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State Counsellor, Indonesian FM exchange views on recent developments in Rakhine State

STATE Counsellor and Union Minister for Foreign Affairs Daw Aung San Suu Kyi received Indonesian Foreign Minister Mrs. Retno L.P. Marsudi at 8.15 pm on Tuesday in Nay Pyi Taw.

At the meeting, they exchanged views on strengthening of bilateral relations and cooperation as well as on recent developments in Rakhine State in an open and friendly manner.

Indonesia has expressed its readiness to provide health care and humanitarian assistance for both communities and to enhance communication channels between the two countries.

Mrs. Retno L.P. Marsudi paid a working visit to Myanmar from 6th to 7th December 2016.

During the visit, a dinner was hosted by the State Counsellor in honour of the visiting Minister at her residence in Nay Pyi Taw.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs U Kyaw Tin and Indonesian Ambassador to Myanmar Dr. Ito Sumardi also attended the dinner.—*Myanmar News Agency*

President U Htin Kyaw donates cash to Myanmar Red Cross Society. PHOTO: PRESIDENT'S OFFICE

President receives chairman of MRCS Dr Mya Thu

President U Htin Kyaw, a patron of the Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS), received Prof Dr Mya Thu, chairman of MRCS and executive committee members at the State room of the President's Palace on Wednesday morning. In the meeting, the president was advised of the activities performed by MRCS in detail. The president donated Ks100,000 to the society and had his name enrolled as a permanent member. Dr Myint Htwe, the Union Minister for Health and Sports, was also present at the meeting. Under Article 4 of the 2015 Myanmar Red Cross Society Law, the President is required to be a patron of the society, it is learnt.—*Myanmar News Agency*

PRESS RELEASE

Foreign Affairs Ministry summons Malaysian Ambassador over Najib's irresponsible remarks

MINISTER of State for Foreign Affairs U Kyaw Tin summoned Malaysian Ambassador H.E. Mohd. Haniff Bin Abd Rahman yesterday afternoon, and expressed his dismay that the Malaysian Prime Minister Najib bin Tun Razak led a public rally in Kula Lumpur on 4th December and made irresponsible remarks against the Government of a fellow ASEAN member state citing unverified and unsubstantiated allegations.

The Minister of State also categorically rejected the accusations of "ethnic cleansing" and "genocide" which were far from the realities on the ground. Such irresponsible remarks could worsen the already deepening polarization between the two communities and incite violent extremism.

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Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

JICA loans worth Ks358bn approved

LOANS from the Japan International Cooperation Agency totalling 31.051billion yen (Ks358.39bn) were approved during the 6th Day Meeting of the 2nd Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, 3rd Regular Session to fund the economically vital Thanlyin Bridge project that will span the Bago River, the finance ministry said.

"Thanlyin Bridge No. 3 is the main one linking to the Thilawa Special Economic Zone and will be a major bridge for transportation and operating border-crossing trade with countries in the Mekong Region and ASEAN countries in the years to come", said U Maung Maung Win, the deputy minister for Planning and Finance. "It will be beneficial not only for Yangon Region but also for the whole nation, becoming the source of catching national revenue."

Another official pointed out that the bridge would directly generate revenue for national coffers.

"Upon completion of the bridge, toll charges are to be collected at fixed prices and the earnings will be paid to the National Revenue. For these, revenues will accrue annually in national income. And it will make vehicles reduce the consumption of oil, making it economically beneficial as it can save much time — at least one hour on the bridge while passing through the bridge", said U Win Khaing, the Union Minister for Construction.

The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw then announced that it recorded the draft on the amendment of law on civil service and it has been sent to the President.

Afterward, Major-General Aung Soe, deputy minister for Home Affairs, praised the country's efforts in eliminating human trafficking. "Myanmar's participation in the ASEAN convention of Eradication of Human Trafficking will bring about an upgrade in protection of human rights, especially for women and children, and provide enjoyment of free and fair treatment and increased cooperation among the member countries, especially more benefits for Myanmar overseas migrant workers", Major-General Aung Soe said.

Major-General Aung Soe. PHOTO: MNA

U Maung Maung Win. PHOTO: MNA

U Win Khaing. PHOTO: MNA

The Speaker of Hluttaw asked Hluttaw representatives for their reaction to the loans from JICA.

"Taking loans at a low interest rate from international monetary institutions to fulfil the needs of infrastructure for national development has been approved, and it needs to choose the projects which will be really beneficial for the people, to constantly check them, to closely supervise and to regularly analyse", said U Soe Thein of constituency 9 of Kayah State.

"Farmers, who make up 70 per cent of the populace and live on agriculture, play an important role of developing the country. The present loan will help lend long-term agricultural loans and will help develop increased production in the agricultural sector, create job opportunities and offer economic stability", said Daw Wint Wah Htun of Shartaw constituency. *—Myanmar News Agency*

Union Information Minister, UNESCO official hold talks on media sector

UNION Minister for Information Dr Pe Myint received Resident Representative of UNESCO Ms Min Jeong Kim and party yesterday morning at his office in Nay Pyi Taw.

At the meeting, the two sides discussed matters related to conducting training for information officers, holding talks with MPs over News Media Law, conducting workshops for journalists and cooperation in Myanmar media sector. *— Myanmar News Agency*

Riverfront real estate project planned for Hlaingthaya Township

TO MEET growing local demand for residential units, the Riverfront Garden Real Estate project constituting of commercial and residential spaces as well as recreation facilities has been implemented in Hlaingthaya Township in western Yangon.

With the approval of the Yangon Region government, the Southern Metal Industry Real Estate Development Co is constructing the US$650 million project in two phases. The phase one consists of a 10-acre project area. Its development will cover 13 structures including four 17-storey high-rise buildings, one 15-storey building, one 23-storey structure and seven 31-storey towers. It will result in 1,713 apartments. The phase two will be developed within a 21-acre space and will include 11 31-storey towers and ten 16-storey structures to produce 2,750 flats. The new development scheme with a capacity to house a population of approximately 18,000 also a three-acre commercial area, swimming pools, Riverside Park and playgrounds.

Scale model of the Riverfront real estate project. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

The 31-acre project is planned to finalise within five to six years, said U Zaw Tun Aung, managing director of Southern Metal Industry Real Estate Development Co.

Works to build a 4.8-meter long riverbank retaining wall has been initiated at the target area, with developers planning to construct the project with the use of about 200 local and foreign engineers as well as 3,000 workers.

The Myanmar Investment Commission approved the development project last July. *—Soe Win (MLA)*

Budget of Yangon Region Cabinet for 2017-2018 discussed

THE Yangon Region Cabinet's estimated 2017-2018 budget totalling Ks424 billion was discussed at the Yangon Region Hluttaw on Tuesday, with most of the spending plan to be used for infrastructure improvements, it is learnt.

"It is targeted to spend Ks424 billion on the development of the region in the coming fiscal year, especially in the sectors of road upgrade, efficient power supply and drinking water distribution as top priorities, in accord with the instructions of the Chief Minister", said U Myint Thaung, the minister for planning and finance of the Yangon Region Cabinet.

Out of the total income of the Yangon Region Cabinet, the Yangon City Development Committee would receive 77 per cent, it is learnt. The budget estimate of the Yangon Region Cabinet for the coming fiscal year was drafted based on taxes to be collected, regular income, lump sum income and the budget allotment granted by the Union Government, and it was submitted for Hluttaw representatives to discuss parts of the budget needed to be amended, according to the minister.

The budget was first submitted to the Cabinet of the Yangon Region on December 1. At the 2nd Yangon Region Hluttaw Meeting held on December 6, questions raised by the representatives were replied to by the respective ministers. The budget will be submitted to the Union Level as the next step.

Previously, there were only 24 departments under the regional government. Two new departments — the department of film promotion and the department of central statistics — bring the total number of departments up to 26.— *Ko Moe*

Workshop on Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Baseline Report for Myanmar held

AT the workshop on SDGs indicators baseline report for Myanmar held at 9:30 am on Wednesday at the meeting room of the Central Statistics Association of the Ministry of Planning & Finance, Dr Wah Wah Maung gave a welcome speech, followed by addresses of deputy director-general Daw Khin Mar Aye and Ms Hyeran Kim, Programme Specialist.

In the discussion, assessment of SDGs and reasons for holding the workshop, systems of the report (draft) and findings of the draft were discussed.

Present at the meeting were development partners, representatives from UN organizations and responsible officials. *—Myanmar News Agency*

Dr Win Myat Aye, the Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, and local authorities hold coordination meeting with aid groups at the Rakhine State Government Office. PHOTO: MNA

Aid groups urged to help ease tensions between two communities in Rakhine

Dr Win Myat Aye, the Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, called on aid groups to maintain a balance between security and freedom in providing aid to the two communities in conflict areas in northern Rakhine State.

The remarks were made at the coordination meeting among the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, the Rakhine State Government and aid groups at Rakhine State Government Office yesterday.

The meeting was held to seek ways for speeding up aid to conflict areas in northern Rakhine.

The Union minister also stressed the need to make efforts to ease the tensions between the two communities while providing humanitarian aid and to make fair efforts in accordance with the law.

Dr Win Myat Aye invited UN agencies and INGOs to cooperate with the government to create job opportunities so that local people would be able to stand on their own feet without relying on the aid.

At the meeting, the Rakhine State Security and Border Affairs Minister clarified the current measures taken by the coordination committee which comprises authorities and aid groups.

Following the meeting, the Union minister and officials of the Rakhine State Government visited the Punnagyun Industrial Zone and discussed with local authorities about speeding up of socio-economic development.—*Myanmar News Agency*

35 shops torched in arson attack in Maungtaw

FIRE broke out at a local bazaar in Kyunpaukpyisu Village in Maungtaw Township on Tuesday, destroying 35 shops, according to the Information Committee of the State Counsellor's Office yesterday.

Abdumal Kyat from Kyunpaukpyisu Village allegedly set fire to the shops shortly after he was released by villagers who had detained him after he was found waiting at night to steal items from the food shop owned by Rawphil Mullah, police said.

A total of 35 shops including 26 temporary make-shift shops containing items worth more than K200,000 were destroyed in the arson attack.

Police are in pursuit of the suspect.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Four arrested on suspicion of provoking unrest in Maungtaw

SECURITY forces on Tuesday arrested four men on suspicion of being involved in provoking unrest in Maungtaw, Rakhine State, according to the Information Committee of the State Counsellor's Office.

Acting on a tip-off that some people accepted cash assistance from abroad and were fomenting discontent in their villages in Maungtaw Township, security forces inspected Thawunchaung (North) Village and Chainkharli Village at about 5:30 pm on Tuesday and arrested Gyar Hansi and Inmi Laul, also known as Aung Moe, both from Thawunchaung Village, and Jarbu Kumar and Mawlawi Tarsein Ali from Chainkharli Village, together with Ks3 million.

