■ NATIONAL
President U Htin Kyaw's New Year Day Message of Greetings
▶ PAGE 3

■ NATIONAL
Vice Presidents' New Year Messages
▶ PAGE 3

■ LOCAL NEWS
Fire destroys 12 shops in Maungtaw

Maungtaw villager missing
▶ PAGE 6

■ LOCAL NEWS
1,200 crimes, 285 dead, 1,073 injured nationwide during Thingyan Festival
▶ PAGE 6

THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

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Paritta Recitation Ceremony held at Presidential Palace

THE Paritta Recitation Ceremony for the 1379 Myanmar Era was held at Ngushwewar Hall of the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday morning, with President U Htin Kyaw, First Lady Daw Su Su Lwin and State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in attendance.

The congregation led by President U Htin Kyaw took the Nine Precepts from Sayadaw Bhaddanta Kavisara. The members of the Sangha recited the Parittas and the President and his congregation listened to the Parittas recited by the monks. Then, the President and wife, the State Counsellor and congregation donated offertories to the members of the Sangha.

Sayadaw Bhaddanta Kavisara delivered a sermon, followed by sharing the merits gained. After the ceremony, President U Htin Kyaw and First Lady Daw Su Su Lwin, the State Counsellor and the congregation offered meals to the members of the Sangha.

SEE PAGE 4 >>

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, upper left, First Lady Daw Su Su Lwin, centre left, President U Htin Kyaw, upper right, and Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint, far right, offer a traditional day meal known as a soon to members of the Sangha at the Presidential Palace. PHOTO: MNA

Firefighters remove debris in Kyaukpyu after Cyclone Maarutha damaged several areas on Sunday.
PHOTO: KYAUKPYU DISTRICT IPRD

Maarutha makes landfall, weakens

Cyclone Maarutha weakened yesterday morning, but heavy isolated rainfall is expected over some regions and states today, according the Meteorology and Hydrology Department.

Rain or thundershowers will be fairly widespread in Nay Pyi Taw, Mandalay, Magway and Taninthayi regions, and Shan, Kayah, Kayin and Mon states. Rain will be scattered in Lower Sagaing and Yangon Regions, Chin and Rakhine States and isolated in the remaining regions and states with isolated heavy rainfall in Nay Pyi Taw, Taninthayi Region, Kayin and Mon states. The degree of certainty for the weather predictions is 80 per cent, according to the weather bureau.

Occasional squalls with rough seas will be experienced in the Ayeyawady Delta, the Gulf of Mottama and along the Mon-Taninthayi Coasts. Surface wind speed in squalls may reach 40 mph. Seas will be moderate elsewhere in Myanmar.

Cyclone Maarutha damages buildings in Kyaukpyu

Cyclone Maarutha's winds caused damage in Kyaukpyu on Sunday, including one of the eight rooms in the internally displaced persons (IDP) building, causing a loss of Ks4.5 lakhs. The cyclone also caused damage in 70 households in eight villages, two medical facilities, two schools, one departmental building and two monasteries, resulting a total loss of Ks22,460,000 in Yanbye Township.

In 18 villages in Manaung Township, damage occurred at six schools, two monasteries, the general hospital, seven households and other buildings, resulting in damages totalling Ks 4,864,000.

Total losses in the district was Ks31,824,000. Police and firefighters continue to clear fallen trees.—*GNLM*

Today is the auspicious day, ending the 1378 ME & changing into the Myanmar New Year 1379 ME

On such an occasion of changing into the New Year, it is customary for Myanmar Society to start in the New Year with new spirit by cleansing spiritual defilements in the Old Year. The dwellers living in the Nay Pyi Taw Council Area as well are keeping Sabbath at the pagodas, stupas and monasteries, paying obeisance and offering sanitary performances towards the aged, making acts of sparing live fish and other beings, listening to sermons and Paritta recited and delivered by Buddhist monks and donating various kinds of offertories on the Myanmar New Year Day.

Buddhist devotees visit Uppatasanti Pagoda on the first day of the Myanmar New Year. PHOTO: MNA

In the morning, the 9th Paritta recitation ceremony with a view to exorcizing evil spirits and bad omens was held at the Cave of Uppatasanti Pagoda, in Nay Pyi Taw where pilgrims and audience listened to the sermons delivered by the Reverend Sayadaws and Buddhist monks led by Abhidhaja Maha Ratha Guru Bhaddanta Kavisara and members of Pagoda board of trustee, members of religious organizations and staff, pilgrims donating "Soon", fruits, flowers, holy water and candle lights. In the afternoon, the Reverend Sayadaws and Buddhist monks recited Paritta in the Nay Pyi Taw Council Area by helicopter with a view to repelling imminent dangers and evil spirits away on the auspicious occasion of the very New Year and sending Metta (Loving Kindness) after aerial spraying of the sacred water.

Similarly, remarkable pagodas in the Nay Pyi Taw Council Area, namely Satta Sattaha pagoda, Maha Sakya Ranthi Pagoda, Datu Jaya Datpaungsu pagoda, Ko Kham Pagoda, Loka Marazein Pagoda, Yan Aung Myin Pagoda and other famous pagodas were crowded with food offering ceremonies to all pilgrims. Events of releasing live fish and birds were also found.

And, Sayadaws recited Parittas intended for repelling imminent dangers and evil spirits away at the ministries, wards, Dhammayones, housing estates of government servicemen, and the audience at the event sharing their meritorious deeds to all beings.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Myanmar New Year Message of Greetings of Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw U Win Myint

Dear respected brothers and sisters of the ethnic people and citizens, first of all let me send warm wishes of Metta (Loving-kindness) for both your peace of mind and physical well-being.

Now is the time when we just embarked on the path to democratic transition of our Union to a Democratic Federal Union. This is a rare opportunity for us to have reached this stage with great difficulty through years of struggle and toil. Thus I want you all to remove all obstacles and hindrances that stand in the way of building of a democratic union collectively. I also want you all to guard against any opposition and dangers to democracy collectively. We also need to guard against any deed damaging the stability and peace that could result in deviation from the road towards democratic change.

Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw U Win Myint.

The Shwehintha Sayadaw said "In working for the people, despite scorn and scoff, hold your onward course with good faith and endeavor". We will exert our efforts for the people according to this saying. In addition to this, there is a special need for all of us to lend a helping hand, do our duty and work as much as possible in helping to achieve internal peace which is a necessity for the stability and development of the Union as well as for peace and prosperity of the citizens. May we have stability and peace as the Republic of the Union of Myanmar progress and develop. May the people have peace and be free from danger. I send Metta (Loving-kindness) again and pray for their happiness and tranquility. Thank you all.

Myanmar New Year Message of Greetings of Speaker of the Amyotha Hluttaw Mahn Win Khaing Than

My dear respected brothers and sisters of the Ethnic People and citizens,

On this auspicious occasion of the Myanmar New Year, on behalf of the Amyotha Hluttaw, I send my greetings and good wishes to all Myanmar citizens for their good health and happiness, and to be able to pass over to the New Year happily with auspiciousness.

In changing from the old year to the New Year, we need to review our performance during the old year, discard the impurities of the old year, and figure out things to do in the New Year with sincerity and good will, good intentions and good faith, and good character.

For the emergence of a prosperous and peaceful Democratic Federal Union, which is the shared aspiration of all ethnic people, I would like to especially urge all ethnic people to participate together with renewed spirit and vigor in building eternal peace imbued with Metta (loving-kindness) at this auspicious time of the New Year.

People's representatives like us follow the Hluttaw motto of "People's voice is Hluttaw's voice, people's wish is Hluttaw's wish, "Hluttaw implements people's hopes" in striving to fulfill the wishes of the people in the best possible way and we pledge to strive with every ounce of our energy.

Beginning from this year, I hope that all brothers and sisters of the ethnic people and citizens are blessed with auspiciousness.

May they achieve a peaceful life and in performing the various needful tasks in the New Year, may they have the ability to act always with an attitude of "respect" by having high regard for elders, respecting equals and being compassionate to those who are younger.

Speaker of Amyotha Hluttaw Mahn Win Khaing Than.

President U Htin Kyaw's New Year Day Message of Greetings

My dear citizens,

On this auspicious Myanmar traditional New Year Day I send these greetings and good wishes for your peace of mind and good health to all of you who have lived in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, as well as all Myanmar citizens living in far off countries for various reasons.

Every time we pass over to a New Year, it is customary for us to reflect upon the past year as we need to build up our renewed energy and strength and formulate plans for the tasks to be implemented for the journey ahead of us.

For our new Government which has been in power for over one year, along our journey, just as we have had successes, we will have to overcome challenges as we continue meeting them.

As we work for a Constitution that leads towards the emergence of a Democratic Federal Union, National Reconciliation, and Internal Peace, as the work is of a very delicate and sensitive nature, we have to work with extra care and focused attention in every aspect of the work.

