President guides NPC toward FY planning

Meeting will determine 2018-2019 development projects based on national need, budget

PRESIDENT U Win Myint, Chairman of the National Planning Commission (NPC), addressed the commission’s meeting (2/2018) held at the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday morning.

The meeting was attended by State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Vice-Presidents U Myint Swe and U Henry Van Thio, Union Ministers, the Union Attorney General, the Union Auditor General, the Union Civil Service Board Chairman, the Nay Pyi Taw Council Chairman, the Central Bank of Myanmar Governor, Chief Ministers of states and regions, Deputy Ministers, regional chairmen and officials of self-administered division and zones.

President U Win Myint said the day’s meeting was held to disclose, discuss and approve the Fiscal Year 2018-2019 National Plan before submitting it to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw in accordance with the 2008 Constitution.

Starting from FY 2018-2019, the financial year of Myanmar was designated to be from 1 October to 30 September. A national plan and regional projects should be conducted according to the newly designated fiscal year.

In changing the financial year, the six-month period from April to September of this year is considered a transitional period during which the National Planning Law is being enacted and implemented.

In drawing up projects for national development, it is necessary to effectively coordinate and draw up work processes according to the current requirements of the people and for the sustainable development of the country, in accordance with state policies, priorities and available State budget.

Union ministries, states and regions are to draw and propose project aims based on the United Nations post-millennium sustainable development goals, economic policies set by the State, long and middle-term aims and in accordance with their own policies, work processes as well as priority programmes.

SEE PAGE-3
It is necessary to obtain the nearest estimate for projects, so that projects can be managed without waste. It is also necessary to manage projects so that there is no waste of public funds and to submit the most accurate estimate for the projects. Estimates and calculations are to be based on the prevailing rate of the region, and extra or excess funds not used are to be calculated and returned.

It was found that when departments and organisations request expenditures, many indirect expenses, such as procurement of office materials and furniture were included, and there were more departmental expenditures in project expenditures. As such, when expenditures are drawn up, departmental expenses are to be reduced as much as possible. As there are limitations in the budgets, the priority should be to include more project work expenses, and to use them effectively. And it is important for the expenditures to be for work that can be completed during the fiscal year. Furthermore, development policies set by the Union government are to be implemented by the departments, according to priorities. Just as an ordinary person with common sense uses his or her own money appropriately, departments and organizations are to appropriately evaluate and utilize project work expenditures and departmental expenditures.

More expenditures were permitted to construct accommodation and housing for public servants during their service period and upon retirement. Project expenditures for reforestation to prevent natural disasters, reduce climate change, development of infrastructure, such as increasing generation of electricity, availability of potable water, irrigation water, transport and communications, were being provided as a priority and expenditure for the development of human resources, such as education, health and social benefits being increased.

In order to fulfill the first point of the union’s economic policy of ensuring that budget estimates and actual implementations are as accurate as possible, not only will union level departments and organizations, but state and region level departments and organizations also need to be effectively managed.

The Finance Commission is to discuss and adopt the Union Budget Estimate for FY 2018-2019 and Union Budget Bill for FY 2018-2019 so that it could be submitted to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, said the President.

Next, Finance Commission Vice-Chairman Vice-President U Myint Swe said the Union Budget Estimate was based on provisional figures of FY 2017-2018. For capital expenditures, a project-wise feasibility study was conducted, and only expenditures for construction, procurement and other work that could be completed in the fiscal year were coordinated and drawn up by the project planning department and permitted.

Ks 50 billion was earmarked for capital expenditures by the Nay Pyi Taw Council, including for infrastructure as well as public servant housing construction. Departmental expenditures for office vehicles was reduced by allocating confiscated vehicles and, if this is not possible, through collective purchases. Luxury expenditures that are not related to production expenditures were reviewed and reduced, while office material and machinery expenditures were reviewed by comparing the situation in the past three years and permitted accordingly.

For the FY 2018-2019 (October to September) Budget, the income is Ks 20,051 billion, expenditures is Ks 24,354 billion, the deficit is 4,303 billion and the deficit to GDP ratio is 4.62 per cent.

The budget includes Ks 682 billion in foreign aid and Ks 2,191 billion in foreign loans. Ks 1,794 billion was supported from the Union fund to cover deficits of states and regions, which was also included in the total expenditure.

Also, an emergency fund of Ks 100 billion was included in the budget for responding to unforeseeable natural disasters. As per the National Natural Disaster Management Law, the State included Ks 20 billion for the National Natural Disaster Management Fund this year.

The Union Budget estimate for FY 2018-2019 and Union Budget Bill for FY 2018-2019 is being submitted to the Finance Commission so that it could review and approve it, according to the Vice President.

Afterwards, Finance Commission Vice-Chairman Vice-President U Henry Van Thio said that Ks 1,793.1 billion will be provided by the Union to the states and regions in FY 2018-2019. The budget prepared by the states and regions were Ks 1,065,632 billion in income, as well as Ks 2,658,732 billion in expenditures and a deficit of Ks 1,793.1 billion.

When the budget of the states and regions were reviewed, it was found that Ks 676,771 billion was earmarked for ordinary expenditures and Ks 1,972,161 billion for capital expenditures. The budget request was found to consist of 31 per cent ordinary expenditures and 69 per cent capital expenditures. Close to 40 per cent, the majority of the ordinary expenditure, was found to be for salaries and wages, while the second largest ordinary expenditure of 30 per cent was found to be for maintenance and repair. The remaining 30 per cent is for travel, material purchases, service expenses, education and social expenses, pensions, expenses for irrigation and rural development.

Further, 36 per cent of the capital expenditure was found to be for road and bridge construction, while 38 per cent is set aside for rural roads, water supplies and other regional development work. Also, 16 per cent is for office and public servant housing construction and 10 per cent for procurement of office materials, furniture and vehicles.

Ks 545,373 million expenditure for FY 2018-2019 was requested after the Ayeawady Region had to cover their one year fuel, lubricant, maintenance expenses and staff allowances for river crossing ferries operated to assist in the transport of goods and people across the river because of the collapse of the Myanmyra Suspension Bridge. As this amount was requested after the union fund to support the states and regions in FY 2018-2019 was already submitted to the Union Government office, the total union fund allocated to support the states and regions would increase to Ks 1,793,645 billion.

The budget estimate drawn up and provided by states and regions for FY 2018-2019 is submitted to the Financial Commission for discussion and approval, said the Vice President.


This was followed by the Nay Pyi Taw Council Chairman and Chief Ministers of states and regions discussing their support of the Union Budget estimate for FY 2018-2019 and Union Budget Bill for FY 2018-2019.

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi emphasized about the importance of not using the minimum amount, but to use the funding for the maximum benefit. For implementing sub-standard projects with the purpose of reducing expenses, it will not be beneficial for the country, in the long run. The work conducted should not be affected by reducing costs in required areas. Using less money is not the main point. The main point is to use the money for the greatest benefit of the country.—MNA
President guides NPC toward FY planning

Aims of the Union ministries that are responsible for sector-wise development and state and region governments responsible for regional development are to be coordinated with the State’s aim, target and policies.

The Ministry of Planning and Finance is to coordinate the aims of the Union ministries that are responsible for sector-wise development and state and region governments responsible for regional development with the State’s aim, target and policies and draw the FY 2018-2019 National Plan.

When Union ministries draw up sector-wise aims, special emphasis is to be placed toward equal and all-round development of states and regions, creating opportunities for new generations and establishing an economic system that sustains development. In the same way, drawing up and implementation of state and region local projects should follow the policies and work processes of the Union, and governments of state and region are to conduct the regional projects to be in line with policies set by the Union.

Submitted proposals for the aim of the project are to be in line with their own aims, works processes and outcomes.