Imi Laul confessed in an interrogation that they received the cash from Jarbaw Rawdein from Myoma Kayindan Ward in Maungtaw to be spent on creating disorder in the villages. Further interrogations are being carried out in order to bring them to court in accordance with the law.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Foreign Affairs Ministry summons Malaysian Ambassador over Najib's irresponsible remarks

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The Malaysian Ambassador was also informed of Myanmar's desire to maintain and strengthen friendly relations with ASEAN family members and of the need not to be misled by the disinformation campaigns waged by certain groups with ulterior motives against Myanmar. The Minister of State also stressed the importance of upholding ASEAN spirit of friendship and cooperation as well as the principle of peaceful resolution of disputes between member states through dialogue, consultation and negotiation.

The Malaysian Ambassador was also informed of the strenuous efforts taken by the Government of Myanmar to resolve the issues in Rakhine State, including the establishment of the Advisory Commission led by Dr. Kofi Annan and a national level Investigation Commission. The Minister of State also stressed the need for the international community to assist Myanmar in its efforts to maintain peace, stability and security of the people and to make progress in building better relations between the two communities, instead of making calls based on unverified allegations that will only cause bigger problems than solutions. The Ambassador was also informed that any action that could radicalize extremist movements would endanger not only ASEAN unity but also regional peace and stability. On its part, Myanmar will continue to strive to achieve harmony, peace and prosperity among all ASEAN member states and beyond.—*Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

Pyin Oo Lwin National Kandawgyi Garden. PHOTO: NAY WHAR (MOEGOK)

Preparations making for 11th Pyin Oo Lwin Horticultural show in Pyin Oo Lwin

PREPARATIONS are underway for the 11th Pyin Oo Lwin Horticultural show, an increasingly elaborate event held on a grand scale every year in National Lake Garden.

Pyin Oo Lwin is famous for its temperate weather, which makes it a favorable place to escape the heat of Mandalay and lower Myanmar.

"We've come from Mandalay to relax here. It has good weather conditions and there are many places to visit. I see preparations for the horticultural show. I will come back here with my children during the show. I have been here often. I feel excited to see scenic beauty of flowers in the coming show", said a visitor.

"To celebrate this year's show on a larger scale than that of the previous years, we are carrying out preparatory measures for the show. We have planted over 300,000 species of flower saplings and now over 173,000 flower plants have been thriving. We selected to grow alien species and native species. We would like to invite the people to come and relax here and enjoy the sights of a wide variety of colourful, beautiful flora and fauna during the show", said U Wai Myo Aung, the executive director of National Kandawgyi Garden.

The 11th Pyin Oo Lwin Horticultural show will run from 15 December to 15 January in Pyin Oo Lwin, Mandalay Region.—*Nay Whar (Moegok)*

TNLA Armed Insurgents Attack Government Troops In Namkham Township

ARMED insurgents from the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) comprising about 15 people attacked government troops stationed in the township of Namkham with firearms and artillery at 9:15pm on Tuesday, but were forced to retreat after the Tatmataw returned fire, according to the Office of the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services.

The government troops are clearing the area, it is learnt. —*Myanmar News Agency*

Bodies of 9 policemen recovered in Mongko

THE bodies of nine policemen who were lost in the fighting in Mongko, Muse Township, were recovered by security forces, according to the Information Committee of the State Counsellor's Office yesterday.

Armed men from the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) ambushed the Mongko Police Station on 2 December. Sixteen police officers were killed in the fierce fighting.

Two bodies were found on 4 December in Ward-5 when security forces conducted an area clearance operation and made contact with one who had arrived in a neighbouring country.

Two more bodies were found at a school near Mongko Police Station, and five were found in a field between the school and the police station on 5 December. Two were found alive in the police station and one police officer was found alive at the school on 6 December.

Out of 16 missing police officers, nine are now confirmed dead, while four have been found alive. Three remain unaccounted for.

The wife of a police officer and a civilian were also killed in the fighting.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Crime NEWS

One killed when car plunges into creek

A TOYOTA Mark II plunged down into a 400-foot-deep ravine at milepost 543 on the Taunggyi- Kengtung Union road on Tuesday, killing the passenger, according to authorities.

The Mark II being seen at the edge of the creek. PHOTO: MYITMAKHA NEWS AGENCY

"As soon as we got the information, we went to the scene of accident together with the lifesaving items. The creek is quite deep inside. We found one woman dead at the scene of accident. The passenger were rescued and sent to the general hospital," said U Zaw Min, Commander of the Mongpyin Township Fire Brigade.

The car driven by Ma Nar Hsay, 24, with another on board plunged down into a deep creek.

The accident killed the driver while the passenger, Kyaw Myo Aung, 30, was serisouly injured. He is receiving medical treatment at Mongpyin General Hospital.

Charges of reckless driving have been lodged by police under sections 304(A) / 338/279 of the Penal Code.—*Myitmakha News Agency*

Murder in Bilin township

A man has been charged with murder for allegedly killing a friend during a drunken argument in Chaung Pyant village, Bilin township, Mon State on Monday.

The victim's sister from Chaung Pyant village informed police of her brother's death at the Bilin police station on Tuesday evening.

"They had a quarrel when they were drinking alcohol together on Monday. During the quarrel, Kaw lar Phoo Wah, alias Hsan Win, 34, hit and killed Kadibar, alias Sein Myint, on the head, under the influence of alcohol. We arrested the offender within 24 hours. We will take action against the offender," said Police Lt-Col Nanda Win from Thaton district police.

The police have filed a murder charge against Kaw lar Phoo Wah under section 302 of the Penal Code.— *Myitmakha News Agency*

Light truck hits highway safety rail, 2 injured

A light truck en route to Mandalay from Yangon driven by Zeyar Hein with seven passengers on board crashed into the aluminum safety rail between mileposts 312/5 and 312/6 on the Yangon-Mandalay Highway yesterday when the driver lost control of his vehicle.

Two out of the eight people on board sustained minor injuries. The injured are undergoing medical treatment at Meiktila General Hospital. Zeyar Hein has been charged with reckless driving under sections 337 and 338 of the Penal Code.—*Than Oo (Laymyethnar)*

LOCAL Business

Myanmar Citizens Bank hit zero stock trading a second time

MYANMAR Citizens Bank (MCB) hit zero volume of stock trading for a second time on 6th December after a similar event occurred on 21st November, according to the Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX).

On 6th December, First Myanmar Investment (FMI) traded 1,417 shares at a share price of Ks16,000, whereas 16,312 shares of Myanmar Thilawa SEZ Holdings (MTSH) were traded at Ks4,600 per share.

Current share prices on 7 December are Ks16,000 for FMI, Ks4,600 for MTSH and Ks9,400 for MCB, while the trading volumes are 1,678 shares of FMI, 5,142 shares of MTSH and 57 shares of MCB, according to YSX.

MCB traded 507 shares on 1st December, 10 shares on 2nd December and 398 shares on 5th December, according to YSX statistics.

"Interest in stock trading is low compared to gold and real estate market. Out of the three shares currently traded on the YSX, people have the most interest in MTSH", said U Maung Sein, a shareholder from Pabedan Township.

MCB commenced its share trading at YSX on 26th August with a base price of Ks7,800 per share. Shares of MCB worth over Ks100million have been traded so far, it is learnt.—*Myitmakha News Agency*

Crackdown on salt businesses in Mon State due to environmental impact

THE competent authorities will inspect salt production businesses in Mon State due to complaints that these businesses are adversely effecting the environment, said an official from Mon State government.

The licenses for salt production businesses will be impounded if the businesses are found to be in violation of environmental regulations. "We have received letters of complaint about the environmental impact, claiming that the inflow of saltwater has destroyed farm land. Therefore, we will go on an inspection tour to check whether the farm land is destroyed by the salt water or not. We will take action against these businessmen if the farmers suffer from the impact from these businesses," the official said. Permits for salt production business in Mon State can be applied for at the Mon State Natural Resource and Environmental Conservation department once a year. There are a large number of license seekers for salt production in Mon State. Licenses have been already granted for 60 salt production fields in Thanbyuzayat Township, 10 fields in Ye Township and one area of salt production land each in Bilin and Paung townships. If these places are found to have environmental impact, the business license will be revoked, it is learnt.—*200*

Import, export licences to be granted without scrutiny of proposed price

IMPORT and export licenses will be issued without scrutiny of prices that may be listed in invoices and sale contracts submitted by the companies in order to have smoother flow of trade, according to an announcement released by the Commerce Ministry on 22nd November.

The seekers of import and export licenses have to provide an import/export application affixed to Ks600 worth stamp duty, an invoice, a sale contract and a pledge stating that the price, the invoice and sale contract are true, it is learnt. Regarding taxation on imports and exports, the tax rate will be set in accordance with the law, rules, procedures and regulations laid down by the Planning and Finance Ministry, depending on the price mentioned in the invoice.

If the companies are found to provide false invoices, sale contracts, documents with lower-than-actul prices with the intention of tax evasion, action will be taken against them according to existing laws. The licenses are granted with the price on the invoice and sale contract but the departments concerned will conduct an inspection abiding by the prescribed international procedure, if needed, according to the Commerce Ministry.—*Mon Mon*

PHOTO: MINISTRY OF ENERGY

ONGC exploring swap deals to import gas from Myanmar

A unit of Oil and Natural Gas Corp Ltd (ONGC) is in early talks with Gazprom for supply of natural gas through a complex swap involving Russia, China and Myanmar, the head of the unit said on Wednesday.

The unit, ONGC Videsh Ltd, and two other state companies, GAIL and Engineers India Ltd, first discussed the idea with Gazprom a few months ago, said Narendra K. Verma, ONGC Videsh's managing director.

"Myanmar is sending gas to China through an existing pipeline ... if Russia can provide equivalent gas to China, then we can reverse the flow of gas from Myanmar to China and bring that gas to India," Verma told reporters on the sidelines of India's Petrotech energy conference.

"For that we'll need a pipeline from Myanmar to India."

He said this was the best way of getting Russia to help India with its gas needs, but would need the cooperation of China and Myanmar.—*Reuters*

Freshly harvested, low-quality rice in high demand at a good price

THE price of newly harvested, poor-quality rice is in high demand at a good price, according to the Wardan commodity depot.

The price of old rice in the market is stable, whereas the fresh new rice price rises by Ks1,000 per bag compared to last month. Some consumers mix and cook new and old rice as a money-saving measure. The rice price in the Muse market has risen due to high demand from China, where rice stocks are very low, it is learnt.

High-quality rice prices range from Ks29,000 to Ks45,500 per bag, depending on the rice variety, whereas low quality rice prices range from Ks16,000 to Ks24,000 per bag, according to the depot.

The Ministry of Commerce is preparing to enter into a government-to-government (G to G) agreement with rice buyer countries: China, the Philippines and Africa, according to the ministry. —*Ko Khant*

Mung bean output to be increased to meet demand from India

THE number of mung bean plantation acres will be increased this winter to meet India's demand of 10,000 tonnes of mung bean, according to the Rakhine Agriculture Department.

