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Myanmar, Bangladesh to consult on villagers who fled to Bangladesh

MYANMAR and Bangladesh have agreed to start consultations for verification and repatriation of those who are proved to have fled from Myanmar following the 9 October attacks against police outposts, according to a statement released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs yesterday.

The ministry released the statement following the visit of the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs U Kyaw Tin to Bangladesh as Special Envoy of the State Counsellor from 11 to 12 January.

During the visit, U Kyaw Tin, accompanied by Myanmar Ambassador to Bangladesh U Myo Myint Than, called on the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her residence in Dhaka on Wednesday.

Prior to the meeting, the Special Envoy and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs also met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali and Foreign Secretary Mr Md. Shahidul Haque on separate occasions at the Padma State Guest House in Dhaka.

During the meetings, the two sides cordially discussed issues of mutual interest and expressed the common desire to deepen bilateral relations and cooperation between Myanmar and Bangladesh and to resume the existing annual bilateral consultation mechanisms as

“The State Counsellor expresses her confidence that Myanmar and Bangladesh would be able to address the issues of mutual concern in a spirit of good neighbourliness.



Minister of State for Foreign Affairs U Kyaw Tin, Special Envoy of the State Counsellor, presents a gift to Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in Dhaka, Bangladesh yesterday. PHOTO: MNA

well as to hold regular meetings between the two border security forces and Army-to-Army talks.

They also stressed the importance of exchanging information with a view to maintaining peace and security along the border and to preventing infiltration of terrorists.

The Bangladesh Prime Minister expressed her desire to strengthen ties with its neighbouring countries and reiterated Bangladesh's zero tolerance policy against terrorism. She also stressed that Bangladesh will not allow its soil to be used for terrorist acts against its neighbouring countries and sought Myanmar's cooperation to resolve the border issues through negotiations.

The Special Envoy also presented to the Prime Minister the State Counsellor's letter expressing her confidence that Myanmar and Bangladesh would be able to address the issues of mutual concern in a spirit of good neighbourliness, trust and mutual understanding between the two countries.

The Investigation Commission on Rakhine State led by Vice President U Myint Swe completed its second field trip to the conflict areas in Maungdaw Township recently to investigate the attacks in October and November.—GNLM

Peace Advisory Committee and DPN to meet in Thailand

THE Peace Advisory Committee led by U Aung Kyi and members U Hla Maung Shwe and Dr Min Zaw Oo and U Kyaw Lin Oo of its technical supporting team will meet with representatives of the

Delegation for Political Negotiation (DPN) led by U Khu Oo Reh of the United Nationalities Federal Council in Chiang Mai, Thailand, yesterday, according to U Hla Muang Shwe.

“The focus is on resuming negotiations as we failed to meet recently due to the Christmas and the New Year holidays. We will discuss three matters including those related to the DPN, the Joint

Monitoring Committee (JMC) and the organising meeting in Yangon,” said U Hla Maung Shwe. The DPN delegation last met with a delegation led by Chairman of the Peace Centre Dr Tin Myo Win

at the branch office of the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre in Yangon on 11 November, and the UNFC has demanded 9 points, most of which have been accepted in principle. **SEE PAGE 3 >>**



သဒ္ဓါထက်သန် မြန်မာအားမန် ကမ္ဘောဇဘဏ်

Three arrested for suspected involvement in 9 October attack in Kyikanpyin

THREE villagers were arrested in Maungtaw yesterday on suspicion of being involved in violent attacks on the Kyikanpyin Border Outpost on 9th October last year.

During interrogations, they confessed their involvement in the attack and current investigations into the situation of local military and police outposts. Measures are being taken by the authorities to take action against them. — Myanmar News Agency



Bushah.



Abu Suphrin.



Sutan Ahmad.

PHOTOS ARE FROM THE STATE COUNSELLOR'S OFFICE INFORMATION COMMITTEE

News posted on RB website on 10 January found to be false



Kori Mullar said in the interrogation that he was neither beaten nor asked for money by the government troops. PHOTO: STATE COUNSELLOR'S OFFICE INFORMATION COMMITTEE

IN a news article posted on the RB News website on 10 January, it was written that government forces arrested Kori Mullar, son of Shahalar Tular, at the village of Kyarkhaungtaung in Maungtaw township, Rakhine State, beat him and asked him to show the hiding places of weapons. He was further told that he could pay

Ks10 lakhs if he did not want to be tortured. In reply to their alleged demands, the accused was said to have paid Ks10 lakhs to the authority concerned.

Departmental officials, military officers and border guard police investigated Kori Mullar in the presence of village elders and villagers. Kori Mullar

said that he was neither beaten nor asked for money. He made a statement of his own and signed it, investigators said. The Office of the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Service released the news that no injuries or bruises were found on the body of Kori Mullar. — Myanmar News Agency

Materials used in manufacturing explosives seized in Laukkai Township



Some material used in making explosives . PHOTO: STATE COUNSELLOR'S OFFICE INFORMATION COMMITTEE

MATERIALS AND ACCESSORIES used in manufacturing explosives were found under an old explosives-producing factory and its premises nearby the Myanmar-China Border.

On receipt of the news that explosives were buried in the township of Laukkai, government troops and Myanmar Police launched an area clearance operation and searched an old explosives-producing factory and 3 adjoining brick buildings about 100 meters from the China border.

In digging up the old factory and its premises, accessories were found — 1.2 inch-diameter Emulsion Explosives, 120 unharmed bags and 300 broken bags of reddish-brown explosives with 20 packs in each bag, 4 bottles each containing 500 milliliters of ethanol, one 300 milliliter container of ammonia

solution, one 500 gram container of sodium chloride, one 500 gram bottle of ammonium chloride, 37 bags of 25-kilogram hydrogenated tallowamine, 0.25 tonnes of pine tar grease and 35 pieces of laboratory equipments.

In 2009, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) armed groups built weapon factories and drug factories in Laukkai region in an attempt to launch armed terrorist attacks. Due to area clearance operations conducted for peace and stability in the area by Tatmadaw troops, they fled the area, leaving the explosives and accessories buried. The discovered explosives and accessories are to be destroyed systematically in combination with mine clearance groups. The site and nearby area is being cleared by the government troops. — Myanmar News Agency

Six Bangladeshi fishermen to be pardoned, deported

SIX IMPRISONED Bangladeshi fishermen were granted a pardon by the President on Wednesday and will be expelled from Myanmar, according to the President's Office.

The six fishermen from Teknaf, Bangladesh, were arrested on 9 November last year while they were catching fish in Myanmar's territorial waters.

They were serving jail terms at Buthidaung Prison when they were granted a presi-



Immigration and Population Department will expel the six illegal fishermen from Bangladesh after further procedures. PHOTO: STATE COUNSELLOR'S OFFICE INFORMATION COMMITTEE

dential pardon in accordance with the Article 401 (1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

The officials of the prison handed over the six fishermen

to the Buthitaung Township Immigration and Population Department for further procedures to expel them. — Myanmar News Agency

Turkish agency delivers rice to two communities in Maungtaw

Turkish Cooperation Coordination Agency officials provided rice bags to villagers from Hsihogyun, Hnwar Yontaung, Thukhamyaing (NaTaLa), Ahlal and Aung Zay Ya (NaTaLa) in Maungtaw on Wednesday. According to the State Counsel-



Villagers are seen together with aids and volunteers from the Turkish aid agency. PHOTO: STATE COUNSELLOR'S OFFICE INFORMATION COMMITTEE

or's Office Information Committee, officials delivered 164 rice bags in Hsihogyun village, 94 bags in Hnwar Yontaung village, 17 bags in Thukhamyaing (NaTa-

La) village, 260 bags in Ahlal village, Kyi Kan Pyin village-tract and 43 bags in Aung Zay Ya and Aung Thaya villages in Maungtaw. — Myanmar News Agency

President U Htin Kyaw meets Ukrainian Foreign Affairs Minister

PRESIDENT U Htin Kyaw received Mr Pavlo Klimkin, Foreign Affairs Minister of Ukraine, at the Credentials Hall of the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw on Thursday morning.

Both sides discussed matters related to bilateral relations and cooperation, promotion of people-to-people relations, the tourism sector and investment opportunities in Myanmar.

Also present at the call were Union Minister Dr Than Myint, Deputy Minister U Khin Maung Tin, Ambassador of Ukraine to Thailand Mr Andrii Beshta and officials. —Myanmar News Agency



President U Htin Kyaw welcomes Mr Pavlo Klimkin, Foreign Affairs Minister of Ukraine, in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

70th Anniversary of Union Day to be held in support of Union Peace Conference

UNION Day, which falls on 12 February, will be observed with the theme of helping the Union Peace Conference—21st Century Panglong, U Myint Swe, Vice-President and Chairman of the Central Committee, said yesterday.

He made the remark at the 2nd coordination meeting of the central committee for convening the 70th anniversary Union Day 2017 celebration held in the meeting room of the Office of the President. The 70th anniversary of Union Day will be observed in accord with the national objectives — awakening Union Spirit, strengthening national solidarity, emergence of the Federal Democratic Union and progress of the socio-economy of the people.

“We must implement for the success of these objectives.

For our country, Union Day is a day of great importance. Presently, the country is building whole-heartedly for the achievement of peace and national unity that is very important for the whole nation,” said the Vice President.

The Vice President also stressed the need for carrying out respective duties on friendly terms, keeping aware of security in order to hold the celebration.

Later during the meeting, Dr Myo Aung, Chairman of Nay Pyi Taw Council and chairman of the management committee for convening the 70th Anniversary of the 2017 Union Day, clarified financial matters and arrangements for the successful celebration of the event in accord with the Union Day Objectives, followed by explanations by chairmen and members of the

sub-committees — matters on security, hospitality, accommodation, transport, theme, finance, invitations, entertainment, flag-hoisting, billboard erection, official dinners, accounts, information centers and other necessities.

In the concluding address, the Vice-President said that “fourteen sub-committees have been formed to carry out respective duties. It is needed to continually check the necessary matters to successfully finish the celebrations.”

Present at the ceremony were Union Day Celebration Central Committee members Union Ministers—Thura U Aung Ko and U Nai Thet Lwin, and sub-committee chairmen—deputy ministers and sub-committee members. —Myanmar News Agency



Vice President U Myint Swe addresses the 2nd coordination meeting of the central committee for convening the 70th anniversary Union Day 2017 celebration in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

State Counsellor receives Ukrainian Foreign Affairs Minister

STATE COUNSELLOR and Union Minister for Foreign Affairs Daw Aung San Suu Kyi received Mr Pavlo Klimkin, Foreign Affairs Minister of Ukraine, at the hall of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at 3:10 pm in Nay

Pyi Taw yesterday.

During the meeting, they discussed matters related to bilateral relations and boosting the cooperation between the two countries.—Myanmar News Agency



State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi holds talks with Mr Pavlo Klimkin, Foreign Affairs Minister of Ukraine. PHOTO: MNA

Peace Advisory Committee and DPN to meet in Thailand

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“The policy of the government is to open the door for peace, to sign ceasefire agreements and to discuss issues at the second meeting of the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference. So we will discuss participation of those who should take part in the negotiations,” U Hla Maung Shwe added.

