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dinner to mark 68th
Independence Day

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68 YEARS STRONG

Nay Pyi Taw puts on grand spectacle for Independence Day



The State Flag is hoisted at a ceremony to mark Myanmar's 68th Anniversary Independence Day. PHOTO: MNA

A GRAND ceremony was held at Nay Pyi Taw City Hall in commemoration of Myanmar's 68th Independence Day yesterday. The ceremony featured the raising and

saluting of the national flag.

The flag was hoisted at 4:20am, the hour when Myanmar gained her independence from the British Empire.

Civil servants, police officers, members of the Red Cross and fire services and local residents totalling 3,000 people attended the ceremony.

A ceremony to salute the national flag was held at 6:45am.

Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham, who is also the chairman of the Central Committee for Or-

ganising the 68th Independence Day, took the salute from the Guard of Honour and saluted the flag together with the people.

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Death Railway Museum opens

THE Death Railway Museum, an institution founded to educate visitors about the World War II-era Burma Railway, was opened at the site of the original railway in Thanbyuzayat Township.

The Burma Railway, also known as the Death Railway, was built by the army of the Japanese Empire in 1943 to support the Japanese war effort by connecting Rangoon to Bangkok. Its construction was notorious for its reliance on forced labour, drawn from both civilian communities in Thailand and Myanmar and Allied prisoners of war.

The museum is dedicated to the memories of the people who sacrificed their lives building the railway, said U Ohn Myint, Chief Minister of Mon State, in his keynote remarks on the occasion of the opening.

He wished for a long-lasting friendship between Myanmar and Japan and peaceful development for Myanmar.

The museum showcases historic photos documenting the Death Railway, as well as paintings, sculptures and 3D images of the daily life of the prisoners of war who died during the construction of the railway.

Silicon statues of Japanese soldiers and prisoners of war are displayed outside the museum.

Tala Mon Company Ltd won the right to build the museum, as well as a hotel, a restaurant and other tourist facilities, on four acres of land in Thanbyuzayat Township.

Construction on the museum started in April 2015.

The museum has offered tourists the opportunity to see a coal-fired C0522 engine, which was used on the Death Railway, and the location where the Death Railway line began, which is now the site of a memorial.

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A steam locomotive pulls coaches along the Death Railway.

PHOTO: KYAW WIN



Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham reads message sent by President U Thein Sein on the occasion of the 68th Anniversary Independence Day. PHOTO: MNA

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Those present at the ceremony also paid tribute to fallen heroes and took the four-point oath.

Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham also read a message sent by President U Thein Sein on the occasion of the 68th Independence Day.

Also present at the ceremony were deputy speakers of the Pyithu Hluttaw and Amyotha Hluttaw, Union ministers, officials from the Nay Pyi Taw Council, senior military officers and members of ethnic minority communities.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Death Railway Museum opens

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The museum is also located in the vicinity of a cemetery in Thanbyuzayat Township where several thousand victims of the Death Railway were buried.

"The Japanese army forced more than 120,000 prisoners of war from various countries to construct the 175-mile Death Railway, linking Thanbyuzayat [in Myanmar] to Kanchanaburi, Thailand. The number of deaths is equal to the sleepers along the railway," said an expert who collects memorabilia to display at the museum.

More than 16,000 prisoners of war died during the construction of the railway, or about 38 prisoners for every kilometre of the 415-kilometre track. Mr Mikio Kinoshita, a 95-year-old Japanese

war veteran, who was 24 years old when he was on duty at the railway construction site during the WWII, attended the opening ceremony, along with his family. The Japanese war veteran said shedding tears that he was satisfied with the museum which is a part of his dream for those who sacrificed their lives in construction of the road. He was a railway engineer and controlled 100 Austrians and 200 Myanmar prisoners of war at the site of the death railway.

Kinoshita expressed his delight at the opening of the museum, saying that his dream of building a museum to commemorate the suffering and loss of lives caused by the events surrounding the railway has finally come true.—*Su Hnin Lae, Kyaw Win*

Independence Day celebrated across Myanmar



Two children participate in a funfair at middle school No. 3 in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA



Children of service personnel participate in contests in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA



Women participate in a traditional funfair contest in Meikhtila. PHOTO: CHAN THAR

PEOPLE across the country celebrated Myanmar's 68th Independence Day, holding flag-hoisting and saluting ceremonies at local independence monument grounds.

Some communities also held funfairs, games and sporting events on public roads.

At the ceremonies, officials gave prizes to people who won essay and poem contests in commemoration of Independence Day. In Nay Pyi Taw, Union ministers, deputy ministers, departmental officials and service personnel and their families participated in the events held at government



Men climbing a bamboo post to get a flag during a funfair in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

staff housing estates. Meanwhile, Nay Pyi Taw National Land Mark, Zoological Garden and Water Fountain Garden were crowded with adults and children alike, all taking advantage of the holiday to take part in recreational activities. On the evenings of 3 and 4 January, all ministry offices, Nay Pyi Taw

City Hall, traffic roundabouts, the Myanmar Jade and jewelry Museum, Jade Garden, Maniyadana Jade Hall, Nay Pyi Taw Myoma market, Thapayaygone market, the Hotel Zone and government staff housing estates in Nay Pyi Taw were decorated with colourful lights.—*Myanmar News Agency*



President U Thein Sein greets dignitaries at a dinner to mark 68th Anniversary Independence Day. PHOTO: MNA

President hosts dinner to mark 68th Independence Day

PRESIDENT U Thein Sein hosted a dinner in Nay Pyi Taw to commemorate Myanmar's 68th Independence Day.

The reception and dinner took place on the lawn of the Presidential Palace yesterday evening.

It was attended by Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham and wife Daw Nan Shwe Hmone, Vice President U Nyan Tun and wife Daw Khin Aye Myint, Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Thura U Shwe Mann and wife Daw Khin Lay Thet, Speaker of the Amyotha Hluttaw U Khin Aung Myint and wife Daw Khin Pyone, Union Chief Justice U Tun Tun Oo, Commander-in-Chief of Defence

Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and wife Daw Kyu Kyu Hla, Chairman of the Constitutional Tribunal U Mya Thein, Chairman of the Union Election Commission U Tin Aye, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice Senior-General Soe Win and wife Daw Than Than Nwe, the deputy speakers of the Pyithu and Amyotha Hluttaws, union ministers, the Union Attorney-General, senior military officers, deputy ministers, MPs, representatives of political parties, departmental heads, diplomats and resident representatives of UN agencies.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Ngamoeyeik Bridge nearly complete

THE construction of the new Ngamoeyeik Bridge, also known as the Thunanda Bridge, is 60 per cent complete, and it is expected to be finished at the end of March 2016, said project manager U Saw Win Soe.

The new bridge will be Myanmar's first bridge to use of Post-Tensioned Box Cross beams. It will link Thunanda Road in North Okkalapa Township to Yazathingyan Road in North Dagon Township, Yangon Region.

The 247-metre long bridge will have a capacity of 75 tonnes per vehicle. It is being built alongside the Thunanda Rope Bridge by 20 engineers—10 from Myanmar and 10 from Thailand—together with 150 labourers.

Construction began in mid-August last year by Myanmar V-Pile Co with the permis-

sion of the Yangon Region government.

Gas pipelines to serve North Dagon Township will soon be installed along both platforms of the new bridge, the project manager said.

The two-way road bridge will help people access the benefits of socio-economic development. Currently, thousands of residents from North Dagon Township are faced with various difficulties using the rope bridge to travel to the North Okkalapa Industrial Zone for work and other daily needs.

It is likely that real estate prices in North Dagon Township will rise after completion of the project, said U Myint, chairman of the North Dagon Township Development Committee.—*Soe Win (MLA)*

Military cannot be separated from nation-building: C-in-C

"TODAY, we are fighting for our nation, our people and our Tatmadaw, if we have to say the truth," said Senior General Min Aung Hlaing at a ceremony held yesterday to present medals and certificates to military personnel for valour in battle.

All Tatmadaw men, including the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services, take an oath that they will fight only for justice. It is the inherent duty of all citizens to protect, as a national task, our land, air and water territories, as well as the lives and property of all nationalities," he said.

"Myanmar's Tatmadaw cannot be separated from nation-building and state-building tasks, as it has had the tradition



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing . PHOTO: MYAWADY

of being involved in national politics," he said.

He added: "The service personnel of the Tatmadaw have sacrificed for perpetuity of My-

anmar's national independence and sovereignty, and the valour means more than bravery because it involves sacrificing body and spirit in the battle."—*Myawady*



Ngamoeyeik Bridge, also known as Thunanda Bridge, seen under construction. PHOTO: SOE WIN

Data collection carried out in public hospitals

THE collection of data on the symptoms of several diseases is being conducted at public hospitals around Myanmar in order to obtain more accurate information from patients, said Daw Thet Thet Mu, an official at the Public Health Department.

"It plays a crucial part in getting the correct information about the challenges of public health," she said.

In the past, public hospitals were not in the habit of gathering data about the outbreak of diseases or their death tolls.

Daw Thet Thet Mu said the main challenge facing the data-collection programmes stems from the fact that record keepers are not healthcare providers, and

that healthcare providers have little knowledge about computer-based data entry systems.

"It is necessary to conduct technical trainings for record keepers, not only at government hospitals, but also at the private ones, to systematically save all useful information obtained from patients," she said.

Every hospital under the Ministry of Health has sent public health information to the ministry through the relevant departments, according to Dr Win Naing of the Mandalay Region Health Department.

"Thanks to the programme, we tracked a massive outbreak of diarrhoea in 2014, and the ministry was able to raise funds to control

the disease," the doctor said.

"Not only technical assistance, but also numbers of staff and equipment are needed at our hospitals in order for us to successfully expand the data-collection programme."

According to figures released by the Ministry of Health in 2014, diarrhoea ranked as Myanmar's most common disease, followed by malaria with over 4,000 cases and tuberculosis with over 3,000 cases.

The figures also show that 14 people in every 100,000 suffered a traumatic injuries in 2014, while 4 people in every 100,000,000 succumbed as a is the injuries.—*Min Htet Aung*

Quake strikes northeast India, Bangladesh; 11 dead, nearly 200 injured

GUWAHATI — A powerful earthquake struck South Asia before dawn yesterday, killing at least 11 people and injuring nearly 200, with efforts to rescue

those trapped in rubble hampered by severed power supplies and telecommunication links.

The US Geological Survey said the quake of magnitude 6.8

was 57 km (35 miles) deep and struck 29 km (18 miles) west of Imphal, the capital of Manipur, bordering Myanmar.

The quake struck while

many residents were asleep, and roofs and staircases of some buildings collapsed in the city of about 270,000 people.

"It was like being tossed around in a frying pan," said Joy Thanglian, a 33-year-old employee of state energy firm Bharat Petroleum. "Then we ran outside."

Police and hospitals in Imphal said the toll had reached six dead, with 100 people injured, 33 of them seriously.

"It was the biggest earthquake we've felt in Imphal," disaster response worker Kanarjit-Kangujam told Reuters by telephone.

Rescue workers battled to find workers believed to have been buried beneath the rubble of a building that had been construction. They were unsure how many might be trapped.

Residents of Imphal said people fled their homes and power and telecoms links were down in the remote region.

At the airport, flights were normal, although a boundary wall collapsed, and a crack appeared in the terminal building, said Thanglian, who works there.

Some people criticised what they called the authorities' slow

response, saying that although the army had begun to clear debris, it appeared to be short of heavy equipment.

"We haven't seen any help from the government side," said disaster volunteer worker Kangujam. "The government has not given us any information."

