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Vol. III, No. 315, 14th Waning of Tabodwe 1378 ME www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com Saturday, 25 February 2017

THILAWA SEZ BEGINS EXPANSION

AN expansion project of the Section 2 of the Thilawa Special economic zone near Yangon was launched yesterday, with Vice-President U Henry Van Thio cutting a ribbon together with Union ministers and Japanese officials.

The construction of the 101-hectare Zone B, has begun located directly south of the 405-hectare Zone A, which is already in operation.

Speaking at the ceremony, Union Minister for Commerce Dr Than Myint thanked the Japanese government and the private sector for their support for the success of Thilawa, Myanmar's first operational special economic zone.

"The first level of Special Economic Zone A has been implemented and has produced export products and has recreated job opportunities for local residents. Now, As Zone B is going to be implemented, foreign investment will increase and could form more job opportunities for local residents. It is an important step for Myanmar-Japan relations which has been growing for 63 years," he said.

"There were opportunities as well as many challenges in implementing this Thilawa SEZ. However, both the government and private sectors of Japan and Myanmar had successfully overcome these challenges to reach this far," he added.

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Vice President U Henry Van Thio and dignitaries cut a ceremonial ribbon to launch the expansion project of the Thilawa SEZ. PHOTO: MNA

Discussion at Pyidaungsu Hluttaw on 5 million euro loan from German bank

Members of Parliament discussed at their meeting yesterday the issue of taking a 5 million euro loan from KfW Development Bank of Germany proposed by the President for a project to improve the Locomotive Engine Factory.

Military Member of Parliament Colonel Myint Swe said that the project would enable the maintenance of broken-down locomotive engines and restoration of old engines that cannot presently be fixed. The improved factory would be able to install new underfloor wheel laths allowing for smoother, quicker and safer rail travel. The loan would also be used to obtain practical and theoretical training courses for staff and improve their skills and efficiency.

Myanmar train transportation is an important part of the country's development because an efficient rail system would allow commodities to be transported cheaply and quickly, which would control price fluctuations and harmoniously support urban rural development, he said.

Colonel Myint Swe said it was necessary to have a modern train system similar to developed countries. He also said the 5 million euros would be used effectively without waste.

U Kyaw Naing, the MP for No. 12 Constituency in Yangon Region, Daw San San Ei, MP for Mohnyin constituency and U Khin Cho, MP for Hlaingbwe constituency also supported the proposal.

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Discussion at Pyidaungsu Hluttaw on 5 million euro loan from German bank

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The Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Htuttaw announced that other Members of Parliament could share explanations and make decisions on the issue at the tenth day of fourth regular section of second Pyidaunsu Htuttaw.

During the meeting, the appointment of Minister for Kayah State Security and Border Affairs was sent to the president by the speaker of Pyidaungsu Htuttaw and the second amendment of Union Election Commission Draft and third amendment of the 1973 Myanmar Board of Examination draft were recorded.

U Aung Kyi Nyunt, MP for No. 4 constituency in Magway Region, read the reports which included remarks and findings concerning the privacy, security and protection bill on which two Htuttaws have not agreed.

The speaker of Pyidaungsu Htuttaw announced that MPs who wanted to discuss the draft could enroll for discussion.

Then, the Speaker approved the 2017 Union Tax draft by taking decisions section by section from the attendees.

U Kyaw Tin, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, made explanation to set up diplomatic relations with Guinea, Malta, Ecuador, Seychelles, Liberia, the Marshall Islands and the Holy See (the Vatican). The speaker invited the participants to enter into a discussion.

The MPs discussed the basic principles of the National Plan for the 2017-2018 fiscal year draft and its projects.

Daw Khin Than Nu, MP for Mindon constituency, said huge amounts of public money were wasted when projects which were not known to Members of Parliament, who are selected by the people, were not provided with basic needs.

She said that the projects should be transparent to the public when being implemented. The systematic implementation in accordance with 12 suggestions by the draft committee would result in flawless projects, she said. Therefore, the draft committee should verify the annual budget proposal to be utilised effectively for the public.

U Khin Maung Myint of the Yatsauk Constituency asked which departments under the Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation ministry can help with the drinking water availability for villages.

In the 2017-2018 National draft plan, although the Union Ministry's vision, policy and procedures were good, the approved budget should be equally allocated for the development in townships and rural areas.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint receives Swedish Parliament Speaker

PYITHU Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint received a delegation led by H.E. Mr. Urban Ahlin, Speaker of the Swedish Parliament (the Risksdag), yesterday morning at Zabuthiri guest house of the Hluttaw Building in Nay Pyi Taw.

The meeting was attended by Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint, Pyithu Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U T Khun Myat, Pyithu Hluttaw Economic and Financial Development Committee member Daw Wint Wah Tun, Transportation, Communications and Construction Committee member Daw Yin Min Hlaing, Myanmar Investment and Industrial Development Committee member U Nay Lin Tun and officials of the Pyithu Hluttaw Office and delegation led by H.E. Mr. Staffan Herrstrom, Ambassador of Sweden to Myanmar.

During the meeting, they discussed matters related to bilateral cooperation between the parliaments of the two countries, the Hluttaw's legislative and legal affairs, Myanmar's internal peace, national reconciliation, rule of law and democratic reform.

In the afternoon, Hluttaw Speakers hosted a luncheon for Speaker of the Riksdag and his delegation. Also present were Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint, Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than, Pyithu Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U T Khun Myat, Amyotha Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U Aye Thar Aung, Chairman of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw's Commission for the Assessment of Legal Affairs and Special Cases Thura U Shwe Mann, Chairmen, secretaries, members from the Pyithu Hluttaw and Amyotha Hluttaw Committees and officials of the Hluttaw Offices.

Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint spoke words of greeting and Speaker of Swedish Parliament gave words of thanks. —*Myanmar News Agency*

Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker holds talks with Swedish Parliament Speaker. PHOTO: MNA

Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker receives Swedish Parliament Speaker

Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than holds talks with Swedish Parliament Speaker in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. PHOTO: MNA

AMYOTHA Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than received his counterpart, H.E. Mr. Urban Ahlin, Speaker of the Swedish Parliament (the Riksdag), at Amyotha Hluttaw Building yesterday morning in Nay Pyi Taw.

During the meeting, they discussed promotion of bilateral cooperation between the two Hluttaws and the legislative processes of the two countries.

Amyotha Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U Aye Thar Aung and officials from the Amyotha Hluttaw Office attended at the meeting.—*Myanmar News Agency*

UEC says election complaint valid

THE Union Election Commission accepted the complaint of U Hla Swe, a candidate representing the USDP of constituency 12, Magway Region, for the parliamentarian seat in Amyotha Hluttaw as election complaint case No. 17/ 2015, applying for the official announcement that he should be declared as the winner in the election for the reason that U Pyu Lwin, the candidate representing NLD of the same constituency, won the victory in the election by exercising unfair malpractices and only he must be declared as the winner, as he got most of the eligible votes unless the amounts of dubious ballots were counted.

After hearing the case with U Hla Tint, UEC member as chairman, and U Kyaw Thu and U Khin Maung Win as members, the jury No. 4 pronounced a decree against the complainant on 24 February 2017, deciding the jury declared the validity of U Pyu Lwin's appointment as the Amyotha Hluttaw representative at the constituency 12 of Magwe region, and simultaneously the jury decided that the complainant would be liable for the court expenses; hence U Hla Swe is required to pay Ks100,000 to U Pyu Lwin, it is learnt.

As of 24 February 2017, there were a total of 45 complaint cases concerning the 2015 general election submitted to the Union Election Commission, and all cases have already been tried and decrees pronounced. If there is any complaint over the decree 17/2015 pronounced by the jury formed by the UEC, the complainant can appeal within 15 days from the issue date of the decision, under section 74(A) of Amyotha Hluttaw election law, it is learnt. —*Myanmar News Agency*

Protest, prayers outside Thai Embassy in Yangon over possible crackdown on Dhammakaya Temple in Bangkok

Zaw Gyi (Panita)

PRAYERS requests for Thai authorities not to crack down on the Dhammakaya temple in Bangkok that has defied orders to hand over a wanted monk was held in front of Thai embassy in Yangon yesterday afternoon.

Buddhist monks and nationalists chanted prayers and held posters yesterday written in Myanmar, Thai and English reading: "May the King of Thailand and its subjects be healthy and wealthy! May monks and laymen in Dhammakaya temple be free from the danger of terrorism!"

It is learnt that the praying ceremony and demonstration was held because of riots that broke out between Thai monks and Thai police during a search for the Dhammakaya temple's abbot for alleged money laundering. It is feared that authorities may forcefully enter the temple in their search for the abbot.

A spokesman for Thailand's Department for Special Investigations said the operation was being carried out in a manner respectful to Buddhism.

State Counsellor receives President of the Russian-Myanmar Society of Friendship and Cooperation and Swedish Parliament Speaker

DAW Aung San Suu Kyi, State Counsellor and Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, received a delegation led by Mr. Mikhail A. Dmitriev, President of the Russian Society of Friendship and Cooperation with the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday and exchanged views on the promotion of friendly relations between the peoples of the two countries.

The State Counsellor and Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Daw Aung San Suu Kyi also received H.E. Mr. Urban Ahlin, Speaker of the Swedish Parliament (the Riksdag) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday and exchanged views on the peace process, the transition process in Myanmar and the promotion of bilateral relations and cooperation between Myanmar and Sweden.—*Myanmar News Agency*

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi welcomes Mr. Mikhail A. Dmitriev at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

VP U Myint Swe receives FEC's Japan-ASEAN Cultural and Economic Exchange Committee Chairman

Vice President U Myint Swe holds talks with Mr. Norio Yamaguchi at the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

VICE President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar U Myint Swe received a delegation led by Mr. Norio Yamaguchi, Chairman of the International Friendship Exchange Council of Japan (FEC), Japan-ASEAN Cultural and Economic Exchange Committee, yesterday at the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw.

During the meeting, they discussed matters related to the development of living standards, farming, livestock and fishery sectors of Myanmar, the development of human resources and providing assistance programmes of Japan for sustainable development of the business sector.

Also present at the meeting were U Kyaw Myo, Deputy Minister for Transport and Communications and officials.—*Myanmar News Agency*

President U Htin Kyaw receives Sweden's Parliament Speaker

President U Htin Kyaw welcomes Sweden's Parliament Speaker Mr. Urban Ahlin. PHOTO: MNA

PRESIDENT U Htin Kyaw received Speaker of the Swedish Parliament H.E. Mr. Urban Ahlin and his delegation at 4 pm yesterday at the Credentials Hall in Nay Pyi Taw.

During the meeting, they discussed matters related to friendship and promoting cooperation, enhancing the economic co-operation between Sweden and Myanmar in the metal and forestry sectors, Sweden's support for Myanmar's peacemaking process and the building of a democratic nation and providing assistance for the development of the state.

Also present at the meeting were Pyithu Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U T Khun Myat, Amyotha Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U Aye Thar Aung, Union Minister for Ethnic Affairs Nai Thet Lwin, Deputy Minister for Planning and Finance U Maung Maung Win and officials.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Thilawa SEZ begins expansion

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At the opening ceremony, U Set Aung, Mr Haruhiko Ando, Deputy Director General from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, H.E Mr Tateshi Higuchi, Mr Hideo Watanabe, the chairman of the Myanmar-Japan Association and others gave separate messages and presented certificates of honour to a local resident.

