At the public sitting of the International Court of Justice held on Wednesday 11 December 2019, I said that it was an honour to appear as agent of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. It was indeed an honour for my delegation and myself to represent our country at the ICJ, but it was also a grave responsibility as the case submitted by The Gambia accused Myanmar of the most serious of crimes, genocide. Our delegation discharged this responsibility to the best of our ability, constantly keeping in mind the honour of our nation, the aspirations of our people, the future of our Union, and our obligations as a member of the international community.

We built our defence firmly on a foundation of honesty and respect for the rule of law, never losing sight of our ultimate goal, which is sustainable peace and harmony among all the communities in our country. Our legal team understood our concerns as well as our aspirations and I would like to take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation for the outstanding legal expertise, dedication to justice and good will that they brought to our case. Acting as our Counsel and Advocates were:

- Mr. Christopher Staker, member of the Bar of England and Wales,
- Mr. William Schabas, OC,
- Miss Phoebe Okowa, Professor of Public International Law, Queen Mary University of London, Advocate of the High Court of Kenya, member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration.

Every country passes through difficult times and Myanmar is no exception. Such trials provide us with an opportunity to assess our strengths and weaknesses, to reinforce one and rectify the other. To grow and develop, we need the courage and wisdom to face challenges honestly and constructively. The challenge that we are now facing at the ICJ stems back not just to the events of the last few years but to the missed opportunities in decades past to address the social, economic and political ills of Rakhine squarely. The past cannot be changed but we can make the best of the present to enable us to build a happy future.

I have often said that no national enterprise of any note can be successfully accomplished without the willing cooperation of the people. And such cooperation, to be truly effective, must be based on a sound understanding of the issues involved. The support of our people, given generously and unquestioningly,
Pyithu Hluttaw debates four annual reports from its committees

THE 14th regular session of second Amyotha Hluttaw held its 17th day meeting yesterday, with queries to the Ministry of Border Affairs, and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, and the release of unused state-owned properties from the respective ministries for urban development programmes.

Queries to ministries

MP U Than Aung of Kyaukkyi constituency asked whether there is any guarantee that the computers and related items provided by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems will not contain any preinstalled software.

Union Election Commission member U Myint Sae replied that they will have experts check on the computers when they receive them from IFES. He said that the computers will only be used for compiling electoral rolls and the processes for counting, tallying and announcing the results of votes during the election will be conducted in the manner stated in existing laws. He added that IFES and the UEC have no personal relations.

Next, U Myo Zaw Oo of Lewe constituency asked if the UEC is actively reviewing whether political parties are maintaining the pledges in the Political Parties Registration Law.

UEC member U Myint Sae replied that they continuously monitor political parties through the election sub-committees and may summon party officials for interviews if necessary. He said they had to warn two political parties to abide by Section 6 of the aforementioned law but have never as of yet had to abolish political parties for failing to abide by it.

After the Q&A session, Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U T Khun Myat announced the receiving of the Pyithu Hluttaw’s 14th regular session was held in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday where starred questions were raised, two annual reports debated, and the annual report of the Public Affairs Management Committee was tabled for approval.

Hlinethaya sports stadium, UEC affairs

Firstly, U Win Min of Hlinethaya constituency asked whether there were plans to make the indoor sports stadium on KanauNg Mintar Gyi Road in Shwe Lin Ban industrial zone accessible by the general public.

Deputy Minister U Kyaw Lin replied that his ministry has difficulties to maintain the stadium in the long run and cannot provide full administration to prevent squatters from coming in. He said the stadium and the land will be transferred to the Ministry of Health and Sports as soon as possible to facilitate public use.

Next, U Maung Myint of Mingin constituency asked whether there is any guarantee that the stadium and the land will be transferred to the Ministry of Health and Sports in the long run and can be kept accessible by the general public.

Deputy Minister U Kyaw Lin replied that his ministry will not provide full administration to the stadium in the long run and cannot be kept accessible by the general public.

Properties for urban development programmes

MP U Ko Ko Naing from Sagaing Region constituency 8 tabled a motion to the relevant ministries to release unused state-owned properties for urban development programmes.

MP U Kyaw Thaung from Sagaing Region constituency 1, MP U Kyaw Toke from Mandalay Region constituency 7 and MP U Hla Oo from Sagaing Region constituency 4 supported the motion. It was also debated by Tatmadaw Representative Major Ye Aung Saw, Daw Hla Htay (a) Daw Ohn Kyi from Mandalay Region constituency 4 and U Hla San from Magway Region constituency 1.

Deputy Minister for Planning, Finance and Industry U Maung Maung Win said the Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U T Khun Myat announced the receiving of the Pyithu Hluttaw’s 14th regular session was held in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday where starred questions were raised, two annual reports debated, and the annual report of the Public Affairs Management Committee was tabled for approval.

Committee Chairman U Yan Lin responded to MPs’ committee secretary U Maung Maung Oo tabled for the Hluttaw to approve the report and the Speaker approved it after gathering the deliberation of the assembly.

Similarly, U Myat Lay Oo of the Pyithu Hluttaw Farmer and Labour Affairs Committee tabled for the Hluttaw to approve their annual report and the Speaker approved it after gathering the deliberation of the assembly.

Next, a debate on another annual report, this time compiled by the Pyithu Hluttaw Public Affairs Management Committee, was led by U Tin Kyu Ko Oo (a) A Tut of Bilin constituency. Committee secretary U Tin Soe responded to the debate and then tabled for the Hluttaw to approve the report and the Speaker approved it after gathering the deliberation of the assembly.

Next, a debate on another annual report, this time compiled by the Pyithu Hluttaw’s 14th regular session will convene today. –Aye Aye Thant (MNA) (Translated by Zaw Htet Oo)
State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s speech on ICJ proceedings to be broadcast again

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s speech relating her experience of the proceedings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) will be broadcast again on the MRTV Programme at 8 a.m., noon, and 6 p.m. on 19 December. — MNA

Speech delivered by State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi about experiences of oral proceedings at International Court of Justice to public

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not just in Myanmar and The Hague but all over the world, was a great source of strength to us when we presented our case at the ICJ. However, I believe there are many who would like to acquire a more detailed knowledge of the proceedings in court and the possible legal and political consequences. And I would like to make this knowledge available to you as fully as possible, for not only is it your right, it is an asset to our country if our people are with us, not just with their hearts but also with their minds, solidity and steadfastly.