As the financial year is being changed, arrangements are to be made to conduct the necessary coordination in drawing up projects, investment programs in state-owned sectors, preparation of indexes, writing and submitting reports. Due to the inflow of foreign investment in FY 2018-2019, mid-term loans provided to basic economic work that require financial investment and required coordination conducted for private sector development and private small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are expected to have more possibilities of developing further. Arrangements are made for inflow of investment and technical know-how into both the state-owned and private agriculture sector that plays the main role in the country's economy. Road networks all over the country have improved, resulting in increased flow of products and people. Financial services are modernized and developed, and new financial services established. The hotel and travel sector is also developing. As such, GDP is expected to grow 7.6 per cent in the National Plan for FY 2018-2019.

Although the country's economy is not developing rapidly, more farm produce was exported, foreign investment flow into the manufacturing sector, SMEs, transport and travel service work, communications, financial and other services improved and, according to end of FY 2017-2018 estimates, the economy was seen to have developed 6.5 per cent.

In addition to this, statistics and data need to be complete, exact and accurate. Systematic management is required for this. Whether the project aims and proposals are feasible, economically viable, beneficial for the people, or not support regional development or not are to be assessed and reviewed. Only then can the State funds be effectively used and national planning aims required for the country and the people are included and conducted.

In conclusion, all are advised to improve and strengthen according to national policies for social economic structure that will reduce and resolve social economic difficulties faced and expose and conduct priority work that are in accord with the situation, said the President.

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said that the National Plan is a plan related to the country. Projects of all ministries and all states and regions are underneath a roof called the National Plan.

“Our country will have true progress if all the projects are connected, united and smoothly conducted. When new projects are thought out, the success and progress of past projects need to be observed. This will show how far the life of the people had progressed. From that, we can think of what needs to be done for the life of the people to progress further. Coopération is required between central government and state/region governments. Soon to be announced Sustained and Balanced Development Project Myanmar will become our strategic paper. If work can be conducted according to the project, there can be sustained and balanced development. Peace and stability is included in the three main pillars of the project. Without peace and stability, it will be difficult to have development. All the projects must know matters that are of interest to the ministry, state and region governments and demands by the people in states and regions. Projects are to be decided by how it is sustainable for the country and could develop. Projects were selected based on budget. Available budget and finance is important. But it is more important to select projects that ought to be implemented. Since our country is not rich, this is more important. Selection should be based on which project provides the most benefit for the country and the people. The National Plan will become a plan for all nations. It is important that the project should be for all nations and not for a state, region or a ministry. In drawing up future projects and to implement the selected projects, emphasis should be placed towards sustained benefit for the country and having a balanced cooperation. This could not be conducted by a single ministry and all are interconnected. All are urged to think and conduct strategically in fulfilling own and country’s requirements”, said the State Counsellor.

Afterwards, National Planning Commission Secretary Union Minister U Soe Win explained the proposed draft of the FY 2018-2019 National Plan.

Kayin State Chief Minister Nang Khin Htwe Myint, Kachin State Chief Minister Dr. Khet Aung and Union Minister U Win Khaing then explained the requirements for regional development and electricity requirements of the country.

In his concluding speech, President U Win Myint said that the drawing, confirming and implementing of the FY 2018-2019 National Planning Bill is to be done in the same way as past annual national planning bills. Although the projects described were drawn up based on policies set by the State, current requirements of the people, long-term development required for the country within the budget, emphasis should also be placed toward unity of ethnic nationals, rule of law, stability, human resource development, conservation and protection of natural environment. In addition to this, there is a need to draw up and implement programmes that are connected to financial, monetary and trade policies. Furthermore, the project aims need to benefit the country and people at the moment, in the short term and in the long term. Regional and international economic development should be continuously monitored and projects that are beneficial for the country need to be conducted in a timely manner.

Projects are to be drawn and implemented according to prevailing laws, rules, procedures, notifications and instructions. Implementation status of the projects should be kept in view throughout the entire project period. Only then can there be sustained transformation of the economic structure and balanced all round development, that are the aims of the country.

The strength of past national plans are to be maintained, weaknesses reviewed and amended when the FY 2018-2019 National Plan is drawn up and implemented. Suggestions and comments made by the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw need to be attended to. In addition to coordination within sections, within regions, within sectors and regions and the aspirations and desires of the people are to be included in the aim of the project. said the President. —MNA

“...We want real freedom and not tinsel and sham of it. When we say real freedom, we mean the freedom not only to plan our political destiny but also the economy and defence of our country by ourselves ...”

(Excerpt from the address made by Bogyoke Aung San at the 2nd session of the Supreme Council of AFPFL, 16 May 1946)
Raw materials shortage hits paper industry

By Nyein Nyein

THE scarcity of raw materials could lead to the suspension of operations at the country’s paper mills, manufacturers said at a press conference in Yangon on Thursday.

U Tin Maung Oo, owner of a paper mill in the Sagaing Region and a representative from Upper Myanmar, said there are 36 paper factories across the country, including six large-scale mills in Upper Myanmar. At present, manufacturers are facing a gradual decline in supplies of raw material, as the country’s raw products are being exported to China because of high prices being paid. Also, the raw materials shortage has led to an increase in prices, and it is believed that local paper mills could come to a halt in the future if China imports more raw materials, which will largely affect factory workers.

Paper millers have requested that authorities control the export of raw materials to foreign countries. U Kyaw Lwin, owner of a paper mill in Yangon’s Shwepauk Industrial Zone, noted, “It is expected that our production will halve in the future if they face a shortage of raw materials. We need to promote cooperation with local tourism organisations and other bodies to increase the arrival of international visitors on an annual basis.”—GNLM

Mandalay oil millers plan seeking FDA certificate

IN a bid to earn the trust of consumers, the Mandalay Oil Millers Association is planning to seek a certificate from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), to compete with other oils being sold in the domestic market, said U Than Lwin, secretary of the association.

A total of 19 mills are running their businesses in Mandalay District, while only four have the FDA certificate. This move aims to build trust with the consumers over locally produced cooking oil, he added.

Many imported edible oils, such as soybean oil, sunflower oil, and vegetable oil have market shares in the domestic market. These cooking oils have certificates and an approval logo and their fair price attracts more consumers than locally-produced edible oil of high quality.

Imported edible oils have certificates only from their country of origin and lack FDA testing. However, local millers cannot compete with them, as marketing and good advertising ensure they sell well, said an oil miller.

The local groundnut oil millers are suffering as a result, prompting them to reduce the purchase price of raw groundnut. However, this could harm groundnut growers.

Since 1989, there are over 3,000 oil mills across the country. Now, only 10 per cent of them exist, and even those that have survived are struggling. — Maung Thwin (Mandalay)
Over 100 small-scale jade mining blocks in Khamti win tender

THE Sagaing Region government has granted permits to small-scale jade miners to operate 104 jade mining blocks in Khamti Township, according to U Zaw Zaw, Deputy Commissioner of the District General Administration Department.

He said authorities also granted 92 applicants to operate jade mining businesses within those jade blocks through a competitive tender system on 10 July. The floor price is Ks500,000 per block. The department will report the list of tender winners to the regional government.

U Thein Hlaing Win, a parliamentarian from Khamti Constituency, said authorities want more residents to apply for jade mining permits, noting that the government organises the distribution of permits in the interest of the residents. However, the number of residents who applied for permits remains low, which could result in a decline in jade mining.

Tender winners will have legal permission to excavate jade and gems for one year. Authorities will announce the date for the launch of the mining businesses only after receiving permission from the regional government.

For the time being, authorities are still drafting rules for small-scale jade and gems mining in other regions and states.—Khine Hsat Wai

MIC grants permits, endorsements to 19 enterprises

A total of 19 permits and endorsements with a capital of US$143.12 million were recently approved at the Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC) meeting 9/2018.

