

VP Dr Sai Mauk Kham stresses coordinated efforts for planned union peace conference

PAGE 3

Central Command holds championship in Commander-in-Chief Cup

PAGE 2

ANALYSIS

2016, a year of high expectations?

PAGE 8

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

President attends opening of Myogyi Multi-purpose Dam



WITH President U Thein Sein present the Myogyi multi-purpose dam was opened yesterday in Ywa Ngan township, Shan State.

The president unveiled a

stone plaque and the signboard of the hydropower plant of the multi-purpose dam during the ceremony. He also inspected the embankment of the dam and its power Intake Gate.

The project was approved at a meeting of the committee for implementing special projects on 22 September, 2006.

Myogyi Dam is the 10th project opened during the term of

the current government. The dam includes a hydro power plant installed with two 15-MW generators that can generate 135.70 million kilowatt hours a year.

The dam will supply irri-

gation water to 82,000 acres of farmland that previously had to rely on irrigation water from the Zawgyi Dam and 33,000 acres of farmland on the Meikhtila plain.

See page 3 >>



A fisherman catches fish in the Bago River during a dry season in Bago. PHOTO: AYE MIN SOE

MoU on Bago River development project inked

A memorandum of understanding on development of Bago River was signed between Cheng Fong Construction Service Co, and the Ministry of Transport on 30 December.

Mr Gu Ruei Guo of Cheng Fong Construction Service Co, and U Tun Lwin Oo, director-general of the Directorate of Water Resources and Improvement of River Systems inked the MoU.

Under the MoU, the Taipei-based Yuh Chern Group will invest the project for maintaining watercourse in the Bago River.

The project assists people along the river improve their socio economic status.

More agreements are likely to sign between the two parties after

observing details of current situation along the river to develop infrastructures in Yangon, Bago and nearby areas.

Bago River plays an important role in supplying water in lower Myanmar, especially in Yangon and Mandalay. It is likely to be a major freshwater resource for distributing water in Thilawa Special Economic Zone.

Yuh Chern Group and the ministry signed an agreement minute last December to cooperate in floods prevention actions, supplying freshwater and watercourse development.

Myanmar has four main rivers and numerous creeks and watercourses across the nation.—GNLM

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw approves three bills, put two on record

THE Pyidaungsu Hluttaw yesterday passed three bills, put on record other two bills and the president's foreign trip, and agreed on a national planning report.

The parliament approved the road transportation bill, the rail transportation bill and the arbitration bill after discussing them clause by clause.

It also heard the clarification of the report on national planning for the first six-month of 2015-16 fiscal year, before putting on re-

cord the pesticide bill, the new plant varieties protection bill and the president's participation in the 27th ASEAN Summit and its related meetings which took place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

National Planning and Economic Development Deputy Minister Daw Leh Leh Thein read out the progress report, which won parliamentary approval as proposed by the Joint Committee for Planning and Financial Development. —*Myanma News Agency*



Pyidaungsu Hluttaw being convened in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

Central Command hold championship in Commander-in-Chief's Cup

THE Central Command's football team held the championship after beating the East Command's team 5-1 in the 54th Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Cup in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

The final attracted Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and wife Daw Kyu Kyu Hla, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services and Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice Senior General Soe Win and high-ranking officers.

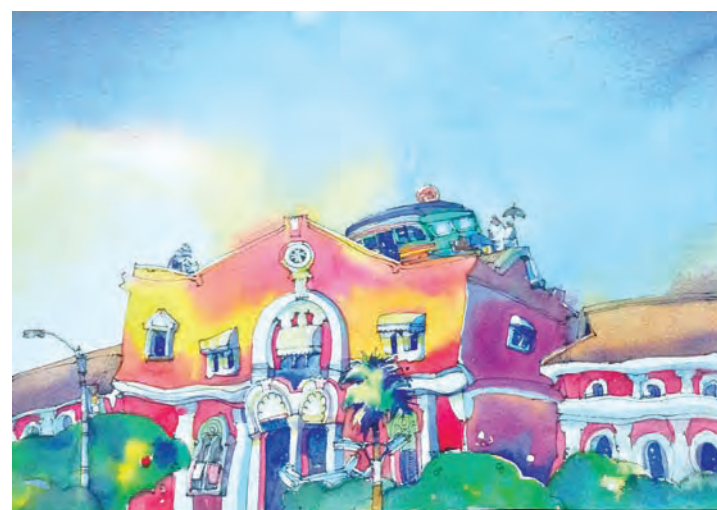
Senior General Min Aung Hlaing presented the Cup and cash awards to the champions. —*Myawady*



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing awards the Central Command's football team with a championship trophy. PHOTO: MYAWADY

Mandalay artists show their works to Yangon audience

A watercolour show is being held at Gallery 65, with plans to help fine arts students improve their studies



Watercolour paintings by Kyaw Thu Win.

Khaing Thanda Lwin

ONLY watercolour paintings by three young artists from Mandalay are being displayed at Gallery 65 in downtown Yangon, focusing on lifestyles of Yangon residents and culture heritage in Mandalay.

The three-day event entitled "Classmate" will run until 3 January, featuring 46 artworks. Among them, six paintings were sold on the opening day of the event.

This is the first group show of those watercolourists—Kyaw Thu Win, Aung and Zarni—who pursued their professional careers at the State School of Fine Arts in Mandalay.

All works are available for sale with price ranging from US\$150 to \$300.

"Partial proceedings from

the sales of works from the exhibition will go towards helping their junior students of fine arts at the school where roughly 20 students are pursuing traditional painting techniques," said Artist U Kyaw Thu Win.

"We plan to support watercolour-related supplies for them."

A 27-year-old painter who created 16 paintings for the event said, "Half of my creations highlight the lost of the city's culture by replacing the new modern buildings in Mandalay, one of culturally rich cities in the country."

Artist Kyaw Thu Win plans to hold his second solo show and a group show with his friend Zarni by 2017 in Yangon next year. His first solo event was held in Mandalay in 2013.

The Gallery 65 is located at No. 65 on Yawmingyi Street in Dagon Township in Yangon.

Shwedagon sees 63,664 tourists in December

THE Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon attracted 63,664 tourists from 35 countries in December last year.

The tourists included

15,168 Thais, 5,254 Koreans, 3,953 Japanese, 3,792 Germans and 3,753 Chinese. Their visits earned the pagoda over K500 million and US\$416. —Ko Chit

Trouble on New Year's Eve

NEW Year's Eve saw two instances of fire, eight traffic accidents and one fight in Yangon Region, according to Yangon Region Police Force.

Eight traffic accidents that night killed three and injured eight.

"We were on full alert, intensifying security at crowded places. We saw no high profile criminal case on the eve of the new year and we thank the people for their cooperation," said Police Col Pyai Sone. A fire broke out at a restaurant in West Shwegondine due to an overheating fan.

Yangon Region Police were on full alert, patrolling the region with 45 traffic police cars.— *Zaw Gyi*



Police inspect cars on the New Year's Eve. PHOTO: ZAW GYI (PANITA)



President U Thein Sein gives presents to the officials of YMEC Co., Ltd which participated in construction of Myogyi multi-purpose Dam. PHOTO: MNA

President attends opening of Myogyi Multi-purpose Dam

>> From page 1

The president said the Myogyi Dam is a new year gift for the people and called for stepping up of efforts for the completion of the other four dam projects : Kyaingkham, Hsedawgyi Yauku, Manipura and Ahtet Bula as they will assist in the prevention of floods.

He also suggested to suspend other projects so as to speed up efforts for completion of the four dams.

At the ceremony, President U Thein Sein viewed a small scale model of Myogyi Multi-purpose dam.

The earthen dam is 2,461 ft long and 258 ft high. The spillway of the dam is an iron-reinforced concrete structure with a diameter of more than 295 ft.—Myanmar News Agency

VP Dr Sai Mauk Kham stresses coordinated efforts for planned union peace conference

THE Central Committee for Union Peace Conference yesterday held its first meeting in Nay Pyi Taw to coordinate the preparations for the successful launch of the Union Peace Conference, according to its Chairman Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham.

The peace conference has been announced to start on 12 January, the vice president quoted President U Thein Sein as saying in a recent meeting. The five-day conference is reported to draw some 1,100 people, including 870 representatives and observers from the government, the parliament, the ethnic armed groups, political parties and interest groups.

Together with 266 special guests, the president will make

his appearance at the event, according to the vice president.

The government signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement with eight ethnic armed organisations on 15 October last year. Under the terms of the agreement, the framework for political dialogue was established by the government, the parliament, the defence forces, political parties, the ethnic signatories and ethnic non-signatories.

The ceasefire agreement requires that the Union Peace Conference be called to start political dialogue in 90 days after the finalisation of the framework. The agreement also required the stakeholders to draw a framework for political dialogue in 60 days.—Myanmar News Agency



Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham addresses a meeting on preparations for launching the union peace conference. PHOTO: MNA

Ethnic parties await dialogue with NLD

Ye Myint

ETHNIC political parties that won national and regional parliamentary seats in the 2015 elections have voiced their will for further cooperation with the National League for Democracy, awaiting the latter's offer of dialogue on a range of issues including ethnic affairs and internal peace expected closer to the time of the hand over.

"We are willing to cooperate with the NLD on ethnic affairs, internal peace, the emergence of a federal Union and constitutional reform in the Parliament," said U Aye Tha Aung, a member of the panel chairs of the United Nationalities Alliance.

The UNA is an ethnic parties' alliance formed by eight eth-

nic-based parties including the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, the Mon National Party, the Arakan National Party and the Zomi Democracy Federation Party that together won more than 90 seats in the country's ethnic states.

Despite close cooperation between the NLD and the alliance after the 1990 elections, in recent years they have grown apart, added the UNA's panel chair.

He stated that a cooperative dialogue is a must for the two sides prior to tacking activities inside as well as outside Parliament.

"We await the NLD's offer of dialogue on the matters that both sides have to work together. We have prepared to have talks with the NLD but the latter's official invitation has not yet come to the

"We are willing to cooperate with the NLD on ethnic affairs, internal peace, the emergence of a federal Union . . ."

U Aye Tha Aung,
Member of the panel chairs of the United Nationalities Alliance

UNA," he said.

The UNA held a summit on 29-30 December in Yangon, with leaders of member parties deciding to work together with the NLD in Parliament while shaping the country's future with regard to peace

and prosperity. The UNA secured around 40 seats in the country's 2015 polls for the new national parliament.

"There might be differences on some issues but we are working towards the same goal as both the UNA and NLD are democratic parties," said Sai Kyaw Nyunt from the SNLD, which won 40 seats in the regional and national parliaments in the 8 November elections, expressing his view on what will happen to the NLD and the UNA in politics.

"To say the least, the two parties will have to form an alliance".

According to the SNLD official, the UNA as well as the SNLD have not yet received an offer of dialogue from the NLD, as far as he knows.

Traffic accident leaves one dead

A motorcycle collided with a van in Zambyuthiri township, Nay Pyi Taw, on the New Year night, killing one of the two men on the bike.

Kyaw Thet Khaing was riding the bike with Aung Aung sitting behind when the accident occurred. The collision left him injured and his friend dead on the spot.

The local police station has filed a lawsuit against him.—Myanmar News Agency

Rare diseases covered by medical insurance scheme

HANGZHOU — Zhejiang has become the first province in China to cover rare diseases, including amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), in its medical insurance scheme.