While the Union Government is striving hard for Peace, we have received Thousands of Millions of Kyats from the people who have contributed with "cetana" for the Peace Process. This gives us encouragement for our onward journey. The donations of the people show how much they hunger for peace, how much they want a life of peace, and how much they have faith in and depend upon the leadership role being taken by the State Counsellor to seek solutions for the peace process by discussing and negotiating with many mass organizations and civil society associations. That is why I hope that during this year we will get good results for the people.

As we work for the development of the socio-economic life of the people, we can see that we have received significantly more and more help, cash donations, and technical assistance from other governments and international organizations who wish to help us. In addition, because of our Government's Economic Policy and new Foreign Investment Law, it is hoped that more investments will come in from foreign investors.

We do not need to stress this enough, especially, when we are implementing a project with government funds or external loans. We need to conduct a feasibility study. That is very important.

Depending upon the size and nature, such a feasibility study may take months or even years in some cases. We have to begin implementation of the project based on the feasibility study.

That is why, just as we have projects which can be implemented within one year, there are projects which might take years. That is why it is difficult to see the benefits of the new projects within a year.

President U Htin Kyaw.

If we have not taken adequate time for study, we may get more bad results than benefits. There can be loss of public funds and it can become a huge burden on the Union government.

Just to give one example, the Fourth Regular Session of the Second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw decided to terminate five projects and suspend 28 projects during the month of March.

That is why, I wish say with extreme seriousness that I thank all the people, who have given us their understanding and trust as they struggle and face many hardships. To summarize this situation, our Union Government has the understanding and acceptance of the people. You can see that we are continuing in our efforts to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of the people.

If we study current world affairs, we can see that people are encountering and feeling the transitional effects of policy changes as well as orientation changes. Although Myanmar is striving to walk on transitional path towards democracy, we may say that we have now reached a situation where we can feel the best hope and encouragement. Because of the fact that a Democratic Federal Union is the only solution for national reconciliation and peace, I believe that if we all are able to walk on this path in unity, in weal or woe, hand in hand, we are sure to reach successfully before long, the goal which all our people have been hoping for, no matter how hard this journey towards peace may be.

In our Union, inhabited by more than a hundred national ethnic races, we need to strive to create strength from diversity. We need to nurture good practices of federalism imbued with the teachings of a peaceful religion, a character of virtue and honesty and a spirit of accommodation and civility. Federalism is the building of unified strength from diversity in an accommodating manner.

As 2017 has been envisioned as "the Year of Peace", we hope that we would be able to bring forth joyful and good results. In accordance with the changed economic environment, we hope that we will get visible and tangible economic progress.

Together with our People, who have been waiting with patience and tolerance, we will strive for tremendous improvements. I wish to make this solemn appeal to the people to continue participating and cooperating with us, without letting go the hands of cooperation.

In this auspicious New Year, I send these Greetings of good wishes for the good health of all citizens and pray that all their positive wishes will find fulfillment.

Vice President U Myint Swe's New Year Message

Vice President U Myint Swe.

On the occasion of the New Year, I send these greetings and good wishes for the good health and auspiciousness of all ethnic nationalities living in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

It is now a year since our Government took office. During this year we have been persistently striving to achieve internal peace as quickly as possible because this is as important as life-blood for the socio-economic development of the people, for all ethnic people to live harmoniously within Myanmar society, for rule of law and all round development.

We have seen with satisfaction the enthusiastic donations made by the people for the achievement of peace. This shows that the government and the people are one in working for the peace process.

At this auspicious time of the Myanmar New Year, I would like to wish yet again that the ethnic people would participate and play their respective parts with new spirits and ideas for the good of the country.

The people need to cooperate with the Government in the endeavor to establish a stable, peaceful democratic system in Myanmar. The Union Government has done its utmost for the socio-economic development of the people and the people have already seen the Government's one year performance.

I pray that the Myanmar New Year 1379 will be the year when the Republic of the Union of Myanmar will see the emergence of clearer images of peace; the year when we can walk on a straight path towards peace; and the year which will be remembered as a memorable year in the history of Myanmar.

I also pray that the Republic of the Union of Myanmar would be able to stand tall as a nation developing in accordance with the changing world; and that all ethnic people would be blessed with both peace of mind and physical well-being and that they would be able to contribute for their benefit, their neighborhoods and the country as dutiful citizens.

New Year Message of Greetings of Vice President U Henry Van Thio

At the time when our ethnic people and citizens of Myanmar are pouring Myanmar traditional Thingyan water to welcome the Myanmar New Year, may all of you be able to march together towards a new era with Metta (loving-kindness), Cetana (good will), Karuna (compassion), fraternal feeling and happiness, with harmony and unison, without any discrimination regardless of race or religion. May there be no danger and may all achieve success. I send good wishes for peace of mind and physical well-being and fulfillment of all wishes.

May it be an auspicious and Happy New Year.

Vice President U Henry Van Thio.

New Year Message of Greetings of the C-in- C of Defence Services

At this time, I send greetings and good wishes to all citizens for their peace of mind and good health, fulfilment of all their wishes, to be free from worries and anxieties and achievement of all they need in happiness and good health. Thingyan actually is our cultural event. By having this Festival, in actual fact people usually perform meritorious deeds, some spend time listening to religious sermons or do meditation, some enter the monkhood, some do charity works. Some enjoy traditional entertainments and amusements. These are all a way of building up a certain kind of strength.

That strength will be a vital force in trying to pass to the New Year. All citizens should get the opportunity to pass to the New Year with the help of that strength. Furthermore, we are responsible to create such opportunities. Based on the opportunities they have been given, I would like to make a wish that all citizens be able to pass to the coming new year with success. Another matter is of course Peace. The nation will prosper only if there is peace. Therefore, I urge you all to endeavor to achieve peace. —*Myanmar News Agency*

Paritta Recitation Ceremony…

>> FROM PAGE 1

Also present on the occasion were Pyinmana Maha Withutayama Zaygon Monastery Sayadaw Abhidhaja Maha Rattha Guru Bhaddanta Kavisara and members of the Sangha, Vice President U Myint Swe and wife, Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw U Win Myint, Chief Justice of the Union U Htun Htun Oo, Chairman of the Constitutional Tribunal of the Union U Myo Nyunt and spouse, Chairman of the Union Election Commission U Hla Thein and wife, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice-Senior General Soe Win and wife and the Union Ministers and their wives.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Pyithu Hluttaw organises Paritta reciting ceremony

PARITTA reciting ceremony was held in the meeting hall of Pyithu Hluttaw building C, Nay Pyi Taw, in the afternoon of Myanmar New Year day of 1379 ME.

The ceremony was attended by the Members of the Sangha led by Sayadaw Bhaddanta Tejobhasa from Tharmanaykyaw Monastery, Wunna Theidi Ward, Ottarathiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw, Pyithu Hluttaw speaker U Win Myint and Pyithu Hluttaw office staff. At the ceremony, Speaker U Win Myint and congregation received the five precepts administered by Sayadaw Bhaddanta Tejobhasa from Tharmanaykyaw Monastery, Wunna Theidi Ward, Ottarathiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw. Afterward, the Buddhist monks led by Sayadaw Bhaddanta Tejobhasa from Tharmanaykyaw Monastery, Wunna Theidi Ward, Ottarathiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw recited the Parittas. Next Speaker U Win Myint and congregation donated the alms and offertories to the monks and shared the merit gained. — *Myanmar News Agency*

Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint donates offertories to a Member of the Sangha at the Paritta reciting ceremony held at Pyithu Hluttaw office in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MNA

Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker pays respects to elder persons in Myawady

AMYOTHA Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than yesterday attended a ceremony in Myawady Township, Kayin State, that pays respect to the aged people on the occasion of the Myanmar Traditional New Year Day.

The Speaker and his wife, Members of Parliament, departmental officials, religious associations and social groups released fingerlings into the Thaungyin River near the Thai –Myanmar Friendship Bridge to mark the New Year Day.

Then, the speaker and party visited Shwe Myin Won pagoda's board of trustee office where health care service was being provided to elderly people.

They also attended the ceremony of paying respect to 274 elderly people held at the pagoda and donated cash and kind to the aged people. On the occasion, elderly people above 80 years old from five wards in Myawady were provided with cash and kind. — *Myanmar News Agency*

Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than presents gift to an elder person. PHOTO: MNA

Wishes for Myanmar New Year from Embassies in Myanmar

British Ambassador Mr. Andrew Patrick.

US Ambassador Mr. Scot Marciel.

Chinese Ambassador Mr. Hong Liang.

Vietnamese Ambassador Dr. Luan Thuy Duong.

EU Ambassador Mr. Roland Kobia.

Japanese Ambassador Mr. Tateshi Higuchi.

Japanese Ambassador Mr. Tateshi Higuchi

I wish good fortune for a joyous new year with families and friends. Myanmar is now advancing both socially and economically moving forward. Last November the State Counsellor made an official visit to Japan and held discussions with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. I will reiterate the message from that meeting that Japan will support Myanmar in both government and private sectors in its development. I wish the coming year to be a prosperous one for all the people of Myanmar.

Chinese Ambassador Mr. Hong Liang

Greetings, on behalf of the People's Republic of China I extend my New Year wishes to all the ethnic nationals and people of this country. May you all have a happy New Year.