Government officials leading the rescue effort could not immediately be reached for comment.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted that he was in touch with authorities in the northeast. Rescue teams from Guwahati, in neighbouring Assam state, were scrambling to reach Imphal.

People in Bangladesh and the Himalayan nation of Nepal ran from their homes, and the quake was also felt as far away as the Myanmar city of Yangon, about 1,176 km (730 miles) to the south, residents said.

Media in Bangladesh reported three people died of heart attacks with police saying at least 90 were injured.

An official at Myanmar's meteorological department in Nay Pyi Taw, the capital, said there were no reports of damage or casualties on the Myanmar side of the border.—Reuters



People look at a damaged building at a market place after an earthquake in Imphal, India, on 4 January.

PHOTO: REUTERS

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Power cuts jump to 14 hours a day in fuel-starved Nepal

KATHMANDU — Nepal's state-run power distribution monopoly yesterday extended power cuts to up to 14 hours a day, increasing the woes of Nepali people whose lives are already crippled by a severe fuel crisis caused by an undeclared fuel blockade by India since late September.

Citing dipping generation at the country's run-of-river hydropower projects and increasing electricity consumption because of the unavailability of fossil fuels, the Nepal Electricity Authority raised power cuts from the existing 11 hours daily.

Nepal has peak electricity demand of 1,300 megawatts but generates only about half of that, resulting in round-the-year power outages.

In winter, when generation at run-of-river hydropower projects dips significantly due to receding

water levels in rivers feeding turbines, the power cuts worsen.

Nepal has only two reservoir projects with a combined generation capacity of 92 megawatts. They were built with Japanese assistance between 1975 and 1983.

Nepal is rich in untapped hydropower potential estimated at 83,000 megawatts, half of which is technically and financially feasible. But plans to build hydropower plants to match projected rises in demand suffered a setback due to political instability that started in 1996 when the country's Maoists, now part of the ruling coalition, started an armed insurgency.

The end of the insurgency in 2006 did not end political turmoil.

Nepal adopted a new Constitution on 20 September, hoping to bring to an end a prolonged political transition from a constitutional monarchy to a federal republic.

However, the charter was rejected by a section of the Madhesi community living mostly in the country's southern flatlands neighbouring India.

In support of protests by the Madhesis who share cultural, familial and linguistic ties with Indians across the border, India slapped an undeclared fuel blockade on Nepal after the Constitution's adoption, resulting in severe shortages of essentials like fuel, cooking gas and medicine.

India denies having blockaded Nepal and blames the crisis on insecurity inside Nepal because of protests by the Madhesis, who are demanding a bigger province and greater representation.

Supplies to landlocked Nepal increased after India on 21 December welcomed the government's decision to make two constitutional amendments to meet the protest-

ers' demands. Protesters have rejected the amendments as incomplete and the Birgunj-Raxaul trading route, which handles half of the trade between Nepal and India, remains closed for the fourth month running.

India was the only nation not to welcome Nepal's Constitution, saying instead on 20 September, "We note the promulgation in Nepal today of a constitution."

The rising power cuts have made life difficult for millions of families in Nepal who switched to electric cooking equipment like rice cookers and induction stoves after cooking gas became unavailable. Nepal was hit by massive earthquakes last spring that left nearly 9,000 dead. International aid agencies have been unable to take adequate winter supplies to quake-hit families because of fuel shortages.—Kyodo News

Philippines tightens security at power plants

MANILA — Government forces will be beefing up security patrols to curb incidence of bombing of towers of the National Grid Corporation of the Philippines (NGCP) in Central Mindanao, the Armed Forces disclosed yesterday.

The military statement came after the NGCP came out with a paid advertisement calling on the public cooperation to stop the bombing of their towers to ensure the continued delivery of electricity.

"We (military) will be stepping up patrols...It is the inherent duty of units to secure vital facilities," Armed Forces of Philippines (AFP) public affairs office chief Col. Noel Detoyato told a press briefing in Camp Aguinaldo. "This will be added to the task of the units, Army units in the area," Detoyato also said, referring to the intensified security patrols, even as he admitted that securing these towers is not an easy job. In the advertisement, the NGCP disclosed

that 16 towers were bombed and toppled last year, causing widespread power outage in Mindanao. It said bombing and destruction of towers is against the law and punishable under the Human Security Act. It asked the public to report suspicious activities near their towers through their hotline.

"Timely information leads to deterrence (of tower bombings)... We need monitoring by the civilians, concerned citizens to detect suspicious activities near these

towers," the military official added. The military has blamed the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and other extortionist groups as behind the attacks. The BIFF is composed of former leaders and members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. The latest NGCP tower to be bombed and toppled was in Lanaodel Sur last 24 December. The NGCP said its Mindanao Power Grid is on "yellow alert" in the wake of the bombing.—Xinhua

India works to disarm grenades, clear buildings on third day of air base operation

PATHANKOT — Indian security forces were working yesterday to defuse grenades and comb the grounds of a vast air base near the border with Pakistan, two days after a militant attack killed seven military personnel and wounded 22.

The attack on the Pathankot air force base in Punjab, a rare targeting of an Indian military installation outside the disputed northern region of Kashmir, threatens to undermine a tentative thaw in relations with Pakistan.

Indian security forces have killed four militants involved in the attack, but gunfire could still be heard at the base on the third day of operations to secure the area, and it was unclear how many militants remained at large, if any.

“Operations to eliminate two more terrorists, possibly, are in the final stages,” Maj Gen Dushyant Singh, of India’s counter-terrorism force, the National Security Guard, told a joint security news briefing at the air base.

“It is likely to take a long time,” he added.

Indian security forces were still trying to clear militants holed up in a building that served as living quarters for air force personnel, army Brig. Anupinder Bevi told the briefing.

Air assets at the base, including aircraft and helicopters, were secure, and there had been no collateral damage or civilian casualties, he added.

Officials have given conflicting accounts on whether the attackers were still active on the base since Home Minister Rajnath Singh declared on Saturday evening



An Indian army officer asks media crew to move aside inside the Indian Air Force (IAF) base at Pathankot in Punjab, India, on 3 January 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

that they had been “neutralised”.

The reluctance of officials to declare the mission complete appeared to reflect an abundance of caution until all the attackers’ bodies had been accounted for. The sound of continuing gunfire from the base added confusion to the picture.

Earlier on Monday, a senior federal government official had said two militants hiding in the administrative block of the base had been killed on Sunday, but authorities had yet to recover the bodies.

“A total of six terrorists have been killed, but every inch of the air base has to be secured before we call off the operation,” said the official in New Delhi, who requested anonymity.

Thousands of police were

scanning hotels, markets and forested areas in the city of Pathankot around the base, to ensure no more militants were hiding there, said police official Manoj Kumar.

“Our biggest concern is to protect public spaces,” Kumar said. “The militants who entered the air base must have a local network co-ordinating with them.”

Manish Mehta, an Indian army spokesman, said the military was working at a “very fast pace” to defuse live hand grenades and gather the remains of the dead militants.

“The air base is large and we have been working all night to ensure that the base is totally in our control,” Mehta said.

Military trucks were seen entering and leaving the walled com-

pound with helicopters flying over it on Monday. The attack came about a week after a surprise visit by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif, the first by an Indian premier in 11 years.

Officials said the attack bore the hallmarks of previous suspected assaults by Pakistan-based militant groups, underscoring the fragility of recent efforts to revive talks between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

Pakistan has condemned the attack and said it wanted to continue to build on the goodwill created by the impromptu meeting between Modi and Sharif last month.—Reuters

ASEAN Community to enhance bloc’s prestige, role on int’l arena

PHNOM PENH — Cambodian Foreign Minister Hor Namhong said yesterday that the ASEAN Community, which was officially launched last week, will enhance the bloc’s prestige and pioneer role on regional and international arenas.

“The ASEAN Community will contribute to strengthening regional stability, peace and security and increasing the efficiency of ASEAN’s core role in the region,” he said during a meeting with some 120 university students here.

“Nowadays, ASEAN is recognised as the most successful regional organisation.”

The ASEAN Community’s opportunities are focused on a single market and production base with a free flow of goods, services, investments, capital and skilled labour, he said.

Hor Namhong, who is also a deputy prime minister, said that the ASEAN Community’s challenges will include development gap, lack of human resources and skilled labour among new member states and lack of budget for ASEAN connectivity development such as physical connectivity, institutional connectivity and people-to-people connectivity.

Founded in 1967 in Thailand, the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.—Xinhua

Hong Kong says ‘no indication’ China involved in case of missing booksellers

HONG KONG — Hong Kong leader Leung Chun-ying said yesterday there was no indication so far outside agents were involved in the disappearance of five booksellers specialising in publications critical of China, but that it would be “unacceptable” if any were.

The disappearances have stoked fears of mainland Chinese authorities using shadowy tactics that erode the “one country, two systems” formula under which the former British colony has been governed since its return to Chinese rule in 1997.

Lee Bo, 65, a shareholder of Causeway Bay Books, “vanished” last week, according to a missing person report filed by Lee’s wife on Thursday. Four associates involved in publishing or selling literature critical of Beijing have also gone missing in mysterious circumstances over the past few months.

Hong Kong opposition lawmakers protested on Sunday outside Beijing’s representative office over Lee’s disappearance.

“We are highly concerned with this case,” said Beijing-backed Hong Kong leader Leung. He added there was “no indication” so far that Lee may have been kidnapped by Chinese State Security agents in the financial hub and whisked across the border to China, though investigations were ongoing.

“If mainland (Chinese) law enforcement personnel enforce the law in Hong Kong, this is unacceptable because it breaches the Basic Law,” Leung said, referring to the city’s mini-constitution, in rare comments defending Hong Kong’s autonomy.

The Basic Law guarantees wide-ranging personal freedoms, including freedom of speech, and independent law enforcement

overseen by an independent judiciary.

When asked about the disappearance of Lee, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said at a daily news briefing that she had no information to offer.

Lee’s wife told media that her husband had phoned her on what appeared to be a Chinese phone number to say he was “assisting” in an investigation, despite having left his travel document at home.

Three of the missing men were last seen late last year in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen.

Another man, Gui Minhai, the author of tabloid-style exposes on Chinese leaders and the owner of Mighty Current, the publishing house that owns the Causeway Bay bookstore, was last seen publicly in the Thai seaside town of Pattaya.—Reuters

China’s capital sees small improvement in air in 2015

BEIJING — China’s capital Beijing saw a small improvement in air quality last year, the city’s environmental protection bureau said yesterday, although levels of a major form of pollution remain several times higher than international standards.

Beijing’s average concentration of PM2.5 — particulate matter with a diameter of 2.5 microns, which can penetrate deep into the lungs — fell 6.2 per cent in 2015, the bureau said in a report posted on its website.

Still, average PM2.5 levels for the year were 80.6 micrograms per cubic metre, several times higher than the World Health Organisation’s air quality guidelines, which call for an annual average no higher than 10 micrograms.

In the first six months of last year, Beijing’s levels of PM2.5 fell by 15.5 per cent compared

with the same period of 2014, Greenpeace said in July.

But persistent pollution as winter neared undermined the improvements over the first half of the year.

The city issued its first ever “red alert” smog warning in December, banning heavy vehicles, restricting the number of cars on the road, advising schools to cancel classes, and requiring outdoor construction to stop.

Levels of sulphur dioxide in Beijing improved the most last year, falling 38 per cent, the bureau said. Meanwhile, the number of days with heavy smog dropped by one to 46 days.

