Tikir Dam to bring regional development to Htantalan

VICE President U Henry Van Thio, who was in Chin State to review the progress of regional development works, inspected the Tikir Dam project in Htantalan Township Sunday morning.

He also inspected the inflow of water into the dam and the status of the dam construction from the dam viewpoint. The Vice President and his delegation were then explained the water storage and electricity generation capacity of the dam, the water distribution network to nearby villages, the setting up of hillside and highland farms, and the regional development works by Irrigation and Water Utilization Management Department Director General U Kyaw Myint Hlaing.

The Vice President then spoke about planting Japanese cherry blossoms, and coffee and pine trees to establish a natural environment in the catchment area and basin area of the dam, distribute clean water to Tikir Village and 11 other villages, set up 550 acres of highland farms to replace slash-and-burn hillside farms, distribute water to the highland farms once it is set up and implement a new eco-tourism project.

Gov’t to hold NCA signing ceremony for NMSP, LDU on 13 Feb

THE New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the Lahu Democratic Union (LDU) will sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement-NCA in Nay Pyi Taw on 13th February.

The signing becomes the first one of its kind for the ruling NLD government. “The New Mon State Party and Lahu Democratic Union are the first organizations which have taken the path of peace in the time of the NLD government and we also continue our efforts for non-signatories to sign the NCA and to participate in our peace process,” said U Kyaw Tint Swe, Deputy Chairman of the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre and Union Minister for the Office of the State Counsellor in his opening address at a planning meeting yesterday for holding the signing ceremony in Nay Pyi Taw.

The signing ceremony would bring delight to the people, especially the people in Mon State and Lahu people, he said. The two armed groups announced their decision to sign the NCA following their meetings separately with State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on 23 January.

SEE PAGE-3
Pyithu Hluttaw discusses classification of ethnic nationals

Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw U Win Myint.

When the ethnic race list was prepared for census collection after independence in 1973, it was based on the ethnic race list included in the 1931 census, 1953-1954 nationality lists, 1961 suggestions by the historical literature and culture office, operating under the ministry of culture, and suggestions by the Myanmar History Commission and coordination of ethnic nationals affairs committee of Burma (Myanmar) Socialist Programme Party. The 135 ethnic nationals in that census do not include the name Rohinya, explained the Union Minister.

The word Rohinya was not used in state-owned and private media, and Rohinya not being included in the ethnic national list has been mentioned repeatedly. Myanmar diplomats in the world and United Nations organisations do not recognise the usage of that word, and if others were using it, official objections, protests and indications were made consistently, said the Union Minister.

The government is conducting work for the long-term benefit of the people and towards national interest. In conducting these works, it is not responding to sentimental words but to legal and formal processes in calm, dignified and effective ways.

The race list obtained from the 2014 census will be published only after consultation with ethnic affairs committee members; ethnic national leaders; ethnic national representatives; historians, culture and social science experts; relevant departments and organisations, as there are contentious matters in the inclusion of ethnic nationals, sub-tribes of ethnic nationals, spellings, new names and classification of ethnic nationals, said the Union Minister.

Questions raised by U Sai Aung Kyaw of Kelhi constituency, U Naing Naing Win of Tamu constituency and Dr. U San Shwe Win of Yekyi constituency were also answered by U Thein Swe.

A motion urging the government to set up appropriate policies to assist Myanmar nationals who return to Myanmar after facing difficulties abroad for various reasons due to migrant labour laws of the host countries, tabled by U Sai Tha Ha Kyaw of Mairel constituency, was then discussed by Daw Khin Hnin Thu of Padaung constituency, U Sai Tun Aye of Mongpan constituency, U Sai Tha Thi Zin of Hseipaw constituency, U Win Thein Zaw of Salingyi constituency, Daw Cho Cho of Outtwin constituency, Daw Nan Than of Lwin of Hpa-an constituency and Dr. Daw Khin Sithu of Loikaw constituency.

In his discussion on the motion, U Thein Swe said the socio-economic development of workers and the employment of nationals are priorities for the ministry. The ministry has drawn up and is implementing policies on migrant workers and employment matters, added the Union Minister.

When our migrant workers return from abroad, whether they go there officially or not, they have official documents or not, the ministry does its best to assist them. The union minister suggested the motion be put on record, as it is an important matter that the government is conducting consistently with all the ministries.

The Hluttaw decided to put the motion on record. In addition to this, the bill to repeal the Dock Workers (Regulation of Employment) Act, 1948, returned without amendment by Amyotha Hluttaw, was also approved by the Hluttaw after the Hluttaw’s decision was obtained.

Amyotha Hluttaw discusses Ponnagyun Industrial Zone

Speaker of Amyotha Hluttaw Mahn Win Khaing Than.

Special Economic Zone Holding Public Co., Ltd. participated in the tender which was called in 2015. Myanmar Kyauk Phyu Special Economic Zone Holding Public Co., Ltd. was selected on 24 August, 2015, and a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed on 16 September, 2015. The MoU term of four months was extended three times and on the fourth extension, the company defaulted on signing the MoU, which ended on 12 April, 2017.

Exo World Group Co. of Israel was permitted to lease 50 acres of land in Ponnagyun Industrial Zone to conduct livestock breeding, cold storage, manufacturing of animal feed, fuel and lubricant storage for ships in the Rakhine State government’s meeting of 28 July, 2017. Granting of permission and the start of preliminary works by Exo World Group Co. were informed to the State directorate of investment and company administration on 24 January, 2018, said the Union Minister.

According to the conceptual plan of the industrial zone, it will include small and medium factories; garment works; livestock; prawn and fish factories; and wood-based factories. Interested economic entities and organisations will be widely invited and permitted to work systematically at set rates and taxes. As the Ponnagyun Industrial Zone is in a least developed region, local and foreign investors will have special privileges and incentives, as mentioned in the Myanmar Investment Law. Interested local and foreign businesses were being invited, and as the works of the implementation committee on the recommendations of the advise commission on Rakhine State are being implemented, and with the special privileges and incentives, local and foreign companies will invest in the Ponnagyun Industrial Zone, explained the Union Minister on behalf of the Rakhine State government.