The move brings hope for patients with rare diseases struggling with high medical fees and a lack of treatment.

Starting Friday, the eastern province will allow local patients with ALS, Gaucher's disease and phenylketonuria (PKU) to have their medical fees partially reimbursed, the human resources and social security department of Zhejiang said.

An official with the department said that more than 80 per cent of medical fees can be reimbursed for a patient whose condition is listed under the state-led medical insurance scheme.

ALS strikes between one and three out of every 100,000 people.

Patients progressively lose muscle strength, eventually becoming paralyzed and unable to speak, move, swallow or breathe. British scientist Stephen Hawking is one of the best-known people with the disease.

Gaucher's disease would cause swelling of liver and spleen, anemia, pain, among other symptoms. PKU is a metabolic genetic disorder that can lead to learning disabilities, seizures and other medical problems.

The ice bucket challenge, which swept many places of the world in 2014, helped draw public attention to rare diseases.

Advocates of their inclusion in the medical insurance scheme say that due to the small number of patients, the drugs are often priced far beyond the financial reach of ordinary families as drug companies try to recover the cost.—Xinhua

North Korea's Kim blames South for mistrust in New Year speech

SEOUL — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un blamed South Korea yesterday for increased mistrust in a New Year speech after a year of heightened tension between the rival countries.

The speech was Kim's fourth since becoming leader in 2011 when his father, Kim Jong Il, died, sparking a long and turbulent succession process marked by several bloody purges in the isolated country.

"South Korea has made a unilateral case for unification and increased mistrust and conflict between us," Kim said during a 30-minute long address, broadcast on North Korean television, highlighting its suspicion of the South's unification policies.

Kim said in last year's speech he would be open to a summit with Seoul but tension surged in August after a landmine blast on their border wounded two South Korean soldiers. The South blamed the North which denied responsibility.

The two sides met for talks in August after a sustained military

stand-off and agreed to reduce tension and hold further talks at vice-ministerial level, although subsequent negotiations have been fruitless. On Wednesday, North Korean state media said its top negotiator with the South, Kim Yang Gon, had been killed in a traffic accident.

"We should cherish last year's high-level talks and make continued efforts to seek dialogue and not take any further steps backwards," Kim Jong Un said of the August negotiations, adding that he would be open to talks with anyone to discuss "peaceful unification".

Applause was played at various points throughout what appeared to be a pre-recorded message. Photographs of factories and farms were interspersed with video of Kim standing in a wood-paneled room in front of a red flag bearing the crest of the ruling Workers' Party.

In a response to Kim's speech, South Korea's foreign ministry reiterated its position that it was open to talks with the North, the Yonhap

News Agency reported. "North Korea should take note that we are seeking to develop inter-Korean relations and lay the groundwork for peaceful unification," an unidentified government official said.

Speeches by a North Korean leader used to be rare. The voice of Kim's father, Kim Jong Il, was only broadcast on state television once, and he made no known public speeches during his 17-year rule. For years, leaders' speeches were only presented as editorials in state newspapers.

Kim Jong Un, however, has turned to broadcasting his speeches and using them to deliver his message, which is closely watched for clues to any policy change.

Kim pledged to develop North Korea's moribund economy and raise living standards, although North Korean leaders have been saying that for decades. Impoverished North Korea is under heavy UN sanctions related to its nuclear and missile programmes. Kim did not mention the nuclear programme in his speech.—Reuters

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China arrests 11 for deadly landslide, death toll now 12

BEIJING — Chinese authorities have formally arrested 11 people for their role in a deadly landslide last month in the southern boomtown of Shenzhen and charged them with negligently causing a serious accident, state news agency Xinhua said.

The government has blamed breaches of construction safety rules for the disaster on 20 December, when a dump overflowed and engulfed 33 buildings. It has started an investigation.

At least 12 people have been confirmed dead while 62 are missing, Xinhua said late on Thursday.

The 11 people arrested include a legal representative and a deputy general manager of Shenzhen Yixianglong Investment Development, which ran the dump, and officials who were supposed to be supervising it, the report added, citing the

Shenzhen prosecutor. They have been charged with the crime of negligently causing a serious accident, and the prosecutor has urged the police to track down other sus-

pects as soon as possible, Xinhua said. It did not elaborate.

Calls to Shenzhen Yixianglong seeking comment went unanswered. The disaster is the latest

deadly accident to raise questions about China's industrial safety standards and lack of oversight over years of rapid economic growth.—Reuters



An aerial view shows rescuers walk among damaged vehicles to search for survivors at the site of a landslide in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China, on 22 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

Indonesia arrests three with suspected links to Islamic State

JAKARTA — Indonesian police on Thursday arrested three men with suspected links to Islamic State as part of an operation in the province of Central Sulawesi to capture the country's most-wanted man, state media reported.

The arrests came as the US embassy in Jakarta issued an "emergency message" for US citizens warning of potential security threats at tourist beaches on the island of Lombok surrounding the New Year's celebrations.

Counter-terrorism officials believe there are at least 1,000 sympathizers of the radical jihadist group across Indonesia. More than a dozen men suspected of

planning bomb attacks over the holiday period were arrested in a series of raids recently, and the hunt is on for their ringleaders.

"This morning my team just reported that they had captured three more people," the Antara news agency quoted Central Sulawesi police chief Idham Azis as saying.

He gave no details of the arrests or the identities of the men, but said they are thought to be linked to militant leader Santoso, who has eluded capture for years and is holed up in jungles near Poso town in Central Sulawesi.

A National Police spokesman did not immediately respond to

Reuters requests for comment on the Antara report.

Azis said a hunt for Santoso and about 30 of his followers would conclude on 9 January. He said seven suspected militants as well as two policemen and an army officer had been killed in the operation.

US authorities on Wednesday noted arrests made by authorities in Turkey, Belgium and Indonesia in connection with suspected plots by Islamic State operatives or sympathizers to launch attacks over the holiday, and said they were monitoring investigations.

Analysts say that Santoso, the first Indonesian to publicly pledge

loyalty to Islamic State, may be an inspiration for would-be jihadists and militants returning from fighting with the group in Syria.

However, some believe there is a bigger threat closer to the capital, Jakarta, on the populous island of Java, where most of the recent arrests were made, and say militants could increasingly target Westerners.

The US embassy message did not spell out the security threat on Lombok, whose beaches are popular with Western holidaymakers, but it did mention specifically Senggigi Beach, the main tourist strip on the west of the island.—Reuters

Afghan leader says end to terrorism a condition for peace talks

KABUL — Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said international meetings next month to lay the groundwork for a possible resumption of peace talks with the Taliban had to seek an approach to the fractured insurgent movement that ensured a rejection of terrorism.

Officials from Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States are due to meet in Islamabad on 11 January to try to revive a peace process that stalled in July when the news came out that Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar had died two years earlier.

Prospects of success have been clouded by bloody infighting in the Taliban over the leadership succession which has made it difficult to identify which parts of the movement may be open to talks and which remain committed to the insurgency.

The legitimacy of Omar's former deputy Mullah Akhtar Mansour, who assumed the leadership in July, is rejected by some militants. Rivals who accuse him of being beholden to Pakistan are



Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani speaks during a news conference in Kabul, Afghanistan on 31 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

suspicious that he hid Omar's death for so long.

"It is obvious that there are groups of Taliban, not a unified movement," Ghani told a news conference on Thursday. "The fundamental issue here is the choice: choose peace or terrorism," he said. "There will be no

tolerance for terrorism."

Next month's meeting will be followed by another encounter in Kabul, with Afghanistan initially represented by Deputy Foreign Minister Hekmat Khalil Karzai.

The United States and China have both been pressing hard

for a resumption of talks with the Taliban but mutual suspicions between Kabul and Islamabad, as well as the factional fighting within the Taliban, have held up the process. Afghanistan has long said Pakistan is harboring Taliban leaders and sponsoring the insurgency as a means of exerting control over Kabul, a charge that Pakistan rejects, saying it too is a victim of terrorism.

For its part, the main faction of the Taliban has rejected peace talks as long as foreign troops in NATO's training and assistance mission remain in Afghanistan.

Despite its leadership disputes, the movement has made big advances this year, inflicting heavy casualties on Afghan forces fighting largely on their own since the withdrawal of most foreign combat troops last year.

As well as the brief capture of the northern city of Kunduz in September, the insurgent movement has also threatened to take the volatile southern province of Helmand after overrunning several district centres.—Reuters

5 New Year revelers arrested in Tokyo's Shibuya

TOKYO — Police arrested five men who gathered in Tokyo's Shibuya district Thursday night to ring in the New Year on suspicion of assaulting riot police and mounting the roof of a police vehicle.

The two teens and three in their 20s allegedly obstructed police officers from performing their duty around midnight Thursday.

Crowds of young people gathered at the Shibuya Crossing from late Thursday night to early Friday morning to celebrate the New Year. About 1,000 police officers were mobilized in the area.

In Nagasaki, southwestern Japan, a 20-year-old man was found drowned early Friday after jumping into a river, police said. Yudai Nakamura, who was on his way to a shrine with his friends to celebrate the New Year, was drunk when he jumped from a bridge into the river.—Kyodo News

Rescue plan rescheduled to save 8 miners trapped in collapsed mine

JINAN — Rescuers on Thursday stopped tunneling through a collapsed mine shaft in east China's Shandong Province to reach eight survivors, over concerns of secondary cave-ins.

Rescuers found signs of life on Wednesday morning, and made contact with the eight miners five days after the gypsum mine collapsed.

"The miners are generally in stable condition. Only one has suffered diarrhea," said Li Zhongjun, a provincial health official with the rescue team.

He said that they have sent provisions including a nutrient solution, clothes and lamps.

The accident happened at 8pm Friday in Pingyi County. At the time, 29 people were working underground. One is confirmed dead, four escaped, and seven have been rescued, so far. Gao Guangwei, deputy head of the Emergency Command Center of the State Administration of Work

Safety, who is overseeing the rescue operation, said the rescue had been held back due to the structural instability of the tunnel and falling debris, and underground water has been gushing into the mine.

