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President attends Naga traditional New Year festival

THE Naga Traditional New Year festival kicked off in Lahe, Sagaing Region yesterday, with President U Htin Kyaw and wife Daw Su Su Lwin in attendance.

The President expressed his delight to see the unspoiled natural environment in the hilly region, pledging that the Union Government is committed to the socio-economic development of the ethnic people in the area.

In his speech at the opening ceremony, President U Htin Kyaw also called for cooperation from all ethnic people in making efforts for development of the country with the aim of building a federal union without separating the mainland and hilly areas.

The Naga Self-Administered Zone has seen progress to a certain extent, as the responsible ministries have built necessary infrastructures in the zone yearly, said Union Minister for Border Affairs Lt-Gen Ye Aung.

However, there is a limit to development in the region because the hilly areas are not easily accessible, he added.

The incumbent government allotted more than Ks 9 billion to the zone in the nine months since it took office and provided 3,758 bags of rice, said Sagaing Region Chief Minister Dr Myint Naing.

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Men and women in Naga traditional dress wait to take part in the New Year Festival held in Lahe, Chin State yesterday.
PHOTO: MYANMAR NEWS AGENCY

Camp for retired elephants in Pathein now a tourist attraction

THE Thitgatoeaing Elephant Camp in Pathein (South) of the Myanmar Timber Enterprise in Ayeyawady Region was turned into an elephant conservation camp for tourism earlier this month.

Among the 18 elephants in the camp, six have been chosen for tourism as they are clever enough to pose for photos with tourists, who can also feed them and wash them as well as travel on them short or long trips to study the natural environment of the camp.

It is also learnt that safety measures for tourists have also been taken during such experiences.

The camp is located at milepost 21/6 on Pathein-Mawtin Road, only about one hour away from Pathein, the region capital, by car. It is also on the way to Ngwe Saung Beach, Goringi Beach Resort and the Mawtinsun Pagoda.

Local and foreign tourists have already begun to visit the camp.

The elephants at the camp once belonged to the Myanma Timber Enterprise (MTE), which falls under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (MNREC) and are now retired from their logging activities.

The retirement of the elephants reportedly comes as part of efforts to curb the deforestation of Myanmar's wildness.

Elephants of the MTE could reportedly carry 2,000 logs a year through Ayeyawady Region's Sin Mon forest.

The number of elephants from Bago and Ayeyawady regions are reportedly depleting as hunters target the animals for their ivory and skin, which is exported to China for a high price.—*Maung Maung Myint (IPRD)*

Suspect in Rakhine attacks detained

Swedu Larmi. PHOTO: MNA

WHILE conducting security operations in Buthidaung, Rakhine State Saturday afternoon, a combined team of Tatmadaw columns and the police border guards captured Swedu Larmi, who is suspected of involvement in the violent attacks in Rakhine State last year.

The suspect was handed over to a local police station in order to take legal action against him in accordance with the law. — *Myanmar News Agency*

157 fire accidents in Bago Region last year

THE number of fires that occurred in Bago Region last year reached 157, an increase of seven cases compared with the previous year, according to the Bago Region Fire Service Department.

The majority of fire accidents happened in Bago District, which tops the list of regions with 56 cases, followed by Pyay District with 40 cases, Taungoo District with 31 cases and Thayawaddy District with 30 cases.

Last year's fires in Bago Region killed five people and destroyed more than Ks150 million worth of properties, including 185 households. Most of the fires were caused by negligence on the part of people who used stoves and electronic devices carelessly, said U Aung Myint, director of the department. Forest fires also occurred in the region twice last year. According to the figures of the Fire Service Department, a total of 150 fire cases occurred in 28 townships in the region in 2015.

The region has over 70 fire stations, 159 fire engines, 148 water tankers, 20 auxiliary vehicles and 22 other vehicles. The fire stations are staffed by nearly 800 officers and other ranks of the fire service department and more than 23,900 auxiliary members. — *Myitmakha News Agency*

Camp for retired elephants in Pathein now a tourist attraction

Tourists ride elephants at Thitgatoeeaing Elephant Camp. (News on page). PHOTO: MNA

Crime NEWS

Yaba pills and heroin seized in Myeik, Lashio

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

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 of Kharsho village in Lashio Township on 11 January. Police seized 33 kilos of raw opium from the two motorcycles. On the same day, police searched a passenger vehicle near Oriental toll gate, Myoshaung Street in Lashio Township and discovered 10,000 yaba pills in the sling bags of passengers Ma Cherry Kyaw and Ma Pyae Pyae Mon.—*Myanmar News Agency*

65th Anniversary of Kayah State held in Loikaw

Kayah ethnic people traditional 65th Anniversary of Kayah State Day. PHOTO: MNA

THE 65th Anniversary of Kayah State Day, 2017, was held at Granite Square in Kandahaywun Park in Loikaw yesterday, with the presence of Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker U Man Win Khaing Than, Union Minister for Ethnic Affairs U Naing Thet Lwin, Chief Minister of Kayah State U L Phaung Sho, Speaker of the State Hluttaw U Hla Htwe, the deputy speaker of the State Hluttaw, state-level officials, Commissioner Mr Suebsak Eaimvijarn of Mae Hong Son Province and delegation, members of peace groups, ethnic leaders, officials and residents.

The Kayah State Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation minister read out the message of the president at the ceremony before the Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker and the Union Minister for Ethnic Affairs gave their own speeches.

The chief minister also delivered an address and the commissioner extended greetings.

The chief minister and officials then presented prizes to winners in vegetable and fruit competitions, traditional wrestling, traditional paddy shelling, tug-of-war and other traditional sports held at the square. — *Kayah State IPRD*

Mandalay Trade Fair and Car Show on 15-18 February

A TRADE fair and car show is planned to take place next month in Mandalay under the arrangement of Top Y International Co Ltd, said U Kan Zaw, managing director of the host company.

The new event will be held from 15 to 18 February from 9am to 9 pm at the City Hall of Mandalay, with a wide range of entertainment programmes including a model show and musical entertainment.

About 50 companies will take part in the event, planning to showcase their products that include auto parts and accessories, electronics, household utensils and kitchenwares through over 100 booths.

Mobile handsets and related accessories, communications devices, healthcare equipment, construction materials, clothing and cosmetics will also be displayed for sale during the exhibition.

Companies which provide wedding service and education service will also be participating in the new trade fair. — *Myitmakha News Agency*

Taungoo District IPRD of Bago Region creates happy world for children

40 pupils and three teachers from the Shining Star Pre-School in Taungoo, Bagon Region on Thursday visited the Taungoo District Public Library of Information and Public Relation Department (IPRD) under the Ministry of Information.

The children told stories, recited poems and played with toys in the reading room of the library.

The Taungoo District IPRD has arranged a reading room in the library with the aim of developing the intellectual curiosity of children, supporting their creativity, expanding their knowledge and providing relaxation.—*Shwe Win (Pyay)*

Children being seen at the Taungoo District Public Library of IPRD. PHOTO: SHWE WIN (PYAY)

President U Htin Kyaw and wife, centre, visit a booth in Lahe displaying traditional ornaments and utensils of the Naga people. PHOTO: MYANMAR NEWS AGENCY

President U Htin Kyaw, right, accepts a spear from a leader of the Naga Self-Administered Zone at the Naga Traditional New Year Festival. PHOTO: MYANMAR NEWS AGENCY

President attends Naga New Year festival

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At the ceremony, Chairman of the Naga Literature and Culture (Central) Committee U Aung Htut extended New Year greetings.

U Kay Sai, Chairman of the Naga SAZ, presented New Year gifts to the President.

Before the Naga traditional New Year was officially launched, the President, Union ministers, regional ministers and donors presented aid to local authorities for the development of the zone.

The Naga ethnic people celebrate the traditional New Year on 15th January after their harvest.

The Naga ethnic tribes have held the New Year festival in individual villages, but since 1956-57, chieftains of the ethnic tribes have collectively held the New Year festival in townships.

Since 1993, the Naga Traditional New Year festival has been held with the assistance of the government. The festival has become a state-level festival since 2001, celebrating in Layshi, Lahe and Nanyun alternatively. This year marks the 17th year in which the Naga New Year has been celebrated as a state-level festival. — *Myanmar News Agency*

UN Special Rapporteur tours Rakhine

Ms Yanghee Lee, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, and her team met with Rakhine State Security and Border Affairs Minister Col Htein Lin and officials at district/township levels at the General Administration Department of Maungtaw District yesterday morning.

Then, she visited Shwe Paho Village and Kyikanpyin (West) Village where the Myo ethnic group lives.

Later, she met with the state security and border affairs minister and Police-Brig-Gen Thura San Lwin and discussed security measures before visiting No. 4 outpost in Kyikanpyin.

Ms Yanhee Lee, left, meets with members of the Muslim community during her tour of conflict areas in northern Rakhine. PHOTO: KO MIN

In the afternoon, she visited the scene where fires broke out in Warbaik and Pyaingpaik during violent attacks last year, before visiting police posts in Ngakhura area and meeting with residents of Laungdon Village. —*Zin Oo (Myanma Alin)*

Myanmar's women to participate in Chinese invitational football contest

SELECTED Myanmar female footballers will take part in coming Chinese invitation football tournament to be held from 19 to 24 January in China.

The Myanmar Women's Team chose 22 players to participate in this year competition. Myanmar will play against teams from the host China, Ukraine and Thailand.

The competition will start on January 19, with Myanmar playing against Ukraine. Myanmar will then play against China on 21 January. Myanmar will meet with the team from Thailand on 24 January.

For Myanmar, Mya Phu Ngon, Zar Zar Myint and May Zin Nwe were selected as goalkeepers. Wai Wai Aung, Khin Than Wai, Aye Aye Moe, Zin Mar Tun, Zin Mar Win, Phu Pwint Khaing and San San Maw will perform as defenders, while Khin Mala Tun, May Sabei Phu, Yupa Khaing, Aye Myo Myat, Win Theingi Tun, May Thu Kyaw, Naw Ar Lo Wah Phaw and Khin Mo Mo Tun as midfielders and Yi Yi Oo, July Kyaw, Khin Moe Wai and Nilar Win as strikers.

The Myanmar Women's Team will also compete in the 2018 AFC Women's Asian Cup qualification in April, the ASEAN Women's football competition in May and the 29th SEA games in August. —*Ye Yint Shine*

Union Minister for Information opens community centre, mobile library

A CEREMONY to formally open a community centre and a mobile library jointly founded by the Ministry of Information and the Daw Khin Kyi Foundation was held at the Natmauk Township Information and Public Relations Department in Magway District yesterday morning.

Union Minister for Information Dr Pe Myint said at the ceremony that the community centre and the mobile library were founded with the intention of keeping in touch with the public and to create an environment in which the public will always be able to enjoy books. The union minister also explained the measures taken for publication of children's literature in order to instill the love of literature at an early age.

Union Minister Dr Pe Myint, centre, visits a mobile library. PHOTO: MNA

The union minister added that the Ministry of Information is an entity that would cooperate with any organisation anywhere in the world that has shared values, wishes and interests. But the union minister pointed out the need for cooperation of the public, including literary enthusiasts, those who wish for community development and officials of government departments for the success of the community centre. Yesterday's event was significant because the community centre and the mobile library are situated in the home town of the National Leader General Aung San, and was implemented with the cooperation of the Ministry of Information and the Daw Khin Kyi Foundation.

Region Minister for Labour, Immigration and People Power U Nay Myo Kyaw gave a speech of thanks at the ceremony and Executive Member of the Daw Khin Kyi Foundation explained the functions of the mobile library.

The union minister and officials formally opened the community centre and toured the mobile library bus before viewing local products, computer courses and the children's reading room.

Later, the union minister visited the museum of General Aung San, which was the childhood home of the national leader, and inspected the Sasanahita Library.

The Ministry of Information and the Daw Khin Kyi Foundation jointly opened community centres and mobile libraries in Insein township and Myaungmya District in August and December last year, the third time such events were held. Plans are underway to open similar community centres and mobile libraries in Pyinmana, Myitkyina, and Hpa-an.

In the afternoon, the union minister inspected the Magway District Information and Public Relations Department and television relay station. — *Myanmar News Agency*

LOCAL Business

A local merchant checks fish arrived early morning from farms at Sanpya Fish Wholesale Market in Yangon. PHOTO: PHOE KHWAR

Fisheries product export fetched over US$400mil this FY

THE export value of fisheries products as of 6th Jan in this fiscal year 2016-2017 reached US$404.366 million, which was up from US$336.791m in the similar period of last FY 2015-2016, according to the statistics of the Commerce Ministry.