Vietnamese Ambassador H.E Dr. Luan Thuy Duong

I wish for all the people of Myanmar health, wealth, prosperity and good fortune in the New Year.

US Ambassador H.E Mr. Scot Marciel

Mingalarbar, I wish you a healthy and prosperous Myanmar New Year. This year we're celebrating the 70th anniversary of relationships and friendship between the people of America and the people of Myanmar. And on behalf of the American people we look forward to being good friends and partners for many more years to come. I extend good wishes to all.

EU Ambassador Mr. Roland Kobia

Dear friends, I would like to wish you on behalf of the European Union, a very prosperous, healthy New Year, 1379. It has been an incredible year with a lot of things being done. The by-elections that just took place were organized in a very professional way, so we would like to congratulate for all the efforts that have been done over the last year. And the EU remains a helpful, constructive partner to help your efforts. Now Myanmar loves football so I would like to take a metaphor from football. Football is a very interesting game because all the players defend different interests in the teams. Also, the team that scores first is not always the team that wins in the end but what is very important is that they always shake hands at the end of the game and they accept the results of the game. Those who make bad fouls will be sent off with a red card and everyone will have to abide by the rules. And the last thing which is very important is that in very good teams, normally these good teams are made of players that come from the different parts of the country.

This is international football but you also have chinlone in Myanmar and the beauty of this game, I think, is that you all play together to try to achieve one common objective. It's not about winning. It's about participating in the transition towards democracy and to be able to give all the good things to Myanmar. Thank you.

British Ambassador Mr. Andrew Patrick

Mingalabar, I extend my wishes for the New Year to all the people of Myanmar to have peace, happiness and all your desires fulfilled in the New Year.—*Myanmar News Agency*

LOCAL Business

Although foreigners have the right to buy condominium, lack of quality contributed to low interest. PHOTO: GNLM/PHOE KHWAR

Foreigners not much interested in Myanmar condominium

FOREIGNERS have shown little interest in Myanmar's condominiums on account of their inability to meet the condominium's criteria and the weakness of law, according to an analysis by the real estate website House.com.mm.

According to the new Condominium Law, foreigners have the right to buy condominiums, but the lack of quality has led foreign expatriates to lose interest, the website found.

Currently, the real estate market is on a downward trend. Most of the developers and owners of the apartments have to depend on rental market. Only the houses in the areas owned by Yangon City Development Committee are found to have a deal.

House.com.mm, online marketplace for real property listings in Myanmar, holds real estate expos every month and most of them are aimed at rentals than sales due to the market's condition. The price gap between the sellers and the buyers results in a slump in sales, according to house.com.mm.

According to the Union Tax and Revenue Law, when buying real estate a 15 per cent tax must be imposed upon the real property worth Ks1 million to Ks30 million, a 20 per cent tax for property between Ks30 million to Ks100 million and a 30 per cent tax on property above Ks100 million. In addition, a seven per cent stamp duty is also levied on real estate contracts in Yangon and a 5 per cent duty in other townships outside Yangon, it is learnt.—*Ko Khant*

Amara Communications to roll out new 4G LTE data with Alepo's solution

MYANMAR's Amara Communications will launch a new 4G LTE and fiber-to-the-subscriber (FTTx) network with the help of the network modernization system of Alepo, a U.S.-based global IT consultant company, according to the News Now Website.

Amara, a member of IGE, one of the five largest companies in Myanmar, is a new entrant to the burgeoning Myanmar telecom market, and Alepo has extensive experience assisting new service providers globally. Alepo will work with Amara to achieve optimised productivity in their business and network IT operations, it is learnt.

In order to provide nationwide advanced data service, and also help the State to earn more revenue, tenders were invited by the Ministry of Transport and Communications. Auction areas were divided into three geographical sections: Area 1 includes Nay Pyi Taw, Magway, Bago, Mon, Kayin and Taninthari; Area 2 includes Yangon, Ayeyawady and Rakhine; and Area 3 consists of Mandalay, Sagaing, Chin, Shan, Kachin and Kayah. Amara Communications won auctions for areas 2 and 3, bidding over US$120 million, the most out of all bidding companies.

"The company will continue to invest and offer advanced data services in Myanmar with Alepo's BSS solution, which is found to be one of the most flexible and robust solutions available on the market", said Daw Aye Mya Mya Kyi, the CEO of Amara Communications. "In addition, we will create more job opportunities for young people:.—*Ko Htet*

Myanmar's mangoes to penetrate five countries

MYANMAR's mangoes will potentially penetrate five foreign countries including Russia this year, according to Mandalay Association of Technology Development and Market Promotion of Myanmar Mangoes. Two mango varieties, Sein Ta Lone (Solitaire diamond) and Mya Kyauk (Emerald) are mainly exported to foreign countries of Japan, South Korea, Russia and Ukraine. Myanmar's mangoes fetch a good export price. The association has already warned mango growers to spray pesticides in order to prevent the trees from the attack of parasitic fungi resulting from recent untimely rain.

The heavy rain in Mandalay Region hopes not to have a negative impact on the yield of mangoes. There are about 100,000 acres of mango farms in Mandalay Region. —*Ko Khant*

1,200 crimes, 285 dead, 1,073 injured nationwide during Thingyan Festival

DESPITE security efforts, there were still numerous cases of accidents and crimes during the water festival. an increase from last year's total.

On the last day of the water festival, 61 crimes occurred, including one murder case, 13 injuries from five car accidents, 29 injuries from 20 violence cases, seven other cases, two cases involving arms, two drug cases, 23 suspected cases of theft, and one death case.

A total of 1,200 crimes occurred and caused 285 deaths and 1,073 injured.

Compared to last year's figures of 967 crimes, 272 deaths and 1,086 injured cases, 233 more cases and 13 more deaths occurred in this year's water festival.

In Nay Pyi Taw Union Territory, there were 39 cases that resulted in 10 deaths and 28 injuries. In Kachin State, there were 34 cases resulting in nine deaths and 15 injuries. In Kayah State there were seven cases that resulted in one death and six injuries. In Kayin State, there were 15 cases resulting in five deaths and 31 injuries.In Chin State, there were three cases in which one died and one was injured. In Sagaing Region, there were 167 cases resulting in 26 deaths and 194 injuries. In Taninthayi Region there were 42 cases in which 11 persons died and 35 were injured. In Bago Region, there were 154 cases resulting in 37 deaths and 183 injuries. In Magway Region, there were 56 cases in which 11 died and 45 were injured. In Mandalay Region, there were 160 cases that resulted in 36 deaths and 136 injuries.

In Mon State, there were 50 cases in which 20 died and 66 were injured. In Rakhine State, there were 47 cases in which 17 died and 66 were injured. In Yangon Region, there were 223 cases in which 44 died and 111 were injured. In Shan State, there were 59 cases in which 29 died and 52 were injured. In Ayeyawaddy Region, there were 144 cases resulting in 28 deaths and 104 injuries.—*Than oo (Laymyet hna)*

Fire destroys twelve shops in Maungtaw

AN outbreak of fire caused by the sparks of a cigarette destroyed 12 shops in Zin Paing Nyar Village in Maungtaw on Sunday.

The incident reportedly occurred in the afternoon with the fire breaking out at the petrol shop owned by Sultan Hussein, 25, living in Doe Tan Village. The fire quickly flared out of control and spread to the shops nearby. The fire destroyed a total of 12 shops with losses amounting to Ks240,000. The police have filed charges against Sultan Hussein. —*Myanmar News Agency*

Maungtaw villager missing

A local resident named Mammad Tarlaung (alias) Zaw Hlaing, 42, living in Kyain Chaung Taung village, Maungtaw Township, disappeared on the morning of 16 April, it is learnt.

Mammad Tarlaung who is engaged in the construction sector, was abducted by a group of men while crossing Jet Chaung village at 8:20 am. He did not return home.

This prompted local border guard police force to search for him in Laung Don, Zaytipyin, Sinthaypyin, Ngasarkyu, Pan Myaung, Jet Chaung and Mhyarsin villages and inspect the household lists in the villages, but their search was fruitless.

Police have take action in accordance with the law.—*Myanmar News Agency*

Murder victim's kin: 'Our hearts are broken'

Mark Angeles

THE siblings of the British man murdered in Yangon last year said they will not cease pleading for the public's help or pressuring authorities until the killer of their brother is brought to justice.

Gary Ferguson, 47, was found dead in a Yangon apartment with head and chest wounds on 6 November.

Myanmar police said Harris Binotti, of Scotland, has not been seen since he and Mr. Ferguson had been drinking together three nights previously on 3 November at the Uptown Hotel on Shukhintar Street in Tharkayta Township. Neighbours reported hearing sounds of a fight among two men and a woman between midnight and 4:30am on 4 November from Binotti's downtown apartment.

Five months after Mr. Ferguson's death, with reports that Binotti, 26, may be in Thailand or another nearby country in Southeast Asia, apparently no progress has been made in apprehending the suspect.

"Our hearts are broken," said Donna Ferguson, Mr. Ferguson's sister, said yesterday. "But we will never give up."