The permits and endorsements to enterprises were approved by the MIC and the respective investment committees of Yangon, Bago and Mandalay regions and Nay Pyi Taw. They will be operating in the manufacturing, agriculture and other service sectors, creating 10,922 local employment opportunities. The existing foreign investments also recruited 300 new employees.

A total of 50 domestic enterprises received permits and endorsements, bringing in a capital of $325.6 million, as of July in the current six-month interim period (April to September) prior to the 2018-2019 fiscal year. Overall, foreign direct investments of $842 million flowed into the country so far, including increased investments and investments of over $149 million in the Thilawa Special Economic Zone.

MIC expects to attain $3 billion within the six-month (April to September) interim period but only over $800 million has been brought into the country so far. If projects with large investments, which are delayed by some ministries, are permitted, it can exceed the target. Projects, such as electric supply using LNG, are still under discussion. MIC is facing difficulties to meet the target with the current inflow of foreign investments, said U Aung Naing Oo, secretary of MIC.

In the similar period, five domestic enterprises were approved by MIC and respective investment committees from Chin and Mon states and Mandalay and Bago regions. They will be operating in the hotel and manufacturing sectors, creating over 364 job opportunities for local residents.

A total of 50 domestic enterprises made investments of $135 million (Ks700 billion) over three months. The total domestic investment flow exceeded $136 million (Ks710 billion).

MIC will facilitate investment and make progress more quickly than before, starting this month. It will also hold investment promotion fairs in states and regions, raising awareness over investment laws. MIC will also link with international commercial attaches and with the international chambers of commerce in Myanmar, promoting investment opportunities in each region.

At present, 60 per cent of foreign investments are in the Yangon Region. Mandalay attracts 30 per cent of investments. Other regions and states attain only a small portion of investments, according to the statistics released by the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration.—GNLM

Trade with Singapore totals $740 million in two months

BILATERAL trade between Myanmar and Singapore was US$740 million in the first two months of the current fiscal year, according to the latest statistics from the Ministry of Commerce.

From 1 April to 31 May, Myanmar imported a wide range of commodities amounting to $634.9 million from the Republic of Singapore, whereas its exports to the island country were valued at $105.9 million.

Myanmar’s exports to Singapore include agricultural products, footwear, textile and clothing, minerals, animal products and other miscellaneous items. Its imports from Singapore include food, rubber and plastics, fuel, capital goods, intermediate goods, consumer products, metals and chemicals, along with other products.

According to the ministry’s data, Myanmar-Singapore trade reached $3.838 billion in the 2017-2018 financial year. Myanmar conducts bilateral trade with Singapore mainly by sea.

Bilateral trade was at its peak in the 2014-2015 FY, reaching $4.896 billion.

Trade between the two countries was $2.967 billion in 2016-2017 FY; $3.696 billion in the 2015-2016 FY; $3.604 billion in the 2013-2014 FY; $2.825 billion in the 2012-2013 FY and $3.656 billion in the 2011-2012 FY.

Singapore is one of the top investors in Myanmar, having invested $2.163 billion during the last financial year.

According to the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration, Myanmar has approved Singapore’s three new investment projects, worth $30.5 million this FY.—Swe Nyein

Workers roll sheets of raw rubber into a machine to dry in the sun. Myanmar still imports rubber from Singapore. PHOTO: KHON (WIN PA)
State Counsellor holds talks with EAO leaders

STATE Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, in her capacity as the chair of the Central Committee on Holding the Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong, received the leaders of ethnic armed organizations who are attending the Third Session of the peace conference yesterday.

At the meeting at the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre in Nay Pyi Taw, the State Counsellor was accompanied by Union Minister U Kyaw Tint Swe, Vice Chairman of the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee, Dr. Tin Myo Win, Chairman of the Peace Commission, Deputy Ministers U Min Thu, U Khin Maung Tin and Director-General U Zaw Htay, while the ethnic delegation was comprised of Saw Mutu Sae Poe, Chairman of the Karen National Union, Vice Chairman Pado Saw Kwe Htoo Win, U Bhun Htun and U Sai Ngin of the Restoration Council of Shan State, Chairman of the New Mon State Party Nai Htaw Mon and Vice Chairman Nai Han Thar, Vice Chairman of the Arakan Liberation Party Khang Soe Naing Aung, Chin National Front Chairman U Pu Zing Cung, Vice Chairman of the PaO National Liberation Organisation Khun Myint Tun, the All Burma Students’ Democratic Front Chairman U Than Gae, Saw Mu Shae of the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army, General Secretary of the Karen National Liberation Army (Peace Council) Naw Kapaw Htoo and Vice Chairman of the Lahbu Democratic Union Kyar Har.

At the meeting, the two sides discussed a time table for success of the national reconciliation and peacemaking process, seeking ways for solving the challenges through political dialogues and close cooperation and discussion between key leaders of the two sides to find solutions.

—Myanmar News Agency

Day Three of 21st Century Panglong Third Session

SECTOR-wise meetings were held on the third day of the Third Session of the Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong, which was convened yesterday in Nay Pyi Taw at the Myanmar International Convention Centre II.

During the political sector meeting, U Aung Thwin Oo, Sai Ram Kyaw Hmu and Daw Chin Chin were facilitators and read the guidelines and rules for conference representatives, observers and facilitators.

Also, meeting attendees discussed political sector policy proposals and compiled the discussion.

During the economic sector meeting, U Aung Hlaing Moe, U Kyaw Lin Oo, Saw Franklin, Nan Yin Han Pha, Daw Thuzar Thant and Sai Win Latt acted as facilitators and read the conference rules, guidelines and rules for conference representatives, observers and facilitators. Following this, discussions on basic economic sector principles, the compilation of comments from each group, along with the setting and confirming of decisions and records were made.

In the social sector meeting, the facilitators were U Kyaw Kyaw Oo, Salai Aung Myint and Daw Sandar Lwin, who explained the form of the meeting, guidelines for facilitators and social sector policies. Compilation of the discussion on policy proposals were then put on record.

Similarly, Lt-Col Saw Cho Aung, Daw Z Nan Raw, Sai Om and U Aung Myo Htwe and Salai Za Kyaw O Lyan were facilitators for the security sector meeting.

Afterwards, an explanation of programs for sector-wise meetings, the reading and explanation of work guidelines for the facilitator group and questions on the security sector work committee meeting were conducted. Suggestions for workshops were then obtained and meeting attendees discussed and suggested national defence matters, subtitles and definitions of security and reintegration.

Also, U Aung Kyaw Zan, Dr. Lwin Lwin We, Salai Ngun Lyan San, U Hlaing Bone Myint and Khan Kyaw Swe were facilitators at the land and environment sector meeting and read the guidelines and rules for conference representatives, observers and facilitators.

Following this, representatives from government, Htuttaw, Tatmadaw, Ethnic Armed Organisations and political parties discussed the policy proposals, point by point, and then put on record the compilation of the discussion.

Later in the day, Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) secretariat members conducted a press conference regarding the sector-wise meetings conducted on the third day of the conference.—Myanmar News Agency
Mahn Ba Khaing, ready to lay down his life for independence

By Than Htike

PHOTO: THAN SOE

Mahn Ba Khaing, a Karen national leader, was one of the martyred leaders who was assassinated on 19 July 1947. He was serving as the Minster for Industry and Labour in Bogyoke (General) Aung San’s interim government.

A famous quote attributed to him was, “I am not afraid to die for the independence of my nation and countrymen.”

Mahn Ba Khaing was feeling ill on the day of the unfortunate meeting at the Secretariat. His wife implored him not to go but he ignored his own health-concerns and attended the meeting, sitting at the right of Bogyoke Aung San and at the edge of the table closest to the door from where the gunmen entered.