We are making arrangements for the full court proceedings to be translated into the Myanmar language and made available to the public. Moreover, tomorrow, members of the team who came with us to the Hague will be taking part in a discussion on the proceedings and the legal, political and diplomatic aspects of International Criminal Justice. I hope that our people will take a keen interest in these discussions to learn not just about the possible implications of the case for Myanmar, but also to acquire a broad understanding of international justice as it stands today.

It fell to me, as Myanmar’s Delegate, to present to the Court relevant facts pertaining to the situation on the ground in Rakhine today, as well as the historical context of the roots of conflict, economic, social and military, in the region. This was particularly important as the Agent, Counsel and Advocates for The Gambia had neglected to address those issues and barely touched on the ARSA attacks that had triggered the conflicts of 2016 and 2017. Neither was there any mention of the present armed conflict between the AA and the Tatmadaw, which has added to the complexity of the challenges in Rakhine. I did not dispute that in situations of armed conflict there could have been violations of human rights and infringement of universality accepted norms of justice and rule of law. However, these do not amount to genocide or intent of genocide. We now wait for the Court to make known its decision, very likely next month. Our case was presented honestly and fully, and I believe the arguments of our Counsel and Advocates were sound and in accordance with the highest norms of justice. Once again I would like to thank all the members of our legal team and the members of our delegation, and their counterparts at home, for their dedication and excellent work.

I can only conclude by thanking our people who rallied to us in our country’s time of need. They gathered at The Hague from different countries in Europe, as well as from such faraway places as the United States, Japan, Australia. And, of course, from Myanmar. Not all of them were affluent but they had not hesitated to come to in-fuse us with the strength of their trust and love. Our people with homes in The Hague opened their doors to strangers, providing them with shelter, meals, warmth, making them members of our Union family. Some who had come have become citizens of other countries but that in no way detracted from the value of their support. Citizenship is a provision under the law; the solidarity of hearts and minds is the solid foundation of unity.

I am heartened that our people who rallied to us had expressed their support in an orderly and civilized manner. In solidarity, we will overcome all the challenges that we may have to meet.

Together.

In solidarity, we will overcome all the challenges that we may have to meet.

UEC, Facebook discuss collaboration ahead of polls

UNION Election Commission Chairman U Hla Thein yesterday received a delegation from Facebook, led by its Director of Public Policy for Southeast Asia Mr Rafael Prankel, at the UEC office in Nay Pyi Taw.

At the meeting, they discussed collaboration on civic education and voter education, programme for curbing fake news and hate speech related to the generation elections, and current efforts for releasing factual information and electoral news.

Members of the UEC were also present at the meeting. — MNA
State Counsellor discusses rule of law, professionalism of MPF

The mindset of police forces can shape public attitudes and that they should lead in promoting public mentality. People will appreciate valiant efforts of police members for their security.

Referring to an eastern saying, she remarked that the worst kind of government was one which the people hated, a bad government was one which the people feared, a good government was one which the people praised, and the best kind of government was one which was invisible, which means serving people from the behind without creating any problems for the people.

International standard of police to citizen ratio is 1 to 450. However, each Myanmar police is serving for 1,000 people, showing insufficient manpower.

For security purposes and this required that more efforts had to be exerted. More police personnel have been dispatched to Rakhine State for security reasons. MPF needs to promote their image through responsible security measures.

The first line of defence for external threats is diplomacy which causes no harm to any party, the second line is development, and the last line is military action; once this stage is reached, there can be harm and losses to both sides.

While the second line of development is not strong enough for the country yet, police forces need to make more strenuous efforts. It is a chance for police to serve the country. Police need to work for people as an opportunity for merit-making. The nature of the police force is not the same as the military. The former is more responsible for security, peace and stability of people in their daily life.

The State Counsellor also advised the MPF to uplift their willingness, endeavours, attitude and knowledge to overcome their difficulties and challenges.

She said it was important to use state-of-the-art modern technology, and that the government is allocating possible budgets to the police force although it has not met the actual needs due to limited budget allocations.

Security forces are more influential figures than any other government departments in the country. However, police must try to secure people's respect instead of their fear, till the people believe that the police are taking responsibilities of security and stability for the public.

She also said the government needs to know the challenges of police personnel and give cash and kind assistance to the family members of police personnel who lost their lives in the line of duty in Rakhine State.

Psycho tests in recruiting police must include tests to identify the attitude of misuse in power. They must have strong determination to overcome challenges, persistence of the good or the bad in any circumstance of power or positions, and that they must work to leave a good tradition for the future.

The State Counsellor also stressed that it was important to have discussions between the senior officials and their subordinates for the requirements in MPF, and urged them to be loyal to the government.

Union Minister for Home Affairs Lt-Gen Kyaw Swe presented the functions of MPF and its coordination with the relevant ministries.

Next, the State Counsellor gave comments and suggestions based on the discussions to ensure coordination. She then had lunch together with senior police officers of MPF.

The meeting was attended by Union Minister for Home Affairs Lt-Gen Kyaw Swe, Union Minister for Office of the Union Government U Min Thu, Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Maj-Gen Aung Thu, Chief of MPF Police Lt-Gen Aung Win Oo, Deputy Chiefs of MPF Police Maj-Gen Myo Swe Win, Police Maj-Gen Aung Naing Thu and senior police officers from different branches under the MPP—MNA (Translated by Aung Khin)
Nay Pyi Taw commemorates International Migrants Day

Vice President U Myint Swe delivers the speech at the ceremony to commemorate the International Migrants Day at the MICC-II in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

PHOTO: MNA

NAY PYI TAW commemorated International Migrants Day at the Myanmar International Convention Centre-II yesterday with Vice President U Myint Swe delivering the opening speech.