Interpol, the global police organisation that facilitates cooperation among international law enforcement agencies, has recently joined in the hunt for Binotti, the prime suspect in the case.

Murder suspect Harris Binotti

The 26-year-old is understood to have left Myanmar hours after the death of Mr. Ferguson. Myanmar officials previously confirmed that Binotti left on a 4:30pm Thai Airways flight on 5 November to Bangkok.

Interpol has issued an international "red notice" alerting police forces around the world that Mr Binotti is wanted for extradition.

The notice, which makes the manhunt for the suspect a truly international, coordinated effort, states that Harris Binotti faces a charge of murder and describes him as 1.68m (5ft 5in), with brown hair and blue eyes.

"Red notices" are issued to international police forces when the suspect is wanted for prosecution or to serve a sentence based on an arrest warrant or court decision.

Mr. Ferguson's brother Martin said the family was relieved that the red notice had finally been issued.

"We waited for five months to get this notice, and now we hope for a swift end to this horrible event," said Martin Ferguson yesterday. "We want to thank the Myanmar authorities for getting this red notice, although slow, we are still relieved it has been issued."

Martin Ferguson said the past five months has given the suspect time to establish ways to stay underground.

"The suspect will of course have had a lot of time to think about his plan to stay out of justice's hands and to make up a story that will help him when he is arrested", Martin Ferguson said. "We would also like to state that we are not happy that the suspect's girlfriend was allowed to travel from Myanmar as she is the only one who could have saved my brother. Therefore, we want Elsie Devolder to also be marked as a suspect or accessory to murder."

Murder victim Gary Ferguson, left, with wife Supatchaya Sichompor, centre, and four-year-old son Jeremy.

Neighbours of Binotti in Kyauktada told reporters in November that a loud ruckus could be heard in the early morning hours of 4 November involving two men and a woman.

"At that time we were sleeping, someone was smashing the walls, smashing the floors," a neighbor said. "At around 4.30am we didn't hear anything."

They said Binotti and his girlfriend, named by police as Elsie Devolder, had rented the apartment for several months, mostly leaving for work in the early morning and returning late at night.

Elsie Devolder did not travel to Bangkok on 5 November with Binotti, authorities said, but left Yangon at a later date. Binotti may still be in Southeast Asia, possibly with Devolder, sources said.

Gary Ferguson, originally from Bangor, Northern Ireland, and Harris Binotti, of Dumfries, Scotland, both taught English at the Horizon International School in Yangon. Binotti's girlfriend was also a teacher.

Mr. Ferguson had worked at the Horizon International School since 2013, while Mr Binotti had been there for about three months.

Mr. Ferguson leaves behind a wife, Supatchaya Sichompor, and a four-year-old son Jeremy.

"We just want Myanmar to know that a great person was murdered", Martin Ferguson said. "A good father who is not anymore able to provide for his son and his wife. They are left to the mercy of the world."

Myanmar ushers in New Year after water festival

Feng Yingqiu

YANGON — A large number of Yangon residents have been crowding around pagodas since Monday morning, especially the sacred Shwedagon Pagoda, and were paying their respects to the Buddhha there.

They bathed statues and sprinkled scented water on the images of Buddha as part of Myanmar's centuries-old heritage practiced on the traditional new year day, after the conclusion of the four-day water festival, which ran from Thursday to Sunday.

As the New Year was being ushered in on Monday, Myanmar people, who are mostly Buddhist, are busy with their annual rituals such as visiting monasteries, stupas, temples to take precepts, making donations and meditating.

On this day, young people normally pay their respects to their parents, grandparents, teachers and elderly people. Some of them give their elders baths, shampoo their hair or give manicures in old people's homes as a gesture to preserve Myanmar's age-old customs and traditions. Other youngsters offer their seniors naturally fragrant sticks of bark.

Also during the New Year, it is customary for people to free caged birds into the wilderness and fish in aquariums into the lakes, as a symbol of love for nature.

People visit Shwedagon Pagoda on the first day of Myanmar's traditional new year in Yangon, Myanmar, on 17 April, 2017. PHOTO: XINHUA

During the annual four-day traditional Thingyan water festival, people throw water on each another. By nature, water is cold and clean and, therefore, Thingyan water makes people feel cool, fresh and pleasant, and happy. It symbolizes the cleansing of sins from the previous year and making a fresh and auspicious start to the New Year.

Water is a symbol of not only cleanliness but also of auspiciousness. The people in Myanmar believe that through the celebration of the water festival, vices and evil deeds accumulated during the previous year can be washed away and replaced with happiness and hope for a better life in the incoming year.

In old days, Myanmar people were content to sprinkle water on each other using leaves, which was the traditional way of observing the water festival.

Nowadays, however, more people are soaking each other using water guns or plastic hoses usually accompanied by loud guffaws, reflecting the fun and enjoyment.

This year's water festival in Myanmar was celebrated joyfully by the people across the nation. Especially in Yangon and Manadalay, people introduced a "walking water festival" as a new form of celebration, with a huge wave of people in festive yet soggy clothes walking along the streets and roads, shouting and chanting, while having water thrown on them by spectators.

With heavy rain and cool weather providing nature's backdrop for the last two days of the festival due to the impact of cyclone Maarutha making landfall in west Myanmar's Rakhine coast, this year's Thingyan water festival ended on Sunday evening.

The festival was brought to a close with a ceremony at the Yangon City' Pandal, comprising a number of songs and dances.

Throughout the year, people look forward to the Myanmar water festival as an occasion to thank the deities for their good lives and to pray for peace and prosperity for their communities.

Among Myanmar's 12 seasonal festivals held every year, the Thingyan water festival is considered the grandest and the most anticipated event by the people of Myanmar.—*Xinhua*

S Korea's ousted president Park indicted over corruption scandal

SEOUL — South Korean prosecutors on Monday indicted jailed former President Park Geun hye over a corruption and abuse-of-power scandal that led to her fall from power.

In a statement, prosecutors said Park is suspected of having received a total of 59.2 billion won (about $52.4 million) in bribe money, according to Yonhap News Agency.

The 65-year-old daughter of assassinated military ruler Park Chung Hee is South Korea's first ex-president to be arrested and indicted since former leaders Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo, who were both jailed on corruption and insurrection charges in the mid-1990s.

Facing over a dozen charges including soliciting bribes, abuse of power and leaking confidential information, Park has denied all the allegations against her.

Since her arrest on 31 March, she has been held in solitary confinement at a detention center on the outskirts of Seoul and has undergone at least five rounds of questioning.

South Korea's first female president stands accused of letting her now-jailed confidante Choi Soon Sil, a private citizen, meddle in state affairs and gain unauthorized access to classified documents.

She is also suspected of colluding with Choi to extort massive donations from dozens of South Korean conglomerates, including Samsung Group and Lotte Group, for two nonprofit foundations under Choi's control.

Park became the country's first democratically elected leader to be dismissed from office when the Constitutional Court on 10 March upheld a parliamentary impeachment vote against her, effectively stripping her of immunity from criminal prosecution.—*Kyodo News*

South Korea's ousted President Park Geun Hye. PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

China, Viet Nam hold 10th meeting of steering committee on cooperation

BEIJING — The 10th meeting of the China-Viet Nam steering committee on cooperation was held on Monday, co-chaired by Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi and Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh.

In the past year, China-Viet Nam relations have continued their good development momentum, and exchanges in various fields have continuously deepened, Yang said.

He called for joint efforts to ensure the success of mutual visits by the leaders of the two parties and countries within the year and to upgrade the quality and standard of pragmatic cooperation.

Echoing Yang on the status of bilateral ties, Pham Binh Minh said his country highly values its comprehensive strategic cooperation with China, and expressed the Vietnamese side's willingness to deepen strategic coordination, enhance political trust, and beef up pragmatic cooperation.

Minh also expressed his wishes for the success of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) to be held this year.

Yang and Minh hailed the significant role the steering committee mechanism has played since its establishment around 10 years ago.

Both sides agreed to implement the consensus reached by their leaders and map out plans for the whole year, spearheaded by deepened high-level visits.

The two sides also reached consensus on advancing their comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation by jointly promoting China's Belt and Road Initiative and Viet Nam's "Two Corridors and One Economic Circle" plan, expanding cooperation in such areas as investment, capacity, infrastructure, people-to-people exchanges, accelerating the building of cross-border economic cooperation zones, as well as properly managing differences to safeguard maritime peace and stability.—*Xinhua*

US "100%" behind S Korea security amid N Korea tensions: Pence

SEOUL — US Vice President Mike Pence on Monday vowed his country's all-out support to defend South Korea amid heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula following a failed missile test by North Korea the previous day.

"We are with you 100 per cent," Pence said in a joint press conference with South Korea's acting President Hwang Kyo Ahn after their talks in Seoul.

Pence arrived in South Korea on Sunday on the first leg of a 10-day trip to the Asia-Pacific region to reinforce regional security alliances, after Pyongyang again defied international warnings and unsuccessfully launched a ballistic missile from near the port city of Sinpo in the morning.