Among the 9-point demands of the UNFC, the government has difficulty fulfilling the demand of the UNFO to allow to participation of foreign observers in the JMC and there has been a slight difference among the UNFC, the government, the Hluttaw and the Tatmadaw.

“As the JMC was established with the aim of addressing domestic issues based on

the situation at home, civilian representatives were included in the process without inviting foreign observers. In addition, it is not also included in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement,” Colonel Wunna Aung, Secretary (2) of the JMC said at the plenary meeting of the JMC on 22 December.

The government expects that drafting a framework for the meeting will be completed in January as about 80 per cent of it has been written.

“We are discussing with the UNFC delegation informally with the aim of resuming talks,” U Hla Maung Shwe said.

The peace advisory committee will also invite the DPN to participate in discussions on the framework and inclusiveness.—Myanmar News Agency

4th BIMSTEC energy meeting continues in Nay Pyi Taw

THE second day of the fourth BIMSTEC energy meeting for senior officials was held at Hotel Shwe Pyi Taw in the Nay Pyi Taw Hotel Zone on Thursday morning.

Present at the meeting were high-ranking officers, representatives and officials from the members of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) including Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan

and Nepal.

At the meeting, participants discussed promotion of energy sufficiency among member countries, programmes to bridge the gap between energy need and generation in the member countries, energy planning for sustainable development including the use of renewable energy and connecting the national grids in member countries, and the MoUs on establishment of the BIMSTEC Grid and the Energy Centre. —Myanmar News Agency

TNLA attack kills two civilians

STRAYED heavy weapon shell claimed lives of two civilians, injuring eight residents in Hochaung Village in Namhsam in northeastern Shan State.

Security forces conducting operations near Namhsam in northeastern Shan State came under the heavy weapon attack of the TNLA yesterday afternoon.

The TNLA fired heavy weapons at an outpost of the

security forces at a hill about 5,000 metres west of the town but four strayed shells landed in Hochaung Village about 3,000 metre away from the outpost, killing two residents and injuring eight villagers including three women. The injured were rushed to Lashio Township Hospital by columns of the Tatmadaw, which is conducting area clearance operations in the area.—*Myanmar News Agency*



Injured woman undergoing medical treatment at Lashio Township Hospital. PHOTO: MNA

Crime NEWS

Villager injured by land mine

A villager was injured after stepping on a land mine while he was carrying water between Kan Daw Yan and Nam Paung villages in Waingmaw, Kachin State on Tuesday.

Local authorities said that the land mine was planted by the Kachin Independence Army

(KIA). According to the report, the injured man is U Tun Oo from Ward-3, Shwe Nyaung Pin Village, Waingmaw Township, Kachin State.

The victim is undergoing medical treatment at Myitkyina General Hospital.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Yaba pill and heroin seized

POLICE from Myeik searched a house owned by Hnin Maung Lin and his father Khin Win on Myat Lay street, Satwun Ward in Myeik on 10 January and discovered 15.54 kilograms of opium powder.

Similarly, Anti-narcotics Squad 24 from Lashio searched a motorcycle ridden by Eik Tun and another motorcycle ridden by Eik Pan near Maungtan gate, the entrance to Kharsho village in Lashio Township, on 11 January. Police seized 33 ki-

los of raw opium from the two motorcycles. On the same day, the police searched an Arr Man passenger vehicle near Oriental toll gate, Myoshaung Street in Lashio Township and discovered 10,000 yaba pills from the bags of passengers Ma Cherry Kyaw and Ma Pyae Pyae Mon on board.

Police filed charges against them under the Anti-narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law.—*Myanmar Police Force*



Suspects Hnin Maung Lin, his father Khin Win seen with drugs. PHOTO: MPF

First part of Danyingon wholesale centre to open later this month

THE first part of the Danyingon fruits, vegetables and flower wholesale market being developed in Yangon's Insein Township is planned to open at the end of this month, according to the Myanmar Argo Exchange (MAEX) Public Co.

The international wholesale market has been built through a private-public partnership between Yangon City Development Committee and MAEX on a 82.78-acre plot with the use of Ks99.8 billion. The project in-

cludes two parts.

The MAEX invested Ks25.18 billion in the first part of the scheme. It plans to sell its shares worth more than Ks5 billion to public.

Established in September 2015, the Myanmar Agro Exchange is a public company with a focus on investing and contributing to the modernisation of the agriculture supply chain.

In the wholesale market, there will be brokerages, a truck terminal and wholesale area,

a fruit and vegetable cleaning facility, a building for selling freshwater and dried fish, another one for selling meat and sea fish, cold storage facilities, retail and wholesale markets for farmers, a fuel refilling station, staff quarters, and public restrooms.

The fruit and vegetable wholesale market in Yangon is a part of the government's development projects to establish similar markets in the capital Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon, Mandalay and Muse.—200

Myanma Railways offers transport service to 120,000 commuters per day

MORE than 120,000 people across the country are using the railway transport services provided by the state-owned Myanma Railways on a daily basis, said U Kyaw Soe Lin from the MR.

The MR put forth continuous efforts to offer better services to its commuters through several railway improvement

projects. The MR estimates that the number of commuters is likely to increase after the current projects are completed.

In collaboration with Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the MR is implementing railway improvement projects including repair of railroads, replacement of carriages and installation of mod-

ern signals and communication systems to run all railways yards and workshop to full capacity.

Myanma Railways operates its transport service business daily with 38 high-speed trains, 56 postal trains, 58 cargo trains, 215 Yangon circulator trains and 20 more trains which run only short trips around the country.—200



Commuters getting onto a circular train at Yangon Central Railway Station on 19 Nov 2016. PHOTO: PHOE KHWAH

Real estate values double in Mon State

PROPERTY values have doubled in Mon State after the inflow of foreign direct investment into the state starting from the third week of December last year, according to local real estate agents.

Both sale and rental prices for land have significantly increased in the aftermath of the new FDI. Investors are searching suitable destinations for their investment projects. They mostly prefer property located beside roads and a large areas of land

that are available in Mawlamyine and Mudon townships.

"This is the important part, to increase land values in the state," said Ko Htain Thein from the KZ real estate agency.

The new foreign investment projects in Mon State include manufacturing businesses as well as electronic component suppliers.

The Myanmar Investment Commission approved investment proposals only after scru-

tiny of environmental and social impact as well as sector-specific development in line with the current laws, rules and regulations.

According to the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration, foreign investment of permitted enterprises as of last December into 1,189 projects in 12 sectors reached US\$67.240 billion. Of that amount, US\$7.468 billion in FDI went into the manufacturing industry.—200

LOCAL Business

Trade value with ITC reached over Ks8,500 million as of December

TRADE value with the Individual Trading Card (ITC) hit over Ks8,556million as of 30 Dec in the current fiscal year, according to the Commerce Ministry.

Export value with the ITC was over Ks759million, whereas import value with ITC hit over Ks7,797million, according to

statistics released by the commerce ministry.

Myawady and Kan Pike Tee border trade camps are found to have the largest trade value using the ITC. The border trade values with ITC as of December in this FY are over Ks577million in Tamu, over Ks594million in

Muse, over Ks1,659million in Kan Pike Tee, over Ks513million in Tachilek, over Ks11million in Lweje, over Ks289million in Kawthaung, over Ks377million in Reed, over Ks723million in Maw Taung, over Ks24million in Keng Tung and over Ks14million in Maese and over Ks3,770million

in Myawady, it is learnt.

The Trade Department issued a total of 1,161 individual trading cards; with 292 cards from 21st Nov 2012 to 31st March 2013, 261 cards in 2013-2014 FY, 317 cards in 2014-2015 FY, 146 cards in 2015-2016 and 145 cards as of end of

December in this FY, according to an announcement released by the aforementioned ministry.

A businessman can trade Ks3million a day with an ITC, and the trade department granted trade up to Ks15million, which amounted to a five-day-trade-value.—Ko Khant



A file photo shows a container ship docks in the Yangon River. PHOTO: REUTERS

Mung bean export price on the decline

THE export price for mung bean plunged by about Ks150,000 in the second week of January when compared to that of the last two weeks, according to the Bayintnaung commodity depot.

Mung bean has a prevailing price of over Ks1.1million per tonne of SQ (special quality) mung bean. The pea price turned to downward trend starting from the last week of December.

The market price of peas in the second week of Jan are Ks1,140,000 per SQ mung bean, Ks1,100,000 per tonnes of FAQ (fair average quality) mung bean and Ks770,000 per tonnes of pigeon peas, according to the Bayintnaung depot.

Fixed-on-board (FOB) price of mung bean (2016 crop) is US\$815-845 per tonne of FAQ and US\$879-905 per tonne of SQ.

Similarly, the pigeon pea price plunged by half this year when compared to that in the similar period of last fiscal year. The pigeon pea prices were Ks48,500 per 20-viss-basket on 9th January 2016 whereas the prevailing price on 9th Jan 2017 was Ks24,200 per basket, according to Pakokku merchants association.—Mon Mon

MCB stock trading hit recorded low in December

THE trading of Myanmar Citizens Bank (MCB) stocks in 2016 fetched only Ks 1,205,460,300, and MCB recorded a 10-month-low in December, trading only 3,138 shares worth Ks29,370,700, according to Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX).

According to the stock trading report for 2016 by YSX, First Myanmar Investment (FMI) traded 1,482,133 shares worth Ks44,573,603,000, whereas Myanmar Thilawa SEZ Holdings (MTSH) traded 946,178 shares worth Ks 24,965,752,800, with a total of stock trading values of

Ks70,744,816,100 by the three listed companies.

The trading of MCB stock had the lowest activity compared to other two listed companies. Its stock trading hit zero volume eight times in November and December. The highest share price of MCB was Ks13,500, whereas the lowest rate was under Ks7,600.

Myanmar Thilawa opened its stock trading on YSX with a share value of Ks40,000 and traded at Ks50,000 per share. Its highest share price was Ks700,000 and the lowest rate

was Ks41,000. After MTSH's split of shares, a share started to trade at Ks5,100. The highest stock price was Ks5,300, whereas the lowest price was Ks4,400.

During 2016, the monthly stock trading values by FMI at YSX were Ks 24,714,431,000 in March and Ks5,867,897,500 in April. With MTSH entering YSX on 20th May, stock trading values of FMI and MTSH amounted to Ks 16,216,528,500 in May and Ks 6,895,863,000 in June and Ks 3,732,548,500 in July respectively. After MCB listed on YSX, the monthly stock trading

values were Ks2,907,600,800 in August, Ks 2,482,949,200 in September, Ks 4,027,821,700 in October and Ks 2,213,328,400 in November. Stock trading on YSX in December hit an all-time low with the trading value of only Ks1,685,847,500, it is learnt from monthly report of YSX.

On 12th Jan, 2017, a total of 20,184 shares worth Ks124,721,700 were traded at YSX, with a share price of Ks13,500 for FMI, Ks4,400 for MTSH and Ks9,100 for MCB.—Ko Htet

Investment value this FY could exceed expected amount

THE investment value in this fiscal year 2016-2017 is likely to exceed the expected amount of US\$6billion, according to the Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC).