Zone B is scheduled to be completed in mid-2018, with developer and operator Myanmar Japan Thilawa Development Ltd. planning to make available some land for leasing to investors by late this year.

The first phase of the new extended Zone B take places on a 101-hectare area and is estimated to be finished in 2018. Some locations could be lent to investors as early as the end of 2017.

The first phase of Thilawa SEZ was opened in September, 2015 and the Zone B project will take only 39 months to be opened.

The reason for the Zone B extension is because of the success of Thilawa Special Economy Zone, in which many investors expressed interest. Since 2014, 78 companies from 16 countries have selected the place for production and logistics industries, and now have 24 factories operational. Currently, 95 per cent of Zone B has been lent.

The Myanmar-Japan Thilawa Development Company was established in January, 2014.

Today, Thilawa SEZ's gross investment is reaching US$1.05 billion and will create 40,000 jobs after Zone B project is finished. It said that so far, 78 companies from 16 different countries have opted to locate their factories, production facilities, or logistic facilities in Thilawa, with total investment exceeding $1 billion.

Half of those companies are from Japan, according to Japanese officials.

The joint venture industrial complex, which is about a 23-kilometer drive from central Yangon, has been allocated a total of 2,400 hectares of land by the Myanmar government.

MJTD involves a consortium of three major Japanese trading firms — Mitsubishi Corp., Marubeni Corp. and Sumitomo Corp. — which jointly hold a 49 percent stake on the company. The rest is held by the government and nine local companies.

Those present were the Union Minister for Commerce, Dr Than Myint, Chairman of Thilawa Special Economic Zone Management Committee and vice chairman of Central Bank U Set Aung, Regional Ministers, Members of Parliament, officials, the Japanese Ambassador to Myanmar H.E Mr Tateshi Higuchi, Chairman of Myanmar Japan Thilawa Development Co. and members, responsible person from JICA, Chairman of Myanmar Thilawa SEZ Holdings Public Co. and members, Chairman of Myanmar Thilawa Public Company,

The Vice President and members planted a tree as a symbol of opening construction.—*GNLM*

Workshop on undergraduate Dental Medicine courses held in Yangon

WORKSHOP towards an outcome-based curriculum for the Bachelor's of Dental Science (BDS) degree course was held on 23 and 24 February at University of Dental Medicine in Yangon.

The workshop towards undergraduate Dental Medicine courses was attended by 31 members of the faculty from Dental Medicine Universities of Yangon and Mandalay.

Responsible officials from the Department of Health Human Resources and other medicine-related universities gave talks at the workshop. —*Myanmar News Agency*

The palace of Hsenwi Sawbwa seen at Hsenwi town, northern Shan State. PHOTO: MYITMAKHA NEWS AGENCY

Palace of Hsenwi Sawbwa to be restored

THE palace of Hsenwi Sawbwa and culture heritage will be restored in Hsenwi town, northern Shan state to boost the number of tourists, it is learnt.

"If we can restore such culture heritage, most of the tourists will come and visit there. Our region can earn the revenue from the tourists. Our local people who are selling the traditional food and handicrafts will get the job opportunities. We will restore Shan palace and culture heritage with the aim of developing our region," said Daw Nan Khin Htar Yee, Shan state Hluttaw MP from Constituency 1 in Hsenwi township.

"I just know that Hsenwi has many culture heritages. I am proud to be a resident of. I want to invite all of you to visit our town," said Ma Nan Yin Kyawt, a local resident from Hsenwi town.

There is a well the water of which does not run out of the whole year in the compound of five-tier monastery. Moreover, there are many traditional foods of Hsenwi town, Shan palace and graveyard and, waterfall. —*Myitmakha News Agency*

Intravenous drugs factory to be finished in 2018

A new intravenous drug factory is being built in Kyaukse town, Mandalay region, according to Myanma Pharmaceutical Industry under the Ministry of Industry.

"We have planned to produce 500cc intravenous drug bottles, and so an intravenous drugs factory is being built in Kyaukse," said U Ko Ko Lwin, Managing-Director of Myanma Pharmaceutical Industry.

"The government is building the new intravenous drugs factory in Kyaukse. We plan to build another intravenous drugs factory in Yangon jointly with a private company," he added.

Myanmar needs over 50 million 500cc bottles of intravenous drug per year. So, we targeted to produce over 17 million in 2017, according to Myanma Pharmaceutical Industry.

"The intravenous drugs will be manufactured in Kyaukse. Currently, we have been able to supply only 10 per cent of the IV needs across the country," said U Ko Ko Aung, general manager of Insein Myanma Pharmaceutical Factory.

Construction of the Kyaukse factory was started in 2017 and is expected to be completed in 2018. Currently, the government produces tablets, capsules, pills, ointment, intramuscular injections and intravenous injections for fever, hypertension, diabetes and heart disease in Yangon, Kyaukse and Sagaing regions. Moreover, the government also produces anti-snake venom. — *Myitmakha News Agency*

Action to be taken against businessmen bribing officials for FDA certificate

THE Ministry of Health and Sports will take deterrent action against those businessmen who give bribes to get Food and Drug Administration (FDA) certification, it is learnt.

"If the businessmen have to pay money to the employees of the FDA to get the FDA certificate, let us know. We will take deterrent action. We cannot accept these kinds of actions. Anyone can inform our department either by email or phone. We will investigate whether the complaint is true or not. Now, I'm hearing that the businessmen are bribing FDA staff to get the certificate," said Union Minister for Health and Sports Dr. Myint Htwe.

We will try to check the samples of goods without delay. Also, the FDA will take deterrent action against illegal food and drug producers in cooperation with the departments concerned.

"We are making food safe. So, the businessmen need to change their wrong habits. We need more and more small and medium entrepreneurs who are conscious of food safety.

Businessmen who produce food and drugs need to provide details on labeling such as the company address, phone numbers, manufacturing date and expiration date.—*Myitmakha News Agency*

Half of pharmaceutical demand to be met by 2020

MYANMA Pharmaceutical Industry expects to manufacture 50 per cent of the needed medicines in the country by 2020, according to the Ministry of Industry.

"We are now able to manufacture only 25 per cent of medicine needs. We plan to produce 50 per cent of pharmacy by 2020," said U Ko Ko Lwin, Managing-Director of Myanma Pharmaceutical Enterprise under the Ministry of Industry.

To fulfil the needs of pharmacies in the country, the government needs to cooperate with private companies. The biggest challenge is the investment challenge to build a pharmacy manufacturing factory, he added.

Currently, the government plans to build a new pharmaceutical factory and manufacture the medicines in accordance with World Health Organisation (WHO) standards. Currently, the government pharmaceutical factory is producing 182 kinds of medicines.

"We are trying to produce quality medicines. Now, we are importing the medicines from abroad," said U Ko Ko Aung, general manager of Insein Myanma Pharmaceutical Factory.

We have many difficulties to develop the local pharmacy production as well as produce professional pharmacists. Also, we need modern machinery to produce quality pharmaceuticals.

Currently, the government produces tablets, capsules, pills, ointment, intramuscular injections and intravenous injections for fever, hypertension, diabetes and heart disease in Yangon, Kyaukse and Sagaing regions. Moreover, the government also produces anti-snake venom. — *Myitmakha News Agency*

Japanese-style flea markets to take place monthly

THE MYANMAR-Japan Socio-Economic Development Association plans to start Japanese-style flea markets in the country on a monthly basis, its spokesperson said.

In Japan, the flea market is held on the first Sunday of every month.

A wide range of used Japanese products, including clothing, high-tech electronics, cosmetics, household utensils and consumer goods are commonly displayed for sale at the market.

Organised by the Myanmar-Japan SEDA, the third occurrence of the flea market was held at People's Square in Yangon on Union Day, which fell on 12 February.

As part of its philanthropic movements, the association is also planning to help around 500 people receive hepatitis B vaccinations free of charge in the near future.—*Myint Maung Soe*

Number of agricultural land renters on the rise in Takon Township

BECAUSE of theexpansion of watermelon and muskmelon plantations in Takon Township, the number of agricultural land renters are on the rise, said local watermelon and muskmelon growers.

The quality of watermelon and muskmelon from some farmlands in Takon Regions are decreasing due to its 10 to 15 year-old farmlands. Therefore, the growers have come to expand the plots of lands. The fertility of the watermelon and muskmelon plantations has become weak. As a result of this, the growers explore to rent the new plots of land, said U Moe Naing, a watermelon grower. The rent for farmland is currently about Ks250,000 an acre. An acre was rented for Ks200,000 last year. The high number of renters scaled up the rent price, said a muskmelon grower.—*Zar Lin Thu*

Crime NEWS

Three houses destroyed by fire in Haka

THREE houses were destroyed by fire between Cherry road and BEHS (1) staff quarters, Myothit ward, Haka town, Chin state yesterday.

According to the police report, U Yan Aung Kyaw was using the candle lights when the electric power broke down.

Then, he left the candles unextinguished inside his room.

As a result, U Yan Aung Kaw died in the fire. We are still investigating the case, said an official from Haka Myoma police station. The fire was put out by the firemen with seven fire engines and with the help of the neighbors within 50 minutes.

The fire damaged three houses and the estimated cost of damages is placed at Ks 4.3 million.

The police have taken action against U Yan Aung Kyaw under sections 304(A)/285. —*Myitmakha News Agency*

LOCAL Business

US to lend expertise in shrimp breeding techniques to local producers

Ko Moe

A file photo shows workers select shrimps in Kyauktan, outside Yangon. PHOTO: NYI ZAW MOE

MYANMAR will collaborate with the U.S. to boost white shrimp production, aiming to penetrate the global market, said Dr Sein Maung from the Myanmar Shrimp Association.

The U.S. will share not only breeding techniques but systems covering biosecurity, pond management and hygiene as well as conservation of the natural environment, said Dr Jim Wybam, chairman of Marine Genetics in Hawaii of the United States.

Dr Sein Maung said specific pathogen-free white shrimp breeding and production will soon be started at the Chaungtha breeding camp with the use of techniques provided by the U.S. as a pilot project, with an aim to breed five million shrimp larvae this year.

Dr Sein Maung said that demand for shrimp is steadily increasing in the international market. White shrimp takes up 86 per cent of the world's fishery market. Local and foreign investment needs to flow into the sector to promote the breeding industry.

Plans are underway to expand the project to Rakhine State and Yangon Region when the Chaungtha camp production is close to full capability.

The SPF white shrimp can grow fast and to a large size, Dr. Sein Maung said.

If the project meets with success, local breeders can go into mass production that will also help reduce the country's import-export gap, said Dr Kyaw Tun Myint, chair of the Myanmar Shrimp Association.

Myanmar predominantly breeds black tiger, the native species of shrimp, on a commercial scale. However, larvae of the species have been imported from neighboring Thailand.

After Cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar in 2008, the number of shrimp breeding camps has been on the decline.

Currently, there are about 200,000 acres of shrimp breeding sites mainly in Ayeyawady Region and Rakhine State.

Last year, the country earned only US$400 million from the export of shrimp, while the export value of shrimp in Thailand and Viet Nam reached over $6 billion.

Import value declined by $187 million since April

THE total import value during this fiscal year reached US$14.351 billion, a decrease of nearly $187 million compared with the same period last year, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

From 1 April of last year to 17 February of this year, the government sector bought capital goods, raw materials and personal goods that amounted to over $541 million from international trade partners, while the private sector imported $13.81 billion worth of products.