“My mother told me when she arrived at the hospital she saw Daw Khin Kyi (Bogyoke’s wife) cradling Bogyoke Aung San in her arms, as they took his body home. My mother fainted when she saw my father. The bodies of the martyred leaders were moved to the Jubilee Hall,” said Daw Myint Myint Khaing, daughter of Mahn Ba Khaing and a retired professor from Yangon East University (Mathematics Department).

“A national ceremony offering soon (meals) to a hundred monks was held at the Jubilee Hall on 11 April 1948. A similar ceremony was held at Yangon City Hall too. My mother offered to offer soon to 40 monks every year and to 5 monks every month at our home. She continued this till the day she passed away at the age of 61 on 2 July 1975 at our house in University Avenue. I was three years old when my father passed away and my younger brother just an infant,” said Daw Myint Myint Khaing.

She and her family currently live in their house in Tamway Township. She said she used to attend the St. Francis Convent mission school (Onew Basic Education High School 4) across the street together with (Bogyoke Aung San’s daughter and now the State Counsellor) Daw Aung San Nye Kyi and (Bogyoke Aung San’s son) U Aung San Lin. Daw Myint Myint Khaing and U Aung San Lin were one year ahead in the Kindergarten class.

“Our family faced a lot of difficulties after my father passed away. Our bad luck started since 1963. My mother’s gas station was taken away in the nationalization process on 20 October. My father opened a banana wholesale shop, but after my mother passed away there were no more bananas coming from the villages, so we had to close down our business. The building had to be renovated from bomb blast damages, too,” said Daw Myint Myint Khaing.

“When the BOC Company gave us gas permits, my uncle U Ah Maung gave us their plot of land in East Race Course Road to open a store. I was told that General Ne Win met personally with the wives of the martyred leaders when the gas stations were nationalized. He told them they would receive a sort of Ks 1,000 pension a month.”

Mahn Ba Khaing was born in Yonetalin Village in Hinthada District. He was born to village elder Mahn Pe Kone and Daw Pu on 26 October 1903. He attended Hpa Hsa Pa La (Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League), Chairman of the Karen Youth Association and Minister for Industry and Labour

I conclude this article with gratitude towards Mahn Ba Khaing, one of the nine martyred leaders, who helped form the Hpa Hsa Pa La (Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League), Chairman of the Karen Youth Association and Minister for Industry and Labour.

* Mahn Ba Khaing, was a Karen national leader. He was one of the martyred leaders, and started serving as the Minister for Industry and Labour in Bogyoke (General) Aung San’s interim government in September 1946.
* He was born in Yonetalin Village in Hinthada District, to village elder Mahn Pe Kone and Daw Pu on 26 October 1903.
* He attended Hinthada ABM School and later established a school to teach the Karen language to children as well as founding the Karen Youth Association.
* He was elected as a parliamentarian for northern Pathein region in 1937.
* Mahn Ba Khaing was heavily involved in resisting the Japanese and advocated for Kayin-Bamar solidarity.
* He bravely participated in the fight against Japanese troops and made utmost efforts to promote friendship between Burmese and Karen societies. He also strived for emergence of Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPFL) and served as a member of its central executive committee. He was elected as Chairman of Karen Youth Organization.
* He, along with other leaders, was assassinated at 10:37 am on 19 July 1947.
Road to peace long, but well worth the effort for country and people

By Hanthawady U Ohn Kyaw

N the eve of the 71 st anniversary of Martyr’s Day, it is with a gloomy heart that I share in this article some of my experiences and attitudes to life by Bogyoke Aung San, the architect of our country’s independence and our national leader.

Extraordinary outlook

The opinions, outlooks and perspectives to life as seen by Bogyoke Aung San were truthful, straightforward, frank, outspoken, forthright, blunt, sincere, direct, plain-spoken, unrepressed, and unvarnished.

Intent

The purpose of this article is to share Bogyoke’s outlook and attitudes with the new generation, who will shoulder the onerous duties of the nation.

Shame independence granted by Japanese

On 1 August 1943, the Japanese Government granted Myanmar a character independence, and at the same time Colonel Aung San was promoted to Major General. Myanmar became nominally independent in 1945 under Japanese occupation.

Personal outlook of Bogyoke

At that juncture, Bogyoke was writing an autobiography where he courageously unveiled “one’s own truth”. Some of his thoughts were translated and quoted into English as follows.

Bogyoke’s outlook on English

“In the February 1940 issue of Thanlwin Magazine, Thakin Aung San published a paper with the title ‘Outlook on politics of Thakin Aung San’.

“My outlook on English

Bogyoke studied and mastered the English language not for personal gain, but for the benefit of the nation.

Degree of certainty is (100%).

In the 1936-37 academic year, Bogyoke Aung San firmly maintained with full conviction on his personal life and opinions in conjunction with the outlook and perspective of human existence in Ocycy Magazine.

“... I am thankful to the heavens angels who lend strong support to my unforgettable mind, even in the darkest hours of the night. Even if my head was soaking with blood, I would never lose down in surrender.”

Would never surrender

“Beyond the greed and the anger, there is a dangerous monster than peace. Nothing is better than peace.

An advance practice for prison environment

In the early part of 1939, Ko Aung San was a university student. During summer holidays, he stayed at the Yangon University Students’ Union building, practicing on living like an inmate. At night, Bogyoke slept alone on a bamboo bench instead of sleeping without a mattress, blanket or mosquito net, enduring all the suffering. He considered the campus bench as if it were a royal wedding bed.

One day, an elderly woman named Daw Ryi Myint, the owner of a tea shop at the Students’ Union, asked Ko Aung San why he was always sleeping on the same floor. Bogyoke answered that he was practicing to be a prisoner, to suffer and tolerate so that he would be ready when he actually would be jailed by the authorities.

Bogyoke’s outlook on English

While serving as student leader, Bogyoke studied the English language very hard. He wrote his speeches in English and he delivered his speeches in English.

On 28 January 1944, he delivered a speech in English in front of a very large audience at the APPFL Conference held at Shwedagon Pagoda.

“... Bogyoke interpreted the politics of the time into a merry assent of topics in an article.

Muddled politics of Myanmar

“Looking back into the chronicle of Myanmar politics, it is found to be a confusing one. Myanmar people have varied and endless ideologies such as the home rule; independent course of action; communal system; rule of the poor; and nationalism.

Bogyoke lamented and bewailed over the different sets of diverse dogmas upheld by the then politicians.

Politics covers all aspects of social affairs.

“When the human being has evolved from the Stone Age into civilisation, the system of ‘politics’ was born out of it. I am of the view that politics must be approached through scientific assessment and evaluation.”

Bogyoke Aung San had pointed out his perception on politics in many ways.

Bogyoke advocated for approaching politics through scientific views in conjunction with social affairs, and not to go crazy and wild, similar to what the so-called political parties wanted to do.

Nevertheless, there is a need to submit my sincere tribute to the Martyrs with fond regard and respect.

Translated by UMT (UIC)

To hoist flag of Myanmar half-mast and to sound siren on 71st ‘Martyrs’ Day’

The President’s Office has issued an instruction to government departments and institutions, which in turn have to convey the instruction down to the lower levels of government organizations and the public, for the flag of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to hoist half-mast throughout the whole country, on Thursday 19 July (71st Martyrs’ Day). Myanma Radio and Television to transmit the sound of siren at 10:07 am, the time Bogyoke Aung San and his colleagues were assassinated, and all vehicles on the roads to stop for a moment and honk their horns.”