Investments totalling US\$4.5billion flowed into the country as of 6 Jan 2017, with over US\$3.4 billion worth of proposals left for the MIC to scrutinise and approve, it is learnt.

"There are over two months left in this fiscal year and we have received over 70 investment proposals with an investment value of US\$3.4billion. If these pro-

posals are approved before the end of this FY, in accordance with the law, the investment values will exceed the expected amount. We were concerned that we could not meet the expected investment value in this fiscal year. However, we are receiving many proposals that could make us exceed the expected figure," said U Aung Naing Oo, the secretary of MIC.

During this fiscal year, the investments that flowed into each sector were: 47.07 per cent to communication, 25.5 per cent to manufacturing, 17.5 per cent

to power, 3.03 per cent to real estate, 2.82 per cent to hotel and tourism, 2.5 per cent to livestock and fisheries and 1.59 per cent to other services, according to the statistics of the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration.

Some permitted investment enterprises by MIC have increased their investment value, especially in the manufacturing sector, followed by the communication and hotel and tourism sectors.

"If the investors want to increase their investments, we will grant permission to increase the

investments and add more to our data after assessments," an MIC official said.

From 1 April to 6 January in this fiscal year, a total of 100 foreign investment enterprises with investments of US\$3,033.058million as well as 40 Myanmar Citizen enterprises with investments of US\$738.446million were given permission to invest in Myanmar. Singapore topped the list of the largest investors in Myanmar, followed by China, Hong Kong, Thailand and Japan.—Myitmakha News Agency

A North Korean cargo ship sinks off southwest of the Goto Islands in Kyushu Prefecture, Japan, in this picture taken on 12 January, 2017 provided by Japan Coast Guard.

PHOTO: REUTERS

North Korean cargo ship sinks off Japan, all crew rescued

TOKYO — A North Korean cargo vessel carrying rice sank off the west coast of Japan's westernmost major island of Kyushu on Thursday after springing a leak, but all 26 crew members were rescued without sustaining injuries, Japan's coastguard said.

It has not been decided how to send the crew, all of them North Koreans,

to their home country, a coastguard official said, adding that they were in good condition.

Japan's ties with North Korea have long been strained due to the abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korean agents decades ago and Pyongyang's missile and nuclear programmes.

The Japanese coast-

guard is treating the incident as a straightforward shipwreck case and there were no signs of abnormalities, the official said.

The cargo ship was carrying 5,720 tonnes of rice from North Korea's west coast city of Nampo to Wonsan on the east coast, the Japanese coastguard said. —Reuters

China's fifth bird flu outbreak hits goose farm in Hunan Province

BEIJING — China's Ministry of Agriculture said late on Wednesday that a bird flu outbreak, the country's fifth since last October, hit a goose farm in its southern Hunan Province, killing 1,054 birds.

The outbreak in Yuanjiang, a city of more than 700,000 people, was confirmed as a case of the H5N6 strain of the virus, the ministry said in a statement on its website.

Local government

culled a further 2,067 birds after the outbreak, which the Ministry of Agriculture said had been brought under control.

The case brings China's total poultry cull since October to more than 175,000 birds as South Korea and other neighbouring countries battle their own major outbreaks. China has confirmed 106 cases of human H7N9 bird flu infections, and 20 deaths in total in December, the National

Health and Family Planning Commission said on Wednesday.

Poultry trade has been suspended or restricted in several provinces following human infections.

The Ministry of Agriculture late last month said the recent outbreaks of bird flu have been handled in a "timely and effective" manner without spreading and have not affected chicken products or prices. —Reuters

India inks cyber security cooperation pact with US

NEW DELHI — India and the United States have sealed a pact for close cooperation and exchange of information in the field of cyber security.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was inked between Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) and US-CERT and signed by Indi-

an Information Technology Secretary Aruna Sundarajan and American envoy in New Delhi Richard Verma Wednesday.

"The MoU intends to promote closer cooperation and the exchange of information pertaining to the Cyber Security in accordance with the relevant laws, rules and regulations

of each economy," an official statement said.

Both countries had signed a similar agreement six years ago to promote closer cooperation and timely exchange of information between the organisations of their respective governments responsible for cyber security. —Xinhua

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Japan's Abe visits Philippines as Duterte's first top guest

MANILA — Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe arrived in the Philippines on Thursday for a two-day visit aimed at shoring up ties with its mercurial new leader, and boosting Tokyo's economic foothold in the face of anticipated competition from China.

Abe's visit is the first by a head of state to the Philippines under President Rodrigo Duterte and comes amid a changing geopolitical landscape, much to do with a dramatic foreign-policy shift by the firebrand leader in Manila.

Duterte has been hostile towards traditional ally the United States while reaching out towards historic adversary China, putting Japan in an uneasy spot given its warm ties with Washington and rivalry with Beijing.

Upon arrival, Abe headed straight for a meeting with Duterte at the presidential palace in Manila. He will travel to Duterte's native of Davao on Friday, during which he and his wife will visit Duterte's family home.

Abe described being the first leader to visit Duterte as a "tremendous honour".

"I chose the Philippines as my first destination this



Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is greeted by Philippine Foreign Secretary Perfecto Yasay upon arrival for a state visit in metro Manila, Philippines, on 12 January 2017. Pictured second right is Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's wife Akie Abe. PHOTO: REUTERS

year and that is testament to my primary emphasis on our bilateral relationship," he said in addressing the meeting.

"I'm committed to elevating our bilateral relationship to a higher ground."

Abe's arrival is timely and comes as China seeks to capitalise on Duterte's openness to its investment in areas that include infrastructure, where Japanese firms have long been important players in Southeast Asia.

Japan is one of the biggest investors in the Philippines, mainly in electronics, financial services and auto manufacturing, through firms that include Toyota, Mitsubishi and Canon.

Representatives of more than 20 Japanese companies are due to join Abe in Davao for a meeting with Philippine companies, which are keen to link up in areas like construction and agribusiness, Philippine business sources said.

Jose Ma. Concepcion, the Philippines presidential consultant for entrepreneurship, said Chinese business would have no impact on Japan's interests, and there were plenty of opportunities up for grabs.

"If you look at the level of investments, the Japanese are far much more entrenched," he said.

"China also has opportunities. The more countries that help us, the better." —Reuters

Samsung chief questioned by prosecutors in South Korea political scandal

SEOUL — Special South Korean prosecutors questioned the head of top conglomerate Samsung Group [SAGR.UL] on suspicion of bribery on Thursday in an influence-peddling scandal that led to President Park Geun-hye's impeachment.

Park remains in office but has been stripped of her powers while the Constitutional Court decides whether to uphold the December impeachment and make her the first democratically elected leader to be forced from office.

Park has denied wrongdoing. "I am very sorry to the South Korean people for not showing a better side," Samsung Group leader Jay Y. Lee told reporters as he arrived at the prosecution office in a black sedan, greeted by protesters holding signs calling for his arrest and accusing him of being the president's accomplice.

Investigators would now decide whether to seek an arrest warrant against Lee, 48, special prosecution spokesman Lee Kyuchul told reporters.

Parliament impeached Park

over allegations she allowed a friend, Choi Soon-sil, to exert inappropriate influence over state affairs.

Choi is accused of colluding with Park to pressure big businesses, including the Samsung Group, to contribute to non-profit foundations backing the president's initiatives. Choi, in detention and on trial on charges of abuse of power and attempted fraud, has denied wrongdoing.

Prosecutors named Lee a suspect on Wednesday and are investigating whether Samsung gave 30 billion won (\$25.28 million) to a business and foundations backed by Choi in exchange for the national pension fund's support for a 2015 merger of Samsung C&T Corp and Cheil Industries Inc.

Lee in December denied accusations the conglomerate sought to curry favour with Park or Choi to secure the 2015 merger, a deal seen as critical for ensuring family control of the conglomerate as generational succession looms.

Wearing a dark suit, white shirt and dark red tie, Lee bowed

after making brief remarks to reporters. A Samsung Group spokeswoman declined to comment on the investigation.

Proving improper dealings between Park, or Choi, and Samsung would be key for the prosecutors' case, analysts said, noting their goal was to prove Park or her surrogates took bribes from corporations in exchange for favours.

The special prosecution spokesman said investigators were also looking into whether Lee lied during a December parliamentary hearing about Samsung's involvement in the scandal, as well as whether he could be charged with breach of trust or embezzlement.

Investigators questioned two senior Samsung Group executives this week as witnesses.

The special prosecution has not begun investigations into any other conglomerates. Dozens of South Korean corporate groups made contributions to the two foundations, but Samsung's donations were the largest. —Reuters



A labourer sits on top of the debris of a monastery damaged during the 2015 earthquake, in Swayambhunath Stupa, a UNESCO world heritage site in Kathmandu, Nepal, on 11 January 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Nepal names new quake reconstruction head, citing delays

KATHMANDU — Nepal fired the head of its earthquake reconstruction agency and named his predecessor to the job in a game of musical chairs that critics say is only making conditions worse for the survivors of the 2015 disaster.

Thousands of homeless people remain in temporary shelters after the 2015 quakes that left 9,000 people dead and destroyed more than 626,000 homes, monuments and other structures.

Information Minister Surender Kari said Sushil Gyewali had been fired as chief of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) tasked to rebuild after Nepal's worse disaster in history.

"We have changed the official because the reconstruction work was very slow and many victims are still left without any government assistance to rebuild," Karki said on Thursday.

"The changes will expedite rebuilding and the government will provide all help and assistance necessary for this," he said.

Gyewali's predecessor

Govind Raj Pokharel has been reappointed to the post, he said. He was fired in 2015 when a new government took charge.

Nepal is in the midst of a political crisis after it adopted a new constitution in September 2015 as an ethnic community of Indian origin opposed it saying their aspiration for greater say was not addressed.

The country, sandwiched between India and China, has had three new governments since the earthquake, causing delays in rebuilding.

Renaud Meyer, country director for the United Nations Development Programme in Nepal said he hoped the changes will not stall the process of reconstruction.

Officials said 61,000 houses had been reconstructed, 475,000 families had received the first instalment of nearly \$500 in rebuilding aid while another 150,000 families had not received any assistance so far due to unexplained reasons.

Gyewali, the deposed official, said he would seek legal action against his dismissal. —Reuters



Jay Y. Lee, centre, vice chairman of Samsung Electronics, arrives to be questioned as a suspect in bribery case in the influence-peddling scandal that led to the president's impeachment at the office of the independent counsel in Seoul, South Korea, Thursday, on 12 January 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Aussie surgeon develops world-first programme to determine liver transplant success likelihood before surgery

SYDNEY — An Australian surgeon has developed a world-first computer programme to determine the likelihood of success of a liver transplant before the surgery takes place.

The programme, developed by a junior surgeon at Melbourne's Austin Hospital, is inspired by the algorithm used by dating websites to pair two people together.

The algorithm uses the top 15 factors known at the time of the transplant to predict the early success of a liver donation and has proved significantly more successful than the current meth-

od which is the surgeon's intuition.