The import value over the 10.5 months of last financial year totalled $14.538 billion, including $2.360 billion from the government sector and $12.177 billion from the private sector, with the country importing $7.447 billion worth of capital goods, $4.20 billion worth of industrial raw materials and $2.88 billion worth of personal goods.

Myanmar normally imports luxury products, personal goods, construction materials, agricultural machinery, raw materials, household goods, foodstuff and electronic devices mainly from neighbouring countries.

This fiscal year, the country exported $9.862 billion worth of products including minerals, fish products, animal products and agriculture products through sea routes and border trade camps, an increase of more than $300 million compared with the same time last year, according to the official figures of the ministry.—Shwe Khine

Border trade value decreases to $6.272 billion this FY

MYANMAR'S border trade value up until 17 January of this fiscal year reached more than US$-6billion, a decrease of over $8 million compared with the similar period last year, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

Between 1 April of last year and 17 February of this year, border trade value hit $6.272 billion. The cross-border trade exports amounted to $3.880 billion while the total imports reached $2.392 billion.

During the period in 2015-2016, border trade was worth $6.280 billion, including $3.982 billion from the export sector and $2.298 billion from the import sector.

Myanmar mostly imports personal goods, industrial raw materials, construction equipment, automobiles and capital goods mainly from China, Japan, India, Indonesia, Germany, France and Hong Kong. It exports agricultural products, fisheries products, mining products, forest products and industrial goods.

Around 80 per cent of Myanmar's total external trade is through sea routes.

The country has carried out border trade with neighbouring Thailand through the Tachilek, Myawady, Kawthaung, Myeik, Hteekhee and Mawtaung border gates. The cross-border trade camps between Myanmar and Bangladesh are Sittway and Maungtaw, while the country trades directly with India via the Tamu and Reed border gates.

Border trade camps with China include Muse, Lweje, Kanpikete, Chinshwehaw and Kengtung. The Muse border has the highest volume and value of total border trade.—*Khine Khant*

MPT chooses Gemalto services to enrich mobile experience

Gemalto (Euronext NL0000400653 GTO), the world leader in digital security, and MPT, the country's no.1 Telecom operator serving 23 million[1] mobile subscribers, are extending their partnership. MPT has acquired Gemalto's Device Management and Advanced Over-The-Air (AOTA), in a bid to strengthen the relationship with its subscribers and expand its service portfolios.

As the fourth[2] fastest-growing mobile market in the world, Myanmar experienced tremendous mobile penetration growth in the past years, from 10% in 2012 to 63% in 2016[3], presently accounting for 6% of the global mobile subscribers. Having launched its 4G network in 2016[4], MPT is committed to further developing 4G usage. For instance, by collecting and analyzing real-time user and handset data via the advance statistic feature under Device Management. Other advanced solutions like AOTA give MPT the competitive edge in delivering services remotely, in turn reducing disruption and enhancing customer experience.

"These additional facilities represent a major leap-forward for MPT. We can now truly understand our subscribers, develop personalized services to meet their changing needs, and boost business opportunities," said Koichi Kawase, Chief Commercial Officer of MPT-KSGM Joint Operations. "MPT's primary objective is to provide the highest service for our customers. Therefore this collaboration, built upon industry-proven technologies and global expertise, will enable us to achieve further convenience and a prime mobile experience for customers in Myanmar". —*GNLM*

Vice President U Henry Van Thio receives, Secretary-General of APWF Secretariat

VICE President U Henry Van Thio, Chairman of the National-level Water Resources Committee, received Mr Kotaro Takemura, Secretary-General of Asia-Pacific Water Forum Secretariat of Japan at the office of the Yangon Region Government at 2pm yesterday.

In the meeting, experiences encountered in 1st Asia-Pacific Water Forum held in Japan, those received from the 2nd APWF held in Thailand and matters concerning the proposals for holding 3rd APWF in Yangon were discussed.

Present at the meeting were U Phyo Min Thein, Yangon Region Chief Minister, and regional ministers, U Tun Lwin, Secretary of National-level Water Resources Committee and Director-General of the Directorate of Water Resources and Improvement of River Systems-DWRIR and responsible officials from the APWF Secretariat.

Afterward, the Vice-President visited the construction site to build the information centre for the National-level Water Resources Committee.

The information centre of the committee includes in the Ayeyarwady River basin multi-development project, and it will be implemented by DWRIR with the World Bank's loan.—*Myanmar News Agency*

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Printed and published at the Global New Light of Myanmar Printing Factory at No.150, Nga Htat Kyee Pagoda Road, Bahan Township, Yangon, by the Global New Light of Myanmar Daily under Printing Permit No. 00510 and Publishing Permit No. 00629.

U Nay Win honoured by State Counsellor for his sacrifice to arrest gunman who killed NLD's lawyer

THE State Counsellor's Office released a congratulatory note, signed by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi herself, yesterday praising U Nay Win for his efforts for arresting the gunman who killed the National League for Democracy's legal advisor U Ko Ni.

For the month of January 2017, the State Counsellor honoured U Nay Win, who sacrificed his life in helping to apprehend the gunman who shot NLD Legal Advisor U Ko Ni at the Yangon International Airport.

The State Councilor's Office letter reads "U Nay Win's swift and selfless decision to react to the situation at hand was instrumental in rousing the people to stand up against acts of civil unrest and assassination. U Nay Win will be forever remembered for his contribution to a democratizing nation and national reconciliation and his sacrifice is a major push for reducing confrontation among the people and opposing violence as well."

She also requested the citizens of the country to take U Nay Win as a role model to be brave, sacrificing and responsible citizens and strive for a noble cause, while opposing injustice; taking it as a foundation in altruistic citizenship on the path to a future nation built on a peaceful and stable society.

On 29 January 2017 a delegation to Indonesia led by Union Minister for Information U Pe Myint landed at Yangon International Airport. A member of the delegation, NLD Legal Advisor U Ko Ni was shot at close range by hired gun Kyi Lin.

As the gunman tried to flee from the airport, taxi drivers and other civilians pursued and tried to apprehend him but none dared to get close to the gunman. It was during that time that U Nay Win, with no hesitation for his own safety, valiantly rushed in and hurled a brick at the gunman, hitting the back of his head. Spurred by U Nay Win's act of courage, the rest of the people were able to successfully capture the gunman Kyi Lin. However U Nay Win was shot near the abdominal region by the gunman in retaliation and passed away while in an ambulance.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Peace provides physical, mental well-being: Dr Tin Myo Win

AT the 1st Forum for Civil Societies held at the Myanmar International Convention Centre 2 in Nay Pyi Taw, Dr Tin Myo Win, chairman of the Peace Commission, said, "Peace is of great importance for a person to be endowed with physical and mental well-being, from the cradle to the grave."

And, Dr Tin Myo Win added, "We firmly believe that provided that not only respective organisations, but also civil societies … will participate wholeheartedly in moving toward the achievement of peace, developments in peace, race and country will come into existence as soon as possible. The State Counsellor stressed the need for the emergence of a political forum, just at the time of moving towards the peace process so that we can know the importance of the civil societies, and especially we can hear voices and problems of the people in associating with the public. We all have already known and accepted that it would be helpful for us in solving problems and hardships only if we can make participation of people and civil societies strong in the peace process, for building up eternal peace successfully."

"Here, I would like to express that people's participation in the peace process is important and it is meant for making democratic practices of deciding the matters concerning survival of their lives by themselves and matters on their rights strong. So, participation of civil societies born of the people in the peace process will help participation of the peace-related groups to be strong, so that it can help assemble different visions and upgrade the accountability and responsibility, leading to the success of peace process," Dr Tin Myo Win said.

At the forum, Daw Than Nwe Aung of Morning Star Intellectual Disability Group and U Aung Myint Tun, Nay Pyi Taw Council member, shared experiences of civil societies, with U Saw Tun Tun clarifying the results of Pre-forum of 1st Forum for civil societies.

Present at the 1st Forum for Civil Societies were responsible officials and representatives from Nay Pyi Taw Council Area and civil societies from States and Regions.—*Myo Hein Aung (MNA)*

4th meeting held for Myanmar Democracy Film Festival

A meeting for the weeklong Myanmar Democracy Film Festival was held yesterday afternoon in the meeting hall of the Myanmar Radio and Television head office on Pyay Road in Yangon.

This was the 4th meeting, in which Union Minister for Information Dr. Pe Myint spoke about the selection of works to be included in the film festival.

Union Minister for Information Dr. Pe Myint addresses the meeting for the weeklong Myanmar Democracy Film Festival yesterday in Yangon. PHOTO: MNA

"We discussed about letting the experts choose which 3 narratives should become major films and having the rest of the stories be filmed as TV series," Dr. Pe Myint said.

Literary experts, officials from the Ministry of Information and the Myanmar Motion Picture Organisation who were in attendance discussed choosing the plots, narratives, director, actors and actresses for the major films and TV series to be produced, with the Union Minister facilitating the discussion.

Of the 45 film scripts submitted for the Myanmar Democracy Film Festival, 11 have been decided on, with three of the scripts selected for filming at the weeklong film festival and the remaining ones to be filmed as TV series.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Myanmar National Human Rights Commission hails Peace Conference

THE Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) made a news release hailing the 2nd Union Peace Conference—21st Century Panlong.

In the news release, it is described that as a preparation for holding 2nd Union Peace Conference—21st-Century Panglong successfully, national-level political dialogues are being held in the respective Regions and States, and it was a great joy, honour and heart-felt support towards the concerted effort of the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) and respective organisations to have seen UPDJC arrange for not only 8 national armed groups that signed the NCA, but also for other armed groups which have not yet signed the national ceasefire agreement to participate in the conference.

The MNHRC believes that holding a successful conference will help bring about eternal peace that the whole populace has greatly hoped for. —*Myanmar News Agency*

India's wind power tariffs hit new low in push for renewables

NEW DELHI — Indian wind power tariffs fell to a record low in a government-run auction on Friday, weeks after solar power rates too hit an all-time low, as the country looks to cut chronic electricity shortages in one of the world's biggest clean energy programmes.

India, the world's third-biggest greenhouse gas emitter, has set a target of raising its renewable energy generation to 175 gigawatt by 2022, around five times current usage, to supply power to its 1.3 billion people and fight climate change.

The government push, personally monitored by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has prompted companies to bid aggressively for solar and wind projects, pushing tariffs low enough to challenge power generated by fossil fuels such as coal over the long term.

In an auction conducted by state-controlled Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) for various wind projects totalling 1 gigawatt, five companies separately quoted a tariff of 3.46 rupees ($0.0519) per unit to win the projects.

Wind turbines turn in the breeze in the outskirts of Jaisalmer in the Indian desert state of Rajasthan, on 30 November 2009. PHOTO: REUTERS

"After solar cost reduction below 3 rupees/unit, wind power cost down to 3.46 rupees/unit through transparent auction," India's coal, power and renewable energy minister, Piyush Goyal, said in a tweet on Friday.

Mytrah Energy, part of London-based Mytrah Group, Ostro Kutch Wind, backed by British private equity firm Actis, and Indian company Inox Wind Infrastructure won contracts for 250 megawatts (MW) each.

Green Infra Wind Energy, majority-owned by Singapore-based Sembcorp Industries Ltd, won a contract for 249.90 MW and Adani Green Energy, part of Indian billionaire Gautam Adani's infrastructure group, was awarded a 50 MW project, according to a senior SECI official and a bid document seen by Reuters.