Next, questions by U Pe Tin of Mon constituency number 6 on the government Aung Bar Lay lottery and U Mya Min Swe of Bago Region constituency on ceasing the collection of the city entry toll were answered by Deputy Minister for Planning and Finance U Set Aung and Nay Pyi Taw Council member U Aung Myint Tun.

Similarly, questions by Daw Htu May of Rakhine State constituency number 11 and U Myint Naing of Rakhine State constituency number 5 were answered by Deputy Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation U Hla Kyaw and Deputy Minister for Electricity and Energy Dr. Tun Naing.

Daw Htu May of Rakhine State constituency number 11 then tabled a motion urging the government to give priority to the least developed states and regions and to implement One Village One Product (OVOP) rural development strategy with the relevant ministerial departments, including a budget for it. The motion was supported by U Sai Wan Haing Khun of Shan State constituency number 3.

Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than asked for the decision of the Hluttaw and then announced the acceptance of the motion by the Hluttaw.

The 13th meeting of the seventh session of the second Amyotha Hluttaw is scheduled for 6 February.
Tikir Dam to bring regional…

The Vice President then went to the Tikir Village coffee tree nursery, where he, along with the State Chief Minister, state Hluttaw speaker and deputy ministers, presented coffee plant saplings to coffee farmers. They then continued to inspect the construction of the Tikir diversion dam.

The Vice President also went to the construction site of a 16-bed Tikir cottage hospital to inspect the staff house and the status of project works.

After arriving at the project briefing hall, Tawwin Kyaphu Company Limited’s construction-in-charge U Thihaz Soe explained the project matters.

The Vice President then attended the Tikir Village Baptist Church prayer service and met the local populace and elders from nearby villages.

During the meeting, the Vice President said the visit was conducted to view firsthand the regional development works.

By constructing the Tikir Dam, water can be distributed sufficiently to Tikir Village, as well as the 11 nearby villages. Model highland farms were being established to replace slash-and-burn hillside farms and the local people were being urged to understand the good intention of the government and strive towards setting up agriculture- and livestock-breeding works. Natural resources such as forests and mountains need to be effectively utilised to establish eco-tourism businesses.

Natural surroundings must be protected and preserved, and the area should be a model region.

The Vice President explained the education, health, road and telecommunication works conducted by the government for regional development.

The local people then explained the requirements for regional development, to which the Vice President replied that short-term works that can be completed in a short time will be conducted, while those that cannot be done in a short time frame will be coordinated and handled within a set time frame. The Vice President added that everyone must strive together for regional development.

The Vice President then inspected the Tikir Dam on a boat after which he and his delegation and him went to Htantalan Township Salan Village and Yambai Village, where local villagers and elders greeted them with traditional dance performances.

From there, the Vice President went to the site where Htantalan Airport is planned to be constructed. At the site, Deputy Minister U Kyaw Lain and Department of Civil Aviation Director U Kyaw Soe explained the preliminary site inspection status.

The new Htantalan Airport runway is 6,000 feet long and 100 feet wide, while 282.02 acres of land has been set aside for the airport.

— Myanmar News Agency
Sea View Condo sales room opened in Myeik

SEA view condominium will be built at the opposite of the Andaman Sea on the Strand Road of Myeik in Taninthayi Region. The sea view condo project will include walking street market and the first sale of shops at the market was opened on the first week of February.

At the opening, the Managing Director of Pyay Pyo Tun International Co., Ltd. gave greetings and CEO from Sea View Condo Project explained about the project and stores. Afterwards, attendees looked around the replica of stores and condo at the display and purchased some shops in some location at the market.

At the project, there are 168 shops in the walking street market and 111 have been sold. The estimated price of a shop is from 40 million to 400 million. The customer can buy on hire purchase because the company is linked to Central Bank in order to be easy for those who want to start an own business. Those who want to purchase the shop must make 30 per cent downpayment and 70 per cent of the rest will be paid with an installment plan during eight years according to the Operation Director of the project.

Construction of the Sea View Condo’s street market has been completed in 60 per cent; the completion of the store construction is one year.—Myanmar Digital News

Erosion control block broken in Mrauk U

EROSION control block was disjoined at the river bank of Apaukwa village in Kyauktaw Township, Mrauk U District.

Twelve houses were destroyed by the land erosion and nine houses are close by the landslide, so they made a move to a safe place with their own plans. No casualties were reported yet. Twelve households including 30 men and 64 women temporarily lived at neighboring houses.—Myanmar Digital News

MoC, Korean company agree to construct logistics hub

THE Ministry of Commerce (MoC) and HUBS MK Company from South Korea entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 24 January, 2018, to construct a logistics hub of international standards, according to a report in Myanma Alinn yesterday.

This logistics hub is slated to be constructed on 59.107 acres in Hlaingthaya Township. The MoC is trying to bolster exports by laying down the national export strategy. In a bid to reduce the supply chain transport cost, a logistics hub is required for exporters and importers.

“We will conduct a feasibility study for the construction of the hub with advanced technology. U Aung Soe, Director General of Myanmar Trade Promotion Organisa- tion, noted.

More logistics hubs are required in Myanmar; as it is faced with storage problems at its ports. However, the construction of a logistics centre requires heavy capital.

“High inflow of foreign investment can contribute to the development of fundamen-tal infrastructure. So, we are inviting more foreign investors,” said U Aung Soe.

—Zar Lin Thu (AMIA)

Record high cases of human trafficking in Yangon region, Shan State

THE number of human trafficking cases has increased in the Yangon and Shan State in January 2018, according to a report in Myawady Daily yesterday.

In January, some 23 cases were recorded in states and regions. Among them, nine each were recorded in the Yangon region and Shan State, two in Mandalay region, and one each in Kayin and Kachin states and the Bago region.

In January, some 68 human traffickers were arrested in 23 cases. Most victims were reportedly sold as fraudulent marriages between couples and forced labour in the neighbouring countries. Two-thirds of the victims were women, most of whom were lured with false incentives, according to the anti-human trafficking police force.

According to the trafficking report in January, many cases of human trafficking came to light, with 39 per cent recorded in Yangon, nine per cent in Mandalay, four per cent in Bago, 39 per cent in Shan State, five per cent in Kachin State and four per cent in Kayin State.