The world-first technology successfully predicted graft failure a month after surgery 84 per cent of the time, compared to 68 per cent for surgeons and researchers are optimistic that it could be adapted for other transplants.

Lawrence Lau, the developer of the programme, said he was inspired to develop the machine-learning programme by a friend who worked for popular dating website eHarmony.

"When we do the organ retrieval we look at the liver, we

feel it with our hands, but ultimately a lot of clinical decisions are based on gut feeling," Lau told News Limited on Thursday.

"At the moment there is not a lot that guides the question of who you give the organ to, other than blood group and the urgency the transplant is required."

Using data from the University of Melbourne, the team from the Austin taught the program to learn using liver transplant outcomes from 2010 to 2013.

Lau said that he hoped the technique could offer thousands of Australians in need of a transplant a second chance at life with



PHOTO: XINHUA

fewer risks. "On one hand if we transplant an organ that is unsuitable, that recipient may die. But sadly, 10 per cent of Australians waiting for a liver transplant die

while waiting," he said.

"If we could quantify this risk, then we can start maximising the use of this precious resource." —Xinhua

Opinion

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Now we can contribute to the Peace Fund

Khin Maung Oo

IT is undeniable that everyone wants peace and stability. The two words may be abstruse for children and some young teens, but once we explain to them the nature of "peace" we are sure that they will understand how these two words are linked to each other because we definitely cannot have peace without stability. We are sure most of us understand that children should be given the freedom to play freely and choose their favorite games or playthings as long as these games are not harmful to them or others. We also think that it is very important to teach our youths the nature of freedom and how to use one's freedom without infringing upon the freedom and the rights of others.

As a matter of fact, peace and stability usually follows independence or freedom. Instead, as a whole nation, we have not achieved peace and stability yet. A century-long colonial rule left the country with an evil legacy. The colonialists planted the seeds of discord and misunderstanding

among our national brethren using the tactic of divide-and-rule, leading to years of armed conflicts. Regrettably enough, civil wars which had started since the time of our country's independence in 1948, are still raging in certain parts of our country.

Now, our incumbent government has been exerting their wholehearted efforts to implement the peace process by holding the Union Peace Conference—21st Century Panglong, for all our national brethren to be able to savour the taste of the Independence, because national development cannot be built without peace and stability and peace can be achieved only through dialogues at round-table meetings. With a view to creating the right conditions for future younger generations to enjoy peace and prosperity, all remaining armed ethnic groups who have the desire to sign the nationwide ceasefire agreement should decide to take part in peace negotiations. We are presently living peacefully under a

new government which has promised us good governance. This government has placed great emphasis upon transparency and effectiveness. We no longer wish to see displaced brethren fleeing from danger zones and waiting for distribution of humanitarian aids desperately, while children from conflict-free zones can study their lesson in peace, and enjoy themselves under safe and secure conditions. As Union citizens, we want armed conflicts to end immediately if possible.

The year 2017 sees bright and hopeful prospects, especially in Yangon. Just a few years ago, many youths except those with a strong sense of civic responsibility, were conspicuous by their absence when it came to taking part in social activities. Now, nearly all young people including ethnic youths are coming out in large numbers to join philanthropic works. Good Samaritan youths are being seen here and there. In the latest initiative of the Yangon Regional Government called the new Yangon Bus

System to be implemented in the next few days, many youths and adults are gearing up to contribute voluntary labour. It shows their enthusiasm and willingness to participate in the nation-building process. The latest news that Union Ministers and NLD Hluttaw representatives donated Kyats 200 million collected monthly from 25% of their salaries, to the Peace Fund has inspired other citizens to contribute money to the fund. Being aware of the needs and wishes of the people, the Government has allowed us to fulfill our desires. In fact, the task of implementing the peace process had been operated using the government's special finance fund and financial contributions from international organizations. At the present moment, allowing the general public to donate as much as they can, to the Peace Fund is a welcome step to allow people to take an active part in the peace process. Therefore, let us take part in this historic peace process, while this wonderful opportunity is in our hands!

Pragmatic approach to establish "Home for the Aged" on self-help basis

Daw Myint Myint Kyi
(Wachet Hospital)

(Continued from 12-1-2017)

WE have had a meeting and discussed the criteria for accepting the "Elderly Person" at the "Home for the Aged" with nurse aid in Sagaing Hills.

Some fundamental principles and standard norms have come into light.

The elderly person, who intend to stay at the Home, must be a well wisher who had helped and assisted in the donation of kyats (10) million from any person for the Wachet Eternal Fund or the person himself / herself had donated kyats (10) million for the Eternal fund. The person will be considered as first priority. Wachet Hospital and the Management will take care of the health of the older person. Day to day cost such as food, accommodation, general expenses (laundry, cleaning and odd jobs) are to be borne by the elder person at the appropriate and reasonable rate prescribed by the Committee. This is one of the basic principles as stipulated at the "Hninzigone Home for the Aged". Since the rule is most appropriate, suitable and justified, the persons residing at the "Home for the Aged" with

nurse aid will feel clear conscience as one is living at the own expense on self reliant basis. There is no need to be humble, modest and reticent. No humiliation is in scope. There will be no gossip and no rumor against the life-long committee members as they clear the bills while staying at the "Home for the Aged" with nurse aid. The residents would have clear mind and plain feeling at the Home.

About one month after the supplication and proposal to the concerned committee in Sagaing Hills, the Vice-Chairman of Upper Myanmar Logistic and Management Committee made a phone call to the author. First, we exchanged the pleasantries, and the author was told that the fine idea of establishing "Home for the Aged" with nurse aid is possible on the Sagaing Hills. The author was nearly forgotten about the proposal as there was no response for many days. It was good and happy news for me as committee members in Upper Myanmar take interest in the scheme.

As the Vice-Chairman of Upper Myanmar Committee happened to be an Engineer specializing in Myanmar Cultural Design, the author took the opportunity in discussing the structural design for the building.

The venue is especially chosen at the west bank of the famous Ayeyawaddy with a view to have clean air and serene environment to the benefit of the elder people staying at the Home.

Thinking about the helping assistances and nurse aids for the aged at the Home, new recruitment of staff members is unavoidable as the regular nurses working at the Wachet Hospital could not be assigned for the "Home for the Aged".

Patron "Phwar Nwe" of Lower Myanmar EC, who had donated kyats (40) million towards the Wachet Eternal Fund, is staying permanently at the "Hninzigone Home for the Aged". Vice-Chairwoman (1) and Vice-Chairwoman (2) of Lower Myanmar EC have taken care on the needs of the elderly person. She is fine and comfortable since the "Hninzigone Home for the Aged" was well established and properly managed.

On 9 September 2016, the writer had the opportunity in meeting with some responsible personnel at the "Hninzigone Home for the Aged", while making some donation in memory of my beloved father. The author sought some information from Medical Superintendent of the Home on the possible training course to be imparted for the new

health care assistants for the elderly persons to be recruited for Sagaing Hills. The MS was agreeable on the proposal to train the new health care staff members. The outcome of the discussions was informed in detailed to Upper Myanmar Wachet Supervisory and Logistic Committee for necessary preparation and to agree on the project.

Action plan from "A to Z" is being set for pragmatic approach to establish "Home for the Aged" with nurse aid on self-help basis. When a donor or donors come forward with the fund especially for the Home, then the implementation of the project could roll on smoothly.

Meanwhile, the author is waiting for a well wisher with a big heart.

Although the author has written a second proposal letter to the Chairman of Upper Myanmar in Sagaing on the plan for training the new nurse aids at "Hninzigone Home for the Aged" in Yangon, there was no reply for many weeks.

On 25 September 2016, the Lower Myanmar EC hosted an event in Yangon to pay homage to elderly persons above (80) years among the Patrons of Wachet EC Circle. Chairman of Upper Myanmar, who is above (80), also travelled to Yangon from

Sagaing for the ceremony. When I asked Upper Myanmar Chairman about the nurse aid training in Yangon, he responded that the Senior Matron of Wachet Hospital in Sagaing was of the view to provide nurse aid training by them internally at Wachet Hospital. That was why no reply came to Yangon.

There was a difference of ideas in the approach of nurse aid training. I am of the view with broad perspective to impart training for about six months combining theory and practice at "Hninzigone Home for the Aged" where over two hundred older persons are sheltering. This pragmatic training is critical for the nurse aid to be assigned at "Home for Aged" in Sagaing Hills.

My beloved father passed away at the age of (98) years, after an extended period of medical treatment at the hospital and at home for about six years. Some private nurses called in for my father had no practical skills in taking care of the feeble patient. Some had no skill in enteral feeding or tube feeding. With all these past experience, I was of the view to impart practical training of nurse aid at Hninzigone. It is critical and vital to shoulder the task of caring the older person.

To be continued

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing receives Ukrainian Foreign Affairs Minister



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing holds talk with Ukraine Foreign Affairs Minister in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing received Mr Pavlo Klimkin, Foreign Affairs Minister of Ukraine,

at the hall of Zayar Thiri Baikman in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

During the meeting, they discussed matters relating to enhancing bilateral relations,

stability and peace of the two armed forces and co-operation of mutual benefit to the two countries.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Aid delivered to ethnic people displaced for fear of extortion, forced conscription by SSA (Wanhai)

EASTERN Command has delivered aid to local ethnics who were displaced because they feared that the Shan State Army (Wanhai) armed group would extort money from them and force them to conscript.

The Commander of the Eastern Command presented 119 bags of rice, 227 viss of cooking oil, 180 packets of salt, foodstuff, commodities and medicines for purifying water

donated by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, State Cabinet, Eastern Command and donors.

The displaced villagers are from Panhnin village and Wanmai village in Hosai village-tract in Maishu township, southern Shan State. They fled to Yephyu village in Marthe village tract, Yatsaut township.

The ceremony was held at the monastery of Yephyu vil-

lage at 1pm on January 10.

In addition, the mobile medical care team of the eastern command gave medical treatment to 211 local people from Monpyin and nearby villages in Marthe village tract at the monastery. Additionally, the Commander of the Eastern Command and responsible officials donated books and foodstuff to local people.—*Myanmar News Agency*

KOICA provides assistance to improve library environment in Sagaing

KOREA International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) handed over the reins of a project yesterday for improving the library at Co-operative University in Sagaing that was implemented from March 2016 to December 2016 at a cost of US\$26,060.

As an encouragement to continue the pursuit of a vibrant and active library that can act as a resource center for students, which is a major aim of the uni-

versity, KOICA World Friend Korea volunteer Ms. Kwon Eunjin proposed this project.

The budget of the project was shared between local authorities with the amount of US\$4,859 and KOICA, which contributed US\$21,201. During the operation period of this project, the rehabilitation of the library environment has been successfully implemented to enhance the facility of the li-

brary. For the library to be well staffed and well managed, KOICA gave staff training to librarians and faculty members on how to maintain an updated database and keep a wide range of sufficient reference books.

The hand-over ceremony was held in the presence of Senior Deputy Representative Mr. Moon Sang Won, officials from the Ministry of Education, community participants and students.