"The auctions have been hard fought and have led to tighter pricing than one would have foreseen even a few months earlier," said Vikram Kailas, chief executive of Mytrah Energy.

The other companies were not immediately available for comment. —*Reuters*

Indonesia seeks to expand aviation-fuel export to Philippines

JAKARTA — Indonesia's state-owned oil and gas firm, PT Pertamina plans to ship aviation fuel to the Philippines, a top official of the company disclosed on Friday.

The exportation could commence after 2023 when the oil refinery in Bontang of East Kalimantan is expected to kick off production of the fuel for aircraft, said Rachmad Hardadi, director at the company.

The director cited that the refinery is currently under construction and expected to be completed in the next six years.

"A total of 35 per cent of aviation fuel production will be shipped overseas,... the Philippines will be a potential market," he said.

The Indonesian government attempts to boost the country's export to help spur economic growth. —*Xinhua*

Samsung Electronics tightens donation rules; report says two group executives offer to quit

SEOUL — Tech giant Samsung Electronics (005930.KS) is tightening board oversight on donations while two senior Samsung Group [SAGR.UL] executives reportedly offered to resign, as the conglomerate struggles with the fallout from a graft scandal that led to its leader's arrest.

Samsung Electronics said on Friday its board of directors will now vote on any financial support to third parties worth 1 billion won ($886,210.56) or more and disclose any such payments publicly. Previously, only payments of 680 billion won or more were subject to board approval.

"This move improves transparency in financial aid and appropriation of social corporate social responsibility funds, and strengthens compliance management," the company said in a statement.

The flagship of South Korea's top conglomerate Samsung Group has been at the centre of an influence-peddling scandal that led South Korea's parliament to impeach President Park Geun-hye in December.

Jay Y. Lee, leader of Samsung Group and Samsung Electronics' vice chairman, was arrested last week after being named a suspect by the South Korean special prosecutor's office.

Lee is accused of pledging 43 billion won in bribes to a company and organizations backed by President Park Geun-hye's confidant, Choi Soon-sil, to curry favor.

Though Samsung Group and Lee have denied paying bribes to Park or seeking improper favors, the conglomerate has pledged to take steps to improve transparency amid accusations and criticisms that Samsung used its financial might to game the system in its favor.

Lee, who is arguing that he was coerced into making the payments, told lawmakers during a December hearing that Samsung Group would take measures to avoid making improper payments in the future.

"It appears that the things that Vice Chairman Lee promised to do are being carried out now," said Park Ju-gun, head of corporate analysis firm CEO Score.

Samsung also said on Friday it was unable to nominate a new outside director for vote at the 24 March annual shareholder meeting due to uncertain circumstances. The firm had in November promised to nominate at least one new board member with "global C-suite experience" as part of its efforts to improve corporate governance.

Separately, South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported later on Friday that Samsung Group Vice Chairman Choi Gee-sung and President Chang Choong-ki have offered to resign to take responsibility for the graft scandal.

Choi and Chang are also suspects in the special prosecutor's investigation.

Samsung Group had no immediate comment to offer on the report when contacted by Reuters. —*Reuters*

Opinion

Write for us

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

We welcome the "National Education Strategic Plan," with open arms!

Khin Maung Oo

AS known by all, our country had seen many hardships, problems and sufferings for over half of a century, though it gained its Independence in 1948. We would not like to blame any longer who was responsible for it, because it would surely turn to past regimes and those involved in their administrative machineries. In fact, lack of knowledge that people have rights for freedom of expression and being overwhelmed by fear to disclose these rights can be said to be attributed to living under these regimes for long. Shouting, "It is time to change," people chose the NLD led government. In other words, we n the ow have the government we deserve, to coin a phrase "A country has a government it deserves." It will take time, or rather several decades to change the deteriorating situations of the country. Nobody can deny that allocating more funds for the education and health sectors can lift up the status of a country. As seen by us, countries that lagged behind us in everything developed more than our status by giving more attention and providing more funding for the education and health sectors.

At the ceremony for launching the "National Education Strategic Plan" held in Nay Pyi Taw on February 23, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi told the audience that in the next five years, Myanmar's education system must be changed, for young students and all adults to get an access to life-long learning and to acquire job opportunities. We need to understand that a Plan cannot be implemented in a moment. Success of a plan cannot be achieved in a moment, just by chanting, "Abracadabra," as in fairy stories.

The State Counsellor added, "Changes are to be started foremost from the education sector. All are required to adopt the National Education Strategic Plan and to consider which factors are mainly needed for successful implementation. In acquiring education, the most important thing is to have a desire to learn. It is incumbent for teachers and those in the leading role of implementing educational policies that has been adopted, to instill in their hearts the desire to learn. Teachers must also have the urge to learn and desire to learn for the whole life, so that similar desires will develop in the minds of students. For this, it is necessary for all participants to aim for success."

"All those in the leading role in implementing education projects, need to bear in their minds that they themselves still have many things to learn. If they thought that they know all and had learnt all, they would no longer be able to learn. Only teachers who want to know and teach themselves and leading persons in the projects will be able to guide citizens to aspire for learning. The desire to learn starts from humility that we still need much to learn. And, we need to have a belief that we have the ability to do anything we are required to know. Children have the eagerness and belief that they have much to know but if teachers and those in authority fail to encourage their belief, their desire to learn will never develop," she stressed.

The State Counsellor's words highlight the fact that the mind-set of the teaching staff needs to be changed. Most of the teachers at chalk-face think that they had graduated from universities, getting educational attainments—BA, B Sc, B Ed, MA (ABD) and so on, hence no need to proceed to learn, they think. I dare say we can reach our goal as our leaders expected, if we contribute our concerted efforts in the respective sectors we are assigned. There is one condition that internal peace needs to spread throughout the whole nation so that fruits of the National Education Strategic Plan can be enjoyed by all Union citizens living in the nation, including our national ethnic brethren.

A species in danger of extinction: Clouded leopard

Rahul Ashem

CLOUDED leopard is a flagship species for the conservation of ecosystem services and habitats as well as to the human environment . Small cat's population in the wild is unknown in the state. It is due to the extensive fragmentation, degradation and forest conversion in the surrounding ecosystems. Most of the protected areas and parks are facing community conflict because of the establishment of villages, cattle rearing and encroachment.

Shifting cultivation and seasonal fires is another reason for the same purposes. It is the right time to understand the value of forest in our daily lives as a raw material source, local employment source as well as the state income source. Forest plays a great role in gathering and releasing the water source and maintains the floral and faunal diversity habitat. It represents the ecosystem services where tiger stand at the apex of that system to form the umbrella species for the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem functions.

Small cats and other herbivore species are the part of trophic niche such as regulation of prey populations and seed dispersal in that habitat. The state is losing the big predators like tigers and leopards in the forested areas. This disrupts the natural balance of wildlife and their surrounding environment. Similarly, removal of small cat's population can alter prey and other animal densities within that system.

Clouded Leopard (Neofelis nebulosa macrosceloides. PHOTO: DR. RAJU KASAMBE. PHOTO TAKEN AT ZOO IN AIZAWL, MIZORAM, INDIA.

The elusive big cat was brought here from forests towards the Myanmar border.

It also alters the plant composition by increasing seeds and seedling process which in turn influences the distribution, abundance and competitive interaction within groups of birds, mammals and insects. As a result, there are chances of competition for the limited resources and superior competitors may displace the weaker competitors resulting less diversity through competitive exclusion.

Out of the family Felidae, clouded leopard is the smallest feline. It is also the most talented climbers among the cats. The scientific name of clouded leopard is Neofelis nebulosa, protected under the Indian wildlife protection act, listed in CITES Appendix 1 and IUCN status as vulnerable, rare and population unknown in the wild. The felid is yellowish brown grey elliptical edged with black floating all over the body. These turn into black oval spots on its legs and into blurred rings on its very long tail.

The head is spotted with two broad bars on the neck and stripes on its cheek. The back of each ear is black with a grey spot in the middle. The short legs feature a heavy appearance look but it is one of the lithest of all the big cats. It can hang from tree branches by using the hind legs which possess flexible ankle joints that allow the foot to rotate backwards.

Unlike other Felidae, it does not leave scats and scrapes along its trails. The cat is arboreal in nature, it ambushes prey from trees and then drags the kill up to the trees to eat. It has the longest canine teeth in proportion to its skull size. It also shelters its young ones in tree hollows. Clouded leopard is strictly prohibited under the CITES rules in term of poaching, trading and selling of meats.

The status of clouded leopard population in the wild is difficult to estimate. It is known that the feline is restricted to Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Sikkim and West Bengal. This region falls within two global biodiversity hotspots, the Himalaya and Indo-Burma, renowned for supporting an astonishing diversity of life alongside an extraordinary diversity of peoples and cultures.

In the state, the feline is distributed in different forest types. From the wet temperate forests of Shirui hills (Ukhrul) to the tropical semi evergreen of Jiri and Makru (Tamenglong) and from sub tropical wet hill forests of Kailam (Churachanpur) to the alpine grassland of Bunning (Tamenglong).

The animal is a nocturnal hunter, shy, elusive, solitary and seldom seen in the wild. They prey on small species like rodents, porcupines, pangolins, squirrels, slow loris, monkeys, birds and smaller varieties of deer or dependent on the area where they live. As the feline is short in structure, it has powerful legs equipped with rotating rear ankles that allow them to safely down climb in a headfirst posture similar to common squirrel.

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Officials on deck as aid from Malaysia are unloaded from the Aung Kyaw Moe (1). PHOTO: MNA

Second batch of aid from Malaysia arrives at Buthidaung Port

RICE and other items donated by Malaysia for villages in Rakhine's Buthidaung and Maungtaw Townships left Sittway on the two-deck watercraft, Aung Kyaw Moe (1), and arrived in Buthidaung Port yesterday evening. Officials from Buthidaung Administrative Committee were present to receive the donated items.

The list of items donated include 2,200 bags of rice, 350 cartons of drinking water, 66 bags of toothpaste, 36 bags of footwear, 45 bags of towels, 348 cartons of soap detergent, 625 cartons of instant noodles, 5 cartons of nail clippers, 33 cartons of razors, 4 cartons of oil, 17 cartons of soap bars, and 92 cartons of women's essentials.

The Township Administrative Committee has stated that the total number of items donated from Malaysia include 6,000 bags of rice, 1,846 cartons of instant noodles, 975 cartons of drinking water, 100 cartons of toothpaste, 36 cartons of toothbrushes, 94 cartons of towels, 35 cartons of balm, and 562 cartons of soap detergent and are for Sittway, Pauktaw and Myebon Townships in Maungtaw District, with the rest of the donated items to be sent via Sittway to other townships concerned. The items will be carefully and systematically sent to villages in need. *—Aye Mya (Mandalay), Aye Min Thu*

Thura U Shwe Mann receives Sweden's Parliament Speaker

CHAIRMAN of Legal Affairs and the Special Cases Assessment Commission of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Thura U Shwe Mann received Sweden's Parliament Speaker H.E. Mr. Urban Ahlin and his delegation at 1:15 pm yesterday at the Hluttaw Building I-1 in Nay Pyi Taw.

During the meeting, the two representatives discussed matters regarding bilateral relations and cooperation in legislative sector.*—Myanmar News Agency*

Thura U Shwe Mann in discussion with Mr. Urban Ahlin. PHOTO: MNA

Basic training course on disaster management opened in Maungtaw

A disaster management basic training course was opened in Devanadi Hall yesterday in Maungtaw, Rakhine State.