In his speech, the Vice President first explained that 18 December was designated as International Migrants Day by the UN General Assembly during the 55th Session in 2000. He said this is the eighth year Myanmar has commemorated the event.

The Vice President said there are numerous factors for the rise of migrant workers and these include global economic shifts, different economic development rates among nations, difference in wages, seeking better job opportunities, climate change, and technological advancements making information on migration easily accessible which makes migrating for work between nations, especially from a developing country to a developed country, more common.

The Vice President said there has been a noticeable increase in migrant workers as a report in 2014 showed there were 150 million migrant workers around the world and it increased to 272 million in 2019, according to a UN report.

He said this year’s International Migrants Day theme was ‘Migration and Social Cohesion’ and focuses on how individual cooperation can benefit society, working together for the good of everyone, ensuring no ostracizing occurs, and increasing trust.

The Vice President called for the need to promote safe, systematic and legal migration for work and reducing illegal migration to other countries. He said taking illegal routes to migration carries the possibility of people landing in dangerous work environments, exploitation, unfulfilled rights and opportunities, human trafficking, forced labour and insufficient pay.

Myanmar participated in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration with other UN member nations in December 2018, said the Vice President. He said the agreement is not legally binding but reflects the pledge to cooperate among the member nations and will bring numerous benefits to Myanmar. He said female migrant workers and children are the most susceptible to exploitation and their needs should not be forgotten when implementing processes for better migrating work systems.

The Vice President said that migrant workers in Southeast Asia are usually indebted and a major portion of their pay is used to repay owed money. He said this greatly delays development in their lives and is a challenge to sustainable family reunification.

He said being free of debt will allow the creation of a good environment. He said the money migrant workers transfer back to their families is an important part of a nation’s GDP and as such, should be provided with a safe channel of remittance.

The Vice President said as expenses for migrant workers should be reduced and traveling implemented seriously, some employers are doing it for zero cost and the government is pushing for all employers to adopt this practice. He urged for licensed overseas employment agencies to abide by existing laws, bylaws, rules and regulations.

Next, the Vice President took a documentary photo with the attendees and concluded the first half of the programme. He then observed the commemorative displays of photographs, books and reports on International Migrants Day.

Later in the second part of the programme, a video clip on the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) assistance to the Myanmar government in promoting constructive benefits of migration and protecting the rights of migrant workers was shown.

This was followed by Union Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population U Thein Swe delivering an address on International Migrants Day and IOM Chief of Mission Mr Akio Nakayama read messages from the UN Secretary-General and the IOM Director-General.

Afterwards, the Union Minister conferred certificates of honor on the Joint Myanmar Affairs Committee, Bangkok-based Migrant Workers Network, Migrant Workers Rights Network, Education and Development Foundation, and Labour Hittai for all their assistance with the affairs of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand and the education, healthcare and social affairs of their families.

The event was attended by Union Ministers Lt-Gen Ye Aung, Dr Pe Myint, U Thein Swe and Dr Win Myat Aye, Nay Pyi Taw Council Chairman Dr Myo Aung, Deputy Minister U Kyaw Myo, Nay Pyi Taw Council members U Nyi Tun, regional/state cabinet ministers, Pyithu and Amyotha Hluttaw representatives, Ambassadors and diplomats, permanent secretaries, directors-general, department heads, UN officials, representatives of INGOs, NGOs, employers and employees, and invited guests.—MNA

(Transalated by Zau Htet Oo)
Vice President U Henry Van Thio attends Christmas dinner

Vice President U Henry Van Thio and wife Dr Shwe Hlusan handed over the Christmas present to the Vice President on behalf of all the Christian entities, and they in turn received Christmas presents handed by Union Minister Thura U Aung Ko.

Vice President U Henry Van Thio then took a documentary photo with the guests, Myanmar Council of Churches Vice-Chairman Bishop U Myat San speaking words of gratitude, and all the guests then sang a hymn.

Union Minister U Kyaw Tin attends 14th ASEM FM’s Meeting in Madrid

UNION Minister for International Cooperation, U Kyaw Tin, arrived back Yangon today after attending the 14th ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting held in Madrid, Spain from 15 to 16 December 2019. The Meeting was inaugurated by His Majesty King Felipe VI, the King of Spain and attended by Ministerial delegations from 51 members of ASEM and representatives from the European Union and the ASEAN Secretariat.

On 15 December 2019, the Union Minister attended the official welcome dinner hosted by the Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of the Kingdom of Spain.

The Union Minister delivered a statement at the Plenary Session of the 14th ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting held on 16 December 2019 under the theme “Revitalizing the multilateral system-advancing the ASEAN partnership on global issues.” In his statement, the Union Minister highlighted the vital role of ASEAN in promoting the relations between Asia and Europe at the time of rapid global change, the role of multilateralism in finding solutions to the global challenges including climate change and the national efforts of Myanmar for adaptation and mitigation of the effects of climate change. He also stressed the need to strengthen the effectiveness and independence of the United Nations and to ensure that response of the multilateral institutions match with the priorities and expectations of the member States concerned.

The Union Minister also highlighted that the observance of the principles of the UN Charter and the applicable international law is of utmost importance for the maintenance of the world peace and security. At the same time, he added, application of international law should be based on sovereign equality, impartiality and avoidance of double standards. He also emphasized the need to correct the mistake of allowing unwieldy mandate holders with no corresponding due diligence to adhere to the principles of independence, impartiality and integrity.

The Union Minister U Kyaw Tin also attended the Working Lunch-Retreat Session hosted by Mr Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. At the working lunch, the Union Minister gave a factual background of the communal violence in Rakhine State, which goes back into past centuries including the movement for creation of an autonomous space in Northern Rakhine State. He also informed the meeting of the ongoing measures taken by the Government to address the accountability of the alleged human rights violations.

