Plan for bridging fiscal year gap

National Planning bill for six-month transition period before new FY discussed

A National Planning Bill to be used during the six-month period from April to September, which is considered a transitional period for the 2018-2019 financial year that now runs from 1 October to 30 September, should maintain the current needs of the people, sustain development and stay within the budget allowed by the government, said President U Htin Kyaw yesterday. The plan is necessary because the fiscal year in Myanmar changed from 1 April to 31 March to 1 October to 30 September for the 2018-2019 fiscal year, creating a six-month gap.

The President’s remarks came at the National Planning Commission meeting 1/2018 at the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday, convened for the purpose of discussing the bill before it is submitted to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. “The six-month period from April to September is the rainy season. Farmers plant crops in this season in rain-fed fields. Meanwhile, in the industry sector, there is lack of post-harvest businesses in this season. Also, the rainy season causes limitations in the construction sector;” the President said. But small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are expected to be developed due to flow of foreign investment, granting loans to SMEs and measures for development of the private sector, he added.

SEE PAGE-3
Message of greetings sent by President U Htin Kyaw to the Kachin State Day Celebrations Ceremony

Dear esteemed brothers and sisters, national brethren residing in the Kachin State,

Today the 10th January is an auspicious and significant 70th Anniversary of Kachin State Day designated by our ethnic Kachin brothers and sisters. I send my greetings and good wishes for the auspiciousness of the ethnic Kachin brothers and sisters as well as all union nationals residing in the Kachin State.

On 10th January 1948, after gaining Independence, the first meeting of the Kachin State Council was held and to honour the establishment of the Kachin State Government, 10th January was designated as Kachin State Day. From that day onwards we have been celebrating annually and today marks the 70th Anniversary.

The Kachin State comprises 4 districts, 18 townships, and 30 towns and it is also a State which is inhabited by such Kachin racial groups as the Jingphaw, Rawang, Lisu, Lachid, Lhaovo, and Zaiwa; Shan racial groups such Taihail, Tailay, Tailon, Taisar, Tai Khamenti; Burmans and other ethnic racial groups totaling a population of a little more than 16,00,000 who are living together in friendship and cordiality.

Kachin State is rich in precious gems and minerals such as gold and jade and is the home of the one and only snow-capped mountain ranges in the whole of South-East Asia. It also has very beautiful scenery. Furthermore, it is also the region where the river Ayeyawady, which may be called the life-blood of Myanmar has its source.

Kachin State with such beautiful scenery and abundance of natural resources was unable to enjoy the natural beauty or use the natural resources effectively for development purpose due to armed conflicts. Only when there is peace, stability and rule of law in the region can the development works be implemented. All the ethnic national races living in Kachin State have known the taste of peace and they are also yearning for peace. Gaining peace is also the biggest desire of the entire people.

Now is the time when there is unprecedented unity between the ethnic nationals, the people, the government, the Tatmadaw, the Hluttaw, political parties, civil society organisations and ethnic armed organisations and the country is on the correct path of development. All organisations need to increase the power of unity with the foundations and will strive together with the people of Kachin State for the stability and development of the Kachin State. Peace will be established so that it can be enjoyed by our offspring. In constructing the Republic of the Union of Myanmar into a democratic country, it is important for all ethnic national races to participate on an equal basis. The Union Government is spending a lot of expenditures on road transport, education, health and human resources development, getting electricity, social economic development of the people and health care for Kachin State development. Based on the existing unity and basic good principles achieved, I wish to urge all ethnic national brothers and sisters in Kachin State to work collectively in unity and harmony toward a new democratic country.

I am sending this message of greeting with a note that the processeses of establishing a peaceful, modern, developed, new democratic country and peace can only succeed if all ethnic national races participate with firm union spirit, true national spirit and in unity with the Union government.

Signed:
Htin Kyaw
President
(Unofficial Translation)

Vice President U Myint Swe arrives in Cambodia

A DELEGATION led by Vice President U Myint Swe arrived in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, yesterday to attend the 2nd Mekong-Lancang Cooperation (MLC) Leaders’ Meeting on 10 January. Cambodia and China will co-chair the meeting, which will review progress and activities of the Member States since the 1st MLC Leaders’ Meeting on 1 March 2016. The meeting will also envision the direction of the MLC’s future activities.

U Myint Swe and party were seen off at Nay Pyi Taw Airport by Union Minister for Defence Li-Gen Sein Win, Union Minister for Commerce Dr. Than Myint, Deputy Minister Maj-Gen Aung Soe, Maj-Gen Than Htut, U Kyaw Myo and officials from the Chinese Embassy and the Cambodian Embassy to Myanmar.

The Vice President is accompanied by U Kyaw Tin, Union Minister for International Cooperation, and other officials.

They were welcomed at Siem Reap airport by Siem Reap Deputy Governor Mr. Tea Seyha, a member of province council Mr. Eung Hoeun, Myanmar Ambassador to Cambodia U Myint Soe and officials from the Myanmar embassy.

The Vice President and party then made a visit to the Angkor Wat Temple, one of the largest temples in this region. It has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1992.

U Myint Swe then went to the Bayon temple, which is the second most popular destination in Cambodia after the Angkor Wat. The Vice President flew back to Phnom Penh yesterday evening.

They received a Guard of Honour on arrival at the airport by Mr. Sun Chanthol, Minister for Public Works and Transport and officials. He also visited Ta Prohm Temple in Phnom Penh. —Myanmar News Agency
Finance Commission meets in Nay Pyi Taw

A meeting of the Finance Commission meeting was held yesterday morning at the Presidential Palace.

The meeting was attended by State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Finance Commission Vice-Chairman Vice-President U Henry Van Thio, secretary Union Minister U Kyaw Win, members Union Attorney General, Union Auditor General, Nay Pyi Taw Council Chairman, states and regions Chief Ministers.

“The present 1/2018 meeting of the Finance Commission is to discuss and adopt the Budget Estimate for 2018 April to September of the Union and Bill on 2018 Budget of the Union”, the President said.

Section 221 of 2008 Constitution requires that the Union Government draft a Union Budget Bill based on the annual Union budget, after coordinating with the Financial Commission, and submit it for approval to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. As per this section, the Financial Commission is to support the Budget Estimate for 2018 April to September of the Union submitted by the Government to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw.

The fiscal year in Myanmar was originally designated to be from 1 April to 31 March, but for fiscal year 2018-2019, it will be changed to 1 October to 30 September. That is why the budget estimate of departments and organisations for the six-month transition period of 1 April to 30 September 2018 is now being drawn up separately.

Spending frameworks according to the Medium-Term Fiscal Framework for union-level departments and organisations were not set as the budget for 1 April to 30 September 2018 is for a six-month period only. Relevant departments and organisations were instead asked to draw up a six-month estimate of income and expenditures, and these departments and organisations had submitted budgets accordingly. Assessment in stages of the budget was based on the corrected budget of the first six months of fiscal year 2017-2018 budget.

In the ordinary expenditure of appointing new staff, the request for expenditure should be for the actual number of new staff that will be appointed in the coming year’s first six month. Maintenance expenditure requested for machineries, vehicles and buildings should also be for the maintenance works that can be completed in the six months period.