The police are trying to work with the public to prevent human trafficking and conduct more awareness training courses. The police are also distributing hand-outs and posters to the public to create awareness.—GNLM
Over 300 livestock exported to China daily

SOME 300 live cattle were exported daily from the Muse 105 Mile trade zone, according to a report in Myanma Alinn yesterday.

After getting a permit for live livestock export, cattle with an estimated value of US$7.25 million were sent out of the country, as of the second week of January.

The export of live cattle started mid-December 2017. More than 330 live goats and 200 cattle were traded daily at the Muse 105 Mile trade gate by Chinese merchants. Some 60 companies were found to be engaged in the live livestock export business.

U Yan Naing Tun, Director General of the Trade Department, told Myanma Alinn that the domestic hog production could not satisfy local consumption. Therefore, export of live pigs was rare.

The inspection departments concerned are making efforts to facilitate trade by issuing health certificates to meet the import regulations of buyer countries.

To export live livestock, a health certificate and a permit must be procured from the region and state’s Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department, besides an export licence from the trade department, operating under the commerce ministry — Zar Lin Thu (AMIA) □
Suspects in killing former MraukU administrator arrested

POLICE detained a family on suspicion of their involvement in the murder of former MraukU administrator U Bo Bo Min Theik, who was stabbed to death in a car on the highway on 30 January.

Police are still actively pursuing others who are suspected of being involved in the killing.

After interviewing eyewitnesses to a car crash in Rakhine State, police arrested Min Than Htay; also known as Min Than Htike, son of Kyaw Myint, also known as Khaing Kyaw, a former village administrator of Teinnyo Village in MraukU Township, near the Kyekikwine Pagoda Road's traffic light in Mayangon, Yangon on 31 January, the day after the killing.

Later that evening, Kyaw Myint and his wife, Daw Kyi Kyi Win, were arrested at Mitra Gon-yang Nunnery in Latyatsan Village, Thanlyin Township, Yangon Region. They were reportedly hiding in the nunnery, trying to elude arrest, police said.

Their six-in-law Ma Khaing Zar Hlaing, wife of Min Than Htaiak, was also found at the monastery and arrested, according to police.

U Bo Bo Min Theik's body was found near an overturned vehicle that had crashed between mileposts No. 169/0 and 169/1 on Yangon-Sittway Road near Thayet Cho Village, between Yongu and Aungpyupin villages, some seven miles north of Punnagyun, Rakhine State. His body was found with several stab wounds, including two to his chest, 12 on his back and one cut over his left eyebrow.

According to witnesses, there were four men in the car, including U Bo Bo Min Theik. U Bo Bo Min Theik reportedly struggled with the men as he was being stabbed, causing the vehicle to overturn. The three other men fled on foot towards a nearby mountain range, witnesses said.

As a result of an interrogation, Kyaw Myint, who is also known as Khaing Kyaw admitted to hatching a plot on 25 January with Ko Latt, Sa Paing, Zaw Myo Aung, who is also known as Zaw Moe Aung, and his neighbour mechanic Myo Chit Aung to kill U Bo Bo Min Theik, police said. Ko Latt, Sa Paing and Zaw Myo Aung are reportedly organisers of AA armed ethnic group in Rakhine State.

Their plan was to abduct U Bo Bo Min Theik as he travelled to Sittway; police said.

On 26 January, they phoned U Bo Bo Min Theik, offering to drive him to Sittway, where he was relocating for a new job. On 30 January, as they were driving to Sittway on Yangon-Sittway Road, Sa Paing and Zaw Myo Aung allegedly stabbed U Bo Bo Min Theik to death when a struggle ensued after the men tried to seize his mobile phone.

It was also discovered that Kyaw Myint and Min Than Htay were transporters of illegal drugs from Shan State to Rakhine State and selling the illicit drugs.

The income from the drug trading was allegedly spent on buying arms for the AA ethnic armed group.

The father-and-son team admitted to earning more than Ks397 million from transporting and trading more than 4.4 million YW Yaba pills from December 2016 to November 2017.

With the proceeds of the first drug haul, they bought two pistols and four cartridges in August 2017, after the third drug run, they bought two pistols and four cartridges in August 2017, they bought two pistols and four cartridges from a woman in Mandalay, they told police. They also bought one pistol from a man in Myawady, one cartridge, nine bullets, 19 M-16 rifles, 38 cartridges and 6,000 bullets, five pistols and 8 cartridges with 59 bullets. The father and son admitted to transferring 23 weapons, 46 cartridges and 6,050 bullet to the AA armed group.

The pair kept one pistol, one cartridge and nine bullets for their personal use, police said.

The investigation is active and ongoing, authorities said, and measures are being taken to expose additional suspects who may be involved in the case.—Myanmar News Agency
Music show boosts morale of students in Maungtaw

THE Yeikhita Swan Arr (National Spirit) philanthropic group organized a music show for teachers and students who were trapped for three days in Nanthartung Monastery, Maungtaw Township, during the ARSA terrorist attacks on 25 August 2017.

The music show was done with the hope of boosting the morale of the teachers and students and was held in the Strand Hotel in Sittway City.

U Win Maung Maung, the Patron of Yeikhita Swan Arr, Shwe Latt Myar (Golden Hands), and WSKD Youth Philanthropic groups, presided over the show. He conferred honorary awards to the presiding Sayadaw of Nanthartung Monastery for “bravely giving protection to 400 students” and also to the presiding Sayadaw of Shwezedi Monastery for making sure the education of the displaced students would continue.

The Yeikhita Swan Arr (National Spirit) philanthropic group is composed of 21 separate philanthropic organizations and has donated over Ks100 million to the Maungtaw area since the 25 August attacks.

The group also has plans to donate items of clothing and food to the security forces stationed in Maungtaw.

The music show hosted actor Min Yarzar, actress Phoo Son, both famous and up-and-coming singers from Rakhine.