U Myint Khaing, Maungtaw Township Administrator, delivered the opening speech and Rakhine State Department of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Director U Kyaw Min explained the aims of the training course.

"The training course is a basic course for the management of disasters. We opened the courses in other townships, but this is the first course in Maungtaw. We will lecture on the procedures with an aim to providing necessary and useful fundamental knowledge and skills in disaster risk management. We need to provide help because one man alone can't prevent the natural disasters," said Director U Kyaw Min.

The training course ran from 24 to 27 February and was attended by 30 trainees from organisations and departments in Maungtaw.

The training course will provide lectures on climate change and its impact, natural disasters, search and rescue, appraisals of affected loss in disasters, natural disaster management laws and rules, disaster management prevention, vulnerability to risks, formulation of community-based natural disaster management projects and mental rehabilitation. *—Aung Thura, Aye Min Thu*

Over 400 university students join Telenor's 32nd Net Monday programme in Myeik

MORE THAN 400 students from Myeik University in Taninthayi Region joined the 32nd edition of Telenor's Net Monday programme, which introduced them to business opportunities available online.

Effective applications of the Internet in the academic field, available business opportunities online and also the risks students may encounter when they are online were discussed at panel discussion on Wednesday by representatives from the university, Café International, ZYAM and Telenor.

A representative of Telenor said the event hopes to inspire young people to use the Internet to create or expand businesses.

"Students can get more opportunities online, such as setting up their business and engaging more with the business community. I believe that this talk will empower them to be more energetic in their future life", said Joslin E. Myrthong, Chief Marketing Officer at Telenor Myanmar.

Telenor, which will celebrate its third anniversary of Net Monday in April, has about 18 million mobile customers in Myanmar.

The Norwegian telecom operator shares a wide range of technical-based knowledge overing various aspects of the Internet and digital life, such as education, professional career, gaming, social networking, mobile financial services and safe internet through the programme.*—GNLM*

A species in danger of ...

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The feline has sharp eye sight to judge distances and their long tails to maintain balance. Scientifically, clouded leopard hunts mostly on the ground for easy prey. The feline is also a perfect swimmer. Despite the name clouded leopard, it is not closely related to the common leopards. Though little information is known about the clouded leopard population, the feline is listed as vulnerable species.

Rising population and increased human activities in the protected areas lead to shrinkage, fragmentation, deforestation and resource exploitation thereby altering the extent and spatial configuration of their habitats. The conversion of landscape into roads, dams and plantations creating more fragmented forests replace diversity with paltry monocultures. Forest degradation and jhum cultivation practices in the hills are another factor for the loss of feline population in the wild. The development of numerous agricultural fields with the destruction of forest causing the habitat to diminish is another reason.

Natural process like disease infections and catastrophic events in certain habitats is also a probable cause for the loss of feline populations. The phenomenon of hunting and killing is an old traditional method. The practice of poaching and illegal trading of clouded leopard is another business in the present generation.

Unfortunately, due to their elusive nature and dense forest habitats, data on the numbers actually surviving in parks are limited and possibly inaccurate. Other small felines like leopard cat, fishing cat, jungle cat, golden cat and marbled cat are facing the same stage of vulnerable race.

The need of the hour is to start monitoring programme cum interviews with the local communities, hunters and related departments. It is important to consult the local villagers the specific occurrence and habitats of clouded leopard, natural history and behavioural observation and also the status on current pressures especially hunting and killing.

An ideal way of identification is showing the photograph of clouded leopard to the residents of the locality. However, small carnivore species cannot be surveyed using direct sightings (since they are elusive, rare and nocturnal in nature) or sign such as tracks and scats. Focusing on reducing deforestation and fragmentation in the surrounding areas can be an attempt to increase the population of clouded leopard.

Poaching laws have been put in place to stop illegal hunting of these animals. Making wildlife corridors in protected areas and parks is also a factor for saving the beautiful cats.

Collective information on biodiversity including wildlife status, population and community interactions and their contributions to ecosystem development is needed for effective conservation of wildlife management on protected areas. Such collective information is developed through regular monitoring and maintaining records with various scientific methods. It is the right time to provide refuge to the clouded leopard which is a flagship species in danger of extinction.

Upset at Trump, Mexico voices 'worry and irritation' to US envoys

MEXICO CITY — Mexico on Thursday expressed "worry and irritation" about US policies to two of President Donald Trump's top envoys, giving a chilly reply to the new administration's hard line on immigration, trade and security.

Comments by Trump about a "military operation" to deport criminals added to the tense atmosphere, and prompted a clarification from Homeland Security chief John Kelly, one of the US officials visiting Mexico City.

The US government angered Mexico this week by saying it was seeking to deport many illegal immigrants to Mexico if they entered the United States from there, regardless of nationality.

It is the latest point of friction between neighbours that have also been at odds over Trump's vow to build a wall on the border and his attempts to browbeat Mexico into giving concessions on trade.

"There exists among Mexicans worry and irritation about what are perceived to be policies that could be harmful for the national interest and for Mexicans here and abroad," Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray told a news conference.

He was speaking after talks in the Mexican capital with US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Kelly, who later met with President Enrique Pena Nieto. The Mexican leader scrapped a summit meeting with Trump in January as tensions rose.

Tillerson and Kelly emphasized traditionally strong US-Mexico ties and both sides pledged further dialogue on migration, trade and security issues. Pena Nieto said the talks were a sign of the will to build a constructive relationship.

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson (R) and Mexico's Foreign Secretary Luis Videgaray arrive to deliver a statement at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Mexico City, Mexico, on 23 February 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Two Mexican newspapers leaked comments from Videgaray, however, that bolstered the perception that Mexico is taking a more robust approach to its dealings with Trump, following jibes that Pena Nieto should stand up to his counterpart.

If the United States taxes imports from Mexico, there will be a response that "hits them where it hurts," La Jornada and Reforma reported Videgaray as saying, based on recordings obtained of a closed-door session with lawmakers on Wednesday.

Videgaray warned of counter-taxes and tariffs targeting US congressional districts most reliant on exports to Mexico if Trump started limiting trade.

Kelly and Tillerson were more measured in their words than either the Mexicans or Trump, who said on Thursday a military operation was being carried out to clear "bad dudes" such as gang members and drug lords from the United States.

Kelly said there would be "no use of military force in immigration operations," and "no, repeat, no" mass deportations. White House spokesman Sean Spicer said Trump's comment was meant to describe the "flawless" manner that US immigration and border authorities worked.

There were some signs of congeniality behind closed doors. Tillerson drank tequila with Mexican counterparts at dinner on Wednesday night, a person familiar with the event said. Pena Nieto's office described the US officials as professional and constructive. —*Reuters*

May's Conservatives gain UK parliament seat as rivals suffer setbacks

STOKE-ON-TRENT/WHITEHAVEN, (England) — British Prime Minister Theresa May's Conservatives secured a landmark victory in a parliamentary by-election on Friday, strengthening her hand ahead of Brexit negotiations as her rivals suffered damaging setbacks.

The Conservatives captured the northwestern seat of Copeland that Labour have held since 1935, the first by-election gain for a governing party for 35 years and a result which piles pressure on the opposition's under-fire socialist leader, Jeremy Corbyn.

In the central English seat of Stoke-on-Trent, Paul Nuttall, leader of the populist anti-EU UK Independence Party, failed to overturn a Labour majority despite almost 70 per cent of the city's voters backing leaving the European Union at last year's referendum, casting doubt on his future too.

Police officers patrol during the Stoke Central by-election count in Stoke on Trent, on 23 February 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

The Conservatives also increased their share of the vote in Stoke from the 2015 election.

The two results point to May's tightening grip on political power following the Brexit vote, and will be used as evidence that her strategy of pursuing a clean break with the EU has stemmed rising right-wing populism without denting her ability to take votes from an increasingly left-wing Labour Party. Although Labour avoided the worst-case scenario of two defeats, Corbyn is likely to face renewed criticism.

"The result ... is a disaster for us. We should not try to insult people's intelligence by suggesting other than that," Labour lawmaker John Woodcock told BBC radio.—*Reuters*

NEWS IN BRIEF

Merkel's conservatives seen ahead of Social Democrats in poll

BERLIN — German Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives were ahead of the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD) in an opinion poll published on Friday, seven months ahead of what is expected to be a tight national election.

The Ipsos poll put Merkel's conservative bloc on 32 per cent while the SPD, which has surged in recent weeks since nominating former European Parliament President Martin Schulz as its candidate, was on 30 per cent. The anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany was in third place on 12 per cent. The far-left Linke was on 10 per cent while the Greens were on 7 per cent and the pro-business Free Democrats (FDP) were on 5 per cent.—*Reuters*

Half of Germans against debt relief for Greece, survey shows

BERLIN — Around half of Germans are against granting debt relief to Greece and around three in 10 want the debt-laden country to quit the euro zone, a survey showed on Friday.

The INSA poll for the newspaper Bild showed 46.4 per cent of people living in Germany, Europe's paymaster, thought giving Greece debt relief would be unfair for other euro zone countries.

That compared with around one fifth (18.4 per cent) who did not share that view and 9.1 per cent who said they did not care.

Athens and its creditors — euro zone member states and the International Monetary Fund — agreed on Monday to resume talks on a long-stalled review of Greece's bailout, but only after Greece accepted examination of its reforms for 2019 onwards.—*Reuters*

Italy says 2,500 boat migrants rescued at sea in three days

ROME — Almost 2,500 boat migrants were rescued in the past three days, the Italian Coast Guard said on Thursday, as this year's arrivals already far outpace the record-setting 2016.

Some 1,100 were plucked from nine flimsy vessels off the coast of Libya on Thursday, the Coast Guard said, after a total of 1,360 were picked up the two preceding days.

Since the beginning of the year, there have been more than 10,700 sea arrivals, the Interior Ministry said on Thursday, a third higher than the same period last year.

"The situation is more dramatic than ever," said Mathilde Auvillain, a spokeswoman on board the Aquarius, a rescue ship run by SOS Mediterranee and Doctors without Borders (MSF).

Last year a record 181,000 boat migrants reached Italy and more than 5,000 died in the Mediterranean. Since 2015, more than a million-and-a-half migrants have flooded into Europe.—*Reuters*

Bodies of 27 migrants recovered in west Libya, 13 in shipping container

TRIPOLI — The bodies of 27 migrants have been recovered in Western Libya, 13 of whom died of suffocation in a shipping container, the Red Crescent said on Thursday.

The migrants found in the container appear to have been locked inside it for several days as it was transported to the coast at Khoms, where they were to attempt to cross the Mediterranean towards Europe, the Red Crescent said in a statement.

Fifty-six migrants were rescued from the container, some suffering from serious injuries and fractures, the statement said.

Another 14 migrant bodies were recovered from the sea near the coastal town of Zuwara, west of Tripoli, on Thursday, while some 124 migrants were rescued in the area, a local Red Crescent spokesman said. —*Reuters*

Kidnapped Ukrainian MP found unharmed, attackers detained — prosecutor

KIEV — A Ukrainian lawmaker kidnapped in the southern city of Odessa earlier on Thursday has been found unharmed and his attackers have been detained, the local prosecutor's office said.