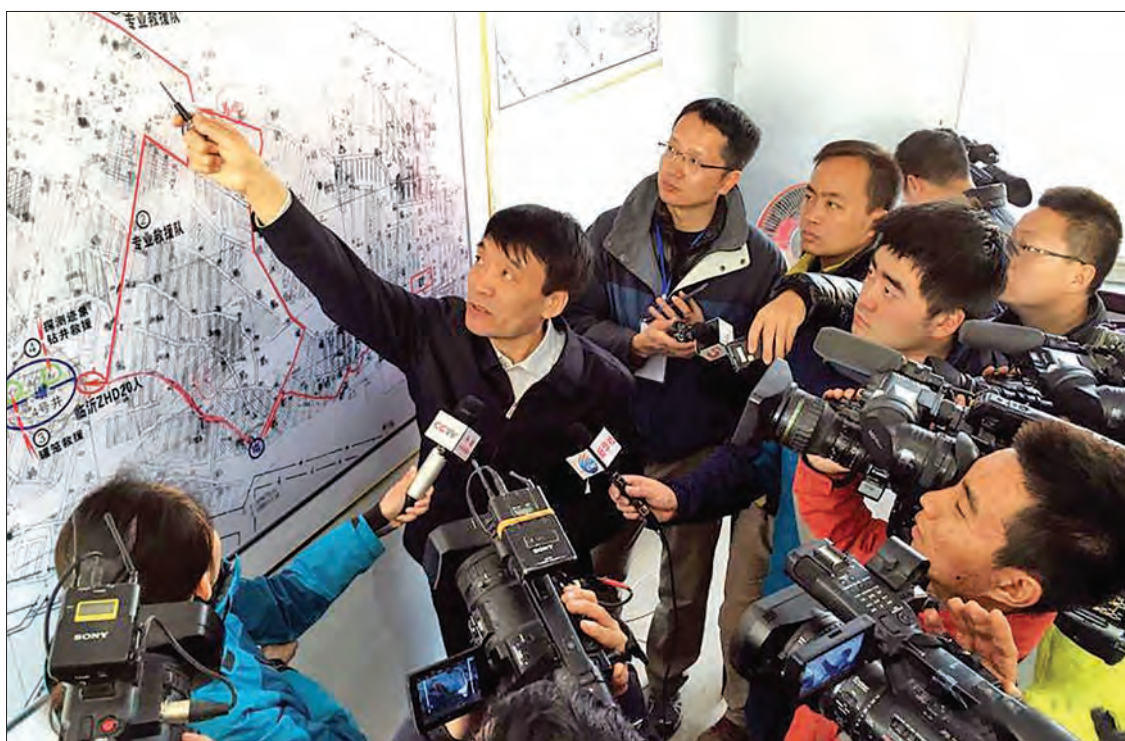
The team on Thursday agreed to review the rescue plan as the mechanical tunneling had increased the risk of new cave-ins.

Gao said rescuers were trying to open a new underground rescue tunnel to reach the trapped miners, while drilling more holes toward their location.

Previously, holes were drilled into the ground so that life detectors can be lowered into the pit. This had helped the team locate the miners. Currently, it is the only way the team can stay in contact and send provisions to the miners.

The owner of the mine drowned himself when working with the rescue team early Sunday morning.

The cause of the accident is still to be confirmed.—Xinhua



Gao Guangwei (2nd L), deputy head of the Emergency Command Centre of the State Administration of Work Safety, introduces a new rescue plan at the collapsed mine in Pingyi County, east China's Shandong Province, on 31 December. PHOTO: XINHUA

Indian capital adopts 'odd-even' scheme to check pollution

NEW DELHI — The government of Indian capital New Delhi yesterday rolled out its much ambitious "odd-even" plan of private cars in the Indian capital to curb alarming levels of pollution.

The formula came into effect this morning and would run for two weeks on experimental

basis, following which final call on its continuation will be taken.

"The scheme will be in operation from 8:00am (local time) to 8:00pm during this period. However, the scheme will not be applicable on Sundays," a government official said.

According to the formula, violators of the policy would be

penalized with a fine of 30 US dollars.

Reports said at several places volunteers were seen displaying placards in support of the policy and assisting traffic police to enforce the formula.

According to the scheme, cars bearing odd-numbered registration plates shall ply on roads

on odd days, while those with even number plates will be ply on even days.

VIPs, women drivers, Compressed Natural Gas-certified vehicles, two-wheelers and those carrying the differently-abled are among the 25 categories which are exempted from the formula.

However, New Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his cabinet colleagues have decided to abide by the rule.

New Delhi has been experiencing hazardous levels of pollution and is one of the most polluted cities in the world, according to the World Health Organisation.—Xinhua

Germany shuts train stations amid global New Year security scares

BERLIN/BRUSSELS — Europe ushered in the New Year with heightened security fears on Friday as German police evacuated two train stations in Munich, citing a tip about a planned suicide bomb attack, and Belgium held three people over an alleged plot.

Security forces in many capitals were on raised alert after a year of militant attacks, including an attack on Paris in November that killed 130 and was claimed by Islamic State (IS).

Soldiers were on the streets of the French capital, and police forces in London, Madrid, Berlin and Istanbul increased their presence as Europeans turned out to celebrate the arrival of 2016.

In New York, police tightened security for the traditional New Year's Eve dropping of the crystal ball in Times Square, where more than a million people hailed the arrival of 2016.

Celebrations in Germany

took on a sombre note when police warned of a possible terror attack and evacuated two train stations in Munich an hour before midnight on Thursday.

Germany had received a tip from another country's intelligence service that IS planned to attack Munich with up to seven suicide bombers, German officials said at a news conference yesterday.

They didn't identify the country that provided the tip-off, but German television said in an unsourced report that it came from France. "I believe this decision was right because I think we cannot take unnecessary risks when we are dealing with such concrete threats, concrete locations, and a concrete time," Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann told a news conference yesterday. The stations — Munich's central station and Pasing station some 8 km (5 miles) away

— reopened several hours later after the threat could not be substantiated.

In Belgium, police were holding three people for questioning on Thursday as part of an investigation into an alleged plot to carry out an attack in Brussels on New Year's Eve.

Authorities on Wednesday called off the usual New Year's Eve fireworks display in the capital, citing fears of a possible militant attack.

Police had initially detained six people after searches at six locations in the Belgian capital and one just outside the city. They also seized computers, mobile phones and equipment for airsoft, a sport using guns that shoot non-lethal plastic pellets.

Three of the six were released late on Thursday. Prosecutors said they were holding the other three for a further 24 hours.—Reuters

Palestinian shot dead after ramming car into Israeli troops

JERUSALEM — Israeli troops shot and killed a Palestinian who rammed them with his car in the occupied West Bank on Thursday, the Israeli military said, as a wave of violence approached its fourth month.

Almost daily Palestinian stabbings, car-rammings and shooting attacks have killed 21 Israelis and a US citizen, raising fears of a wider escalation a decade after the last Palestinian uprising subsided.

Since the start of October, Israeli forces or armed civilians have killed at least 132 Palestinians, 82 of whom authorities described as assailants. Most of the others have been killed in clashes with security forces.

The Israeli military said a Palestinian drove his vehicle into a group of soldiers, injuring one of them, on a road by the village of Hawara, near the West Bank city of Nablus. "The assailant was shot by forces on the site, resulting in his death," the military said in a statement.

An Israeli civilian stabbed by a Palestinian in an attack earlier this month and a Palestinian in Gaza wounded in a stone-throwing clash with Israeli soldiers, also died of their wounds in hospital this week. The surge in violence has been fueled by Palestinians' frustration over Israel's 48-year occupation of land they seek for an independent state, and the expansion of settlements in those

territories which were captured by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war. Palestinian leaders say a younger generation sees no hope for the future living under Israeli security restrictions and with a stifled economy. The latest round of US-brokered peace talks collapsed in April 2014.

Violence has also been triggered by Muslim anger over stepped-up Israeli visits to Jerusalem's al Aqsa mosque complex. The site, Islam's holiest outside Saudi Arabia, is also revered by many Jews as a vestige of their biblical temples. Israeli leaders says Islamist groups who call for the destruction of Israel have played a major role in inciting the recent violence.—Reuters



An Israeli soldier and a policeman inspect the scene where a Palestinian, who the Israeli military said rammed Israeli troops with his car, was shot and killed by the troops in the village of Hawara near the West Bank city of Nablus, on 31 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Brazilian woman found strangled in apartment set on fire

NAGOYA — Police said Thursday two women were found strangled in an apartment in central Japan's Aichi Prefecture that was set on fire, and that one of them was a Brazilian national.

The woman was identified as Kimberly Akemy Amarilha Maruyama, 27, a part-time worker at a leisure facility. She had lived in the apartment run by the Aichi prefectural government in the city of Handa with her two children since April, an apartment official said.

The two children were found safe Wednesday night. Police are trying to identify the other woman discovered in the apartment.

Autopsies showed the two women had suffocated to death on Wednesday afternoon. The apartment was believed to have been set ablaze following their death, investigators said. A neighbour reported a fire in the apartment at around 2:10pm Wednesday.—Kyodo News

Higher excise duties on fuel, alcoholic drinks as of 1 January

BELGRADE — The first day of the New Year will see a rise in excise duties on fuel and alcoholic drinks, but for now there is no fear the price of fuel would go up at the very start of the year.

The price of fuel should not increase immediately, given that oil companies have announced they will not automatically raise prices due to the global collapse of oil prices, which hit a ten-year low.

The excise duty on lead-free petrol will be increased from RSD 50 to RSD 52.5 per liter, and on gas oil from RSD 50 to RSD 54, while the excise duties on non-alcoholic drinks will go up by two percent.

The excise duty will be charged not only on alcoholic drinks, but also low-alcoholic drinks containing over 1.2 per cent of alcohol.—Tanjug

At least 18 people killed in Egypt ferry boat sinking

CAIRO — At least 18 people were killed late Thursday when a ferry boat sank in the river Nile, Egyptian state television reported yesterday.

The accident happened in the Kafr el-Sheikh Province, around 140 kilometres north of Cairo. Kafr el-Sheikh Governor el-Sayed Nasr said the ferry was transferring people between two towns in Kafr el-Sheikh and Beheira governorates when the accident occurred.

The boat was carrying 22 people, official news agency MENA reported. Rescue teams are still searching for more possible victims, the report added. The cause of the accident was not immediately clear.

However Nasr said investigations would reveal whether the boat sank because of excessive weight on board or because of bad weather conditions.—Xinhua

Hundreds of flights canceled as Istanbul hit by heavy snow

ISTANBUL — Hundreds of flights in and out of Turkey were cancelled for Thursday and Friday at Istanbul's two airports after the city was blanketed by heavy snow, which also forced the closure of schools and brought chaos to the roads.

Turkish Airlines cancelled 265 flights in and out of the main Ataturk airport and 37 at Sabiha Gokcen, Istanbul's second airport. Budget airline Pegasus said it had canceled 34 flights arriving or departing from Sabiha Gokcen.

On Wednesday, city authorities said they had more than 1,000 vehicles and heavy machinery ready to keep roads open, but warned residents against all but essential travel.

More snowfall is forecast for much of Thursday.—Reuters

US, allies conduct 24 strikes against Islamic State: US military

WASHINGTON — The US-led coalition carried out 24 strikes against Islamic State militants on Wednesday, putting pressure on the group around Ramadi and Mosul in Iraq and along the Mar'a line in Syria, the US military said in a statement on Thursday.

Warplanes carried out nine air strikes near Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, which fell to Islamic State fighters in 2014.

The coalition has stepped up strikes around Mosul over the past two weeks, hitting it more than 90 times, a pace three times that of the previous two-week period.—Reuters

White House delays imposing new sanctions on Iran: WSJ

WASHINGTON — The White House has delayed imposing new financial sanctions on Iran over its ballistic-missile programme, *The Wall Street Journal* reported on Thursday.

On Wednesday, *the Journal*, citing US officials, said the Obama administration was preparing to sanction nearly a dozen companies and individuals in Iran, Hong Kong and the United Arab Emirates for

their role in developing Iran's ballistic-missile programme.

The US sanctions were expected to be formally announced this week, the newspaper said.

Sources familiar with the situation confirmed to Reuters that the United States was preparing sanctions.

The Obama administration is committed to combating Iran's missile programme and the sanc-

tions being developed by the US Treasury Department remain on the table, *the Journal* reported on Thursday, citing US officials.

But US officials offered no definitive timeline for when the sanctions would be imposed, the newspaper said. At one point, they were scheduled to be announced on Wednesday morning in Washington, according to a notification the White House sent to Congress,

the Journal reported.