The fisheries exports attained over US$668m in 2011-2012, over US$493m in 2012-2013 and over US$341m in 2013-2014. Exports then declined slightly. In the 2015-2016 fiscal year, export values were up a bit at over US$469m.

"The erratic weather adversely affected fisheries production and fish resources, and offshore fishing does not look very promising. As a result of this, to boost the export volume, the fish farming sector should be prioritised," said a representative of the fisheries sector. "All the stakeholders in the fisheries export supply chain, including the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation and Myanmar Fishery Federation (MFF) need to exert the concerted efforts."

Those engaged in Myanmar's fish and prawn farming need to switch over to modern farming methods from the traditional methods, the MFF said. Adopting the modern farming techniques can help to prevent the fish from infectious disease, increase the growth rate of fish and prawn and clean the farming lakes, according to MFF.

To control the quality of lake water, the farmers should conduct testing at the laboratories of the Fisheries department. Saltwater and freshwater prawn farming businessmen are currently facing difficulties. Out of 27 hatcheries for freshwater prawns, only four are left due to difficulties in the reproduction process. Similarly in saltwater farming, only some prawn farmers are able to farm prawns. Only 40,000 tonnes of freshwater and saltwater prawns can be produced in the country, requiring that prawns are being imported from Thailand, it is learnt.—*Ko Khant*

Myanmar Tourism Bank to offer short-term loans to SME tourism businessmen

MYANMAR Tourism Bank will be opened to offer short-term loans to businessmen working on a manageable scale and to those engaged in small-and-medium-sized tourism enterprises (SMEs), according to the Myanmar Tourism Federation.

"Tourism Bank aims at providing loans to start-up entrepreneurs. The bank is not still granted as investment bank and so, it cannot provide long-term loan plan," said U Phyo Wai Yarzar, the vice chairman of Myanmar Tourism Federation, at a regular meetings held on last Friday at UMFCCI.

Myanmar Tourism Bank branches will be opened in Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon and Mandalay regions. The bank is seeking a license from the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism to open a bank through the Central Bank of Myanmar, it is learnt.

The Central Bank of Myanmar is expected to grant the license soon, which would allow the bank to open this year, he continued.

Myanmar Tourism Bank was established by the Myanmar Tourism Bank Public Company and will offer banking services as local private banks, at an interest rate set by the Central Bank of Myanmar.

There are over 20 local private banks and over 10 foreign banks, it is learnt. —*Myitmakha News Agnecy*

Rubber prices on the rise from high global petroleum price

THE price of Myanmar rubber is on the rise due to its relation to the global petroleum price in the market, said rubber merchants recently.

The price of rubber is also on the rise from the high purchase price from China and high petroleum price, plus the appreciation of the dollar in 2016.

In addition, the rise in rubber price resulted from the decrease in Thailand's rubber production, said the rubber exporters.

Local rubber growers battered by low prices since 2012 resumed their operations, which were forced to halt due to the declining price, but the rubber price has turned to an upward trend towards the end of 2016. The rubber price hit a four-year record high of around Ks1,200 per pound, said the rubber businessmen.

Myanmar's rubber is exported to China, Malaysia and Japan. Over 80,000 tonnes of rubber are annually exported, according to Myanmar Rubber Planters and Producers Association. To maintain the price on the rise, quality needs to be controlled so that Myanmar's rubber meets the export market's criteria. However, the quality of Myanmar's rubber is inconsistent, merchants said. —*Mon Mon*

Telecom sector received FDI of over US$2.8 billion

THE telecommunications sector attracted foreign direct investments (FDI) of over US$2.8billion over the past two years, receiving investments from Japan, Norway and Qatar.

The telecoms sector is projected to support 5 per cent of Myanmar's GDP in five years, with increasing FDI entering, according to the existing three operators

Passengers use mobile phones as they take a ferry in the Yangon River. PHOTO: PHOE KHWAR

Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications (MPT), Ooredoo and Telenor. Additionally, the telecoms industry is expected to employ 250,000 local residents in five years. The fourth telecom, Myanmar National Tele & Communications (MNTC), in cooperation with Viet Nam's Viettel Company, will reportedly launch its service in 2018, following its operator's license that was granted on 12th Jan 2017. — *Ko Htet*

Thahtay power project hopes to generate 386 million kilowatts of electricity yearly

THE THAHTAY hydropower project being developed in Thandwe, a township in Rakhine State, is expected to generate 386 million kilowatt hours of electricity yearly, according to the Ministry of Electricity and Energy.

The power project has been implemented on Thahtay Creek, 12 miles northeast of Thandwe in Rakhine State, at a cost of a government-approved Ks354.6 billion, said U Htay Aung, deputy permanent secretary of the ministry.

The project covers the construction of a main dam, spillway, field channels, diversion tunnels and a power plant.

The construction of diversion tunnels No. 1 and No. 2 were finalised in January 2015, with the project implementer continuing the work relating to the strength development of the tunnels.

The Thahtay hydropower project has been initiated by the Department of Hydropower Implementation since the 2008-2009 fiscal year for the purpose of supplying over 380 million kilowatt hours of power across the country annually.

The project is expected to be completed by 2023-2024 FY.—*Myitmakha News Agency*

Abe, Jokowi meet to strengthen cooperation on South China Sea

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (C) is welcomed at Indonesia's international airport in Jakarta on 15 January, 2017. Abe met with President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo later that day. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

BOGOR, Indonesia — Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Indonesian President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo met south of Jakarta on Sunday, with the leaders expected to affirm coordination on maritime security amid tension over China's military buildup in disputed waters of the South China Sea.

In the talks at Bogor Palace, Abe is also set to pitch Japan's cooperation in developing infrastructure in the Southeast Asian country, including a new port project in eastern Jakarta, at a time when Indonesia is strengthening economic ties with China.

Abe's visit to Indonesia is the latest stop on a four-nation tour since Thursday that has already taken him to the Philippines and Australia. He will fly to Viet Nam on Monday.

Japan views Indonesia, with the world's fourth-largest population and high economic potential, as a major power in the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations and expects it to play a leading role in addressing regional challenges such as the South China Sea issue, Japanese officials said.

Territorial disputes in the South China Sea involve China and five other governments — Brunei, the Philippines, Malaysia, Viet Nam and Taiwan.

Although neither Japan nor Indonesia is a claimant in the disputes, the officials said both countries are worried about China's increasing military presence in the busy shipping lane and keen to maintain a rules-based order in the sea.

Tokyo is involved in a dispute with Beijing over the Japanese-controlled Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea that are claimed by China, which calls them Diaoyu.

In Sunday's talks, Abe and Jokowi are set to agree on strengthening maritime cooperation, with the Indonesian navy remaining alert in monitoring and patrolling the vicinity of the Natuna Islands on the southern edge of the South China Sea. The navy has also been cracking down on Chinese fishing boats operating illegally in the country's exclusive economic zone.

China recognizes Indonesian sovereignty over the Natuna Islands but at the same time argues that Beijing and Jakarta have overlapping claims for maritime rights and interests in the area that need to be resolved — an assertion Indonesia rejects.

Indonesia has also proposed cooperation with Japan on exploration for oil and gas in the Natuna area.

In the area of infrastructure development, aside from the new Patimban port project, the leaders may also take up a medium-speed railway project linking Indonesia's two largest business hubs of Jakarta and Surabaya.

The project is part of efforts to revitalize the existing 725-kilometre railway between Jakarta and Surabaya, after Japan lost out to China in September 2015 in bidding to construct a high-speed railway between Indonesia's capital and the West Java provincial capital Bandung.

Abe and Jokowi are also expected to affirm security ties in light of an agreement to promote talks for forging a pact on the transfer of Japanese defence equipment and technology to Indonesia, the officials said.

Amid the growing threat of Islamist extremists, the leaders may also discuss counterterrorism measures, with Indonesia home to the world's largest Muslim population, the officials said.—*Kyodo News*

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Cambodian PM hosts dinner for local journalists, spokespersons for 1st time

Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen addresses to local journalists in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on 14 January, 2017. PHOTO: XINHUA

PHNOM PENH — Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen hosted a banquet for more than 1,000 local media members and spokespersons for the first time on Saturday evening.

Speaking at the event held at the 5-star Sokha Phnom Penh Hotel here, Hun Sen urged journalists to report news "accurately and fast" and advised the spokespersons for state institutions and ministries to cooperate well with journalists.

The prime minister also called on journalists to comply with the journalist's code of ethics, not taking money from unscrupulous wealthy or powerful people in order to conceal their wrong acts.

"I want nothing from you (journalists), but accurate news reporting," he said. "My presence today is to strengthen the role of media outlets and to give an incentive to journalists, not to stifle your rights."

He added that journalists must dare to make corrections if they had released untrue information.

The Southeast Asian country has some 22 television channels, 812 newspapers, news bulletins and magazines, and 72 news websites as well as 334 radio stations, according to Information Minister Khieu Kanharith.—*Xinhua*

Philippines takes helm of ASEAN, as bloc nears 50th anniversary

MANILA — The Philippines launched its one-year chairmanship of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations on Sunday, as the bloc nears the 50th anniversary of its formation.

A ceremony led by the country's President Rodrigo Duterte was held at a convention centre in his hometown of Davao City in the south of the country, with around a thousand people, including government officials and diplomats from other countries, attending the event.

"The Philippines, as ASEAN chair, will remain steadfast in upholding the ideals and values we hold dear and in working for the realization of our shared aspirations," Duterte said in his speech, noting that the organization's goals would be achieved through policy initiatives, coordination, consensus and cooperation.

The chairmanship of the regional bloc — which groups together Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam — is rotated every year.

In the previous year, ASEAN's chairmanship was held by Laos, under its president, Bounnhang Vorachith.

In the same speech, Duterte also said that priorities under his term include regional peace and stability, as well as maritime security and cooperation, both of which are increasing concerns due to territorial disputes in the South China Sea which could potentially become a flashpoint for armed confrontation between rival claimants.

The 50th anniversary of the formation of ASEAN will occur during the Philippines' chairmanship, with the bloc having been formed in August 1967. The Philippines was one of the organization's five founding member states. —*Kyodo News*

More rain and pain expected as Thai flood death toll rises to 40

BANGKOK — Thailand faces more hardship from unseasonable floods that have killed 40 people in its south, with more rain expected in the major rubber-producing and tourist region in coming days, a top disaster agency official said on Sunday.

Persistent heavy rain well into what should be the dry season has triggered floods across the south, cutting road and rail links, threatening crops and affecting about 1.6 million people, said Chatchai Promlert, head of the Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Department.

"The worst isn't over. We're expecting more rain this week while clean-up efforts are underway in places where the waters have subsided," Chatchai told Reuters.

The Meteorological Department said on its website more rain was expected on Monday.

The rainy season in Thailand normally takes place from June to November. The floods, which began on January 1, have followed unseasonably heavy rain.

Workers stand by a flood-damaged train line in Bang Saphan Workers stand by a flood-damaged train line in Bang Saphan district in Prachuap Khiri province, Thailand on 11 January, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Thailand is one of the world's most important producers of natural rubber and the national rubber authority said on Thursday output in 2016-2017 would be about 10 per cent lower because of the floods.

Global rubber prices have spiked on concern about the impact.

Flooding occurs in Thailand regularly during the rainy season but January is traditionally sunny and clear, and a high season for the tourist industry, including in southern seaside resorts.

The country saw its worst flooding in half a century in 2011, when heavy rain beginning in July that year over northern regions led to six months of inundations, including in the central plains, where industrial estates have replaced rice fields in many places.

The floods submerged a third of the country, killed more than 900 people and crippled industry.

The army played a major role in relief efforts in 2011 while the then civilian government was criticised for what many saw as lacklustre disaster efforts.

The army, which seized power in a 2014 coup, has again been playing a major role in helping with relief efforts. The Federation of Thai Industries said last week the southern floods would have little impact on economic growth.—*Reuters*

China's top judge warns courts on judicial independence

BEIJING — China's courts must firmly resist the western idea of judicial independence and other ideologies which threaten the leadership of the ruling Communist Party, the country's top judge was reported as saying by state-run Chinese News Service.