Earlier, the head of President Petro Poroshenko's BPP faction, Ihor Hryniv, told parliament that MP Oleksiy Honcharenko had been kidnapped "in broad daylight" in his native Odessa.

"The criminal group has been neutralised. Honcharenko is in a safe place," said Inna Verba, a spokeswoman for the Odessa prosecutor's office.—*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

Iraqi forces push into first districts of western Mosul

SOUTH OF MOSUL, (Iraq) — US-backed Iraqi security forces advanced deeper into the western half of Mosul on Friday one day after launching attacks on several fronts towards Islamic State's last main stronghold in the city.

Troops had recaptured Mosul airport on Thursday, an important prize in the battle to end the jihadists' control of territory in Iraq.

Counter-terrorism forces managed on Friday to fully control the Ghozlani army base, pushing deeper towards the southwestern districts of Tal al-Rumman and al-Mamoun, a military spokesman said.

Federal police and an elite Interior Ministry unit known as Rapid Response are clearing the airport of roadside bombs and booby traps left by Islamic State militants who retreated from their positions there on Thursday.

Iraqi government forces plan to repair the airport and use it as a base from which to drive the militants from Mosul's western districts, where about 750,000 people are believed to be trapped.

Iraqi army launch a rocket towards Islamic State militants during a battle with Islamic State militants near Ghozlani military complex, south of Mosul. PHOTO: REUTERS

Government forces pushed the insurgents out of eastern Mosul last month but the IS still holds the western sector of the city, divided by the Tigris river.

"Our forces are fighting Daesh terrorists in Tal al-Rumman and al-Mamoun. We will eliminate them soon and take control over the two districts," Counter Terrorism Services (CTS) spokesman Sabah al-Numan said.

Islamic State militants used suicide car bomb attacks and drones carrying small bombs to disrupt the CTS units from further advancing.

"There is a resistance there. The drones are particularly annoying today," Major General Sami al-Aridi, a senior CTS commander, told Reuters in the southwestern front of Mosul.

Rapid response forces are trying to advance beyond the airport to breach Islamic State defences around districts on the southern edge of Mosul.

"We are now fighting Daesh at the southern edge of the city. We are trying to breach trenches and high berm they used as defensive line," Colonel Falah al-Wabdan told Reuters.

Losing Mosul could spell the end of the Iraqi section of the militants' self-styled caliphate spanning Iraq and Syria.

Iraqi commanders expect the battle in western Mosul to be more difficult than the east, however, in part because tanks and armoured vehicles cannot pass through narrow alleyways that crisscross the city's ancient western districts.—*Reuters*

Guatemala blocks entry to Dutch ship providing abortions

A guard faces members of Women on Waves, a Dutch non-profit that provides abortion services beyond the territorial waters of countries where abortion is illegal, in Puerto de San Jose, Guatemala on 23 February 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

PORT OF SAN JOSE, (Guatemala) — Guatemala's army detained a boat carrying a supply of abortion pills on Thursday and prevented it from picking up women seeking to end their pregnancies, saying the move was prohibited by the country's constitution.

The boat, operated by Dutch nonprofit Women on Waves, was in military custody with some of its seven crew members still aboard, after landing at a private pier at the Port of San Jose, 75 miles (120 km) south of the capital, said Leticia Zenevich, a spokeswoman for the group.

The organisation provides free abortion services for women pregnant up to 10 weeks, beyond the territorial waters of countries where abortion is illegal.

The abortion pill — also known as a medication abortion — combines two medicines, mifepristone and misoprostol, to end a pregnancy. It is more than 90 per cent effective for women up to 10 weeks pregnant.

In a statement, the Guatemalan army said that it would not allow the nonprofit to carry out its activities, in adherence "to the Constitution regarding the preservation of human life and the laws in effect in our country."

The trip was the first made by the organisation since Morocco blocked a ship from entering one of its harbours in 2012, Zenevich said.

Marleny Arias, a 50-year-old Guatemalan, heckled the ship's crew, yelling: "Why don't you go to the Netherlands to kill children?"

Group organizers defended the legality of the ship's operation, which picks up women on shore and brings them to international waters where local laws do not apply.

On board, women are given an abortion pill and remain under observation for a few hours before returning to land.

"Guatemala has been chosen because the laws are very restrictive on the subject of abortion," said Quetzali Cerezo, director of Women in Equity in Guatemala, which helps the Dutch nonprofit.

In Guatemala, where Catholic and Evangelical churches hold powerful influence, abortions are only permitted if a mother's life is at risk.

According to the organisation, which was founded in 1999, some 65,000 illegal abortions are performed annually in the Latin American country.—*Reuters*

Greece says expects Turkey to seek extradition of soldiers

ATHENS — Greece said on Friday it was expecting an extradition request from Turkey for two Turks who had claimed asylum and were suspected by Turkish authorities of a link to a coup attempt last July.

The two, who appeared to be members of the military, have been held at an undisclosed location in northern Greece since applying for asylum on 20 February.

Eight other members of the Turkish military flew to Greece by helicopter last year in the aftermath of the failed attempt to topple President Tayyip Erdogan. Greece's top court has declined to extradite them, in a case which has strained relations between NATO allies Greece and Turkey.

Since the failed coup, some 40,000 people have been arrested in Turkey and more than 100,000 have been sacked or suspended from the military, civil service and private sector.

"We would expect that Turkey will submit an extradition request (for the two)...This case looks a lot more serious," a government official said, but gave no details.

At least one media outlet reported they were commandos, whose unit went on trial on Monday on charges of attempting to assassinate Erdogan as the coup unfolded on 15 July, with attacks on the parliament and a hotel where the president had been staying.

"They initially claimed doing different professions ... when we ascertained their identity, we realize they were members of the military," a police official told Reuters. Greece's defence minister Panos Kammenos told Ant1 TV:

"Greece condemned the coup attempt from its inception, and from there on it's Greece's courts which will decide, based on Greek laws and international conventions, the extradition or not of someone who seeks asylum." —*Reuters*

FlyBe airplane landing gear collapses at Amsterdam airport

AMSTERDAM — The landing gear of a FlyBe Group airplane collapsed during landing at Amsterdam's Schiphol on Thursday, causing it to veer off the runway. There were no injuries, the airport said in a statement.

It was unclear if a heavy storm over the North Sea had played a role, a spokesman said.

All 59 passengers and crew were brought from the runway to the terminal by bus, the statement said.

Bombardier Inc spokesman Bryan Tucker said in an email that FlyBe was operating its Q400 prop plane.

"We are working with the operator (FlyBe) to understand what happened," Tucker said. "Our engineering teams are ready to assist."—*Reuters*

A plane of FlyBe airlines is seen of the runway of Schiphol airpoprt after landing gear broke in high winds, in Amsterdam, Netherlands, on 23 February 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

French police clash with protesting youths, arrest 26

PARIS — French police fired tear gas on Thursday at youths who hurled projectiles and vandalised property on the fringes of a student demonstration against the alleged rape of a young black man by police using a baton.

Hundreds of high-school students blocked the entrances to more than a dozen schools in Paris during the unauthorised rally which was largely peaceful aside from the isolated skirmishes. Police made 26 arrests.

The protest comes two months before a presidential election in which opinion polls show far-right leader Marine Le Pen performing strongly on an anti-immigration, nationalist platform.

It was the latest in a series of demonstrations against the alleged police mistreatment of a 22-year-old man identified only as Theo, who remains in hospital with injuries to his anus and head.

One banner at Thursday's rally read "Revenge for Theo!"

He has called for public calm and his family has said they have faith in the French justice system.

The Paris school authority said more than 10 schools had been targeted by youths who piled up rubbish bins and other objects at the entrance gates. In one case, a deputy school director was injured when protesters hurled a fire extinguisher.

Education Minister Najat Vallaud-Belkacem said she understood young people's "emotion" over the Theo case but called for public calm and denounced the violence.

"I am appealing for calm because excesses like this, violence and blocking entrances to places, are not acceptable. The state will show considerable firmness," she said on Public Senat TV.

Video footage on social media showed a confrontation on the fringes of the rally in the Place de la Nation square in the east of Paris, where riot police in protective gear advanced on groups of mostly-hooded youths in sidestreets.—*Reuters*

Thousands of San Jose, California, residents allowed home after flooding

SAN JOSE — Some residents of San Jose in Northern California who were forced out this week by flooding from a rain-swollen creek returned on Thursday to find their homes stayed dry, but nearly 4,000 people were still under evacuation orders, officials said.

The flooding in San Jose, south of San Francisco, that began on Tuesday in the city of about 1 million people was the worst it has seen since at least 1997.

Trash-strewn, murky floodwaters swamped city blocks in the hub of the high-tech Silicon Valley, engulfing the entire first floors of some homes as firefighters in inflatable boats rescued stranded residents.

At the height of the crisis, city officials ordered about 14,000 people to evacuate.

Waters began receding on Wednesday and it became clear swaths of evacuated areas were untouched, San Jose spokesman David Vossbrink said by phone. Evacuation orders were lifted in those zones and residents are returning.

Nevertheless, floodwaters inundated several neighborhoods in areas stretching from southeast to northeast of downtown, with the Rock Springs section hit hardest, Vossbrink said. It mostly consists of apartment buildings and townhomes.

More than 1,000 properties, home to 3,800 people, were still under evacuation orders on Thursday, Vossbrink said. It was unclear when they would be allowed home. City inspectors would need to assess for damage in flooded areas and in some places workers were still pumping out water, he said. The scope of the damage also remained unknown.

People stand by a flooded street near William Street Park after heavy rains overflowed nearby Coyote Creek in San Jose, California, US, on 21 February 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Coyote Creek, the waterway that flooded, fell below flood stage on Wednesday but was still flowing at high levels a day later, Vossbrink said.

With some San Jose citizens saying warnings to evacuate came too late, Mayor Sam Liccardo has acknowledged authorities could have been quicker in alerting people.

City officials have said they were caught by surprise by the flooding, which came from Coyote Creek and followed heavy rain early this week which forced a reservoir upstream to overflow. Models suggested the creek could handle higher flow than it did, Vossbrink said.

"Models are never perfect," he added.

Ultimately, the creek reached a record height of 14.4 feet (4.4 meters) on Tuesday, according to the National Weather Service.

The Weather Service has forecast light rain will return to Northern California this weekend. "If it's light rains we should be in good shape. I think everyone is concerned it's still winter and there will be rain to come later in the season," Vossbrink said.—*Reuters*

Woman killed by flying debris as storm Doris batters Britain

A fallen tree brought down by high winds from Storm Doris lies across a main road in Isleworth in London, Britain, on 23 February 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

LONDON — A woman was killed by flying debris on Thursday as storm Doris battered Britain and Ireland, disrupting travel and leaving thousands without power as it swept in from the Atlantic.

The woman died from serious head injuries when she was hit by debris falling into the street in the Midlands city of Wolverhampton, emergency services said. In Cambridgeshire, eastern England, 11 people were taken to hospital with minor injuries when a double-decker bus was blown onto its side. Doris brought winds of up to 94 miles per hour in Wales, heavy snow forced school closures in Scotland and power was cut to thousands of homes in Ireland. Some flights were cancelled and many travellers faced train and road delays.—*Reuters*

Turin tightens bans on diesel cars to fight air pollution

TURIN, (Italy), — The city of Turin, led by the Five Star Movement mayor Chiara Appendino, has decided to restrict the movement of some diesel cars under certain circumstances, because of the high levels of air pollution in the northern Italian city.