Myanmar News Agency

U Hlinn Lynn Presents Credentials to the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam

U Hlinn Lynn, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to Brunei Darussalam, presented his Credentials to His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzuddinewhat the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam on 7 July 2018 in Bandar Seri Begawan – Myanmar News Agency

Myanmar Daily Weather Report

(Based on 7:00 pm Friday 13th July 2018)

BAY INERENCE: According to the observations at 10:10 hrs M.S.T yesterday, the low pressure area over the North-west of the Bay of Bengal will move to south-west over the coastal waters of the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal.

FUTURE FORECAST: A low pressure system over the eastern half of the Bay of Bengal will move towards the coastal waters of the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal.

BAY FORECAST: On Saturday 14th July, the low pressure area will move over the south-eastern coastal waters of the Bay of Bengal.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL: 1300 HRS 14TH JULY 2018

Rain or thunderstorms will be scattered over the coastal waters of the Bay of Bengal.

Agricultural activities in the coastal areas are advised to take precautionary measures to protect crops. People are advised to take precautions to protect livestock and property.

TohoingforofMyanmarhalf-mastandtosound siren on 71st ‘Martyrs’ Day’

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Myanmar News Agency
State Counsellor attends dinner for artistes from MMPO

STATE Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi attended a dinner hosted by Union Minister for Information Dr. Pe Myint and wife Daw Khin Nwe Oo for artistes from the Myanmar Motion Picture Organization (MMPO) at the residence of the Union Minister for Information yesterday.

Also attending the dinner were Chairman of Nay Pyi Taw Council Dr. Myo Aung, Deputy Minister for Information U Aung Hla Tun, Nay Pyi Taw Council member U Aung Myin Tun, Nay Pyi Taw Development Committee member U Min Thu, Myanmar Motion Picture Organization patron Baji Soe Moe, Chairman of Myanmar Motion Picture Organization U Zin Wine, artistes, directors, producers of motion picture and invited guests.

The State Counsellor extended her greetings to the guests, noting recent efforts by the government to boost Myanmar’s film industry. “We want to establish a modern movie park in Nay Pyi Taw. By doing so, it is expected to make a positive contribution to the development of the motion picture industry. We should take into consideration to make the use of the good points of Nay Pyi Taw such as its natural environment and beauty and its transportation hub. With the progress of political, economic and social affairs, we should make an effort to conduct the Myanmar Motion Picture sector: I would like you to collect these historical and arts heritages and turn them into a force for the nation”, she said.

The Union Minister for Information explained the process of striving for Nay Pyi Taw to become an entertainment city, and the cooperation with the Myanmar Motion Picture Organization. MMPO patron Baji Soe Moe also extended greetings, and the MMPO Chairman U Zin Wine was introduced to the attendees. Afterwards, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi greeted the attendees. — MNA

UPC aims for basic principles for democracy, federal system for 2019

THE Secretariat of the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee held a press conference yesterday in Nay Pyi Taw following day three of the Third Session of the Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong.

U Zaw Htay, Secretariat member of the UPDJC, said State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and leaders of the ethnic armed organisations held talks yesterday seeking ways for overcoming challenges of the national reconciliation and peace process, for holding better and more effective political dialogues and close cooperation between the decision makers of the two sides.

At the meeting, the two sides agreed to discuss the points in detail following the Third Session of the Peace Conference, he added. Regarding the political sector, four groups agreed to discuss the points in detail following the Third Session of the Peace Conference, he added. His comment was that the four points submitted by the UPDJC would be part of efforts for getting the basic principles for democracy and federal government.

The government set its target of reaching agreement on basic principles for a federal system in 2018 and two sessions in 2019 as part of efforts for getting the basic principles for democracy and a federal system. The government set its target of reaching agreement on basic principles for a federal system in 2019 and laying down foundations for the federal system in 2020, following the official and unofficial meetings.

The representatives of the government, the Tatmadaw, the Hluttaw and ethnic armed organisations agreed on original meanings of the 14 points and will discuss choice of words and spellings in groups today. —Ye Khaung Nyunt

Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker receives Malaysian ambassador

U T Khun Myat, Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw, received the Ambassador of Malaysia Mr. Zahairi Baharim at the Pyithu Hluttaw building in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

At the meeting, they cordially discussed promoting friendly relations and cooperation between Malaysia and Myanmar, promoting bilateral cooperation in the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) and Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), boosting economic and investment between the two countries, health care and labour issues. — Myanmar News Agency

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi poses for photo with (MMPO) artistes at the residence of the Union Minister for Information. PHOTO: MNA

UPDJC Secretariat holds a press conference. PHOTO: PHOE HTAUNG
New continental report hails E. Africa’s economic performance

ADDIS ABABA — The East African region has enjoyed a more resilient economic growth as compared to other parts of the continent over the past few decades, revealed a report released by the African Union (AU) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Center.

Africa’s Development Dynamics 2018, which was released on Wednesday at AU’s headquarters in Ethiopia’s capital Addis Ababa, indicated mixed performances of different African regions in terms of growth, jobs and inequalities.

According to the report, the East African region has enjoyed stronger and more resilient economic growth than the other regions of the continent, at over 4 percent annually since 1990. The report also noted East Africa’s economic trajectory as a “more diversified economy.”

The first edition of Africa’s Development Dynamics report on Wednesday also revealed that the East African region had managed to reduce extreme poverty by 23 percent between the year 1990 and 2013, followed by West Africa which is able to reduce poverty level by 12 percent during the reported period.

The report, however, indicated the major challenges witnessed in other parts of the continent, including the Central African region, where the number of jobs in the formal economy has been falling since 2015. It also revealed that inequality in Africa is most prevalent in Southern Africa, which in terms of income contains six out of the ten most unequal countries in the world.

In addition to the underemployment and vulnerable employment that characterize most of the African labor markets, some countries in North and Southern Africa face high structural employment, according to the report.

The report also commended some African countries for their strategic partnership with China and other emerging economies.

“The decision by certain countries to increase investment in infrastructure and the growing number of commercial partnerships - with China, India and other emerging countries - have also proved judicious,” the report indicated.

The report, among other things, revealed that favorable trend in commodities prices, strong domestic demand, progress in the pursuit of macroeconomic policies and strategies to diversity national economies have been major drivers of the continent’s recent growth, which is forecast to reach 4 percent annually between 2018 and 2020.

— Xinhua

Egypt raises cigarette prices by at least 10 percent to reduce budget deficit

CAIRO — Egypt on Thursday raised the prices of cigarettes and tobacco products by at least 10 percent as part of its efforts to reduce budget deficit in the 2018-2019 fiscal year.

“The government seeks to collect 58.5 billion Egyptian pounds (about 3.27 billion U.S. dollars) of taxes from cigarettes and tobacco products in the new budget for the 2018-2019 fiscal year,” said Ibrahim al-Imbabi, head of the tobacco division of the Chamber of Food Industries at the Federation of Egyptian Industries.

The prices of some brands of cigarettes, particularly local ones, increased by 10 to 15 percent, while others by up to 29.4 percent.

According to the new price list released by Egypt’s dominant cigarette maker Eastern Tobacco Company, the value added tax (VAT) represents at least 70 percent of the pack price.

In a televised statement Wednesday the company chairman, Mohamed Haroun, said that 50 percent of the new price increase will be directed to the newly launched health insurance system.

The company said in a recent statement that it produced 83 billion cigarettes in the 2016-2017 fiscal year.

Egypt has been suffering economic recession over the past few years due to political instability and relevant security challenges. It devaluated its currency in November 2016 as part of a strict three-year economic reform program based on austerity measures, including fuel and energy subsidy cuts and tax hikes.

The liberalization of the Egyptian pound’s exchange rate encouraged the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to support Egypt’s economic reform plan with a 12-billion-dollar loan, two thirds of which has already been delivered.