In the capital expenditure portion, ongoing construction works and works that can be completed during the six months period is to be requested. It is to be noted that in the six-month budget period only the first two months are in the summertime while the remaining four months will be in the rainy season. It is not possible to complete new works in this period and thus there shouldn’t be requests for new works during this period. Expenditure requests to purchase machinery during this six-month period should be for those that can be purchased within this period. Machinery purchases should be in local currency and use of foreign currency should be reduced as much as possible.

The Union Government will not use macroeconomic indicators and indexes to fulfill the deficits of states and regions and will set 50 per cent of the deficit amount of fiscal year 2017-2018. States/Regions governments should use these funds for the benefit of the people and must follow the instructions and tender rules in a transparent manner in conducting construction and purchasing works.

Implementation period for the six-month budget is short and expenditures should be spent based on income. Expenditures are to be spent efficiently during the six months period to prevent waste. Only then will the expenditure GDP ratio be maintained. While the private sector is being supported for the country’s economic development, the government sector needs to lay down financial policies that will support economic development with full collection of tax and income from state economic organisations. Expenditures should be spent as a priority on increasing and supporting manufacturing and services.

Acquired foreign aid and loans should be spent effectively for the people. If foreign aid and loans are allocated without having sufficient time to spend it during the six-month period, there’ll be unspent expenditures that will have to be refunded.

The Budget Estimate for 2018 April to September of the Union and Bill on the 2018 Budget of the Union are urged to be discussed and adopted said the President.

Finance Commission Vice-Chairman Vice-President U Henry Van Thio said the Union fulfillment is Ks376.74 billion and the budget submitted by states and regions had a total income of Ks776.74 billion and a total expenditure of Ks1.23 trillion, making for a deficit of Ks853.79 billion.

President U Htin Kyaw delivers the speech at the meeting of the Finance Commission 1/2018 at the Presidential Palace. PHOTO: MNA

National Planning bill for six-month transition period before new FY discussed

FROM PAGE-1

“In the National Planning for the six-month period, it is found that the country’s GDP is expected to see 7.2 per cent growth in the six month period from April to September 2018 since transportation, hotels and tourism and financial services are expected to see progress,” he said.

Though the country’s economy has not accelerated, the economic growth of the 2017-2018 Fiscal Year is expected to reach 6.8 per cent due to favourable weather in the time of harvest, flow of foreign investment, increasing production of SMEs, better transportation and tourism services, communications, financial services and other services.

“The aims of planning for the six-month period should focus on the projects which are urgently needed to be implemented for the people and for the projects which are considered essential for the National Planning of the 2018-2019 Fiscal Year,” said the President.

Speaking at the meeting, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi called for stronger linkages between the Union Government and regional/state governments for making the projects a success.

“Just more than 6 per cent to 7 per cent growth for our country is not enough for Myanmar, which is just on track for development,” said the State Counsellor.

She also highlighted the lack of progress in the agriculture sector, putting the blame on problems related with land rights.

“Without seeing satisfactory solutions to the land rights issues in the agriculture sector on which 70 per cent of the country’s population are relying, we cannot say that the development of the country is adequate,” she added.

She also called for innovation for the market-oriented economic system in terms of penetrating foreign markets and establishing a market for local products in attempts to overcome the challenges for trade deficit.

She also called on regional and state governments for taking political and economic approaches to their projects in order to make the projects a success.

The State Counsellor also called for stepping up efforts for disaster preparedness as the country was suffering the impacts of climate change.

“Before implementation, all projects should be viewed on whether they would benefit the emergence of a Democratic Federal Republic, because we are marching towards a Democratic Federal Republic,” said the State Counsellor. — Myanmar News Agency
Government subsidies help enhance livestock sector

AS a result of the medium-term loan plan provided by the government at a low interest rate, the livestock sector this year is likely to improve, U Win Kyaing, secretary of Myanmar Fishery Federation, told Myawady Daily.

“We cannot make profits without investment. Small investments might slow the development of businesses. The government provided Ky6700 billion for the loan plan,” he said.

The government announced it will provide a loan of some Ky6700 billion under the medium-term plan at a low interest rate to the agriculture, livestock and small and medium enterprise sectors.

Foreigners are not allowed to invest 100 per cent in Myanmar’s livestock sector.

Three livestock zones are planned to be set up in the Yangon Region. These zones will include cold storages and advanced packaging machines for the fisheries, according to a report in the Myawady Daily yesterday.

The current fiscal year witnessed foreign direct investments worth $18.7 million in the livestock and fisheries sector, according to the statistics provided by the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration.—GNLM

Over 1,600 tonnes of honey exported to foreign countries

Some 1,642 metric tonnes of honey, with an estimated value of US$2.47 million, have been shipped to foreign markets to date, according to the Apiculture Enterprise.

In the last nine months of the current fiscal year (FY), Myanmar exported nearly 260 metric tonnes to America and 200 tonnes to Canada. The export volume was up by 200 tonnes against last FY. Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, Viet Nam, Thailand and China bought honey from Myanmar, which is now trying to penetrate the European Union market. Myanmar’s honey has considerable value in the international market.

China buys Myanmar’s honey for use in traditional medicines and food, owing to its high medicinal value. Beekeeping enterprises are mostly found in the Mandalay, Sagaing and Magway regions and the Shan State. There are some 80,000 hives in the Mandalay Region and some 150,000 hives across the country, according to the Apiculture Enterprise.—Htet Myat

Businessmen demand screening of wheat imports

Wheat imported into the country does not have the Phyto Certificate or the Food and Drug Administration’s approval, according to a report in the Myana Ailin.

To protect domestic wheat flour enterprises, the concerned authorities intend to scrutinise import licences. While importers get easy and direct access to the domestic market, local manufacturers are facing difficulties, said local wheat producers.

Some local wheat factories have been forced to shut down operations as their flour cannot compete with the imported product. In addition to the quality of locally produced wheat flour, the financial hardships of local small and medium enterprises are also causing the suspension of businesses.

Wheat imports require approvals from the relevant department.

Previously, feed was being produced with the use of corn as raw materials, whereas feed manufacturers are now substituting raw corn with imported wheat, as it is cheaper.—Myat Thu (AMIA)
Chin State elephant foot yams fail to meet foreign demand

The elephant foot yam, also known as the whitesport Giant Arum, which is largely grown in the Chin State in Myanmar, failed to meet foreign demand because of the crop’s inferior quality this year.

“Agricultural experts from Japan visited Myanmar and found the quality of elephant foot yams in Myanmar was better than those in Indonesia. Therefore, Japan bought as many elephant foot yams as Myanmar could supply. Japan prefers to buy the dry elephant foot yam variety. However, the quality of elephant foot yams has declined because the local farmers are still using traditional methods of storage,” said U Ma Nar Lein, an elephant foot yam trader from Pan Awe Village, Mindat Township.

Currently, Japan has permitted 240 metric tonnes of elephant foot yam imports from Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Sri Lanka. If the number crosses 240 metric tonnes, Japan will collect US$29 per kilogram as tax,” he added. Elephant foot yams are found across Chin State, but the Mindat and Kanpetlet townships produce the highest quality fruit. The yams are then sent to Mandalay and Muse. India, South Korea, China, the Philippines, Indonesia and Japan regularly buy elephant foot yam powder. Therefore, the value-added powder is manufactured by the locals of the Mindat township.