India has said it will purchase 10,000 tonnes of mung bean during the next fiscal year, which has prompted the agriculture department to begin the process of significantly increasing the output of mung bean from 37,000 to 40,000 acres in Buthidaung, Minbya, MraukU, Kyauktaw, Taungup, Thandwe and Gwa townships in Rakhine State, it is learnt.

India has already entered into an agreement to purchase the mung beans that will be grown mostly in Rakhine State. The department is currently conducting a tour of the farms to encourage the growers to cultivate more mung beans. A minimum of 40,000 acres of land will be required to meet the demand, said U Aung San Thar, the deputy director of Rakhine Agriculture Department.

An acre of mung beans yields 8 baskets in Rakhine State and so 320,000 baskets of mung beans will be produced from Rakhine State if a boost in plantation acres to 40,000 is successful, according to the state agriculture department.

The number of crop plantations, including mung beans, is actually decreasing in Yathedaung and Maungtaw townships due to the instability in Rakhine State, it is learnt.

"As far as I am concerned, we gain more benefits from the cultivation of peas than the paddy farming because it saves more labour costs. We have just broadcasted the pea seeds two weeks before we harvested the paddy. We can get 10 baskets of mung beans per acre if we systematically cultivate them", said U Kyaw Zan Aung, a farmer from Minbya Township.

Before 2000, the locals from Rakhine cultivated mung bean on a manageable scale only for local consumption. Starting in 2011, the locals began to produce mung bean on a commercial scale because of the demand from merchants who were coming to Rakhine.—*Myitmakha News Agency*

Indian train crash kills two, renewing network safety fears

NEW DELHI — A train ran off the tracks in India's eastern state of West Bengal, killing at least two people and injuring six, a railways spokesman said on Wednesday, reviving concerns about safety just weeks after a crash that killed about 150 people.

India's state-run rail system, the world's fourth-largest and a lifeline for millions of poorer travellers, has struggled under growing demand and a lack of investment in upgrades.

The train, travelling from the eastern city of Patna to the northeastern city of Guwahati, left the tracks in the district of Alipurduar late on Tuesday, the spokesman said.

"A full investigation will take place," Anil Saxena told Reuters.

India's deadliest rail crash in years on 20 November prompted a request from the railways to the finance ministry for about $17.5 billion to set up a dedicated safety fund, in addition to record investment pledged by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government to modernise the network. —*Reuters*

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Nearly 100 killed, hundreds hurt as quake strikes Indonesia's Aceh

Indonesian rescue workers carry a survivor from a fallen building after an earthquake in Ulee Glee, Pidie Jaya, in the northern province of Aceh, Indonesia, on 7 December 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

PIDIE (JAYA) — Nearly 100 people were killed and hundreds injured in Indonesia on Wednesday when a strong earthquake hit its Aceh province and rescuers used earth movers and bare hands to search for survivors in scores of toppled buildings.

Medical volunteers rushed in fading evening light to get people to hospitals, which were straining to cope with the influx of injured.

The Aceh provincial government said in a statement 93 people had died and more than 500 were injured, many seriously.

Sutopo Nugroho of Indonesia's national disaster management agency, said a state of emergency had been declared in Aceh, which sits on the northern tip of Sumatra island.

"We are now focusing on searching for victims and possible survivors," said Nugroho. His agency put the death toll at 94.

Aceh was devastated by a massive earthquake and tsunami centered on its western coast near the provincial capital, Banda Aceh, on 26 December, 2004. That tsunami killed 226,000 people along Indian Ocean shorelines.

Officials urged people to sleep outdoors as twilight fell, in case aftershocks caused more damage to already precarious buildings.

President Joko Widodo was expected to visit the area on Thursday, his deputy told media.

Wednesday's quake hit the east coast of the province, about 170 km (105 miles) from Banda Aceh. Nugroho said Aceh's Pidie Jaya regency, with a population of about 140,000, was worst hit.

Many victims had suffered broken bones and gashes and had to be treated in hospital corridors and hastily erected disaster tents, a Reuters witness said.

Television showed footage of flattened mosques, fallen electricity poles and crushed cars.

A Red Crescent volunteer said health workers were struggling.

"There aren't enough medical staff," the Red Crescent's Muklis, who like many Indonesians uses one name, told TVOne.

Nugroho said more than 1,000 personnel, including military officers and volunteers, had been deployed to help in disaster relief.

The US Geological Survey said the quake struck just after 5 am (2200 GMT Tuesday) at a depth of 17 km (11 miles). No tsunami warning was issued.

At least five aftershocks were felt after the initial quake, the disaster management agency said.

The region suffered massive destruction in 2004 when a 9.2 magnitude quake triggered a tsunami that wiped out entire communities in Indonesia and other countries around the Indian Ocean.

Indonesia was the hardest hit, with more than 120,000 people killed in Aceh.—*Reuters*

Cambodia opposition leader returns to parliament after royal pardon

Kem Sokha, leader of the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), arrives before a plenary session at the National Assembly of Cambodia, in central Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on 7 December 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

PHNOM PENH — The leader of Cambodia's opposition party returned to parliament on Wednesday after receiving a royal pardon, a move that could ease a year of political tension in the Southeast Asian country.

The opposition complains that Prime Minister Hun Sen's ruling party has launched a crackdown in a bid to intimidate critics before a general election due in 2018.

Kem Sokha, the acting leader of the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), said he would work with Hun Sen and his Cambodian People's Party (CPP) to end disputes.

Kem Sokha was sentenced to five months in prison in September after failing to appear in court over a case against two lawmakers from his party.

Since May he had been holed up at the CNRP headquarters in the capital, Phnom Penh, to avoid arrest, and he received a royal pardon at Hun Sen's request last week. Hun Sen, who has ruled Cambodia with an iron fist for 30 years, congratulated Kem Sokha on his appointment as parliament's minority leader on Wednesday and said he looked forward to working with the opposition leader.

"He's my dialogue partner to discuss national issues," Hun Sen told parliament.

Kem Sokha urged politicians to end their rhetoric. "What we need to do further is to find a national agreement so that our country can progress," he said.

Cambodian opposition leader Sam Rainsy, who lives abroad in exile, said on social network Twitter that he remained the minority leader in parliament.

"As CNRP president, I remain Minority Leader (as specified in National Assembly's internal rules). My counterpart is Hun Sen," Sam Rainsy tweeted on Monday. Hun Sen's strategy appears to drive a bigger wedge between the two opposition leaders by allowing Kem Sokha the space to assume more formal leadership while blocking Sam Rainsy's return, said Miguel Chanco, regional lead analyst of the Economist Intelligence Unit.

"The CPP is hoping that it manages to crack the opposition's unity before the coming election cycle. A divided opposition is certainly easier to beat at the ballot box," Chanco said. —*Reuters*

Thailand to investigate BBC over profile of new king: minister

Government officials walk past a picture of Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn Bodindradebayavarangkun at the Government House in Bangkok, Thailand, on 6 December 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

BANGKOK — Thailand's defence minister said on Wednesday authorities will investigate the BBC on suspicion of insulting the monarchy in connection with a Thai-language profile of the new king that has stirred social media anger.

Offending the dignity of a reigning monarch, known by the French term lese-majeste, is a serious crime under Thai law and offenders can be punished with up to 15 years in prison.

The constitutional monarchy has been in the international spotlight since King Bhumibol Adulyadej died on 13 October at the age of 88, after seven decades on the throne.

His son was proclaimed King Maha Vajiralongkorn Bodindradebayavarangkun on Thursday last week and BBC Thai, the BBC's Thai-language service, published a profile of him online.

The piece was widely shared on social media and some Thais have said its content was insulting to the new king.

"Authorities have to pursue the matter. It is their duty to pursue anything that is against the law," Defence Minister Prawit Wongsuwan told reporters.

The BBC declined to comment.

The Thai Ministry of Digital Economy blocked a link to the profile on the BBC's Thai website on Tuesday and it remained blocked on Wednesday. A message on the site said it was blocked for "inappropriate content".

Anyone can file a lese-majeste complaint against another person and police always investigate such cases, rights groups say.

Plainclothes police and some soldiers in uniform went to the BBC's office in Bangkok on Tuesday, witnesses said. No BBC staff were there at the time and the officers later left.

The BBC's television coverage of Thailand has been repeatedly blocked since the death of King Bhumibol.

Police said they would investigate the content of the profile of the new king.

"Then we'll proceed according to the law," senior police official Chayapon Chatchaidej told reporters.

He said nobody had filed a complaint against the BBC.

Police on Saturday arrested a Thai democracy activist opposed to the military government that has been in power since a 2014 coup for sharing a link to the BBC profile.

He was later released on bail.

The military government has zealously pursued cases of alleged criticism of the monarchy since it took power.

International rights groups say the lese-majeste law leave too much room for interpretation and that the penalties are too severe. —*Reuters*

Bangladesh upholds death sentences over 2004 attack on British envoy

DHAKA — Bangladesh's Supreme Court upheld death sentences on Wednesday for three members of an outlawed Islamist militant group in connection with a grenade attack on the British ambassador in 2004.

The Islamists, including the head of the Harkat-ul Jihad Islami group, were sentenced to death in 2008 for the attack in which three people were killed and about 50, including then British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury, were wounded.

A panel of four judges headed by Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha upheld the death sentences for the three, including the group's leader, Mufti Abdul Hannan, Deputy Attorney General Bashir Ahmed told reporters.

The court also upheld life imprisonment for two others for the 21 May, 2004, attack, he said.

Defense lawyer Mohammad Ali told reporters he would file petitions seeking a review of the court's judgment.

The attack came after Friday prayers at a Muslim shrine in the northeastern district of Sylhet. The Bangladesh-born British envoy was wounded in the leg.

The militant group was blamed for several other attacks, including a bomb blast later in 2004 on a rally by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who was then the leader of the opposition.

Twenty-three people were killed and more than 150 wounded in that attack. Hasina suffered partial hearing loss. The ruling came amid rising concern over the growth of Islamist militancy in the Muslim-majority South Asian country of 160 million people, which has seen a string of deadly attacks recently, the most serious on 1 July, when gunmen stormed a cafe killing 22 people, most of them foreigners.—*Reuters*

Police guard Mufti Abdul Hannan (2nd R), alleged leader of the Bangladesh chapter of the Islamist militant group Harkatul Jihad, outside a court in Dhaka, on 2 October 2005. PHOTO: REUTERS

Japan, Iran ministers meet to discuss outlook for nuclear deal

TOKYO — Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida and Iranian counterpart Javad Zarif met on Wednesday amid uncertainties over the future of Tehran's historic nuclear deal with the West following the election of Donald Trump as US president.

The two ministers are expected to discuss implementation of the 2015 deal, which limits Iran's nuclear programme in exchange for the lifting of most international sanctions. The deal has been endorsed by the UN Security Council.

In his presidential campaign, Trump said that if elected, his "number one priority" as president would be to "dismantle the disastrous deal with Iran," one promoted by US President Barack Obama.

Following the nuclear deal Iran struck with six major powers in July last year, Japan is stepping up relations with the oil-rich country, lifting its sanctions on Iran in January and signing a bilateral investment pact the following month.