—Han Lin Naing

Music show organized by Yeikhita Swan Arr (National Spirit) philanthropic group held in Maungtaw. PHOTO: ZAW ZAW NAING
Responding through dialogue is democratic culture

Maung Thaung Win (Ex-diplomat)

ACCORDING to the Oxford English Dictionary, “spirit” is defined as “the disposition or mental condition or disposition; mental condition or disposition”. This means the strong determination of all the races to achieve its independence by a steady and thin. In 1932, the first university stude- was also known as religious association. In 1932, the first university stu- t a strike

Essential Elements in Binding Union Spirit

It is of vital importance for all the ethnic races to equally participate in promoting the national unity and the union spirit which can keep the Union strong.

Translating the translations turn ridiculous, insulting silly

By Arakan Sein

Translators do translations; translations get involved in several steps of proofreading, choice of words and acquisition of languages and cultures concerned. The translators can hardly hope to convey in the mother lan- guage every expression of the original language. For this reason, the translator himself, indeed in one language is seldom the exact equivalent of a word in a different one.

If many translators are allowed to translate the same article or essay, they are believed to produce many different translations. One thing is certain; the more they translate, the more they will be involved in the matter. That is why it comes to translations of Buddhist texts, the Bible or the Holy Quran, the translators’ work has to be cautiously shaped in the way which they have transcribed. They have been under pressure in the course of translation process in order to avoid terrible mistakes which believers may easily get offended.

Accurately translated in this respect, still, they tend to make mistakes.

We translate Myanmar into English and English into Myanmar daily in the Myanmar and English newspapers. A lot of our words are added, changed, or deleted every day. It is very hard to understand the meaning of each word because words from other languages have entered English every moment of our lives.

Different translators and interpreters do different translations and interpretations. As English is highly sensitive language, we must focus on proofreading, typing and knowledge of the language and culture of the country. The arrangement or position of a letter in an English word makes the meaning totally different from each other. For example, let us have a look at this sentence: Tiger Woods was on the trail when he fired under par. Tiger Woods on the trial when he fired under par. Tiger Woods happened to be in the law court, not on the golf course.

Some words sound ride, some insulting and some silly. Outstanding examples are:

- English: Bogyoke Aung San
- Burmese: ဘွဲ့ကြီး (မျက်စာ) စားချင် (မိုး)

This sentence is grammatically correct, but the meaning is different. “Bogyoke Aung San” must be a person who eats a snake and one can imagine that he is a villain. “Bogyoke Aung San” is a national hero.

The above short article highlights that we are greatly in need of Certified Professional Translators or Certified Translators in various fields. The Certified Translators are professional translators who are able to produce high-quality translations.

We have to consider the interest of the country and the people. Similarly, the people who are now in the government and the Hlutaw have also struggled for democracy for decades. Hence, the path of dialogue is the key to solving issues.
Ethnic literature festival planned in Shan State

The Ministry of Information and the Shan State Government held a discussion meeting yesterday to plan ahead for the Ethnic literature and paper reading festival to be held at a later date. Shan State Chief Minister Dr. Lin Htut, who is also the Patron of the Ethnic literature and paper reading festival planning committee, delivered the opening speech.

Next, Chairman or the Ethnic literature and paper reading festival planning committee and Minister for Bamar Ethnic Affairs, Dr. Aung Than Maung explained the process of the upcoming Ethnic literature and paper reading festival.

The festival will include exhibition booths for traditional ethnic handiworks, traditional literature recitals and dances. There are 24 topics in the recital part and 10 of them are about culture. Participants include Yinkyar, Yinmet, Tanaw, and An ethnics reciting their traditional literature, Eastern and Northern Shan ethnics reciting Lisu literature and Kachin people residing in Shan State will recite their traditional literature as well. The festival will also host booths selling traditional ethnic cuisine, traditional costumes and paraphernalia.

Next, U Ye Naing, the Director General of the Information and Public Relations Department lead discussions with the various committees for the festival’s organizations, ranging from the committee for handling invitations to the committee for organizing entertainment. —Shan State IPRD

Myanmar-Japan to jointly implement affordable housing project

Myanmar will implement an affordable housing project in cooperation with the Japanese government, this fiscal year, as a pilot project in Mingaladon Township, Yangon Region, according to a report in Myawady Daily yesterday.

The project will be implemented with two housing designs. The technology and other construction materials that are used in the project will be showcased in the showroom, said U Shein Win, vice chairman of Myanmar Construction Entrepreneurs Association (MCEA).

As for the pilot project, MCEA will take responsibility for land allocation, while Japan will provide financial assistance for the construction. After three years, Japan will transfer the building, along with the land and showrooms, to the MCEA. Currently, the Japan-Myanmar Association for Industry of Housing and Urban Development and MCEA have signed a memorandum of understanding on 4 December, 2017, to run trials of the affordable housing project. —GNLM

Forestry Department, WCS Myanmar to protect river tern nests

The forestry department and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Myanmar are protecting river tern nests in the upstream of Chindwin river, with the cooperation of the local people, according to a report in Myawady Daily yesterday.

The combined population of river terns in their major habitats in the Ayeyawady and Chindwin rivers is hardly more than 100, while the majority of the population is found between Khamti and Homalin in the Chindwin river. During the survey in 2017, some 41 nests were found near the Ayeyawady and Chindwin rivers. Some 40 per cent of the breeding was successful. This year, 11 nests were found, and a survey is still being carried out to find more. Since 2017, the forestry department and WCS Myanmar have worked to protect the nests from humans and animals, with the cooperation of the local people.

As it is breeding season now, the WCS has set up a warning system and signboards on the sandbanks and islands to increase awareness. —GNLM

Price of rough rice increases slightly

The price of rough rice, which is mainly exported, has increased slightly in the local market before the arrival of the summer paddy crop.

Also, the foreign ship meant to purchase Myanmar rice has been berthed, according to a report in Myawady Daily yesterday.

“The price of good quality rice, which is consumed mostly in the local market, has stabilised. However, the stock of rough rice that will be exported has decreased gradually. Summer paddy will be supplied to the local market by the end of February,” said U Than Oo, secretary of Myanmar Rice Association.

In the last two weeks, the price of rough rice was between Ks18,500 and Ks19,000 per bag. However, now, the price of rough rice has increased to Ks20,000 per bag.

Currently, the Pawsan variety from the delta region is selling for between Ks30,000 and Ks40,000 per bag, while the new Shwebo Pawsan variety costs some Ks40,000 per bag. The price of old Shwebo Pawsan is Ks60,000, because there is no old stock left.