There are three types of elephant foot yams: white, yellow and red. Yellow and red are popular export items to China and Japan. Elephant foot yams grow naturally in Chin State but are now cultivated systematically as they have become a cash crop with foreign demand.— Zo Hay Hsar

Myanmar eyes border trade worth US$640 million through Chinshwehaw gate

Border trade through Chinshwehaw is expected to reach US$640 million this fiscal year, according to a recent report in the Myanmar Alin. This will include US$620 million in exports and US$20 million in imports. The main export items are pulses, corn, sesame, rice, rubber, livestock, sugar and bamboo, whereas seasoning powder, fertilisers, construction tools, consumer goods and food products are being imported.

Chinshwehaw is the second largest checkpoint among the Sino-Myanmar gates. To bolster border trade, the limit on the import quota set by China must be raised. China does not impose a quota limit on the import of green grams, peanuts and sesame but imposes it on rice, corn, rubber and sugar.

China has set a quota limit of 100,000 tonnes on the import of rice. This limit is low compared to the actual import volume, said U Sai Kyaw, secretary of Mandalay Region Rice Merchants Association.

The trade value last fiscal year reached more than US$573 million, including US$515 million in exports and US$57 million in imports.— Zar Lin Thu (AMIA)
Foreign passengers using circular railway double this year

The number of foreign passengers using circular train services has increased twofold in the current fiscal year (FY) after the fares were reduced, according to the Myanma Railways (MR).

In 2015, MR collected US$1 from foreigners for using the Yangon circular train services. However, foreigners now pay the same fare as the locals, said U Zaw Lwin, traffic general manager of Division 7 of Myanma Railways.

Earlier, the train fare was Ks200 for all distances, but now, the shorter distances cost Ks100 for 15 miles, while the entire trip costs Ks200.

In 2016-2017 FY, between 3,500 and 4,000 foreign passengers used the Yangon circular train services per month. In 2017-2018 FY, the number of foreign passengers increased to more than 8,000 per month.

Currently, nine circular trains are plying daily for 215 km. The number of foreign passengers used the Yangon Circular train has increased to more than 8,000 per month, according to a report in the Myawady Daily yesterday.

A few days ago, the road on the Chinese side was covered with snow, which led to a decline in the demand for melons and, consequently, their price.

Although the roads are operational today, the prices keep on falling, said U Kyaw Min, a melon trader. Moreover, the quality of sweet melons has also been affected by the unmitigable rainfall across the country.

Taiwan watermelons cost between 2,000 and 3,500 yuan per tonne, while melons are priced between 1,000 and 3,100 yuan, according to a report in the Myawady Daily yesterday.

Melon prices continue to decline in Muse border trade zone

Experts suspect ancient buildings found in Wundwin are from Innwa and early Konebaung era

BRICKS that were discovered near the Samone River close to Nabegone Village in Mandalay Region’s Wundwin Township might be the foundation of a religious building from the Innwa and early Konebaung era because they are not similar to the bricks found from the Pyu era, according to the Department of Archaeology and National Museum (Mandalay Branch).

The bricks were exposed and subsequently found due to water erosion from the Samone River in November last year, and people predicted that the old buildings might be a fortress from the Pyu period.

Officials from the Department of Archaeology went and checked the region on 8 December and said the building might be from Innwa and early Konebaung era.

When the bank of Samone River was collapsed, bones were first found at the wall of the river bank. Then the brickwork was discovered under the bones. The bricks are one foot long and eight inches wide, and the bricks are in square and triangle shapes, locals said.

"The area where the rows of brick came out is an area where Ywar Haung Gone village once existed, and a pagoda south of the river was toppled and destroyed in the past," said U San Yin, a villager from Nabegone Village.

Agricultural department encourages Sterculia gum cultivation

The Mogaung Township Agricultural Department is encouraging local cultivators and land owners to grow Sterculia gum to create job opportunities and earn foreign income.

"There are many fallow and virgin lands in Mogaung Township, as well as other townships. I want to encourage them to grow Sterculia gum, which requires less capital. Some 250 to 300 Sterculia gum plants can be grown per acre. A three- or four-year-old Sterculia urens tree produces one or two ticals of Sterculia gum per day. Therefore, we should be growing Sterculia gum on a commercial scale," said U Sein Lwin, an official at the Mogaung Township Agricultural Department.

Stereulcia gum is a medium-sized deciduous tree with horizontally spreading branches. It grows to a height between 50 feet and 90 feet and has a circumference between 6 feet and 10 feet. It can thrive in any region.

Stereulcia gum is in great demand from neighbouring countries. Currently, the price of Myanmar’s Sterculia gum is between Ks60,000 and Ks110,000 per viss.

The gum is used as an ingredient in snacks and cosmetics and by the pharmaceutical and industrial sectors. The gum is also used in traditional medicines. Currently, the agricultural department is cultivating the gum in the Pin Baw region, Mogaung Township, as a pilot project.

Experts suspect ancient buildings found in Wundwin are from Innwa and early Konebaung era

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Officials from the Department of Archaeology went and checked the region on 8 December and said the building might be from Innwa and early Konebaung era.

When we went to check, we found arch bricks that were used for building the top of a pagoda and the size of the arch brick and the foundation brick are not the same size of the bricks found from the Pyu era. Most of the bricks we found are used in Innwa and early Konebaung era.

That’s why we think that it might be a religious building from Innwa and Konebaung era," said an archaeology official from the department.

When the bank of Samone River was collapsed, bones were first found at the wall of the river bank. Then the brickwork was discovered under the bones. The bricks are one foot long and eight inches wide, and the bricks are in square and triangle shapes, locals said.

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Foreign Head of State sends felicitations to President U Htin Kyaw

The following is message of felicitations from Foreign Head of State / Government sent to President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar U Htin Kyaw, on the occasion of the 70th Anniversary Independence Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

From His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd) Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia
Your Excellency,

On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar’s Independence, I wish to convey to you and the people of Myanmar my warmest wishes, together with those of the Australian Government and people.

Following Myanmar’s historic elections in 2015, our two countries have increased our bilateral engagement. Senior Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, Minister for International Development and the Pacific, visited in March 2017 for the inaugural Australia-Myanmar Strategic Dialogue, and to lead the Third High-Level Consultations on Development Cooperate. We welcomed Myanmar Parliamentarians to Australia in July and November, and reciprocated with visits to Myanmar by Australian Parliamentarians on a number of occasions over the past year.

We appreciate Myanmar’s support as Australia’s ASEAN Country Coordinator, and we work closely together on diverse regional issues. We thank Myanmar for hosting the Australia-ASEAN Forum in March 2017, and look forward to the visit of State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi for the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in March 2018. Australia supports Myanmar’s democratic reform process. A stable and prosperous Myanmar, which embraces the diversity of all its people, upholds democratic principles and respects universal human rights, will benefit the people of Myanmar and the region.

As a close regional partner, we will continue to work with Myanmar through a challenging period of reform and transition. Our development assistance program will support basic education, the peace process, governance and economic growth.

May I express my confidence that the friendly relations between our two countries will continue to prosper in the coming year.

Foreign Heads of State send felicitations to State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

The following are messages of felicitations from Foreign Heads of State / Government sent to State Counsellor and Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Myanmar in 2018.

From HM Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel
Dear Madam Minister,

I extend warm congratulations to you and the people of Myanmar on the occasion of your 70th Independence Day. May the coming year be marked by greater stability, prosperity and peace.

Israel is proud of its strong partnership with Myanmar; forged over the past seven decades. Throughout the years, the friendship between our two peoples has been reinforced through numerous high-level visits in both countries and increasing cooperation in a variety of areas, including agriculture, education and healthcare.