Hwang said he and Pence agreed to continue with the planned deployment of the United States' Terminal High Altitude Area Defence anti-missile system in South Korea to counter the North Korean threat.

The two also agreed to swiftly implement punitive measures against North Korea should it continue with its provocative actions, according to Hwang.—*Xinhua*

Opinion

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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.

New Year resolutions should include humanitarian needs

Aye Min Soe

SOME people take their New Year resolutions seriously, while some just bid farewell to the old year on New Year's Day. Many people are accustomed to the thinking that they have washed away all evil, bad habits and dirty thoughts with the water they have thrown during Thingyan. There is no denying that everybody has made some sort of New Year resolutions, whether they realise it or not. People change with the passing of time. So do their wishes and aspirations. Taken seriously, New Year resolutions provide us with an opportunity to gauge our goals.

In the New Year, we can use the start of a new year to make significant changes that can have a lasting impact on our life and our country.

Now is the time when the country is transforming itself into a democratic nation in accordance with the wishes of all the people. And it is also the time for all the nationalities to contribute their labour and efforts in unity for national reconciliation, internal peace and for the emergence of a Federal Democratic Union.

To achieve peace, for democratic transformation to continue with vigour, for our Union to endure, we all need to work together with each other with unflagging zeal, constant vigilance and diligence to the best of our mental and physical abilities.

Today is the time for the people and the new generation to work with a new mindset and renewed strength for the country and for future generations.

Our country is now on the road toward peace. Building peace sets a value on beauty, elegance, truth and peaceful co-existence. Building the path of peace based on these values can lead us to the goal we desire.

We believe all humans on this earth are desirous of, and aspire to peace. Only those who do not understand the meaning and value of peace do not set a value on it and are thus not desirous of it.

This year is a great challenge for our country, which needs stability and national reconciliation. Myanmar has not had total peace since it became an independent nation. This is why peace is the country's most important goal. Without peace, we cannot achieve sustainable prosperity.

In this Myanmar New Year, whatever resolution we adopt for our own country, it has to meet the standard of humanity and human needs.

Nothing but total, lasting peace should be our country's New Year resolution.

Scientists discover eggs of one of world's most endangered turtles

Male in breeding colors. Credit Kalyar Platt

A team of Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)/Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) scientists working in Myanmar have reported the successful recovery of 44 fertile eggs of the critically endangered Burmese roofed turtle (Batagur trivittata) – one of the world's most endangered turtles with less than five females remaining in the wild.

Photo: Wildlife Conservation Society

> "A combination of overharvesting of eggs, incidental loss in fishing gear, and habitat loss due to gold mining had pushed the species to the brink of extinction.

A combination of overharvesting of eggs, incidental loss in fishing gear, and habitat loss due to gold mining had pushed the species to the brink of extinction. But ongoing conservation work offers a glimmer of hope for the imperiled turtle.

For the past 11 years, WCS scientists have monitored nesting sites awaiting females to emerge from the Chindwin River to dig nests on sand bars. This year, three clutches were found. Two of the clutches contained viable eggs. A third clutch, located in an area far upstream where scientists expect no males exist, contained no viable eggs. Another clutch of four viable eggs was found last December.

All told, 44 viable eggs have been recovered and are now in a protected incubation site where they receive 24 hour monitoring. The eggs are expected to hatch in early June. The hatchlings will be immediately transported to another facility and maintained in large pools for the next four or five years. Once the turtles are at a size thought safe from predation, they will be released back into the river.

WCS scientists say that the number of viable eggs recovered is an improvement over the past few years. In 2016, only a single viable clutch was found. No viable eggs were produced in 2015; and in 2014, just a single viable egg was deposited.

Young male turtles released into the wild in 2015 are believed to be responsible for inseminating the wild females. Scientists will conduct DNA tests on the hatchlings. If paternity can be traced to the released males, it would mark a major milestone in the conservation of the species, and Asian river turtles in general. The captive population has grown to over 600 juveniles of all sizes, and conservationists plan to continue to release animals back into the wild.

Said Steven Platt, Regional Herpetologist for WCS's Myanmar Program: "Every year we hold our breath until the females emerge from the river and lay their eggs. We were delighted to collect so many viable eggs this year, but we still have a long way to go before we have a secure wild population of these turtles in the Chindwin River. Although not yet a true 'success story' in the sense that we have recovered the species, had WCS and TSA not intervened when we did, I have no doubt that Batagur trivittata would have already slipped over the edge of the extinction abyss."

WCS is working with partners to breed additional Burmese roofed turtles at the Yadanabon Zoo. Last year, WCS and zoo staff modified the turtles' diet to include more protein and constructed an additional sandy nesting area. This spurred the turtles to nest in both nesting area this year. Rather than excavate the clutches and risk damaging the embryos, WCS advised zoo staff to simply leave the eggs in situ to complete incubation. They have constructed small fences around the nesting areas to intercept the hatchlings as they emerge from the nests in June.

Meanwhile, turtles in another breeding facility in Lawkanandar Wildlife Sanctuary are continuing to grow. Scientists expect reproduction to begin within the next year or two. An additional 98 turtles live at a third assurance colony in Htamanthi Wildlife Sanctuary. These turtles are doing well and scientists expect breeding within five years. A forth assurance colony has been established in the Singapore Zoo.

> "WCS scientists say that the number of viable eggs recovered is an improvement over the past few years.

In 2012, WCS announced a strategy that draws on all of the resources and expertise across the institution – from its Zoos and Aquarium, Global Health Program, and Global Conservation Programs – to take direct responsibility for the continued survival of some of the world's most endangered tortoises and freshwater turtles WCS focuses on two key strategies: reducing the number of adults lost and increasing the number of juvenile turtles entering into the population annually.—*Wildlife Conservation Society*

Steven Platt (left) with field team. Photo: Kalyar Platt

Steven Platt at incubation area. Photo: Kalyar Platt

Smithsonian Scientists Discover Two Colorful Geckos in Vanishing Myanmar Rainforest

Study Shows Rapid Deforestation Threatening Future of Country's Rare and Threatened Species

The Tenasserim Mountain bent-toed gecko is one of two new species of gecko discovered during a biodiversity survey in little-studied areas of Myanmar by Smithsonian and Fauna & Flora International scientists. Photo: Grant Connette, Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute

SMITHSONIAN scientists have discovered two new gecko species — the Lenya banded bent-toed gecko (Cyrtodactylus lenya) and Tenasserim Mountain bent-toed gecko (C. payarhtanesnsis), in the little-studied lowland forests of Myanmar. In a study published April 12 in PLOS ONE, the authors describe the new species but warn that rapid deforestation poses an imminent threat not only to the geckos, but to the many species that share their habitat.

"Southern Myanmar has incredible lowland forests that scientists have not had a chance to explore because of a history of armed conflict in the area," said Grant Connette, Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute (SCBI) fellow and lead author on the paper. "Recent political change has opened up the area so we can now survey the biodiversity, but there has also been a rapid increase in forest clearing, often for rubber and palm oil plantations. As we are trying to document these species for the first time, we are witnessing the loss of the forests they depend on."

The study, which also included authors from the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History and Fauna & Flora International, focuses specifically on the biodiversity and deforestation in and around Myanmar's proposed Lenya National Park. This area is traditionally a stronghold for rare and threatened species, such as the tiger, Asian elephant and Malayan tapir.

Myanmar is a globally recognized biodiversity hotspot, supporting a very high number of species, many of which are unique to the region and of global importance.

Myanmar also has one of the highest deforestation rates in the world. The researchers used satellite data to determine that the proposed national park has recently been losing forest at a rate that is double the national average from 2002 to 2014. Forests surrounding the proposed national park have been cleared even faster, with a rate of loss 25 times greater than the rest of the country. Once cleared, the forests are often replaced by agricultural or agroforestry crops. Lowland forests have almost completely vanished from mainland Southeast Asia, making the intact forests in Myanmar especially valuable.

In 2016, the paper's authors conducted a survey of the amphibians and reptiles of the proposed national park, finding 67 species of frogs, snakes and lizards, including the two newly discovered bent-toed geckos. Myanmar has 18 known species of bent-toed geckos, which come in a variety of colors and patterns. Bent-toed geckos often have a limited geographic range, and the researchers found these two species near areas of recent forest clearing, according to Daniel Mulcahy, herpetologist at the National Museum of Natural History and co-author on the paper.

The Lenya banded bent-toed gecko is one of two new species of gecko discovered during a biodiversity survey in little-studied areas of Myanmar by Smithsonian and Fauna & Flora International scientists. Photo: Grant Connette, Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute

"These geckos are flagships for conservation in this incredibly diverse landscape," Mulcahy said. "We can help these newly identified geckos by determining what species are in the area, whether they live only here and nowhere else, and whether they have sufficient protection. With that information, conservationists can work with the government and local villages to implement practices that give these species a chance at a future."