While in Madrid, the Union Minister met with Dato Lim Jock Hoi, ASEM Secretary General and discussed on speeding up the implementation of priority projects for creating conducive conditions in Rakhine State for the repatriation process. The Union Minister also held bilateral meeting with Mr Fernando M. Valenzuela Marzo, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Europe Union, Spain and His Majesty King Felipe VI of Spain.

The Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) was established in 1996, to serve as a platform for informal dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe. Presently it comprises 53 partners: 30 European and 21 Asian countries, European Union and the ASEAN Secretariat. Next ASEM Summit will be held in Cambodia in November 2020. — MNA
Senior General Min Aung Hlaing to attend National Defence Day, People’s Army Foundation Day in Viet Nam

COMMANDER in Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and Myanmar Tatmadaw delegation left Mingalardon Air Base yesterday for Viet Nam at the invitation of Senior Lieutenant General Phan Van Giang, Chief of the General Staff of the Vietnam People’s Army.

Myanmar Tatmadaw delegation will attend the 30th anniversary of National Defence Day and the 75th anniversary of People’s Army of Viet Nam Foundation Anniversary.

On arrival at the Noi Bai International Airport, the Senior General and party were welcomed by Lt-Gen Ngo Minh Tien, Myanmar Ambassador to Viet Nam at the invitation of Senior Lieutenant General Phan Van Giang, Chief of the General Staff of the Vietnam People’s Army.

The Myanmar Tatmadaw delegation led by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing visit the 102 Mechanized Infantry Regiment of Vietnam People’s Army.

PHOTO: OFFICE OF THE C-IN-C OF DEFENCE SERVICES

Seminar focuses on building better employer-employee relations

A seminar on Constructive Industrial Relations and Job Security was convened in Yangon yesterday with representatives from the government, employers, and employees exchanging views on current challenges in labour relations.

Organized by the Confederation of Trade Unions of Myanmar (CTUM), the two-day seminar was held in the Hlinethaya Industrial Zone in the western part of Yangon. The speakers at the seminar echoed calls from the tripartite group for constructive relations between employers and employees.

Regarding good relations between employers and employees, Mar Si of Tailor Garment, a representative from the employers’ sector, highlighted the need for clear and concise directives from the government and stressed the importance of accountability and responsibility among employers.

She also highlighted the important role played by HR personnel in factories in preventing misunderstandings between employers and employees which could spark labour disputes.

Next, Aung Naing Tun, a representative of the basic labour union and from the Alpine Drinking Water Factory, spoke about labour challenges, which include discrimination at factories, surveillance, and attempts to break up labour unions.

“Giving overtime opportunities only to non-members of a labour union is leading to breaking up of the unions,” he said, adding that some factories restrict labour strikes when they recruit new workers.

U Zaw Than Tint, an official of the Labour Relations Department of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, called on both employers and employees to utilize the negotiation skills of the Work Coordination Committee, which is formed with three representatives from the employer’s side, three from the employees’ side, and three dignitaries chosen from among the local people, to settle labour disputes in factories.

“I am confident that if both employers and employees follow the EC (Employment Contract), labour disputes would decrease,” said U Zaw Than Tint.

Asked to comment on the labour environment in Myanmar, Mr Hiroyuki Nagumo, president of the Japan International Labour Foundation, said that after seeing the results of the discussion, he felt that Myanmar is still far from the point it needs to reach in terms of labour relations.

He said that to build good relations, employers and employees should not consider each other as enemies, and both sides should take responsibility and do their work dutifully.

He said the role of a labour union is not to fight with others but to build trust with them.

“Our stand is to try hard to build trust with local people, then with authorities and employers,” said Mr Hiroyuki Nagumo.

He added that a labour union is concerned with all workers, not just its members, and a labour union must work for all.

The president of JILAF also pledged to continue supporting the Myanmar labour sector. —GNLM
Building a strong foundation for construction sector

When we look at the contracts signed between the Ministry of Construction and private construction companies under the BOT system, we find that weaknesses and problems in past contracts have not benefited the people or the contractors.

This reflects the for binding BOT contracts, which offer a win-win solution for the people or the contractors.

While we work on legislation, we also need to look at ten -

levels and channels, including government to government, parliament to parliament, party to party, people to people cross-border initiatives, including trade and investment, agriculture, agro-industry and fishery connectivity, energy and telecommunications, tourism, Information and Communication Technology to promote cooperation in regional and international activities. To celebrate the completion of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 2020, to continue the working closely and extending support to each other at the regional and international level, under the frameworks of the progress on socio-economic life and development. The Myanmar side expressed its appreciation to Viet Nam for its consistent support extended to Myanmar’s peace process and national reconciliation as well as its sharing with Myanmar its experiences with regard to economic development. The two leaders reiterated their commitments to enhance cooperation in promotion of trade and investments between the two countries and the exchange of leadership and people from both sides. The leaders stressed the importance of close friendship and cooperation, especially at the leadership level, among the peoples and leaders from both countries. They also discussed the progress achieved in the bilateral cooperation in the past years, especially the agreements on the bilateral cooperation in the area of telecommunications, information and communication technology.

The two sides emphasized that the exchange of visits at all levels and channels, including government to government, parliament to parliament, party to party, people to people cross-border initiatives, including trade and investment, agriculture, agro-industry and fishery connectivity, energy and telecommunications, tourism, Information and Communication Technology to promote cooperation in regional and international activities. To celebrate the completion of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 2020, to continue the working closely and extending support to each other at the regional and international level, under the frameworks of the progress on socio-economic life and development. The Myanmar side expressed its appreciation to Viet Nam for its consistent support extended to Myanmar’s peace process and national reconciliation as well as its sharing with Myanmar its experiences with regard to economic development. The two leaders reiterated their commitments to enhance cooperation in promotion of trade and investments between the two countries and the exchange of leadership and people from both sides. The leaders stressed the importance of close friendship and cooperation, especially at the leadership level, among the peoples and leaders from both countries. They also discussed the progress achieved in the bilateral cooperation in the past years, especially the agreements on the bilateral cooperation in the area of telecommunications, information and communication technology.

