some sports like Major League Baseball.

The partnership comes days after Bloomberg reported that YouTube had signed a long-term agreement with Universal Music Group and Sony Music Entertainment.

‘Hamilton’ takes centre stage in London’s West End

LONDON — They may have been casting off the yoke of British rule, but the cast of Broadway smash “Hamilton” nonetheless received a rapturous reception from a star-studded, 1,500-strong audience at the show’s official opening night in London on Thursday.

The show, created by Lin-Manuel Miranda, is an unconventional take on the life of Alexander Hamilton, one of the founding fathers of the United States, featuring a racially diverse cast and a hip-hop-inflected score.

Though the show is rooted firmly in the 18th and 19th centuries, Miranda feels that its themes of legacy and how one spends time on earth still resonate with contemporary audiences.

“That’s what Hamilton and (antagonist Vice President Aaron) Burr are wrestling with the whole time, and I think that’s what people are responding to,” Miranda told Reuters.

Miranda, who played the title role on Broadway, took to the stage after the performance to thank the cast and crew.

Addressing media coverage of the show’s runaway success, he said: “I never want to see the words ‘overnight success’ associated with this show,” saying that his relationships with collaborators on the project dated to 2002.

Thursday’s show was attended by many notable public figures, including musical impresario Andrew Lloyd Webber, Queen guitarist Brian May and London Mayor Sadiq Khan.

“Breaking Bad” star Bryan Cranston, who also attended the performance, described the show as “a masterpiece,” adding that it was “striking a chord with the younger generations and that’s what we need in the theatre.”

The play is notable for casting black, Asian and Latin actors to play the roles of white historical figures.

The title role, which was originally played by Miranda, who is of Puerto Rican descent, was filled by Londoner Jamael Westman, who has Irish and Jamaican heritage.

The London production, housed in the newly refurbished Victoria Palace theatre, is the show’s first foray outside of the United States after successful runs in Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles, as well as New York. The Broadway production won 11 Tony awards and netted Miranda a Pulitzer Prize in 2016.

Any uncertainty about whether British audiences would share their American counterparts’ enthusiasm for the show was quickly assuaged by a remarkable demand for tickets, which London’s Guardian newspaper reported were being offered by re-sellers for up to 6,000 pounds ($8,000).

The show’s depiction of an effete King George III, Britain’s ruler during the US revolutionary war, also drew some of the biggest laughs of the night from the British crowd. — Reuters
**SPORT**

MYANMAR SECURES BRONZE IN THAN NIENT CUP BY DEFEATING THAILAND

The Myanmar U-21 team secured third place in the international Than Nien Cup by beating Thailand by a decisive score of 4-2 at Can Tho Stadium in Vietnam yesterday.

Myanmar lined up with goalkeeper Phone Thitsar Min, Kyaw Thu Tun, Ye Yint Aung, Win Moe Kyaw, Than Htike Zin, Myat Kaung Khant, Kyaw Myint Win, Shwe Ko, Aee Soe, Hein Htet Aung and Soe Lwin Lwin.

At the 2-minute mark, from the middle of the line, Myanmar’s Shwe Ko was able to break free of the goalkeeper Philakhlang and scored the opening goal for Myanmar over the slow defence of Thailand.

Thailand played more aggressively after the opening score, and in the 32nd minute, Thailand’s striker Nattawut Suksum picked up the ball with the back defender and tied the score at 1-1.

But a lack of concentration by Thailand cost them dearly.

At the 35-minute mark, Myanmar’s Kyaw Myint Win took advantage of a beautiful pass to escape from the middle of the field before launching a cross shot into the corner of the goal, lifting Myanmar to a 2-1 lead.

The adjustment did not improve the play.

Myanmar players penetrated with quick fading to keep the defenders away, creating a lot of work from Philakhlang, Thailand’s goalkeeper.

In the decisive victory, Myanmar’s Kyaw Myint Win easily scored at the 83-minute mark. At 86 minutes, in a quick counter-attack situation, Myanmar’s Aee Soe comfortably caught a horizontal line pass from a teammate and hit the empty net to seal the victory, bringing home bronze for the U-21 Myanmar squad. “I’m glad for our win. I was so focused on my boys’ strength and stamina for this match. Our team’s fast and accurate strikers can take advantage over the some weak points of Thai’s defence line, so we did win with a decisive result.” said Myanmar Head Coach U Kyi Lwin after the match.—Kyaw Zin Lin

**Eight teams to compete in KBZ Bank Women’s League 2017-2018**

A new club has joined the original seven teams for the upcoming season of KBZ-Bank Women’s League 2017-2018, according to the Myanmar Football Federation.

A total of eight teams -- Myawady FC, Thitsar Arman FC, Sport & Education FC, ISPP FC, Gandamar FC, YREO FC, Zewkapin FC and a new team, University Clubs, under the department of higher education, will be competing in the women’s professional league, the MFF said.

Under the supervision of MFF and mainly sponsored by Kanbawza Bank, Myanmar’s largest private commercial bank, the KBZ Bank Women’s League was launched in Myanmar last year in order to improve the country’s female football sector. Other ASEAN countries have had established women’s football leagues for years.

The first round of the upcoming season will be from 27 December 2017 to 8 February 2018, while the second round will be played from 13 March 2018 to 10 May 2018.

Myawady FC will play against Thitsar Arman FC in the opening match of the League on 27 December at Aung San Stadium, Yangon.

—Kyaw Zin Lin

**Man United’s Smalling looking forward to Vardy challenge**

LONDON — Manchester United defender Chris Smalling is wary of the threat posed by Leicester City striker Jamie Vardy but is ready to keep him quiet.

Vardy was a key component in Leicester’s title-winning campaign in 2015/16 and has scored seven goals in 16 league matches this season, along with a League Cup goal in the mid-week defeat by Manchester City.

Smalling said United’s defenders would not be able to relax for a moment at the King Power Stadium. “He is someone who is a bit of a nightmare for defenders because he is often rattling around and chasing with non-stop running. “He runs in behind which, as a defender, is the hardest thing to deal with, but I will be looking forward to that battle and, hopefully, I’ll be ready to keep him quiet.”

United are looking for a third consecutive league win to keep in touch with leaders City but will face a Leicester side who have won four of their last five league games to climb to eighth.

“You know their qualities and their wingers - Demarai Gray is coming into the team and Riyad Mahrez is in form as well,” said Smalling. “So those are the players we need to keep quiet and, when we get the ball, we need to make sure that we get at their backline.”

—Reuters

Manchester United’s Chris Smalling. PHOTO: REUTERS