The Ministry of Education, Co-operative University Sagaing, established in 2012, is currently producing Youth Cooperators who are qualified and proficient in Co-operative economics. It has been providing courses such as Department of Co-operatives, Department of Commerce, and Department of Statistics with the aim of educating students about modern Business Management studies and knowledge of local and global economies.—*GNLM*



Senior Deputy Representative Mr. Moon Sang Won and dignitaries pose for a documentary photo at hand-over ceremony in Sagaing. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

One million new jobs needed for young people in the next four years

A NEW census report reveals that despite its young population, Myanmar must position itself well if it is to harness a demographic dividend – the phenomenon which has been a major driver of rapid economic growth in the Asian Tigers.

A unique window of opportunity opens when there are more people of working age than there are people above or below working age. To become an Asian Tiger, a country also needs steeply declining fertility and mortality rates. In Myanmar's case, the demographic changes have been more gradual. New population projections reveal that the dependency ratio – the number of dependents such as children and elderly per 100 economically active people – will remain almost constant at 52.5 for the next 35 years. In comparison, Thailand, Singapore and China have all had dependency ratios below 40.

The findings come from the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census Thematic Report on Population Dynamics. The report shows that a demographic dividend in Myanmar would not have the same depth as in Thailand or Singapore. However, it would last over a longer period of time. Myanmar can still harness a modest demographic dividend, but only if the country invests in its young people; better access to family planning; public health; secondary education; vocational training; and economic policies that support job creation.

Young people in particular will require targeted policies and interventions. In the next four

years, one million new jobs are needed to ensure employment for Myanmar's large youth population. From 2016 to 2030, 3.7 million new jobs are needed simply to keep employment at current levels.

"The time to invest in jobs, education and skills training is now. Without new jobs, young people who are unable to find their place in the labour market and in society, may become disillusioned and not reach their full potential. Unless millions of new jobs are created, the prospect of even a modest demographic dividend may evaporate", says Janet Jackson, UNFPA Representative for Myanmar.

Women too are critical to Myanmar's development. Today only half of women (50.5 per cent) are employed, compared to 80 per cent in Thailand. According to the report, if more women entered the job market, there would be a "dramatic rise" in the country's per capita income. By realizing the potential of women and enabling their entry into the labour market, Myanmar can generate its very own brand of economic growth driven by a "gender dividend".

"The data shows that women hold a key to Myanmar's future prosperity. The "gender dividend" can be unlocked immediately if jobs are created. But for this to happen, women need equal rights to education, jobs, credit and land. With women playing a crucial role in economic growth, Myanmar can harness a double dividend – both youth and gender", says Jackson.—*UNFPA*

UEC Chairman receives MILI delegation, Chinese ambassador



UEC Chairman U Hla Thein holds talk with MILI delegation led by U Nay Lin Soe in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

U HLA THEIN, Chairman of the Union Election Commission, received a delegation of the Myanmar Independent Living Initiative led by U Nay Lin Soe yesterday morning and Chinese Ambassador to Myanmar Mr Hong Liang yesterday afternoon at the commission office in Nay Pyi Taw.

The chairman and the MILI delegation discussed designation of areas for cooperation of voters with disabilities in the upcoming by-election, organizing a forum

of the commission, civil society organisations, organisations of persons with disabilities and political parties and preparations for the by-election.

The chairman and the Chinese ambassador discussed the invitation of Chinese observers during the by-elections, matters related to political parties, assistance for the by-election and the commission's preparations for free and independent elections. *Myanmar News Agency*

Iraqi forces make fresh gains in southeast Mosul — military statement

BAGHDAD — Iraqi forces drove back Islamic State militants in southeastern Mosul on Thursday, making gains in an area where advances have been particularly tough, the military said in a statement.

Rapid response units from Iraq's federal police advanced in the Sumer district, which lies on the eastern bank of the Tigris river, and also in neighbouring Sahrour, the statement reported by state television said.

Forces have pressed forward much more slowly in that area than units in the east and northeast, who have taken control of a number of neighbourhoods in the past week.

The army's elite Counter Terrorism Service (CTS), has spearheaded advances in eastern Mosul.

The US-backed campaign to recapture Mosul, Islamic State's last major stronghold in Iraq,



Members of the Iraqi rapid response forces fire missile toward Islamic State militants during a battle between Iraqi forces and Islamic State militants in Sumer district of eastern Mosul, Iraq, on 11 January 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

has pushed ahead with renewed vigour since the turn of the year after troops got bogged down inside the city in November and December.

New tactics, including one night raid, better

defences against suicide car bomb attacks and improved coordination between the army and security forces, have helped forge momentum, US and Iraqi officers say.

The ultra-hardline

group's loss of Mosul would probably spell the end for the Iraqi side of its self-styled caliphate, which it declared after sweeping through parts of Iraq and Syria in 2014. —Reuters

US probe clears forces over civilian deaths in northern Afghan city

KABUL — A US military investigation confirmed that dozens of Afghan civilians were killed in a special forces operation near the northern city of Kunduz last year, but found troops had acted in self-defence and decided no action would be taken against them.

The report, published on Thursday, said 33 civilians were killed and 27 wounded last November when a US and Afghan special forces unit returned fire against Taliban fighters in the village of Boz, near Kunduz, and called in air support.

"The investigation concluded that US forces acted in self-defence, in accordance with the Law of Armed Conflict, and in accordance with all applicable regulations and policy," the US military in Afghanistan said in a statement.

The raid, involving both US and Afghan special forces, took place

during operations to push back Taliban fighters from the vicinity of Kunduz, the strategic city they had come close to overrunning in October.

The unit came under heavy fire from Taliban fighters using civilian houses as firing positions and suffered several casualties before calling in air support, the military added.

"Regardless of the circumstances, I deeply regret the loss of innocent lives," Gen. John Nicholson, commander of US Forces in Afghanistan said in the statement, adding that "all possible measures" would be taken to protect Afghan civilians.

While the investigation concluded that more than 30 civilians had been killed, it said aircraft providing support had used "the minimum amount of force required to neutralize the various threats from the civilian buildings". —Reuters

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Ex-UN chief Ban 'perplexed and embarrassed' over relatives' bribery case

SEOUL — Former United Nations chief Ban Ki-moon, who is expected to run for president of South Korea, said he was "perplexed and embarrassed" over bribery accusations brought by US prosecutors this week against his brother and nephew.

Ban's younger brother Ban Ki-sang and his nephew Joo Hyun Bahn were accused in a Manhattan federal court on Tuesday of a scheme to bribe a Middle Eastern official for an attempted \$800 million sale of a building complex in Viet Nam.

"I am perplexed and embarrassed that close members of my family have become involved in something like this. I feel it is regrettable the situation has troubled many," Ban told Korean reporters at John F. Kennedy International Airport on Wednesday ahead of his departure for South Korea.

"I had absolutely no knowledge. My nephew is grown and I barely had any involvement in his life or how he does business," he said in remarks broadcast on South Korean TV.

Ban, who was accompanied by his wife Yoo Soon-taek as well as an aide and security staff, according to Yonhap News Agency, said his heart "felt like bursting" with excitement at the thought of returning to South Korea. His Asiana Airlines flight will land at around 0800 GMT on Thursday.

A former foreign minister, Ban has not declared his intention



UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon delivers a speech after being awarded with the Legion of Honour (Legion d'Honneur) by the French president at the Elysee Palace in Paris, France, on 17 November 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

to enter the race to succeed President Park Geun-hye, who was impeached by parliament in December over an influence-peddling scandal.

Park could become South Korea's first democratically elected leader to leave office in disgrace if the Constitutional Court upholds that vote.

Controversy around the building deal linked to Ban's relatives had been reported previously in South Korean media and Ban made similar remarks regarding the case in 2015.

In September, a Seoul district court ordered Ban's nephew to pay civil damages of about \$590,000 to builder Keangnam Enterprises. The court said the nephew had

fraudulently led Keangnam to believe that the Qatar Investment Authority was close to buying the Viet Nam skyscraper.

In emails cited in the US indictment, Ban's nephew is shown to be using the family name in an attempt to secure the deal, and expressed concern that negative media coverage if it fell through would be bad for the family given its prominence.

Ban Ki-moon was not mentioned in the indictment.

His nephew Bahn, a 38-year-old South Korean national living in New Jersey, pleaded not guilty during a Tuesday court hearing. His father was not arrested and could not be reached immediately for comment.—Reuters

Merkel says EU 27 must show united front in Brexit talks

LUXEMBOURG — The 27 members of the European Union negotiating with London on Britain's exit from the bloc must stick together and not allow themselves to be divided, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Thursday.

Merkel, speaking against the background of a planned reduction in corporation tax in Britain, also said EU members must agree on a joint approach to corporation tax.

"We all know that we need more harmonization," she told a joint news conference with Luxembourg's Prime Minister Xavier Bettel.

Referring to Britain's decision to leave the EU and what looks like being a difficult and complex negotiating process on the divorce terms, Merkel said: "It is important that we do not allow ourselves to be divided, the 27 must act together in the negotiations."

The chancellor also stressed it was important for EU member states to increase the exchange of data to improve security in the

bloc, and that they should quickly implement a register of people entering and leaving.

Since a Tunisian failed asylum seeker rammed a truck into a Berlin Christmas market, killing 12 people, last month before fleeing to Italy where he was shot dead, Merkel has stepped up her calls for cross-border cooperation on security issues.

"Everyone sees the urgency and everyone knows that if

we do not succeed, each country will introduce its own border controls and free movement won't be possible," said Merkel, adding that meant freedom of services as well as of people.

"It makes me optimistic that a lot of countries have sadly had the experience that terrorism is a big challenge for all of us and only cross border cooperation in the (passport free) Schengen area will help us," she said.—Reuters



Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel reviews an honour guard during an official visit to Luxembourg, on 12 January 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

China's aircraft carrier formation passes through Taiwan Strait

BEIJING — A naval formation consisting of aircraft carrier Liaoning passed through the Taiwan Strait Thursday morning en route to drills in the South China Sea, said a spokesperson with the People's Liberation Army Navy.

Liang Yang said the Liaoning and other naval vessels in the formation were scientifically organised and meticulously operated during the navigation.

Since it was commissioned in 2012, the Liaoning has been carrying out training and tests steadily, the navy said. The Liaoning is China's only aircraft carrier in operation. It was refitted based on an unfinished carrier from the former Soviet Union.—Xinhua

Turkish army says airstrikes kill 22 IS militants in northern Syria

ANKARA — Turkish warplanes killed 22 Islamic State (IS) terrorists in airstrikes on IS targets in Al-Bab, in northern Syria, in the last 24 hours, the Turkish General Staff said on Thursday.

Targets in the air raids included 160 positions belonging to terrorists, including defence positions, shelters and command facilities, the military said in a statement.

A total of 2,845 improvised explosive devices have been destroyed since last August, when Turkey launched the Euphrates Shield Operation against both IS and the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), the military wing of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD).

Turkey regards the YPG and the PYD as terrorist organisations due to their links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party.—Xinhua

US Senate panel approves Montenegro's NATO bid

WASHINGTON — The US Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved a resolution on Wednesday supporting Montenegro's membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), trying for a second time to back the former Yugoslav republic's bid.