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PM Mr Nguyen Xuan Phuc visits Shwedagon Pagoda, Vietnamese investments in Yangon before return home

Accompanied by Union Minister for Education Dr Myo Thein Gyi, the Vietnamese delegation visited Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon at 7:45 am.

They paid homage to the pagoda where Senior Buddhist monks presented them a relic replica of Shwedagon Pagoda to be erected in Vietnam to mark friendship ties between the two countries.

After signing the visitor’s book, the Vietnamese Premier and delegation members made donations at Myanmar’s landmark pagoda.

They then arrived at the Telecom International Myanmar Co., Ltd (Mytel) headquarters on Shwedagon Pagoda Road and heard reports on operations of the joint venture telecom firms.

The Prime Minister and officials witnessed signing of an MoU between the Viettel Group and the HD Bank.

They also attended the opening ceremony of the first representative office of HD Bank in Myanmar from Vietnam after visiting the offices of Truong Hai Auto (THACO) and the Bank for Investment and Development of Vietnam (BIDV) at Myanmar Plaza.

They proceeded to Hotel Melia, and held a meeting with Myanmar-Viet Nam Friendship Association about promotion of investments and cultural exchange programmes.

The Vietnamese Premier held talks with the Yangon Region Chief Minister and his cabinet members about fostering cooperation in investments between the two countries.

The Vietnamese delegation left Yangon International Airport for home at 12:25 pm. They were seen off by the Union Minister for Planning, Finance and Industry U Soe Win, Yangon Region Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein, Governor of Central Bank of Myanmar U Kyaw Kyaw Maung and officials.

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Rubber export income down $5 mln in current fiscal

MYANMAR exported rubber worth US$40 million over the last two months of the current financial year, a sharp drop of $5 million compared with the corresponding period of the previous fiscal, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

Over 32,000 tons of rubber was shipped to the external markets in the current financial year. The export volume was over 36,000 tons in the year ago period.

An improvement in Myanmar rubber exports will be directly related to the price offered, said U Khin Kyaw Myint, secretary of the Myanmar Rubber Planters and Producers Association (MRPPA).
The volatile rubber price is related to global climate change, and government subsidy will be required for growers in need, he said. Rubber is primarily produced in Mon and Kayin states and Taninthayi, Bago, and Yangon regions in Myanmar. There are over 1.6 million acres of rubber plantations in Myanmar, with Mon State accounting for about 500,000 acres, followed by Kayin State (270,000 acres), according to the MRPPA.

About 300,000 tons of rubber is produced annually across the country. Seventy percent of rubber produced in Myanmar goes to China. It is also shipped to Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Viet Nam, Korea, India, Japan, and other countries.

At present, Myanmar is exporting only rubber sheets owing to lack of machinery and technology. Export rubber varieties include synthetic rubber, ribbed smoked sheet RSS 1,5, Myanmar Standard Rubber MSR-20, Technically Specified Rubber TSH-20, and Crepe Rubber.

The MRPPA had sought special rubber zones in the regions and states to produce value-added rubber and quality raw materials at the 15th regular meeting with private entrepreneurs, led by Vice President U Myint Swe, which was held in March.

About 150,000 tons of rubber were exported in the 2017-2018 financial year. Myanmar shipped over 190,000 tons of rubber, with an estimated value of $250 million, to external markets in the 2018-2019 fiscal year, an increase of 41,000 tons which helped boost earnings by $60 million compared to the year ago period, according to data released by the Ministry of Commerce.

Annual inflation rate remains at 8.6% in Oct

THE annual rate of inflation in Myanmar, based on the Consumer Price Index, stood at 8.6 per cent in October, according to a report released recently by the Central Statistical Organization, under the Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry.

The figure showed no remarkable change month-on-month. The rate was registered at 8.61 per cent in September.

The Myanmar Kyat gained against the US dollar in October. The price of imported oil dropped, but domestic fuel oil price was on the higher side.

There was a remarkable increase in CPI in the food, household goods and maintenance, transportation, other commodities, clothing, health, education services, recreations, culture, non-food and tobacco and beverages groups and telecommunications.

The annual inflation rate based on CPI stood at just 6.6 per cent in November, 2018 and reached its highest level in September this year at 8.61 per cent.

In October, Magway Region recorded the highest inflation rate at 12.4 per cent, followed by Sagaing Region at 11.53 per cent, and Mandalay Region at 10.1 per cent.

Earlier, the inflation rate was calculated based on a 2006 survey. The base year was later changed to 2012. The Central Statistical Organization conducted a Household Income and Expenditure Survey in 82 townships in November, 2012. To reduce the inflation rate, the concerned authorities have been making efforts on the basis of policies on finance, currency, trade, and foreign currency control, in keeping with the second five-year National Development plan.

By Nyein Nyein

INVESTMENTS by Myanmar citizens in the country exceeded K600 billion from 1 October to 14 December of the current fiscal year, as per a press statement issued by the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA).

As of 14 December, 26 local enterprises were allowed to invest in the country by the Myanmar Investment Commission and the state and region investment committees. Domestic investments have reached K638 billion so far, including expansion of capital by existing enterprises.

This financial year, the quantum of investment was larger compared with the year ago period.

Thirteen enterprises invested in the manufacturing sector; four businesses pumped funds into the other services sector; the hotels and tourism and the real estate development sectors attracted three enterprises each; and, one project was approved in the livestock and fisheries, electricity, and agricultural sectors each.

Since 1988 and as of 30 October, domestic investments of K19.644 billion have been made by 1,649 enterprises in the country, as per data from the DICA.

To simplify the verification process of investment projects, the Myanmar Investment Law allows the region and state Investment Committees to endorse local and foreign proposals, where the initial investment does not exceed K6 billion, or $5 million.