These efforts are part of the Smithsonian's Myanmar Biodiversity Initiative, led by Melissa Songer, SCBI conservation biologist and co-author on the paper. The initiative uses science to help increase conservation capacity of Myanmar partner organizations and ensure the long-term survival of species, landscapes and ecosystems in the country. The data collected in this biodiversity survey and those in the future will become part of a broader project collecting baseline biodiversity data to inform management of protected areas in the country.

"Given the Smithsonian's more than 20-year history doing research and training in Myanmar, we are uniquely positioned to really ramp up our scientific and conservation efforts in this changed political climate," Songer said. "While we do not think people realize just how fast these forests are going, we are hopeful that there are new opportunities now to safeguard the forests in this unique part of the world."

SCBI's Katie LaJeunesse Connette and the Natural History Museum's George Zug are also co-authors on this paper. Additional authors on this paper are: Patrick Oswald and Mark Grindley, Fauna & Flora International; and Myint Kyaw Thura, Myanmar Environment & Sustainable Conservation Co. Ltd.—*Smithsonian's National Zoo & Conservation Biology Institute*

Pence warns North Korea of US resolve shown in Syria, Afghan strikes

SEOUL— US Vice President Mike Pence put North Korea on notice on Monday neither the United States nor South Korea would tolerate further missile and nuclear tests, with US attacks in Syria and Afghanistan showing its resolve.

Pence and South Korean acting president Hwang Kyo-ahn, speaking a day after a failed missile test by the North and two days after a huge display of missiles in Pyongyang, also said they would strengthen anti-North Korea defences by moving ahead with the early deployment of the THAAD missile defence system.

Pence is on the first stop of a four-nation Asia tour intended to show America's allies, and remind its adversaries, that the administration of President Donald Trump was not turning its back on the increasingly volatile region.

In a joint appearance, Pence said North Korea should mind the actions and intent of the president.

"Just in the past two weeks, the world witnessed the strength and resolve of our new president in actions taken in Syria and Afghanistan. North Korea would do well not to test his resolve or the strength of the armed forces of the United States in this region."

The US Navy this month struck a Syrian airfield with 59 Tomahawk missiles. On Thursday, the US military said it had dropped "the mother of all bombs," the largest non-nuclear device it has ever unleashed in combat, on a network of caves and tunnels used by Islamic State in eastern Afghanistan.

North Korea's KCNA news agency on Monday carried a letter from leader Kim Jong Un to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad marking the 70th anniversary of Syria's independence.

"I express again a strong support and alliance to the Syrian government and its people for its work of justice, condemning the United States' recent violent invasive act against your country," Kim said.

On a visit to the border between North and South Korea earlier in the day, Pence reiterated that the US "era of strategic patience" with Pyongyang was over.

Pence, whose father served in the 1950-53 Korean War, said the United States would stand by its

US Vice President Mike Pence speaks beside acting South Korean President and Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn during a news conference in Seoul, South Korea on 17 April, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

"iron-clad alliance" with South Korea and was seeking peace through strength.

"All options are on the table to achieve the objectives and ensure the stability of the people of this country," he told reporters as tinny propaganda music floated across from the North Korean side of the so-called demilitarised zone (DMZ). "There was a period of strategic patience but the era of strategic patience is over."

The United States, its allies and China are working together on a range of responses to North Korea's latest failed ballistic missile test, Trump's national security adviser said on Sunday, citing what he called an international consensus to act.

But Pence and Hwang said they were troubled by retaliatory moves by China against the deployment of in South Korea of a US anti-missile system known as the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD).

"The United States is troubled by China's economic retaliation against South Korea for taking appropriate steps to defend itself," Pence said.

South Korea, which accuses China or discriminating against some South Korean companies working in China, and the United States say the sole purpose of THAAD is to guard against North Korean missiles. China says its powerful radar can penetrate its territory and undermine its security and spoke out against it again on Monday.

Trump's national security adviser, HR McMaster, indicated on Sunday that Trump was not considering military action against North Korea for now, even as a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier strike group was heading for the region.

"It's time for us to undertake all actions we can, short of a military option, to try to resolve this peacefully," he said on ABC's "This Week" programme. "We are working together with our allies and partners and with the Chinese leadership to develop a range of options.

The Trump administration is focusing its strategy on tougher economic sanctions, possibly including an oil embargo, a global ban on its airline, intercepting cargo ships and punishing Chinese banks doing business with Pyongyang, Reuters reported last week, citing US officials.

While Trump has employed tough rhetoric in response to North Korea's recent missile tests, the president's options appear limited in dealing with a challenge that has vexed his Oval Office predecessors.

Most options fall into four categories: economic sanctions, covert action, diplomatic negotiations and military force. Pence landed in South Korea hours after the North's failed missile launch. His visit came a day after North Korea held a military parade in its capital, Pyongyang, marking the 105th anniversary of the birth of founding father Kim Il Sung.

What appeared to be new long-range ballistic missiles were on display in the parade.

Tensions have risen as Trump takes a hard rhetorical line with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, who has rebuffed admonitions from China and proceeded with nuclear and missile programmes seen by Washington as a direct threat.

Trump acknowledged on Sunday that the softer line he had taken on China's management of its currency was linked to its help on North Korea. Pence said Trump was hopeful China "will take actions needed to bring about change in policy" in North Korea.

"But as the president has made very clear, either China will deal with this problem or the United States and our allies will," he said.

China has spoken out against the North's weapons tests and has supported UN sanctions. It has repeatedly called for talks while appearing increasingly frustrated with the North.

China banned imports of North Korean coal on 26 February, cutting off its most important export. China's customs department issued an order on 7 April telling traders to return North Korean coal cargoes, trading sources said.

Pyongyang has conducted several missile and nuclear tests in defiance of UN sanctions, and regularly threatens to destroy South Korea and the United States. North and South Korea are technically still at war because their 1950-1953 conflict ended in a truce, not a treaty.

The North has said it has developed and would launch a missile that can strike the US mainland, but officials and experts believe it is some time away from mastering the necessary technology, including miniaturising a nuclear warhead.—*Reuters*

NEWS IN BRIEF

McCain:Kosovo army possible through constitutional change

PRISTINA — A Kosovo army can only be formed through constitutional change and with consent of all those living in Kosovo, US Senator John McCain said in the Kosovo assembly on Thursday.

Kosovo's long-term security is tied with political relations with the US, NATO and international partners, the RTS quoted McCain as saying.—*Tanjug*

Russia says plans a meeting with USA and UN on Syria in Geneva — agencies

MOSCOW— Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov said on Monday that diplomats from Russia, the United States and the United Nations plan to discuss the Syrian crisis in Geneva next week, Russian news agencies quoted him as saying.

Bogdanov also said Moscow was still waiting for confirmation from Washington that the meeting would take place.—*Reuters*

Turkish electoral board head says ballots, envelopes in referendum are valid

ANKARA— Ballots and envelopes provided to voters for Sunday's referendum on boosting the powers of President Tayyip Erdogan were produced by the High Electoral Board (YSK) and are valid, the head of the board said on Monday.

Speaking to reporters in Ankara, YSK Chairman Sadi Guven said a last-minute decision by the board to allow unstamped ballots in the referendum was not unprecedented as the government had previously permitted such a move.

The "No" campaign has said the decision raised questions about the validity of the vote. Following the vote on Sunday, Guven said the decision was taken before results were entered into the system, and that members of the ruling AK Party and the main opposition were present at almost all polling stations and signed off on reports. *Reuters*

China reiterates opposition to S Korea's THAAD anti-missile system

BEIJING— China reiterated on Monday its opposition to the deployment of a sophisticated US anti-missile system in South Korea.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang voiced China's opposition to the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system at a regular briefing in Beijing, and also urged all parties to work together to maintain peace and stability in the region.

South Korean acting President Hwang Kyo-ahn and visiting US Vice President Mike Pence on Monday reaffirmed their plans to go ahead with the deployment of the system. China says the system's powerful radar is a threat to its security. The United States and South Korea say it is only aimed at defence against North Korean missiles.—*Reuters*

8 missing in NW China landslide

XI'AN—- Eight people went missing in a landslide in northwest China's Shaanxi Province on Monday, local authorities said.

A seven-story residential building collapsed in the landslide, which occurred at 11:58 am in Maoping Township, Baihe County in the city of Ankang, according to the county's publicity department.

The building accommodates 39 people from 11 households. An initial investigation showed that eight people were missing.

Rescue work is under way.

The county was hit by rainstorms over the weekend.—*Xinhua*

Turkey's Erdogan declares referendum victory, opponents plan challenge

ANKARA/ISTANBUL — President Tayyip Erdogan declared victory in a referendum on Sunday to grant him sweeping powers in the biggest overhaul of modern Turkish politics, but opponents said the vote was marred by irregularities and they would challenge its result.

Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast and its three main cities, including the capital Ankara and the largest city Istanbul, looked set to vote "No" after a bitter and divisive campaign.

Erdogan said 25 million people had supported the proposal, which will replace Turkey's parliamentary system with an all-powerful presidency and abolish the office of prime minister, giving the "Yes" camp 51.5 per cent of the vote.