The committee passed a resolution in 2016, but the Senate did not vote on it before adjourning for the year. The US Constitution requires a two-thirds vote in the 100-member Senate for approval of new NATO members.

Montenegro's membership would represent the alliance's first expansion since Albania and Croatia joined in 2009. Although the country is a long-time ally of Russia, relations with Moscow have been uneasy recently, given its government's pursuit of closer integration with the west. Montenegro also joined European Union sanctions against Russia over its annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula.—Reuters

New Zealand father and daughter found in Australia after month at sea

SYDNEY — A New Zealand man and his six-year old daughter missing at sea for more than a month have landed in Australia after sailing their small, damaged yacht across the treacherous 2,000 km (1,241.7 miles) Tasman Sea.

Alan Langdon, 46, and his daughter Que had planned a short journey from Kawhia to the Bay of Islands on New Zealand's east coast, but after a storm damaged the yacht's rudder they found themselves drifting out to sea.

"Once we were in the position with no rudder, we didn't have as many options," Langdon told local media after docking his 21 foot (6.4 metres) yacht on Wednesday in Ulladulla, a fishing port 230 kms south of Sydney. "I waited for the fine weather, that didn't come. At that stage we were getting pushed south and out," said Langdon, adding he then decided it would be safer to head to Australia across the Tasman Sea.—Reuters

Indonesia to send delegation for upcoming Mideast peace conference in Paris

JAKARTA — Indonesia will send a delegation to attend the Middle East peace conference scheduled on weekend in France, continuing support toward two-state solution to settle Israel-Palestine conflict, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Thursday.

Armanatha Nasir, spokesperson of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said the delegation would be led by the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs A.M. Fachir.

"We will intensively involve in discussions to promote dialogues between Israeli and Palestinian civil societies that may further spur spirit of cooperation and tolerance between the two of them in two-state solution concept," Nasir said.—Xinhua

Thai crackdown on budget tours hits Chinese New Year

BANGKOK — Chinese hotel bookings to Thailand for the Lunar New Year have tumbled as a crackdown on cheap package tours hits visitor numbers from its biggest source of holiday-makers.

Tourism is increasingly important for Thailand given that its economic growth lags other Southeast Asian economies. Between 2012 and 2016, the number of Chinese visitors trebled to nearly a third of all Thailand's tourists by numbers and revenue.

But a crackdown on "zero-dollar" package tours in September sent that into reverse with little sign of recovery ahead of the Lunar New Year holiday 28 January to 2 February.

The D Land Holiday Co. Ltd caters to Chinese tourists. Bookings are only 300 for the Lunar New Year compared to 800 last year, its owner said.

"It's the crackdown,"

Ruengdet Amorndetphakdee told Reuters.

Other hotel groups, including Central Plaza Hotel Pcl, said Chinese bookings had fallen. Tristar Floating Restaurant Co. Ltd. has six cruise ships for Chinese visitors — now it operates only one. Thailand's tourism authority expects a 7.7 per cent drop in Chinese tourists for the Lunar New Year this year, though offset by a 3.9 per cent rise in tourists from elsewhere, and it sees Chinese tourist numbers rising back during 2017.

Zero-dollar tourists pay everything up front.

Operators cut any cost they can while tourists are sometimes cajoled into buying over-priced souvenirs so the company earns a commission. Those are the practices Thailand wants to stop.

But the government's insistence on a minimum 1,000 baht (23 pounds) per night charge for package tourists had made Thailand



Boat drivers wait for tourists at a pier at Chao Phraya River in Bangkok, Thailand, on 11 January 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

uncompetitive for many Chinese visitors, tour operators say. "We weren't prepared for this," Chanapan Kaewklachaiyawuth, secretary-general of Thai-Chinese Tourism Alliance Association told Reuters. Chinese tourist numbers

fell 30 per cent in November from the year before to the lowest monthly total in more than two years.

At least part of that drop-off was due to a one-month mourning period following the 13th October death of King Bhumibol

Adulyadej, tour operators say. Thailand nonetheless forecasts that Chinese tourist numbers will recover to reach nine million by the end of 2017 to just top last year's total.

By targeting wealthier Chinese travellers, revenue

from China will increase over 14 per cent this year to around 500 billion baht, according to Tourism Authority of Thailand Governor Yuthasak Supasorn.

"It's certainly a change, but Thai operators are able to adapt," he told Reuters. Overall, Thailand expects growth in tourist revenue of 8.5 per cent to nearly \$50 billion — more than double the overall economic growth rate forecast.

Although Chinese visitor numbers have fallen, the number of travellers from elsewhere has continued to rise. Central Plaza said increased bookings from Russia had helped despite Chinese cancellations.

Tristar Floating Restaurant Co., Ltd. is looking to new markets in Southeast Asia such as Indonesia, Viet Nam, the Philippines and Myanmar, company president Vichai Tanasapanant told Reuters television.—Reuters

Volkswagen reaches \$4.3 billion settlement with US regulators

NEW YORK — Volkswagen AG has agreed to pay \$4.3 billion in penalties over a diesel emissions-cheating scheme involving nearly 600,000 vehicles in the United States, the Justice Department said Wednesday.

The German carmaker has also agreed to plead guilty to three criminal felony counts, it said, adding that the company will be obliged to work with an in-

dependent monitor for a period of three years.

"Volkswagen's attempts to dodge emissions standards and import falsely certified vehicles into the country represent an egregious violation of our nation's environmental, consumer protection and financial laws," said Attorney General Loretta Lynch.

"Today's actions reflect the Justice Department's

steadfast commitment to defending consumers, protecting our environment and our financial system and holding individuals and companies accountable for corporate wrongdoing."

The settlement is a major step forward in Volkswagen's efforts to move past the emissions manipulation scandal that came to light in September 2015. —Kyodo News

Drone delivers soup to surfers in test flight

FUKUSHIMA, (Japan) — A drone successfully delivered a bottle of hot soup to surfers in Japan on Thursday in a test of an unmanned flying vehicle traveling a preset route of more than 10 kilometers.

Japan's industry ministry and the Fukushima prefectural government were among those conducting the test in a coastal area of Minamisoma in the prefecture, north of the crisis-hit Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Traveling at 43 km per hour, the drone took 15 minutes to cover the

12 km from Fukushima Hama-Dori Robot Testing Zone to Kitaizumi, a popular surfing spot northeast of Tokyo.

It was the first test of its kind in the world involving a drone flying for more than 10 km on a programmed route to make a delivery, according to the prefectural government.

The robot testing zone is a designated area for testing robots to be used during post-disaster relief activities.

An official of the prefecture said that as Japan has only a limited number

of areas where long-distance drones can be tested, Fukushima will invite robot- and drone-related businesses to the prefecture as part of efforts to recover from the nuclear accident.

Minamisoma Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai said he hopes the success of the test "will encourage many drone and robot researchers to come to Minamisoma."

Other contributors to the test included the Autonomous Control System Laboratory headed by Kenzo Nonami, a leading drone system developer in Japan.—Kyodo News



A drone delivers a bottle of hot soup to surfers on the beach of Minamisoma in the northeastern Japan prefecture of Fukushima on 12 January 2017, during a test of an unmanned flying vehicle traveling a preset route of more than 10 kilometres. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

TRADEMARK CAUTION

Hocheng Corporation, a company registered under the laws of Taiwan, R.O.C., which is located at 1Fl., No. 398, Xingshan Rd., Neihu District, Taipei City 11469, Taiwan, R.O.C., is the sole owner of the following trademarks:

HCG

Reg. Nos. 6623/2013, 15422/2016

In respect of **Class 11**: Urinal, bathtubs, whirlpool bathtub, water closets, lavatories, bidets, faucets, shower heads, toilet seats, sinks, toilets, valves for plumbing, electric hot air hand dryers (for restrooms), water filtering units for producing potable water for domestic use in class 11.

HCG

Reg. Nos. 6624/2013, 15423/2016

In respect of **Class 21**: Soap dishes, holders for toilet paper, toothbrush and tumbler holders, soap dispensers, non metal-made towel holders, non metal-made towel bars, non metal-made cloth holders in class 21.

Hocheng Corporation claims the trademark right and other relevant intellectual property rights for the marks as mentioned above. **Hocheng Corporation** reserves the rights to take legal measures against any infringer who violates its intellectual property or other legal rights in accordance with the concerned laws of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

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For **Hocheng Corporation**

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Email address: myanmar@tilleke.com

Dated: 13-01-2017

California rainfall ebbs but flooding continues

LOS ANGELES — The rainfall that has pummeled the US West this week lightened on Wednesday but that did not keep swollen rivers from overflowing their banks in California, where water lapped up against houses in a wine-growing region, officials said.

In Portland, Oregon, the city's more than 600,000 residents awoke to roughly a foot (30 cm) of snow, which led to city-wide school closures and an emergency declaration by Governor Kate Brown.

This was the latest round of extreme precipitation unleashed by a weather pattern meteorologists call an "atmospheric river" — a dense plume of moisture flowing from the tropical Pacific into California and the West.

"All available state resources will be made available to ensure the safety of communities throughout Oregon," said Brown, urging people not to travel until roads had been cleared and services restored.

The last weeks of 2016 were particularly wet for California, which has struggled through years of drought, and the rainfall has



A worker wades through the flooded 5 freeway after an El Nino-strengthened storm brought rain to Los Angeles, California, United States, on 6 January 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

intensified in the past week, officials said.

In wine-growing Sonoma County, north of San Francisco, the Russian River has been flooding since early on Monday and water was lapping at houses in low-lying areas of the town of Guerneville, said Hannah Euser, a spokeswoman for the county.

Local media showed photos of people navigating flooded streets by canoe in the community of less than 5,000 people.

Authorities asked residents of 650 homes in

Guerneville to seek higher ground even as officials assess damage to determine how many houses were flooded, Euser said.

The rain had stopped by midday on Wednesday but the floodwaters were not expected to recede until late on Thursday, she said.

Concerns about flooding have also led to the evacuation of about 600 homes in Madera County in central California, Jonathan Gudel, a spokesman for the state Governor's Office of Emergency Services, said.

The nearby Yosemite

National Park was open again on Wednesday, after precipitation and rockfalls caused road closures there earlier this week, park officials said in a statement.

Ray Standley, 76, owner of the General Store in nearby Fish Camp which depends on visitors to Yosemite to support local businesses, said the rain had washed away most of the snow in town.

"Thank goodness they've reopened now, so we should be good for the holiday coming on Monday," he said by phone.

Near California's state capital, the Sacramento County Sheriff's Department on Tuesday advised residents of Wilton, a community of more than 5,000 people, to evacuate their homes because of anticipated flooding along the Cosumnes River.

The extent of damage in Wilton was not immediately clear.

During all the rainfall, a small tornado touched down in the Sacramento area on Tuesday, twisting two metal awnings and stripping limbs off trees, Weather Prediction Centre meteorologist Bob Oravec said.

The National Weather Service had several flood advisories in effect on Wednesday for areas of Northern California, along with winter storm and avalanche warnings for the Sierra Nevada region around Lake Tahoe, where up to 7 inches of snow was forecast to fall by Thursday afternoon.