Last year, China relied on coal to provide 64 per cent of its primary energy, contributing to the choking smog smothering its major cities. Planners hope next year to reduce the coal proportion to 63 per cent.—Reuters

Obama's gun control options each has legal pitfalls



Handguns are seen for sale in a display case at Metro Shooting Supplies in Bridgeton, Missouri in 2014. PHOTO: REUTERS

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama is expected to announce new gun control curbs this week, but he will have to decide whether to take bold action that would likely spark a major legal challenge from opponents or a more cautious route that may be less effective, legal experts said.

Obama, who has expressed deep frustration about US gun control regulations after a series of mass shootings at schools and other places during his presidency, said he will meet US Attorney General Loretta Lynch yesterday to discuss gun control measures that do not require congressional approval. The president said in his weekly radio address on Friday he has received “too many letters from parents, and teachers, and kids, to sit around and do nothing” about the issue.

The Washington Post and *Politico* reported late last week that one of Obama's main proposals would require some unlicensed gun dealers to get licenses and conduct background checks on potential buyers. Current law exempts smaller dealers who often operate at gun shows and sell online. Obama, who has been thwarted by the Republican-controlled Congress in his push for tighter gun control legislation, could act through an executive order, which would be immediate and carry the force of law. It would also almost certainly prompt lawsuits by gun advocates claiming the president lacks the authority to change the legal definition of who must obtain a dealer's license.

The conservative advocacy group Freedom Watch plans to sue to block any executive order on gun control, Larry Klayman, the group's general counsel, told Reuters on Sunday. An executive

order would draw immediate comparisons to Obama's initiative aimed at protecting five million undocumented immigrants from deportation. Challengers sued and won an injunction that blocked the move. The administration has asked the US Supreme Court to take up that case.

Obama could take the less risky path on guns by directing the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) to redefine its guidance on who is considered a dealer under federal gun law. This would be advisory and lack the force of law, which would mean that prosecutors could not rely on it when pursuing small gun dealers.

He has received “too many letters from parents, and teachers, and kids, to sit around and do nothing” about the issue.

US President Barack Obama

“The guidance could be used as evidence that prosecutors made a reasonable interpretation that a dealer needed a license, but it's not binding,” said James Jacobs, law professor at New York University and author of the 2004 book “Can Gun Control Work?”

“In a way, it's more like a speech, like the head of the ATF saying who needs a federal dealer's license,” he said.

Obama could choose an even more cautious route and direct the ATF to begin the formal administrative rulemaking process to

change its regulations for who is considered a firearms dealer under the existing Gun Control Act. Agency action that includes the chance for public comment would create an enforceable rule that would likely pass legal muster, but that process probably would not conclude before Obama leaves office in January 2017.

Lawmakers could still try to block such ATF rulemaking by denying the agency funding, particularly funds for enforcing the rule if it was passed in the face of congressional opposition.

Already some Republican candidates seeking the party's nomination to be its presidential candidate in the 2016 election, including frontrunner Donald Trump, said they would overturn any gun control measures by Obama if they get into office.

Still, the President should be on firm Second Amendment ground if he pushes for a widening in the way the current law is applied, legal experts said.

“There are very few things I'd say with 100 per cent certainty about what the Supreme Court and other courts would do, but I'm 100 per cent certain that no court would say requiring more background checks violates the Second Amendment,” said Stanford University law professor John Donohue.

The Second Amendment of the US Constitution protects the right of Americans to keep and bear arms.

Regardless of what steps Obama might take to increase the number of dealers who must conduct background checks, legal experts said that he cannot accomplish his desired gun control agenda — like boosting oversight of gun show sales — through executive action alone.—*Reuters*

NEWS IN BRIEF

Suicide bomber blows himself up near Kabul airport

KABUL — A suicide bomber in a car blew himself up close to a police checkpoint near Kabul airport yesterday but caused no other casualties, a police spokesman said.

The bomber was spotted by police as his car approached the checkpoint, prompting him to detonate his explosives, the spokesman said.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

The blast follows a series of attacks in the Afghan capital over recent days, including a suicide attack on a restaurant popular with foreigners and wealthy Afghans which killed a 12 year-old boy and a security guard.

The attacks have coincided with a new effort to restart peace talks with the Taliban after earlier meetings were broken off last July.—*Reuters*

Guatemala's Fuego volcano spews ash but no evacuations ordered

GUATEMALA CITY — Guatemala's Fuego volcano belched black ash high into the sky on Sunday night, as an eruption that began last week intensified, but authorities have not ordered the evacuation of nearby villages.

Guatemala's volcanic monitor, Insivumeh, said in a statement that thick columns of ash reached nearly 24,000 feet (7,300 metres) amid loud explosions and extended new lava flows.

The volcano, about 30 miles (50 km) southwest of the Guatemalan capital, has not impacted any flights at the country's main international airport.—*Reuters*

Two climbers killed in avalanche near Chamonix

PARIS — Two people died Sunday afternoon in an avalanche near the ski area of the Grands Montets in Chamonix in the Massif du Mont-Blanc of France, confirmed French Interior Ministry.

“Mr. Bernard Cazeneuve, Minister of the Interior, called everyone upon the utmost caution of avalanche risk at Alpine peaks in the coming hours,” read an official statement.

“This afternoon in the Massif of Mont Blanc near Chamonix (Haute-Savoie), an avalanche caused the death of two Lithuanian mountaineers,” it added.

The two victims, a man and a woman, were accompanied by a third person, who was unharmed, climbing the Grands Montets before being swept away by a wind slab at 3200 metres.

“Cazeneuve addresses his condolences to the families and friends of the victims...and asks all residents and vacationers to strictly comply with safety regulations issued by the prefectural authorities,” said the official statement.—*Xinhua*

E-building permits launched in Serbia

BELGRADE — The online issuance of construction permits began in all local self-governments yesterday, and the e-permitting system, located at the Business Registers Agency (APR), can be accessed through several sites.

All applications for construction permits will be submitted electronically, and citizens can apply directly or through authorised project designers.

The system can be accessed through the websites of the Business Registers Agency, the Ministry of Construction and local self-governments.

Serbia's Construction Minister Zorana Mihajlovic has told Tanjug that the relevant regulations will take effect on 1 January, but that e-permits will actually start being issued yesterday, the first working day of 2016. — *Tanjug*

Bus crash kills 9 in central Turkey

ANKARA — Nine people were killed and at least 17 others injured when a passenger bus overturned in central Turkey yesterday, local daily *Hurriyet* reported.

Authorities have opened an investigation into the accident, which happened on a stretch of slippery road on the Ankara-Kirsehir highway, the paper reported on its website.

It is not immediately known if any foreign nationals were among those killed and injured.—*Xinhua*

Iran says Riyadh thrives on tension after relations cut



Iranian protesters chant slogans as they hold pictures of Shi'ite cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr during a demonstration against the execution of Nimr in Saudi Arabia, outside the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Tehran on 3 January. PHOTO: REUTERS

DUBAI — Saudi Arabia used an attack on its embassy in Tehran as a pretext to fuel tensions, Iran's foreign ministry said yesterday after Riyadh severed diplomatic relations.

Iran was committed to protecting its foreign diplomatic missions, the ministry added.

Iranian protesters stormed the Saudi Embassy in the early hours of Sunday after Saudi Arabia executed Shi'ite cleric Nimr al-Nimr, prompting Riyadh to

withdraw its diplomatic staff and order Iranian diplomats to leave the kingdom.

The protesters lit fires and smashed furniture in the embassy before being cleared out by the police, who made 40 arrests. No Saudi diplomats were in the embassy. Iranian officials condemned the attack as well as Nimr's execution.

"Iran has acted in accordance with its (diplomatic) obligations to control the broad wave of

popular emotion that arose," foreign ministry spokesman Hossein Jaber Ansari said in televised remarks.

"Saudi Arabia benefits and thrives on prolonging tensions... (It) has used this incident as an excuse to fuel the tensions," he added.

Ansari said Iranian diplomats had not yet left Saudi Arabia. They were given 48 hours to leave late on Sunday night. — *Reuters*

Syrian rebel group backs Saudi move to cut ties with Iran

BEIRUT — Syrian insurgent group Jaysh al-Islam yesterday welcomed Saudi Arabia's rupture of ties with Iran, saying Tehran's backing of Shi'ite militias was destabilizing the Middle East and stoking sectarian tensions in Syria.

Jaysh al-Islam is a Sunni Muslim group that is part of a new, Saudi-backed opposition body set up with the aim of bringing about peace talks between rebels and the Iranian-backed Syrian government led by President Bashar al-Assad.

The group, whose leader was killed in a 26 December air strike, said Iran was "threatening the security of the region by exporting criminal militias that spread destruction and death and filled with sectari-

an vengeance". The European Union's foreign policy chief warned Iran's foreign minister on Sunday that renewed tension between Shi'ite Iran and Saudi Arabia's Sunni monarchy could wreck efforts to find a political solution for the crisis in Syria.

Saudi Arabia condemned the killing of Jaysh al-Islam's leader Zahran Allosuh in an aerial raid in his stronghold east of Damascus, saying his death did not serve the peace process in the war-torn country.

Iranian-backed militias and Lebanese Shi'ite militant group Hezbollah are fighting alongside the Syrian army against mainly Sunni insurgents backed by Saudi Arabia, other Gulf states and Turkey in a conflict that has cost over 250,000 lives. — *Reuters*

China voices concern over Iran-Saudi Arabia row

BEIJING — China yesterday voiced concern over a row between Iran and Saudi Arabia, calling on the two countries to keep calm and show restraint.

"China is paying close attention to the development of the situation, and worries about the escalation of regional conflict caused by their row," said Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying at a regular press briefing.

Hua's remarks came after Saudi Arabia announced on Saturday it would cut off diplomatic ties with Iran, and asked all Iranian diplomats to leave within 48 hours.

Late on Saturday, angry Iranian protesters stormed the Saudi diplomatic mission to protest Saudi Arabia's execution of 47 individuals on terrorism charges.

"We hope all relevant parties can strengthen communication and cooperation in anti-terrorism. We also hope the security and dignity of diplomats and missions can be ensured," Hua said.

She called on the two sides to keep calm, show restraint and properly resolve disputes through dialogue and consultation in order to maintain the region's peace and stability. — *Xinhua*

Afghan forces besiege insurgents near Indian consulate in Mazar

MAZAR-I-SHARIF — Afghan special forces fought with insurgents barricaded in a house near the Indian consulate in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif yesterday after an overnight attack that coincided with an assault on an Indian air base near the border with Pakistan.

A small group of gunmen tried unsuccessfully to break into the consulate late on Sunday, taking advantage of the fact that many people were watching the final of a football championship between Afghanistan and India.

They shut themselves into the house after failing to get into the consulate and battled security forces into the early hours of the morning. Troops were moving slowly to minimise civilian casualties, with operations also hampered by heavy rain.

"The area is sealed off and we are proceeding cautiously and making all possible efforts to protect the lives of those in the area. The attackers will be killed," the provincial governor, Atta Mohammad Noor, said on his Facebook page.

Gunfire rang out as army and police commandos fired rocket-propelled grenades and heavy machine guns at the building and helicopters circled overhead in a residential area of the city, in Balkh province, bordering Uzbekistan.

At least one civilian was wounded and five security force personnel were slightly injured by a hand grenade but the Indian ambassador said all the consulate staff were safe.

Noor blamed "enemies of peace and stability" for the attack, which came amid renewed

efforts to lower tension between India and its rival Pakistan and restart peace talks with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

But there was no more concrete indication of who may have been responsible.