In mid-June, Egypt increased fuel prices by up to 66.6 percent as prescribed by the IMF to continue the implementation of the country’s economic reform program. — Xinhua

12 injured in fuel tank explosion near Egypt’s Cairo airport

CAIRO — Twelve people were injured in a fuel tank explosion near Egypt’s Cairo International Airport on Thursday night, but the air traffic was not affected.

Security sources told the state-run MENA news agency that blast occurred in Cairo’s Heliopolis district.

Two tanks that belong to a petrochemical company exploded outside the airport, said Egyptian Civil Aviation Minister Mohamed Younis al-Masri in a statement. All domestic and international flights have been operating normally he said.

The minister added that the explosion was caused by high temperature and the fire was under control. — Xinhua

30 killed in US-led airstrikes targeting residential areas in Syria’s Deir al-Zour

DAMASCUS — At least 30 people were killed and dozens of others wounded overnight by U.S.-led airstrikes in the eastern Syrian province of Deir al-Zour, state news agency SANA reported Friday.

The airstrikes targeted the residential areas in the towns of Baghour Fqani and Sousheh on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River near Al-Bukamal city in eastern Deir al-Zour, it said.

The death toll was likely to rise as many of the wounded are in critical condition, it added.

Dozens of homes were destroyed in the towns, said SANA, accusing the U.S.-led coalition of attacking the towns to punish the local residents for refusing the entry of the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

The towns are located inside the small pocket controlled by the militant group Islamic State (IS) in the eastern countryside of Deir al-Zour.

The Syrian government, however, contended that the real goal of the coalition is to prolong the crisis in Syria as it uses IS as a pretext to further destabilize the country. — Xinhua

A man smokes a cigarette at a public place. PHOTO: XINHUA

Security forces stand guard outside the petrochemical company where two tanks exploded in Cairo, Egypt on 13 July 2018. PHOTO: XINHUA

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WORLD
LONDON — The British diver who found 12 Thai boys and their coach trapped alive in a flooded cave has described his “massive relief” as he counted them one by one, in what he called an unprecedented rescue operation.

Richard Stanton, one of a pair of British caving experts who located the “Wild Boars” team, gave reporters Friday a first-hand account of the moment he saw the boys emerge from behind a rock face onto a muddy ledge kilometres (miles) inside the Tham Luang cave.

“That was a massive, massive relief. Initially we weren’t certain they were all alive — as they were coming down I was counting them until I got to 13,” he said.

“We couldn’t see them initially — they had to come round the corner.”

The discovery prompted the stunning rescue of the boys who captivated Thailand and the world, with the final members finally emerging safely Tuesday after 18 days underground.

In order to rescue the boys, divers had to contend with a treacherous escape route made up of narrow, water-filled tunnels, with the threat of heavy rain injecting urgency to the bid.

“The mission was “an order of difficulty much higher than anything that’s been accomplished anywhere around the world by any other cave diving team,” said Stanton.

Footage of the moment Stanton and John Volanthen discovered the 13 dishevelled and emaciated boys was viewed millions of times after it was posted on the official Facebook page of Thai Navy SEALs, prompting hope for their rescue.

“You hear on the video, John said ‘How many?’,” Stanton said. “I’d already counted them, they were already there.”

Fellow diver Chris Jewell provided new details of the operation, describing how Thai authorities had diverted rivers on the mountain top to help control water levels in the cave.

The measure “brought additional time to get this outcome,” Jewell said.

Stanton rejected suggestions the divers were heroes. “We were just using a very, very unique skill set which we normally use for our own interest,” he said. “Sometimes we are able to use that to give something back to the community and that’s what we did.” —AFP

US President Donald Trump launched an extraordinary attack on Prime Minister Theresa May’s Brexit strategy, plunging the transatlantic “special relationship” to a new low as they prepared to meet Friday on the second day of his tumultuous trip to Britain.

In an interview conducted before he began his visit, which will draw large protests, Trump said May’s plans for close future relations with the EU would “probably kill” her hopes for a trade deal with the United States.

He told The Sun tabloid it was not what Britons backed when they voted in a June 2016 referendum to quit the European Union, and also said former foreign minister Boris Johnson, who resigned this week over the Brexit plan, would make “a great prime minister.”

Junior British foreign minister Alan Duncan sought to brush off the remarks, telling BBC radio: “Donald Trump is a controversialist, that’s his style... I don’t think we see it as rude.”

But the comments drew outrage from some British lawmakers and will make for an awkward atmosphere with May when the pair meet at her country retreat of Chequers for a working lunch, followed by a press conference.

They also undermine the prime minister as she faces speculation of a leadership challenge from euro sceptics in her Conservative party following the resignations of Johnson and Brexit secretary David Davis.

Trump, a long-time supporter for Brexit, said he had advised May to leave the EU in a different way but was ignored.

“I would have done it much differently. I actually told Theresa May how to do it but she didn’t agree, she didn’t listen to me,” he told The Sun.

“She wanted to go a different route. I would actually say that she probably went the opposite way. And that is fine. She should negotiate the best way she knows how. But it is too bad what is going on.” Referring to the Brexit blueprint published by the government on Thursday, which calls for close trading links with the EU after Brexit, Trump said: “The deal she is striking is a much different deal than the one the people voted on.

“It was not the deal that was in the referendum. I have just been hearing this over the last three days. I know they have had a lot of resignations. So a lot of people don’t like it.”

Duncan suggested the president had not seen the detail of the plan when he gave the interview on Wednesday, while also stressing that the much-vaunted special relationship was about much more than Brexit.

But Anthony Gardner, who was former president Barack Obama’s ambassador to the EU, held nothing back in attacking Trump’s attack on May as “totally unacceptable” and “unprecedented” in the middle of a high-profile visit.

“He is out of control and an embarrassment. He is an (a) one-man wrecking machine,” Gardner tweeted.

Trump flew into Britain on Thursday, having already subjected NATO allies in Brussels to a roasting over their levels of defence spending.

“Kill the deal!”

May has insisted that her Brexit plan will allow Britain to strike its own lucrative trade deals with countries like the US after leaving the EU in March next year.

She pressed Trump about the deal on Thursday at a gala dinner at Blenheim Palace, the birthplace of Britain’s World War II leader Winston Churchill.

Brexit “creates an opportunity to reach a free trade agreement that creates jobs and growth here in the UK and right across the United States”, she said. But Trump poured cold water on May’s offer.

“If they do a deal like that, we would be dealing with the European Union instead of dealing with the UK, so it will probably kill the deal,” he said.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders later told reporters Trump was “thankful for the wonderful welcome” he received in Britain.

“The president likes and respects Prime Minister May very much. As he said in his interview with The Sun he ‘is a very good person’ and he ‘never said anything bad about her’,” she said.

Tea with the queen

Trump and May are due to watch a display of military special forces on Friday before their formal talks which will cover Russia, ahead of a summit in Finland on Monday between Trump and President Vladimir Putin.

Putin’s government is accused by May’s of unleashing a deadly nerve agent in the English city of Salisbury. Moscow denies the charge, but May is pressing Trump to raise the issue with Putin.

Trump will later Friday take tea with Queen Elizabeth II at Windsor Castle, before spending the weekend in Scotland on a private visit that will likely take 18 holes at one of the property magnate’s golf courses, where more protesters await him.

He will not attend any high-profile events in London but a mass protest is planned in the capital on Friday, where demonstrators will fly a giant balloon next to the British parliament depicting Trump as a nappy-clad baby.

The balloon was authorised by London Mayor Sadiq Khan, who has crossed swords with Trump several times after the president posted factually incorrect messages over a series of terror attacks in Britain in 2017.

In his Sun interview, Trump said Khan had done “a very bad job on terrorism”, which he linked to migration. The mayor defended his record to the BBC.