While some projects no longer need MIC approval, businesses that are strategic to the government require a permit from the commission. In addition, those businesses that have large capital investments exceeding $5 million and that may have a possible impact on the environment and the local community need to be approved by the MIC’s proposal assessment team.
Twenty shuttle buses to run from Yangon airport to highway terminals

By Nyein Nyein

THE Omni Focus Company will offer shuttle bus services from Yangon airport to the highway bus terminals with the help of 20 buses, said U Hla Aung, Joint Secretary of the Yangon Region Transport Authority (YRTA).

The company has also forwarded a request to the YRTA to operate 27 buses on a route linking four universities — Yangon University of Technology (Hlinethayar), University of Medicine (2), Dagon University, and University of Economics (Ywarthargyi). “The Omni Focus Company has submitted proposals for two more bus lines. The first one is a shuttle bus service from Yangon airport to two highway bus terminals — Aungmingala and Dagon Ayar. The second service would link four universities,” said U Hla Aung.

“At present, we are preparing space to accommodate the shuttle buses at Aungmingala and Dagon Ayar highway terminals,” he said.

The registration process of those buses is delaying the services. The company is making efforts to offer the services as soon as possible,” according to the YRTA.

“The bus lines can help ensure the security of commuters. The YRTA is striving to provide better transportation services,” said U Hla Aung.

At present, the Omni Focus Company is running services with YBS No 20, 83, 98, 99, and 56, and the airport shuttle bus from Yangon airport to Yangon Central Railway Station.

To improve transport facilities in Yangon, the Yangon Bus Service system (YBS) was launched on 16 January, 2017, during the incumbent government’s term. At present, more than 100 bus lines are operating 4,500 buses on 135 routes, along with the airport shuttle and city transit. The number of daily commuters has been estimated at 1.8 million. (Translated by Ei Myat Mon)

Several flowering plants on display at Pyin Oo Lwin flower festival this year

THE Pyin Oo Lwin National Kandawgyi Garden Flower Festival is showcasing a variety of flower species this year. The month-long flower festival is being held from 15 December 2019 to 15 January 2020.

The flower festival is crowded with visitors. This year, the flower festival will also display Nakyarpanwingabar from Myanmar, Kyulit flower from the Netherlands, Hninsepin (Rose) from England, and lilies from Italy. A variety of beautiful flowers will also be displayed and sold at the flower festival, said an official from the festival organizing committee.

Famous singers will perform on 21, 22, and 25, December at the flower festival, free of charge (FOC).

“Our team is visiting the flower festival from Yangon Region. We come for the flower festival every year in December. We are very glad to see that many flower species are being displayed this year compared to last year,” said a local visitor from Yangon Region. Many travelers are visiting the Pyin Oo Lwin flower festival this year compared with last year.—Kyaw Kyaw (Mahlaing) (Translated by Huy Mar)

Film analysis programme for “The Tin Drum” to be held at FDC

A film analysis programme for the Plame D’or and Best Foreign Language Film awards winning film “The Tin Drum” by director Volker Schlondorff will be held at the movie theater, No.50, Golden Valley, at 22 December, noon.

The programme aiming to develop Myanmar films is happening 32nd time under the sub-category of Cinematheque Programme and the management member of Film Development Center Dr Aung Min will lead the discussion.

“The film chosen for coming programme is a Drama film with the taste of erotic and surreal. The film won the Palme D’or award of Cannes Film Festival in 1979 and Best Foreign Language Film at the Oscars 1980. In 1989, the film got its highest gross. The film “The Tin Drum” is a film adaption of a novel by Günter Grass and the director wrote the script with French screenwriter Jean-Claude Carriere.

The story is about a boy named Oskra who tried to stop the growing of his body on his 7th Birthday during the World War 2. He accidentally knew the power of the tin drum and used the power of drum every time he was upset. However, in the end, he threw away the tin drum and decided to live normally. —Thein Htike Thu (FDC) (Translated by Bahtoo)
Japan to earmark record 102 trl. yen for FY 2020 budget

TOKYO — The government has decided to earmark a record 102 trillion yen ($938 billion) in the initial draft budget for fiscal 2020 to fund swelling social security and defense outlays, government sources said Wednesday.

The spending plan, which Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s Cabinet will approve on Friday, will top 100 trillion yen for the second consecutive year. The draft budget includes funds for free preschool education as well as record defense spending, partly due to the North Korean nuclear and missile threat.

As part of efforts to improve its battered fiscal health, the government plans to cut new bond issuance by about 100 billion yen to 32.56 trillion yen, down for the 10th consecutive year.

The total amount of the draft budget was decided after a meeting between Finance Minister Taro Aso and internal affairs ministers Sanae Takaichi over the allocation of national tax revenues to local governments.

French government, unions to meet over pension strike impasse

PARIS — The French government and labour unions face off Wednesday over a pensions overhaul, 14 days into a crippling transport strike that is hurting businesses, wearing out commuters and casting a shadow over holiday plans.

After hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets on Tuesday, both sides stood firm ahead of a series of meetings, with government officials having said they are ready to negotiate.

Union leaders have vowed to continue their action into the new year as the government defended its plan to forge the country’s 42 pension schemes into a single points-based system.

With attitudes appearing to be hardening, the hardline CGT union claimed it had cut electricity to tens of thousands of homes in the Gironde department in the southwest and the cities of Lyon, Nantes and Orleans on Tuesday, and about 2,000 households in Paris. And it has warned of further cuts.

At a meeting late Tuesday, four unions including the CGT decided to continue their action, which has wreaked havoc on public transport in Paris and other cities, hobbled regional and international trains, and grounded planes on some strike days.

The unions urged their members to take “local actions” throughout the Christmas holidays, and vowed there would be no letup unless the reform plan is withdrawn.

EU chief says UK risks more in post-Brexit trade talks

STRASBOURGH — European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen warned Wednesday that failing to rapidly negotiate a new trade deal after Brexit would hurt Britain more than it would the EU.

“The timetable ahead of us is extremely challenging,” she told the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

“In case we cannot conclude an agreement by the end of 2020, we will face again a cliff edge. This would clearly harm our interests but it will impact more the UK than us.”