Last month, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Kabul and Islamabad on the same day, underlining the drive to improve stability and overcome the longstanding hostility in the region.

However, Sunday's attack and a separate assault on an Indian air base in Pathankot, in the northwest Indian state of Punjab, underlined how difficult that process is likely to be.

As the attack in Mazar-i-Sharif began, Indian security forces were still engaged in mopping up the insurgents in Pathankot.

In 2014, India's consulate in

the western Afghan city of Herat was hit by heavily armed insurgents including suicide bombers, one of a series of attacks on Indian diplomatic stations in Afghanistan.

istan over previous years.

Pakistan has long been suspicious of India's engagement with Afghanistan and its diplomatic presence there. — *Reuters*



Afghan National Army (ANA) personnel keep watch during an operation near the Indian consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan on 4 January. PHOTO: REUTERS

OPINION

United we stand, divided we fall

Khin Maung Aye

MYANMAR has been a union inhabited by a plethora of national races since time immemorial. All national brethren have coexisted peacefully, despite differences of opinion, religious beliefs, traditions and cultural mores. They have been able to seek means of peaceful co-existence chiefly because they have had a common interest, namely, the non-disintegration of the union. This is how the people of this country have maintained unity within diversity. Different communities have

helped each other in times of crises, calling to mind the saying “Blood is thicker than water”.

Myanmar has stood tall among the world’s nations, with monarchs who are famous for the establishment of the First Myanmar Propre, the Second Myanmar Propre and the Third Myanmar Propre in three different eras. Myanmar society deteriorated in late 19th century because internal forces were not united, and in that disunity, the country fell into the hands of the British colonialists.

Nonetheless, the people of Myanmar revolted against the colonialist aggressors for decades with undaunted spirit. They relentlessly fought back, holding in their hand whatever weapon was available to them. Overpowered by the intruding forces, our ancestors sacrificed life and limb, but their fighting spirit never died, even in the face of physical death. Thanks to their strong determination, relentless effort and undaunted spirit, Myanmar was able to seize back its independence after a century of colonial rule. She stood as an independent, sovereign power again on 4 January 1948.

It is, therefore, worth remembering that independence and sovereignty are easily lost when disunity prevails among our national brethren. It would be very unwise of us to lose that independence, for which we have all struggled extremely hard. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance for us all to preserve independence and sovereignty, even at the cost of our lives.

Let us not forget the saying “United we stand; divided we fall”.

Write for us

We appreciate your feedback and contributions. If you have any comments or would like to submit editorials, analyses or reports please email thantunaungnlm@gmail.com with your name and title.

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.

A Rickety Train Ride Around Yangon

Khin Maung Myint

AS far as I can remember, the last time I rode a train was in 1995. In the past, while I was still in the government service, I usually travelled by motor vehicles or trains when I went around the country on duty. However, after my retirement, I had never travelled outside Yangon, so I had not ridden a train for over twenty years ago. Thus I’m not familiar with the conditions of our train service, as to how much it had improved or deteriorated over these years.

A few days ago, I happened to be traveling on a Yangon circular train with a group of elderly people, who were on their way to a day care center for the aged, located at the junction of the Kabar Aye Pagoda Road and Parami Road. I was accompanying them to learn first-hand how that day care center is running. That morning, I arrived at the Pazundaung Railway station at about 6:45 AM. with two acquaintances of mine, both of whom are eighty two years old. While we were waiting for the train more elderly persons arrived. The train was scheduled to arrive at 7:00 AM, however, it arrived about ten minutes late.

The train stopped for only about a minute or may be less. I scrambled up a two-rung vertical step, with much difficulty, as the station platform was too low and the train floor was high. When the train started to move, one of the elderly was still on the first rung of the step, hanging-on to the hand rails desperately so as not to fall off the train. He had to be helped by those who were already on-board to get safely onto the train. Once on the train, I noticed, he was having trouble standing up steadily as the train was swaying from side

to side making him nearly lose his balance until he got a seat to settle in. Luckily, I was already seated when the train started to move and gathered some speed. Though not very fast, the train was swaying, rocking and jerking roughly in un-describable motions. The ride was very uncomfortable and the bench seats were of hard wooden surfaces without any cushion, making it worse.

When I looked at the others, they seemed not to mind the discomforts and uneasiness caused by the rickety train. As it was a new experience for me, I was greatly awed by the nonchalance of the other passengers, old and young. They seemed at ease, but my mind was racing, thinking how am I going to manage to get safely off the train at our destination. I had seen at the two or three stops on the way that the stopping time for passengers to disembark and embark was too short. Those who were embarking didn’t wait for those getting off the train, but scrambled hurriedly onboard, blocking the doorways and causing unnecessary delays.

As the number of the elderly with whom I was traveling was quite large, I was worried all of us may not have the time to get off before the train start rolling. Luckily, as I was sitting close to the door, I managed to push through the onslaught of embarking passengers and was able to get off quickly. When the train started to move, there was an elderly person, with a walking stick in one hand, still on the train. I was worried he may not be able to get off, however, my worries were unfounded. He expertly slide off the moving train with ease. If I were in his situation, I wouldn’t dare to get off and would have to try and get off at the next stop.

The next morning my whole

body was aching. At first I was wondering what could have caused that. Then a realization came to me that it must be the result of the rough motions of the train taking toll on my old muscles and joints, as I was not accustomed to it. Thus I made a decision to acclimatize myself to the rough train rides by traveling around the city on the circular routes in future. As the taxi fares are very expensive and the public buses are even worse and more dangerous, I thought it would be more convenient to travel by train though they may be uncomfortable.

From that day onwards, I took the trains to go to the downtown areas, as much as possible. In due course of time, I got accustomed to the motions of the train and learned to move in rhythm with the train’s motion, which eased the punishing movements somewhat and also became expert in getting on and off the trains with ease. As I travelled more and more by trains, I couldn’t avoid but notice the shortcomings of our train service that need upgrading.

As safety is most important, I will be discussing that subject first. In the past, I had seen that there was either the station master or his assistant or the train guard, with a red and green flag striding up and down the platform whenever there was a train about to leave the station. That person control the departure of the train after checking that all the boarding passengers were safely on the train. Another safety concern was the difference in the levels of the platform and the train deck. Our ancient station platforms are too low, making it difficult for disabled and elderly persons to board the train. Today in most countries, the platforms are at the same level with the train deck and the space between them are only a few inches, making

boarding easy and safe even for people on wheel chairs.

Another necessary thing is to make the trains comfortable, by at least making them run as smooth as possible. One foreign tourist once told me that riding the express train to Mandalay was like riding an unbroken horse at a rodeo. At the time I heard his remarks, I thought he was exaggerating, until now. Even if the train which was moving at a moderate speed is causing much discomforts, I can imagine what would riding an express train would be like. In a cartoon strip a young man from Pyinoolwin was visiting his grandma in Yangon. The granny asked him what transport he used to travel to Yangon. The young man replied, he rode a horse to get there. The old lady was dumbfounded on hearing his answer. The young man laughed and explained to her that, in fact he came by train. The railways engineers know best what they should do to make the trains run smoothly, so I’ll leave that matter to them and will not go into detail.

Also from the hygiene and health point of view, the toilets on the trains should be upgraded. The present toilet systems that dispose the human wastes along the rail tracks are rarely seen in most countries. Today, train carriages are fitted with built-in septic tanks, thus the rail tracks are free of human wastes. The toilets should also have enough water to keep them clean at all times and afford the passengers to wash their hands after using the toilets. Hope that the arrangements to give contracts to private companies to clean the trains would materialize soon.

Although there are many things that need to be improved, I would mention only one more that should be urgently done in the first phase of the upgrading pro-

gramme. That is to see to it that the trains are more punctual so that the commuters would rely more on them.

I would like to point out that if the circular train service could be upgraded, it would certainly attract more commuters to travel around the city by trains. This trend would definitely reduce the traffic congestions in Yangon, which is becoming a nuisance. This upgrading phase would only be a temporary measure to ease the transportation problems. For the long-term developments, the Mass Rapid Transport System (MRTS), such as the Sky-train or the Subway systems, which can move large volumes of passengers rapidly, should be considered, so as to be consistent with the modernizations and developments in the other sectors. I understand that plans are underway to upgrade the railway service with the cooperation of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). As that may be sometimes before they can be implemented, something should be done in the meantime, for the safety and convenience of the commuters and at the same time ease the traffic congestions.

In conclusion, I would like to urge the authorities concerned to consider replacing the present rail tracks with wider gauge tracks that would be compatible with the trains from the neighbouring countries. The wider gauge tracks would make it unnecessary to modify the undercarriages or the wheel bases to fit our existing tracks, which would make the carriages more stable and minimize the sluggish motions. It would also make the Pan-Asian Railway link, which some countries are hoping to establish, a possibility. If that becomes a reality it would be greatly beneficial to the region and of course to to country too.

Health Ministry to inspect water sources in populous parts of Yangon

THE Yangon Region Health Department will make a field trip to inspect drinking water wells and lakes in wards and villages in Hlaingthaya Township, one of Yangon's most populated satellite towns, in the first week of January, according to Township Medical Superintendent Dr Khin Yupa Soe.

The aim of the field trip is to ensure that local people consume safe water. As the population rises, the area faces rising environmental pollution from sewage near lakes and the inflow of flood waters in the rainy season.

Residents welcomed the health department initiative. They currently must rely on water bottles and lakes, as water from tube-wells is unfit for consumption.

The inspections will be made at 16 lakes around the township, with a special focus on six lakes located in Ward 7, the most populous area in the township.

There are nine villages and 20 wards in Hlaingthaya Township.

According to the department's preliminary research, there are very few tube-wells containing potable drinking water in the township.—164/Myanma Alin



Local people line up to collect drinking water during a limited time in an evening of last summer in outskirts of Yangon. PHOTO: AYE MIN SOE

Crime News

Police seize drug dealers



Pyi Soe is seen together with drugs seized from him. PHOTO: POLICE

A DRUG dealer named Pyi Soe was arrested by police in Tachilek in possession of a cache of heroin and yabba (synthetic amphetamine) tablets on 1 January.

Acting on a tip-off, a combined team comprising members of No. 30 Anti-Drug Squad (Tachilek) searched two houses

in Yanaungmye Ward, Tachilek Township, and discovered 4,989 yabba pills and 21.4 grams of heroin.

Action has been taken against the suspect under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law.—Police IPRD

Eight-month old child killed in vehicle overturn

A CAR heading to Myizaw Village in Tiddim, Chin State, fell 14 feet into a roadside ditch when driver Hlan Swan Htan, 40, lost control. An eight-month-old child named Ma Lonlin was killed.

Another 10 people in the vehicle, including an old woman, sustained injuries.

The driver was found guilty of reckless driving by the police in Tiddim Township.—Police IPRD

Police arrest man for gambling

AUTHORITIES arrested a 49-year-old man who is believed to have been illegally betting on football on 2 January in Mandalay.

Acting on a tip-off, police officers from the Mogok Myoma Police Station searched a shop in Myoma Ward in Mogok,

Mandalay Region. They found objects related to gambling, including more than 4 million kyats (US\$3,000) inside the shop.

San Hlaing has been charged under the law by police at the Mogok Myoma Police Station.—Police IPRD

12 injured in traffic accident

TWELVE people were injured in a car crash in Kalay Township, Sagaing Region, on 3 January, police reported.

A Toyota pickup driven by U Maung Maung Nyunt, 40, of Taungzalat Ward in Kalay Township, overturned on the outskirts of the township when the driver

lost control.

A total of 12 passengers, including 17-year-old Kay Thi San, were injured and admitted to the township hospital.