—AFP
Kim seeks “new future” in ties with US in letter to Trump

WASHINGTON — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has sought “a new future” in relations with the United States, saying he believes efforts to improve ties will succeed, according to a letter addressed to U.S. President Donald Trump. But the letter, which Trump posted in an image with an English translation on Twitter on Thursday, made no reference to denuclearization, which Kim committed to achieve in a joint statement he signed with Trump in Singapore. “I firmly believe that the strong will, sincere efforts and unique approach of myself and Your Excellency Mr. President aimed at opening up a new future between the DPRK and the U.S. will surely come to fruition,” Kim said, according to the translation of the letter dated last Friday.

DPRK is the acronym of North Korea’s official name, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.—Kyodo News
‘Skyscraper’ towers over summer schedule of sequels

LOS ANGELES — A glance through the summer movie schedules reveals one rather depressing common denominator: every single big budget release is a sequel — apart from one.

Dwayne Johnson cuts a solitary figure in that all-important late May to early August period — when movie-goers seek refuge from the heat in air-conditioned multiplexes — as the only star of an entirely original blockbuster.

Even “Skyscraper,” which hits US theaters on Friday, is something of a 1970s and 80s disaster movie pastiche, with Johnson walking — or climbing, much of the time — the well-worn path of the traditional action hero.

“I wanted to make a movie that was an homage to ‘Die Hard’ and ‘Towering Inferno’,” the 46-year-old star said at the premiere in New York on Wednesday.

The Universal release casts the former wrestler as a retired amputee FBI hostage rescuer turned security expert who has to clear his name and snare the bad guys when the world’s tallest building goes up in flames in Hong Kong.

Men in tights

It’s been a tough few months for film fans desperate to see something a little more nuanced than giant robots and men in tights lurching each other repeatedly in mid-air.

“There are 11 sequels on either side of us in our corridor. Who really gets to say they are in an original movie that this brilliant mind created from scratch?” said “Skyscraper” producer Beau Flynn, gesturing down the arrivals line to writer-director Rawson Marshall Thurber.

“Everything was created from his head and it is something that has to be admired. I think, by the audience, and hopefully supported. It’s very hard to do that at this scale in Hollywood today.”

“Avengers: Infinity War” and “Deadpool 2” kicked off the blockbuster season, although both were released before what most people think of as the peak period, when school’s out and kids are begging to see the latest Marvel or DC offering. Since late May, we’ve been treated to “Solo: A Star Wars Story.” “Action Point,” part of the “Jackass” series of movies — “Ocean’s 8,” “Incredibles 2,” “Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom,” “Sicario: Day of the Soldado,” “The First Purge” and “Ant-Man and the Wasp.”

If they all sound familiar, it’s probably because you’ve seen or heard about their relatively similar predecessors — and we still have “Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again,” “The Equalizer 2” and “Mission: Impossible - Fallout” to sit through before the August schedules bring back more creative storytelling. It hasn’t entirely been a summer of retreads, capes and spandex suits, of course.

Ruling from your home: Inside Australia’s micronations boom

SYDNEY — Lounging on a sofa in his flowing robes, a gold crown resting on his snowy hair and a stuffed white toy tiger at his feet, Paul Delprat looks every inch the self-appointed Prince of the Principality of Wy.

Delprat, 76, is the self-appointed Prince of the Principality of Wy, a micronation consisting of his home in the north Sydney suburb of Mosman.

Micronations — entities that have proclaimed independence but are not recognised by governments — have been declared around the world. One of the latest is Asgardia, started by Russian scientist and businessman Maxim Serov.

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“The rise of micronations hasn’t just stemmed from the relaxed attitude of Australian governments willing to tolerate the tiny fiefdoms as long as they pay taxes. PHOTO: AFP

The rise of micronations hasn’t just stemmed from the relaxed attitude of Australian governments willing to tolerate the tiny fiefdoms as long as they pay taxes. PHOTO: AFP

Establishing a micronation is not without its hazards.

John Rudge, the Grand Duke of the Grand Duchy of Avram in Australia’s southern island state of Tasmania, issued his own notes and coins in 1980 after writing a PhD thesis about setting up a central bank. The government disputed his use of the word “bank” on the notes and took him to court, although the case was eventually dismissed, Rudge tells AFP. The country’s oldest micronation, the Principality of Hutt River, 500 kilometres (300 miles) north of Perth, was set up by Leonard Casley in 1970 after a row with the Western Australian state government over wheat quotas. Prince Leonard, who owns some 75 square kilometres (29 square miles) of farmland — an area larger than that of more than 20 bona fide states, territories or dependencies — was last year ordered by a court to pay Aus$3.2 million in taxes. Even so, the property reportedly makes a tidy sum for the now-retired prince — who handed over the reins to his youngest son Graeme last year — as a tourist attraction.

“Skyscraper” has been admired in some quarters for presenting women in empowering roles, including Neve Campbell, who plays Dwayne Johnson’s hard-as-nails ex-military wife. PHOTO: AFP

Willem Dafoe joins Disney’s ‘Togo’

LOS ANGELES — Actor Willem Dafoe will star in Disney’s live action film “Togo.”

According to The Hollywood Reporter, “The Florida Project” actor will play Seppala, the Finnish dog driver, in the film. To be directed by Ericson Core, the film is about 1925 serum run to Nome, Alaska, also known as the Great Race of Mercy, in which dog-sled teams relayed to transport diphtheria antitoxin serum through harsh conditions over nearly 700 miles to save the town from an epidemic.

The film is being developed for Disney streaming service which is expected to launch next year. It will be produced by Kim Zubick, Dafoe, 62, will also be seen in DC’s “Aquaman” which will hit the theatres in December this year.

He also has Dee Rees’ Netflix film, co-starring Anne Hathaway and Ben Affleck. PHOTO: PTI
First space tourist flights could come in 2019

LONDON — The two companies leading the pack in the pursuit of space tourism say they are just months away from their first out-of-this-world passenger flights — though neither has set a firm date.

Virgin Galactic, founded by British billionaire Richard Branson, and Blue Origin, by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, are racing to be the first to finish their tests — with both companies using radically different technology.

Moments of weightlessness
Neither Virgin nor Blue Origin’s passengers will find themselves orbiting the Earth: instead, their weightless experience will last just minutes. It’s an offering far different from the first space tourists, who paid tens of millions of dollars to travel to the International Space Station (ISS) in the 2000s.

Having paid for a much cheaper ticket — costing $250,000 with Virgin, as yet unknown with Blue Origin — the new round of space tourists will be propelled dozens of miles into the atmosphere, before coming back down to Earth. By comparison, the ISS is in orbit 250 miles (400 kilometers) from our planet.

The goal is to approach or pass through the imaginary line marking where space begins — either the Karman line, at 100 kilometers or 62 miles, or the 50-mile boundary recognized by the US Air Force.

At this altitude, the sky looks dark and the curvature of the earth can be seen clearly.

Virgin Galactic
With Virgin Galactic, six passengers and two pilots are boarded onto SpaceShipTwo VSS Unity, which resembles a private jet.

The VSS Unity will be attached to a carrier spacecraft — the WhiteKnightTwo — from which it will then detach at around 49,000 feet (15,000 meters.) Once released, the spacecraft will fire up its rocket, and head for the sky.

Then, the passengers will float in zero-gravity for several minutes, before coming back down to Earth.

The descent is slowed down by a “feathering” system that sees the spacecraft’s tail pivot, as if arching, before returning to normal and gliding to land at Virgin’s “spaceport” in the New Mexico desert. —AFP

High-energy “ghost particle” reveals birthplace of cosmic rays: studies

WASHINGTON — An international group of astrophysicists has for the first time determined the birthplace of a highest-energy neutrino, nearly four billion light-years away from Earth.