That appeared short of the decisive victory for which he and the ruling AK Party had aggressively campaigned. Nevertheless, thousands of flag-waving supporters rallied in Ankara and Istanbul in celebration.

"For the first time in the history of the Republic, we are changing our ruling system through civil politics," Erdogan said, referring to the military coups which marred Turkish politics for decades. "That is why it is very significant."

Under the changes, most of which will only come into effect after the next elections due in 2019, the president will appoint the cabinet and an undefined number of vice-presidents, and be able to select and remove senior civil servants without parliamentary approval. There has been some speculation that Erdogan could call new elections so that his new powers could take effect right away. However, Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Simsek told Reuters there was no such plan, and the elections would still be held in 2019.

Erdogan himself survived a failed coup attempt last July, responding with a crackdown that has seen 47,000 people detained and 120,000 sacked or suspended from their jobs. In Ankara, where Prime Minister Binali Yildirim addressed cheering supporters, convoys of cars honking horns clogged a main avenue as they headed toward the AK Party's headquarters, their passengers waving flags from the windows.

But opponents questioned the validity of the vote, calling for a recount and challenging a last minute decision by the electoral authorities to allow ballots to be counted that were not stamped by election officials.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan greets his supporters in Istanbul, Turkey on 16 April, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

The head of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), Kemal Kilicdaroglu, said the legitimacy of the referendum was open to question. His party said it would demand a recount of up to 60 per cent of the votes.

The chairman of the electoral board said the decision to allow unstamped ballots to be counted was not unprecedented, as the government had allowed such a move in the past.

Kilicdaroglu has accused Erdogan of seeking a "one-man regime", and said the proposed changes would put the country in danger.

In some affluent neighborhoods in Istanbul, people took to the streets in protest while others banged pots and pans at home — a sign of dissent that was widespread during anti-Erdogan protests in 2013.

In Istanbul's Besiktas neighbourhood, more than 300 protesters brought traffic on a main street to a standstill, a Reuters cameraman at the scene said. In Ankara, scuffles between AK Party and opposition supporters broke out near the headquarters of the CHP.—*Reuters*

South Africa's Ramaphosa says leaders must listen to protesters

JOHANNESBURG — South African Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa has said that leaders should listen to protesters who have taken to the streets demanding that President Jacob Zuma resign or be removed after a cabinet reshuffle triggered damaging credit downgrades.

Zuma is to step down as head of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) in December but his second term as president only expires after a general election in 2019. Ramaphosa and Zuma's ex-wife Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma are the leading candidates vying to replace him.

Zuma is widely believed to support his ex-wife's candidacy, while Ramaphosa, a wealthy businessman and former trade unionist, has the backing of the ANC's labour allies.

"People of our country are taking to the streets. They're raising their concerns, and I think what we should be doing as leaders is to listen to some of the concerns that are being raised," Ramaphosa told the eNCA news network on Sunday after attending an Easter church service in northern Limpopo province.

Ramaphosa's remarks are a marked contrast to Zuma's. He has accused the marchers of having racist motives. The protests have had mixed racial profiles, and drew tens of thousands to Pretoria on Wednesday and nationwide on 7 April. Zuma, who turned 75 on Wednesday, has survived previous protests. But the main opposition party Democratic Alliance (DA) and other parties believe they can drum up support to force Zuma from office following his dismissal of respected Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan in a cabinet reshuffle. Fitch and S&P Global Ratings have downgraded South Africa's debt to "junk", citing Gordhan's dismissal as one reason. South Africa's top court is considering whether a parliamentary motion of no confidence against Zuma should be taken by secret ballot. Opposition parties have said the motion would be more likely to succeed if held by secret ballot.—*Reuters*

ent Cyril Ramaphosa speaks during a lecture at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in Singapore on 7 October, 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

Syrian army regains key town in north Hama province

AMMAN — The Syrian army regained the strategic town of Soran near the city of Hama in the central part of western Syria on Sunday with an assault backed by heavy Russian air strikes, rebels and residents said.

Most of the rebels had retreated from the town after troops stormed it following dozens of strikes by jets believed to be Russian since dawn, including so-called parachute bombs that also targeted other towns in the area, including Latamneh and Kafr Zeita.

"There was hysterical bombing that targeted the town and the whole area and rebels fought fierce battles until they were forced to pull out," said one rebel, a member of the Jaish al Izza group, which has a strong presence in Hama province who requested anonymity.

The army was aided by Iranian-backed Shi'ite militias who had supported the overstretched government forces, rebels say.

The stronghold of Soran is the army's northern gateway to the city of Hama, the provincial capital. It had been captured by the army last year, then lost in the latest rebel offensive.

The army's advance into Soran rolls back most of the territorial gains made by rebels, who include jihadist groups, after a major offensive last month in northern Hama province in the center of the populated west of the country.

The rebels in retaliation had fired scores of rockets on the nearby Hama military airport. Videos downloaded on social media showed plumes of smoke rising from a distance.

Jaish al Nasr, a Free Syrian Army rebel group, said it had hit the airport with forty rockets, leading to several fires in the compound of the air base.

The rebels still hold the strategic town of Morek, north of Hama city. It lies on a major north-south highway crucial to control of western Syria. —*Reuters*

Russia to upgrade Iskander-M missile systems

An upgraded version of the tactical missile system Iskander-M will be presented after 2020. PHOTO: TASS

MOSCOW— An upgraded version of the tactical missile system Iskander-M will be presented after 2020, Rostec corporation's CEO Sergey Chemezov has said.

"Over the past several years the Machine-Building Design Bureau KBM has developed more than 20 smart weapon systems and their alternations. In accordance with the adopted strategy of the cluster Armaments within ten years we are going to upgrade the tactical missile systems. After 2020 an upgraded version of the Iskander system will be presented," Chemezov said.

Earlier, KBM General Designer Valery Kashin told TASS in an interview the Iskander-M systems will stay in service for another 25-30 years. The Defence Ministry is currently considering proposals for their upgrade.

The current contract for supplying the Iskander systems is valid till the end of this year.

The KBM design bureau is 75 today. It is the sole designer of shoulder-launched anti-aircraft systems Strela, Igla and Verba, anti-tank system Khrizantema and tactical missile system Iskander.—*TASS*

Far-left veteran Melenchon draws big crowd as French election enters final straight

TOULOUSE/PARIS— Far-left candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon drew tens of thousands to a rally on Sunday, aiming to maintain momentum that has pushed the one-time outsider into contention in the French presidential election, with the first round of voting a week away.

Opinion polls show the top four candidates — centrist Emmanuel Macron, far-right leader Marine Le Pen, conservative Francois Fillon and Melenchon — within touching distance of each other before the 23 April first round after a surge by Melenchon in the last few weeks.

The polls tip Macron to beat National Front leader Le Pen in a runoff between the two leading candidates on 7 May.

The outside possibility of a second-round showdown between Le Pen and Melenchon, both of whom propose a referendum on France's membership of the European Union if their attempts to overhaul the bloc fail, has raised concern among some investors after last year's shock British vote to leave the bloc.

Melenchon has pledged sharply higher government spending and would impose a 90 percent tax on top earners and take France out of NATO. Le Pen has promised a crackdown on illegal immigration and wants to scrap the euro.

"We represent a France of beauty and generosity, that starts each new day mindful of our motto - liberty, equality and fraternity," Melenchon told the Toulouse rally.

His team said 70,000 turned up while local police put the number at 40,000.

Outgoing Socialist President Francois Hollande told a French television programme broadcast on Sunday that he would personally feel "guilty" if Le Pen became president, bringing a far right party to power in France.

Front-runner Macron, a former economy minister and investment banker who has attempted to break the mould of French politics by launching a new centrist party, opted for a lower-profile visit in the Paris area on Sunday to people with difficulties finding housing.

Fillon, who is being investigated by magistrates on suspicion of embezzling state funds, held meetings with Catholic voters on Saturday but had no rally on Sunday, while all four leading candidates are set to hold large rallies on Monday.

The elections take place with France on heightened security alert following a spate of attacks by Islamist militants since January 2015 that have killed more than 230 people.

Asked by the Journal du Dimanche newspaper if authorities feared an attack timed to coincide with the election, Interior Minister Matthias Fekl replied: "No threat is being ruled out."

Anti-fascists held a demonstration in Paris on Sunday, and Fekl said authorities were aware of the risk of violent street protests by opponents of the National Front if Le Pen got through to the second round. —*Reuters*

Trump supporters, opponents clash in California park

BERKELEY— A melee erupted on Saturday in a Berkeley, California park where supporters and opponents of President Donald Trump were holding competing rallies, resulting in at least 20 arrests as police struggled to keep the two camps apart.

As fist fights broke out between the two sides and people threw bottles and cans over a barricade separating them, police resorted to using to an explosive device at one point in a bid to restore order.

Several people were observed by a Reuters reporter with bloodied faces and minor injuries, but there was no official word on casualties from authorities. Media, citing police, reported that at least 11 people were injured.

Police said more arrests could follow after video shot during the melee was reviewed.

The trouble unfolded when hundreds of Trump opponents staged a counter-rally alongside an event billed as a "Patriots Day" free-speech rally and picnic, organized by mostly Trump supporters.