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen. PHOTO: AFP

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China, Japan defense ministers agree to boost mutual trust

BEIJING — The defense ministers of China and Japan agreed Wednesday to boost mutual trust and strengthen communication amid growing Japanese concerns over China's increasing military assertiveness in the East and South China seas.

“We want to strengthen communication and boost mutual trust to build a constructive bilateral security relationship,” Chinese Defence Minister Gen. Wei Fenghe said at the start of the meeting.

While also expressing a desire to increase mutual trust, Japanese Defence Minister Taro Kono made clear that there are still various concerns between the two countries including the East China Sea.

“We have strong concerns especially regarding Chinese vessels and airplanes in the sea and airspace surrounding the Senkaku Islands,” Kono said.

This is the first visit by a Japanese defense chief to China since 2009, reflecting a recent thaw in bilateral ties that had previously grown frosty over wartime history and territory.

Kono told reporters in Tokyo on Tuesday that he plans to have a “frank discussion” over various security and defense issues with Wei.—Kyodo News

Thai police make arrest over ‘inappropriate’ Facebook rally photo

BANGKOK — Thai police arrested a suspect behind an “inappropriate” photo posted on Facebook from an anti-government rally, a minister said Wednesday, as the offending image went viral days after the largest protest since March’s elections.

Downtown Bangkok saw thousands turn out Saturday for a rally led by ultra-popular opposition frontman Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit and his Future Forward Party (FFP) executives.

Carrying posters denouncing “dictatorship” and calling for prime minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha to “get out”, the protesters rallied peacefully for an hour.

The event drew the ire of authorities, however, with Digital Economy and Society Minister Buddhipongse Punnakanta singling out an “inappropriate” post of a picture that has upset “all Thais”.

The photo shared was snapped during the rally, displaying a protester holding a profanity-laced sign decrying “dictatorship”.

A mural of the revered late King Bhumibol Adulyadej appeared in the background.

Thailand has some of the world’s harshest laws, but authorities have not specified what the suspect was charged with.

Buddhipongse said he had conducted investigations before the suspect’s arrest, but refused to give any further details.—AFP

Japanese journalist wins high-profile #MeToo case

TOKYO — A Tokyo court Wednesday awarded 3.3 million yen ($30,000) in damages to journalist Shiori Ito, who accused a former TV reporter of rape in one of the most high-profile cases of the #MeToo movement in Japan.

The civil case made headlines in Japan and abroad, as it is rare for rape victims to report the crime to the police — according to a 2017 government survey, only four percent of women come forward.

Ito, 30, has become an outspoken symbol for #MeToo in Japan, where the movement against sexual harassment and abuse has struggled to take hold.

She had sought 11 million yen ($100,000) in compensation from Noriyuki Yamaguchi, a former TV reporter with close links to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, alleging he raped her after inviting her to dinner to discuss a job opportunity in 2015.

Yamaguchi continues to deny any wrongdoing and had filed a counter-suit against Ito, seeking 130 million yen in compensation.

“We won. The counter-suit was turned down,” said Ito outside the court, holding up a banner that read “victory” as supporters cheered and clapped.

“Honestly I still don’t know how I feel,” she told reporters, struggling to hold back the tears. “However, winning this case doesn’t mean this sexual assault didn’t happen... This is not the end,” she added.

She said she hoped the case would change what she called the “under-developed” legal and social environment surrounding rape in Japan.

Japan hiked minimum jail terms for rapists from three to five years and widened the definition of sexual assault victims to include men for the first time in 2017.—AFP

Parents of girl found in Malaysia jungle say case has ‘criminal element’

DUBLIN — The parents of a Franco-Irish teenager whose body was found in the Malaysian jungle said they believe there was a “criminal element” to her disappearance, which police classified as a missing person case.

The unclad body of 15-year-old Nora Quoirin was discovered in August after a 10-day hunt through dense rainforest, in a ravine about 2.5 kilometres (1.5 miles) from the resort where she had been staying.

Meabh and Sebastian Quoirin told Irish broadcaster RTE they could not imagine that Nora, who had learning difficulties, “could have been able to wander that far.”

“For us something very complex happened. We have insisted from the beginning that we believe there was a criminal element to what happened,” they said in an interview published Tuesday.—AFP
Impeachment vote set for Wednesday as Trump rages

WASHINGTON — An enraged US President Donald Trump said he was being subjected to an “attempted coup” and a witch trial as Democrats set a historic impeachment vote for Wednesday.

In an extraordinarily angry six-page letter, Trump on Tuesday told Nancy Pelosi, speaker of the Democratic-led House of Representatives, that “history will judge you harshly.”

Referring to a famous miscarriage of justice and religious extremism in the 17th-century United States, resulting in 20 executions, Trump said he had been given less rights than “those accused in the Salem Witch Trials.”

The letter came just minutes before Pelosi announced that the House would vote Wednesday to make Trump only the third US leader ever impeached and placed on trial in the Senate.

“The House of Representatives will exercise one of the most solemn powers granted to us by the Constitution as we vote to approve two articles of impeachment against the president of the United States,” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in a letter to Democratic colleagues on Tuesday.

“During this very prayerful moment in our nation’s history, we must honor our oath to support and defend our constitution from all enemies, foreign and domestic,” she added.

Frustration and fury

Trump is accused of attempting to force Ukraine into what would have been a damaging announcement of an unproven probe into a main 2020 reelection rival, Joe Biden. He is also accused of obstructing Congress by refusing to cooperate with the impeachment investigation, barring staff from testifying and holding back documentary evidence.

The two articles of impeachment are certain to pass in the House, where Democrats hold a firm majority.—AFP

US Congress ends Cyprus arms embargo, in blow to Turkey

WASHINGTON — The US Congress voted Tuesday to lift a decades-old arms embargo on Cyprus, defying Turkey by seeking warmer ties at a time of renewed tensions.

The Senate approved the measure as part of a massive defense spending bill that passed 86 to eight and already went through the House of Representatives, with President Donald Trump likely to sign it.