The rainfall along the US West Coast was weakening on Wednesday, Oravec said. The weather service expected it to end by Thursday night. —Reuters

World food prices fall in 2016 for fifth straight year

ROME — World food prices fell for a fifth straight year in 2016 as losses in cereals, meat and dairy outweighed rises in sugar and vegetable oils, the United Nations food agency said on Thursday.

Prices remained stable in December from the month before, according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) main food price index, which has edged up steadily after hitting a seven-year low in January.

The full year 2016 logged a 1.5 percent annual drop in the index, which measures monthly changes for a basket of cereals, oilseeds, dairy products, meat and sugar.

December's reading of 171.8 points versus 171.9 points in November resulted from strong gains in vegetable oils and dairy largely offsetting falls in sugar and meat, the FAO said.

Sugar prices rose by about a third across the year, despite an 8.6 percent dip in December that mainly stemmed from a weaker Brazilian real against the dollar and an expected jump in production in Brazil's main sugarcane-growing region.

"Economic uncertainties, including movements in exchange rates, are likely to influence food markets even more ... this year," FAO senior economist Abdolreza Abbassian said.

Cereal prices steadily declined during the year, ending 39 percent below their 2011 peak. —Reuters

Poll sees Fillon beating far-right's Le Pen easily in French runoff

PARIS — French conservative Francois Fillon will beat far-right leader Marine Le Pen by 63 percent to 37 percent if they meet head to head in a presidential election runoff in May, a poll showed on Thursday.

The POP 2017 poll was in line with the findings of other surveys showing Fillon, a former prime minister, losing momentum with his share of the vote in

the first round, falling to 24 percent from as much as 27.5 percent a month ago.

The poll showed him trailing National Front (FN) leader Le Pen by one or two percentage points in the first-round vote on 23 April, but picking up enough votes from other defeated candidates, including from centrists among the Socialists, to defeat her comfortably in the 7 May knockout.

However, the poll also appeared to confirm that Emmanuel Macron, a popular former economy minister under Socialist President Francois Hollande who is running as an independent, might still be in a position to pull off a surprise.

Macron is seen as coming in third place in the first round with 16-20 percent of the vote, the

poll showed, depending on which candidate the Socialists pick for the party ticket in their primaries this month.

But he might be able to count on scooping up much of the 5 percent of the votes that the poll attributed to centrist Francois Bayrou if the latter decides not to run.

Bayrou, a former education minister and currently mayor of Pau, has social

policies which are close to those of Macron and so his supporters may throw their weight behind the former investment banker.

Bayrou has not yet said whether he will run.

The poll, which had a margin of error of 3.3 percent, was conducted by Internet from 6-8 January and was based on a sample of 946 people registered to vote. —Reuters

"Special Felicitation"

This is to honour that the Government of the Union of Myanmar awarded "4th Operator Licence" (GSM) of Nationwide Telecommunication to Myanmar National Tele & Communication Co., Ltd (MNTC) and we wish MNTC could provide the good service for the interest of the people who are living through out rural and urban area.





An artist rendering shows Lucas Museum of Narrative Art to be built in Exposition Park in downtown Los Angeles in this image released in California, US, on 10 January 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

George Lucas' \$1 billion 'Star Wars' museum finds Los Angeles home

LOS ANGELES — "Star Wars" filmmaker George Lucas has settled on Los Angeles for the home of his \$1 billion storytelling museum, after pulling the project from Chicago last year.

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti said Tuesday that the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art will be located in Exposition Park in downtown Los Angeles.

"I believed in the vision for the Lucas Museum, and we went after it with everything we have — because I know that L.A. is

the ideal place for making sure that it touches the widest possible audience," Garcetti said in a statement, thanking Lucas and his wife, Mellody Hobson.

The museum was initially planned for Chicago, but Lucas ran into legal challenges from an open-spaces group and pulled the project. Garcetti immediately moved to woo the filmmaker to house the museum in Los Angeles.

The proposed museum, valued at \$1 billion and funded by

Lucas, would feature exhibitions of Lucas' collection of paintings, illustrations and digital art from the blockbuster "Star Wars" movie franchise he started in 1977. "South Los Angeles's Promise Zone best positions the museum to have the greatest impact on the broader community, fulfilling our goal of inspiring, engaging and educating a broad and diverse visitorship," the museum's board of directors said in a statement.

The proposed site for the

museum is next to the University of Southern California, where Lucas studied film and met future collaborators including Steven Spielberg.

Lucas sold his "Star Wars" franchise to Walt Disney Co. in 2012 for \$4 billion. Disney rebooted the franchise with six new films, including a new trilogy in the space saga commencing with 2015's "The Force Awakens," and standalone stories such as December's "Rogue One: A Star Wars Story."—Reuters

Selena Gomez needed a break: Charlie Puth

LOS ANGELES — Pop star Charlie Puth has applauded pal Selena Gomez for taking a break last year to focus on her health. The singers became friends while working on the collaboration "We Don't Talk Anymore", and he was as concerned as anyone when Gomez walked away from her world tour last year to tackle anxiety, panic attacks and depression linked to her lupus battle.

Gomez spent 90 days out of the limelight and returned in style at the American Music Awards in November last year.

She also returned to Instagram recently to mark the fifth anniversary of the end of her hit Disney show "The Wizards of Waverly Place", and Puth is glad she's back.

He's also happy she took a much-needed break, reported MTV. "I think it's good and I think it's great that she was taking some time off for herself, because I see it on a much smaller scale - people..., who are maybe not necessarily fans, seeing you as an object and shouting things at you," he said.

"Real fans won't scream obscene things out at you, but it's important to feel like a human again. So, I think her taking some time off is a really good thing."—PTI

Tom Holland confirms Spiderman appearance in Avengers: Infinity War

LOS ANGELES — Actor Tom Holland has confirmed that Spider-Man will make an appearance in the third installment of The Avengers film franchise. The "Wolf Hall" actor said that Spider-Man would join The Avengers to fight against Thanos in "Avengers: Infinity War", reported Ace Showbiz.

A Tom Holland Twitter fan page posted scans of his interview with an Italian magazine, L'uomo Vogue along with a rough translation of parts where the "In the Heart of the Sea" actor confirmed his appearance.

Holland said that it was Chris Evans and Robert Downey Jr who convinced Marvel that he's the right person to join Marvel Cinematic Universe. Other superheroes that have been confirmed for Avengers: Infinity War include Doctor Strange, Guardians of the Galaxy,

Hawkeye, Hulk, Iron Man, Scarlet Witch, Captain America, Thor, Vision, Winter Soldier and Wong.

Actor Peter Dinklage, best

known for playing Tyrion Lannister on HBO's hit series Game of Thrones, is in early talks for a key role in Avengers: Infinity War.

The 47-year-old star is expected to appear in both the next two "Avengers" films, including "Infinity War" and a yet-untitled sequel back-to-back, reported Variety. According to a source, production on the seventh season of "Game of Thrones" has recently wrapped and the remaining schedule for the show has moved from a summer shoot to a fall shoot so, Dinklage might shoot for the film sometime in early summer.

The plot details of Dinklage's character is yet to be disclosed at this time. He is one of the few new cast members to be added to the franchise. Previous stars like Robert Downey Jr and Chris Evans are on board to return.

Directed by Anthony Russo and Joe Russo, "Avengers: Infinity War" is set for a 4 May, 2018 release in the US.—PTI

New Jersey's Monmouth University to host Bruce Springsteen archive

NEW YORK — A university in US rock icon Bruce Springsteen's home state of New Jersey will be home to a collection of decades' worth of works and memorabilia from his Grammy

Award-winning career, a school spokeswoman said on Wednesday. Monmouth University will establish the Bruce Springsteen Archives and Centre for American Music at its campus in the borough of West Long Branch, just miles from Asbury Park where he forged his career. The archive will include all of the "Born to Run" singer's recorded works as well as posters, photos, articles and other artifacts.

The centre "will preserve and promote the legacy of Bruce Spring-

steen and his role in American music," the university said in a statement. It will also highlight the work of other American musicians, including Woody Guthrie, Frank Sinatra and Robert Johnson. It will include a collection housed at Monmouth University since 2011, and will continue to accept works and memorabilia from Springsteen, fans and other donors, school spokeswoman Tara Peters said. The archives will be available for viewing by the public by appointment only at Monmouth, which is one

of nine university affiliates of the Grammy Museum in Los Angeles, Peters said. Springsteen, 67, who rose from playing in the gritty clubs of the Jersey Shore to international superstardom, has long maintained a home in, and close ties to, the Garden State roots.—Reuters



Bruce Springsteen performs during The River Tour at the LA Memorial Sports Arena in Los Angeles, California, US, on 17 March 2016.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Germans cheer new landmark as Hamburg concert hall opens

BERLIN — Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie concert hall opens on Wednesday, delivering one of Germany's most prestigious 21st century cultural projects - albeit some seven years late and busting its budget.

The new landmark, with a red-brick base and glass structure on top, curved windows and a roof that resembles the crest of a wave, is built on a 1960s warehouse that stored tea, tobacco and cocoa.

Overlooking Hamburg harbor, it evokes a ship floating on water and is part of a development that uses old warehouses to create residential and office space in Germany's biggest port.

Chancellor Angela Merkel, a regular at the annual Wagner festival in Bayreuth, and President Joachim Gauck will attend the inauguration on Wednesday evening. The programme includes works by Beethoven, Cavaleri and Wagner.

Music-lovers are keen to judge the acclaimed acoustics in the main hall which has 2,100 seats and where no member of the audience is more than 30 meters (yards) from the conductor.

The Hanseatic trading



The 'Elbphilharmonie' (Philharmonic Hall), which will open its doors to public on 11 January 2017, is illuminated during a light test in downtown Hamburg, Germany, on 9 January 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

port of Hamburg, now a media hub with chic shopping arcades as well as its red light district around the Reeperbahn, hopes the hall will help draw tourists to Germany's second-biggest city.

"The construction of the Elbphilharmonie is an invitation to the world to come to Hamburg to visit this extraordinary building and experience the power of music," said Hamburg Mayor Olaf Scholz.

Architects Herzog & de Meuron have called the Elbphilharmonie a city in

itself, with restaurants, a hotel and a 37 meter-high plaza between the brick and glass layers open to the public, offering a panorama of the city.

The cost to the city was put at about 75 million euros (\$80 million) back in 2003 but has ballooned to some 790 million euros due in part to delays and legal disputes. It had been due to open in 2009. The opening has come as a relief to Germans whose reputation for efficiency has been dented by delays on infrastructure projects, most notably Ber-

lin's new airport.

German media have praised the Elbphilharmonie's ambition to perform a range of music, from traditional symphony concerts and operas to modern improvisations and electro music.

"In post-war Germany, culture was something like spiritual self-defence against a dark past and a murky present. That has changed. Today it is rather a confirmation that times are better," wrote the Sueddeutsche Zeitung in an editorial.—Reuters

Swedish archaeologists discover 12 ancient Egyptian cemeteries near Aswan

CAIRO — Swedish archaeologists have unearthed a dozen burial sites near the southern city of Aswan that date back almost 3,500 years to the New Kingdom era of ancient Egypt, the Antiquities Ministry said on Wednesday.