In the coming week, the price of Export-25 mark rice will not drop, and the price is expected to rise by Ks100 and Ks200 in the Bayinnaung wholesale market, according to the rice market. —GNLM
‘Judge me’ - Paris suspect refuses to answer Belgian court

BRUSSELS — The prime surviving suspect in the 2015 Islamic State attacks on Paris said he would answer no questions as his trial in Belgium over a shooting that preceded his arrest got under way in Brussels on Monday.

Salah Abdeslam, 28, his long black hair and beard a stark contrast to the cropped, clean-shaven young man familiar across Europe from wanted posters during his four months on the run, was asked by the judge to rise and identify himself.

Appearing in public for the first time since the November 2015 attacks and his arrest in Brussels four months later, he remained seated, flanked by two masked Belgian police officers.

“I do not wish to answer questions,” Abdeslam said.

After a first session during which his alleged accomplice admitted to having fought for Islamic State in Syria and said that both accused were present during the March 2016 shootout with Brussels police, the judge again asked Abdeslam to speak.

Citing his right to silence and declaring his Muslim faith, he accused the media of denouncing him before his trial:

“Judge me. Do as you want with me,” he told the judge.

“I put my trust in my Lord.”

“I remain silent. That is a right which I have” he said, adding: “My silence does not make me a criminal or guilty.”

“I am defending myself by remaining silent.”

He asked the prosecution to base itself on forensic evidence “and not swagger about to satisfy public opinion”, adding: “Muslims are judged and treated in the worst kind of ways. They are judged without mercy. There is no presumption of innocence.”

That reluctance to engage with the court may prove a disappointment to Parisians who hoped that he might end more than two years of silence to give some indication of how and why the attacks which killed 130 people were organized.

His trial in France is not expected until next year. He was not charged over the Islamic State attacks in Brussels four days after his arrest, though prosecutors say the suicide bombers who killed 32 people acted swiftly out of fear that Abdeslam might reveal plans for a new attack in France under interrogation.

Among those attending the trial was Bob de Zwart, who survived the gun attack during a rock concert at Paris’s Bataclan concert hall on Friday, Nov. 13, 2015. He told Reuters that he had come to Brussels because he wanted to see Abdeslam.

He was, however, not surprised that the alleged lone survivor of the group had not broken his two-year silence.

Abdeslam arrived under heavy guard from France, where he has been held under 24-hour suicide watch near Paris.

He will spend the nights of the coming week of Belgian hearings in a high-security French prison just across the border.

Co-accused Sofien Ayari, a 24-year-old Tunisian, told the court that he had been with Islamic State forces in Syria.

He said he had been with Abdeslam at the site of the shootout, though only a third man, who was killed by police marksmen, had he said, fired on the police officers who raided their hideout.—Reuters

China advises its tourists to avoid Maldives till politics stabilise

BEIJING — China’s foreign ministry on Monday advised Chinese citizens to avoid visiting the Maldives until political tensions subside on the Indian Ocean archipelago.

A tropical paradise for holidaymakers, the Maldives has been beset by fractious politics for years, but concern over potential instability heightened after its attorney-general warned they would prosecute those opposing, criticising or dismissing the army through its media posts and protests criticising the Maldives’ government.

The Chinese embassy to the Maldives on Friday issued a travel warning urging Chinese citizens to be cautious when travelling to the country, according to the official Xinhua news agency.

Mohamed Anil, attorney general of the Maldives, said on Sunday that the government had received information that the Supreme Court was preparing to fire Yameen, but such a move would be illegal and the police and army had been instructed not to carry out such an order.—Reuters

Turkey detains nearly 600 for opposing Syrian offensive

ANKARA — Turkey has so far detained 573 people for social media posts and protests criticising its military offensive in Syria, the government said on Monday.

The crackdown, which has extended to the national medical association, has deepened concerns about free speech under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has criticised opponents of the military intervention as “traitors”.

Turkey last month launched an air and ground offensive, dubbed Operation Olive Branch, against the Kurdish YPG militia in Syria’s northwestern Afrin region. Authorities have repeatedly warned they would prosecute those opposing, criticising or misrepresenting the incursion.

“Since the start of Operation Olive Branch, 449 people have been detained for spreading terrorist propaganda on social media and 124 people detained for taking part in protest action,” the Interior Ministry said in a statement.

The operation has been widely supported by Turkey’s mainly pro-government media and by most political parties, with the exception of the pro-Kurdish opposition.

Last week, a prosecutor ordered the detention of 11 senior members of the Turkish Medical Association, including its chairman, after the organisation criticised the incursion, saying: “No to war, peace immediately”.

Erdogan criticised the body as traitors. Detention orders were issued for another 13 people for supporting the medics.

Three of the doctors were later released on probation, according to the Hurriyet newspaper.

“There are laws that prohibit the glorification of terrorism, support for terrorism through propaganda and media. The prosecutors are implementing the laws,” Erdogan’s spokesman, Ibrahim Kalin, told reporters in Istanbul at the weekend.

Ankara considers the US-backed YPG, which controls Afrin, to be a terrorist group and an extension of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) which has fought an insurgency in Turkey’s predominantly Kurdish southeast since 1984.

Turkey is in the midst of a widening crackdown that began after a failed coup attempt in July 2016. Some 50,000 people have been jailed and 150,000 sacked or suspended from their jobs.

Critics, including rights groups and some Western allies, say Erdogan is using the coup as a pretext to muzzle dissent. The latest arrests have also drawn criticism from the European Union.

Turkey says its measures are necessary due to the gravity of the security threats it faces. —Reuters
Russia builds two radars for Space Forces

MOSCOW — Russia’s Defence Ministry has completed the construction of two radars for the country’s Space Forces and four storage facilities for Bulava sea-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles. PHOTO: TASS

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Greenpeace appeals after losing Norwegian Arctic drilling lawsuit

OSLO — Environmental groups launched an appeal on Monday against an Oslo court verdict last month, in which Greenpeace and Nature and Youth disputed the Oslo District Court’s decision to allow companies including Statoil, Chevron, Lukoil and ConocoPhillips to bid for licenses to explore the Arctic seabed.