Tokyo is pushing Japanese companies to do business there amid intensifying foreign competition for access to the Iranian market.

The ministers' meeting also comes after Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, according to the Japanese Foreign Ministry, expressed his willingness to visit Iran during talks with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York in September.—*Kyodo News*

Over 800 tourists standed in southeast India islands due to bad weather

NEW DELHI — More than 800 tourists, including some international travellers, are being stranded in India's southeastern Andaman and Nicobar Islands due to extremely bad weather, the Indian Navy said Wednesday.

Navy spokesperson Captain D.K. Sharma said four naval ships have been dispatched to Havelock Island, which is 36 km from Port Blair, the capital of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, to evacuate those stranded amid fear of a potential cyclonic storm hitting the island.

He said that the four ships have arrived at the area but could not proceed towards Havelock Island because of the bad state of the sea water.

"More than 800 tourists are stranded in Havelock Island; we are ready for evacuation, waiting for weather to clear," he added.

The naval spokesperson said the ships will evacuate the tourists from Havelock Island and ferry them to Port Blair, from where they can leave for their respective destinations.

"Our highest consideration is the safety of the tourists," he said.—*Xinhua*

Opinion

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We appreciate your feedback and contributions. If you have any comments or would like to submit editorials, analyses or reports please email ***ce@globalnewlightofmyanmar.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.

View objectively and be upright

Editorial From
Myanma Alinn

ONE official from UNHCR stationed in Cox's Bazzaar made accusations which are not in accordance with the code of conduct of a UN official regarding the affairs of northern Rakhine state. The Permanent Representative of Myanmar stationed in Geneva, Switzerland went to the UNHCR office on 25 November and presented his objections to the said incident.

In the accusations made by the UNHCR official stationed in Bangladesh, he had mentioned that the Myanmar government had been killing in large groups and that genocide was being committed against the muslim minority.

Again, regarding the incidents that occurred in northern Rakhine state, certain religious organizations organized and incited people to stage demonstrations in front of the Myanmar embassies in Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand in tandem. In these demonstrations, accusations were made that this amounted to religious genocide.

In the Maungtaw district of northern Rakhine state, the region's peace and stability was severely affected because of the terrorist activities that followed the systematic and carefully planned attacks. When government and police forces began to conduct area clearance operations and took action to restore law and order, accusations were made saying security forces have committed human rights violations, burnt houses, killed and committed rape. Groundless accusations emerged. As mentioned above, the UNHCR official stationed in Bangladesh and those responsible for inciting and masterminding the demonstrations in Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia echoed these accusations.

If that were not so, one might say that they all sang to the same tune with one aim in mind.

We wish to point out that hanging on to groundless accusations as facts can lead to divergence from the truth. The correct solution will not be found.

At the very least, even the news agencies themselves in their efforts to get correct news have to rely mainly on the efforts, hard work, level of professionalism and willingness to adhere to the code of conduct and professional ethics of their reporters and cameramen. To put it another way, they have to consider all the news reports they have received from the news teams in the field as correct and true (even if the code of conduct and professional ethics oblige them to verify the facts contained in these reports). To give an example, during the time of Cyclone Nargis, there was one foreign news agency which had received prior permission to gather news in Myanmar. In one scene shot by this news team, the newscaster made it appear that the water was chest deep when in fact the water level was only up to his thigh. In the Sagaing Region when there was flooding in Kale Township, one reporter from a local news agency, while remaining only in the town, although he had not actually witnessed these gave reports about natural disasters which were in variance with the truth. Later, action had to be taken against this reporter. Especially, such incorrect and false news which have not been verified, as stated earlier, usually emerge during times of natural calamities and in times of armed conflicts.

UN staff members, who have to work for the benefit of all mankind, have to take into account their code of conduct and professional ethics, in performance of their duties. While they are performing their international duties they need to steer clear of the influence of a particular country, the influence of an ideology and the influence of a particular person.

When there are two parties in a particular issue, they should not side with one party. They should think and look at the issue objectively and carry out their duties in a fair manner, taking a position which is righteous and upright.

Paddy-growing Region Void Of Bullock Carts

A One Soe

Under the scorching sun, a man is moving toward to the village with speedy steps, carrying two bundles of straw with each one on the edges a shoulder-yoke, across harvested fields. He is no other than U Maung Hlaing, aged 38 of the village "Thari Konebaung" in the southern part of Maungtaw Township. He earns his living by farming 3 acreage of his own land, not having a bullock cart in his possessions.

Nearly in every part of the country, farmers and peasants use cattle and tractors in their agricultural jobs such as plowing and furrowing. And they transport bundles of reaped paddies to threshing grounds by cart, whereas in Maungtaw region cattle are used in farming, but carts are never used for transportation. Hence not to mention cart paths bound for their working places and other villages, even a rut left by a cart wheel is not found in their region.

Wiping out drops of sweat flowing on to his face, U Maung Than Hlaing said, "I have been carrying reaped paddy bundles for five times. My paddy field is not far from the village."

Farmers harvest rice in the village of "Thari Konebaung" PHOTO: A ONE SOE

According to him, 3 acres of his farm land is expected to produce 200 baskets or so. Cattle are hired from cattle owners for rent for using in polughing and furrowing only, but they harvest and carry by themselves without using carts, he added.

Cows found in this region are totally different from strong ones found in Upper & Central Part of Myanmar.

Dr Shwe Soe Aung, Maungtaw district head of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department explained, "The breeds of cattle in this region are not strong-built like those in upper Myanmar, but they are resistant weather. People never plow nor furrow deep as in other parts of the country because of the fertility of the soil. Plans to upgrade the breed of cattle are underway."

One of the locals also said, "The area has a vast land of fertility. Even in the harvest season, the soil is too wet with water for carts to move on the wet land. Sometimes we had to drain water from the fields for the convenient harvests."

Pedigree paddy seeds planted in Maungtaw District are Yadanar Aung, Theehtat Yin, Sinthwe Latt, Manawhari, Manawthukha, Palethwe and Yadanar Toe with Ngasein, Meedone, Kaukhnyin and terraced-land paddy planted traditionally, according to the district agricultural office.

Manual labor is commonly used in Maungtaw region. It must be named the characteristic of this area. Now, U Maung Than Hlaing went outside the village to carry harvested bundles of paddy to his threshing ground.

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Vendor Managed Inventory Scheme to begin in Thilawa SEZ

A warehouse is seen in Thilawa Special Economic Zone. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Tomoaki Yabe

"Vendor Managed Inventory" (VMI) scheme will begin its operation in Thilawa Special Economic Zone (Thilawa SEZ), allowing alternative method for non-resident foreign companies to distribute their products into Myanmar. Such instruction about the new scheme was issued by Thilawa SEZ Management Committee on 7th October 2016. Warehouse operators in Thilawa SEZ will be required to apply for SEZ Warehouse Certificate by fulfilling the criteria specified by Thilawa SEZ Management Committee.

The export oriented Free Zone investors in Thilawa SEZ are deemed to be situated outside of Myanmar, and are therefore exempted from customs duty and other import related taxes for their import of raw materials and products required for their production. Under the new vendor managed inventory scheme, Thilawa SEZ Management Committee will also permit storage of "cargo held on account" owned by non-resident foreign companies.

This will allow non-resident foreign companies to stock their goods in transit for storage in a free zone warehouse pertaining to the temporary storage of cargos from a foreign supplier without paying duties and other taxes until such time that these cargos are withdrawn for consumption in Myanmar or shipped outside of Myanmar.

Warehouse operators must obtain SEZ Warehouse Certificate from SEZ Management Committee in order to provide such service. According to the instruction, criteria for their approval include; a dedicated office space for the Customs Officer, CCTV Camera, physical separating units between free zone and promotion zone storage area and 24 hour security guards. As free zone area is deemed to be out of Myanmar, it has no restriction on the storage period for cargo held on account. For domestic cargo stored in the promotion zone warehouse, the maximum storage period is three years.

Tax benefits & reduction in lead time

Vendor managed inventory scheme is especially beneficial for import of goods with high duties and other taxes for the purpose of delaying payment of duties until the goods are sold from local distributors to the end users. There are also benefits in not requiring import licenses when forwarding the goods into SEZ Warehouse, which means no more problems with penalty fees to be paid at Yangon Port.

These benefits will apply to, for example, the storage of brand new vehicles which has been approved as "regulated cargos". "Regulated cargo" indicate any cargos which require special clearance as may be prescribed under relevant laws in Myanmar, or by relevant authorities of Myanmar for the import into Myanmar, which includes 4-wheel and 2-wheel vehicles, regulated food products, pharmaceutical products, alcohol, tobacco, cigarettes, and other products.

Trading companies with numerous buyers in Myanmar may utilize this scheme for importing large volume of grain or raw materials into Thilawa SEZ followed by assorting, packaging and selling to the local market in accordance with the needs of each individual buyer in Myanmar. This will lead to a reduction in logistics cost in comparison to importing separately for individual buyers in Myanmar.

The benefit of the scheme also includes much shortened lead time compared to the conventional method of selling goods to local distributors from stock points in Japan, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Local distributors can benefit considerably by shifting their stock to the supplier's side in Thilawa SEZ minimizing their necessary stock level without causing any stockout.

Brand new distribution channel in Myanmar for foreign suppliers

"This scheme gives non-resident foreign companies an alternative distribution method for their products regardless of whether the companies are registered in Myanmar or not.

We are excited to see this progression since we believe this will accelerate the economic development of Myanmar", says Tomoaki Yabe, the managing director of Daizen Myanmar; one of the total logistics solution provider based in Thilawa SEZ.

Improvised bomb found on Shan State highway defused

GOVERNMENT troops found an improvised bomb on Lashio-Theinni Union Highway yesterday and were able to disable the device, according to the Office of the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services.

The bomb was found near mile-post 196/7 at about 1:30 pm while troops were conducting area clearance operations in Sanlaung Village in Theinni Township in northern Shan State. —*Myanmar News Agency*

MYANMAR GAZETTE

The President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has appointed the following persons as heads of service organizations shown against each on probation from the date they assume charge of their duties.

	Name	Appointment
(1)	U Khin Latt Deputy Director-General President's Office	Director-General Union Minister's Office President's Office
(2)	U Kyaw Kyaw Han Deputy Director-General President's Office	Director-General Political and Security Department President's Office
(3)	U Brat Singh Deputy Director-General President's Office	Director-General Economic Department President's Office

Japan Grants a total of 31.4 million USD for three projects

Mr. Tateshi HIGUCHI exchanges notes with Ms Ms. Naoe YAKIYA.

THE signing ceremony of Exchange of Notes for three projects amounting to three billion and five hundred eighty-one million Japanese Yen (approx.31.4 million USD) was held in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

Mr. Tateshi HIGUCHI, Ambassador of Japan to Myanmar signed the Exchange of Notes with U Maung Maung Win, Deputy Minister for Planning and Finance for two projects, with Ms. Naoe YAKIYA, Deputy Country Director, World Food Program (WFP) Myanmar for the third project.