Two papers published on Thursday in the journal Science reported the multi-messenger observations that provide a clue to an unsolved mystery: the origin of cosmic rays.

High-energy cosmic neutrinos are ghostly subatomic particles that can travel unhindered for billions of light years from the most extreme environments in the universe, carrying unique information about the regions where they are produced.

IceCube, the largest detector specialized in hunting the particles, which was located at the South Pole, detected on Sept. 22 in 2017 the neutrino whose energy was more than 40 times that of the protons produced in the world’s largest particle accelerator at CERN outside Geneva.

The birth of neutrinos is always linked to proton interactions while the cosmic rays largely consist of high-energy protons, according to the studies.

Neutrinos, always accompanied by the photons, possess no charge, so unlike the electrically charged particles of cosmic rays that can be deflected by cosmic magnetic fields, they can travel through the universe without detours.

Then, a space observatory called Fermi-LAT reported that the direction of the neutrino was in line with a known gamma-ray source in an active star: the blazar TXS 0506+056, making the blazar a highly likely candidate for the neutrino source.

The blazar, a giant elliptical galaxy with a massive, rapidly spinning black hole at its core, is situated just off the left shoulder of the constellation Orion. It emits outflows of particles and energetic radiation moving close to the speed of light.

Those huge “jets” shoot out into space at right angles to the massive vortex that sucks matter into the black hole, according to the studies.

Astrophysicists have long suspected that these jets generate a substantial proportion of cosmic particle radiation.

“Now we have found key evidence supporting this assumption,” said Elisa Resconi from the Technical University of Munich, whose group contributed to the findings.

The findings, confirmed by ground- and space-based telescopes around the globe, demonstrated the advantage of combining the signals from different cosmic messengers, like neutrinos and photons. “The era of multi-messenger astrophysics is here,” said National Science Foundation director France Cordova. —Xinhua

Rare skull of elephant ancestor unveiled in France

PARIS — A French farmer kept quiet for years after stumbling across the skull of an extinct ancestor of the elephant near the Pyrenees mountains, the Natural History Museum of Toulouse has told AFP.

The farmer discovered the first-ever skull of a Pyrenean mastodon in 2014 while doing work on his land near the village of L’Isle-en-Dodon, about 70 kilometres (44 miles) southwest of Toulouse.

Worried that the farm would be overrun by hordes of amateur paleontologists he kept the find a secret for two years before eventually contacting the museum.

“It was only when we went there, in 2017, that we realised the significance of the discovery,” the museum’s management said.

The gomphothereum pyreniacum was “a kind of elephant with four tusks measuring around 80 centimetres, two on the upper jaw and two on the lower jaw,” museum director Francis Duranton told AFP on Wednesday.

Before that the only evidence that the giant herbivores had roamed the area millions of years ago were four teeth found in the same area in 1857.

“Now we have a full skull which will allow us to get a clearer picture of the anatomy of this species,” Duranton said.

“We’re putting a face on a species which had become almost mythical,” the museum’s curator Pierre Dalous added.

The skull has been unearthed and brought to a laboratory partly encased in rock.

“Now we have to chip away, centimetre by centimetre, to reveal the rest of the skull,” Dalous said, adding that experts were halfway through the work which is expected to be completed within six to nine months. —AFP
**SPORT**

14 JULY 2018

**THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR**

**Dejected England, Belgium aim to leave World Cup on a high**

SAINT PETERSBURG (Russia) — England manager Gareth Southgate admits the World Cup third-place play-off is a game that no team wants to play, but Saturday’s match against Belgium offers the chance to finish the tournament on a winning note.

A gut-wrenching 2-1 loss to Croatia after extra-time denied England a shot at a second World Cup triumph, instead setting up a consolation game against familiar foes Belgium. Roberto Martinez’s side, who were beaten 1-0 by France in the last four; topped Group G ahead of England after an Adnan Januzaj goal settled a low-key encounter in Kaliningrad.

That game saw both coaches heavily rotate their teams, and a similar scenario is likely in Saint Petersburg, with several fringe players pushing for a start.

“The honest thing is, it’s not a game any team wants to play in,” said Southgate, whose side have drawn praise for the way they have briefly united a country bitterly divided over Brexit.

However, he insisted that will not alter England’s approach as they look to achieve their best finish since they won the competition in 1966.

“We’ll want to give a performance of huge pride, there’s no question about that,” said Southgate.

“Every time we wear the shirt of our national team we want to play with pride, we want to play well and we want to win.”

Reserve goalkeepers Jack Butland and Nick Pope are the only two members of England’s 23-man squad yet to feature in Russia, as Southgate stuck with the same line-up throughout the knockout phase.

**Important game**

For Belgium and their “golden generation”, many of the key players should return for the 2022 World Cup, even if Vincent Kompany and Jan Vertonghen will probably be gone by then.

Martinez, who signed an extension until after Euro 2020 in May, can guide Belgium to the nation’s best result at the World Cup. They finished fourth in 1986.

“We want to finish on a high and these players deserve to finish on a high,” said the Spaniard.

“You need to try to see the opportunity of finishing third at the World Cup. That doesn’t happen too often, so we need to understand that this is an important game.”

**Inaugural Athletics World Cup set for London lift-off**

LONDON — The inaugural Athletics World Cup will be staged in London this weekend with the IAAF and British organisers hoping the concept will find a permanent slot in the calendar, despite clashing with other major sports events. The competition comes from the stated drive of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) president Sebastian Coe to attract new audiences with fresh ideas, utilising a format which provides non-stop action. There will be eight competing nations, with one entrant per team in every male and female track and field event up to the 1500 metres. Points tallied up at the close of two days at the London Stadium will determine which country lifts the platinum winners’ trophy. Great Britain, the United States, Jamaica, South Africa, China, Germany, France and Poland all qualified as the top eight in the medal standings at the 2017 IAAF world championships, also in London, and will share the $2 million (£1.42m) prize fund. “Each event is going to be filled with high-level athletes and high-level competition,” USA shot putter Darrell Hill said. And yet some argue the clash of dates with Sunday’s football World Cup final in Moscow, and the concluding day nearby of the Wimbledon tennis tournament, has left the new competition toiling to gain traction out of the starting blocks. As has the absence of a number of leading performers, including the current top three in the men’s 100 metres world rankings, Americans Noah Lyles, Ronnie Baker and Michael Rodgers, and British favourites Dina Asher-Smith and Laura Muir; with Germany and China also fielding weakened teams. — AFP

**Judo course at University of Yangon launched**

WITH the aim of promoting the sport of judo in Myanmar, a judo course was launched in Yangon on Wednesday, along with an exhibition and opening ceremony under the arrangement of the Myanmar Judo Federation (MJF) and the sport team from Yangon University.

During the opening ceremony, chairperson of the Judo Federation, U Tun Tun, attended and delivered a speech.

The Myanmar Judo Federation was founded in 1958. The sport originated in Myanmar in 1941 with the effort of 30 men (Thirty Comrades) who had studied military training in Japan.

Judo was introduced at Yangon University in 1966. Now with the aid of award-winning coaches and modern judo equipment, the MJF will be undertaking an effort to train and nurture new and talented judo fighters in Yangon University, said U Tun Tun.

He also remarked that, although judo disappeared from the university from 1969 to 1996, the quality of the athletes from Yangon University did not decline, as many judo athletes were qualified to compete in the 1996 Southeast Asian Peninsula Games hosted in Myanmar.

The ceremony was attended by university officials led by Rector of the University of Yangon Dr. Phoe Khaung, judo coaches and judo exhibitors from MJF.

The course will be attended by 30 judo devotees, with the aim of participating in judo competition at the university level. — GNLM