The Oslo court said a 2015 application by Norwegian company Statoil and its Russian partner Gazprom to enter areas for oil exploration in the Norwegian part of the Barents Sea was lawful. The court also upheld a challenge from Greenpeace that the auction methods violated citizens’ right to a clean environment.

“The court’s verdict is built on a misinterpretation of a minor point in the item 3M-30,” said Truls Gulevson, head of Greenpeace Norway, in launching the appeal. “By opening up these pristine areas for oil exploration, Norway is effectively smuggling its emissions outside of its own borders and furthering climate change, which harms everyone, everywhere,” he said.

Greenpeace says the court battle is the first in the world to test whether climate change is a threat to rights enshrined in a nation’s constitution. About 100 national constitutions around the world, including Norway’s, include guarantees of a safe environment.

Italian Leonardo to step up Asia sales under new business plan

SINGAPORE — Italian defence group Leonardo aims to sell around 8.4 billion euros ($10.49 billion) of products in Asia over the next five years as part of a business plan designed to boost exports, a senior executive said.

“The state-backed conglomerate last week promised double-digit profit growth in its first business plan under Chief Executive Alessandro Profumo but disappointed investors on shorter term prospects, three months after a profit warning clubbed shares.

As part of the plan, Leonardo expects to sell 70 billion euros of products like helicopters and weapons systems over the next five years, a growth of around 6 per cent a year, with 60 per cent of sales to export markets.

Asia is forecast to account for 20 per cent of export sales during that period, Chief Commercial Officer Lorenzo Mariani said in a phone interview ahead of the start of the Singapore Airshow on Tuesday.

“We are going to expand very quickly, opening new offices and facilities in Indonesia, Thailand, Australia and Bangladesh,” he told Reuters.

Profumo, a veteran banker, was picked to steer Leonardo on an aggressive expansion drive as part of a broader and longer term strategy targeting higher growth than in the past.

As the group shifts its focus towards foreign markets, Leonardo is due to almost double the number of international marketing offices and open logistics hubs offering customer support to its clients, particularly in key markets such as the Middle East and Asia.

Leonardo on Monday announced plans to set up a new helicopter maintenance centre in Japan to service the fleet of more than 120 of its rotorcraft operating in the Asian nation.

The Italian company makes civil and military helicopters, as well as aeronautics and weapons systems and the Eurofighter Typhoon fighter jet in partnership with Airbus SE and BAE Systems PLC.
Nepali tea receives int’l trademark after 154-year cultivation

KATHMANDU — Nepalese tea has finally received its own brand logo or trademark in the international market after over a century long cultivation, government authorities said on Monday.

According to the National Tea and Coffee Development Board under the Ministry of Agricultural Development, it developed and registered the brand logo in the Department of Industry and has been endorsed.

“Nepali tea producers used to export tea with respective companies names or logos. Now, the tea will be sold in the international market with a common logo, which represents the national identity,” Sheshkanta Gautam, executive director of the Nepal Tea and Coffee Development Board, told Xinhua.

The trademark comprises an image of mountains with “Nepal Tea: Quality from the Himalayas” written below it. Gautam informed that the logo will be formally unveiled during the third “Nepal Tea: Terhathum” written below it.

According to the statistics, the tea cultivation started in the Himalayan country from eastern district Ilam, some 154 years ago, while Nepal became a member of International Tea Committee in 2007.

The government of Nepal has also been marking 15th Baisakh as per the Nepali calendar as National Tea day.

With the approval of Nepalese Orthodox Tea Certification Mark Implementation Directive, the board has already asked the producers, processors, packagers and traders to use the logo.

According to the National Tea and Coffee Development Board, Nepal produces tea in over 27,688 hectares of land in 44 districts, mainly in eastern districts like Ilam, Jhapa, Dhan曲折, Terhathum and Panchthar.

Nepal has been exporting tea to eight international destinations, mainly India, Canada, Germany, the United States and China among others.

Shankar Sapkota, co-spokesperson at the Ministry of Agricultural Development, told Xinhua, “Having Nepal’s own trademark is indeed good news which will be beneficial for the farmers and overall tea industry.”

According to the statistics, the tea cultivation started in the Himalayan country from eastern district Ilam, some 154 years ago, while Nepal became a member of International Tea Committee in 2007.

The government of Nepal has also been marking 15th Baisakh as per the Nepali calendar as National Tea day.

SINGAPORE — Singapore’s government is seeking to amend a law that led to shortened sentences for church leaders convicted of misusing millions of dollars, in a case that has gripped the city-state where there is little tolerance for corruption.

This follows a decision last week by a Singapore court to reject a prosecution appeal to reinstate longer jail sentences for the church leaders, after the High Court reduced their sentences in April 2017.

The government believes the sentences are “too low” for those including City Harvest Church’s co-founder Kong Hee, convicted of using funds to support his wife’s pop-singing career, Minister for Law Kasiviswanathan Shanmugam said.

Kong, 53, was originally sentenced to eight years in jail in October 2015 for criminal breach of trust and falsification of accounts. The High Court later reduced that sentence to three-and-a-half years.

“It is now up to parliament to amend the law, and that we should do soon,” Shanmugam said in parliament on Monday.

Singapore's governing People's Action Party has a large majority in parliament.

Shanmugam said the judgment shows there is a “lacuna” or gap in the law around punishment for senior officers charged with criminal breach of trust.

“The government’s policy is clear ... If you abuse that trust you should be more culpable, and you should be liable for more severe punishments compared to a normal employee.”

“For the last 40 years the law, as applied by the courts, reflected this principle. In April last year, the position changed.”

The mix of money, faith and scandal in the City Harvest Church case is unique in Singapore, and gained much public interest during a legal battle that spanned nearly five years.

Local media said it was the largest amount of charity funds ever misappropriated in Singapore, and the country’s most expensive criminal trial.

While megachurches originated in the United States, some of the largest are in Asia, where packaging the traditional biblical message into a more dynamic format of pop music, lively services and social media has lured a new generation of followers and turned the churches into major enterprises.