The United States imposed an embargo on the full island in 1987 with an aim to prevent an arms race and encourage a peaceful settlement between the Greek majority and Turkish minority. Critics say the step has been counterproductive by forcing Cyprus to seek other partners while Turkey, a NATO member, has stationed forces in northern Cyprus since its invasion in 1974.

Democratic Senator Robert Menendez and Republican Senator Marco Rubio spearheaded the effort, saying they also wanted to encourage growing cooperation between Cyprus, Greece and Israel.

“With Cyprus seeking to deepen its strategic partnership with the United States, it is in our national security and economic interest to lift this outdated decades-long arms restrictions that are no longer helping US security objectives,” Menendez said after initial approval of the lifting of the embargo.

While the two Cypriot communities have made progress in improving relations, tensions have spilled over an accord between Turkey and Libya for newly discovered gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean, undercutting claims by Greece and internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus.

US officials have been concerned that the ban has brought EU member Cyprus closer to Russia, with the island in 2015 signing off on an access deal to its ports. Under the new act, the United States will still restrict certain sensitive technologies to Cyprus until the US certifies that the island is denying Russian military vessels port access for refueling and servicing.

In a standoff in 1997, Turkey threatened an attack on Cyprus if it went ahead with installing the advanced S-300 missile defense system from Russia.—AFP

Romania’s 1989 revolution in five testimonies

BUCHAREST — In December 1989, Romania was shaken by 10 days of protests that led to the fall of Europe’s last communist dictatorship.

The protests started in Timisoara in the west of the country and spread to Bucharest, causing leader Nicolae Ceausescu to flee on 22 December.

Ceausescu was executed on 25 December with his wife Elena. More than 1,000 people died in the crackdown on protesters before and after Ceausescu’s death. Five witnesses share their memories with AFP.

The pastor

Laszlo Tokes, a Reformed Church pastor, is often described as the one who sparked the revolution when his threatening expulsion for criticising the Ceausescu regime first brought people into the streets. “I couldn’t imagine that on 15 December, people would respond to my call... and that they would come to my church to express their solidarity. “Our life was on the line. We were in a desperate situation. There was no alternative other than Ceausescu’s fall, but that seemed unlikely. 22 December was a miracle.” Today the 67-year-old ex-parliamentarian from the Hungarian minority is still pastor in Oradea in the north-east.—AFP

2 killed, 13 injured as parking roof collapse at Riyadh university

RIYADH — At least two people died, and 13 others were injured as a result of a parking roof that collapsed at the AlmAarefa University in the Saudi Arabian capital city of Riyadh, the country’s civil defense service said.

The incident took place on Tuesday. “An incident of a roof collapse at the southern parking lot of a Maarefa University building in the Dariya district of Riyadh resulted in the death of two people and the injury of 13 people who received necessary medical attention in a timely manner and were discharged from the hospital in good health,” the service wrote on Twitter.

The Saudi civil defense added that the two killed were both female, and that the collapse was caused by the lack of maintenance of the building, and that the number of injured was likely to increase. —ANI
Thet Htar Thuzar joins Asia Olympic Project in Malaysia

MYANMAR badminton icon Thet Htar Thuzar is currently taking part in the Asia Olympic Project, which is being held in Cyberjaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The project is being supervised by the Badminton Project as a year-end regional training programme.

Twenty players from Iran, Lebanon, Maldives, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Jordan, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are participating in the training session.

Thet Htar Thuzar has been chosen for seven days of physical, on-court, technical, and tactical training, and physiotherapy with physicians, trainers, and experts. The training is aimed at making players physically fit ahead of international competitions.

During the Asia Olympic Project week in Malaysia, all 20 badminton players will get sparring partners from Malaysia and Indonesia to play with and gauge their level of play, according to Badminton Asia Development.

Along with Thet Htar Thuzar, two more Myanmar players — Khing Thinzar and Zaw Lin Htoo — are taking part in the training session. They left from Yangon International Airport on 15 December for the training programme in Kuala Lumpur.

Thet Htar Thuzar and her team will be back home before 25 December for a national badminton tournament, according to Thet Htar Thuzar’s official social media page.—Lynn Thit (Tgi)

VUC, MIU score big in Week-7 of Myanmar Futsal League

THE Victoria University College (VUC) F.C. and Myanmar Imperial College (MIC) F.C. made big wins in yesterday’s Week-7 matches, which took place at the National Indoor Stadium II in Yangon.

The VUC F.C. drubbed Let Wel Thone Nara F.C. by 20-4, and the MIU F.C. beat AMM Brothers F.C. by 14-0 in yesterday’s matches. With the wins, the two teams remain at the top of the Myanmar Futsal League standing table with 18 points and no losses.

VUC is leading the table with a goal difference.

In the meantime, other matches saw good competition with narrow results. The Myanmar Football Federation U-19 F.C. played to a 5-5 draw with On Doctor F.C., and Futsal Chit Thu F.C. beat Dream Team F.C. by 5-2.

Meanwhile, GV F.C. beat Myoma JY F.C. by 5-2 and maintained its no-loss streak.—Lynn Thit (Tgi)

4th Inter-School Sailing Championship continues in Yangon

THE 4th Myanmar Inter-School Sailing Championship 2019 is being held at the Yangon Sailing Club in Yangon, under the supervision of the Myanmar Yachting Federation. Students from schools in Yangon and Mandalay and are participating in the seven-day competition which started on 15 December and will conclude on 21 December.

Students from Basic Education High School No 1, Dagon, Basic Education High School No 4, Kamayut, Basic Education High School No 2, Kamayut, Teacher Training College’s High School, Basic Education High School No 2, Bahan, ILBC, and Aung Academy Private Schools in Yangon Region are participating in the competition, along with students of Sports and Physical Education Sciences in Mandalay and Yangon.

The winners of the championship will be given prizes in a ceremony, according to the Yangon Sailing Club.—Lynn Thit (Tgi)