From Thursday to Friday, cars with the standard of Euro 3 and Euro 4 are not allowed on the roads in the daytime. The ban also concerns petrol and gas vehicles.

The prohibition, which began on Monday and has been extended, was implemented after the level of pollution allowed by the law in the air was exceeded for seven consecutive days.

The ban will be triggered or lifted according to the level of pollution recorded in the air. It is part of a series of measures taken in the past weeks by the city council to try to reduce air pollution in Turin.

The repeated breaches of air pollution limits in the Turin area were cited by the European Commission in a warning sent on 15 February to Italy and other countries.

The new provision has drawn criticism from opposition parties and associations of artisans and merchants, according to local media.

Critics say the measure is not achieving results and instead is harming business and trade, as it may cause inconveniences for owners who can not use their vehicles.

Appendino, the Turin mayor, defends her decision, arguing that public health is more important than anything else. A change of mentality is needed, in her opinion, according to a video she released to explain the measure to fellow citizens.

She reminded also the European warnings to Italy and other countries regarding pollution.

The new rules exacerbate regional laws already in force. According to the new provisions, all diesel cars will not be allowed on roads after the limit of 100 micrograms per cubic meter of particulates is exceeded for three consecutive days. In this case, also the central city area will be forbidden to all private vehicles.

If the level of 50 micrograms is exceeded for seven consecutive days, diesel cars up to Euro 4 standard are not allowed on the roads.

In recent months, many Italian cities and towns have adopted various measures against air pollution. According to the environmental organization Legambiente in the Piedmont region, air had been the worst in the last four years, because of the high levels of smog.

On 15 February, the European Commission sent final warnings to Germany, France, Spain, Italy and Britain for failing to address repeated breaches of air pollution limits for nitrogen dioxide (NO2), urging those member states to take action to ensure good air quality and safeguard public health.

"If Member States fail to act within two months, the Commission may decide to take the matter to the Court of Justice of the EU,"the EU executive said in a statement.—*Xinhua*

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

MV WEST SCENT VOY. NO (141)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV WEST SCENT VOY. NO (141) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 25.2.2017 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of A.W.P.T where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S INTERASIA LINES

Phone No: 2301185

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

MV VIEN DONG 3 VOY. NO (-)

Consignees of cargo carried on MV VIEN DONG 3 VOY. NO (-) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 25.2.2017 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of MSTL-3 where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S RK SHIPPING & TRADING PTE LTD

Phone No: 2301928

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

MV INNWA STAR VOY. NO ( )

Consignees of cargo carried on MV INNWA STAR VOY. NO ( ) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 25.2.2017 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.P where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S REGIONAL CONTAINER LINES

Phone No: 2301185

PHOTO: PTI

Big B admires kids who choose family profession

MUMBAI — Megastar Amitabh Bachchan says he admires children who follow professions which are traditional in their families.

The "Piku" star launched Ustad Amjad Ali Khan's sons album — 'Journey- Rabab to Sarod' — by Amaan Ali Bangash and Ayaan Ali Bangash, here last evening.

"It's very rare for the heads of family to follow their tradition into the next generation and I really want to compliment you for continuing this tradition in your family...

Unfortunately with me it didn't happen because when I was young somebody asked my mother, 'so is your son going to be another poet'?

"She said, 'one poet in the family is enough'. So I didn't follow that. But thank you so much Amjad Ali Khan Saab for building these two into wonderful masters themselves and I wish them all the very best," he said.

The 74-year-old actor said it was a proud moment for him to launch the album as he has known both Amaan and Ayaan since they were toddlers.

"For me personally it's another kind of journey. Both Amaan and Ayaan were introduced to me as toddlers many many years ago, to see them today become masters of their craft, taught by the eminent Ustad Amjad Ali Khan saab, is indeed a wonderful journey," he said. At the launch, Amaan and Ayaan performed along with Daud Khan Sadozai, who has also collaborated with the duo on the album.—*PTI*

Pregnant Beyonce pulls out of Coachella music festival

LOS ANGELES — Pregnant singer Beyonce on Thursday pulled out of performing at California's Coachella music festival in April, citing doctor's orders.

The "Formation" singer, 35, who is expecting twins, will however headline the event in 2018, organizers said in a statement.

"Following the advice of her doctors to keep a less rigorous schedule in the coming months, Beyonce has made the decision to forgo performing at the 2017 Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival," the statement from festival organizer Golden Voice and Beyonce's Parkwood Entertainment said.

"However, Goldenvoice and Parkwood are pleased to confirm that she will be a headliner at the 2018 festival. Thank you for your understanding."

Beyonce was due to headline the annual festival in the Southern California desert on 15 April and 22 April. It was not clear who would replace her.

The R&B singer performed at the Grammy ceremony on 12 February, where she proudly displayed a large baby bump and took home two awards.

Beyonce and her rapper husband Jay Z, who have a five year-old daughter Blue Ivy, have not said when the twins are due.—*Reuters*

Beyonce performs at the 59th Annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles, California, US, on 12 February 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

Oscar best actor race is tale of two opposites

LOS ANGELES — Denzel Washington plays a talkative, bombastic, larger-than-life dad whose personality leaps off the screen.

Casey Affleck, by contrast, plays an introverted father, taciturn, mumbling and depressed.

Both men are competing to be named best actor at Sunday's Oscars in what award watchers say is the ceremony's biggest cliffhanger after weeks of campaigns and show business accolades.

While musical "La La Land" is widely expected to win the top award — best picture — Washington's performance in black family drama "Fences" and Affleck's role in the heart-breaking "Manchester by the Sea" are going down to the wire.

"There is a lot of affection for Denzel Washington and there is also the #OscarsSoWhite controversy from last year that has to be on Oscar voters' minds," said Matt Atchity, editor in chief of review aggregator RottenTomatoes.com.

If all goes well for Washington, 62, he would join the likes of Meryl Streep and Jack Nicholson among a rare group of actors who have won three Oscars.

Affleck, 41, the younger brother of actor Ben Affleck, is seeking his first ever Oscar. He had swept 90 percent of prior awards and critics prizes until losing to a stunned Washington at the Screen Actors Guild ceremony in January.

Affleck's early wins came despite 2010 sexual harassment allegations that resurfaced as his Oscar prospects gathered steam. Two civil lawsuits alleging unwanted advances were filed by female crew members on an earlier Affleck film, and were settled out of court for undisclosed sums. Affleck's lawyer at the time denied the allegations.

"It doesn't help, but I don't think it's going to be a key factor at the Oscars," said Tim Gray, who covers awards for Hollywood trade publication Variety.

Gray likened the Affleck case to that of film maker Roman Polanski, who won a best director Oscar in 2002 despite a 1977 rape case.

Denzel Washington poses with the award for Outstanding Actor in a Motion Picture for his role in "Fences" backstage at the 48th NAACP Image Awards in Pasadena, California, US, on 11 February 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

"When Polanski got the Oscar for 'The Pianist,' nobody predicted he was going to win. But it felt like Academy voters were sending a message that they were voting on the work, not a person's character," Gray said.

The other lead actor contenders — Andrew Garfield ("Hacksaw Ridge"), Viggo Mortensen ("Captain Fantastic") and Ryan Gosling ("La La Land") — were thought to be long shots as voting by the 6,600 members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences closed on Tuesday.

Sunday could bring surprises also in the lead actress race with a late surge of support for French actress Isabelle Huppert, star of psychological thriller "Elle."

Huppert, 63, was an upset winner over early favorite Natalie Portman ("Jackie") at the Golden Globes last month. She has now moved into second spot among experts at awards site Goldderby.com, although most expect Emma Stone to take home her first Oscar for playing a struggling actress in "La La Land."

The Academy Awards ceremony, hosted by comedian Jimmy Kimmel, takes place in Hollywood and will be shown live on ABC television starting at 5 pm EST/8 pm PST (2200 GMT).—*Reuters*

Prada combines soft and strong elements for its winter collection

A model presents a creation from the Fendi's Autumn/Winter 2017 women collection. PHOTO: REUTERS

MILAN — Italian fashion house Prada brought to the catwalk soft and strong designs in an attempt to define the role of women in society, in a powerful show ending the second day of Milan's fashion week.

The women imagined by Miuccia Prada, founder and creative director of the eponymous luxury group, wore corduroy pants, biker berets, and long velvet skirts that recalled women protests of the 1970s.

"I don't want to talk politics with fashion... but I want to do it my way, in a subtle way," Miuccia Prada told reporters ahead of the show.

Models paraded down the catwalk to the sound of electronic music wearing woollen caps, rough brown pant suits and duffle coats. The set appeared to be a home, filled with cozy seats and beds with flower linens and posters on the walls.

Their heads were adorned by bonnets that resembled lion manes, making them appear regal and strong.

But moments later they slipped into sequined colored, designs decorated with delicate marabou feathers or knee-length mermaid tail skirts.

"(In the collection) there are all those typical womanly things, like flowers and fringes and feathers... mixed with more serious clothes, made for a combating woman," said Prada, adding that all sides of a woman should coexist.

She explained that the matching of the pieces of her collections were "crude, immediate and direct, not sophisticated" and the frequent use of wool pieces was symbolic of both women at home and of fashion in the 70s.

"There are random touches of whatever came to my mind," she said.—*Reuters*

JR West unveils luxury express train 'Mizukaze'

OSAKA — West Japan Railway Co. on Thursday unveiled its 10-coach luxury "Twilight Express Mizukaze" train which has proven immensely popular even months before the start of its services through western Japan in June.

"The train realizes the concept of a hotel running through beautiful Japan. We hope to offer a new standard of rail travel," West Japan Railway President Tatsuo Kijima said as he introduced Mizukaze to the press.

According to the company known as JR West, there were a total of 2,022 applications during the initial round of reservations for tickets for the 368 rooms available between June and September.

Photo shows the inside of "Twilight Express Mizukaze," a 10-coach luxury express train of West Japan Railway Co., when it is unveiled to the media in Osaka on 23 February 2017. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

A one-night tour with a room for two people will be 270,000 yen ($2,400). The price for a suite starts from 750,000 yen.

Mizukaze will run from Kyoto and Osaka to Shimonoseki in Yamaguchi Prefecture, and return via coastal areas facing the Sea of Japan, offering passengers a one- or two-night tour. Passengers will be able to get off the train and visit tourist sites. —*Kyodo News*

Germany kicks off six days of carnival despite higher security

Carnival revellers celebrate during 'Weiberfastnacht' (Women's Carnival) in Cologne, Germany, on 23 February 2017, marking the start of a week of street festivals with the highlight 'Rosenmontag', Rose Monday processions. PHOTO: REUTERS

COLOGNE (Germany) — Revelers in clown costumes and wigs kicked off six days of merriment on Thursday with Weiberfastnacht or "women's carnival", traditionally the day when women take over town halls and symbolically "castrate" men by cutting off their ties.

Carnival festivities began at precisely 11:11 am in Cologne and other Catholic parts of Germany despite stormy weather and high security after an Islamist attack on a Christmas market in Berlin in December that killed 12 people.

In Mainz, police chief Achim Zahn appealed to carnival-goers to use common sense and avoid dressing up as suicide bombers with explosive belts, the German website Strand Journal reported.