People's Courts at all levels must disregard erroneous western notions, including constitutional democracy and separation of powers, Chief Justice Zhou Qiang was reported by the news agency as saying at a Supreme People's Court meeting on Saturday.

China has in recent years unveiled legal reforms such as those aimed at giving judges more independence and limiting local official's influence over courts, but courts are not independent and ultimately answer to the party leadership. Since he took office in March 2013, President Xi Jinping, who has a doctorate in law, has vowed to put "power within the cage of regulations" and called for judicial independence under the party.

Zhou's comments on Saturday come after the country's anti-graft watchdog said that a mechanism independent of the Communist Party to keep officials in check cannot exist in China. At an annual meeting earlier this month, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) pledged to create a national supervisory commission and a corresponding national law, as part of a move to reform the oversight system for thousands of party officials. But the reforms would stop short of placing power outside the party, CCDI officials said at a briefing on 9 January.—*Reuters*

Japan's bid to launch world's smallest satellite-carrying rocket fails

KAGOSHIMA, Japan — Japan's space agency on Sunday aborted the launch of the world's smallest rocket capable of placing a satellite in orbit shortly after liftoff following a communication problem.

Carrying a mini satellite for observation of the Earth's surface, the No 4 vehicle of the SS-520 series lifted off at 8:33 am from the agency's Uchinoura Space Centre in Kagoshima Prefecture, southwestern Japan, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency said earlier. But the agency aborted ignition of the second stage after it lost communication with the rocket 20 seconds after liftoff.

The rocket — about the size of a utility pole — and its payload fell into the sea off Uchinoura. JAXA has no further plans to launch a rocket of this size, it said.

"It's truly regrettable. We will probe the cause (of the failure)," Hiroto Habu, associate professor at JAXA who was in charge of development of the rocket, said, adding the latest incident will not affect the development and launch of other rockets at the agency.

Measuring 10 metres in length and 50 centimetres in diameter, the Japanese rocket was developed to provide a technologically reliable means to launch mini satellites — a growing segment of the commercial space market.

JAXA used commercially available components found in home electronics and smartphones for the rocket to demonstrate how the cost of placing satellites in orbit could be reduced.

The No 4 vehicle's total production and launch costs are estimated at around 500 million yen ($4.3 million).

The small satellite carrier, roughly a fifth the size of JAXA's mainstay H-2A launch vehicle, was a three-stage rocket based on a two-stage model that the agency has been using.

It was designed to place a satellite weighing up to 4 kilograms in orbit at altitudes of up to 2,000 kilometers above the Earth's surface.—*Kyodo News*

South Korea prosecutor weighs economic impact of arrest of Samsung chief

SEOUL — South Korea's special prosecutor said on Sunday it will take into account the economic impact of whether to arrest Samsung Group leader Jay Y Lee in connection with an influence-peddling investigation involving the president.

The office also delayed by one day, until Monday, its decision on whether to seek the arrest of Lee, the third-generation leader of South Korea's largest conglomerate, or chaebol, citing the gravity of the case.

The special prosecution had said it would make a decision on Lee by Sunday. But spokesman Lee Kyu-chul told reporters on Sunday investigators were deliberating all factors including the potential economic impact of the arrest of Jay Y Lee.

Prosecutors have been investigating whether Samsung provided 30 billion won ($25.46 million) to a business and foundations backed by President Park Geun-hye's friend, Choi Soon-sil, in exchange for the national pension fund's support for a 2015 merger of two Samsung affiliates.

Samsung Electronics vice chairman Jay Y Lee is surrounded by media as he leaves the office of the independent counsel in Seoul, South Korea, on 13 January, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

The Samsung chief denied bribery accusations during a parliamentary hearing in December.

Taking into account the economic impact could prove beneficial to the 48-year-old Lee. The imposition of less severe punishment on erring business leaders to avoid negative economic consequences has precedent in South Korea.

"Law and principle are the most important metric, and after also considering various factors mentioned previously, we will decide by law and principle," the prosecution spokesman Lee said, referring to economic impact, without elaborating.

A Samsung Group spokeswoman declined to comment.

Samsung's Lee was questioned for 22 hours before leaving the special prosecutors' office in Seoul on Friday morning as part of the investigation into a corruption scandal that has led to President Park's impeachment by parliament. Establishing a money-for-favour exchange between Samsung and Park or her surrogate is critical for the special prosecutor's investigation, analysts say.—*Reuters*

Washington protesters vow to fight for civil rights under Trump

Activists march during the National Action Network's 'We Shall Not Be Moved' march in Washington, DC, US, on 14 January, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

WASHINGTON — US civil rights activists vowed on Saturday to defend hard-fought gains in voting rights and criminal justice during the presidency of Donald Trump, kicking off a week of protests ahead of the Republican's inauguration.

About 2,000 mostly black protesters ignored steady rain to march and rally near Washington's Martin Luther King Jr Memorial, as speakers urged them to fight for minority rights and President Barack Obama's signature healthcare law, which Trump has vowed to dismantle.

The Rev Al Sharpton, the rally's organizer and a veteran civil rights leader, said Democrats in Congress needed to be sent a simple message: "Get some backbone."

"We march in the driving rain because we want the nation to understand that what has been fought for and gained, that you're going to need more than one election to turn it around," he said.

The rally drew fewer people than organizers had initially expected, but Sharpton said afterwards he was satisfied with the turnout, given the rain and temperatures hovering just above freezing.

"I really didn't think we'd get those kind of numbers," he said in a telephone interview.

Trump, a New York real estate developer, won with a populist platform that included promises to build a wall along the Mexican border, restrict immigration from Muslim countries and dismantle Obamacare.

His choice of Senator Jeff Sessions, an Alabama Republican, to become attorney general has raised concern among many on the left that Trump could weaken voting rights for minorities and roll back criminal justice reforms.

"We will march until hell freezes over, and when it does, we will march on the ice," said Cornell William Brooks, president and chief executive of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

The rally also included the Hispanic group La Raza, politicians, relatives of African-Americans slain by police, the National Urban League, Planned Parenthood and the Human Rights Campaign, an advocacy group for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender civil rights.

The rally came hours after Trump blasted US Representative John Lewis after the Georgia Democrat and civil rights campaigner said Russia's alleged hacking aimed at helping Trump put his legitimacy into question.

Trump replied on Twitter that Lewis should focus instead on his Atlanta district. "All talk, talk, talk - no action or results! Sad!," he wrote.

About 30 groups, almost all of them anti-Trump, have gotten permits to protest before, during and after the inauguration. Thousands of demonstrators have vowed to shut down the inauguration.

Washington police and the US Secret Service plan to have some 3,000 extra officers and an additional 5,000 National Guard troops on hand for security.

By far the biggest event will be the Women's March on Washington the day after the inauguration, which organizers say could draw 200,000 people.—*Reuters*

"We are Europe" French presidential candidate Macron tells rally

PARIS — "We are Europe, we are Brussels, we wanted it and we need it," French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron told thousands of supporters on Saturday in a call for a stronger and united European Union.

Opinion polls indicate that Macron, who is running as an independent in the April-May election, is gaining on the frontrunners, conservative candidate Francois Fillon and far-right leader Marine Le Pen.

"We need Europe because Europe makes us bigger, because Europe makes us stronger," Macron told 5,000 supporters, according to his team, calling for a true joint security and defence policy at EU level.

Immigration and security are key issues in the campaign, with Le Pen promising to be tough on immigration and radical Islam and to exit the EU's open-border Schengen area. Macron was addressing a rally in Lille, in northern France, a traditional Socialist bastion where Le Pen's eurosceptic National Front has performed strongly in recent local elections. Macron said that, in order to counter illegal immigration, European states must reinforce controls at external borders, have a common asylum policy managed from the countries of origin, and a joint intelligence policy.

"I don't propose an ideological policy in terms of immigration, but one that would be efficient, clear and carried out with our European partners," he said. —*Reuters*

NEWS IN BRIEF

Russia to upgrade its naval, air bases in Syria — Interfax

MOSCOW — Russia plans to improve and expand its naval and air bases in Syria, Interfax news agency reported on Sunday, citing an unnamed source, as Moscow cements its presence in the Middle Eastern country, its only overseas military deployment.

The source told Interfax that Russia will start repairing a second runway at Hmeimin air base near Latakia, while the Tartus naval base will be upgraded in order to handle bigger ships such as cruisers.

President Vladimir Putin has announced a partial withdrawal of Russian forces from Syria, where they have been helping forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad.

But Moscow wants to retain a permanent presence both in Hmeimin and Tartus. The source also told Interfax that Russia will still deploy S-300 surface-to-air defence systems and Bastion coastal missile launchers in Tartus.—*Reuters*

Britain and UAE launch joint military exercises

DUBAI — Britain and the United Arab Emirates launched a joint military exercise dubbed "Sea Dagger 2017", Emirati state news agency WAM reported on Sunday.

The exercise, which WAM said was aimed at "training on the planning, implementation and management of joint military operations", takes place as Gulf Arab and American rivalry with nearby Iran continues to simmer. Saudi Arabia and its smaller Gulf Arab neighbors accuse Iran of seeking to spread its power in the Arab world at their expense by backing Shi'ite Muslim militants in conflicts throughout the region, a charge Tehran denies. A US Navy destroyer fired warning shots at four Iranian military vessels in the Strait of Hormuz last week.—*Reuters*

Filipino police arrest local man over murder of 2 Japanese in Manila

DAVAO, (Philippines) — Philippine police have arrested a local man in the killings of two Japanese men in Manila in 2014 and 2015 in a "murder-for-insurance" case, local broadcasters reported on Saturday.

The police arrested an army reservist Kirby Patricio Tan at his home in the southern part of Manila where they seized guns and a grenade, according to the report.

Tan is suspected of fatally shooting 32-year-old Shinsuke Toba, who ran an osteopathic clinic in Yamanashi Prefecture, west of Tokyo, on 18 October, 2014, and Tatsuya Nakamura, 42, an acquaintance of Toba also from Yamanashi, sometime between 31 August and 1 September, 2015.—*Kyodo News*

Three men taken for questioning after Brussels anti-terror raid released

BRUSSELS — Three men detained for questioning late on Saturday after an anti-terror raid in the Brussels district of Molenbeek were released without charges, Belgian prosecutors said on Sunday.

Prosecutors said on Saturday that several houses had been searched in relation to an anti-terror investigation but that nothing was found. They did not give any details about the case.

Molenbeek gained international attention when locals with links to Syria took part in the November 2015 attacks that killed 130 people in Paris.—*Reuters*

At least 24 dead in India as boat capsizes in Ganges

BHUBANESHWAR — At least 24 people have drowned after a boat capsized in the Ganges river in India's eastern state of Bihar on Saturday, a government official said.

The incident took place in the evening, when people were using the vessel to go to watch kite-flying celebrations to mark a harvest festival.The boat was carrying 50 people, more than its capacity of 30, and it capsized not far from the shore in the state capital Patna, state Disaster Management Minister Chandrashekhar told Reuters.

Nineteen bodies had been found, he said, while 10 to 12 people managed to swim to safety. Eight people were rescued and admitted to hospital.

"We believe a minimum of four to five (more) bodies may be in the river," said Chandrashekhar, who goes by one name only.

He added that rescue operations were under way. —*Reuters*

Opinion

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

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

A mother's lap is paradise

Khin Maung Oo

NOWADAYS, Mothers' Day is honorably held across the world in recognition of a mother's gratitude. A tree gives shade and coolness to travelers. Likewise, a mother's "metta" or loving-kindness gives warmth and protection to her children wherever they may be. During the period of conception which lasts for over nine months, the baby lives in the mother's womb curled up with the knees touching its chest. Till the baby is born, the mother has to take care of her health and make sure that she sticks to a healthy diet. She suffers a lot and makes a lot of sacrifices.

From the time of birth we get all we need from our mothers plus a lot of tender loving care. For saying so, it may be tantamount to saying that we do not recognize the gratitude of our fathers. No, we do not mean to say that. In terms of the sacrifices and sufferings they have to go through for the sake of their offspring, we believe that mother's love is far greater than that of a father. So, we eulogize mother's love so much so that most of the people call their countries mother lands. They name their languages mother languages or mother tongues. For government service personnel, they call the departments under which they serve, their mother departments. Thus, we call the Ayeyawaddy River, Mother Ayeyawaddy.