—Reuters

Singapore seeks to amend law after ‘too low’ megachurch fraud sentences
Box Office: ‘Jumanji’ Regains Top Spot for Modest Super Bowl Weekend

LOS ANGELES — Sony’s resilient “Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle” has returned to the top of the North American box office, leading a modest Super Bowl weekend with $11 million at 3,553 sites. The session caps a remarkable run for the Dwayne Johnson-Kevin Hart action comedy, which also won the box office on its third, fourth and fifth weekends. “Jumanji” has become the 42nd highest domestic grosser of all time with $352.6 million, less than $590,000 behind Johnson’s “Parasite” for the 41st spot.

“Jumanji,” which declined just 32 per cent, is only the 11th title to top $11 million in its seventh weekend. It’s the lowest total for a first-place film since the second weekend of “The Hitman’s Bodyguard” won the final frame of August. Fox’s “Maze Runner: The Death Cure,” which won the box office last weekend, finished second with $10.2 million from 3,793 locations. The weekend’s sole opener, Helen Mirren’s horror-thriller “Winchester,” launched in third with $9.3 million at 2,480 venues, topping its total and “Winchester” ended up taking the number one spot as “Maze Runner” adds to its total and “Winchester” enjoys a bit of counter programing success amidst a sea of Oscar contenders over what is a typically slow moviegoing weekend,” said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst with comScore.

Los Angeles — US reality TV star Kylie Jenner announced on Sunday the birth of her child with rapper Travis Scott, after months of rumours surrounding her pregnancy. The 20-year-old Jenner said in a post on social media platform Instagram that her “beautiful, healthy baby girl” arrived on 1 February and apologised to fans for keeping her pregnancy a secret. “I’m sorry for keeping you in the dark through all the assumptions,” Jenner wrote. “I understand you’re used to me bringing you along on all my journeys. My pregnancy was one I chose not to do in front of the world.” Jenner’s half-sister Kim Kardashian, 37, and her rapper husband Kanye West announced the birth of their third child on 16 January, a girl born to a surrogate. Jenner’s other half-sister Khloe Kardashian, 33, announced in December that she is six months pregnant with her basketball player boyfriend Tristan Thomas.

Jenner, who has parlayed her family’s reality TV show and a 101 million Instagram following into a lucrative cosmetics line, posted a teaser on Instagram to a YouTube video entitled “To Our Daughter,” that shows her in the delivery room just after giving birth, holding her newborn baby. The arrival of Jenner’s child quickly became the top trending topic on Twitter in the United States, surpassing #SuperBowlSunday just hours before the start of the big game.

Soon after Jenner made the announcement, her mother Kris and sisters Kendall, Kim and Khloe all posted messages of love and support on social media.

— Reuters

Celebrity Kylie Jenner announces birth of baby girl

Timberlake back at Super Bowl halftime, no wardrobe malfunctions

MINNEAPOLIS — Justin Timberlake posed for a selfie, paid tribute to music legend Prince and played it safe at a halftime Super Bowl performance on Sunday, returning to the gig where he and Janet Jackson introduced “wardrobe malfunction” to the American lexicon.

Timberlake danced and sang his way through a roughly 12-minute set before a television audience estimated at over 100 million people, mixing a song from his new album and staples such as “Can’t Stop the Feeling” that made him an intentionally known solo artist.

In an homage in Minneapolis to the state’s native son Prince, who died in 2016, Timberlake played a white piano and sat beneath a projection of Prince on a screen to sing a cover of “I Would Die 4 U.”

The only major piece of clothing that came off this time in Internet history at the time. Timberlake said via social media just ahead of his 2018 performance that he would not be sharing the Super Bowl stage with Jackson on Sunday.

Jackson ended up taking most of the blame for the 2004 incident, with some radio stations boycotting her music. Timberlake came away from the incident with little damage to his career.

A few hours ahead of the game, Jackson’s fans stormed social media and made #JanetJacksonAppreciationDay the top trending item on US Twitter. Supporters of the singer flooded the social media platform with messages of appreciation for Jackson, who as a solo artist has sold more than double the number of records of Timberlake, according to Recording Industry Association of America data.

— Reuters
“Long banquet” held in southwest China to welcome Spring Festival

CHONGQING — A traditional “1,000-metre-long banquet” was held over the weekend in southwest China’s Chongqing Municipality as locals welcome the Lunar New Year.

More than 800 tables of delicacies were presented at the banquet along a street that stretches more than a kilometre in Chongqing’s Zhongshan Old Town. The food was for the hosts’ relatives as well as more than 30,000 tourists.

Residents of the town traditionally hold these banquets to welcome the Spring Festival, which falls on 16 February this year. In the past, the town was a busy port, and locals would prepare food along the street to cater to business people and porters who could not make it home for family gatherings.

In 2005, locals decided to boost local tourism by resuming the tradition. Each year, on weekends before the Spring Festival, families cook their best dishes beside their homes to entertain visitors.

Resident Li Chunmei prepared smoked pig trotters and sausages on Sunday. She prepared 45 tables of food for visiting gourmards. “Hosting the banquet has always been the busiest day in town,” Li said. “Business has been really good.” —Xinhua

School’s out

A group of students on Bahlo Road in Sanchaung are apparently happy that school has ended for the day. —PHOTO: MARK

“Astro Boy” headlines opening of annual Sapporo snow festival

SAPPORO — An annual winter festival began on Monday in Sapporo with some 200 snow and ice sculptures on display, including one of the famous manga hero, “Astro Boy.”

More than 2 million people from Japan and abroad are expected to visit the 69th Sapporo Snow Festival in Hokkaido, a weekend-long event held in three venues in the capital of Japan’s northernmost prefecture.

Commemorating the 90th anniversary of the birth of legendary manga artist Osamu Tezuka, a sculpture of his iconic cartoon character Astro Boy is featured along with other exhibits such as Yakushi Temple, one of the most famous Buddhist temples in Nara. The temple sculpture will be used as a canvas for a projection mapping show every evening of the festival.

Also among the exhibits at the main Odori site are smaller statues of much-talked-about Nippon Ham Fighters rookie baseball player Kotaro Kiyomiya and popular comedienne Blouson Chiemi. The Tsudome festival site, the festival’s second largest display area, opened Thursday and has been drawing visitors to its large snow slide.