Donald Trump-style wigs and masks were in high demand across Germany, where carnival activities traditionally poke fun at politicians. Susanne Mueller, managing director of Festartikel Mueller, a Bavarian-based company that makes party costumes, told Reuters that about 30 per cent of her company's wig production was dedicated to the US president's blond coiffure this year. —*Reuters*

Norwegian unveils cheap flights to US from Irish cities

DUBLIN — Low-cost airline Norwegian on Thursday announced a series of groundbreaking new transatlantic flights from three Irish cities, offering passengers low-cost travel to the United States from just 69 euros (73 US dollars).

Starting from 1 July, Norwegian will operate the first ever transatlantic flights from Cork with a service to Providence Airport, Rhode Island, together with new US routes from Shannon and Dublin to New York's Stewart International Airport and Providence, the airline said, adding that fares start from 69 euros one way.

The flights will serve two destinations on the US east coast, with a focus on smaller US airports, which offer access into New York, Boston areas, Norwegian said. The new transatlantic routes will be operated on brand new Boeing 737 MAX aircraft, it said. —*Xinhua*

mitv Myanmar International
Programme Schedule

(25-2-2017 07:00am ~ 26-2-2017 07:00am) MST

07:03	Am	News
07:26	Am	Great Shwedagon-The Prayer Halls And Buddha Images (Part-2)
07:52	Am	Next Generation "May Melody"
08:03	Am	News
08:26	Am	A May Yay Yin Nat Festival (Ep - I)
08:42	Am	Welcome to the Southern most part of Myanmar
08:52	Am	Next Generation: Nyan Kyal Say
09:03	Am	News
09:26	Am	Aye Aye Soe: Myanma Pioneer Female Bodybuilder
09:40	Am	A bike Ride in pursuit of Mural Art (Episode-2)
10:03	Am	News
10:26	Am	Next Generation "Skater"
10:35	Am	Five-Star Ocean Liners in Myanmar Waters
10:50	Am	Myanmar Traditional Bullock-Cart & Equestrian Racing

(11:00 Am ~ 03:00 Pm)- Friday 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	New
07:26	Pm	Myanmar's Traditions and Culture "Golden Land"
07:46	Pm	Dances of Myanmar: Enn Traditional Dance
07:49	Pm	Today Myanmar: Sim Card Registering
08:03	Pm	New
08:26	Pm	Bogalay Tint Aung: A Man of Versatility (Part-2)
08:53	Pm	Young Talents: Animator Swan Thura Htun

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

Old loves highlight Japan and Viet Nam's new bonds

HANOI — "This is my husband," said 94-year-old Nguyen Thi Xuan, holding up a pillow wrapped in a Vietnamese flag, with a Japanese army shirt pushed inside. She sleeps with it every night.

Xuan is among the few surviving widows of Japanese soldiers who were shipped home in the aftermath of World War II, many never to see their Vietnamese families again.

Next week, Japan's 83-year-old Emperor Akihito will meet some of the widows and their descendants, during one of many trips he has made to soothe the wounds of the war.

The story of the Vietnamese-Japanese families charts the ups and downs of the countries' ties at a time they are being brought closer by shared concern over the rise of China.

While many Vietnamese resented Japan's occupation in 1940, less bloody than many of its other conquests, some also saw it as a step to ending French colonial rule in Indochina.

Of more than one million Vietnamese deaths during the occupation, most were due to famine blamed on French and Japanese administrators rather than violence.

Some, like Xuan, fell in love.

Vietnamese Nguyen Thi Xuan, 94, who married Japanese soldier Nguyen Van Duc during World War II, poses with a portrait of him at her house in Hanoi, Viet Nam, on 14 February 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

"He spoke really good Vietnamese and often whispered Vietnamese songs," Xuan says of her husband, eyes twinkling.

They married in 1945, after Japan's defeat, when about 100,000 Japanese soldiers were stationed in Indochina.

Rather than return home, he stayed among some 600 former soldiers recruited by liberation leader Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh to bring military expertise to fight the French.

About half the Japanese died in fighting or from disease, but when the Viet Minh beat the French in 1954, the Vietnamese government decided the survivors should be sent home.—*Reuters*

MRTV
Programme Schedule (25-2-2017, Saturday)

6:00 Am
- Paritta by Hilly Region Missionary Sayadaw

7:00 Am
- Breakfast News

7:30 Am
- Hyper Sport

8:35 Am
- Documentary

9:10 Am
- Documentary

9:30 Am
- Business News

10:30 Am
- Poem for Children

11:00 Am
- 2017 Matriculation Examination Lessons (Economics)

11:25 Am
- Health and Vegetable

11:30 Am
- Game for Children

1:50 Pm
- Weekly Enterainment News

2:20 Pm
- Teleplay

2:35 Pm
- Documentary

3:30 Pm
- Myanmar National League MNL (1) (2017)(Live) (Hantharwady United FC Vs Yangon United FC)

5:30 Pm
- ASEAN Programme

5:45Pm
- NHK Programme "Japan's Job Encyclopedia" (Temple Carpenter)

6:35 Pm
- Tasty Trip

7:15 Pm
- TV Drama Series

8:00 Pm
- News/International News/ Weather Report
- Documentary
- Pyi Thu Ni Ti
- "Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra" (Part-2)

Note/ Hourly News Bulletins (Local + International)

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PHOTO: REUTERS

Djokovic back on court at Acapulco

LONDON — World number two Novak Djokovic will make his return from a shoulder injury at next week's ATP tournament in Acapulco, the Serb said on Friday.

Djokovic had accepted a wildcard into the Mexican tournament which boasts a strong field including Australian Open finalist Rafa Nadal and world number four Milos Raonic.

"Great news! You'll see me back on court next week in Acapulco at @AbiertoTelcel," the 12-times grand slam champion wrote on his Twitter account. "Did you miss me?"

Djokovic carried the shoulder problem into Serbia's Davis win over Russia earlier this month and skipped the ABN Amro tournament in Rotterdam which Frenchman Jo-Wilfried Tsonga won on Sunday.—*Reuters*

Ronaldo, Manchester United top Chinese internet tables

LONDON — Real Madrid striker Cristiano Ronaldo is comfortably the most influential soccer player online in China, while Manchester United are the most dominant club, according to a report.

The annual 'Red Card' report by Shanghai-based consultancy Mailman compiled data on top European clubs and their players, using metrics including social media followers, fan engagement and e-commerce.

Portugal forward Ronaldo topped the index ahead of second-placed Arsenal midfielder Mesut Ozil and third-placed Real team mate Gareth Bale. Manchester United pair Anthony Martial and Wayne Rooney rounded out the top five.

Ronaldo's online engagement was more than "10 times" higher than any other player, the report said.

Football-mad China has proven an increasingly lucrative market for Europe's top leagues, clubs and players in recent years. The English Premier League sold three years of television rights in China from 2019-20 to streaming service PPTV for $700 million, a source told Reuters in November, several times the size of a previous six-year deal with Beijing-based Super Sports Media.

Manchester United toured the country in the pre-season last year and were ranked ahead of Bayern Munich, Arsenal and Liverpool for online influence.

Cross-town rivals Manchester City were fifth on the table.

Although English clubs dominated the top five, the German Bundesliga was rated the most influential league ahead of the Premier League and Spain's third-ranked La Liga.

The Bundesliga was the only European league to have launched a "full digital presence including a Chinese language website", the report said.

China has the world's largest population of internet users, with its top social messaging app WeChat boasting 800 million users.—*Reuters*

Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo. PHOTO: REUTERS

Ranieri's Leicester departure leaves Thailand unmoved

LONDON — The dismissal of Leicester City coach Claudio Ranieri has caused barely a ripple in Thailand, where even last season's stunning Premier League title triumph for a locally-owned team failed to break traditional club loyalties.

The Italian was unceremoniously sacked on Thursday after a 2-1 loss to Sevilla in the first leg of a Champions League Round of 16 tie, and with the team hovering just a point and a place above the relegation zone after 25 matches.

On the streets of Bangkok on Friday, it proved a challenge to find anyone moved by the decision, or even a Leicester City supporter.

"I don't think Leicester City is part of the conversation," said 34-year-old office worker and Manchester United fan Kulthida Wattana.

"Thai people see them as an example of Thais succeeding on the world stage but in terms of football, its not really anything".—*Reuters*

Three Russians cleared to compete in international competition

LONDON — Three Russian athletes, including the women's defending European indoor pole vault champion, were cleared on Thursday to compete in international competition under a neutral flag after proving their anti-doping credentials.

The International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) said pole vaulter Anzhelika Sidorova — European champion indoors and out — sprinter Kristina Sivkova and hammer thrower Aleksei Sokirskii all met the "exceptional eligibility criteria" after showing they had undergone dope testing in an environment considered acceptable by the doping review board.

Sidorova and Sivkova are now eligible to compete in the 3-5 March European championships in Belgrade, along with long jumper Darya Klishina and middle-distance runner Yuliya Stepanova, who were declared eligible previously.

Sokirskii is free to compete in the annual European Throwing Cup in the Canary Islands scheduled for March 11-12.

"Their participation as neutral athletes in international competition is still subject to acceptance by the individual athlete and the organiser of the competition in question, in accordance with the rules of that competition," the IAAF said in a statement.

All other Russians remain ineligible as the country's athletics federation is suspended from all competition as a result of widespread state-sponsored doping and corruption.

IAAF President Sebastian Coe said: "The application process to compete internationally as neutral athletes is about our desire to support the hopes and aspirations of all clean athletes including Russian athletes who have been failed by their national system.

"While prioritising applications based upon the entry deadlines of the competitions concerned, the primary responsibility of the Doping Review Board must always be to safeguard the integrity of competition."—*Reuters*

Anzhelika Sidorova of Russia. PHOTO: REUTERS

United favourites but Southampton can harness spirit of '76

LONDON — For Manchester United fans of a certain age the name Bobby Stokes will still induce cold sweats as their team prepare for Sunday's League Cup final against Southampton at Wembley.

With United boss Jose Mourinho enjoying such an affinity with the competition that launched his English trophy collection, United will be favourites against their Premier League rivals.

But that's what they were in the 1976 FA Cup final when Southampton, then a second-tier club, stunned them with a 1-0 victory secured by Stokes in the 83rd minute.

Stokes, who died aged 44 in 1995, is still a cult hero at the south-coast club whose highlights since have been defeats in the 1979 League Cup and 2003 FA Cup finals.

While Saints manager Claude Puel can gild his first season in the job with an unexpected trophy, the stakes are higher for Mourinho as he tries to make his mark at a club where silverware is a basic requirement.

The unpopular Louis van Gaal managed it last season, steering United to an FA Cup success before making way for Mourinho, who won the League Cup for the third time in 2014-15 during his second spell in charge of Chelsea.

Victory on Saturday would bring Mourinho level with his United predecessor Alex Ferguson and Brian Clough, who jointly hold the record as the most successful managers in League Cup history.

While that would be a noteworthy achievement, the wider significance would be a first meaningful trophy for Mourinho at United, although his side did win the Community Shield curtain-raiser against Leicester City back in August.

The League Cup final win over Liverpool in 2005 got the Portuguese rolling at Chelsea, months after he arrived in England describing himself as the "Special One".—*Reuters*

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www.facebook.com/globalnewlightofmyanmar
Advertisement & Circulation — (+95) (01) 8604532

THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

"Printed and published at the Global New Light of Myanmar Printing Factory at No.150, Nga Htat Kyee Pagoda Road, Bahan Township, Yangon, by the Global New Light of Myanmar Daily under Printing Permit No. 00510 and Publishing Permit No. 00629."