The hundreds of trainees from Myanmar in Israel help bolster our people-to-people contacts, as do the many Israeli tourists drawn to Myanmar’s breathtaking landscapes, rich culture and archaeological treasures.

I reiterate my invitation for you to visit Israel at your earliest convenience. It will be my pleasure to welcome you to Jerusalem and discuss how we can expand our partnership even further.

On behalf of the people and government of Israel, I wish you memorable and enjoyable Independence Day celebrations.

From Honourable Alan Peter S. Cayetano Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines
Excellency,

The Filipino people join me in conveying my sincerest felicitations to Your Excellency on the occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the Independence Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

Anchored on our common and firm resolve to work toward greater development and progress, I am confident that our cooperation in various fields of shared interest will continue to significantly contribute to the warm friendship between our countries and peoples.

I assure Your Excellency of my continued support for meaningful endeavors that will mutually benefit our peoples and strengthen our countries’ ties.

Accept, Excellency, the renewed assurances of my highest consideration.

Ministry of Border Affairs, GRET sign MoU

THE Ministry of Border Affairs and Groupe de Recherches et d’Exchanges Technologiques (GRET) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for a three-year project on food sufficiency, development of livelihoods and effective management of natural resources in the meeting hall of the Ministry of Border Affairs yesterday afternoon. The signing ceremony was attended by Union Minister for Border Affairs Lt-Gen Ye Aung, Deputy Minister Maj-Gen Than Htut, GRET Country Representative Daw Myint Su and other officials.

Lt-Gen Ye Aung delivered a speech, while Daw Myint Su explained the MoU. Next, Progress of Border Areas and National Races Department Director General U Ye Naing and Daw Myint Su signed the MoU. According to the MoU, the Ministry of Border Affairs, the progress of border areas and national races department and GRET will cooperate on the project in Haka, Falam, Tiddim, Tonzang, and Thantlang townships in the northern Chin State and Paletwa township in the southern Chin State. —Myanmar News Agency
The Union Government is making preparations for the development of Small and Medium Enterprises. The advanced countries already have many ambitious initiatives and efforts for the development of SMEs can be regarded to be the initiatives for the development of the national economy.

As for the SMEs entrepreneurs, they can improve the performance of their individual economic enterprises as well as contribute to the development of their local economic environment by making their SMEs develop into big ones, while lifting up their capacities for long-lasting survival through their innovations and collective strength.

Smokeless Industry Which Will Fill up Profits and Will Be Free of National Deficit
By Khin Maung Htay [Education]

B eing a country in the ASEAN region, Myanmar has an area of 241,278 square miles, consisting of the national population of over 137 million. Three fourths of the population is concentrated in the coastal and coastal areas. Likewise the neighboring countries, it abounds with cultural heritages and religious edifices. It has many ancient pagodas, stupas, shrines and monasteries. Yet, sorrowfully enough, such a beautiful and pleasant country is found to be having in miserable states in fetching the national income from the sector of hotel and tourism industry, compared to that of the regional countries.

This made me glance at the parts of the performances being carried out by the State Government Tourism. Tourism, in fact is the 2nd biggest smokeless industry of the nation. For the smaller sector development the Ministry of Hotel and Tourism is leading to implement the tasks. The major project for tourism industry (2013-2015) will be adopted as the roadmap on the development of local tourism industries.

For all departments and organizations to join in the campaign “Policy on participation of social societies in Myanmar tourism industry” had already been laid down.

National strength

“Sustainable Tourism a Tool for Economic Growth” is the theme for this year. With a view to sustainable development implementalists see that are being made in the following 5 sectors.

1. economic sector - to become a developed economic sector
2. social sector - to create job opportunities with favorable conditions and to bring about giving authority to the people
3. natural environment - to control climate changes and to conserve natural environment
4. cultural sector - to safeguard material and non-material cultural heritage

In the 2nd sector as essentially bringing about peace for the national progress. In fact, aims, objectives and policies the government is practically implementing are excellent. Yet, compared to regional countries, income from tourism industry of Myanmar is smaller. And tourism industry stood next to last, followed by Brunei and Laos, according to the statistics in 2014, fetching $1.6 billion. Even 302 billions of dollar was fetched US $ 3 billion in that period. First stood, fetching US $4.64 billion. Why did not Myanmar hotel and tourism industry succeed? It wholly depends upon the facts occurring in which extent aims and policies can be successfully implemented and how much studies can be made into the bottom level.

Being fond of travelling the author did go about in Shan State and in Central Myanmar frequently. I also went on the road to the Myi Maung Year held in 1996, making trips occasionally in my leisure time up to now. Very recently, I painted a visit to Bagan. Myin-U and Poppa regions during the October School Holidays, after a long hiatus of several years. And, unexpectedly got to Nga-Saung-Saung beach on the Full-Moon Day of Thaungmoon. Not long before, some of my close friends returned from Malaysia and Thailand, sharing knowledge of foreign trips to me. While enjoying vocation knowledge, I am itching to make regulations about Myanmar tourism.

Higher prices

To put in detail, as regards local tourism there will take a few pages. To briefly say about it, extensions of routes cannot be made yet even in the frequently visited trips such as Nga-Saung and Chaung-Tha. Due to rough gound and narrow roads it takes too much time to get to the destinations. There are not enough lodging facilities and hotels there. A number of hotels take too much prices for lodging but cannot give satisfaction to everyone. Due to non-availability of rental of double rooms, I myself had to hire a family rooms for 4 persons for one whole day and a half. In the immediate vicinity of the beach, sanitation was unsatisfactory. Eateries and restaurants are also demanding too much prices for their services and food. In Nga-Saung U some famous restaurants run short of space. So they rush to food-stalls opened along roadside, around 3pm.

Sea-breeze to breathe in

As for the visitors who stay for a night at the hotel nearby the beach, they can enjoy breathing in the sea breeze. Although speed-boats, cycle cleaners are available, it is too expensive to hire them. No foreigners apart from local visitors have them for enjoyment from riding. In the daytime electricity is unavailable. Entertainment programs are not seen made. Failing that, unnecessary occasions can happen.

Street food stalls

According to my colleagues who recently returned from foreign trips to Bangkok and Ma- lay sia, their stock reply to my enquiry is “Totally different in everything.” Thai land’s tourism fetched foreign income so much so that for such good services and their foods’ cheap prices and delicacies. The city abounds with street food stall. Hotels are also sold. The Emerald Pagoda daily once-crowded with piglets all-day long. Entertainment programmes are likewise taking a lot of people’s money. Everywhere we go in that country they take money from us and whenshow in our country every traveller can go about any place just paying the fare for the entrance into the beaches.

Abundance of beautiful beaches

Along the 1800-mile-long coast there are beaches of great beauty. Also, its amounts are only a few. Easily accessible beaches such as Ngapali, Chaung-tha, Ngwe-Saung, and in the years, Ngwe-Saung and Tatasa are well-known. Due to efforts of loc al people some beaches and island becomes to known to the public in a few years ago. For example Goringyi island was targeted to implement as a hotel zone as for the department, due to the lack of island’s people’s effort. In their addition, there are many wonderful and beautiful islands in Dawei. Recently known island is the Marked Island, where even sea mariners can call at the island. It has many characteristics. Travellers can go up by speed-boat. There are nature-like bang- golas also are Dzone Island, Dazo Waterfall, Naphinlha island, Hhapyaza island, Nahtawan Vekin island, Lay Island, Smart Island, Hhityinlha Island and Pearl island to visit.