Imposing such penalties would be legal under the landmark nuclear agreement forged between global powers and Iran in July, the officials said, according to *the Journal*. Iranian officials have said the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, would view such penalties as violating the nuclear accord.

US officials have said the

Treasury Department retains a right under the nuclear deal to blacklist Iranian entities suspected of involvement in missile development.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani ordered his defense minister on Thursday to expand Iran's missile programme, in defiance of the US threat to impose sanctions over a missile test Iran carried out in October.—*Reuters*

Blaze hits Dubai skyscraper, New Year's fireworks proceed nearby



A fire engulfs The Address Hotel in downtown Dubai in the United Arab Emirates on 31 December.

PHOTO: REUTERS

DUBAI — Fire engulfed a 63-storey skyscraper in Dubai on Thursday night, but with the block evacuated and only minor injuries reported authorities went ahead with a New Year's fireworks display at the world's tallest building a few hundred metres away.

Tongues of flame shot skywards from one side of the luxury Address Downtown Dubai hotel and residential block, which stands across a plaza from the 160-storey Burj Khalifa tower where people had gathered for fireworks to mark the New Year.

Television pictures showed pieces of blazing debris raining down from The Address as evacuated occupants hurried away from the building, some running.

"We came out on my balcony to look at the Burj. All the buildings around here had fireworks prepped on the roof," Paul Mithun, a US consultant in downtown Dubai said.

"We were like, huh, that looks like a little Olympic torch off in the distance. We thought someone lit fireworks. In under two minutes, the fire went up

two-thirds of the length of the hotel. I watched the whole thing. It was real bad."

But as midnight struck, with the Address building continuing to burn, onlookers cheered as a swirling mass of multicoloured fireworks enveloped the Burj Khalifa.

The Dubai government's media office said the Address blaze was 90 per cent under control. Police chief Major General Khamis Matar told Al Arabiya television: "All residents of the hotel were evacuated and there are 14 injured, with light injuries."

A medic on the scene who declined to be identified told Reuters: "There are more than 60 people injured with light injuries from smoke inhalation and from crowding while in the stairs evacuating the building."

One resident staying on the 15th floor of the tower, completed in 2008, told Britain's Sky News of "absolute pandemonium" as those inside realized the building was ablaze.

"The alarms went off when the building was already properly

on fire," he said.

A Reuters correspondent saw police evacuating a viewing area near the base of the Burj Khalifa.

The fire at the Address building had taken hold in minutes.

"Oh my God!" shouted one witness who happened to see the first few moments.

"The flames were running up one side of the building, reaching about halfway up ... Flames were licking upwards and out. Orange and yellow," the witness said.

As the evacuation proceeded, there were moments of panic.

"There's more shouting. It's more panicked this time, many voices, some screams," the witness said. The Dubai media office said the blaze had started on the 20th floor, on the outside of the 300-metre tower, and that internal fire-fighting systems were operating to try to prevent it getting inside the hotel.

Four fire brigade teams were at the site.

Dubai is a trade, tourism and investment hub for the Gulf region, and is one of seven emirates that make up the United Arab Emirates (UAE).—*Reuters*

Syria ceasefire plan struggles to define a 'terrorist'

WASHINGTON — A UN plan to suspend Syria's nearly five-year-old civil war calls for listing which militant groups may be fought despite an eventual ceasefire, one of the toughest issues vexing diplomats trying to end the conflict.

A UN draft discussion paper obtained by Reuters includes eight "framework principles" to be embraced by all countries and rebel groups that sign on to a ceasefire. The ceasefire plan also lists issues still to be negotiated, including defining "those terrorist organisations against whom combat is allowed."

The paper's authenticity was confirmed by two diplomats who spoke on condition of anonymity. The diplomats stressed that the document was a draft, originally prepared by the United Nations, and they said multiple versions of the draft have been passed back and forth among US, UN and other diplomats.

The ceasefire idea, endorsed by the UN Security Council on 18 December at the urging of major powers and regional players that include the United States, Russia, Iran and Turkey, would exclude militant groups such as Islamic State, also known as ISIS, and al Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front.

Diplomats say the result could be a messy, partial ceasefire in which government and acceptable rebel forces stop shooting at one another but still go after Islamic State militants and other groups branded as terrorist.

With Nusra Front fighters scattered across northern Syria rather than concentrated in any one place, attacks on them could harm civilians as well as groups who signed on to any ceasefire, diplomats and analysts said.

Identifying the groups still subject to attack is a diplomatic

task delegated to Jordan's government.

In a tangible sign of the difficulty, the Jaysh al Islam militant group has agreed to take part in the peace talks, yet its leader was killed on Friday in an air strike that rebel sources say was carried out by Russian aircraft.

The US State Department said the killing had complicated efforts to achieve a political settlement, a point it said US Secretary of State John Kerry made to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in a phone call on Monday.

Staffan de Mistura, the third UN envoy tasked with ending a civil war that has killed at least 250,000 people and driven millions from their homes, has taken the lead in laying out the possible dimensions of a ceasefire, diplomats said.

De Mistura has said he hopes to open talks between the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government and opposition groups in Geneva on 25 January.

Those talks will focus on trying to get the two sides to agree on a political transition for Syria.

Separate talks are underway about the shape of a ceasefire and the draft document obtained by Reuters addresses this. Quick agreement seems likely on some framework principles, such as a recognition of Syria's territorial integrity, but others will be vexing. Among these is one to require the withdrawal of "foreign fighters unlawfully present in Syria."

That language could allow Assad to argue that fighters from Iran, Russia, Iraqi Shi'ite militias and others that support him are in Syria at his invitation and therefore lawfully present — a stance sure to be resisted by opposition and rebel groups.—*Reuters*

OPINION

2016, a year of high expectations?

Kyaw Thura

A new year, a new government and a new parliament will all no doubt make 2016 a year of high expectations and hopes amid rising pressures for overdue political, economic, social and educational reforms. At this critical moment, the calibre of the new government is the subject of much speculations among interest groups.

This challenges the incoming government to make a difference in setting an aspirational and realistic vision for the future of the country by defining a new development agenda to follow. At the same time, this will place a considerable burden on the chairperson of the National League for Democracy, the opposition party which won in the 8 November Election by securing an 80% of parliamentary seats.

In retrospect, the government emphasised the need to fight poverty and advance rural development under a number of green projects. However, its top-down management style failed to live up to their expectations. In reality, the decentralisation of power for the exploitation and protection of natural resources is inextricably linked with the development of all regions and states in the country.

It requires commitment and courage to translate this vision into action and overcome the challenges of alleviating poverty and enhancing rural development in order to enable the people to grasp opportunities for their own empowerment and fulfillment of a better future.

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

Balance of Power

News Analysis

U Khin Maung
(A retired diplomat)

IN this globalized world of ours, all countries are interdependent in economic, political and social affairs and their developments. In fact, on nation is an island. All countries in the world are members in a family of nations. In our world history, almost all nations, big and small, developed and underdeveloped, had suffered very much with massive losses of life and extensive damage to property from two man-made disasters: World War I and World War II.

Against this background, I would like to present to you only the essential extracts taken from the preamble to the Charter of the United Nations, as follows:

"We the peoples of the United Nations determined," to save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to established conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom", and for these ends to practice tolerance and live together, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, we have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims, our respective governments, through their representatives, do hereby establish an international organization to be known as the United Nations.

Well, although we have the honour of the United Nations Organization already set up to accomplish its noble aims and purposes and having resolved to combine its members states' efforts and has always done its utmost to have its noble mission accomplished, some states are still involved in internal conflict or in civil war and some, in inter-state conflicts, if not clashes or war. Under this situation, may I present to you news analysis, under the title of "balance of power". Balance of power" means a situation in which political or military strength is divided between two countries or group of countries. From my own point of view, I would like to say that balance of power means something like power struggle, power contest between two countries or a group of countries, protecting against and preventing one single country or group of countries from getting too much the upper hand upon others, and not to become too much powerful or influential so that there will be a balance between states. Such a power struggle can be seen doing through diplomacy or through threat or use of force.

During the "Cold-War" period, there was intense power struggle with checks and balances to control each other, the capitalist bloc led by the United States of America, and the communist bloc led by the Soviet Union. And thus, there was and there is still NATO, North Atlantic Treaty Organization comprising USA, Canada and Western capitalist countries, and on the other side, there was once rival pact made between the communist or the so-

cialist States.

In those days, our native land, Myanmar, was a neutral state or non-aligned state and was also a member-state of the non-aligned movement, with no alignment, nor owing allegiance to either bloc. So, thanks to our country's international image, U Thant, the then Permanent Representative to the United Nations, was deservedly appointed by the United Nations General Assembly, upon the recommendation of the United Nations Security Council as the UN Secretary-general, with no objections by both blocs.

Now, please allow me to present to you "news analysis" based on a top news item of the recent days and it is still developing. This news item, in my opinion, highlights the instances of the balance of power. It is about the South China Sea dispute and about the tensions arising between China and the United States. As we all know, China is now the fastest growing economy in Asia and the world's second biggest economy, overtaking Japan. And China claims almost the entire energy-rich South China Sea waters. Through the South China sea, more than US dollars 5 trillion of marine trade passes each year. The 4 ASEAN nations Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Viet Nam and the self-ruled territory Taiwan have overlapping claims over the same South China Sea. China's assertiveness in this "South China" has raised tensions with its neighbours and with the United States, which is also the Philippine's dominant security partner. Against this background and China's asser-

tiveness, regrettably not according to the process of law for its claims over the South China Sea, the United States has come into this sea dispute to balance the rising power of China, I think.

Asserting that China should abide by the international law in general, and the United Nations convention on the law of the sea in particular, in this dispute, the United States challenges China's claims over the South Sea, where China builds artificial islands and light-houses. As a way of challenging China's claim, the United States has sent a warship near the South China Sea area, which the United States calls international waters, where is freedom of navigation. And the US warship sailed through the disputed waters near the artificial island China has built.

Moreover, I have also observed from the international media that the United States' B2 bomber plane recently flew past near the Chinese artificial island in the South China Sea. In this case, the United States claims freedom of international air space, but china claims it is violation of its air-space sovereignty. In passing, I would like to state a well-known provision of the international law on the three knids of territorial sovereignty of a state I.E sovereignty over the land territory, sea territory and air territory.

As a piece of news analysis, may I mention as follows: China is too strong for the 4 ASEAN nations—Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Viet Nam and self-ruled territory Taiwan to challenge China's assertive claims through head on collision

or one-on-one clash over the South China sea. Thus, this crisis has brought the United States into play, mainly, I think, for the purpose of balance of power.

Well, the other instance of balance of power, in my view, is the arms sales deal reached between the United States and Taiwan. Taiwan is a self-ruled territory, where the defeated national forces have fled at the end of the civil war with China's communists in 1949. And China has declared that it has never renounced the use of force to bring Taiwan under its control. Under this situation, Taiwan has sought the strategic alliance of the United States so that the United States may come to its defense in case of necessity. On the other side, China has strongly called on the United States to respect China's core interests.

Well, on our part, we earnestly hope and expect that all states involved, 4 Asean Nations and Taiwan and China, Asia's super economic power will seek peaceful solution, diplomatic solution, legal solution and reach peaceful settlements. We also wish the balance of power-play ended peacefully without resorting to the use of force. And in this balance of power play, may diplomacy win, we pray. Why? Simply because diplomacy is the first and foremost line of defence and, diplomacy achieves a win-win result. In any dispute, diplomatic solution, or diplomacy is better than war. In diplomacy, it is persuasion and persuasion and compromise that have full play. There is no good war and bad peace.