Kalay Myoma Police Station has filed a lawsuit against the reckless driver under Section 338/37.—Police IPRD

Police arrest man who robbed ailing traveller

POLICE arrested a man who stole cash and other items from a traveller on 1 January near PyonU Village in Wetlat Township within a day of the crime.

A traveller named U Tun-Naing Oo, 39, who was visiting his father in Sagaing Region from Mandalay Region, collapsed on the side of the Shwebo-Mandalay Road after falling ill due to an anaemic disease.

Kaung Myat Zaw, 27, stole nearly K2 million (US\$1,560), two savings books from Ayeyawady and Kanbawza banks, an MPU card, an iPad Mini 3 tablet, a handset and other essential documents and clothes from the victim.

Police arrested Kaung Myat Zaw after the suspect withdrew K5 million (\$4,000) from Ayeyawady Bank through the plaintiff's account on the same day.

Action was taken against the suspect under the law at the Shwebo Myoma Police Station.—Police IPRD

UK economy finished 2015 strongly, says CBI

LONDON — Growth in Britain's private sector picked up speed in the three months to December and companies think the momentum will carry on into early 2016, a leading employers group said, suggesting a recent slowing of the economy might be easing.

The Confederation of British Industry said yesterday its monthly growth indicator — based on surveys of manufacturers, retailers and services — rose to a three-month high of +20 from +13 in November and was above a long-run average of +5.

"The UK economy has finished the year strongly, with business services acting as a lightning rod for growth," said Carolyn Fairbairn, the CBI's director-general.

"Nonetheless, there is no room for complacency in 2016 as significant challenges to global growth remain."

A separate survey of chief financial officers of large British companies, conducted by accountants Deloitte, showed business confidence fell back to lev-



People walk along the platform at Stratford underground tube station as they make their way to work early in London on 4 January 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

els last seen in 2012.

Growth in business services offset a slight fall in manufacturing in the three months to December, the CBI said.

The slowdown in the global economy and the strength in sterling have hampered British exports, leaving the recovery reliant on consumers who have

been helped by a combination of low inflation, near rock-bottom interest rates and rising wages.

Britain's economy has outpaced many of its peers in the

developed world over the past couple of years but growth slowed to 0.4 per cent in the third quarter, according to unexpectedly weak official figures published in December.

In 2015 as a whole, growth is likely to have slowed to around 2.2 per cent, down from 2.9 per cent in 2014.

The Bank of England has said it expected the economy to grow by 0.6 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2015.

It is watching for signs of stronger wage growth before moving towards its first interest rate hike since before the financial crisis.

The CBI survey found output expectations for the next three months rose to +20 in December from +17 in November.

Some economists have warned that uncertainty over Britain's planned referendum on its membership of the European Union could hurt growth in 2016. Prime Minister David Cameron has said he will hold the referendum within the next two years.—Reuters

Samsung Electronics warns of tough 2016 amid fourth-quarter outlook concerns



A Samsung logo is seen at Samsung Electronics' headquarters in Seoul, South Korea. PHOTO: REUTERS

SEOUL — South Korean tech giant Samsung Electronics Co Ltd said it expects a difficult business environment in 2016 due to weak global economic conditions and heightened competition in key businesses including memory chips and smartphones.

In a statement yesterday, Samsung said Chief Executive Kwon Oh-hyun told employees in a New Year's address that low global growth will persist this year, with greater uncertainty stemming from issues such as financial risks for emerging countries.

The comments, which didn't disclose specific forecasts, come amid growing concerns that October-December results for the world's biggest maker of smartphones and chips may be weaker than previously expected. By 0302 GMT (11.02pm ET Sunday)

Samsung shares were down 3.4 per cent, after earlier dropping 3.5 per cent to a three-month low, while the broader Seoul market was off 1.5 per cent.

"Negative impact from weak demand and falling sales prices for semiconductor and liquid crystal display industries was likely bigger than initially anticipated," brokerage Korea Investment said in a report issued separately yesterday.

Korea Investment lowered its estimate for Samsung's fourth-quarter operating profit to 6.4 trillion won (\$5.41 billion) from 6.8 trillion won previously. The mean estimate of 36 analysts' forecasts compiled from a survey by Thomson Reuters I/B/E/S is for operating profit of 6.8 trillion won, 8.1 per cent lower than the 7.4 trillion won booked in the third quarter.—Reuters

Nikkei plunges 3% on weak Chinese manufacturing data

TOKYO — Tokyo stocks tumbled on the first trading day of 2016 yesterday, with the Nikkei index ending down more than 3 per cent, as a further decline in Chinese manufacturing conditions in December revived concerns about a slowdown in the world's second-largest economy.

The 225-issue Nikkei Stock Average ended down 582.73 points, or 3.06 per cent, from last Wednesday at 18,450.98, a roughly 10-week closing low. Tokyo markets were closed Thursday and Friday for the New Year holidays.

The broader Topix index of all First Section issues on the Tokyo Stock Exchange finished 37.63 points, or 2.43 per cent, lower at 1,509.67.

Foods, chemicals and trans-

port equipment issues led declines.

The Nikkei ended the first day of trading lower than the previous year's close for the third year running.

Stocks opened lower, with investor sentiment dampened by losses on Wall Street on New Year's Eve last Thursday. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell more than 1 per cent to close lower on an annual basis for the first time in seven years.

Losses then widened dramatically after the release mid-morning of the private-sector Caixin purchasing managers' index showed a further decline in business conditions for Chinese manufacturers.

In China, a rout in Shanghai and Shenzhen stocks following the data's release triggered a

trading halt midafternoon local time.

Trading volumes in Tokyo remained low with some investors still on holiday, leaving the market prone to a volatile response to the Chinese data, said Hiroaki Hiwada, strategist at Toyo Securities Co.

"If Wall Street shows a more muted response to the Chinese data later Monday, Tokyo stocks will likely gain back some ground Tuesday to line up with the US reaction," Hiwada said.

Also fuelling selling Monday were concerns over geopolitical conditions in the Middle East after tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran deepened over the weekend, said Chihiro Ota, general manager of investment research at SMBC Nikko Securities Inc.—Reuters

Resale prices of Singapore's public housing units fall 1.5% in 2015

SINGAPORE — Resale prices of Singapore's public housing units built by the Housing and Development Board (HDB) fell 1.5 per cent in 2015, the HDB said in its flash estimates released yesterday.

HDB resale prices in the fourth quarter of 2015 edged up for the first time since the third quarter of 2013, with the Resale

Price Index, which provides information on the general price movements in the resale public housing market, coming in at 134.9 in the fourth quarter, up 0.2 per cent from the previous quarter.

The HDB plans to launch about 18,000 flats in 2016, an increase of about 3,000 units from 15,100 units in 2015, to meet the

expected demand because of the recent policy changes.

The first build-to-order exercise will be held in February.

About 80 per cent of the resident population in Singapore live in high-rise flats built by the HDB and sold to local households under the basic principle of one unit per household.—Xinhua

Children aged four to 10 eat 22 kg sugar annually

LONDON — Children between the ages of four and 10 years consume 22 kilogrammes of sugar every year, an amount equivalent to the average weight of a five-year old, according to a public health campaign in the UK.

The campaign, which urges parents to take care of their offspring's diet, warns that obesity and tooth decay are among the consequences of children consuming three times as much sugar as they should.

The 22 kilogrammes is equivalent to 5,500 sugar cubes.

The main culprits of sugar are soft drinks, biscuits, buns, cakes, breakfast cereals, confectionery, fruit juices, pastries and puddings.

"Children are having too much sugar. This can lead to painful tooth decay, weight gain and obesity, which can also affect children's wellbeing as they are more likely to be bullied, have low self-esteem and miss school,"

said Dr Alison Tedstone, chief nutritionist for Public Health England.

As part of its "Sugar Smart campaign", Change4Life, a public health programme in the UK, has launched a free app that allows people to scan the barcode of a product to show the amount of sugar it contains in cubes and grammes, *'The Guardian'* reported.

"Children aged five shouldn't have more than 19 grammes of sugar per day — that is five cubes, but it is very easy to have more. Our easy-to-use app will help parents see exactly where the sugar in their children's diet is coming from, so they can make informed choices about what to cut down on," Alison added.

The maximum added sugar intake for seven to 10-year-olds is 24 grammes (six sugar cubes) and for anyone aged 11 or older, it is 30 grammes (seven sugar cubes).—PTI



PHOTO: REUTERS

Dengue outbreak eases in Taiwan

TAIPEI — New cases of dengue fever recorded daily in Taiwan has remained below 100 in the past two weeks, with 23 new cases reported on Saturday, announced the island's disease control agency Sunday.

Most cases were found in Kaohsiung and Tainan, major cities in south Taiwan, since the outbreak in May. On Saturday, Kaohsiung reported 22 new cases, while Tainan only one.

The number of new cases in Kaohsiung has continued to drop over the past five weeks, said the agency in a press release earlier.

The total number of dengue fever cases reached 43,259 as of Saturday. According to a weekly update on Tuesday, the death toll of dengue fever stood at 212 across the island.

Although the situation has been notably eased, the agency warned the public to stay alert and prevent relapse.—Xinhua

Stargazers look up to sky in middle of neon signs in Osaka

OSAKA — Osaka in western Japan is a busy, crowded city with a lot of glaring neon lights that is probably one of the least suitable locations for observing stars.

However, it is still possible to enjoy star watching right in the middle of Osaka, according to Keisuke Yamaguchi, a 30-year-old native of the city.

Yamaguchi is the owner of "hoshicafe SPICA," a cafe bar themed on stars, where stargazers gather every night, and an "astronomy guide" who can teach customers about stars and how to enjoy them in the night sky.

The first thing you see on entering the cafe bar on the fifth floor of the multitenant building in Osaka's Chuo Ward is the ceiling full of stars created by a planetarium. Around 8pm, Yamaguchi begins explaining about star signs and their episodes in Greek mythology to customers.

The customers then go up to the building's rooftop deck to

gaze the night sky through an astronomical telescope.

"I can really see it!" and "It's so beautiful!" screamed some of the female customers, as they spotted the Vega, one of the stars

consisting of the constellation Lyra, during a rooftop stargazing session in late November.

"I could feel closer to stars. I wish I could have watched them forever," said Megumi Murase, a

19-year-old university freshman.

Many items on the menu at Yamaguchi's place have unique names related to stars. Customers can enjoy original cocktails including ones named "Andromeda" and "Hayabusa." "Stardust gâteau chocolat" is one of the options for a dessert.

Yamaguchi said he was not a space enthusiast until when he saw shining stars in the Milky Way in his 20s in the mountains of neighbouring Nara Prefecture.

While it is not so easy to spot many stars in the sky above bright Osaka, he realised he could still see some constellations such as Cygnus, prompting him to open the cafe bar in 2011 to share his enthusiasm about stars with more people.

Yamaguchi named the cafe bar after the brightest star in the constellation Virgo, with the concept of making an observation of a starry sky an entertainment.

"I hope that looking at stars will become part of people's everyday lives," said Yamaguchi.—Kyodo News



The inside of "hoshicafe SPICA" in Osaka, a cafe bar themed on stars where customers can enjoy a planetarium in 2015.

PHOTO: KYODO NEWS



Alzheimer's disease patient Isidora Tomaz, 82, sits in an armchair in her house in Lisbon September 15, 2009. PHOTO: REUTERS

Chinese researchers find flavonoids in cotton petals to treat Alzheimer's disease

URUMQI — A new drug to treat Alzheimer's disease that uses flavonoids found and extracted by Chinese researchers from cotton petals has entered clinical trial.