Apart from a few, nearly all children love their mothers. Undeniably, we find it difficult to reciprocate our filial duties to our parents as much as we have received parental duties from our parents. To our great joy and delight, whatever it is, we see that many post their expressions of thanks and acknowledgements about their mothers' gratitude on Facebook. We used to suck milk at our mothers' breasts, lying in their laps. When we were young, we had slept in our mother's lap whenever we needed soothing words, whenever we felt sorrow or pain. It is not an exaggeration if we say that a mother's lap is a comfortable and safe place for a baby. Not to mention the fact that children and adolescent youths, even the aged can never forget the time when they lay in the lap of their mothers.

Presently, most of our Myanmar youths have been in foreign countries for further studies or for work. Before they get accustomed to their new environments and the culture and traditions of these new countries, they will surely feel homesick for their mothers and their motherland. Especially, those who get into trouble or fall into difficult situations, it is natural that they will miss families and their motherland and also feel downhearted. In fact, governments establish diplomatic and consular missions in foreign countries to protect the interests of their nationals. Now, our new government which was voted into power by the people has instructed its embassies to help our overseas students and workers to solve problems encountered in their learning and working environments. Thus, our embassies will become mother-like overseas institutions representing our government, in the near future. The embassies on their part should try their best to make their fellow citizens feel safe and welcome whenever Myanmar citizens come to them for assistance. They should act like mothers living in foreign countries so that overseas Myanmar citizens will feel the urge to rush to them and "sit in their laps", so to speak, whenever they need.

Last but not least, I would like to urge our national brethren to help in any way possible for the successful implementation of the Union Peace Conference — 21st Century Panglong, in order that our younger generations would be able to sit in the mother's lap peacefully.

Special Procedures and Special Rapporteur

Dr.Khine Khine Win

Special rapporteur on the situations of human rights in Myanmar, Ms. Yanghee Lee arrived in Myanmar for her fifth trip during last week. In this regard, many Myanmar people revealed their feeling on facebook and some people showed their feeling very seriously. After seeing their emotional talking about her on facebook, I would like to share the basic knowledge about what is special rapporteur, what are special procedures, why she is coming, what is her mandate.

What is special rapporteur? The Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. They are independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on thematic human rights issues in all parts of the world or a specific country.

In order to maintain their impartiality, these experts are not UN staff and they work in accordance with their personal capabilities and are not paid a salary, furthermore they do not represent their country of citizenship.

What are special procedures? Special Procedures are established by resolutions of the UN Human Rights Council (previously the Commission on Human Rights). The system of Special Procedures is a central element of the United Nations human rights machinery and covers all human rights: civil, cultural, economic, political, and social.There are two types of mandate in special procedures, thematic mandates and country mandates. As of 30 September 2016 there are 43 thematic and 14 country mandates.

What is thematic mandate? Thematic mandate is to monitor a thematic human rights issue in all parts of the world for a term of 3 years (renewable once, max 6 years). What is country mandate? Country mandate is to monitor the human rights situation in a specific country, appointed on a one year basis reviewed annually by HRC. Currently there are 14 country mandates, they are Belarus, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, DPR Korea, Haiti, Iran, Mali, Myanmar, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, Syria.

Sadly, the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar was first established in 1992 under the Commission on Human Rights Resolution 58 and extended annually. Because of Human Rights Resolution on Myanmar, the special rapporteur came to Myanmar.

Ms. Yanghee Lee was appointed by the UN Human Rights Council in 2014 as the Special rapporteur on situation of human rights in Myanmar. She is the fifth special rapporteur for Myanmar. Before, Mr.Tomas OJEA Quintana, (Argentina, 2008-2014), Mr. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro((Brazil), December 2000-April 2008) Mr. Rajsoomer LALLAH,(Mauritius, 1996-2000) (resigned on 02/11/2000) and Mr.Yozo YOKOTA (Japan, 1992- 1996) were special rapporteur of Myanmar.

What are the main activities for thematic mandate and country mandate? The main activities are country visits, thematic work/ reporting and communications. The Special rapporteur can undertake official country visit (upon invitation from the Goverment) with the aims to investigate and assess the human rights situations related to the mandate by meetings with representatives. End of the mission, a debriefing with government and a press conference will be held. Finally, special rapporteur will present report to the Human Rights Council. Observations of violations and specific recommendations made to Government, and also often to international community as well as specific UN Agencies.

Most experts (country mandte, thematic madate) are mandated to receive complaints about human rights violations related to their mandates. These complaints can concern human rights violations against individuals or groups of individuals. They can also relate to domestic legislation (draft or not), policies, programs or other measures affecting individuals or groups. Complaints can be submitted by victims, their representatives (families, lawyers), NGOs or other.The concerned Special procedures mandates review the information, then decide if they will send a communication to the Government concerned.

Here it should be noted that the communications of special procedures do not constitute a quasi-judicial procedure.

They can be brought against all States regardless of its status of ratification of international human rights treaties and no requirement to exhaust domestic remedies prior to submitting the complaint.

These are the some basic knowledge about special procedure and special rapporteur. Myanmar is one of the countries which still have country mandate out of 14 countries. Because of UNRS, Ms. Yanghee Lee came to Myanmar and she will monitor the situation of human rights and assess progress in implementation of her previous recommendations in line with her mandate from the UN Human Rights Council.

Being Myanmar citizen, we all have responsibility to work together to improve the human rights situation in Myanmar instead of blaming special rapporteur, Government need to fulfill its international human rights obligations and commitment. Let me believe, Yes we can.

References:

http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/Welcomepage.aspx

Startup investors fret over risks of mass data collection

SANTA BARBARA, (Calif.) — Nearly every technology startup wants the same thing: more data.

But in the rush to collect all manner of information about customers, tensions are rising in Silicon Valley over whether such practices amount to a form of surveillance that customers will ultimately find invasive.

Whether ordering an Uber, streaming music, shopping online or tracking a health condition, consumers are giving an unprecedented amount of information to technology companies.

"The data that companies ... have on you is significantly greater than you appreciate," Mark Suster, managing partner at venture capital firm Upfront Ventures, said in an interview at a conference in Santa Barbara, California, sponsored by CB Insights, a business data firm.

Discussions during the two-day conference centered on the importance of 'big data,' the catchphrase referring to massive information sets that are stored and analyzed by companies.

Collecting big data helps Airbnb, for instance, know whether its customers prefer to travel to the beach or mountains, and Uber knows popular drop-off locations and how to price trips.

Collecting large amounts of data is also paramount to developing artificial intelligence (AI), among the most highly sought technologies in Silicon Valley, which teaches machines to make decisions that humans previously had. AI can, for example, help a shopper decide on a new pair of shoes, help a doctor diagnose a disease and enable a car to drive itself.

But questions loom about how much personal information startups are collecting and how securely they store the data, with whom they share it and how they intend to use it.

"We are going to become comfortable with a level of surveillance that we never would have previously been comfortable with, because it makes things just a little easier," said Jeremy Liew, a venture capitalist with Lightspeed Venture Partners.

An illustration picture shows a network cable next to a pack of smartphones in Berlin, on 7 June 2013. PHOTO: REUTERS

Some startups have overstepped. Uber Technologies Inc faced an investigation by New York's attorney general into a feature known internally as "God View," which allowed employees to access and track the location of individual Uber riders without obtaining permission. Uber settled the matter and agreed to encrypt customers' geo-location data.

Peter Coles, head economist for Airbnb, said the data his company guards is fairly benign. "I think it is very unlikely that we would be collecting anything about users that they would be surprised to know."

But the tension was pronounced in one on-stage discussion at the conference. Matthew Zeiler, founder and chief executive of Clarifai, a visual recognition tool used in healthcare, suggested creating a Wikipedia-style database of anonymous patient data that was open to the public.

"That can be very harmful, especially to the patients," argued Gabriel Otte, founder and CEO of Freenome, a cancer-detection startup. Patients would be loath to tell the truth, he said, if they knew their most private health information was going to end up on the internet, even without their name attached.

Still, it is unclear if younger generations, who have grown up with apps such as Facebook and Snapchat that encourage sharing, view privacy in the same way.

"People don't care as much as they profess," Dave McClure, founding partner of 500 Startups, said in an interview. "Convenience is generally going to win over privacy."—*Reuters*

Britain may change 'economic model' if shut out of EU single market: Hammond

LONDON — Britain could change its economic model to regain competitiveness if it were to leave the European Union without an agreement on market access, British finance minister Phillip Hammond said in a German newspaper interview published on Sunday.

In a thinly veiled threat that Britain could use its corporate tax as a form of leverage in Brexit negotiations, Hammond told Welt am Sonntag he hoped Britain would remain a European-style economy with corresponding tax and regulation systems.

"But if we are forced to be something different, then we will have to become something different," Hammond said when asked directly about Britain's plans to lower corporate tax.

"If we have no access to the European market, if we are closed off, if Britain were to leave the European Union without an agreement on market access, then we could suffer from economic damage at least in the short-term," he said.

Britain's Foreign Minister Philip Hammond (R) and Foreign Ministry Political Director Tim Barrow arrive with fellow G7 foreign ministers for a working session, the fourth session of the their meetings in Hiroshima, Japan, on 11 April 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

"In this case, we could be forced to change our economic model and we will have to change our model to regain competitiveness," Hammond said. "We will change our model, and we will come back, and we will be competitively engaged."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has said the EU must consider limiting Britain's access to its market if London fails to accept the bloc's 'four freedoms' in Brexit negotiations.

The EU's single market emerged from the 1992 Maastricht Treaty on European integration. This enshrines the EU's "four freedoms" - of movement of goods, capital, people, and services.

British Prime Minister Theresa May has repeatedly said she will not reveal her Brexit negotiating strategy before triggering Article 50 of the EU's Lisbon Treaty, a step expected by the end of March.

May has said she wants Britain to regain control over immigration, restore its sovereignty and also establish the best possible trading relations with the EU.

But senior EU leaders have warned Britain there could be no "cherry picking", and Merkel has urged the 27 remaining EU states not to allow themselves to be divided.

Hammond said in the interview Britain had not taken a firm position yet on what form of immigration controls it wants.

"But we are aware that the message from the referendum is that we must control our immigration policy," he added.

Hammond said Britain did not want to close its doors completely to EU citizens who wanted to work in the UK.

"Clearly we need people to come and work in our economy to keep it functioning," Hammond said. "But we must have overall control."—*Reuters*

Nissan picks London for first European on-road autonomous car tests

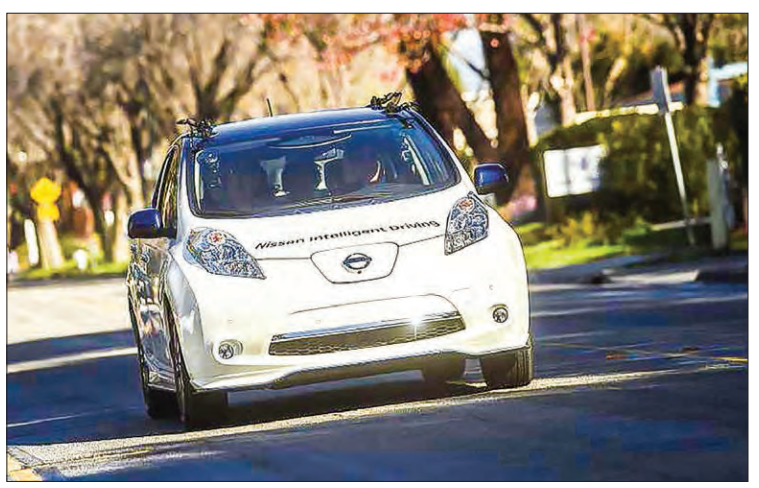
LONDON — Japanese carmaker Nissan (7201.T) said it will conduct its first European real-world trials of self-driving cars in London, choosing Britain just months after it said it would build two new models in the country despite concerns over Brexit.

The government has said it wants to encourage the development and testing of autonomous driving technology in Britain, helping build an industry to serve a worldwide market it reckons could be worth around 900 billion pounds ($1.1 trillion) by 2025.

On Friday Nissan said a modified version of its compact electric LEAF car equipped with autonomous driving technology will be tested in the capital next month, the first such demonstrations on European public roads.

"With future models secured and cutting-edge innovation being developed right here in the UK, we're looking forward to a strong future of designing, engineering and manufacturing in the country for customers right across the world," said Nissan Europe Chairman Paul Willcox.