The three projects are : Project for Improvement of Magway General Hospital, Economic and Social Development Programme and The ODA Project (the Food Assistance Program) through World Food Program.— *GNLM*

Myanmar suspends sending of workers to Malaysia following Malay PM-led strike

The Myanmar government has suspended sending workers to Malaysia because of the current situation in Malaysia, according to the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population.

The employment agencies in Myanmar that are sending Myanmar workers to Malaysia said that the suspension was effective from 6 December for the safety of Myanmar workers.

"Currently, we've suspended the sending of Myanmar workers to Malaysia. We have to do so until the situation has become normal," said U Kyaw Htein Kyaw, general secretary of Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation .

Although the agencies are allowed to send Myanmar workers who have been permitted by the Health, Education and Human Resource Development Committee, they have to recall their workers if the latter create problems in Malaysia because the former have agreed to recall them when entering into the contract with the labour department. Mass rallies led by Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak and his Malaysian ruling party UMNO on 4 December requested Myanmar to stop violence against the Muslim community in Rakhine State.

There are over 400,000 Myanmar citizens living and working in Malaysia. Currently, the Myanmar embassy in Kuala Lumpur has issued a statement warning Myanmar citizens in Malaysia to stay alert.— *Myitmakha News Agency*

Cuba, US to discuss detente in wake of Trump election

HAVANA/WASHINGTON — Cuba and the United States will draw up a roadmap for deepening their detente on Wednesday in a first meeting since the election of Donald Trump as US president and the death of Cuban revolutionary Fidel Castro.

The fifth US-Cuban bilateral commission comes at a time of increased uncertainty about the future of US-Cuban relations given Trump's promise to end the detente if Cuba did not offer a better "deal."

The administration of outgoing US President Barack Obama has pressed American companies to complete additional business deals in Cuba to help further cement the president's policy by the time Trump takes office on 20 January.

"We will define the actions that will be carried out in the coming weeks to further the process of improving relations," the Cuban foreign ministry said on Tuesday. Those actions would include high-level visits and accords of cooperation in areas of mutual interest, it said.

Communist-ruled Cuba has so far mostly stayed quiet on Trump's statements, waiting to see whether he converts his tough rhetoric into policy change.

Several major US companies, such as General Electric, are in the final stages of negotiating deals with Cuba, sources familiar with the matter say. One of those sources, based in Washington, said more than half a dozen announcements, ranging from cruise ships and travel to manufacturing and telecommunications, are believed to be in the works.—*Reuters*

US President Barack Obama receives a hug after speaking to active service members and their families during his visit to MacDill Air Force Base, home to US Central Command and US Special Operations Command, in Tampa, Florida, US, on 6 December 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Obama defends record on terrorism in national security speech

TAMPA, (Fla) — President Barack Obama on Tuesday warned that the United States would not be able to wipe out terrorism with military might as he offered a sweeping defence of his administration's national security record.

In his final major speech on counterterrorism as president, Obama argued that his administration had been able to make al Qaeda "a shadow of its former self" and had put Islamic State on its heels, but said terrorism would remain a threat to the United States.

"Rather than offer false promises that we can eliminate terrorism by dropping more bombs or deploying more and more troops or fencing ourselves off from the rest of the world, we have to take a long view of the terrorist threat and we have to pursue a smart strategy that can be sustained," Obama said during a speech at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida.

Obama will turn over the White House on 20 January to Republican President-elect Donald Trump who has been sharply critical of his administration's approach to fighting terrorism.

Trump referred to Obama and Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton as the "co-founders" of Islamic State during the presidential campaign, blaming them for the initial spread of the militant group.

The White House said Obama's national security speech had been planned long before the 8 November election and was not aimed specifically at the incoming Trump administration.

But during his speech, Obama spoke of the importance of adhering to American laws and values and against reinstating the use of waterboarding or imposing a religious test on immigrants, two positions that Trump has supported in the past.

"The whole objective of these terrorists is to scare us into changing who we are and our democracy," Obama said.

Obama signed an executive order after taking office in January 2009 that banned waterboarding and other "enhanced interrogation techniques" or EITs. Such executive orders can be rescinded by a president's successors.

Many lawmakers and human rights groups have denounced waterboarding, an interrogation technique that simulates drowning, as torture.

While Trump is now calling for "extreme vetting" of certain refugees admitted to the United States, during the campaign he proposed banning foreign-born Muslims from entering the country.

Obama came into office planning to unwind US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and promising to focus on fighting militant groups that threatened the United States wherever they were.

Instead, he has been forced to return some US troops to Iraq and keep thousands in place in Afghanistan after more than 14-1/2 years of war.

Obama said his administration's approach of providing support to local partners and not undertaking massive ground invasions has been effective and is making progress in the fight to take Mosul in Iraq from Islamic State.

Some counterterrorism experts have pointed to the rise of Islamic State as an example of Obama being too slow to respond to an emerging threat.

While the United States has been successful in killing some key militant leaders, Obama's "legacy has been tarnished by the way terrorist groups have regenerated and strengthened in the latter parts of his presidency," said Robin Simcox, a fellow at the Heritage Foundation.—*Reuters*

NEWS IN BRIEF

Ship with 64 passengers on board sinks off Yemen coast — shipping sources

ADEN — A passenger ship carrying more than 60 passengers, including women and children, sank while sailing to Socotra island in the Indian Ocean from Hadramout province in mainland Yemen, shipping sources said on Wednesday.

They said rescue teams had managed to pull at least five passengers from the vessel, which was sailing from the Hadramout provincial capital, Mukalla, when it sank northwest of Socotra with 64 people on board. The fate of the rest of the passengers, or what caused the ship to sink, was not known.

The Yemeni fisheries minister, Fahad Kaffen, appealed to the Saudi-led Arab alliance, which maintains a naval presence in the area, to help with search and rescue efforts.

Socotra and Hadramout province are under the control of the Yemeni government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, which is locked in a war with Iran-aligned Houthis who control most of northern Yemen.—*Reuters*

Man suspected to be behind threats against Vucics arrested

BELGRADE — In coordination with the Prosecutor's Office for High-Technology Crime, Serbian police have arrested a 28-year-old man, identified by the initials M. R., on suspicion of making threats against members of PM Aleksandar Vucic's family in a comment posted on the portal of a daily newspaper.

The police found a mobile phone used by the suspect to access a Facebook profile named "Child of Partizan" to post the threats.

The suspect has been placed in 48-hour detention pending criminal charges and a transfer to the relevant prosecutor's office, the police said in a statement. Vucic said earlier in the day his underage daughter had been a target of threats posted by a Facebook user on the website of the Belgrade-based *Kurir* daily.—*Tanjug*

Italian president pushes for new voting law before election

ROME — Italy's President Sergio Mattarella wants parliament to draft a new electoral law before any ballot is held, a source close to the president said on Tuesday, a move likely to delay any vote after Prime Minister Matteo Renzi resigns.

Renzi said he would step down after losing a referendum on constitutional reform on Sunday, but Mattarella asked him to stay on until parliament passes the 2017 budget, a vote scheduled for Wednesday.

The next parliamentary election is not scheduled until 2018 but on Tuesday there was growing consensus among party leaders for it to be held a year earlier. Interior Minister Angelino Alfano said the vote should be held in February.—*Reuters*

Aleppo rebels call for five-day ceasefire, talks about city's future

BEIRUT — Syrian rebels in besieged eastern Aleppo called for an immediate five-day ceasefire and negotiations about the future of the city, and for medical and civilian evacuations, in a humanitarian plan published on Wednesday.

A "humanitarian initiative" document signed in the name of the Aleppo Leadership Council requested the evacuation of around 500 critical medical cases from east Aleppo under United Nations supervision and civilian evacuations to the northern Aleppo countryside. It also called for all involved parties to talk about the future of the city once the humanitarian situation is alleviated.—*Reuters*

South Korean naval ships visit Viet Nam to boost military cooperation

HANOI — Two vessels of South Korea Navy on Wednesday docked at Cam Ranh International Port in Viet Nam's south central coastal Khanh Hoa province to begin a visit aimed at boosting military cooperation.

The ships, ROKS Cheon Ji and ROKS Chungmugong Yi Sunshi, have 39 officers and 485 crewmembers on board.

The visit aims to bolster cooperation between the two militaries and thereby helping enhance the two countries' strategic partnership, said a report of Viet Nam's state-run news agency *VNA*.

This is the second time South Korean military vessels have visited Viet Nam after May 2015, when its coast guard force visited Viet Nam's central Da Nang city.—*Xinhua*

Yemen says UN roadmap to end conflict sets 'dangerous precedent'

Houthi rebels parade during a rally held to mobilise fighters for battles against government forces, in Sanaa, Yemen, on 1 December 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

WASHINGTON — Yemen on Tuesday appeared to reject a UN plan to end its civil war, saying the roadmap would create a "dangerous international precedent" by legitimizing the rebellion against the country's internationally recognised government.

Yemen's position deals a major setback to international efforts to end the 20-month conflict, which has unleashed a humanitarian disaster and killed more than 10,000 people.

A 6 December letter to the Security Council from Yemen's UN mission, seen by Reuters, called UN envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh's plan a "free incentive to the Houthi-Saleh rebels, legitimizing their rebellion, their agenda."

"The Ould Cheikh Roadmap creates a dangerous international precedent, encouraging coup trends against elected authorities and national consensus. Which are in clear violations of internationally established laws and norms."

Since March 2015, a Saudi-led coalition has been fighting Iran-allied Houthi rebels and forces loyal to former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and trying to restore to power internationally recognised President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi.

The coalition has failed to dislodge the Houthis and their allies in Yemen's army from the capital, Sanaa. The UN proposal to end the stalemate envisions Hadi handing his powers to a less divisive deputy in exchange for the Houthis quitting major cities.

The 6 December letter detailed a list of actions necessary for any political solution, including that Saleh and Houthi leader Abdul-Malik al-Houthi must "leave political life and leave the country with their families into self-imposed exile for a period of at least 10 years."

A senior diplomat at the United Nations told Reuters last month that Saudi Arabia appeared to accept Ould Cheikh's initiative and had encouraged Hadi to deal with it.

The United Arab Emirates, another key country in the coalition, has said it supported the plan, which the United States and the United Kingdom also endorse.—*Reuters*

Monitor says Syrian army seizes Aleppo Old City from rebels

BEIRUT — A war monitor said on Wednesday the Syrian army had seized control of all parts of the Old City of Aleppo which had been held by rebels, part of an advance which has seen insurgents lose around two thirds of their main urban stronghold over the past two weeks.

The Syrian army and allied forces began to enter the Old City on Tuesday, and are looking closer than ever to achieving their most important victory of the five-year-old civil war by driving rebels out of the besieged eastern sector of the city.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the army advance on Tuesday and overnight, which was supported by heavy air strikes and shelling, caused insurgents to withdraw from the historic Old City, including from the area around the historic Umayyad Mosque.