Researchers at Xinjiang Technical Institute of Physics and Chemistry under the Chinese Academy of Sciences said this week that they had discovered flavonoids capable of improving animals' learning ability in a

study that began in 2003.

These flavonoids were found to improve the memory of mice with dementia and that of naturally aged mice.

Researchers then identified the 20 flavonoid compounds in the petals and made tablets that can produce a similar effect at small dosages.

The research institute signed a deal with a pharmaceutical

marker to apply the research finding.

The white and pink cotton-petal blossom bloom before the cotton bolls. Xinjiang is a major cotton production base in China. Previously these petals were discarded but after their medicinal property were uncovered, they now sell for around 15 yuan per kilogram in the market.—Xinhua

EU warns new Mideast tension risks Syria peace effort



European Union Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini.
PHOTO: REUTERS

BRUSSELS — The European Union's foreign policy chief warned Iran's foreign minister on Sunday that renewed tension between Shi'ite Iran

and Saudi Arabia's Sunni monarchy could wreck efforts to find a political solution for the crisis in Syria.

Federica Mogherini

said in a statement that she had spoken by telephone with Iran's foreign minister, Javad Zarif, at length on Sunday morning after violence erupted in Iran following Saudi Arabia's execution of a Shi'ite cleric.

Mogherini said she and Zarif had agreed that no effort should be spared by all parties to keep the situation under control and to prevent sectarian tensions from escalating.

"The international community and the main regional actors are actively working together to support a political solution for the crisis in Syria and

to join forces against terrorist groups, and these efforts should not be jeopardized by new instability," Mogherini said.

Mogherini said that she had been informed of the storming of the Saudi embassy in Tehran by protesters and of steps taken by the Iranian authorities to defuse tensions and protect the Saudi diplomats.

Mogherini also spoke by phone in the afternoon with Saudi foreign minister Adel al-Jubeir, reiterating the EU's opposition to the death penalty and expressing concern over the risk of an escalation of sectarian violence.—Reuters

Venezuela opposition taps Henry Ramos to lead National Assembly

CARACAS — Venezuela's opposition coalition on Sunday chose Henry Ramos to lead the country's National Assembly, which convenes Tuesday for its first session with an opposition majority in more than 16 years.

Ramos, 72, is secretary general of the Democratic Action party, one that is seen by critics as representing the old guard of Venezuelan politics that Hugo Chavez successfully rallied against when elected to the presidency in 1998.

Yet, supporters say Ramos is a skilled and by far the most experienced politician in the ring.

"We represent an alternative... We are not going to be the anti-establishment, rather an autonomous legislative power," said Ramos, a lawyer, who won the election with 62 of the 111 votes cast.

It took place a month after the opposition trounced the ruling Socialist Party in legislative elections, giving the opposition 112 seats — a two-thirds majority — in the 167-seat National Assembly.

However, the new Congress is likely to get off to a conflictive start on Tuesday when it formally chooses the body's president.

Four newly elected lawmakers were blocked from taking office last week, three of them from the opposition, after a legal challenge by the So-

cialist Party.

The country's Supreme Court also agreed to hear challenges against the election of another six opposition deputies.

Yet, the opposition remains defiant.

"The people chose 112 and 112 will be sworn in," Jesus Torrealba, secretary of the opposition coalition, said at a press conference on Saturday.

Torrealba's biggest headache since taking over as secretary of the opposition coalition in late 2014 has been holding various factions together.

The infighting came to the fore in recent weeks with major opposition leaders publicly criticising each other.

Julio Borges was Ramos' main contender on Sunday. The 46-year-old leads the relatively young Justice First party, which won the largest number of seats among the opposition in Congress.

However, Ramos united smaller opposition factions that feared dominance by Justice First, analysts said.

The opposition called for supporters to join lawmakers outside the National Assembly on Tuesday morning. President Nicolas Maduro has said he would veto one of the opposition's major planks, the release of imprisoned politicians, and told the opposition in December to "suck on your change."—Reuters



Henry Ramos Allup (L), deputy of Venezuela's coalition of opposition parties (MUD), addresses the media during a news conference as he sits next to fellow deputy Julio Borges in Caracas on 3 January. PHOTO: REUTERS

Two civilians, soldier killed in Turkish army operations against Kurd rebels

DIYARBAKIR (Turkey) — Two civilians and a soldier have been killed in southeastern Turkey as military operations to root out armed fighters focused on urban centres across the mainly Kurdish region, security sources said.

A 35-year-old mother of three children was killed and another person was wounded on Sunday after a mortar hit their house in the district of Sur in the region's largest city of Di-

yarbakir, the sources said late on Sunday. In the town of Silopi, east of Diyarbakir near the Syrian and Iraqi borders, a man was killed by gunfire and his wife and another relative were wounded after they attempted to venture out of their home, the sources added.

A soldier was killed in a bomb attack by members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in Sur late on Sunday, the Chief of the General Staff said in a

statement yesterday.

Historic Sur district, which boasts UNESCO World Heritage sites, has been under a round-the-clock curfew since 2 December as the army tries to push out PKK fighters who have dug trenches and built barricades there and other residential areas in the region. Violence in the three-decade war with the PKK flared in July after the collapse of peace talks. President Tayyip Erdogan said

last week there would be no let-up in a military campaign that he said had killed more than 3,000 militants in 2015.

Hundreds of soldiers and civilians have also died in towns and cities across the region in the operations.

Erdogan said at the weekend he backs a criminal probe of the leaders of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), a parliamentary group with Kurdish origins, over comments about self-rule.—Reuters

Japan's annual traffic deaths up 1st time in 15 years

TOKYO — Japan's traffic death toll in 2015 increased for the first time in 15 years, up 0.1 per cent from the previous year to 4,117, the National Police Agency said yesterday.

"We take the situation seriously and review the measures drastically," Taro Kono, chairman of the National Public Safety Commission supervis-

ing police forces, said at a press conference.

Of the total deaths, people aged 65 or above accounted for 54.6 per cent, the highest since such data became available in 1967, with an increase of 54 people, or 2.5 per cent, to 2,247, according to the agency.

The government in March 2011 announced its

goal of reducing the annual number of road fatalities to 3,000 or under by 2015 but was not able to achieve that goal. In the government's new plan starting this year, it aims to reduce the number of fatalities to 2,500 or less by 2020.

The traffic death toll was declining for 14 years in a row until 2014.

The number of traf-

fic accidents stood at 536,789, leaving 665,126 people injured, as both figures dropped for the 11th straight year.

The number of accidents related to drunk driving fell for the fifth consecutive year to 203 incidents, down 10.6 per cent, the lowest since 1990 when the data became available.—Kyodo News

Frutarom invests in algae startup for food, cosmetic products

JERUSALEM — One of the world's largest flavouring and specialty natural ingredient companies is investing in algae to enhance its food and cosmetic products.

Frutarom Industries said yesterday it bought half of a biotech startup called Algalo, which is based on a kibbutz, or communal farm, in north-

ern Israel, that developed a way to efficiently cultivate, harvest and process a variety of algae.

The algae yield strong antioxidants, lipids and proteins that can help cardiovascular and immune systems, as well as bone structure, Israel-based Frutarom said.

Algalo says its low-cost photobioreactor,

which uses light to cultivate algae, can grow almost all species of microalgae in high productivity.

Frutarom will invest 10 million shekels (\$2.56 million) for 50 per cent of Algalo shares and to build a modern biotechnology facility for algae harvesting.

The size of the algae-based ingredient

market is estimated to be hundreds of millions of dollars and has grown at double-digit rates in recent years, Frutarom Chief Executive Ori Yehudai said.

"We foresee the rapid growth in this market continuing in coming years in light of consumer trends towards healthier and more natural products," he said.—Reuters

Failed Catalan government makes another Spanish election more likely

MADRID — Catalan far-left party CUP said on Sunday it would not support acting regional head Artur Mas in his bid for another term, forcing new local elections and increasing the likelihood all Spaniards may have to return to the ballot box this year.

The drawn-out process of forming a government in Catalonia echoes the political stalemate gripping Spain at a national level following an inconclusive general election two weeks ago.

The prospect of new elections in Catalonia, most likely in March, increases the likelihood of a second general election this year as the receding threat of a strong Catalan government seeking a split from Spain will reduce pressure on Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's centre-right People's Party (PP) and the opposition Socialists to form a grand coalition to stand up to a separatist Catalan administration. At the same time, pro-independence Catalan parties



Catalan acting President Artur Mas gestures during an election session for the new president in the Catalan regional parliament in Barcelona, Spain in 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

with seats in Spain's parliament will now be less likely to support a coalition government that does not allow a referendum as they begin campaigning for another round of regional elections on a

separatist platform.

CUP, a fringe anti-capitalist party which rejects Catalan membership of NATO and the European Union, has held the key to the formation of the regional

government since September elections awarded a majority to pro-independence parties, but it has repeatedly rejected the candidature of Mas, who heads a centre-right, business-friendly party.

The future of Catalonia is at the centre of talks between national parties on whether to form a grand coalition after Spaniards, disillusioned by recession and high-level corruption cases, turned away from establishment political forces and voted for new parties in last month's general election, leaving no party with a majority.

Whether to allow Catalonia a referendum on independence is a major sticking point preventing a left-wing alliance between newcomer Podemos, which supports a vote, and the Socialists, who don't.

However, the messy and protracted process to choose a Catalan leader in the aftermath of the September election, hailed at the

time as a victory for separatists, has cast a pall over the independence movement and highlighted its divisions.

Separatist fervour has dulled since 2012 when at the height of Spain's recession around one million people turned out onto the streets of Barcelona clamouring for independence.

A tentative economic recovery has started to chip away at one of the highest unemployment rates amongst developed nations and Catalan businessmen have warned that political uncertainty in the region could put off investors.

Meanwhile, high-level corruption cases have also touched the independence movement with former regional president and prominent Catalan nationalist Jordi Pujol charged with money laundering on Wednesday as part of a long-running investigation into his hidden bank accounts.—Reuters

Sri Lanka sees greater tourist arrivals, largely due to strong growth from China

COLOMBO — Sri Lanka received almost 1.8 million tourists in 2015, up 17.8 per cent from the previous year, largely due to a strong growth from China, statistics from the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority showed yesterday.

December arrivals grew 15.4 per cent to 206,114 from 178,672 in 2014, totaling to an overall tourist arrival of 1,798,380 in the year compared to the 1,527,153 in the previous year.

China was the second highest country with the most number of tourist arrivals following India, and it recorded the highest growth by any country of 67.6 per cent compared to the previous year with 214,783 tourist arrivals in 2015. In 2014 China recorded 128,166 tourists.

Indian arrivals grew 30.3 per cent to 316,247 in 2015 from the year before, with the number of visitors in December rising 35.5 per cent to 35,437.

United Kingdom recorded the third highest number of visitors with 161,845, a 12.3 per cent increase from the previous year.

With an increase in the number of Chinese tourists, the Sri Lankan government recently said that it is targeting more Chinese airlines to arrive in the island nation as it looks to further expand its tourism industry this year.

Tourism has become the number one foreign exchange earner in the country and the government hopes to attract at least 3 million tourists by the end of 2016 and has set a target of 4 million by 2020.—Xinhua

Protesters occupy Oregon wildlife refuge as dispute over Western range flares

PRINCETON — A group of self-styled militiamen occupied the headquarters of a US wildlife refuge in eastern Oregon to protest the imminent jailing of two ranchers, officials said on Sunday, in the latest skirmish over federal land management in the West.