Ancient cultural heritage in abundance

Visitors coming to Myanmar are not solely focusing on ancient cultural heritages. Some visit here to enjoy natural beauties of Myanmar. mountains, islands and beaches. Some people want to go to the regions, with just some money for making. Some come to study religious or cultural traditions. Myanmar has millions of year’s of culture.

The Republic of the Union President’s Office

Resignation of Ayeyawady Region Chief Minister approved

In accordance with the provisions stated in article 304 (a) of the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myan mar and Section 12 (a) of Region or State Government Law, State Law and Order and Public Safety Act, 2011, the Chief Minister of the Ayeyawady Region has been permitted to resign of his own volition from the position of Regional diced by Khin Myint Oo
Central committee, work committees hold coordinating meeting to discuss second Hluttaw seventh regular session

THE central committee and work committees held a coordinating meeting yesterday afternoon for the successful organisation of the second Hluttaw seventh regular session.

At the meeting, held at the Hluttaw Building Zabuthiri Hall, Mahn Win Khaing Than, a patron of the 2018 Hluttaw meetings organising central committee, the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker; and the Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker announced the second Hluttaw seventh regular session will be held on 15 January.

At the next Hluttaw meeting, the adoption of the budget estimate for the Union from April to September 2018, the bill on the 2018 Budget of the Union Planning and Finance, Union Attorney General office, Union Auditor General office and the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw office. — Myanmar News Agency

Next, the Hluttaw meetings organising central committee patron and Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint thanked all the ministries that had cooperated with the Hluttaw to hold the previous Hluttaw regular sessions. He also recognised the Hluttaw security arrangements made by the relevant ministerial departments and organisations. He then thanked the (union) ministers, as well as the deputy ministers and officials of the attending departments and organisations, and noted that the mutual understanding with Hluttaw was a good tradition.

Later, the attending union ministers, Nay Pyi Taw council chairman, deputy ministers and officials explained the arrangements being made by the related committees, while the Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker and the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker coordinated and commented on the discussion, and then delivered a concluding speech.

The meeting was attended by the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Amyotha Hluttaw Speakers, the Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker, Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Amyotha Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U Aye Tha Aung, Pyithu Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U T Khun Myat, union ministers, the Nay Pyi Taw council chairman, deputy ministers, related committee secretaries and officials from each of the Hluttaw offices. — Myanmar News Agency

Myanmar National Human Rights Commission releases statement on Terrorist Attacks

Myanmar National Human Rights Commission released a Statement regarding the ARSA terrorist attacks in Maungtaw yesterday. Following is the full text of the statement.

Statement by the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission No. (1/2018)

1. It is learned from the news that the ARSA terrorists attacked the vehicle carrying members of the security force with explosive device and small arms from the hillock of North West of Kyein Chaung village in Maungtaw Township, Rakhine State around 10:00 am on 5 January 2018 and a driver and two members of security force were wounded.

2. Such attack may not only affect the process of stability, security, prevalence of law and order and development in Rakhine State but also seriously hinder the arrangements for the repatriation of returnees, who left homes due to terrorist attacks in August, to the places they had resided. In addition, it may also affect the regional development undertaken by the Government and the UEHRD process.

3. The Myanmar National Human Rights Commission strongly condemns such attack by the ARSA terrorists.

Myanmar National Human Rights Commission

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing hosts dinner in honour of Chief of Defence Force of Singapore Armed Forces

SENIOR General Min Aung Hlaing, Tatmadaw commander-in-chief, hosted a dinner in honour of Lt-Gen Perry Lim, chief of the Defence Force of the Singapore Armed Forces, at Nay Pyi Taw Park Royal Hotel yesterday evening. At the dinner, the Tatmadaw commander-in-chief delivered a welcome speech, while the chief of the Defence Force of the Singapore Armed Forces gave a speech of thanks. They then had dinner together with the other attendees. The Myawady Music Band, under the Directorate of Public Relations and Psychological Warfare, entertained the dinner guests with songs and dances. — MNA

Chair of Pyithu Hluttaw Bill Committee meets members of Connect to Everyone Association

CHAIR of the Pyithu Hluttaw Bill Committee U Tun Aung, alias U Tun Tun Hein, received members of the Connect to Everyone Association in the hall of the Hluttaw Building (2), Nay Pyi Taw, yesterday afternoon. During the meeting, they discussed matters related to farmland rules, the contracts act and other registration processes. — MNA
Finance Commission meets in Nay Pyi Taw

Assessments were made on the expenditures for the six months and a total of Ks34.713 billion was reduced from the states and regions expenditures. After this reduction, the states and regions had a total income of Ks376.743 billion and a total expenditure of 1,195.82 billion, making for a deficit of Ks819.077 billion, said the Vice President.

Union Minister for Planning and Finance U Kyaw Win, Secretary of Planning and Finance U Win Myint said the benefits gained from re-designating the financial year is far beyond the expenses incurred and believed to enable the economic development of the country.

Union-level departments and organisations need to coordinate with states and regions governments so that there are no duplications in the expenditures requested at the union level and states and regions level. In making investments for basic infrastructure development of the country, union-level departments and organisations and states and regions governments need to draw up and implement projects that are in line with the 12 economic policies laid out by the union and the United Nations’ 17 sustainable development goals.

The government needs to make expenditures for the benefit of the people, and at the same time, try to increase income. There is a need to increase income through production and services as well as in collecting tax and other incomes. All the while, expenses on education, health and other expenses like electricity, road and telecommunication, agriculture, livestock breeding and basic infrastructure need to be spent for the benefit of the people.

Works in finance should be conducted according to prescribed rules and regulations as well as financial management regulations and must be transparent and ready for auditing at any time, said the President.—Myanmar News Agency

Muse border trade up by $198 million this FY

Trade through the Muse border gate, which is the largest trading gateway among Myanmar’s border gates, reached more than US$4.1 billion in the first nine months of the current fiscal year (FY), according to the Commerce Ministry.

Between April 1 and December 29 this FY, the Sino-Myanmar border trade at the Muse, Lwejel, Chinswheaw, Kankieh and Kengtung gates reached $4.76 billion, which is $107 million more than its value during the same period last FY.

Of the five check-points between Myanmar and China, Chinswheaw and Kengtung have shown a slight decrease in trade.

As of October this FY, bilateral trade value with Myanmar’s main partner China via the sea route and border gates reached $6.53 billion, including an estimated $2.85 billion in exports and $3.5 billion in imports.

China’s trade with Myanmar is second to only its regional trade. Myanmar’s border trade with China performed better than its trade via sea.

Further, Myanmar’s exports to the most populous country, China, surpassed its imports. Rice, various kinds of peas, sesame seeds, corn, vegetables and fruits, dried tea leaves, fishery products, rubber, minerals and animal products are exported to China, whereas machinery, plastic raw materials, consumer products and electronic tools flow into Myanmar.—Mon Mon

Myanmar Parliamentary Union meeting (1/2018) held in Nay Pyi Taw

A meeting organised by the Myanmar Parliamentary Union (MPU) was held at the Zabuthiri Hall of Hluttaw building in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday morning, during which the effectiveness of the hluttaws and the relationship between federal and regional parliaments was discussed.