The event at the Susukino site will begin Monday evening, showcasing frozen fish in ice displays. —Kyodo News

Paris atelier provides safe haven for exiled artists

PARIS — Paris, whose bohemian culture attracted some of the world’s finest painters at the turn of the 20th century, is opening its doors to a new wave of talent, driven its way this time by war and poverty.

Lina Aljijakli, a 35-year-old Syrian born in the now war-ravaged city of Hama, is one of a record number of immigrants seeking asylum in France. Her art is being exhibited at the grand Palais Royal along with works by 14 other exiled artists.

She said freedom of expression was compromised in Syria, where a seven-year civil war has killed hundreds of thousands of people and forced millions from their homes. “You never knew what could happen. You could get arrested, get killed,” Aljijakli told Reuters TV. A large studio in Paris’ 18th arrondissement has become a dedicated workspace for some 150 exiled artists from countries such as Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Iran. It has provided Aljijakli with a sanctuary from where she can express her emotions on canvas. One of her works on display in the former royal palace shows faces of women and children outlined against a blue background. The painting represents the suffering of Syrian women imprisoned and separated from their children, she says, of women hurt by aerial bombardments and of women who make the perilous sea-crossing in search of safety. Judith Depaule, who runs the atelier, sees the artist’s as the latest chapter in the artistic history of a city that gave rise to Impressionism, Art Nouveau and Cubism, and is synonymous with artists from Picasso and Van Gogh to Hemingway and Beckett.

“So it’s about time that tradition is renewed,” Depaule said. “Art and French culture have a lot to learn from this melting pot, from this contribution from other cultures.” Another artist is Syrian filmmaker Mohammad Hijazi. Aged 29, he applauded the opportunity Paris has provided but wants to be known for more than just his portrayal of war. “My hope is ... to tell the world that we are able to produce work not simply because we have a war or a revolt or a conflict or fighting.” —Reuters

The second Graduation Ceremony of Global Gateway University was held at Lotte Hotel on Pyay Road on 3 February. —PHOTO: GNLM

Pham Thanh Phong, a student from Vietnam, poses for a photo in front of a snow sculpture of Kotaro Kiyomiya, a highly touted Nippon Ham Fighters rookie, at the annual Sapporo Snow Festival in Hokkaido on 5 February, 2018. —PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

A man and his sister pose for a photo in front of a snow sculpture of Kotaro Kiyomiya, a highly touted Nippon Ham Fighters rookie, at the annual Sapporo Snow Festival in Hokkaido on 5 February, 2018. —PHOTO: KYODO NEWS
Last-gasp Kane penalty earns Spurs draw at Liverpool

LONDON — Harry Kane scored his 100th Premier League goal from the penalty spot in stoppage time to snatch a point for Tottenham Hotspur in a thrilling 2-2 draw with Liverpool at Anfield on Sunday.

Mohamed Salah capitalised on a mistake from Eric Dier to put Liverpool in front in the third minute, taking his tally to 20 league goals for the season.

Substitute Victor Wanyama thundered home an equaliser 10 minutes from time before Kane missed from the penalty spot in the 87th minute.

In the most dramatic of finales, Salah thought he had won it in the 91st minute, only for Spurs to win another penalty which Kane converted to leave his team fifth in the table, two points behind third-placed Liverpool.

“It is difficult to get every decision right,” Spurs manager Mauricio Pochettino said. “When they are right and show character I needed to congratulate them.”

Defender Virgil van Dijk, returning to the Liverpool starting lineup, did a fine job of keeping an unchanged Spurs quiet for the majority of the first half.

Liverpool’s task was made easier by their early opener. Dier, in attempting to make an interception, diverted the ball into the path of Salah, putting the Egypt international clean through to break the deadlock.

Tottenham’s only shot on target in the first 45 minutes came via the boot of Mousa Dembele, but his half-volley was easily saved by Loris Karius.

Spurs improved after the break and almost equalised through Son Heung-min in the 58th minute, but Karius stood tall to make the block.

The visitors equalised out of the blue when Wanyama thundered the ball into the net from distance before the drama unfolded.

Kane’s tame penalty was easily saved by Karius after the England striker had been felled in the box before Salah danced his way past two Spurs defenders and fired into the net to score what looked likely to be the winner.

However, the linesman spotted a foul by Van Dijk on substitute Erik Lamela in the box, giving Kane the chance to make amends.

“The softest touch in the whole game decides the game,” Klopp said. “It is not a penalty.”

Kane duly converted from the spot with virtually the last kick off the game to silence Anfield. — Reuters

Leeds fire manager Christiansen

LONDON — Leeds United have sacked Dane Thomas Christiansen as manager after eight months in charge, the Championship club said on Sunday.

Leeds, three-times English champions, lie 18th in the second-tier standings and have not recorded a league win since 26 December.

“It is difficult to get every decision right,” Spurs manager Mauricio Pochettino said. “When they are right and show character I needed to congratulate them.”

Leeds United can confirm that head coach Thomas Christiansen has left the club,” the club said in a statement.

“Chairman Andrea Radrizzani and the Board of Directors would like to thank Thomas and his staff for their hard work over the past eight months.”

The 44-year-old Christiansen formerly managed Cypriot side APOEL.

Leeds, relegated from the Premier League in 2004, are looking for their seventh manager since 2014 and British media reported that former England boss Steve McClaren was among the favourites to get the job. — Reuters

Atletico see off Valencia to close gap on Barca

BARCELONA — Angel Correa’s thunderbolt earned Atletico Madrid a 1-0 win over Valencia on Sunday, helping them to close the gap on Barcelona to nine points at the top of La Liga.

In a predictably tight game between the second and third-placed clubs at the Wanda Metropolitano, few chances were created but Atletico had the upper hand, with Neto tipping away a Saul Niguez piledriver from some distance and then repelling Diego Costa’s header from a corner. Correa broke the deadlock in spectacular fashion in the 59th minute, receiving the ball from Koke and crashing a shot into the top right corner from outside the area for his sixth league goal of the season.

It was enough to help Atletico move closer to Barcelona, who dropped two points earlier after drawing 1-1 at local rivals Espanyol. — Reuters