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Reduced tomato market hits farmers at Inlay Lake

TOMATO farmers around Inlay Lake are experiencing losses this year because of a downward price surge for their crops and have reportedly begun selling off their produce for cattle feed.

This year's winter harvest at the famous lake coincides with the "kitchen crop" harvest that occurs across Myanmar.

"We face this kind of downturn every three years or so," said a local resident from Nyaung Shwe.

Tomato growers have seen close to no profit this year because of the depressed market.

This year, 40,000 vissees of tomatoes were disposed of by farmers. Farmers were able to sell 30 vissees of tomatoes for K5000. In the Inlay region, local farmers grew 600 to 900 tomatoes on a 40 foot plot.

Inlay lake is about 14 miles long and 7 miles wide at its most expansive. Roughly 25% of the surface is covered by carefully tended floating gardens. The sight of the long rafts of vegetation bobbing up and down in the wake of the locals' motorised narrowboats is quite disconcerting at first.—*Tin Hlaing (Meiktila)*



A woman arrange tomatoes from Inlay lake to send them to market. PHOTO: AYE MIN SOE



Water fountain in Mandalay Moat attracts residents for recreation every night. PHOTO: THIHA KO KO

Mandalay water feature completed

THE Mandalay Regional Government and Mandalay City Development Committee have successfully implemented the installation of a circular water fountain which puts on water shows daily. The show includes

a seven colour lighting display with different kinds of music at night time on the surface of the Mandalay Moat in front of the MCDC office between 26 street and 72 street, Aungmyaethazan Township. Work on the installa-

tion started on 3 December and was completed on Christmas Day. The water fountain, which is controlled by a central computer, is 183 feet in length and 100 feet in height.—*Thiha Ko Ko (Mandalay)*

Crime News

Yabba pills and heroin lead to arrests

AN Anti-drug squad discovered 130 yabba pills (a synthetic-amphetamine based narcotic) and 6.3 grams of heroin at the house of Ma Pu Sein in Thone Paw village, Kathar township, on Monday. In another incident police discovered 2800 yabba pills on a bike

headed from Moekaung to Toneyan on the same day.

A further raid led to the discovery of 390 yabba pills at the house of one Lone Maung in Linkhay township. Charges have been filed under the Anti-Narcotic law.—*Myanmar Police Force*



Ma Pu Sein is seen together with drugs seized from her. PHOTO: POLICE

12 wheel vehicle crashes into shop in Sagaing

A TRUCK driven by one Tun Linn Aung, 28, crashed into a shop and a number of vehicles parked beside the road near mile post (18/2) on Shwebo-Monywa road, Sagaing.

The 12-wheel truck lost control, causing the accident. There were no reported casualties.

The driver was deemed guilty of careless driving by police.—*Chit Ko Ko (Saging)*

Jades seized in Muse

A MOBILE team seized a cache of illegal jade at a checkpoint at milepost 105, Muse township, on Tuesday.

Acting on a tip-off, the team

searched a vehicle on the main road near an Asia World tours guide office. Various packages of jade were discovered in the vehicle.—*Thant Sin (Muse)*

Heroin seized in Aungmyaythazan

LOCAL authorities seized heroin at the Man Thasa hotel in Aung Myaythazan township on Saturday.

Acting on a tip-off, local police searched a hotel room and found 65 grams of heroin belonging to an individual known as Zalatt, 40, who was a

guest at the hotel. After interrogating Zalatt police are in hot pursuit of one Kinuee, 40, who was allegedly working with Zalatt.

Local police are filing charges against the two women under the anti-Narcotic Act.—*Maung Pyithu (Mandalay)*

Mingla Mandalay December Special Sales

THE Mingla Mandalay December Special Sales was held from 25 to 29 December in Mandalay's Chanmyathasi township.

Foreign and local companies sold products including consumer goods, cosmetics, food, clothes, Myanmar traditional costumes and cotton wares, mobile phones and its related equipment and other electrical wares at special prices to lure buyers.

The Sales included a music show by singer R Zarni and his band.

There was also an entertainment show by model dancers.—*Maung Pyi Thu-Mandalay*

BBC reports own websites hit by cyber attack

LONDON — The BBC's online services, including its news website and iPlayer catch-up TV platform, were taken down on Thursday by a large web attack, the British broadcaster reported.

The BBC's sites, which rank only behind Google and Facebook in visitor numbers in Britain, according to Internet analytics firm comScore, were hit from 0700 GMT, with many users receiving an error message rather than content. The broadcaster itself reported it had been hit by a "distributed denial of service (DDoS)" attack, cit-

ing sources within the organisation.

DDoS attackers typically target sites by flooding servers with messages from multiple systems so they are unable to respond to legitimate traffic.

The BBC press office said it would not confirm or deny it had been hit by an attack.

"We're aware of a technical issue affecting the BBC website and we are working to fix this now," the BBC press office said.

It said at 1145 GMT its sites were back up and operating normally.—Reuters



BBC workers place barriers near to the main entrance of the BBC headquarters and studios in Portland Place, London, on 16 July. PHOTO: REUTERS

Britain to review airport shop sales as retailers pocket tax savings

LONDON — Britain is to review airport retail sales after some businesses were found to be pocketing about half of tax savings meant for passengers, rather than passing on the discount, the government said on Thursday.

Most retailers at British airports, who include WH Smith (SMWH.L) and Dixons Carphone (DC.L), ask passengers to show boarding cards when paying for goods, typically citing security as the reason.

A newspaper reported in August, however, that some use the information to avoid paying 20 per cent value-added tax (VAT) on goods headed outside the European Union.

The report prompted a back-

lash from consumers, with many refusing to show their boarding cards to retailers.

Announcing the review on Thursday, the government said in a statement that some airport retailers were keeping up to an estimated 50 pence of every pound of potential sales tax savings, instead of passing them on to consumers.

"VAT relief at airports is intended to cut prices for those travellers — not be a windfall gain for shops," British finance minister George Osborne said in the statement. Many people could be paying over the odds for their purchases because the tax concession was not passed on, he said.

"This is simply unacceptable." A spokesman for WH Smith said it

would cooperate fully with the review. The company also said over half of its airport sales comprising items like newspapers, books and sandwiches, did not attract VAT.

"The limited benefit that we obtain in our other product categories, where customers travel outside of the EU only, is reflected in our single pricing policy for all customers, which overall provides better value," a spokesman said.

Dixons Carphone said it had no further comment to add.

The review, which will be conducted by Britain's tax agency and will report in early 2016, will consider ways to ensure prices reflect VAT savings, as well as savings on duty, the government said.—Reuters

Japan business leaders vow to encourage investment, wage hikes in 2016

TOKYO — Japanese business leaders yesterday pledged to encourage investment and wage hikes by domestic companies to ensure the economy steers clear of deflation and achieves sustainable growth.

In his New Year message, Sadayuki Sakakibara, chairman of the Japan Business Federation, also known as Keidanren, expressed hope that the year 2016 will see a "solid path" set toward bolstering the country's gross domestic product to 600 trillion yen (\$5 trillion), a goal set by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Abe has been calling on companies to go ahead with wage hikes and bolster capital investment, as economic growth remains shaky. The Bank of Japan is also throwing its own support behind companies proactively spending on wages.

Sakakibara said he will ask companies to consider pay hikes for annual income growth, while urging the government to proceed with "bold regulatory reforms" to reinvigorate the corporate sector.

Yoshimitsu Kobayashi, chairman of the Japan Association of Corporate Executives, said, "I hope that companies will proactively make investments and raise wages so we can create a virtuous cycle of economic growth." The Keizai Doyukai chief also said corporate managers need to improve capital efficiency and corporate governance to survive fierce global competition. The association will promote mergers and acquisitions, as well as realignments in Japan, Kobayashi said.

Akio Mimura, chairman of the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said support is needed for small and medium-sized companies struggling from rising material costs and severe labour shortages. Mimura also said curbing social security costs is a key challenge facing Japan, which can only be tackled by a stable administration. "Our expectations are high for the current administration (of Prime Minister Abe) to carry it out," he said.—Kyodo News



A Duty Free shop is seen in Terminal 2 at Heathrow Airport in London. PHOTO: REUTERS

Some WhatsApp users still facing service disruption

SAN FRANCISCO — WhatsApp, a messaging service owned by Facebook Inc, said some users were still facing issues while accessing its messaging service.

The problems were primarily centred in the UK and Western Europe, according to DownDetector, a website that provides real-time overview of Internet and

mobile services.

"We appear to be having issues again," a WhatsApp spokesman told Reuters.

The company had earlier said it had completely restored the service. WhatsApp, however, did not provide any details on what led to the outage, which began shortly after 4.30pm UK time on New Year's eve.—Reuters

Number of newborn babies rises in 2015 for 1st time since 2010

TOKYO — The estimated number of newborn babies in Japan in 2015 rose by around 4,000 from the previous year to 1,008,000, marking the first increase since 2010, the health ministry said Thursday.

The ministry's estimates also showed the number of people who died in 2015 totaled 1,302,000, up 29,000 from a year earlier. As a result, the natural population decline, calculated by deducting the number of deaths from that of births, stood at a record 294,000.

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare attributed the rise to an improvement in employment conditions and government efforts to boost day care services as well as an increase in the number of births among women in their early 30s in the first half of 2015.

But the overall trend of a decline in the number of children is expected to continue with a fall in the population of women of reproductive age.

The number of newborn babies, which hit more than 2 million annually in the 1970s, dropped below 1.5 million in 1984 and below 1.1 million in 2005, the health ministry data showed.

On the other hand, the number of deaths topped 1.3 million for the first time in 2015, resulting in a natural population decline for the ninth consecutive year. The top four leading causes of death in the country were cancer, heart disease, pneumonia and cerebrovascular disease.

The number of couples that got married in 2015 stood at 635,000, down about 9,000 from 2014 and marking a record low for postwar Japan. Divorced couples numbered 225,000, up around 3,000.

On average, a person was born every 31 seconds and a person died every 24 seconds.

Couples got married every 50 seconds and divorced every 140 seconds.—*Kyodo News*

WellCare makes CVS Health its pharmacy benefit manager

WASHINGTON — Health insurer WellCare Health Plans said it would change its pharmacy benefit manager to CVS Health Corp from United Health Corp's Optum Rx, effective 1 January.

About 3.8 million WellCare members enrolled under its Medicaid, Medicare and prescription drug plans will be able to access CVS' pharmacy network, WellCare said on Thursday.

Pharmacy benefit managers administer health plans and run large mail order pharmacies, help-

ing insurers get better prices from drugmakers. CVS is the second-largest US pharmacy benefit manager and drugstore.