The occupation, which began on Saturday, followed a march in Burns, a small city about 50 miles (80 km) north of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, in support of Dwight Hammond Jr. and his son, Steven Hammond.

Hammond and his son, convicted in 2012 of setting fires that spread to public land, travelled to Los Angeles on Sunday evening to turn themselves in to federal authorities, according to their lawyer W. Alan Schroeder. They were to be sent back to prison after federal prosecutors won an appeal that resulted in their re-sentencing to longer terms.

Their ranch borders on the southern edge of the refuge, a bird sanctuary in the arid high desert in the eastern part of the state, about 305 miles (490 km) southeast of Portland.

The protest was being led by Ammon Bundy, the son of Cliven Bundy, owner of a ranch in Nevada where his family staged an armed protest against the Bureau of Land Management in April 2014. The agency sought to seize Bundy's cattle after he refused to pay grazing fees. Federal agents finally backed down, citing safety concerns, and returned hundreds of cattle to Bundy.

Federal and state authorities have not said how they planned to respond to the occupation



Arizona cattle rancher LaVoy Finicum leads a tour through the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge near Burns, Oregon on 3 January. PHOTO: REUTERS

of the refuge's headquarters in Princeton, Oregon.

It involved an unknown number of people, Jason Holm, a spokesman for the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Land Management, said in a statement. No employees were in the building.

Holm described the occupation as a break-in, although federal justice and Interior Department officials contacted later declined to say whether any crimes were committed in the occupation. Wildlife refuge buildings were closed over the holiday weekend.

In an interview posted on Facebook, Bundy said the occupation was in reaction to the government intrusion into the rights of private-property owners.

"It is the people's facility, owned by the people," Bundy said. "It has been provided for us to be able to come together and unite and make a hard stand

against this overreach — this taking of the people's land and resources."

Bundy told CNN some of the occupiers were armed.

The Hammonds distanced themselves last month from the Bundy, according to a letter Schroeder wrote to the county sheriff on 11 December.

"I write to clarify that neither Ammon Bundy nor anyone with his group/organisation speak for the Hammond family, Dwight Hammond or Steven Hammond," Schroeder wrote in the letter, which was seen by Reuters.

The incident is part of a decades-old conflict between ranchers and the federal government over Washington's management of hundreds of thousands of rangeland. Critics of the federal government say it often oversteps its authority and exercises arbitrary power over land use without sufficient accountability.—Reuters

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Cate Blanchett dances onstage after winning award

LOS ANGELES — Actress Cate Blanchett danced in joy after winning an honour at the Palm Springs International Film Festival Awards gala for her role in critically acclaimed movie “Carol”.

The 46-year-old Australian actress has been tipped for Oscars glory following her performance as a 1950s housewife who falls in love with a younger woman, played by Rooney Mara, reported The Wrap.

After it was announced she had won the Desert Palm Achievement Award — Actress at the ceremony, Blanchett threw her hands up and danced on stage with jubilation as she accepted the statuette from fellow actress Saoirse Ronan.

Other big winners at the gala, held at the California Convention Centre, included Johnny Depp, who won an award for his role as gangster Whitey Bulger in “Black Mass”.

Accepting the Desert Palm Achievement Award — Actor from director Scott Cooper, he thanked wife Amber Heard for “living with all these characters,” adding, “It’s hard for me. It’s got to be hard for her.”

Steve Carell and Christian Bale were among the



PHOTO: REUTERS

stars collecting the award for best ensemble cast for “The Big Short”, while Bryan Cranston was given the Spotlight Award by Helen Mirren for his star turn in “Trumbo”.

Michael Fassbender was presented with the International Star Award — Actor by his Steve Jobs co-star Kate Winslet, and the actor thanked her, writer Aaron Sorkin, director Danny Boyle, and studio Universal, saying, “I believe you have a movie that will stand the test of time. Unfortunate about the box office figures, but, thank god for Jurassic World.”

Matt Damon, who received the Chairman’s Award for his role in “The Martian”, used his acceptance speech to push for the film’s director, Ridley Scott, to win an Oscar.

He said, “What he’s given to cinema, it’s not an accident. He’s just a master director. I was shocked to find out... But I thought that he already had an Academy Award because he directed a best picture. And so, the bottom line is, he’s given more than enough to cinema, so I hope that this is his year.”—PTI

Chinese musical staged to mark 400th anniversary Shakespeare’s death

BEIJING — A Chinese musical named “With Love, William Shakespeare” is being staged in Beijing to commemorate the 400th anniversary the death of William Shakespeare.

The musical, presented in Beijing’s Star Theater from 31 December, 2015 to 31 January, reinterprets the classics of Shakespeare, including Romeo and Juliet, Twelfth Night, The Taming of the Shrew and A Midsummer Night’s Dream, in

the context of modern China.

It tells of four young people who turn to Shakespeare’s works for answers whenever their relationships are in trouble, only to end up in failure and disappointment.

The British Council has sponsored a global celebration of Shakespeare for the anniversary. One hundred and forty countries and regions will be involved in its Shakespeare Lives programme this year.—Xinhua

I had scratches and bruises everywhere: Jennifer Lopez

LONDON — Singer-actress Jennifer Lopez had “scratches and bruises everywhere” after her 10 outfit changes at the American Music Awards (AMAs).

The “On the Floor” hitmaker, 46, dropped jaws with her see-through gowns, skintight catsuits and cleavage-baring frocks when she hosted the show in Los Angeles two months ago, reported Femalefirst.

“I had scratches and bruises everywhere from trying on

so much stuff,” she said.

But, despite the injuries she sustained, the curvaceous actress knew she had to make an impact with her raunchy fashion sense and provocative dance moves because she couldn’t rely on her comedy factor to get her through.

“I’m not going to try to be a comedian. I’m just going to play to my strengths. I’m a singer, I’m a dancer and I’m a performer. I’ve always wanted to be a singer and a dancer and an actress since I was very young.”—PTI



PHOTO: REUTERS

‘Star Wars: The Force Awakens’ barreling towards ‘Avatar’s’ record

LOS ANGELES — Having vanquished “Titanic” and “Jurassic World,” “Star Wars: The Force Awakens” has set its sights on “Avatar.”

The space opera sequel is moving up the all-time domestic box office charts at a record clip and now is poised to overtake those pointy eared blue aliens as the top grossing film in history. “Avatar” earned \$760.5 million during its stateside run and “Star Wars: The Force Awakens” has generated \$740.4 million domestically after picking up \$88.3 million over New Year’s weekend. It should take the crown from “Avatar” early next week.

Globally, “Star Wars: The Force Awakens” ranks as the sixth highest-grossing film in history, having earned \$1.5 billion worldwide. It should pass “Furious 7” and “Marvel’s The Avengers” to become the fourth biggest film in history in the coming days.

The film will get a big shot in the arm next week when it premieres in China, the world’s second biggest market for film.

Depending on how enthusiastically it is received in the People’s Republic, “The Force Awakens” could shoot past “Avatar’s” record \$2.8 billion global haul.

Even as “The Force Awakens” commanded the bulk of box office revenues a few films managed to profit from the holiday season. Paramount’s “Daddy’s Home,” a comedy about a nerdy stepfather (Will Ferrell) who finds himself outshone by his wife’s first husband (Mark Wahlberg), picked up \$29 million in its second weekend, driving the film’s domestic total to \$93.7 million.

The Weinstein Company did relatively well after moving up the wide release of “The Hateful Eight” by a week. The revisionist western from Quentin Tarantino racked up \$16.2 million to finish in third place. That’s a solid start, though on the lower-end for wide-release debuts from the director. For instance, “The Hateful Eight” trails the \$30.1 million launch for “Django Unchained” or the \$38 million kickoff for “Inglourious Basterds.” It has made

\$29.6 million since debuting in a limited number of 70mm theaters over Christmas.

Universal’s “Sisters,” a Tina Fey and Amy Poehler pairing, continued to show impressive endurance, snagging fourth place with \$12.6 million. The film has made \$61.7 million in three weeks of release, putting it ahead of Fey and Poehler’s previous teaming on “Baby Mama,” which made \$60.5 million during its run in 2008.

Fox’s “Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Road Chip” added \$11.8 million to its \$67.4 million in receipts to round out the top five. The studio also fielded “Joy,” an off-beat biopic about the creator of the Miracle Mop, which earned \$10.4 million in its second weekend to bring its total to a robust \$38.7 million.

Despite its wonky premise, “The Big Short” appears to be an awards season breakout. The comedy about the financial crisis of 2008 earned \$9 million last weekend, bringing its total to just under \$33 million. Paramount is releasing the film, which stars

Steve Carell, Ryan Gosling, and Christian Bale as savvy investors who bet against the housing market and won.

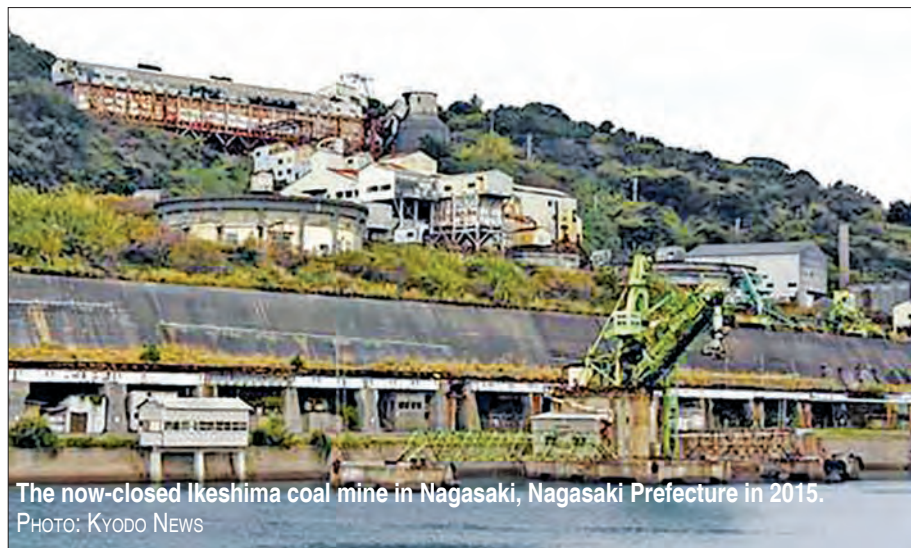
Sony’s “Concussion” took in an estimated \$8 million for, bringing its domestic haul to \$25.4 million. Will Smith stars as a crusading doctor who takes on pro-

fessional football for its indifference to the health and safety of its players. At a cost of \$35 million, “Concussion” ranks as a modest bet for Sony, but it has yet to get the traction that “Joy” or the “Big Short” has enjoyed and may need some Oscar love to become a hit for the studio.—Reuters



Cast members Daisy Ridley and John Boyega (2nd R) pose for pictures with Star Wars characters BB-8 (R) and R2-D2 (L) at the China Premiere of the film “Star Wars: The Force Awakens” in Shanghai, China, on 27 December 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

Former coal mining island seeking to survive on tourism



The now-closed Ikeshima coal mine in Nagasaki, Nagasaki Prefecture in 2015.
PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

NAGASAKI — Ikeshima, a tiny former mining island in the city of Nagasaki, is promoting tourism to revitalize its economy amid growing popular interest in Japan's industrial heritage.

Ikeshima, about 4 kilometres around, had one of the nation's last two coal mines to close. Mining began in 1959 and during the peak of operations in Japan's high-growth era, the island had some 8,000 men, women and children living in vast apartment complexes.

But imports of inex-

pensive coal led to the closure of the mine in 2001. Most families left the island, causing a plunge in the population to about 160.