“There are many issues which can be addressed between the union-level hluttaws and Regions/States level Hluttaws,” said Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint,起身讲话.

Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker U Aye Thaung then clarified the decisions made in the hluttaw meetings, and the procedures of the amending rules.

Pyithu Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U Khin Myat discussed the hluttaw issues which are most often encountered in the process, and Director General of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Office, U Kyaw Soe explained the formation and situations of the related sectors.—Myanmar News Agency

Finance Commission meets in Nay Pyi Taw

FROM PAGE: 3

As his concluding speech, Chairman of Finance Commission President U Htin Kyaw said the benefits gained from re-designating the financial year is far beyond the expenses incurred and believed to enable the economic development of the country.

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Booming Indian cities look to bike sharing to put brakes on congestion

MUMBAI—A handful of Indian cities are gearing up to launch bike-sharing systems to ease traffic congestion and deadly air pollution, as urban populations surge and vehicles clog the streets.

Bike-sharing systems in the southern city of My- saru and the central city of Bhopal, both launched last June, have met with a tremendous response, officials say.

About half a dozen more cities, including Ben- galuru, Pune and Elahbana- swath, are now drawing up similar plans, according to the World Resources Insti- tute (WRI), a Washington DC-based research organ- ization.

“Bike sharing is a viable option for Indian cities—we just need good quality bikes, dedicated lanes and a system that is efficient,” said Chandramani Sharda, chief executive of Bhopal Smart City Corporation.

The corporation imple- ments the federally-funded Smart Cities programme to improve services like internet connectivity and public transport in 100 cit- ies across India.

With rising incomes and a large young popu- lation, passenger vehicle ownership in India has nearly tripled in the last decade, government data shows. Gridlock has be- come common and transit systems struggle to keep pace. Vehicle emissions ac- count for almost a third of air pollution in India, which has nearly half the world’s 20 most polluted cities, ac- cording to the World Health Organization.

Some 2.5 million peo- ple in the country die every year due to pollution.

Mysuru, close to the technology hub of Bengaluru, was the first to intro- duce a bike-sharing pro- gramme, with the state’s chief minister riding a yel- low ‘Trin Trin bike at the launch.

Registered users can borrow any of 450 bikes from 48 docking stations for a nominal fee.

In Bhopal, users can register on their smart- phones and unlock one of 500 bikes from 60 docking stations. The city now has 11 kilometres (6.8 miles) of dedicated bike lanes, according to WRI, which provided technical exper- tise to the Bhopal Munici- pal Corporation on the bike-sharing system.

More than 25,000 peo- ple registered in the first few months, half of them women, said Amit Bhatt, director of transport at WRI India.

“In India, people look down on those who bike. So we had to show this is cool, with good quality bikes and a mobile app to register and unlock bikes” he said.

“But the main priority is safety, with dedicated bike lanes. That has en- couraged people to give it a go,” he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Officials must be care- ful not to repeat the mistakes of China, where unchecked growth of bike-sharing firms led to piles of discarded bikes clogging sidewalks, Bhatt added.—Reuters ■

Thousands of California flee homes ahead of possible mudslides

LOS ANGELES—Thousands of Southern Cali- forni ans fled their homes on Monday as a power- ful rain storm that could cause flash floods and trigger mudslides soaked steep slopes where a se- ries of intense wildfires burned off vegetation last month. Heavy downpours that could produce more than 1 inch (2.5 cm) of rain per hour were expected through Tuesday evening, forcing officials to order or advise Ventura, Santa Barbara and Los Ange- les county residents who live near where wildfires burned to evacuate their homes.

“Recent burn areas will be especially vul- nerable where dangerous mud and debris flows are possible,” the National Weather Service said in a statement.

Several December wildfires, included a blaze known as the Thomas Fire which was the largest in the state’s history, burned away vegetation that holds the soil in place and baked a waxy layer into the earth that prevents water from sinking deeply into the ground.

About 30,000 resi- dents were under evacu- ation orders or advisories on Monday, ABC news re- ported.

“J ust tired. I can’t seem to get my life kick-started,” Teri Lebow, whose Montecito, Califor- nia was damaged by the wildfires, told the Los An- geles Times.

The storm system was expected to produce 4 inches to 7 inches (10 to 18 cm) in the foothills and mountains with 9 inches (23 cm) in isolated areas.

Three inches (7 cm) to two feet (61 cm) of snow was also forecast for higher elevations, the National Weather Service said.— Reuters ■

ITALY’s former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. PHOTO: REUTERS

Berlusconi says Italy cannot leave euro, Northern League agrees

ROME—Silvio Berlus- coni said on Tuesday that Italy must not leave the euro and that his main ally going into March’s election, the Northern League, agrees that quit- ting the currency would be unsustainable for the economy.

The League’s leader, Matteo Salvini, has giv- en mixed signals about the euro—which many Italians blame for the moribund state of their economy. He ridiculed the idea of a referendum proposed by the rival 5-Star movement, but as late as last week pledged to rectify the “error” of the single currency.

Berlusconi—who hopes to lead the centre-right back to power in March—said the com- mon currency should be continued to be handled in the manner that Euro- pean Central Bank head Mario Draghi has done.

“Salvini is no longer of the idea that we should leave the euro,” Berlus- coni said. “He has un- derstood that it would be unsustainable for our economy.”

Berlusconi’s centre-right Forza Italia par- ty, the Northern League and a second far-right party, Brothers of Ita- ly, look set to win the 4 March election but with less than an absolute majority.

Hostility to the euro is a prominent issue in campaigning for the election and the prospect that anti-establishment parties could try to pull the country out of the single currency has rattled financial markets. Ber- lusconi and others say the euro was introduced to Italy with too high of an exchange rate to the old Italian lira.—Reuters ■

INVITATION TO OPEN TENDER

Sealed tenders are invited by Department of Medical Services, Ministry of Health and Sports for the supply of Medicine & Medical Products of Nuclear Medicine De- partments in (2017-2018) Budget Year and for the supply of Medical Equipments for Yangon Children Hospital and Women & Children Hospital (Monywa) by Donation of Government of Republic of India.

Tender documents are available during office hours at the Procurement and Supply Division, Department of Medical Services, office No.(4), Ministry of Health and Sports Commencing from 15.1.2018.

Sealed bids are to be submitted to the office, not later than (30.1.2018) 15:00 hour, after which no bid will be accepted. No telegraph/telex proposal will be accepted.

For detailed information please contact the Phone No.067-3411510, 067-3411544, Procurement and Supply Division Office, Department of Medical Services, Minis- try of Health and Sports.

Procurement and Supply Division Ministry of Health and Sports

CLAIM’S DAY NOTICE

M.V MAENAM-1 VOY. NO. (003)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V MAENAM-1 VOY. NO. (003) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 10-1-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of HPT where it will lie at the consigne’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 after the Claims Day.

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY AGENT FOR: MS INTERASIA LINES

Phone No: 2301185

CLAIM’S DAY NOTICE

M.V CSC XIN HAI V - 1715

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V CSC XIN HAI V - 1715 are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 10-1-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of MFTT where it will lie at the consigne’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 after the Claims Day.

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY AGENT FOR: MS UNISPRING LOGISTICS HOLDING PTE LTD.