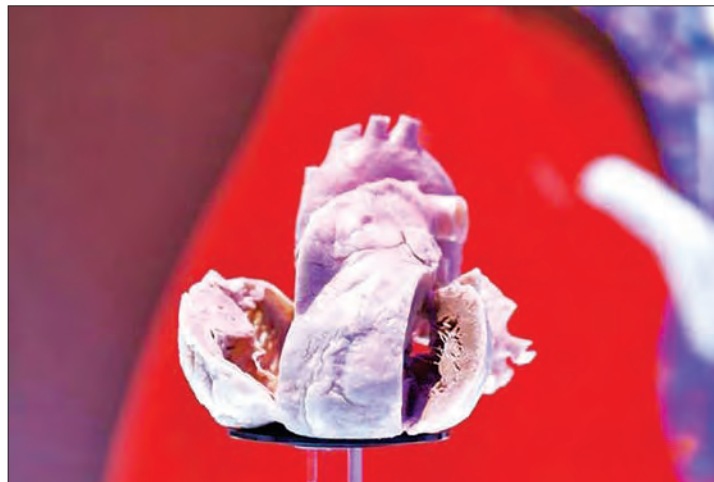
WellCare, which focuses on government-sponsored insurance plans, recorded \$3.7 million in PBM transitional costs in the quarter ended 30 September.

Shares of WellCare were down about 2 per cent while those of United Health and CVS Health were down about 1 per cent in early trading on the New York Stock Exchange on Thursday.—*Reuters*



A pedestrian walks past a CVS store in downtown Washington in 2010. PHOTO: REUTERS

Men with heart disease don't know risks for erectile dysfunction



A plastinated human heart is on display at the European Society of Cardiology meeting venue in Amsterdam. PHOTO: REUTERS

NEW YORK — Few men with heart disease know the condition is a leading cause of erectile dysfunction or understand all of the things they can do to make sexual difficulties less likely, a Polish study suggests.

Researchers focused on men with ischemic heart disease, or hardening of the arteries, which restricts blood flow to the heart and — in cases of erectile dysfunction — also reduces circulation in the penis. This type of heart disease is linked to most cases of erectile dysfunction (ED) in men over 60.

Out of 500 men in the study, about 190 of them, or 38 per cent, couldn't name any of the six things they could do to minimize their risk of ED — quit smoking, shed excess pounds, control diabetes, lower cholesterol, reduce blood pressure and get more exercise.

Just 31 of them, or about 6 per cent, could name all six of these modifiable risk factors for ED, the researchers report in the

International Journal of Impotence Research.

Instead of focusing on these risks, many men think that ED is primarily caused by low testosterone, cycling or benign prostate tumours, study co-author Zygmunt Domagala of Wroclaw Medical University in Poland said by email.

"Patients simply don't understand that a healthy lifestyle with leisure time physical activity and some diet modifications such as eating fish can influence penile function," Domagala said.

The men in the study were 62 years old on average and all of them had experienced at least one previous heart attack.

Most of them were overweight, smoked and had high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes. Nearly all of them failed to get sufficient exercise, and 15 per cent were obese.

Almost 80 per cent of the men experienced ED, with about 23 per cent describing the condition as severe or moderate

to severe.

Even though sedentary lifestyle was the most common modifiable risk factor for ED among men in the survey, patients were even less aware of this than the other contributors.

The most frequently cited risk factor was smoking, correctly identified by 179 of the participants. Excess weight was noted by 166 of the men.

Among the patients who could name at least one risk factor, 106 of them could name only one, while 64 cited two and 48 were able to list three.

Having ED didn't make the men any more likely to identify modifiable risk factors, which may be due to a lack of effective sex education, the authors conclude.

One limitation of the study is that only a limited number of patients responded to all the questions, leaving limited data in particular for the severity of erectile dysfunction and the intensity of physical activity, the researchers acknowledge.

Even so, the results aren't surprising, especially given how often patients and physicians alike are uncomfortable having frank discussions about sexual health, said Dr Vito Angelo Giagulli, a researcher in endocrinology and metabolic diseases at the University of Bari in Italy who wasn't involved in the study.

"In order to overcome this negative attitude I would suggest that those subjects suffering from ED should dare ask their doctors about this problem, given that it is a reliable barometer of good health and especially quality of life," Giagulli said by email.—*Reuters*

Guinea president urges reintegration of people cured from Ebola

CONAKRY — Guinea President Alpha Conde has appealed for socio-professional reintegration of people cured from Ebola, after Tuesday's declaration by the World Health Organisation (WHO) that the country was Ebola-free.

An official ceremony to mark the end of the end of Ebola in Guinea was held in Conakry in the presence of the president, members of government, ambassadors and Guinea's bilateral as well as multilateral partners.

During the ceremony, Conde urged the population and actors at all levels to end stigmatization and rejection of people cured from the disease

in families, places of work and the society in general.

"We must protect our brothers and sisters who were affected by the Ebola epidemic," the president said.

He recalled that over 2,000 Guineans died from the Ebola virus that has been spreading in the country for the last two years.

Conde used the opportunity to thank the international community, all friendly countries and partners who helped his country fight against Ebola, by providing funds as well as technical and logistical support.

Ibrahima Savane, the representative of people cured from Ebola, expressed the anx-

iety and fear Ebola patients and victims suffered during their hospitalisation.

He said the end of Ebola should not be a time "to drop our guard," but rather it should be a moment to "reinforce vigilance and maintain preventive measures to avert a recurrence of the disease."

"We have won the battle, but the war is not yet over," the Guinean Ebola survivor said.

WHO's representative in Guinea Dr Mohammed Belhocine said in the last two years, over 2,000 national health workers and expatriates and over 52 million US dollars were mobilized to fight against Ebola in Guinea.—*Xinhua*

Erdogan vows no respite in Turkey's war on Kurdish militants

ISTANBUL — Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan on Thursday vowed no let-up in a military campaign which he said had killed more than 3,000 mostly Kurdish militants this year in some of the heaviest fighting since their insurgency began three decades ago.

In a New Year statement, Erdogan said Turkey had “the resources and determination” to deal with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which first took up arms in 1984 to push for greater autonomy in the largely Kurdish southeast.

The violence has pre-occupied the NATO member's armed forces and complicated international efforts to fight Islamic State in neighbouring Syria, where a Kurdish group linked to the PKK is fighting the jihadists.



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan. PHOTO: REUTERS

Western allies want Turkey to focus more squarely on the threat from Islamic State.

“Our security forces are continuing to cleanse every place of terrorists, in the mountains and in the cities, and will continue to do so,” Erdogan said, referring to the PKK.

Turkey launched what it dubbed a “synchronized

war on terror” in July, meant to include a campaign against Islamic State in Syria as well as Kurdish militants at home.

But it has overwhelmingly concentrated its efforts on the PKK.

Southeastern Turkey has plunged back into some of its worst violence since the 1990s after a two-year ceasefire between the

PKK — designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and European Union — and the state collapsed in July.

Warplanes have bombed PKK camps in southeastern Turkey and across the border in the mountains of northern Iraq, while thousands of troops backed by tanks have in recent weeks pressed a campaign within Turkey to flush out militants on the ground.

Erdogan said 3,100 militants had been killed by the Turkish military in and outside the country since the start of 2015, which would be one of the highest rates of attrition for years.

Since the PKK launched its insurgency, fighting has been largely in the countryside, but the latest violence has focused on urban areas, where the

PKK youth wing has set up barricades and dug trenches to keep security forces out.

Residents in towns such as Cizre and Silopi, which have been rocked by explosions and gunfire in recent weeks, have complained that the military operations are indiscriminate and that round-the-clock curfews have left even the sick unable to get to hospitals.

The violence has also hit once-thriving cross-border trade.

The UND transporters' association said on Thursday around 10,000 truck drivers were stuck on the Iraqi side of the border because of the security concerns in Silopi and Cizre.

In apparent reference to a row with Baghdad over the deployment of Turkish troops to northern Iraq, Er-

dogan said Turkey had no territorial ambitions in any other country and did not question the sovereignty of its neighbours.

Iraq's prime minister accused Turkey on Wednesday of failing to respect an agreement to withdraw its troops from the north and its foreign minister said if forced, Iraq could resort to military action to defend its sovereignty.

The diplomatic dispute flared after Turkey deployed a force protection unit of around 150 troops earlier this month, citing heightened security risks near a military base where its troops were training an Iraqi militia to fight Islamic State.

“We just want people who are historically and culturally our brothers to live in peace and security,” Erdogan said.—Reuters

Tabakovic: We are doing everything to ensure cheaper loans

BELGRADE — Strengthening the role of the dinar in the national economy is a strategic goal for the National Bank of Serbia (NBS) and the Serbian government, while the objective of the key policy rate reduction is to make dinar-denominated retail and business loans as cheap as possible, says NBS governor Jorgovanka Tabakovic.

The measures have already proved effective as average interest rates on dinar-denominated retail loans fell from 21.9 per cent since January

2013 to 13.2 per cent last October, she said in an interview to Politika.

“Citizens are taking more and more dinar-denominated loans and about two thirds of newly-approved loans in the first nine months of this year were denominated in dinars,” the NBS governor said. She also said that the NBS is sending signals of predictability for business by targeting inflation, adding that the target of four plus-minus one and a half percent will remain unchanged in 2016. — Tanjug

Nigerian president vows to make things better in 2016

LAGOS — Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari yesterday reassured citizens of the country that his administration was determined to make things better in the shortest possible time.

The President, who gave the reassurance in his new year message, said he was aware that Nigerians had experienced a number of significant hardships over the past months.

Buhari said these challenges were temporary as his administration was working hard to

make things better for all Nigerians, irrespective of their socio-political backgrounds.

The Nigerian leader pledged to continue to do his utmost best to keep to every promise he made to Nigerians during the election campaign.

The former military ruler said he would be totally committed to being that kind of leader.

He promised to continue to initiate positive and enduring change for the betterment of the nation in spite of distractions

in some quarters.

Buhari added that Nigerians would in due course begin to enjoy the fruits of his administration's ongoing work.

According to him, the effective and efficient implementation of the 2016 budget proposals will address many of the socio-economic issues that are of current concern to Nigerians.

The president commended the Armed Forces for significantly curtailing the insurgency which had ravaged the northeast of

Nigeria over the past few years. According to him, there was still a lot of work to be done in the area of security.

On corruption, the president said his administration's ongoing crackdown on corruption would continue to be vigorously undertaken.

He urged the courts to support these efforts and help in the recovery of stolen funds by speedily concluding trials and showing that impunity no longer had a place in the country.—Xinhua

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV KUO HSIUNG VOY NO ()

Consignees of cargo carried on MV KUO HSIUNG VOY NO () are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 2.1.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of H.P.T where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim's Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY

AGENT FOR: M/S CHINA SHIPPING LINES

Phone No: 2301185

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV NIAMULMOWLA VOY NO (-)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV NIAMULMOWLA VOY NO (-) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 1.1.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T.T where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim's Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY

AGENT FOR: M/S BAY LINE SHIPPING PTE LTD.

Phone No: 2301186

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV UBC CANADA VOY NO (44)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV UBC CANADA VOY NO (44) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 3.1.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T.T where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim's Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

No claims against this vessel will be admitted after the Claims Day.

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY

AGENT FOR: M/S MERIDIAN SHIPPING AGENCIES PTE LTD.

Phone No: 2301186

Floods swamp Missouri, Illinois; 9m people in risk areas

ST LOUIS (MISSOURI) — Towns in Tennessee and southern Illinois prepared on Thursday to cope with potential flooding after rain-swollen rivers washed out hundreds of structures in Missouri, Arkansas and eastern Oklahoma and forced thousands to flee their homes.

As of Thursday morning, some 9.3 million people nationwide were in areas with flood warnings. That was down from 12.1 million on Wednesday and 17.7 million on Tuesday.