In October the firm, which builds around a third of Britain's total car output, said it would expand production at its plant in northeast England with what a source described as a government promise of extra support to counter any loss of competitiveness caused by Britain's EU exit. —*Reuters*



An autonomous drive Nissan Leaf drives during a media preview of autonomous Renault-Nissan Alliance vehicles in Sunnyvale, California on 7 January 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Iraqi rapid response forces inspect a car during a battle with Islamic State militants in the district of Yarimja in southern Mosul, Iraq, on 14 January, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Iraq special forces sweep Mosul University for remaining militants — spokesman

MOSUL — Iraqi special forces swept the campus of Mosul University on Sunday to clear it of any remaining Islamic State militants after taking full control of the area, a spokesman said.

Counter-terrorism service (CTS) troops drove the jihadists back inside the strategically located university complex and seized clusters of buildings including colleges on Saturday, an important gain towards retaking the entire eastern half of the city.

"The university is completely liberated and forces are sweeping the complex for any hiding militants," CTS spokesman Sabah al-Numan told Reuters by phone. "Most buildings are booby-trapped so we're being cautious."

"We're not stopping," he added, saying the CTS was working to push into areas next to the university.

Parts of the sprawling campus overlook neighbouring districts in eastern Mosul, making it a crucial gain for taking remaining IS-held areas along the Tigris river, an Iraqi commander said this week.

Iraqi forces, backed by air cover from a US-led coalition, say they are close to recapturing the entire eastern bank of the river, bringing them in full control of eastern Mosul, and thus half of IS's last major Iraq stronghold.

Attacks on the west of the city, which Islamic State still fully controls, can begin once the east is secured. The Tigris bisects Mosul from north to south.—*Reuters*

Russia's Chechnya chief says over 50 suspected militants detained

MOSCOW — Ramzan Kadyrov, the hardline pro-Moscow head of Russia's Northern Caucasus Republic of Chechnya, said on Sunday that more than 50 suspected militants were detained in the biggest sting operation of recent years.

Moscow has waged two wars against separatists in the predominantly Muslim region since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The region is now ruled by Kadyrov, a former rebel fighter now loyal to President Vladimir Putin.

Civil rights activists accuse Kadyrov of arbitrary arrests of dissidents. Kadyrov said on his Instagram account that a group directed by a Chechen-born militant based in Syria had been targeted. "As of now, all the bandgroup was neutralized, more than 50 of its participants were delivered to police stations," Kadyrov said. The security situation in the North Caucasus region remains volatile as unemployment and corruption is rife, pushing some young men to embrace radical versions of Islam.

Some Chechens are known to be fighting as committed jihadis on the side of Islamic State in Syria and Moscow fears they may return to attack Russia, something they have threatened to do. The Kremlin has justified its campaign of air strikes in Syria by saying its main objective was to crush Islamic State.—*Reuters*

Syria fighting threatens deal to fix damaged Damascus water source

DAMASCUS — The Syrian army and allied militia clashed with rebels in Wadi Barada near Damascus on Sunday, threatening to disrupt planned repair works to a pumping station that supplies most of the capital's water, a war monitor said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the army and the allied Lebanese militia Hezbollah had made some gains against rebels in the Wadi Barada area. Heavy fighting reached the outskirts of the Ain al-Fija town, where the water springs are located, the British-based war monitor said.

Wadi Barada, a mountainous valley northwest of Damascus, has become a major battlefront in the Syrian war, and the damage to the pumping station has caused severe water shortages in the capital since the beginning of the year.

The governor of the Damascus Countryside province said on Friday that engineers had entered Ain al-Fija to repair the pumping station, as part of a wider agreement that included the departure of some rebels from Wadi Barada and a settlement with others who would remain there.

But the plan was derailed on Saturday evening, after armed men killed the head of a negotiation team who was overseeing the agreement and repairs, the Observatory said.

A military media unit run by Hezbollah said the army and its allies captured some positions overlooking Ain al-Fija on Saturday, after taking two nearby villages in recent days and edging closer towards the water facility.

The water spring was knocked out of service in late December. The United Nations has said it was damaged because "infrastructure was deliberately targeted", without saying who was responsible, leaving four million people in Damascus without safe drinking water supplies.

The UN warned the shortages could lead to waterborne disease outbreaks.—*Reuters*

Jordan's king reshuffles cabinet amid growing security, economic challenges

AMMAN — Jordan's King Abdullah reshuffled his cabinet but retained Hani Mulki as prime minister on Sunday, granting him more scope to tackle the threat of Islamist militants and to press ahead with unpopular IMF-mandated reforms to cut spiraling public debt.

The reshuffle, the second since the business-friendly Mulki was appointed last May, comes at a time of sluggish economic growth, poor business sentiment and concerns over Jordan's political stability following a series of security lapses.

Jordan has stepped up its role in the US-led military campaign against Islamic State in the region and risks being drawn into a prolonged conflict with the militants.

The five new ministers entering the cabinet include Ghaleb Zubi, a former police chief, as interior minister and Ayman Safadi, a long-time adviser to the royal family, as foreign minister, according to a palace statement.

Safadi has strong ties to the Gulf states and has been critical of President Bashar al-Assad in neighbouring Syria. Safadi, whose appointment was a surprise, replaces Nasser Joudeh, who has served as Jordan's chief diplomat since 2009. The outgoing interior minister, Salamah Hamad, had narrowly avoided a vote of no-confidence in parliament over his handling of an Islamic State attack in the southern city of Karak last month in which at least nine people, including a Canadian tourist and members of the security forces, were killed.

In another major security lapse, a Jordanian guard shot dead three members of the US special forces at an airbase last November, an incident that tarnished the image of the country's security forces and shook the confidence of its Western backers in its ability to handle security threats. Diplomats say the security lapses raise concerns over the possible radicalisation of some members of Jordan's military and security apparatus. Jordan is among the closest allies of the United States in the Middle East region.

In Sunday's reshuffle, Finance Minister Omar Malhas kept his job, in which he is overseeing a tough three-year programme agreed with the International Monetary Fund that aims to cut public debt to 77 percent of national output GDP by 2021 from 94 percent now.

Politicians and economists say the tough fiscal consolidation plan, which includes raising taxes on basic food and fuel items in the coming months and cutting subsidies, will worsen the plight of poorer Jordanians. Removing subsidies has triggered civil unrest in the past. Jordan's economy is expected to have grown by 2.4 percent last year, below an IMF target of 2.8 percent.—*Reuters*

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS SCHEDULE

YANGON TO BANGKOK

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
TG-304	09:50	11:45	Daily
TG-302	15:00	16:55	Daily
TG-306	19:50	21:45	Daily
PG-706	6:00	8:15	Daily
PG-702	10:30	12:25	Daily
PG-708	15:30	17:25	Daily
PG-704	18:20	20:15	Daily
8M-335	7:30	9:15	Daily
8M-331	16:30	18:15	Daily
UB-017	17:45	19:15	Daily
UB-019	8:00	9:30	3,5,7
UB-019	8:55	10:25	1,6

BANGKOK TO YANGON

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
TG-303	8:00	8:45	Daily
TG-301	13:15	14:00	Daily
TG-305	18:05	18:50	Daily
PG-701	8:45	9:40	Daily
PG-707	13:45	14:40	Daily
PG-703	16:45	17:35	Daily
PG-705	20:30	21:45	Daily
8M-336	10:15	11:00	Daily
8M-332	19:20	20:05	Daily
UB-020	10:35	11:10	3,5
UB-018	21:05	21:35	Daily
UB-020	11:30	12:05	1,6

YGN TO DMK

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
FD-252	8:30	10:20	Daily
FD-256	12:55	14:40	Daily
FD-254	17:35	19:25	Daily
FD-258	21:40	23:30	Daily
DD-4231	08:00	9:45	Daily
DD-4235	12:00	13:45	Daily
DD-4239	21:00	22:55	Daily
SL-201	11:00	13:35	Daily
SL-207	19:45	21:45	Daily

DMK TO YGN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
FD-251	7:15	8:00	Daily
FD-255	11:35	12:25	Daily
FD-253	16:20	17:05	Daily
FD-257	20:15	21:10	Daily
DD-4234	10:30	11:15	Daily
DD-4230	6:30	7:15	Daily
DD-4238	19:25	20:15	Daily
SL-200	08:45	10:00	Daily
SL-206	17:10	18:35	Daily

YGN TO CAN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
8M-713	20;25	01:00+1	1
8M-711	8:40	13:15	2,4,5,7
CZ-3056	11:35	15:50	3,6
CZ-3056	17:40	22:20	1,5

CAN TO YGN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
8M-714	2:05	3:40	2
8M-712	14:15	15:50	2,4,5,7
CZ-3055	8:40	10:35	3,6
CZ-3055	14:40	16:40	1,5

YGN TO SIN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
8M-231	8:20	12:40	Daily
SQ-997	10:25	15:10	Daily
MI-515	14:20	18:50	1,3,5
MI-519	17:35	22:10	Daily
MI-522	16:20	20:50	4,6
MI-533	13:35	20:50	2
3k-584	19:40	00:10	Daily
3K-582	11:35	16:05	Daily
TR-2823	9:25	13:55	1,2,4,5,7
UB-001	7:15	11:45	Daily

SIN TO YGN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
8M-232	13:45	15:15	Daily
SQ-998	07:55	09:20	Daily
MI-522	11:30	15:30	4,6
MI-518	15:15	16:40	Daily
MI-516	12:00	13:25	1,3,5
MI-533	11:30	12:45	2
3K-583	17:30	19:00	Daily
3k-581	09:10	10:40	Daily
TR-2822	7:20	8:45	1,2,4,5,7
UB-002	13:00	14:30	Daily

YGN TO NRT

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
NH-814	22:10	06:45	Daily

NRT TO YGN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
NH-813	11:00	16:30	Daily

YGN TO ICN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
KE-472	23:30	7:50	Daily

ICN TO YGN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
KE-471	18:30	22:30	Daily

YGN TO KUL

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
AK-505	8:30	12:45	Daily
AK-503	19:10	23:30	Daily
8M-501	16:10	20:10	2
8M-501	11:45	15:45	1
MH-741	11:15	15:40	Daily
MH-743	16:00	20:15	1,4,6,7

KUL TO YGN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
AK-504	6:55	8:00	Daily
AK-502	17:20	18:30	Daily
8M-502	16:45	17:45	1
8M-502	21:10	22:10	2
MH-742	13:55	15:05	1,4,6,7
MH-740	09:10	10:15	Daily

YGN TO KMG

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
CA-416	12:30	16:00	Daily
MU-2032	15:30	18:50	Daily
MU-2012	12:55	19:55	3

KMG TO YGN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
CA-415	10:50	11:30	Daily
MU-2031	13:50	14:30	Daily
MU-2011	08:20	11:55	3

YGN TO TPE

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
CI-7916	10:50	16:10	Daily

TPE TO YGN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
CI-7915	7:00	9:50	Daily

YGN TO PEK

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
CA-906	23:50	0550+1	1,3,5,7

PEK TO YGN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
CA-905	19:30	22:50	1,3,5,7

YGN TO HAN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
VN-956	19:10	21:30	Daily

HAN TO YGN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
VN-957	16:40	18:10	Daily

YGN TO SGN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
VN-942	12:10	14:55	2,3,4,5,7

SGN TO YGN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
VN-943	9:25	11:10	2,3,4,5,7

YGN TO HKG

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
KA -251	1:05	5:25	Daily
UB-8027	09:00	13:30	1,3,5,7

HKG TO YGN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
KA-250	21:50	23:45	1,3,5,7
KA-252	22:20	00:10	2,4,6
UB-8028	14:50	16:20	1,3,5,7

YGN TO DOH

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
QR-919	8:05	11:30	1,3,4,6,7

DOH TO YGN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
QR-918	20:10	5:20	1,3,4,6,7

YGN TO CNX

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
PG -724	13:40	15:35	Daily

CNX TO YGN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
PG-723	12:00	12:55	Daily

YGN TO DAC

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
BG-061	16:45	18:30	1,3,6

DAC TO YGN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
BG-060	13:30	16:00	1,3,6

MDL TO DMK

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
FD-245	12:55	15:15	Daily

DMK TO MDL

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
FD-244	11:10	12:25	Daily

MDL TO SIN

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
MI-533	15:45	20:50	2
MI-522	14:15	20:15	4,6

SIN TO MDL

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
MI-522	11:30	13:20	4,6
MI-533	11:30	14:50	2

MDL TO BKK

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
PG-710	14:10	16:35	Daily

BKK TO MDL

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
PG-709	12:00	13:20	Daily

MDL TO KMG

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
MU-2030	14:25	17:15	Daily

KMG TO MDL

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
MU-2029	13:20	13:15	Daily

NYT to BKK

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
PG-722	19:50	22:50	1,3,4,5,6,7

BKK TO NYT

Flight no.	Dep	Arv	Days
PG-721	17:20	19:20	1,3,4,5,6,7

AIRLINE CODES

8M	= Myanmar Airways International		
BG	= Biman Bangladesh Airlines		
MH	= Malaysia Airlines		
MU	= China Eastern Airlines		
NH	= All Nippon Airways		
SQ	= Singapore Airways		
PG	= Bangkok Airways		
UB	= Myanmar National Airlines		
VN	= Vietnam Airline		
3K	= Jet Star	AK	= Air Asia
AI	= Air India	CA	= Air China
CI	= China Airlines	CZ	= China Southern
DD	= Nok Airline	FD	= Air Asia
KA	= Dragonair	KE	= Korea Airlines
MI	= Silk Air	QR	= Qatar Airways
TG	= Thai Airways	TR	= Tiger Airline

DAY			
1	= Monday	4	= Thursday
2	= Tuesday	5	= Friday
3	= Wednesday	6	= Saturday
		7	= Sunday

SpaceX returns to flight, sending satellites into orbit

CAPE CANAVERAL — A SpaceX Falcon rocket blasted off from California on Saturday, returning the company to flight for the first time since a fiery launch-pad explosion in September.