In 2011, the island began using its mine carts again for guided tours inside the mine. A three-car train carries up to 27 passengers 300 metres inside the mine.

Visitors then get off the train and walk further inside the pit. Ikeshima is the only former coal mine in Japan that permits tourists to enter on foot.

"Pipes remain as they were and the tour was a rare experience for me," said Daichi Inoue, 19, from Fujisawa, Kanagawa Prefecture.

Increasing interest in Japan's industrial heritage has been a boon to Ikeshima. Other sites attracting tourists include the coal mining island of Hashima, commonly called Gunkanjima (Battleship Island), also in Nagasaki, which has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage site, a part of "Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolu-

tion: Iron and Steel, Shipbuilding and Coal Mining." About 4,500 tourists rode on trains inside the Ikeshima mine in 2014 and the number is estimated to have topped 7,000 in 2015.

"Visitors include students on school trips and foreigners. I want them to learn about the modernisation of coal mining," said Mitsuaki Wakabaya, 67, a former miner serving as a tour guide.

To further promote tourism on the island, tours to visit the now-vacated apartment complexes used by miners and other locations were added in 2015.

Hidemi Kondo, a 65-year-old resident, opened a souvenir shop near the mine mouth in July last year. Among the things he sells are T-shirts with designs of "cat miners" produced in cooperation with young people outside the island. "We would like to create an environment which encourages tourists to visit here repeatedly," Kondo said. "This island has no other choice but to survive on tourism."—Kyodo News

Quake-hit areas, summit venue mark year's 1st workday

TOKYO — Workers across Japan reported yesterday for the first business day of 2016 following the New Year's vacation.

Norio Kanno, mayor of Iitate in Fukushima Prefecture, told some 100 employees to keep their hopes alive at a ceremony held at a temporary office in the city of Fukushima, as all residents have evacuated the village following the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster nearly five years ago.

The mayor urged workers from the village, to which residents are scheduled to be repatriated in 2017, to stick together.

In the coastal town of Onagawa in Miyagi Prefecture, which was also severely affected by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, families shopped at stores of a shopping street opened late last year. Fruit and vegetable shop owner Yoshikatsu Aihara, 68, said the new shopping

street helped the area regain vigor.

"By selling delicious fruits at low prices, I hope I can contribute in some way to reconstructing our town," he said.

Eikei Suzuki, governor of Mie Prefecture, where the summit of major industrialised countries will be held in May, told prefectural staff to do their utmost to ensure the success of the event. "We will be marking a new chapter in our prefectural history," Suzuki said.

Hokkaido Railway Co. President Osamu Shimada told staff of the trouble-prone railway operator to work hard to ensure safety as a shinkansen bullet train line will open in March to link the northern main island with the Honshu mainland.

Last year, a train operated by JR Hokkaido made an emergency stop in Seikan Tunnel between Hokkaido and Honshu af-



A staff member arranges products at a fruit and vegetable shop which opened at the end of the previous year at a shopping district in the 2011 disaster-damaged northeastern Japanese town of Onagawa, Miyagi Prefecture, on 4 January 2016, the first business day of the year. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

ter smoke was detected, forcing the evacuation of passengers. Over the recent holidays, tunnel fires and traffic light troubles occurred.

"We still have problems piled up," a male JR Hokkaido worker said, vowing to work harder to carry out reforms.

Staff at the Ministry of

Internal Affairs and Communications began preparing for a House of Councillors election this summer where the voting age will be lowered to 18 from 20. Junichi Oizumi, head of the ministry election department, said he will work hard so that young voters will become more interested in politics.—Kyodo News



News Channel
in Brief

(5-1-2016, Tuesday)

6:00 am

• Paritta By Venerable Mingun Sayadaw

7:35 am

• Socio Economic Scenes

8:35 am

• Documentary

9:35 am

• MRTV's Youth Programme

10:35 am

• Science and Technology Programme

11:35 am

• Documentary

12:35 pm

• Teleplay (Part-1)

12:45 pm

• TV Drama Series

1:30 pm

• TV Drama Series

2:10 pm

• Sing & Enjoy

3:35 pm

• University of Distance Education (TV Lectures) — Second Year (Chemistry)

5:35 pm

• Money Talk Myanmar

6:35 pm

• People's Talks

8:00 pm

• News / International News / Weather Report

9:00 pm

• News

• Yes or No Talk Show

• Channel Zero

(Part-12)

Note/ Hourly News Bulletins (Local + International)



Entertainment
Channel

(5-1-2016, Tuesday)

6:00 am

• Nice And Sweet Song

6:10 am

• Pyi Thu Ni Ti

6:25 am

• Musical Programme

6:40 am

• Fashion Show

6:50 am

• TV Drama Series

8:25 am

• Teleplay

8:35 am

• Radio Drama

9:30 am

• Musical Programme

9:55 am

• ASEAN China Cultural Show

10:10 am

• Myanmar Video

From 5.1.2016 (Tuesday) 06:00 hrs

To 6.1.2016 (Wednesday) 06:00 hrs

This schedule will be repeated four times in 24 hours.



Myanmar
International

(5-1-2016 07:00 am ~ 6-1-2016 07:00 am) MST

Today Fresh

07:03	Am	News
07:26	Am	Ancient Shwe-San-Taw Pagoda
07:41	Am	Innovative Handiworks Based On The Art Of Line Drawing
08:03	Am	News
08:26	Am	Orchidologist Dr. Saw Lwin
08:47	Am	Crab Business (Part-II) Soft Shell Crab
09:03	Am	News
09:26	Am	Life In NightArt In Life (Ep-1)
10:03	Am	News
10:26	Am	Hanlin, A Treasure Trove Of The Ancient Pyu City
10:51	Am	Today Myanmar: New Tech Challenges

(11:00 Am ~ 03:00 Pm) - Monday Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(03:00 Pm ~ 07:00 Pm) - Today Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)

Prime Time

07:03	Pm	News
07:26	Pm	A Day Out With Sarah (EP-7)
07:53	Pm	Traditional Snacks
08:03	Pm	News
08:26	Pm	Discovering Tribes "Gaybar Kayin"
08:47	Pm	Fortune Teller: "Yan Moe Aung"

(09:00 Pm ~ 11:00 Pm) - Today Repeat (09:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)

(11:00 Pm ~ 03:00 Am) - Monday Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)

(03:00 Am ~ 07:00 Am) - Today Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)

(For Detailed Schedule - www.myanmaritv.com/schedule)

Chelsea thrash Palace, Spurs draw at Everton

LONDON — Chelsea began the year offering signs of a revival as the Premier League champions won 3-0 at Crystal Palace on Sunday before Tottenham Hotspur underlined their top-four credentials with a 1-1 draw at Everton.

Goals from Brazil duo Oscar and Willian and one for Spain striker Diego Costa earned Chelsea the points at Selhurst Park and gave stand-in manager Guus Hiddink his first win since taking over last month.

Hiddink's side began the day in 16th place, three points above the relegation zone after a woeful opening half of the season, but comprehensively outplayed seventh-placed Palace in torrential rain.

Chelsea's biggest league victory for 12 months, only their third in their last 11 matches, moved them up two spots on 23 points, 13 points behind fourth-placed London rivals Tottenham who shared the points in a tight tussle at Goodison Park.

Former Spurs winger Aaron Lennon gave Everton the lead but Dele Alli equalised on the stroke of halftime as the visitors stretched their unbeaten away run to nine games.

Tottenham have 36 points, six behind leaders Arsenal who moved top with a 1-0 home win over Newcastle United on Sat-

urday, four adrift of surprise package Leicester City and three off Manchester City. Everton remain in mid-table with 27 points.

While a top-four finish still appears unlikely for Chelsea, captain John Terry said the club is now moving in the right direction having lost nine of their opening 15 games.

"This was the Chelsea of last year, the football was first class and we kept the ball in tough conditions," captain Terry told Sky Sports.

"A near year, a new start, we just have to keep winning games now. We are where we are, we knew as a group we had to get better and we have done so slowly and surely and today hopefully is not the last of it."

Palace, who stay on 31 points but could have gone fifth with a win, were without two of their most influential players in suspended midfielder Yohan Cabaye and injured winger Yannick Bolasie but more than matched the visitors for 25 minutes.

Frazier Campbell had a half chance but sliced wide and shortly afterwards Chelsea struck.

Cesc Fabregas, booed by Chelsea's fans in the wake of Mourinho's dismissal, split the Palace defence with a measured



Everton's Romelu Lukaku in action with Tottenham's Jan Vertonghen during Barclays Premier League at Goodison Park on 3 January. PHOTO: REUTERS

pass and Costa, another player who has disappointed this season, advanced on goal before unselfishly squaring the ball for Oscar to stroke home after 29 minutes.

Palace keeper Wayne Hennessey saved well from Cesar Azpilicueta soon afterwards as Chelsea began to pop the ball around confidently on the sodden turf. Wilfried Zaha wasted Palace's only opening of the second half when he shot tamely at goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois.

Chelsea then extended their lead in spectacular fashion on the hour, Willian's ferocious rising drive from just outside the penalty area giving Hennes-

sey no chance. Six minutes later Costa capped a hard-working performance with a close-range third goal after Willian's shot was saved.

Chelsea's only concern was an injury to their Belgium forward Eden Hazard who limped off midway through the first half after signalling to the bench that he could not continue.

Tottenham, who have been the subject of title talk this week after a fine Christmas spell, dominated the first half at Everton with Harry Kane and Ben Davies rattling the woodwork, but they trailed to Lennon's well-taken goal after 22 minutes. They were rewarded just

before halftime when Alli chested down a superb pass from Toby Alderweireld and volleyed low past Everton keeper Tim Howard.

Everton improved after the break and could have won it through Ross Barkley in stoppage time but Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino said he felt it was two points dropped.

"Normally we have music in the dressing room," said the Argentine. "We did not after this game because we are disappointed. Maybe tomorrow we can feel proud we have a point but now we feel this is two points lost."—Reuters

Bosz leaves Vitesse for Maccabi Tel Aviv

AMSTERDAM — Vitesse Arnhem coach Peter Bosz has resigned to take over at Israeli champions Maccabi Tel Aviv after signing an 18-month contract, the Dutch club said yesterday.

"Maccabi Tel Aviv have approached me several times and having listened to their plans I've decided to accept the challenge," said Bosz, 52, on the Vitesse website (www.vitesse.nl).

Assistant Rob Maas has been put in caretaker charge of Vitesse, who lie fifth in the Dutch league standings. At Maccabi Tel Aviv, Bosz replaces Slavisa Jokanovic, who moved to Fulham last month.—Reuters



Chelsea's coach Jose Mourinho (L) talks with Vitesse Arnhem's coach Peter Bosz before their friendly soccer match in Arnhem in 2014. PHOTO: REUTERS

Hobbling Serena ruled out of opening Hopman Cup tie

PERTH — World number one Serena Williams was ruled out of her opening match at the Hopman Cup mixed team event in Perth yesterday because of inflammation of the knee, organisers said.

The 34-year-old was scheduled to play her first official match since the US Open last September for the United States in their round robin tie against Ukraine but pulled out after a morning warm-up at the venue.

"I'm disappointed to not take the court in Perth today,"

Williams said in a news release.

"I had every intention to play this morning. Unfortunately, due to inflammation in my knee I need to rest and am confident to be out there against Aussie Gold tomorrow evening."

Williams, who is using the event as preparation for her tilt at a 22nd grand slam singles title at the Australian Open later this month, will be replaced in the US team by 20-year-old Vicky Duval.—Reuters