At least 28 people have died in the US Midwest since the weekend in the rare winter floods, mostly from driving into flooded areas after storms dropped up to 12 inches (30 cm) of rain, officials said. Flooding in the Midwest usually comes in the spring as snowmelt swells rivers.

While floodwaters from a number of rivers began to recede on Thursday around St. Louis, towns farther down the Mississippi hoped their levees would resist rising river levels. Southern states like Louisiana will be affected in coming days, the National Weather Service said.

The days of downpours have pushed the Mississippi and its tributaries to record highs or levels not seen in decades, the NWS and local



The Mississippi River is pictured flowing at 800,000 CFS (cubic feet per second) measured by the US Geological Survey (USGS) in St Louis, Missouri, on 31 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

officials said.

Workers in Tennessee were preparing on Thursday for the Mississippi River in Memphis to reach flood stage over the weekend.

"We're moving things up high and we've got our generators out and got some extra water," said Dotty Kirkendoll, a clerk at Riverside Park Marina on McKellar Lake, which feeds off the Mississippi River.

The Mississippi, the second-longest river in the

United States, is expected to crest in the small town of Thebes, in southern Illinois, at 47.5 feet (14 metres) on Sunday, more than 1-1/2 feet above the 1995 record, the NWS said.

Thebes village worker Bobby White said some sewage pumps were shut down to avoid overloading and that portable toilets had been supplied to affected areas. Most homes in the town, including his own, are on a hill and should be fine, he

said. "Most of the people at the bottom of the hill moved out years ago," White said.

The floodwaters have closed sections of major trucking routes Interstate 44 and Interstate 55, with the latter expected to partially reopen on Thursday evening, the Missouri Department of Transportation said.

The US Coast Guard issued a high water safety advisory on Thursday for more than 560 miles (900 km) of the Lower Mississip-

pi River from Caruthersville, Missouri, to near Natchez, Mississippi.

Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal declared a state of emergency to prepare for flooding.

"All that water's coming south and we have to be ready for it," Lieutenant Governor-Elect Billy Nungesser told CNN. "It's a serious concern. It's early in the season. We usually don't see this until much later."—Reuters

Israel to spend \$3bn more to improve living standards of Arab minority

JERUSALEM — Israel will spend around 13 billion shekels (\$3.3 billion) over the next five years to improve the standard of living of its Arab minority and narrow gaps with its Jewish population.

Arabs comprise nearly 21 per cent of Israel's 8.46 million population. The Arab Joint list — which combined four smaller political parties — is the third largest in Israel's 120-seat parliament with 13 seats.

In a plan approved by the cabinet, investment will be boosted in education, infrastructure, culture, sports and transportation in Arab areas that have long been neglected or are not up to the same standards of Jewish citizens.

"This is an attempt to correct a historical wrong," Eli Groner, director general of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), told Reuters on Thursday.

Groner said that in education, there is a gap between Jewish and Arab achievements in school, while Arab men often do not work in the professions they studied, he noted.

According to Tel Aviv University, Arabs comprise just 13 per cent of Israel's civilian labour force, while figures show 75 per cent of Arab men work and just 33 per cent of Arab women.

"We're trying to address these issues while encouraging them to better integrate into Israeli society," Groner said.

As part of the plan, there will be new industrial zones and sports stadiums, and more spending on transportation, roads and water supply.

"It's a shift in allocating spending toward these priorities," Groner said.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a statement said the plan will strengthen law enforcement in the minority sector with emphasis on illegal construction.

"For the first time the Israeli government is changing the allocation mechanisms in government ministries so that Israel's Arab citizens will receive their relative share in the state budget," said Social Equality Minister Gila Gamliel.—Reuters



THE ASEAN SECRETARIAT INVITES ASEAN NATIONALS TO APPLY FOR THE FOLLOWING VACANCIES:

Position vacant at the **Office of Secretary-General:**

- Head, ASEAN Connectivity

Positions vacant at the **Community & Corporate Affairs Department:**

- Director Legal Services & Agreements
- Senior Officer Property Management
- Senior Officer Resource Management

For details on terms of reference and application, kindly visit www.asean.org/opportunities/vacancies.

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND IRRIGATION DEVELOPMENT OF IRRIGATION AND LAND CONSOLIDATION SCHEMES IN MYANMAR UNDER THE LINE OF CREDIT FROM EXPORT IMPORT BANK OF INDIA

CORRIGENDUM 1 (Date Extension) IFB NO. [MOAI/INDIALOAN/MYN-ILC/BID/2015/001] dated 17th November, 2015

Refer Agricultural Mechanization Department (AMD), Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (MOAI), the Republic of the Union of Myanmar open tender for procurement of farm machinery and implements for Development of Irrigation and Land Consolidation Schemes in Myanmar.

1. The last date and time of submission of bid has been postponed till further notice.
2. All Corrigendum/Amendments/Changes, if any will be issued and made available on website www.moai.gov.mm and made available to bidders who already purchased bid document through email. Prospective Bidders/tenderer are advised to keep visiting the website www.moai.gov.mm on regular basis.

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People accept me in different roles: Sunil Grover

PANAJI — Actor Sunil Grover, known for his popular female comic character "Gutthi" on a television show, says people also accept him in various roles as a man, which shows his versatility.

"I am happy being a woman (on screen). That is not a problem for me. But I am happy that people also accept me as a man (on screen) which means I am an actor who is accepted in various kind of roles despite my funny character on screen," Grover told PTI.

He said after doing funny character and a funny role (in "Comedy Nights with Kapil"), people are accepting me in serious roles, that is making me happy.

Sunil is portying the character of "Gutthi" in "Comedy Nights with Kapil", hosted by

comedian Kapil Sharma, which airs on Colours channel.

"It is a challenge for audience than for me (to accept me in a serious role)," the 38-year-old actor said.

The stand-up comedian was in Goa to perform for the New Year bash on Casino Pride, an off shore vessel.

Sunil also said that he is comfortable in being anyone else other than himself.

"I am more comfortable in being someone else. Whether it is (wearing) salwar kamiz or policemen suit, a bikini or a shorts, anything would do," he said.

Sunil said his new year resolution was to work harder and to make people laugh.

"I want to keep trying and keep people entertained," he added.—PTI

'Batman v Superman' and 'Zoolander 2' among expected big 2016 hits

LOS ANGELES — Moviegoers can expect a wide range of films in the coming year, from comedies to superheroes, and spinoffs from two of the most popular film franchises of all time.

"Zoolander 2" will open on 12 February in the United States.

Variety Senior Writer James Rainey explains why he thinks this movie will be a big attraction for some film fans.

"Penelope Cruz, Olivia Munn and, of course, Owen Wilson, and Ben Stiller in the title role. It's totally silly. But I think it's going to be fun and good."

Other big pictures worth

looking at include 'Batman v Superman' and something new from the world of 'Harry Potter'.

"And I think, for mainstream audiences, you've got the spinoff of the 'Harry Potter' franchise coming at the end of the year, which is 'Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them' from J.K. Rowling — from her pen to Warner Bros. screen. That's a big one at the end of the year, around Thanksgiving 2016."

Rainey admits that "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" will be a tough act to follow.

"The Force Awakens" will be released in China on 9th January.—Xinhua

Vidya back from hospital, to spend b'day at home

MUMBAI — Actress Vidya Balan says she is grateful to be back home from hospital in time to celebrate her 37th birthday with her family.

The "Kahaani" actress was admitted on 29 December at a city-based hospital for a suspected kidney stone.

"Grateful to be back home in time to bring in my birth-

day ... Thank You for all your love, prayers and wishes. Happy 2016 to each of you," Balan posted on twitter.

The actress and her producer husband, Siddharth Roy Kapur had planned to ring in New Year and Balan's birthday today at an undisclosed location abroad. But they cancelled the plan after her illness.—PTI

Robert Redford's death reports are 'sick hoax', publicist says

NEW YORK — Robert Redford is alive and well, his publicist said on Thursday, calling reports on Twitter that the "Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid" actor had died "a sick hoax."

Twitter briefly erupted with R.I.P. tributes after a tweet purporting to come from Britain's Sky News said the 79-year-old actor had died after falling off a golf buggy in the Southern California beach city of Santa Monica.

The fake news feed where the post appeared, Sky Breaking News, in the past has spread other celebrity death reports that proved untrue.

"This is a sick hoax. I just spoke to him and there is no truth to this whatsoever," Robert Redford's publicist, Cindi Berger, said. She said the actor was at



US actor Robert Redford arrives at the Princess Grace Awards gala in Monaco on 5 September. PHOTO: REUTERS

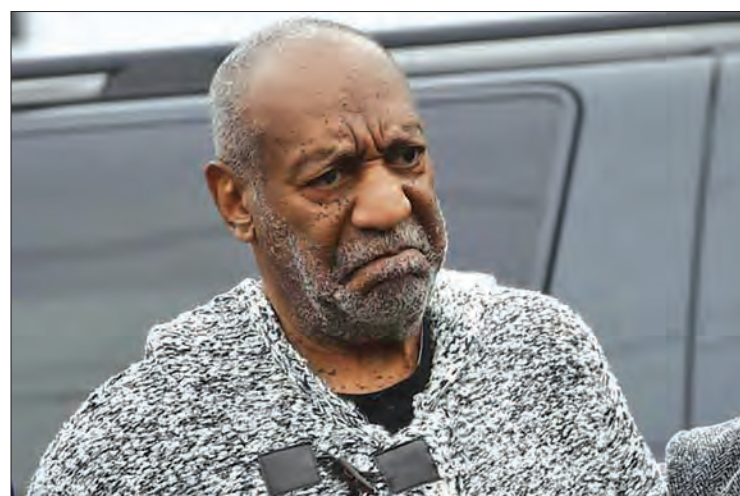
home and fine.

In the roughly 15 minutes in which the hoax report spread like wildfire on Twitter, posters tweeted their sadness, calling

Redford an icon, a "looker in his day" and a "proper star."

There was no comment from Redford himself, who is not on Twitter or Instagram.—Reuters

Cosby faces big financial threat from civil lawsuits: legal experts



Actor and comedian Bill Cosby arrives for his arraignment on sexual assault charges at the Montgomery County Courthouse in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania on 30 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

NEW YORK — Civil lawsuits accusing Bill Cosby of sex abuse and defamation could do major damage to the entertainer's wealth, regardless of how a criminal prosecution plays out, lawyers who have handled similar cases said on Thursday.

Cosby, who has been accused by more than 50 women of sexually abusing them in incidents dating back decades, was charged in suburban Philadelphia on Wednesday in the only criminal case he has faced. The actor and comedian is charged with aggravated indecent assault against one of the women, a second-degree felony carrying a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$25,000 fine.

The financial assets of the entertainer, who personified the model American family man in a long-running hit television show, are more at risk from at least sev-

en ongoing civil suits that have been filed or joined by 13 women.

Cosby, 78, has denied the criminal and civil allegations. He has sued some of his accusers for defamation, and his lawyers have questioned their motives, suggesting they are after money.

A loss in the civil litigation could be very costly for Cosby, whose career made him one of the wealthiest people in the US entertainment industry, several plaintiffs lawyers not involved in the suits said. Jury awards in cases where a person has claimed sex abuse or defamation can run into the tens of millions of dollars, not including his legal fees. "This is going to be enormously expensive for Cosby," said Paul Callan, a New York lawyer who successfully represented the estate of retired American football player O.J. Simpson's ex-wife in a civil case after Simpson was acquitted

in her killing. In a statement on Wednesday, a lawyer for Cosby, Monique Pressley, denounced the charges as unjustified and said Cosby would be exonerated. A spokesman for Cosby declined to comment on Thursday.