The 230-foot (70-metre) rocket launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base at 9:54 am PST (1754 GMT) to deliver 10 satellites into orbit for Iridium Communications Inc. "It's a clean sweep - 10 for 10," SpaceX launch commentator John Insprucker said after the satellites were released.

SpaceX founder and entrepreneur Elon Musk's ambitious flight plans had been grounded since the 1 September explosion during fueling ahead of a pre-flight test in Florida.

About 10 minutes after Saturday's launch, the first stage of the rocket, which had separated from the rest of craft, successfully touched down on a platform in the Pacific Ocean, a feat previously accomplished by four other returning Falcon rockets. SpaceX intends to reuse its rockets to cut costs.

"Rocket is stable," Musk posted on Twitter. "Mission looks good." Two other returning Falcon boosters landed on the ground. The mission tested changes implemented by Space Exploration Technologies Corp, known as SpaceX, since the launchpad explosion. Accident investigators determined that a canister of helium burst inside the rocket's second-stage liquid oxygen tank, triggering the explosion. The canister is being redesigned, but until then SpaceX is addressing the issue by modifying its fueling procedures. The explosion destroyed a $62 million SpaceX booster and a $200 million Israeli communications satellite that it was to put into orbit two days later.

The accident clouded the company's aggressive agenda, which includes beginning to ferry US astronauts into space next year, when it also plans to make its first voyage to Mars. Saturday's flight begins to clear a logjam of more than 70 planned missions, worth more than $10 billion, involving SpaceX Falcon rockets, which last flew in August, SpaceX said.

The launch is the first in a seven-flight contract with Iridium worth $468.1 million, company spokeswoman Diane Hockenberry said. SpaceX aims to launch 27 rockets in 2017, more than triple the eight flights the privately held firm managed in 2016, according to a report on Friday in the Wall Street Journal. In addition to its dozens of commercial customers, SpaceX is one of two companies hired by NASA to fly cargo to the International Space Station.

The company's 2017 agenda includes the debut launch of a heavy-lift booster, flying its first reused rocket and repairing the Florida launchpad damaged in the explosion.—*Reuters*

SpaceX Falcon rocket lifts off from Space Launch Complex 4E at Vandenberg Air Force Base, California, US, on 14 January, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

US Supreme Court agrees to hear dispute over biologic drug sales

NEW YORK — The US Supreme Court on Friday agreed to hear a dispute over whether companies that make copycat versions of biologic drugs must wait six months after winning federal approval to begin selling them. The justices will take up an appeal by Novartis AG of a 2015 federal appeals court decision that prevented the Swiss pharmaceutical company from selling its biosimilar version of California-based Amgen Inc's $1-billion-a-year Neupogen until six months after the Food and Drug Administration approved it. The case could determine how quickly patients have access to biosimilar medicines at potentially cheaper prices.

Unlike traditional drugs, biologic drugs cannot be copied exactly to make generic versions. A 2010 federal law allows companies to seek approval to sell near-copies called biosimilars.

Biologic drugs are complex chemicals made inside living cells. Insurers expect biosimilars, like generics, to be cheaper than original brands.—*Reuters*

PHOTO: ITAR TASS

Russia to deploy more S-400 to Crimea: report

MOSCOW — Russia will deploy more S-400 Triumf missile systems to Crimea after the Obama administration extended sanctions against Russia for its actions in Crimea and Ukraine, said local media on Saturday.

"Deployment of additional S-400 systems to Crimea is foreseen, but I will not talk about the timing now," said Lt Gen Viktor Sevastyanov, a senior Russian air force commander, was quoted by RIA Novosti agency as saying.

An anti-aircraft missile regiment armed with the S-400 system had entered combat duty in Crimea, Russia's Southern Military District announced Friday.

The S-400 Triumf, by far Russia's most advanced surface-to-air missile system, is capable of hitting an airborne target at a distance of up to 400 km with medium- and long-range missiles.

Outgoing US President Barack Obama ordered Friday to extend punitive measures against Russia imposed in March, 2014 for one more year for "its purported annexation of Crimea and its use of force in Ukraine."

The United States and its allies accused Russia of fueling the conflict in southeastern Ukraine and illegally incorporating Crimea.

Moscow insisted that a vast majority of Crimea residents voted to rejoin Russia in a popular referendum.—*Xinhua*

Philippines' Duterte says he may impose martial law if drug problem 'virulent'

MANILA — Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has said he would impose martial law if the drug problem became "very virulent", just a month after dismissing as "nonsense" any suggestion he might do so.

Duterte has made a brutal war on drugs a central pillar of his administration since he took office in the middle of last year.

Since July, more than 6,000 people have been killed in the anti-drug campaign, in both police operations and unexplained killings by suspected "vigilantes". More than 1 million drug peddlers and users have been arrested or have surrendered to authorities.

Duterte, speaking to members of a chamber of commerce in the southern city of Davao late on Saturday, said he has sworn to protect the country against all threats, including drugs, which he said has affected about 4 million people. "If I wanted to, and it will deteriorate into something really very virulent, I will declare martial law," he said.

"No one can stop me," he said, referring to the Supreme Court and Congress.

"My country transcends everything else, even the limitations." The Philippines endured a decade of martial law from the early 1970s and memories of campaigns to restore democracy and protect human rights are fresh in the minds of many people.

Last month, Duterte appeared to rule out any possibility he might declare martial law. "That's nonsense. We had martial law before, what happened? Did it improve our lives now? Not at all," he said.—*Reuters*

German Eurowings flight to head home from Kuwait after bomb scare

FRANKFURT/DUBAI — A flight from Oman to Germany operated by Lufthansa's budget unit Eurowings will head home after getting the all clear by authorities in Kuwait where it made an emergency landing over a bomb scare, spokespeople for the airlines said.

A Lufthansa spokesman confirmed that the plane, which was flying from Salalah in southern Oman to Cologne, had made an emergency landing in Kuwait for aviation authorities to carry out investigations. It had 287 passengers and 10 crew on board.

No evidence of explosives was found on the plane, he said.

A statement from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) of Kuwait, published on state news agency KUNA, confirmed no explosives were found on board.

A Eurowings spokesman said passengers would be flown back to Germany from Kuwait on the same plane, an A330 jet. The pilot and relevant authorities had decided on an emergency landing as a preventive measure, he said, but declined to give further details of the incident.

Passengers had left the plane and were being looked after in a hotel while awaiting details for continuing flight home, he said.

Because the flight crew had exceeded its maximum working hours, the departure was scheduled for 2200 GMT on 15 January.—*Reuters*

At Paris meeting, major powers to warn Trump over Middle East peace

PARIS — Major powers will send a message to US President-elect Donald Trump on Sunday that a two-state solution between Israelis and Palestinians is the only way forward, and warn that his plan to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem could derail peace efforts.

Some 70 countries, including key European and Arab states as well as the permanent members of the UN Security Council, are due in Paris for a meeting that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected as "futile" and "rigged". Neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians will be represented.

But, just five days before Trump is sworn in, the conference provides a platform for countries to send a strong signal to the future American leader.

Trump has pledged to pursue more pro-Israeli policies and move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv, where it has been for 68 years, to Jerusalem, all but enshrining the city as Israel's capital despite international objections.

"It would be a unilateral decision that could escalate tensions on the ground," a senior French diplomat said.

"It's not negligible that 70 countries recall (the need for) a two-state solution when his administration could implement controversial measures that may aggravate things."

France has said the meeting does not intend to impose anything on Israel or the Palestinians and that, ultimately, only direct negotiations between the two can resolve the conflict.

"There is no time to waste," French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault told delegates at the opening of the all-day conference. "We are not sheltered from an explosion of violence."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (R) stands next to Republican US presidential candidate Donald Trump during their meeting in New York, on 25 September, 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

A draft communique seen by Reuters reaffirms existing international resolutions, urges both sides to restate their commitment to the two-state solution and disavow officials who reject it, and asks the protagonists to "refrain from unilateral steps that prejudge the outcome of final status negotiations".

Diplomats said the communique could be toughened up with an allusion to Trump's plans for Jerusalem and whether to have a follow-up to the French initiative intensely debated.

Relations between the United States and Israel have soured during President Barack Obama's administration, reaching a low point late last month when Washington declined to veto a UN resolution demanding an end to Israeli settlements in occupied territory.

Obama's secretary of state, John Kerry, said the settlement programme threatened Middle East peace, and that the two-state solution was in "serious jeopardy".

Palestinian President Authority Mahmoud Abbas said on Saturday that he had written to Trump warning that a move to Jerusalem would kill off the peace process and strip the United States of its role as honest broker — and could lead to the Palestinians going back on their recognition of Israel.

Home to Europe's largest Muslim and Jewish communities, France has tried to breathe new life into the peace process over the past year. It believes that, with the uncertainty surrounding how the next US administration will handle the issue, it is important to push the sides back to talks rather than allowing a fragile status quo to fester.

But with elections coming up this year in France and Germany, and Britain appearing to align itself more closely with the Trump administration on the issue, the prospects of the European Union, the largest economic partner for both Israel and the Palestinians, taking a lead on the matter appear unlikely.

Arab states have their own concerns about how Trump's relationship with them will turn out, and have taken a cautious line.

"All this is premature. We need to give the new US administration time to assess what they want to do," said a Middle Eastern diplomat based in Paris.—*Reuters*

Britain's May to call for national unity in major Brexit speech

LONDON — Prime Minister Theresa May will use a major speech on Brexit next week to call on Britons to reject the acrimony of last year's referendum and unite around the vision of a Britain more open to the world, her office said on Sunday.

May intends to kick off the formal process of negotiating the terms of Britain's exit from the European Union by the end of March, but has given little away about what deal she will be seeking, frustrating some investors, businesses and lawmakers. She is due to make a speech in London on Tuesday before an audience including foreign diplomats as well as Britain's own Brexit negotiating team and other senior officials, May's Downing Street office said in a statement.

Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May leaves Downing Street in London, Britain on 11 January, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

It said she would stress the need for Britons, who voted for Brexit by 52 to 48 percent in last June's referendum after a deeply divisive campaign, to unite around common goals such as protecting and enhancing workers' rights.

"Now we need to put an end to the division and the language associated with it — 'Leaver' and 'Remainer' and all the accompanying insults — and unite to make a success of Brexit and build a truly global Britain," May is expected to say. Her comments came as finance minister Philip Hammond said Britain could change its economic model to regain competitiveness if it were to leave the EU without an agreement on market access. Those comments, from an interview with German newspaper Welt am Sonntag, were interpreted as a warning that Britain could use its corporate tax as a form of leverage in Brexit negotiations.

"He appears to be making a sort of threat to the European community," said Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the opposition Labour Party. "It seems to me a recipe for some kind of trade war with Europe in the future."