A Turkey-based official with one of the rebel factions told Reuters government forces had taken part of the Old City, but not all of it. A military source confirmed to Reuters on Wednesday that the Syrian army had entered Aleppo's Old City.

Restoring full control over Aleppo, Syria's most populous city before the war, would be a major prize for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in the country's multi-sided conflict.

The war has killed hundreds of thousands of people, made more than half of Syrians homeless and created the world's worst refugee crisis.—*Reuters*

The sun rises while smoke is pictured near Aleppo's historic citadel, as seen from a government-controlled area of Aleppo, Syria, on 6 December 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Female Afghan cyclists push boundaries one wheelie at a time

KABUL — Brushing aside suicide bombings and public scorn, the young women of Afghanistan's first freestyle cycling club hope their pop-a-wheelies, bunnyhops and backflips will trailblaze a new path for future generations in this conservative Muslim nation.

Fifteen women, mainly teenagers, are among 50 members of the small Kabul club, established two months ago to help keep young Afghans away from drugs, petty crime and violence.

"Most of the time people are harassing us because they see girls cycling as a bad thing," said Zahra Ronna, 18, wearing a black Nike hat on her red and white bicycle.

"We are tired of war and we want to practise new things in our lives," she told Reuters Television.

Under the Taliban in the 1990s, women in Afghanistan were banned from going to school or stepping outside their home without a male family member.

Women's rights have made gains since the hardline Islamist group's ouster in 2001, but observers worry that progress is at risk as violence against women persists and they remain under-represented in politics.

"We ask people to set their girls free so they can achieve their goals and liberty. Women are not only supposed to work at home," Ronna said.

Ronna and other cyclists gather three times a week at a concrete playground in the capital, using metal tables, wooden crates and boxes to perfect stunts they have seen performed on YouTube, Facebook and other social media.

The club's founder, Asghar Mehrzada, said the group is attracting a lot of interest from young Afghans, who pay a membership fee of 400 afghanis ($6) per month.

He hopes the Afghan government and international aid groups will help fund its expansion with better bicycles and facilities.

"The big challenge that we face is insecurity. We are not confident of the security to go out and do this sport," said Mehrzada, a civil society activist when he is not on his bike.

For Fatima Mahdawi, another female cyclist, the club offers a much-needed escape from violence, which has worsened over the past year due to a resurgent Taliban.

"There are lots of problems in this country we live in," she said.

"But whenever I come to the club, it gives me huge energy and joy. I feel like I'm flying."—*Reuters*

Bolivia detains airline CEO after Colombia soccer crash

LA PAZ — Bolivian authorities detained on Tuesday the chief executive of airline LaMia, the owner of the plane that crashed last week in Colombia and killed nearly all of Brazil's Chapacoense soccer team, prosecutors said.

Gustavo Vargas, the chief executive, and two other employees of the tiny Bolivia-based charter airline were taken to a prosecutor's office in Santa Cruz for up to eight hours of questioning before prosecutors decide if they should be held in jail.

Bolivian Attorney General Ramiro Guerrero said the initial investigation is into possible criminal failure to follow safety procedures.

"It could easily turn into a manslaughter case," he said.

The crash killed 71 people after the plane apparently ran out of fuel, sending shock waves through the global soccer community.

Earlier on Tuesday, Bolivia demanded Brazil expel a Bolivian air traffic controller who traveled there to provide authorities information about the crash.

Bolivian Interior Minister Carlos Romero said Celia Castedo had illegally bypassed migration controls on her way out of the country in an attempt to flee justice. He said Castedo was being sought as part of a broad investigation into Bolivia's air travel authority after the 28 November crash.

A rescue worker sits near the wreckage of a plane that crashed into the Colombian jungle with Brazilian soccer team Chapecoense onboard near Medellin, Colombia, on 29 November 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

"There is no argument to justify an asylum request," Romero said. "Logically, in a case like this there should be a process of automatic expulsion (from Brazil)."

Federal prosecutors in Brazil said late on Monday that the woman had come to them in the border city of Corumba after the Bolivian air travel authority accused her of negligence.

Brazilian TV station Globo reported Castedo was seeking asylum in Brazil and that she had questioned a flight plan showing the intended route would push the limits of the plane's maximum possible flight time.

Bolivian authorities on Thursday suspended the license of LaMia, which was bringing the Chapecoense club to the finals of the Copa Sudamericana.

Bolivia's government has replaced the management of its air travel authority in order to ensure a transparent investigation.

Brazilian prosecutors said they would meet on Wednesday with their Colombian and Bolivian peers to investigate the crash.—*Reuters*

Authorities identify all but one of 36 Oakland fire victims

OAKLAND, (Calif) — Authorities in Oakland, California, said on Tuesday they had identified all but one of the 36 victims whose bodies were pulled from the debris of a fire that ripped through a dance party at a warehouse at the weekend.

Emergency workers have searched and cleared at least 90 per cent of the charred building, officials told a news conference. Searchers were still sifting through the rest of the structure on Tuesday evening in a non-stop operation.

"This has been a heavy labour operation plus a heavy mental operation," Oakland Fire Chief Teresa Deloach Reed said.

A local state of emergency has been proclaimed, she said, potentially allowing for state and federal funds to help cover the costs of the inferno, the cause of which has yet to be determined. Reed said the City Council was set to ratify the proclamation later this week.

The blaze erupted late on Friday in a sprawling two-story building known as the Ghost Ship that was leased to an artists' collective.

The coroner's office has completed autopsies on half the 36 victims, said Alameda County Sheriff's Office spokesman J.D. Nelson. He said 35 had been identified, and the families of 30 notified.

Nelson said smoke inhalation, typical for a major fire of this kind, was found to be the cause of death in all those examined.

Survivors said flames spread quickly and billowing thick, black smoke blinded and choked those struggling to flee. One victim's body was positioned in a way to shield another person, who also died, Nelson said.

Officials have said arson was not immediately suspected. However, charges ranging from involuntary manslaughter to murder could be brought, Alameda County District Attorney Nancy O'Malley told reporters on Monday.

The dance party was held on the second floor, which partially collapsed. The 10,000-square-foot (900-square-metre) building lacked sprinklers and smoke detectors, and wooden pallets partially formed a makeshift stairway between its first and second floors, officials said on Monday. It had just two exterior doors.

The manager of the warehouse, Derrick Almena, broke down on Tuesday during an interview with NBC's "Today" programme and declined to answer questions about the condition of the building before the fire. He said he was sorry.

Two children place flowers at a makeshift memorial near the scene of the fatal warehouse fire in Oakland, California, US on 6 December 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

"I'd rather get on the floor and be trampled by the parents," Almena said. "I'd rather let them tear at my flesh than answer these ridiculous questions."

Oakland Mayor Libby Schaff told an evening news conference that three complaints had been made against the warehouse between 2005 and 2014, according to the city's planning and building department.

Schaff said two complaints were made in 2014, one alleging construction of housing without permits and another claiming construction materials were blocking the sidewalk. The third, in 2005, alleged that a vacant lot next to the warehouse was being used as a parking lot and homeless encampment, Schaff said.

Schaff said the city was still compiling data and reports about the warehouse from other city agencies, including the police and fire departments.

Among the dead was Chelsea Dolan, 33, a San Francisco-based musician who, according to her Facebook page, was scheduled to perform as a DJ at the warehouse on Friday night.

"She was someone so talented, she could have been a diva if she wanted to, but she never was," Dolan's friend, Gehno Sanchez Aviance, said on Sunday. Thousands gathered for a candlelight vigil in Oakland on Monday night to mourn the dead.—*Reuters*

Switzerland makes progress in money laundering fight -task force report

ZURICH — Switzerland has boosted anti-money laundering measures over the last decade but could still do more to prevent financial crime, the inter-governmental Financial Action Task Force (FATF) said on Wednesday.

Once a haven for untaxed and illicit assets, the small but influential finance hub has been stung into action by a global push to combat money laundering and financial crime. That has led to considerable improvement in its efforts since 2005, the global task force said.

"Switzerland demonstrates a strong commitment to mutual legal assistance," FATF said in a statement. "It should continue to pursue its efforts on all other forms of international cooperation, including on the supervision of financial groups given the key role of the Swiss financial centre."

Legal reforms and assistive investigations had strengthened the country's efforts and helped return considerable sums in a number of international grand corruption cases.

Swiss authorities have collected financial information and seized assets for their international counterparts in a number of prominent cases, including investigations into Malaysian state fund 1MDB, global soccer body FIFA and Brazilian state-run oil company Petrobras.

But Switzerland should do more when it comes to preventing financial crime, the report concluded. In particular, banks and other financial intermediaries should step up efforts to spot and report suspected crime.

Banks too seldom reported suspicious transactions, the FATF said, and most such reports occurred only after information from external sources had come to light.

Swiss financial watchdog FINMA has called on banks to be more thorough in their checks and in October said 15 were in a "red zone" of lenders particularly exposed to money laundering.

The finance ministry said it would analyse the recommendations of the report and submit a corresponding proposal to the Swiss cabinet next year.—*Reuters*

Los Angeles metro system bomb threat not credible – FBI

LOS ANGELES — A threat to detonate a bomb at a subway station in Los Angeles was not credible, federal authorities said late on Tuesday after police spent the day searching commuters and leading bomb-sniffing dogs around stations across the metro area.

Authorities found no evidence regarding a specific but uncorroborated threat made by a caller who warned that a bomb would blow up on Tuesday at the Metro Red Line's Universal City station, the Federal Bureau of Investigation said.

"Based on significant similarities, law enforcement partners also believe the anonymous caller may have, on a previous occasion, reported threats that did not materialize," the FBI said in a statement.

Heavy security at subway stations in Los Angeles greeted commuters on Tuesday. Armed deputies searched passengers' bags while bomb squad teams led dogs around stations across the Los Angeles County transit system, media footage showed.

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, who boarded a train at the Universal City station on Tuesday, said law enforcement was prepared and asked the public to be vigilant.

LA County Sheriffs Deputies patrol inside of the Universal City Metro subway station after a reported threat against the Los Angeles rail system in Los Angeles, California, US on 6 December 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Federal and city officials said on Monday they had been alerted by authorities in another country to a "specific" threat against the city's Red Line commuter rail system, prompting them to beef up security and alert the public.

Law enforcement officials said the threat had been relayed to the FBI by a law enforcement agency in another country, where the threat had originated. Officials did not identify the country.

The male caller, speaking in English, had warned authorities in that country of a potential attack on Tuesday targeting the Red Line station, which is across the street from the Universal Studios theme park, Los Angeles Police Chief Charlie Beck said.

The caller did not threaten to carry out the attack, but said he was alerting law enforcement.

The Red Line runs between downtown Los Angeles and northern neighbourhoods, including Hollywood and North Hollywood. It carries about 145,000 passengers a day as part of the city's larger transit system.—*Reuters*

Passenger plane carrying 47 crashes in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD — A Pakistan International Airlines plane carrying 47 people has crashed in northern Pakistan, Geo TV reported.