The allegations against Cosby - with so many accusers claiming they were drugged before he allegedly sexually assaulted them — mean he is particularly vulnerable to civil punitive damages, the lawyers said. Punitive awards are meant to punish and deter a defendant, while compensatory awards cover actual costs of plaintiffs.

Various media estimates have put Cosby's net worth at between \$380 million and \$450 million in recent years. His ability to pay is likely to be a factor in a civil award or settlement, lawyers said.

"Any jury assessing this starts with, what amount of money punishes him given his net worth?" said Brad Edwards, a Florida lawyer who represents sex abuse plaintiffs. "Even if you said \$20 million, you're talking about a fraction of his net worth," he added, so a jury could go even higher in determining a punitive award.

Big US jury awards have to survive review by judges. Some states cap awards, and a punitive award generally must be less than 10 times the compensatory award.

In court papers filed on Dec. 14 in one suit, Cosby's lawyers said women suing Cosby in Massachusetts are "engaged in a campaign to assassinate Mr. Cosby's reputation and character" in order to "extract financial gain." —Reuters

Media should give more space to good news, pope says after grim year

VATICAN CITY — The media should give more space to positive, inspirational stories to counterbalance the preponderance of evil, violence and hate in the world, Pope Francis said on Thursday in his year-end message.

Francis led about 10,000 worshippers in a traditional year-end solemn "Te Deum" vespers service of thanksgiving in St Peter's Basilica.

In his brief homily, Francis said the outgoing year had been marked by many tragedies.

"(There has been) violence, death, unspeakable suffering by so many innocent people, refugees forced to leave their countries, men, women and children without homes, food or means of support," he said.

But he said there had also been "so many great gestures of goodness" to help those in need, "even if they are not on television news programs (because) good things don't make news".

He said the media should not allow such gestures of solidarity to be "obscured by the arrogance of evil".

The Argentine pope, marking the third New Year's season since his election in 2013, condemned the "insatiable thirst for power and gratuitous violence" the world had seen in 2015,

without giving examples.

But in his Christmas message last week, he urged the world to unite to end atrocities by Islamist militants who he said were causing immense suffering in many countries.

Security has been very tight at the Vatican since the 13 November Paris attacks in which 130 people were killed.

Police are checking the bags of people as they approach the Vatican area and then have to go through additional, airport-style screening if they want to enter St Peter's Square or St Peter's Basilica.

Francis also condemned a political corruption scandal that hit Rome, the city of which he is also bishop. The scandal, known as "Mafia Capital", has spawned a massive trial with 46 defendants that began last month.

Mobsters, bureaucrats and politicians are accused of siphoning millions of euros from public contracts for everything from refugee shelters to trash collection. The 79-year-old pope, who appears to have held up well during his numerous public appearances over the Christmas and New Year's season, is due to celebrate a Mass on Friday in the basilica to mark the Catholic Church's World Day of Peace.—Reuters



Pope Francis leads the First Vespers and Te Deum prayers in Saint Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, on 31 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

PICTURE OF THE DAY



Visitors play with world famous Pony carrying a toy monkey on its back in Nanjing City, capital of East China's Jiangsu Province, on 30 December 2015. The horse will attend celebrations of the upcoming Spring Festival, China's Lunar New Year. According to Chinese lunar calendar, 2015 is the Year of the sheep and 2016 is the Year of Monkey. PHOTO: XINHUA

Kenyan President says to expand road network, better education system in 2016

MOMBASA — Kenya will launch various development projects this year as the country seeks to develop and become a middle-income nation.

In his New Year address to the nation, President Uhuru Kenyatta said the government will build 8,000 km of new tarmacked roads in 2016.

"The projects will cover every county of Kenya. The first batch totalling 1,700 kilometres will be launched this January. A second batch of 1,800 kilometres will be launched in March. I appeal to governors to fully support this programme," said Kenyatta.

The country will also review its education system to make it more modern and relevant to the changing development needs of the 21st century.

"We will deliver digital learning devices to our schools this year. We will do a lot more that I do not wish to set out at this moment. Most importantly, we will work together as one people to

build a great nation that each one of us will be proud to call home," he said, adding that his government will remain open, democratic, transparent, united and peaceful.

The Kenyan government will also seek to better the lives of citizens and unite the nation.

"We will achieve our dream of happy individuals, strong families, united communities and a successful nation. The transformation will continue with greater momentum. We will keep on delivering on our promise," he said.

Among the country's achievements in 2015, according to the president, is the construction of the standard gauge railway, devolution, rural electrification and increased use of mobile phones, with subscribers standing at 30 million.

"What is normal today, electricity, cell phones, devolution, security system improvement, digital broadcasting, internet, were figments and desires only a

few years ago. This is how society evolves and transforms," he said.

He hailed a recent heroic act of Muslims saving the lives of Christians during a terror attack on a bus in Mandera, northern Kenya.

"In this instant, I would like to hail the act of bravery demonstrated by patriotic Kenyans during the recent attack on a bus in Mandera. Through sheer bravery and courage, they were able to save the lives of fellow Kenyans. They truly stood up for Kenya. I salute and congratulate them for their quick and heroic action," Kenyatta said.

Kenya too in 2015 strengthened its relationship with its neighbours in particular Uganda, and across the border the US and China. "In other continents, Kenya stamped its footprint, making friends and successfully fostering win-win, mutually beneficial interests which rapidly advanced our development agenda," he said.—Reuters



Entertainment Channel

(2-1-2016, Saturday)

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 6:00 am | • Cassette Drama |
| • Classical Songs | 8:15 am |
| 6:10 am | • Musical Programme |
| • Real Story, Real Movie | 8:40 am |
| 6:30 am | • Dramatic Arts |
| • Musical Programme | 10:00 am |
| 6:45 am | • Myanmar Video |
| • Myanmar Series | Noon |
| 7:00 am | • Close Down |

From 2.1.2016 (Saturday) 06:00 hrs To 3.1.2016 (Sunday) 06:00 hrs
This schedule will be repeated four times in 24 hours.

Powerball jackpot up to \$334m for Saturday drawing

NEW YORK — The Powerball jackpot for the US multi-state lottery drawing is up to \$334 million for the Saturday drawing, which would make for a wealthy 2016 for whoever wins. There were no jackpot winners for Wednesday's drawing, according to the Multi-State Lottery Association's website. Saturday's drawing has an estimated \$205 million cash value.

Saturday's jackpot would be the 12th highest in Powerball's 23-year history, according to the lottery association. The biggest Powerball jackpots in 2015 were \$564.1 million in February and \$310.5 million in September. The largest ever winning jackpot was \$656 million, in a Mega Millions lottery drawing on 30 March, 2012. The lottery association is a non-profit owned and operated by member lotteries.—Reuters



A powerball Lottery ticket is shown in this photo illustration after being purchased at a gas station in San Diego, California, on 10 February. PHOTO: REUTERS

Pellegrini says Manchester City have 'complete' squad

LONDON — Manchester City's Manuel Pellegrini could be one of the least active Premier League managers in the January transfer window after declaring his title-chasing squad "complete" on Thursday.

The Abu Dhabi-owned club were English football's biggest spenders in the summer, splashing out heavily on the likes of forwards Raheem Sterling and Kevin De Bruyne and defender Nicolas Otamendi.

"Really I think this squad is complete," Pellegrini told reporters ahead of City's trip to high-flying Watford on Saturday.

"As always I said that we are not going to close the window but we are not really thinking of any special players to bring in," added the Chilean.

City, three points behind leaders Arsenal and Leicester City at

the halfway stage of the season, will be without injured captain Vincent Kompany for at least a month while Samir Nasri is also on the absentee list.

Kompany has missed more than half of the league games this season, playing in nine out of the 19, and hobbled off within 10 minutes of appearing as a second-half substitute against Sunderland last Saturday.

Pellegrini said promoted Watford, ninth in the league and seven points behind City, were doing a great job but his side were in a good position.

"Always the best position is to be top of the table but I think that this is a special season in the Premier League," he said. "We are three points behind the leaders and I hope we are going to compete strongly with a very good second half of the season." —Reuters



Manchester City manager Manuel Pellegrini before the match during UEFA Champions League Group Stage at Etihad Stadium, Manchester, England on 8 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

Rio celebrates start of Olympic year with special firework

RIO DE JANEIRO — The city of Rio marked the year of 2016 Rio Olympics with a special fireworks show at the famous Copacabana Beach on 1 January, 2016.

The fireworks show is a traditional New Year's Eve party in Rio held in every new year's eve, while this year with less than eight months to go until Rio Olympics, a special fireworks highlighting the Olympic spirit through images and sounds was displayed.

"We start the year of the Olympics. We think that 2016 is a year to stay in the city's history. Nothing better to start this year with this very special party, which is the Copacabana New Year's Eve," said Rio Mayor Eduardo Paes. —Xinhua

Virus costs Schwartzel South African Open title tilt

CAPE TOWN — A wretched Christmas for South African golfer Charl Schwartzel has been compounded by having to withdraw from next week's South African Open when the European PGA Tour resumes after the holiday break.

The former US Masters winner has been in and out of hospital in recent days for rehydration treatment after being afflicted by a stomach virus, as were many family members gathered for the festive season.

While Schwartzel is on the mend, he has been forced to pull out of one of the few domestic

titles he has yet to win, South Africa's Sunshine Tour said on Thursday.

"I am hugely disappointed to be missing out on the SA Open," he said in a statement.

"Everybody knows how keen I am to win our national Open and, having come so close the last couple of years and following my good form at Leopard Creek, I was really looking forward to contending at Glendower. "I look forward to being strong and healthy in time for the Joburg Open the following week, however," Schwartzel added. —Reuters



Charl Schwartzel hits his tee shot on the 3rd hole during the final round of the 2015 PGA Championship golf tournament at Whistling Straits. PHOTO: REUTERS

Top four place will now be tough for Valencia: Neville

BARCELONA — Valencia will find it tough to qualify for next season's Champions League following their 1-0 reverse at Villarreal on Thursday, said new coach Gary Neville.

The former England and Manchester United defender was brought in to put the club back on track after a slow start to the season but they are yet to win under him in three La Liga games.

Two draws and a defeat have left them 10th in the table after 17 matches, 11 points adrift of Villarreal who occupy fourth spot, the position that earns qualification for the preliminary round of the Champions League.

Valencia also face a severe test against third-placed Real Madrid on Sunday.

"It is a large distance to make up and I am concentrating on the next game," Neville told a news conference. "The defeat makes it a lot more difficult but there are still points to be played for.

"I am desperately looking to pick up points but I am also looking for a good performance. There were good signs against Olympique Lyonnais and Eibar but today we saw something different as we had a good 45 minutes.

"This makes me feel better as we knew how to play in the second half and if we continue that way then it is possible to pick up the



Valencia's new coach Gary Neville. PHOTO: REUTERS

points we need. In the second half we played the best football since I arrived," added Neville.

Valencia began very defensively against Villarreal with a five-man rearguard and, although they came out of their shells after the break, conceded from a Bruno Soriano free kick in the 64th min-

ute. "We needed to pass the ball better. We were bunched together too much and we should have looked to attack more," said Neville.

"When you have five at the back you can be too defensive and we were conscious of that but we didn't do it well." —Reuters