Nevertheless, Corbyn said he would not block the triggering of 'Article 50' — the legal process of leaving the EU. An upcoming legal ruling could insist that May gets parliamentary approval for her plan to trigger Article 50 by the end of March.

The extracts of May's speech did not say whether she would reveal her stance on one of the key questions: whether she will try and keep Britain within the European single market or customs union or, if not, what level of access she will aim for.

The Sunday Times and other newspapers said the speech would signal that Britain was seeking a "clean and hard" Brexit, which would involve leaving the single market and the customs union. The report cited an unnamed source in May's office who said her words were likely to cause a market correction. A spokesman from May's office told Reuters the reports were speculation and did not comment further. The problem for Britain is that the EU is likely to insist on freedom of movement for EU citizens in return for full access to the single market, while many of those who voted for Brexit did so precisely in order to be able to restrict immigration. May's speech will be closely watched by financial markets for information on which of these divergent goals she will prioritise.

After she said in a TV interview a week ago that post-Brexit Britain would not be able to keep "bits" of its EU membership, the pound fell sharply as the comment was interpreted as signalling a clean break from the single market.

In a separate Sunday Times article, Brexit minister David Davis wrote that Britain would consider ways to extend or smooth the exit process to provide certainty for businesses.

"If it proves necessary, we have said we will consider time for implementation of new arrangements," he wrote.—*Reuters*

Ex-UN chief Ban says South Korea's THAAD deployment appropriate

SEOUL — Former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who is expected to run for president of South Korea, said on Sunday it is appropriate for the country to be the site of a US anti-missile system that is due to be deployed later this year.

"Since the reality is the Korean peninsula is in a quasi-war-like state, such action made by the government is appropriate," Ban was quoted by South Korea's Yonhap News Agency as saying.

China objects strongly to the planned deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system as it worries its powerful radar can penetrate its territory.

Ban said he "understands THAAD deployment is made as a defensive measure, as ultimately North Korea is developing nuclear missiles and accumulating ballistic missile technology," he was quoted as telling reporters at the memorial for the 2010 sinking of a navy ship that South Korea blames on the North.

"There is the issue of relations with neighbouring countries. This problem can be solved diplomatically," Ban said, according to Yonhap. Ban returned to South Korea on Thursday after his decade at the helm of the global body ended in December. He has yet to say whether or not he will run for president.—*Reuters*

Former UN chief Ban Ki-moon speaks during a news conference upon his arrival at the Incheon International Airport in Incheon, South Korea, on 12 January, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Chicken cull under way at farm in Gifu after bird flu detected

GIFU, (Japan) — Local authorities said Sunday they are culling all 80,000 chickens at a poultry farm in central Japan after a highly virulent strain of bird flu was detected Saturday, while they are also checking whether the flu has spread to neighboring farms.

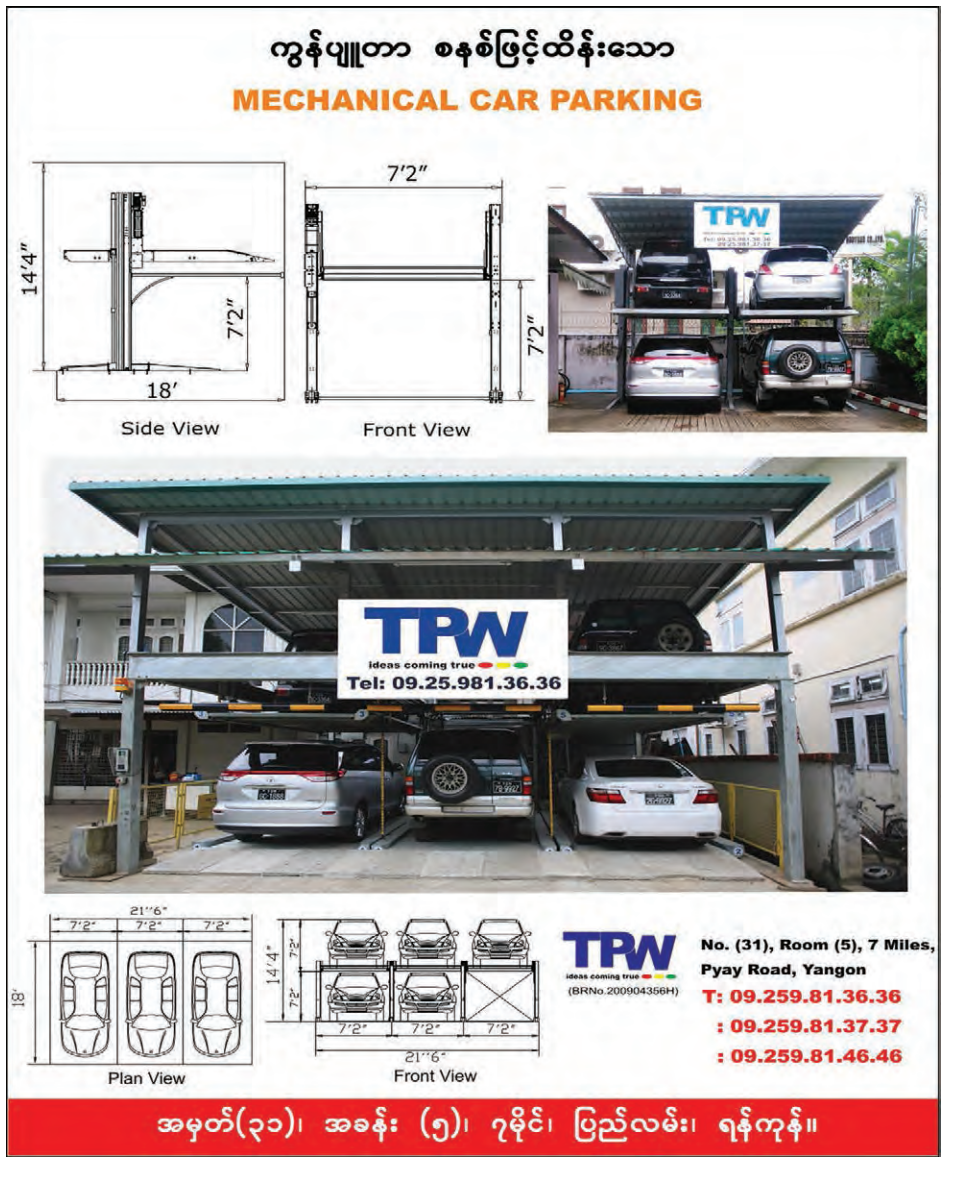
With a highly pathogenic H5 strain confirmed in a detailed analysis, the government of Gifu Prefecture began culling the chickens Saturday night at the farm in the city of Yamagata.

Since November, cases of the highly pathogenic H5 virus have been found at poultry farms in Niigata and Aomori prefectures, Hokkaido as well as in Miyazaki Prefecture.

Supplied photo taken on 15 January, 2017, shows local officials culling chickens at a poultry farm in Yamagata in Gifu Prefecture, central Japan, after a highly virulent strain of bird flu was detected a day earlier. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

On Sunday morning, Gifu Govorner Hajime Furuta met Kenichi Hosoda, parliamentary vice minister for agriculture, forestry and fisheries, to discuss ways to deal with the situation. Hosoda vowed to offer thorough support to the prefectural government.

The prefectural government has restricted the movement of poultry and eggs within a radius of 10 kilometers from the farm in question. The farm notified the prefectural government of a suspected bird flu case Saturday morning as it found more than 100 of its chickens had died. Of seven chickens examined by the local government, six tested positive in a preliminary exam. Further tests showed the presence of the H5 virus.—*Kyodo News*



Singer Jennifer Holliday pulls out of Trump inauguration event

Singer Jennifer Holliday performs during the 11th season finale of ''American Idol'' in Los Angeles, California, US on 23 May, 2012. PHOTO: REUTERS

NEW YORK — Broadway star Jennifer Holliday said on Saturday she was pulling out of a concert celebrating the inauguration of President-elect Donald Trump, citing an online article that cast the performance as a "betrayal" of her gay and lesbian fans.

The Tony-award winning singer, best known for her roles in the Broadway musicals "Dreamgirls" and "Your Arms Too Short to Box with God," announced the cancellation in a letter first published by The Wrap, an entertainment industry news website.

"I sincerely apologize for my lapse of judgment, for being uneducated on the issues that affect every American at this crucial time in history and for causing such dismay and heartbreak to my fans," Holliday said in the letter, which was released to Reuters by her representatives.

Holliday was not scheduled to perform at Friday's inauguration itself but at an event at the Lincoln Memorial the night before called the "Make America Great Again! Welcome Celebration." Also scheduled to appear are country music star Toby Keith, rock band 3 Doors Down and Oscar-winning actor Jon Voight.

In a column for the Daily Beast website, entertainment reporter Kevin Fallon called Holliday a gay icon for her work on Broadway and said that Trump had surrounded himself with politicians who vocally oppose LGBT rights.

"For the gay community that has bolstered Holliday's, in her own words, embattled and difficult career, and cheered on her recent successes, the news (of Holliday's planned performance) feels like a betrayal. It is heartbreaking," Fallon wrote.

In her letter, Holliday wrote that she had originally agreed to perform for Trump as a "bi-partisan songbird" who had sung for four presidents, both Republican and Democrat, dating back to Ronald Reagan. "I was honestly just thinking that I wanted my voice to be a healing and unifying force for hope through music to help our deeply polarized country," Holliday wrote.

"Regretfully, I did not take into consideration that my performing for the concert would actually instead be taken as a political act against my own personal beliefs and be mistaken for support of Donald Trump and Mike Pence," she said.

In addition to her career on Broadway, Holliday has found success on the pop charts and as a Gospel singer.

She won a Tony award in 1982 for her role as Effie White in the original production of "Dreamgirls" and two Grammy awards later that decade. —*Reuters*

Olivia Wilde best female role model: Jason Sudeikis

LOS ANGELES — Actor Jason Sudeikis has praised partner Olivia Wilde for being the perfect female role model for their daughter, Daisy.

The 41-year-old star said that he is not afraid anymore to raise their newborn girl as he trusts the instincts of the 32-year-old actress as a woman, reported People magazine.

Sudeikis said, "My joke, when we had Otis was, at least, having a boy, I have a better understanding of how Im going to screw him up. But with a little girl, I mean, she couldnt have a better role model in (Olivia Wilde) and my sisters and Olivia?s sisters and our mothers."

The "Son of Zorn" star called himself a feminist and said his outlook on womens issues and their treatment in society did a turnaround after the birth of their daughter, who was born in October 2016.

The couple also have a son Otis Alexander, who was born on April 20, 2014.—*PTI*

Actress Olivia Wilde. PHOTO: REUTERS

Post-Fukushima disaster character's popularity grows in Thailand

The Thai TV series Miraigar T1 is shot in Kakunodate, Akita Prefecture, on 6 September, 2016. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

AKITA — A Japanese hero character created in the aftermath of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami is growing in popularity in Thailand through a television program broadcast in the Southeast Asian nation.

The television show featuring the character named "Tohoku Gasshin Miraigar" (Miraigar God of Tohoku) has been broadcast in Thailand since November. It was initially launched in the disaster-struck northeastern Japan region in 2012 to entertain children suffering in the aftermath of the 11 March, 2011, natural disasters and subsequent Fukushima nuclear accident.

Akita Prefecture-based company Courage Force Inc developed the character by combining themes from Akita Prefecture's demon-like deity Namahage, the Nebuta summer festival in Aomori Prefecture and other famous aspects of four other northeastern prefectures. Since creating the character, the company has held live shows in support of disaster victims around the region.

In December 2014, Courage Force launched an overseas campaign, and President Tamotsu Ebina contacted Thai partners through an international exchange group. It later held a live show there and a decision was made in July 2016 to broadcast a Miraigar television programme.

The series named Miraigar T1, showcasing the character and a local counterpart, has proved very popular.

The programme depicts the two Miraigars fighting against demons in modern settings. Japanese singer Ichiro Mizuki put his voice to the theme song which is subtitled in Thai. The programme has been shot in popular sightseeing spots such as Kakunodate and Oga in Akita Prefecture, and Matsushima in Miyagi Prefecture, in a bid to attract Thai tourists.—*Kyodo News*

Dia Mirza joins cast of Sanjay Dutt film

MUMBAI —Actress Dia Mirza is the latest addition to the cast of Rajkumar Hirani's upcoming Sanjay Dutt biopic, which went on floors yesterday.