Civil Aviation Authority sources were quoted as saying the ATR-42 plane took off from Chitral around 3 p.m. and the pilot made a mayday call to the control tower shortly before communication was lost around 4:30 p.m.

Geo TV said the plane crashed in Havelian, a municipality of Abbottabad district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

PIA confirmed in a statement that Flight 116 had gone missing, but did not confirm the crash. —*Kyodo News*

South Sudan deports AP journalist, agency says it is over his reporting

NAIROBI — South Sudan has deported a journalist working for the international Associated Press news agency, and the reporter said on Wednesday that it was because his reporting was critical of the government.

Presidential spokesman Ateny Wek Ateny said he was not aware of such a deportation and could not comment.

Journalists in South Sudan have often complained of harassment by the authorities during the civil conflict. In 2015, five journalists were killed in South Sudan, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

"Yesterday I was arrested and deported by members of South Sudan's National Security Service. The officers did not officially present me with a reason for my arrest and deportation, but repeatedly said that my reporting was too critical of the government. This is a violation of press freedom," Justin Lynch said on his Twitter account.

"As an international journalist, it is an unfortunate reality that I am privileged compared to my brave South Sudanese colleagues, who are frequently the victim of intimidation or even death."

South Sudan, which won independence in 2011, plunged into civil conflict in December 2013 after a long running political feud between President Salva Kiir and his former deputy, Riek Machar, who are from different ethnic groups. Much of the fighting ran along ethnic lines.

A peace deal was signed in 2015 but proved shaky from the outset. Weeks after Machar flew back to Juba this year to return to his former post, fighting again erupted in July. Machar has since left the country and been replaced. Associated Press defended Lynch's reporting from the country.

"Any move to suppress legitimate journalism and truthful reporting shedding light on humanitarian crimes is wrong and should be condemned. We hope that the government of South Sudan will reconsider its actions," it quoted Ian Phillips, its vice president for international news, as saying in a story about Lynch's deportation.

In November, security officials temporarily shut down Eye Radio in Juba, a popular radio station set up with US backing, without giving a reason.

In September, the authorities shut the *Nation Mirror* newspaper without giving a reason, although it followed coverage of a report by a US-based group alleging misuse of state funds by the nation's leaders. It remains closed.

In July, authorities detained a newspaper editor for writing articles that criticised the country's leaders over a flare-up in violence that month. —*Reuters*

INDUSTRIAL DESIGN CAUTION

SUNTORY BEVERAGE & FOOD LIMITED, a company incorporated in Japan and having its registered office at 3-1-1 Kyobashi, Chuo-ku, Tokyo 104-0031 Japan, is the owner and proprietor of the following Design in the title of "**Packaging Container**".

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Daw La Min May, *H.G.P*
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C/o **Kelvin Chia Yangon Ltd.**,
Level 8A, UFC Tower, Corner of Mahabandoola Road & Thein Phyu Road, Botahtaung Tsp, Yangon,
The Republic of the Union of Myanmar.
Dated **8 December 2016** lmm@kcyangon.com

CLAIMS DAY NOTICE

MV SHAHR E KORD VOY. NO ( )

Consignees of cargo carried on MV SHAHR E KORD VOY. NO ( ) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 8.12.2016 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T.T where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
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Gigi Hadid crowned model of year at Fashion Awards

LONDON — American fashion model Gigi Hadid was crowned international model of the year and designer Alexander McQueen named best British brand at the 2016 Fashion Awards on Monday night.

The fashion industry's top designers, models and celebrity fans braved chilly winter weather in London to walk the red carpet at the Royal Albert Hall.

Hadid, 21, beat her younger sister Bella and fellow models Kendall Jenner, Adwoa Aboah and Lineisy Montero for the top modeling award. Alexander McQueen was named best British brand, and Gucci was awarded prizes for international business leader and international accessories designer.—*Reuters*

Gigi Hadid, winner of the International Model award poses for photographers. PHOTO: REUTERS

Matt Damon defends role in 'Great Wall' against charge of 'whitewashing'

BEIJING — Hollywood actor Matt Damon on Tuesday defended his starring role in upcoming Hollywood film "The Great Wall", saying that accusations of "whitewashing", or the use Caucasian stars over actors of other ethnicities, were unfounded.

"Zhang Yimou called me and asked me to be in his movie," Damon said in Beijing, referring to the film's director who joined him on a panel.

Damon, also joined by co-star Andy Lau, said he would be "mortified" if he felt the accusations were merited. Critics decried the decision to cast Damon for the fantasy film set in ancient China.

Damon said the issue was "very important" but drew a distinction between the practice and his role in "The Great Wall".

"When I think of 'whitewashing' I think Chuck Connors playing Geronimo, that's whitewashing and that's unacceptable," he said, referring to a Caucasian actor who played the Native American chief Geronimo in a 1962 Western.

Zhang, the acclaimed director behind "Hero" and "House of Flying Daggers", said the accusations were "unfair" to Damon.

"Once you've seen the film you'll see it's not like that," he said.

"It's a group of people, a group of heroes, and as it's set to the backdrop of a Chinese story so there are lots of Chinese heroes."

"The Great Wall", out in China in this month and in the United States in February, features Zhang's trademarks of martial arts and saturated filters, and is centered around the mysterious origins of The Great Wall of China and what the wall's original purpose was.

Strict censorship laws have prevented many Hollywood films from being released in mainland China. To counter that, US studios are co-producing big budget movies with Chinese investors.

Hong Kong actor Andy Lau, an Asian super-star, said it remained to be seen whether Zhang's "mission" to bring Chinese culture to the West through film would succeed.—*Reuters*

Actor Matt Damon attends a red carpet event promoting Chinese director Zhang Yimou's latest film 'Great Wall' in Beijing, China on 6 December 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Beyonce leads Grammy nominations as pop, R&B dominates top fields

LOS ANGELES — Beyonce got a leading nine Grammy nominations on Tuesday, followed by Drake, Rihanna and Kanye West with eight nods each, as pop, R&B and hip hop took center stage in the contest for the music industry's highest honours.

Beyonce's haul included album, song and record of the year, the top three Grammy accolades, for her hit song "Formation" and visual album "Lemonade," a collection of songs about race, feminism and empowerment.

The R&B singer, 35, will compete head-on with Britain's Adele, the only other artist to be nominated for all three top awards and who returns to the Grammys after sweeping up six statuettes in 2012 for her album "21."

Justin Bieber's "Purpose," Canadian hip hop star Drake's "Views" and country musician Sturgill Simpson's "A Sailor's Guide To Earth" rounded out the contenders for album of the year.

Among the major snubs were West's "The Life of Pablo" album, which was shut out of the album, record and song of the year categories this year, as well as David Bowie's final album "Blackstar," which was released two days before his death in January.

"Blackstar" however was nominated for four Grammys, including best alternative album.

The Grammy Awards, to be held in Los Angeles on 12 February, are chosen by members of the music industry and in the past have often been dominated by rock and country music.

But in recent years, more R&B and hip hop artists have been recognised in line with the commercial success of the music form. Drake and Beyonce, along with Adele, had three of the biggest selling albums worldwide of 2016. Music industry publication Billboard said on Tuesday that Grammy voters had "recognised with their nominees this year what the rest of the music-listening world has long accepted: that both its commercial and critical center lies with pop, hip hop and R&B."—*Reuters*

'Rogue One' has keys to enter 'Star Wars' franchise, says director

SAN FRANCISCO — You don't have to be a "Star Wars" superfan to see the first spin-off movie "Rogue One: A Star Wars Story," says director Gareth Edwards, but he's hoping the film will light a passion for the franchise in any newcomers.

The first of three planned Disney "Star Wars" spinoff films, "Rogue One" is intended as a standalone movie, although it is set before the original 1977 film "A New Hope."

Anticipation is high with tickets selling fast ahead of the 14 December world rollout, and box office analysts are predicting that "Rogue One" will take in some $130 million at North American movie theaters on its opening weekend.

"Rogue One" doesn't start with the signature "Star Wars" theme music or the screen crawl of story information that opened the previous seven films in the franchise.

"You don't have to have seen 'Star Wars' to come and see this film. You could never have seen it in your life and everything you needed to know, you learn during this movie," Edwards told Reuters.

"My goal would be, if we do our jobs properly, that by the time the film ends, the first thing you want to do is watch 'A New Hope' and see the rest if you haven't seen it before," he added.

Gareth Edwards. PHOTO: REUTERS

Secrecy has been tight around plot details, but "Rogue One" will follow a group of rebels led by Jyn Erso (Felicity Jones) who embark on a mission to steal the plans for the Galactic Empire's new super weapon, the Death Star.

Not only is a female character front and centre of the action, but the film has one of the most diverse casts yet for a big-budget Hollywood movie, including Mexico's Diego Luna, Chinese actors Jiang Wen and Donnie Yen, and British-born actor Riz Ahmed, who is of Pakistani descent.—*Reuters*

Sri Lanka's tourist arrivals rise by 16 per cent in November

COLOMBO — Tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka rose by 16 per cent in November compared with the same month in 2015 with India and China remaining the leading markets, statistics from the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority showed on Wednesday.

China recorded a 10.5 per cent growth on a year-to-year basis as over 18,000 tourists visited Sri Lanka in November, while India recorded a 2.5 per cent growth from the same month last year, with over 30,000 visitors arriving.

In total over 1.8 million tourists have arrived in the island country this year and the government has said it hopes to achieve a target of at least 2 million tourists by year end.

In November alone, 167,217 tourists arrived in Sri Lanka, a 16 per cent rise from the 144,147 the same month last year.

China, which has become the second largest source of tourists to Sri Lanka, has helped improve the island nation's tourism industry once heavily scarred by a 30-year civil war between the government troops and Tamil Tiger rebels which ended in May 2009.

Last year, Sri Lanka attracted 200,000 Chinese tourists. The Sri Lankan government has set a target of attracting 4 million tourists by 2020.—*Xinhua*

Cab-hailing company Careem launches women drivers in conservative Pakistan

KARACHI/LAHORE (Pakistan) — Taxi-hailing service Careem introduced women drivers in Pakistan on Wednesday, a rare initiative in a deeply conservative Muslim country where women account for only 22 per cent of the workforce.

Careem has a larger market share than rival Uber in most of the 32 cities in the Middle East, North Africa and Pakistan region in which it operates.

Now it has a new idea for Pakistan: taxis driven by women, who will pick up both male and female customers.

The start-up operates in the Pakistani cities of Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi.

"We want to give women the same opportunities and the same chance that men have of leveraging our platform to generate healthy income," said Careem's Pakistan General Manager Ahmed Usman.

Usman said seven women drivers had qualified to join the fleet but applications were open and the company hoped more would apply.

Zahra Ali, 30, heard about Careem from a friend and thought it would be an "honourable" way to support her two children, who she is raising alone since the death of her husband two years ago.

Aasia Abdul Aziz, one of the pioneer women drivers of Careem, drives her car in Karachi, Pakistan, on 6 December 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

She had just enough money to buy a car and got her driving license this year.