Phone No: 2301928
Christ statue procession in Philippines draws throngs of devotees

MANILA — Hundreds of thousands of devotees in the Philippines, many of them barefooted, joined a chaotic procession on Tuesday that featured a black statue of Jesus Christ, one of the biggest annual festivals in the predominantly Roman Catholic nation.

The faithful gathered in downtown Manila to follow a carriage bearing the statue, believed to have healing powers, in a parade that began at dawn.

Protesters and other religious rites were also held elsewhere in the country of 116 million people to celebrate the feast.

Citing police estimates, media said this year’s festivities may draw 17 million devotees nationwide, some seeking healing for illnesses and forgiveness for sins and others offering thanks for blessings.

Rogelio Lim said all his wishes had come true since he became a Black Nazarene devotee in 1977.

“My child is now a medicine graduate,” he told Reuters. “I have been spared diseases. I have been blessed with a house. Everything we wished for: A good job. Everything. This is why I am here, to thank Him.”

The Philippine Red Cross said it had assisted more than 700 devotees who were feeling unwell, or suffered injuries amid the parade’s growing crowds, many of whom clambered to reach towards the icon. Alvin Carlos said he felt stronger after touching the Black Nazarene.

“Rain or shine, I gained the strength to continue because of my strong faith in Him,” he said.

More than 4,000 police and soldiers were deployed to ensure the Manila procession would be peaceful, said Oscar Albayalde, the capital’s police chief.

Phnom Penh — Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen said on Tuesday that the upcoming second Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) leaders’ meeting will bring great benefits to the six countries along the Lancang-Mekong River.

“This meeting will bring a lot of development projects to the countries along the Mekong River, which connects to the Lancang River in China,” he wrote on his Facebook page.

The prime minister said it was a pride for Cambodia to host such an important summit and lauded the country’s peace and political stability.

Hun Sen and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang will co-chair the second LMC leaders’ meeting in Phnom Penh on 10 January, according to a Cambodian foreign ministry statement.

The meeting will also bring together Lao Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith, Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, and Myanmar Vice President Myint Swe.

Thai FM confirms former PM Yingluck in London

BANGKOK — The foreign minister of Thailand confirmed on Tuesday that fugitive former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra is in Britain.

At the Government House where he attended a weekly cabinet meeting, Don Pramudwina, the Thai foreign minister, said he has been informed since last September by the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs that Yingluck is in London.

Whether or not Yingluck may have already filed a request for political asylum in Britain was not reported by the British authorities to Thailand as yet, according to the minister.

Don said Yingluck might probably use a foreign country’s passport to travel to Britain and elsewhere in the world since her Thailand passports were earlier revoked.

Don didn’t give any comments on whether Thailand will seek Yingluck’s extradition.

He also declined to answer whether the Thai government will lodge an objection on the British government if Yingluck applied for political asylum there, saying the issue will not affect the Thailand-Britain relations.

The Phue Thai Party led by the former premier recently unveiled that Yingluck has sought asylum in Britain.

The party said if Yingluck was granted political asylum there, she would be issued a passport or travel document which can be used for five years.

Legal experts said if Yingluck could provide full proof that she was politically persecuted, the British government would consider to approve the asylum. They said a detailed address in Britain is needed when applying for asylum.

Yingluck was widely rumored to go shopping in London during the New Year holiday and a picture of her posing alongside an unidentified woman has gone viral in social media.
‘The Greatest Showman’ swings to top of Billboard 200 chart

LOS ANGELES — The soundtrack for circus musical “The Greatest Showman” climbed to the top of the US weekly Billboard 200 album chart on Monday, leaving offers from Ed Sheeran and Taylor Swift as the runner-ups.

“The Greatest Showman” soundtrack, which features songs by the cast including Hugh Jackman, Zac Efron and Zendaya, sold another 106,000 total album units in the week ending on 4 January, according to figures from Nielsen SoundScan.

The soundtrack’s lead song, “This is Me,” won the Golden Globe for best original song in a motion picture on Sunday. The 20th Century Fox film, about circus entertainer PT Barnum, has grossed $150 million worldwide since its 20 December release.

Sheeran’s “Divide” album remained at No 2 for a second week with sales of 67,000 units, while his single “Perfect” featuring Beyonce held steady at No 1 on the Digital Songs chart with another 109,000 copies sold.

Swift’s “Reputation” album, which opened 2018 at the top of the Billboard 200 chart last week, dropped to No 3 with 48,000 units sold.

No new entries made the top 10 of the Billboard 200 chart this week.—Reuters

Chris Hemsworth open to play Thor post ‘Avengers 4’

LOS ANGELES — Actor Chris Hemsworth has said that if given an opportunity, he would love to keep on playing superhero Thor in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The 34-year-old actor has rediscovered his passion for the role. “Two or three films ago I was like ‘okay, a couple more’. I was enjoying it but I was like… I felt a little restricted. And after this last experience with ‘Taika, and actually these last two ‘Avengers’, I feel like we’ve reinvented that character a number of times — even in these next two, he evolves again, and you don’t get that opportunity often in a franchise. “So I definitely feel a renewed sense of excitement and enthusiasm, and more so than ever, I think,” Hemsworth said.—PTI

‘Roseanne’ star says revived show reflects Trump’s America

PASADENA, California — The March revival of hit 1990s television comedy “Roseanne” will show how a politically divided, working-class American family grapples with daily life and challenges after the election of US President Donald Trump, the show’s stars said on Monday.

Walt Disney Co’s ABC broadcast network is bringing back “Roseanne,” starring Roseanne Barr and John Goodman, for nine episodes starting on 27 March.

In the new episodes, the titular Roseanne, played by Barr, is now a grandmother who voted for Trump and at times clashes with family members and friends. “It was the working-class people who elected Trump,” Barr said. “I felt that was very real and something that needed to be discussed.”

Barr herself has spoken in support of Trump, but the show’s producers said the series does not advocate a political stance. “There is no agenda on anybody’s part but to get honest feelings out there within a family that’s relateable,” executive producer Bruce Helford said.

Many original cast members returned for the revival including Goodman, who plays Roseanne’s husband Dan, and Sara Gilbert, who portrays daughter Darlene.

Barr “felt like a grandmother and I just, I just thought, you know, I thought, ‘this is Roseanne’s story, this is her story.” Gilbert said. “The dialogue is kind of missing.”—Reuters
Rock N Roll Journey for Emperor fans

Rocker Zaw Win Htut and Emperor’s Rock N Roll Journey concert will be held on January 20 in the Rose Garden hotel in Yangon.

“Whenever Zaw Win Htut holds a concert, we first all gather at our Emperor Fan Club, then go together to watch it. We all want to watch his one man show. That’s why we organized the concert. Tickets will be sold from our Emperor Fan Facebook page to make it convenient for fans across Myanmar to get tickets,” said the organizer of the concert.

“The intention of holding the concert is for online fans to meet each other in person.”

“They want to listen to his old songs and latest songs,” he said. In the past he usually plans to play 30 songs in concert, but he ends up playing more.

“If he sings about 60 songs at this concert, the show will be last till 3 or 4 AM. He said he was going to sing the songs from his latest album titled ‘Journey 1’ also,” the organizer said.

The name of the concert “Rock N Roll Journey” is after the name of his latest album, he added.—Ko Linn

Asia’s largest toys fair opens in Hong Kong with latest innovative products

HONG KONG — The Hong Kong Toys & Games Fair, the largest of its kind in Asia and second largest in the world, opened on Monday at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, with over 2,000 global exhibitors showcasing a broad selection of the latest innovative products.