The actress shared a photograph from the set of the film in which she is seen cutting a cake with co-stars Ranbir Kapoor, who plays the lead role, Vicky Kaushal and the director. "The happiest place in the world is on a @RajkumarHirani film set #SanjayDuttBiopic #RanbirKapoor @vickykaushal09," Dia wrote on Twitter. The actress previously collaborated with Hirani in "Lage Raho Munnabhai.—*PTI*

Madame Tussauds unveils Amitabh Bachchan waxwork for Delhi opening

People take pictures of a waxwork of Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan at a photocall for the new Madam Tussaud's waxwork museum in New Delhi, India on 12 January, 2017.
PHOTO: REUTERS

NEW DELHI — Madame Tussauds unveiled a waxwork of Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan on Thursday ahead of the museum's opening later this year in the Indian capital of New Delhi.

Bachchan, 74, is one of Indian cinema's most revered and influential actors and has been a mainstay on screens for five decades.

"We looked at the culture and of course, we have a lot of Indian visitors in our existing attractions as well. Their feedback is so positive ... that we said we need to be there," Marcel Kloos, Merlin Entertainments' director of new openings in emerging markets said.

Guests at the unveiling photographed themselves alongside Bachchan, as well as with a waxwork of American popstar Lady Gaga.

The Delhi branch above the city centre's famed Regal Cinema is India's first Madame Tussauds, the museum's twenty-third globally and its ninth in Asia, where a growing middle class are prepared to pay to see wax figures of their favourite stars.

Wax statues of leading figures from Bollywood, sports and politics will feature in Delhi including one of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi — who is already in the London branch — as well as cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar. —*Reuters*

World's biggest travel rush kicks off

BEIJING — The world's most populous country kicked off its largest annual travel rush Friday, with a record number of trips expected during the Chinese New Year holiday season.

The 40-day travel frenzy from 13 January to 21 February is known as "Chunyun," the hectic period surrounding Chinese lunar New Year, or Spring Festival, which falls on 27 January this year.

The Chinese New Year celebrations are China's most important family holiday, with hundreds of millions of people heading for their hometowns to reunite with relatives and old friends, putting huge stress on the transport system.

A record 2.978 billion trips are expected during "Chunyun" this year, up 2.2 per cent year on year, according to the Ministry of Transport.

Up to 356 million trips are expected to be made via rail, up 9.7 per cent year on year.

A total of 2.52 billion trips are expected to be made via roads and 43.5 million trips via waterways, up 1 percent and 2 percent year on year, respectively.

Trips made via air are expected to rise 10 percent year on year to 58.3 million, the ministry said.

The ministry said that more passenger trains would be added during the period to deal with the extra numbers, and ticket purchase procedures would be simplified to improve services.

China's rapidly-developing high-speed railways will help ease the holiday strain for travelers. The country boasts a high-speed rail network of more than 20,000 km, the world's largest. —*Xinhua*

Passengers access to Hankou Railway Station in Wuhan, capital of central China's Hubei Province, on 13 January 2017.
PHOTO: XINHUA

mitv Myanmar International
Programme Schedule

(16-1-2017 07:00am ~ 17-1-2017 07:00am) MST

07:03	Am	News
07:27	Am	Myanmar Delicate Artistic Creations-Gem Stone Painting)
07:46	Am	Amazing: Magician Sak Kaw Ma
08:03	Am	News
08:26	Am	Travelogue "Chaung Tha at its peak period"
08:41	Am	Marketable Goods (Myanmar Arts & Handicrafts)
08:53	Am	Independent Filmmaker
09:03	Am	News
09:27	Am	Shwe Maw Daw : The Glory of Bago City
09:53	Am	School for the Blind
10:03	Am	News
10:26	Am	Crab Business (Part-II) Soft Shell Crab
10:38	Am	On the River

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

Prime Time

07:03	Pm	News
07:27	Pm	Food Trip (Ep-10)(Part -1)
08:03	Pm	News
08:26	Pm	Discovering Tribes "Lisu: Their Life and Customs (Part-I)
08:49	Pm	Beauties of Makyee Island - Island of Tamarind Tree

(09:00 Pm ~ 11:00 Pm) -Today Repeat (09:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(11:00 Pm ~ 03:00 Am)- Sunday 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)

Scientists find clues to why binge-drinking causes binge-eating

Union flags and a paper hat lie on a table with empty glasses at a Leave.eu party, as votes are counted for the EU referendum, in London, Britain on 24 June, 2016.
PHOTO: REUTERS

LONDO — Scientists have found that the brain cells in mice that stimulate the urge to eat can be activated by alcohol as well as by hunger — a discovery that could help explain why binge drinking often leads to binge eating.

In an experiment, mice subjected to a three-day "alcoholic weekend" were found to eat significantly more food than mice that stayed sober.

The results, published in the journal Nature Communications on on 10 January, show that major components of the brain's feeding circuits are activated by alcohol, the researchers said.

"Our data suggest that alcohol sustains fundamental appetite signals, (and does) not just disinhibit their behavioral manifestation," wrote Denis Burdakov, who led the study at the Francis Crick Institute in London.

Consumption of alcohol has previously been linked to overeating in humans, but the underlying causes were unclear — particularly since alcohol is high in calories, and calorie intake usually suppresses brain appetite signals.

Burdakov said his study found that specific hunger-promoting brain cells known as Agrp neurons, which form part of the feeding circuit in mouse brains, are activated by alcohol.

To test the validity of their findings, Burdakov's team were able to block activity of these neurons in some mice, and they found that this eliminated alcohol-induced overeating.

This shows, they said, "that the alcohol-associated activity of Agrp neurons...is the critical step in alcohol-induced overeating".

Obesity and heavy drinking are major causes of heart disease, diabetes and other chronic health problems affecting millions of people worldwide. Public Health England said last month that eight out of 10 middle-aged adults in Britain either weigh too much, drink too much or exercise too little.—*Reuters*

THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

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Dark horse Konta keeping it all in perspective

MELBOURNE — Johanna Konta did her best to downplay expectations on Sunday but there was no quieting the chatter around Melbourne Park that, for the first time in decades, Britain has a genuine contender for the Australian Open women's crown.

Having been born and raised until her early teens in Sydney has clearly helped the 25-year-old to a higher profile in a host nation desperate for local success, even by proxy, but there are good reasons why the ninth seed is attracting such attention.

A surprise run to the semi-finals at last year's tournament was followed by a season where Konta won her maiden title at Stanford and moved into the top 10 for the first time, just missing out on a spot at the season-ending WTA Finals.

The chatter reached fever pitch last Friday, however, when Konta simply demolished world number three Agnieszka Radwanska in the city of her birth to claim her second tour title.

Britain's Johanna Konta reacts during a news conference ahead of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne, Australia, on 15 January, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Konta's huge improvement over the last year has come on the back of intensive work on the mental side of her game, so it was no surprise that she was not buying into talk of grand slam titles on Sunday.

"I'm definitely very pleased with the level I played," she said of the Sydney International final.

"But we all know that it's not a given. It doesn't decide how you will do in the next event. I'm taking it as a positive from the week itself, but I'm looking to, again, work hard here and really try to do the best that I can here."

Virginia Wade was the last Briton to win the Australian Open back in 1972 and her 1977 Wimbledon triumph remains the last in a grand slam by a British woman.

"It's always been my dream to be at the top of the game," Konta added when asked about whether she could keep her career on an upward trajectory.

"As a possibility, of course. But I think there's a lot of work to be done between reality and dreams. I think there's work to be done there." The work starts again on Tuesday in a first round tie against Kirsten Flipkens, who beat Konta in their one previous meeting and reached the Wimbledon semi-finals in 2013.

"I'm looking forward to the challenge, the opportunity to play her again. She's a great player," Konta said. "She's been around the tour for a long time. That's by no accident."

Konta split with coach Esteban Carril last December soon after her sports psychologist Juan Coto, a friend of the Spaniard, died suddenly at the age of 47.

Belgian Wim Fissette, a former mentor of grand slam champion Kim Clijsters, has taken up the coaching reins and Konta was pleased with how the relationship was going.

"I guess we're doing well together," she laughed. "I think he's a very calm individual, but he's also quite funny. So far we're having a good time."

Having a good time is clearly important to a player like Konta, who struggled to deal with the pressures of the game before she embarked on her meteoric rise. "I am extremely grateful and really am enjoying what I do," she said. "I really love playing. I love learning. I just try to make the most out of every single day, and therefore really just maximise the career that I have." —*Reuters*

Chelsea's Gary Cahill attempts an overhead kick Premier League Leicester City and Chelsea at the King Power Stadium on 14 January, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Chelsea manager Antonio Conte. PHOTO: REUTERS

Chelsea, Spurs and Arsenal enjoy big wins

LONDON — Chelsea made light of striker Diego Costa's absence to extend their lead at the top of the Premier League to seven points on Saturday with a 3-0 win at champions Leicester City.

After a Harry Kane-inspired Tottenham Hotspur and a ruthless Arsenal side kept up the pressure at the top with 4-0 victories, Chelsea found an unlikely hero in wing back Marcos Alonso, who scored their first two goals at the King Power Stadium.

All the pre-match ballyhoo had been about Costa, the league's leading marksman, having been dropped from Antonio Conte's squad amid reports of a fall-out over his fitness.

Before the game, though, Chelsea released quotes from Conte on their official Twitter site saying that Costa had not trained since Tuesday because of "a pain in his back".

"We played without Diego against Bournemouth and we have had time to prepare for this. We've prepared very well," Conte said. That preparation was shown swiftly as Spaniard Alonso struck early in both halves and Pedro completed a rout of the feeble champions as Chelsea moved to 52 points, seven clear of Spurs.

Liverpool, on 44 with third-placed Arsenal, could regain second spot and cut the gap at the top back to five points if they win at Manchester United, who are fifth, on Sunday.

Tottenham striker Kane had a special day with a brilliant hat-trick in the 4-0 demolition of West Bromwich Albion that saw Mauricio Pochettino's ever-improving contenders move into second with a seventh straight win in all competitions.

It was Kane's first match since he became a father last Sunday. "It's amazing. The week has been a whirlwind having a little daughter - to finish it off like this is the best way possible," he said, after taking his season's tally to 13 league goals.

Arsenal went up to third on goal difference after Olivier Giroud struck his fifth goal in as many games to set them on the way to a 4-0 trouncing of Swansea City, who are now bottom.

Between Giroud's opener and Alexis Sanchez's 73rd minute effort, Paul Clement, in his first league game in charge of the Swans, also had to watch miserably as Jack Cork and Kyle Naughton deflected Alex Iwobi shots past their own keeper.

Hull City recovered to beat Bournemouth 3-1 with a double from Abel Hernandez giving new manager Marco Silva the ideal league debut as they leapt from last place above Swansea and Sunderland, who were beaten 3-1 at home by Stoke City.

Peter Crouch scored his 99th league goal for the Potters — a header, naturally — while Marko Arnautovic netted twice, but the goal of the day came from West Ham's Andy Carroll who struck an astonishing mid-air volley in a 3-0 win over Crystal Palace.

"It's been a while in the making. I've been trying for a couple of years. It's got to be the best goal I've scored," the striker, who has suffered from a string of injuries, said.—*Reuters*

Barca ease past Las Palmas to provisionally go second

MADRID — Luis Suarez scored a brace and Lionel Messi was also on target as Barcelona thrashed Las Palmas 5-0 on Saturday with a ruthless second-half display at the Nou Camp to provisionally go second and cut the gap with leaders Real Madrid to two points.

Uruguay international Suarez scored his 101st goal for Barcelona by stroking in Andre Gomes' cutback in the 15th minute as the Portuguese midfielder recorded his first assist for the club since his 35-million-euro move from Valencia last summer.

Barca coach Luis Enrique had rotated his side after Wednesday's 3-1 victory over Athletic Bilbao in the King's Cup, resting Neymar, Gerard Pique, captain Andres Iniesta and Sergi Roberto but still watched his side dominate Las Palmas.

Messi scored for the seventh consecutive competitive game by mopping up a loose ball on the rebound in the 52nd minute after Rafinha's shot was only parried by goalkeeper Javi Varas, while Suarez curled in a pass from Rafinha to get his second and Barca's third in the 57th.—*Reuters*

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