Human and animal remains were found in the cemeteries, which were discovered in the Gabal al-Silsila or Chain of Mountains area 65 km (40.3 miles) north of Aswan and would have been used during the reigns of pharaohs Thutmose III and Amenhotep II.

It is hoped the burial sites will help historians better understand ancient Egyptian healthcare and give a boost to Egypt's struggling tourism industry, which has been beset by political upheaval and

militant attacks since the unseating of autocrat Hosni Mubarak in 2011.

Some of the cemeteries were for animals and contain one or two chambers with either stone or clay coffins, or ones made of cartonnage, Mahmoud Afify, the ministry's head of Ancient Egyptian Antiquities, said in a statement. Totems and scorpions were also found.

The expedition from Sweden's Lund University began in 2012. In 2015 it discovered the remains of an ancient temple also in Gabal al-Silsila.

Initial examinations revealed several complete bodies as well as evidence of malnutrition and broken bones that were the result of heavy labour, the ministry quoted expedition head Maria Nilsson as saying.—Reuters



Skeletal and animal remains are seen at one of 12 newly discovered ancient Egyptian cemeteries dating back to the New Kingdom era at Gabal al-Silsila or Chain of Mountains area in Upper Egypt, north of Aswan, on 11 January 2017, in this handout picture courtesy of the Ministry of Antiquities. PHOTO: REUTERS

Staying grounded: converted jet offers unusual stay in Wales

REDBERTH (WALES) — Aviation enthusiasts have a novel way to feed their hobby without even taking to the skies — sleeping in a decommissioned private jet in Wales.

With a double bedroom at the back and long leather sofa behind the cockpit, the 1970s JetStar sleeps 4 people on a campsite in Pembrokeshire. It joins a few other old planes — like a jumbo jet in Sweden — that have been converted into accommodation. Still bearing

original features, the plane, which would have carried maximum nine passengers, comes with a bar area, an Xbox with flight games in the cockpit, a toilet and a cold water basin. "It ticks quite a few different people's boxes," said Apple Camping owner Toby Rhys-Davies, who bought the jet from a salvage yard. "I've had all sorts of people staying from plane enthusiasts to people who are scared of flying and then just couples."—Reuters



The luxury Jetstar private jet, built in the seventies and retaining most of the original features which is now being used as a holiday let is seen in Redberth, Pembrokeshire, Wales on 11 January 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

MRTV Programme Schedule (13-1-2017, Friday)

6:00 Am	♦ Paritta by Hilly Region Missionary Sayadaw	3:15 Pm	♦ TV Drama Series
7:00 Am	♦ Breakfast News	4:15 Pm	♦ "The Myanmar National League"
8:30 Am	♦ Current Affairs	4:30 Pm	♦ Myanmar Series
9:30 Am	♦ Weekly Entertainment News	5:15 Pm	♦ Analysis for Myanmar Movie
10:30 Am	♦ Weekly Sport Info	5:35 Pm	♦ Hyper Sport
11:15 Am	♦ Terleplay	6:20 Pm	♦ HUMAN DIGNITY FILM INSTITUTE "Crossfire, Safety Blank"
11:35 Pm	♦ MRTV Worker Programme	7:15 Pm	♦ TV Drama Series
12:35 Pm	♦ TV Drama Series	8:00 Pm	♦ News/International News/ Weather Report
1:20 Pm	♦ Teleplaye	9:00 Pm	♦ News/ Weather Report
1:35 Pm	♦ Documentary		♦ TV Drama Series
2:05 Pm	♦ Talk on Old Film		♦ Song in Myanmar Movies (Part-24)
2:35 Pm	♦ Applled Financial Knowledge		

Note/ Hourly News Bulletins (Local + International)

mitv Myanmar International Programme Schedule

(13-1-2017 07:00am ~ 14-1-2017 07:00am) MST		
07:03	Am	News
07:26	Am	A Day Life of Kayan Padaung Tribe
07:55	Am	Dances of Myanmar "Lisu Traditional Dance"
08:03	Am	News
08:26	Am	Versatile Artist
08:53	Am	Kayah
09:03	Am	News
09:26	Am	Applied Myanmar Traditional Martial Art-Part-1
09:50	Am	Culture Shows: Theatrical Art
10:03	Am	News
10:26	Am	The Green Corner (Epi-9) Mixed Media Bottel

10:38	Am	Htan Taw Drums (Part-I) "Osi"
10:51	Am	Licuala Palm Leaf
(11:00 Am ~ 03:00 Pm) - Thursday Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)		
(03:00 Pm ~ 07:00 Pm) -Today Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)		
Prime Time		
07:03	Pm	News
07:26	Pm	A Journey to Southern Shan State (Ep-3)
07:41	Pm	Jade Pagoda: Weirawsana
08:03	Pm	News
08:26	Pm	Sai Htee Hseng or an Exceptional Music Star from Shan Plateaus (Ep-1)
08:54	Pm	Kyaikhteeyoe: My Father The Porter
(09:00 Pm ~ 11:00 Pm) -Today Repeat (09:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)		
(11:00 Pm ~ 03:00 Am)- Thursday 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)		

Profligate Saints squander chances in 1-0 win over Liverpool

LONDON — Nathan Redmond's fine first-half goal gave Southampton a 1-0 win over Liverpool in their League Cup semi-final first leg at St Mary's on Wednesday, but the tie remains in the balance after the hosts squandered a series of chances.

The Saints were deserved winners against a disappointing Liverpool side, who did far less with the greater share of possession.

Poor finishing from Southampton, however, and a rehabilitating performance in goal by Liverpool's Loris Karius left everything to play for in the second leg at Anfield in two weeks' time.

The Saints took the lead against a subdued Liverpool when Redmond darted onto Jay Rodriguez's through pass to steer the ball right footed past the advancing Karius in the 20th minute.

The hosts failed to add to their advantage, however, and a number of opportunities went begging, including two more for Redmond.

"We were in good shape when we started (the match) but our reaction (to going behind) was not good," Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said.

"We lost our timing... It will be a completely different game (at Anfield), tonight we weren't good enough. It was a deserved result (for Southampton)."

Southampton's Nathan Redmond scores their first goal during EFL Cup Semi Final First Leg at St Mary's Stadium, 11 January 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS



Only a minute before the goal Karius, who had been dropped after Liverpool's 4-3

league defeat at Bournemouth last month, blocked a shot from Redmond with his foot.

The winger then failed to convert another opportunity shortly before halftime with a shot from his weaker left foot that the young German goalkeeper leapt to push away.

Southampton always looked the more likely to score and they were denied by the woodwork five minutes from fulltime when Redmond chipped Shane Long's cross to the far post onto the bar before it was cleared.

Early first-half pressure from Liverpool almost delivered them a goal, but Fraser Forster tipped a shot from Roberto Firmino over the bar.

Brazilian playmaker Philippe Coutinho came on for the last half hour in his first appearance since sustaining an ankle injury in November but looked rusty and failed to spark the improvement Klopp had hoped for. "We were strong together and had a very good spirit," Saints manager Claude Puel said.

"It was a good performance, it was important to win and with a clean sheet. I think Liverpool had only one chance in the first half. We were strong together in defence and kept the ball and had good counter-attacks."

Manchester United beat Hull City 2-0 in the first leg of their semi-final at Old Trafford on Tuesday.—Reuters

Asian fringe ready for World Cup expansion — Japan FA boss

TOKYO — FIFA's decision to expand the World Cup to 48 teams will be a catalyst to soccer's growth in countries hovering on the fringe of the showpiece tournament, according to Japan Football Association (JFA) president Kozo Tashima.

Tashima is a member of the FIFA Council, which voted on Tuesday to add 16 more teams to its current 32 from the 2026 edition of the tournament.

Critics fear the expansion will lower the overall standard of the tournament but Tashima cited the example of Japan, which has taken part in the last five World Cups, and said it would be provide an impetus for soccer's growth globally.

"Many teams in Asia are also close to being fully prepared to participate," Tashima told Reuters on Thursday.

"Japan was the same when we first participated in 1998. We had a taste of what football was at a world level and was able to consistently participate

in all five World Cups that followed. This contributed greatly to the development of Japanese football.

"I believe countries in Asia, Oceania, Europe, for example Iceland, and other small countries deserve the same chance."

Kashima pointed to Iceland's Euro 2016 victory over England to further his point.

"In the past, tournaments were more about Europe versus South America, but now, many other national teams have become stronger," he said.

"We are now in a generation where even Iceland beat England. Our decision was based on the fact that team number expansion would be, without a doubt, a progress for football, globally." The other main talking point in Asian football is the money being splashed out by Chinese Super League clubs to lure top players from abroad.

Tashima thought it might ultimately help strengthen Japanese football.—Reuters

Free kick specialist Messi fires Barca into cup last eight

BARCELONA — Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez and Neymar were all on target as holders Barcelona beat Athletic Bilbao 3-1 on Wednesday to overturn a deficit from the first leg and advance to the quarter-finals of the King's Cup.

A Luis Suarez volley put Barca ahead in the 35th minute while Brazil international Neymar earned and converted a penalty three minutes into the second half to score his first goal since October and put Barca in front in the tie after losing the first leg 2-1.

Athletic responded immediately though, substitute defender Gorka Elustondo crossing for Barcelona-born Enric Saborit to head home in the 51st minute. The goal emboldened the visitors for a 10-minute spell but Barca withstood the pressure.

Messi had squandered two free kicks in the first half but avoided the possibility of extra time and penalties by curling a dead ball in off the post in the 79th, his second set piece goal

in four days.

"We didn't lose our composure, we created lots of chances and I think we deserved to go through," Barca coach Luis Enrique told reporters after a first win in 2017 following the defeat in the first leg and Sunday's 1-1 draw with Villarreal.

"We controlled the game today and Athletic practically had no chances."

Barcelona had been livid with the referee's decisions in the first leg after Gerard Pique and Neymar were denied penalties and Bilbao's Aritz Aduriz was fortunate not to be shown a red card.

The Nou Camp exploded with rage on Wednesday when Neymar was harshly ruled offside as he squared for Suarez to find the net.

Barca channelled their sense of injustice to craft a brilliant opening goal, however, Messi wriggling free of two players in midfield to slip the ball to Neymar who turned his marker and crossed for Suarez to acrobatically volley home.

It was the Uruguayan's 100th goal for the club since joining from Liverpool in 2014.

Barca struck again at the start of the second half when Neymar cut into the area from the left and dived past one defender before falling over the body of Eneko Boveda and winning a penalty.

The Brazilian coolly converted to score for the first time since the 4-0 win over Manchester City on 19 October.

Neymar hit the post later as Athletic grew tired and the Basques were condemned to another cup defeat at the hands of Barcelona, who beat them in the final in 2009, 2012 and 2015 and sent them packing in the last eight last season.

Barca join Alaves, Alcorcon, Atletico Madrid and Real Sociedad in the quarter-final draw which takes place on Friday, with Real Madrid, Eibar and Celta Vigo, who all take heavy advantages into their second-leg games on Thursday, aiming to join them.—Reuters