The fair, organized by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC) every year, features this year about 2,100 exhibitors from 45 countries and regions.

Besides six group pavilions showcasing the latest toys and games from around the world, the fair also includes a Brand Name Gallery that features more than 240 renowned brands from 18 countries and regions, a Smart-Tech Toys zone that gathers a myriad of innovative toys and games incorporating the latest AR/VR/MR technologies and mobile applications, a Kidult World that showcases toys for grown-ups, as well as a Pet Toys zone.

The Hong Kong Toys & Games Fair was held concurrently with the Hong Kong Baby Products Fair and the Hong Kong International Stationery Fair. The three events will last for four days and feature more than 2,940 global exhibitors in total.

HKTDC said it has organized more than 120 buying missions from 65 countries and regions, inviting some 9,000 buyers from about 6,200 companies to visit and source at the three fairs.

HKTDC Acting Executive Director Benjamin Chau said the three fairs present a diverse lineup of innovative products, including educational toys that inspire fun learning, toys and baby products that incorporate smart technologies, as well as eco-friendly stationery items that showcase creative designs, meeting the various sourcing needs of global buyers.

“These spectacular fairs provide a platform in the coming four days for international suppliers and buyers to do business,” Philip Yung, permanent secretary for commerce and economic development of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government, said at the opening ceremony. “Outside this exhibition hall, Hong Kong provides an effective platform for the wider business community.” —Xinhua

Ancient finding in Peru sheds light on desert society — archaeologist

LIMA — Archaeologists have discovered two chambers used for political ceremonies on Peru’s desert coast more than 1,500 years ago that had previously only been glimpsed in the illustrations of the ancient Moche people, an archaeologist said on Monday.

The finding, at the ruins of the Limon archaeological complex in the region of Lambayeque, will provide key clues to understanding the Moche’s political life before the desert society’s sudden decline, said lead archaeologist Walter Alva.

One room features two thrones where a powerful leader and guest likely enjoyed elaborate feasts, said Alva. The other has a circular podium, possibly for making announcements.

The events that took place in the chambers were so important they had been featured repeatedly on Moche ceramics, Alva said. “These scenes had been depicted in the iconography of the Moche world but we had never been lucky enough to physically find where they took place,” he said. “It’s a very important finding.”

The Moche, one of several complex societies that thrived in Peru long before the rise of the Incan empire, ruled over a vast swath of coastal desert from 100 to 700 AD, thanks to irrigation canals they built to grow crops in desert valleys. The Moche are known for their elaborate gold work and sculptures featuring a wide variety of sexual acts.

Many researchers believe a disastrous climate event, such as the El Nino phenomena that still triggers severe flooding in northern Peru, probably led to the collapse of Moche society.

Alva said construction on part of the recently unearthed chambers appears to have halted abruptly in the 5th century. The rooms were believed to have been used only by the elite, and paintings of fish and sea lions can be seen on the walls.

Women are believed to have held political and religious positions in Moche society. Last year, Peruvian officials and archaeologists unveiled a replica of the face of an ancient female Moche ruler, the Lady of Cao, whose elaborately tattooed body had been buried with weapons and gold objects.

—Reuters
Ex-Eagle Murray gets winner for Seagulls with VAR quiet

BRIGHTON, Britain — An 87th minute goal from substitute Glenn Murray gave Brighton & Hove Albion a 2-1 win over Crystal Palace in the FA Cup third round on Monday in the first competitive English game to feature use of the Video Assistant Referee (VAR).

The new technology did not get used for any reviews during the game which took place without any real controversy apart from some questions over former Palace striker Murray’s goal.

Brighton took the lead in the 23rd minute when Argentine full-back Ezequiel Schelotto fed Palace keeper Wayne Hennessey who will be disappointed he did not save at his near post.

Bakary Sako, who had been the main threat for Palace throughout, pulled the London side level when he took advantage of space outside the Brighton box and hammered home a fierce drive.

Sam Baldock hit the post for Brighton and Beram Kayal blasted over from a promising position as the home side pushed for a winner but it was the experienced Murray who sank Palace’s hopes of earning a replay.

A looping header goalwards from Uwe Hunemeier was touched over the line by Murray’s knee and despite some appeals for handball there was no use of the review system.

Television replays suggested the goal was legal.

VAR involves two video assistant referees watching the on-pitch action remotely and then drawing the match referee’s attention to officiating mistakes.

The VAR system has already been used in several leagues including the Bundesliga and Italy’s Serie A and could feature in this year’s World Cup in Russia in June and July.

Brighton’s Glenn Murray scores their second goal during the FA Cup Third Round match between Brighton & Hove Albion and Crystal Palace at The American Express Community Stadium in Brighton, Britain on 8 January, 2018. PHOTO: REUTERS

Soccer’s law-making body IFAB is expected to decide next March whether to allow video assistant referees to become part of the game on a permanent basis. — Reuters

South Australian state upgrades facilities in bid to host world-class tennis events

CANBERRA — South Australian authorities have announced an ambitious 150 million Australian dollar (about 117 million USD) plan to bring world-class tennis back to the state.

The proposal would see 150 million Australian dollars spent on upgrading Adelaide’s Memorial Drive tennis center which would include increased capacity for spectators and a retractable roof being added to the venue.

Australia’s federal government has committed 10 million dollars to the project with Tennis South Australia CEO Seven Baldas now working to secure the remaining funding.

“We have been working with all levels of government to ensure that this project has the support it needs throughout the project,” Baldas said in a media release on Monday evening.

“All of our research has shown that it will build upon the already significant economic benefits sporting events contribute to our state and will help attract more events to the Riverbank,” Baldas added.

Craig Tiley, CEO of Tennis Australia, said that another world-class tennis venue in Australia could only be a positive for the sport.

“South Australia has a rich tennis history and the state has produced some of our country’s biggest names in the sport,” Tiley said.

“There is a need for a 21st Century facility that can be filled with new, fresh content...we believe that with facilities such as these...Adelaide can gain international prominence on the global tennis calendar,” Tiley added.

Adelaide hosted the Australian Open 14 times between its inception in 1905, when it was known as the Australasian Championships. It permanently moved to Melbourne in 1972.—Reuters

Sprinter spiked rival’s drink, causing positive drug test

TOKYO — One of Japan’s top sprint canoeists has been banned from competition for eight years for spiking his rival’s drink with a prohibited substance, causing him to fail a doping test, the Japan Anti-Doping Agency said on Tuesday.

The incident took place at the national canoe sprint championships last September in Komatsu, Ishikawa Prefecture, where the perpetrator, 22-year-old Yasuhiro Suzuki, and the victim, 25-year-old Seiji Komatsu, were both competing, according to the Japan Canoe Federation.

The two had been considered among the top prospects to represent Japan at the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games and were teammates at last year’s canoe sprint world championships in the Czech Republic, where Suzuki finished 24th in the men’s K1 5000 meters.

Komatsu was a member of the K4 500m crew which reached the semi-finals.

An investigation by the canoe federation found that Suzuki drugged his rival for Olympic team selection in order to cause his disqualification.

After Komatsu tested positive, Suzuki admitted putting a muscle-building supplement containing a banned substance in his drink. JADA handed down the eight-year ban. Komatsu had his disqualification and temporary ban for failing the test overturned.—Kyodo News