When Ali applied to be a Careem driver a few months ago, she was told there was no provision for women drivers.

Then Careem called back with good news.

"The only skill I know is driving," Ali told Reuters at her home in the city of Lahore. "Now I can raise my children honourably, I can give my children a good education."

Launched in Dubai in 2012, Careem has a global force of 90,000-plus drivers and more than four million users registered through its mobile app.

In the sweltering southern city of Karachi, among Careem's largest markets, demand for secure taxis is particularly strong among women, Usman said.

"If an organisation is offering security for women ... naturally that is very important," said driver Aasia Abdul Aziz, 46, when asked why she chose to work for Careen.

"Especially in a city like Karachi where no work can be done in the absence of proper security."

Aziz said she had worked long hours at a beauty salon for most of her life and now that her two daughters were settled in jobs, she wanted work that allowed her flexibility.

When asked about the challenges of being a woman driver in Pakistan, Aziz said:

"When people start accepting something, when our public realise that women can do a certain job and are doing it in a commendable manner, then I think it will not be so difficult."

Domestic abuse, other violence and economic discrimination make Pakistan the world's third-most-dangerous country for women, a 2011 Thomson Reuters Foundation expert poll showed.

About 500 women are killed in Pakistan every year at the hands of relatives over perceived damage to family "honor" that can involve eloping, fraternizing with men or any other infraction against conservative values.

"One must face problems bravely," Ali said in Lahore. "Women are not weak; it is our society which portrays them as weak. One cannot move forward with fear." —*Reuters*

mitv Myanmar International
Programme Schedule

(8-12-2016 07:00 AM ~ 9-12-2016 07:00 AM) MST

07:03	Am	News
07:26	Am	Myanmar Social & Charitable Association (Ep-2) (Jivitadana Hospital)
07:50	Am	Culture Shows: Theatrical Art
08:03	Am	News
08:27	Am	Lucrative Myanma Rattan Industry
08:46	Am	Ywar Thit's Monhinkhar
09:03	Am	News
09:27	Am	Product of Myanmar - Stone of The Heavens
09:52	Am	Sagaing: Gold Leaf
10:03	Am	News
10:26	Am	Reflected Glory
10:50	Am	Kay Tu Mar Lar "The Decision"

(11:00 Am ~ 03:00 Pm)- Wednesday 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
07:27	Pm	Strolling Along A Memory Link - U Pein Bridge
07:45	Pm	Htan Taw Drums (Part-II) "Dobat"
08:03	Pm	News
08:26	Pm	The Rising Glory of Myanmar Arts
08:54	Pm	Myanmar Traditional Art Bronze Casting

(11:00 Pm ~ 03:00 Am)- Wesnesday 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)

Starbucks courts millennials with $10 coffee at new Reserve bars

Sandy Roberts pours samples of Starbucks Reserve Sun Dried Ethiopia Yirgacheffe coffee during the company's annual shareholders meeting in Seattle, Washington, US in 2014. PHOTO: REUTERS

LOS ANGELES/NEW YORK — Starbucks Corp co-founder Howard Schultz's plan to build a new prestige brand is a bet that moving upscale can raise the profile of the world's largest coffee brand with millennials like Megan Sauers.

Schultz in April will step down as chief executive to focus on building 1,000 new "Reserve" brand stores. Over time there also will be as many as 30 large, showcase Reserve Roastery and Tasting Rooms in major cities around the world.

Starbucks last week announced that Schultz was moving into the role of executive chairman in April to focus on the project. Analysts expect more details at a meeting in New York on Wednesday.

The transition marks a turning point for Starbucks, which introduced millions of people around the world to higher quality coffee and espresso drinks and now must find a way to avoid being labelled pedestrian when compared with upscale rivals like Blue Bottle and Intelligentsia, which are popping up in US cities. "Starbucks is the millennials' parents' coffee house and Starbucks is acutely aware of that," said Ric Rhinehart, executive director of the Specialty Coffee Association of America. Starbucks' Reserve projects are "a reminder that they did this first and they do this best," said AB Bernstein analyst Sara Senatore. The company already has added Reserve bars to a handful of Starbucks shops in major cities including New York.

Reuters visited one such cafe on Manhattan's Upper East Side, which offered $10 (7.89 pounds) cups of coffee made in glass siphons, $10 "flights" of Reserve brews and nitro cold brew via a separate Reserve menu.

Twenty-four-year-old Sauers came in for her standard Starbucks caffeine jolt and discovered the new brand. "I'd probably just stick to the regular, I'm not too picky," said Sauer, a recent transplant from Ohio. But she showed the kind of aspiration that Starbucks seeks. "If I had the money to spend more towards coffee I'd do it," she said, calling the Reserve bar a great idea for the neighbourhood. "I think people want it, too." Reserve stores will exclusively sell and serve exotic, small-lot coffees that can cost $50 per 8-ounce bag. Executives expect customers to stay longer and spend more, driving twice the financial returns of typical Starbucks stores, which have average unit sales of about $1.6 million annually. Reserve likely has room to set prices higher than Starbucks. Blue Bottle and Intelligentsia shops in Los Angeles charge $4.50 for their 12-ounce lattes, versus $3.25 at Starbucks.

Starbucks' 1,000 Reserve stores could boost company revenue if they hit targets, said Bernstein's Senatore, who cautioned that Schultz's new project has investment requirements that could become less attractive in a slowdown. And as Starbucks has already learned, moving upscale carries its own risks. "There is always a market for what is different, special and rare, but the minute you become so available that anyone can get what you are selling, you lose your cachet," said market researcher Robert Passikoff, president and founder of Brand Keys. —*Reuters*

THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

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Turan upstages Messi as Barca crush Gladbach

BARCELONA — Arda Turan grabbed a hat-trick to lead Barcelona to a 4-0 rout of Borussia Moenchengladbach on Tuesday while Lionel Messi fell short of equalling Cristiano Ronaldo's Champions League group stage goal record.

With Barca already through as Group C winners and the other positions also determined, the main attraction at the Nou Camp was the possibility of Messi matching Ronaldo's haul of 11 goals in the 2013-14 competition.

Things looked promising for the Argentina maestro when he played a one-two with Turan and fired the ball into the corner of the net in the 16th minute.

Messi spurned two chances to make it 2-0 before the break and, in the end, had to be content with 10 goals in Group C.

The second half belonged to Turan who was playing instead of the suspended Neymar.

The Turkish striker doubled Barca's lead in the 50th minute, arriving at the far post to nod in Denis Suarez's deflected cross, and netted again in the 53rd as he produced a crisp finish after a cut-back from the lively Aleix Vidal.

Turan completed his first treble for Barca by turning in Paco Alcacer's cross from close range, squeezing the ball past goalkeeper Yann Sommer's near post in the 67th minute. Barca ended up with 15 points from six matches while Manchester City also went through to the knockout stages on nine.

Moenchengladbach qualified for the last 32 of the Europa League by finishing third and Celtic were bottom.—*Reuters*

Barcelona's Arda Turan scores a goal against Borussia Moenchengladbach's goalkeeper Yann Sommer during UEFA Champions League Group Stage at Camp Nou stadium, Barcelona, Spain on 6 December. PHOTO: REUTERS

Pyongyang welcomes back women's soccer world champions

PYONGYANG — North Korea's under-20 women's soccer team paraded through the streets of Pyongyang in a flower-covered vehicle on Tuesday, celebrating their World Cup win upon their return to the isolated nation's capital.

North Korea beat France 3-1 in the final of the FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup in Papua New Guinea on Saturday.

Footage filmed by North Korea's state media KCNA, which could not be verified by Reuters, showed the players greeted by North Korean officials and emotional family members at Pyongyang's international airport.

Residents cheered and waved flowers as the team paraded through the streets of Pyongyang.

It was the second world title for North Korean women's soccer this year, after their national team won the U-17 FIFA Women's World Cup in Jordan a little more than a month ago.—*Reuters*

Djokovic has not worked hard enough, says Becker

BELGRADE — Novak Djokovic lost his momentum in the second half of last season and was toppled as the world number one by Andy Murray because his workrate dropped, the Serbian's former coach Boris Becker said on Wednesday.

Speaking a day after the two terminated their cooperation by mutual consent, German Becker said Djokovic's need to spend more time with his family had derailed him on the court.

"He didn't spend as much time on the practice court in the last six months as he should have and he knows that," said Becker, who helped Djokovic to six grand slam titles after they teamed up in December 2013. "Success like this doesn't happen by pushing a button. Success like this doesn't just happen by showing up at a tournament. You have to work your bottom off because the opposition does the same," he told Sky News. "The profession of a tennis player is probably the most selfish one in sports because it has to be about you and he is the first to say he is a family man, so of course his wife and the rest of his family had to take back seats.

"They don't spend enough time together. I had it too, 20 years ago. It is just the nature of the beast, being a tennis player."

Having completed a career slam when he won his maiden French Open title in June, Djokovic suffered an astonishing loss of form. He crashed out of Wimbledon in the third round to American Sam Querrey and made a first-round exit at the Rio Olympics at the hands of Argentine Juan Martin Del Potro.

Djokovic then lost the US Open final to Swiss Stan Wawrinka, a defeat six-times major champion Becker said was a massive psychological blow to the Serb.—*Reuters*

Arsenal's Alexis Sanchez in action with FC Basel's Marek Suchy during UEFA Champions League Group Stage at St.Jakob-Park, Basel, Switzerland on 6 December 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Arsenal punching their weight again in Europe

LONDON — The true value of Arsenal's table-topping display against Basel will not become clear until Monday's draw for the Champions League last 16 but a 4-1 win proved they are starting to punch their weight again in the competition.

Despite 19 consecutive group stage campaigns, defeat at the last 16 stage for the past six seasons has reduced Arsenal to members of the supporting cast.

While the A-listers — the likes of Barcelona, Real Madrid and Bayern Munich — march into Spring eyeing Europe's most prized club trophy, Arsenal have sloped away for domestic chores.

Not even a title chase, rather just grinding out a top-four spot in the Premier League.

Things might just be different this season though.

Beaten only twice in 23 matches in all competitions so far, Arsenal look far more resilient than in recent seasons, without losing any of their customary flair.

Hat-trick man Lucas Perez's second goal on Tuesday was the end product of a 33-pass move — the longest sequence to goal so far in this season's Champions League.

Arsenal went through Group A undefeated, the first time they had managed that since the 2005/06 season, and qualified for the last 16 as group winners for the first time since 2011/12.

That will guarantee they are spared a meeting with Lionel Messi's Barcelona in the last 16, although Bayern Munich or any two from Real Madrid, Borussia Dortmund, Juventus and Sevilla could be blocking their path after Christmas.

Arsenal will also enjoy a home second leg in the last 16, an advantage they have not had since 2012, although that year they were thumped 4-0 by Milan in the San Siro leaving them mission impossible in the return.

"It's difficult to know (the advantages of finishing top) you feel a bit less guilty," Wenger said. —*Reuters*

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