Between 500 and 1,000 people were in the park as the rallies peaked, according to an estimate by a Reuters reporter.

Among the Trump opponents were some counter-protesters dressed in black and wearing masks. The other side included self-described "patriots" and "nationalists", Trump supporters, free speech advocates, and other groups.

Daryl Tempesta, 52, who said he served in the US Air Force near the end of the Cold War, went to the rally to show his support for Trump.

"As a veteran, I like the track America is on, and that Trump is willing to stand and say we are still America and we are not going to be globalist, we're not going to be a communist country," Tempesta said. "That's a message I can get behind."

A weekly farmers market was canceled ahead of the rally due to concerns about violence. Even so, a stall selling fresh vegetables was open for business amid the fist fighting, explosions from firecrackers and smoke wafting through the air.

"We decided to show up anyway because this is our livelihood," said Tim Mueller, a farmer who owns the stall, surrounded by protesters on both sides.

At least 100 people from both camps eventually moved out of the park and into one of the city's main intersections, where they continued to fist fight, hurl insults and chant at each other.

The police presence was light there, and only two or three officers were seen near the crossroads.

Berkeley has a long history of liberal activism and the University of California, Berkeley, was a center of protests in the 1960s.—*Reuters*

Germany glad bitter Turkish referendum campaign over — foreign minister

BERLIN— Germany's foreign minister said on Sunday it was good that the Turkish referendum was over and urged people to remain calm with the 'Yes' vote for constitutional change to expand President Tayyip Erdogan's power narrowly ahead.

"It looks like it will be a close result, as expected. However the vote of the Turkish people turns out in the end, we'd be well advised to keep calm and to proceed in a level-headed way," Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said in a statement.

"It's good that election campaign, which was fought so bitterly, including here in Germany, is now over," said Gabriel, a member of the Social Democrats (SPD) — the junior partner in Chancellor Angela Merkel's ruling coalition.

Peter Altmaier, Merkel's chief of staff, said on German broadcaster ARD that the result showed there was a "very lively political debate" in Turkey but said it was necessary to wait for official results before commenting further.

He said there were election observers in Turkey and the German government "would of course respect a result that came about in a free and democratic vote".

Asked if the vote was free and democratic, Altmaier said the German government would discuss the result once it was official and election observers would look at whether it was fairly conducted.

Senior SPD member Axel Schaefer said majorities reached in democratic votes could turn against democracy itself, pointing to the 1933 elections in Germany, when support for Adolf Hitler's Nazis surged.

"The Brexit vote is pushing Britain into the sidelines, the presidential election of (U.S. President Donald) Trump is taking the USA on an adventure, the Erdogan referendum is leading Turkey into absolutism and the 1933 German parliamentary election led Germany into the abyss," he said.—*Reuters*

United Air removes engaged couple traveling to wedding from plane

NEW YORK — An engaged couple flying on United Airlines from Houston, Texas, to their wedding in Costa Rica were removed by a federal law enforcement officer from the flight on Saturday amid disputed circumstances, according to media reports.

The removal comes at a time of heightened scrutiny of the airline's approach to customer service after a video emerged a week ago showing security officers dragging a bloodied passenger off an overbooked United Express flight in Chicago.

United said the couple repeatedly tried to sit in more expensive seats for which they had not paid and would not follow flight crew instructions, according to the KHOU 11 New channel in Houston.

United, owned by United Continental Holdings Inc, did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Sunday evening.

Michael Hohl and his fiancée, Amber Maxwell, gave a different account. Hohl said he and Maxwell found another passenger sleeping sprawled across their seats after they were the last to board the flight, according to an interview with KHOU.

Soon after moving to other, empty seats in the economy cabin a few rows up, flight crew denied their request to pay a supplement for the seats, which United sells as "economy plus", and told them to move back to their original seats, Hohl said.—*Reuters*

Cleveland police seek man who broadcast killing on Facebook

CLEVELAND — Cleveland police were searching for a suspect they said broadcast video of himself on Facebook killing a person on Sunday and claiming that he had murdered others.

The Cleveland Division of Police said it was looking for Steve Stephens in connection with the killing of an individual in the city, whom police did not identify. It said he was armed and dangerous.

"Suspect did broadcast the killing on Facebook Live and has claimed to have committed multiple other homicides which are yet to be verified," the police said in a statement, referring to social-media network Facebook Inc's live-streaming video service. It said Stephens may be driving a white or cream-colored sports utility vehicle.

In January, four black people in Chicago were accused of attacking an 18-year-old disabled white man and broadcasting the attack on Facebook Live while making anti-white racial taunts. The incident prompted international outrage. A month later, the accused pleaded not guilty to assaulting the man, whom prosecutors described as schizophrenic.—*Reuters*

Japan PM urges North Korea to refrain from more provocative actions

TOKYO — Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe urged North Korea on Monday to refrain from taking further provocative actions, comply with UN resolutions and abandon its nuclear missile development.

Tensions on the Korean peninsula have escalated as US President Donald Trump takes a hard rhetorical line with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, who has rebuffed admonitions from China and proceeded with missile tests.

North Korea launched a ballistic missile on Sunday but it blew up almost immediately, the US Pacific Command said.

Abe told parliament he would exchange views on North Korea with Russian President Vladimir Putin when they hold a summit meeting later this month.

He also said the government was considering measures to respond to contingencies stemming from a potential crisis on the Korean peninsula, including floods of refugees and how to evacuate Japanese citizens from South Korea.

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe speaks during an upper house panel session at the Parliament in Tokyo, Japan, in this photo taken by Kyodo on 13 April, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

"We assume a series of responses in case of evacuees into Japan, such as protecting them, a process of landing, housing facilities and their management, and a screening whether our nation should protect them," Abe said.

Japan's National Security Council discussed how to evacuate its nearly 60,000 citizens from South Korea in the event of a crisis, a government official said on Friday amid rising concern over North Korea's nuclear weapons programme. US Vice President Mike Pence visited the demilitarised border between North and South Korea on Monday and reiterated that the US "era of strategic patience" with Pyongyang was over.—*Reuters*

Britain's Prince Harry sought counselling more than a decade after mother's death

LONDON — Britain's Prince Harry sought counselling in his late twenties to help deal with the grief of losing his mother more than a decade earlier, he told the Telegraph newspaper.

Harry, whose mother Diana died in a car crash in Paris in 1997 when he was just 12, said he had come "very close to a complete breakdown" on several occasions after shutting down his emotions, impacting both his work and his personal life.

"My way of dealing with it was sticking my head in the sand, refusing to ever think about my mum, because why would that help? It's only going to make you sad, it's not going to bring her back," he said in an interview published on Monday.

"So from an emotional side, I was like 'right, don't ever let your emotions be part of anything'."

He said his older brother Prince William had encouraged him to seek help and he had been to see "a shrink" several times. He also took up boxing to help deal with aggression after feeling he was "on the verge of punching someone".

"(I) started to have a few conversations and actually all of a sudden, all of this grief that I have never processed started to come to the forefront and I was like, there is actually a lot of stuff here that I need to deal with," he said, adding that he had experienced two years of "total chaos".

The princes' mother Diana was married to heir-to-the-throne Prince Charles between 1981 and 1996, when the couple divorced. She was killed when the car she was in crashed while being chased by paparazzi on motorbikes.

Harry, who is fifth in line to the throne, described at times facing anxiety during royal engagements but said he was now in a "good place".

He served in the British Army for 10 years, including two stints in Afghanistan, and now works with several charities including supporting wounded soldiers. Along with William and William's wife Catherine, he also set up a mental health charity.

"Because of the process I have been through over the past two and a half years, I've now been able to take my work seriously, been able to take my private life seriously as well, and been able to put blood, sweat and tears into the things that really make a difference and things that I think will make a difference to everybody else," he said. —*Reuters*

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

MV MCC HA LONG VOY. NO ( )

Consignees of cargo carried on MV MCC HA LONG VOY. NO ( ) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 17.4.2017 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of A.I.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 MCC TRANSPORT(S'PORE) PTE LTD

Phone No: 2301185

CLAIM'S DAY NOTICE

MV SOUL OF LUCK VOY. NO ( )

Consignees of cargo carried on MV SOUL OF LUCK VOY. NO ( ) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 18.4.2017 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T.T where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S MCC TRANSPORT(S'PORE) PTE LTD

Phone No: 2301185

Next Star Wars movie to feature new female character

ORLANDO, (Fla) — The largely testosterone-fueled Star Wars movie franchise has added an important new female character in the eighth film, "Star Wars: The Last Jedi", director Rian Johnson said on Friday at a fanfest in Orlando.

Johnson said the movie, scheduled for release in December, is still in post production.

Kelly Marie Tran plays Rose, a maintenance worker in the Resistance. Johnson said her character embodies the notion that even the most unlikely person can step up and become a hero. He said her part is the biggest new role in the film.

Lucasfilm also live-streamed to fans worldwide the first movie trailer that features Rey, played by Daisy Ridley, wielding a light saber under the guidance of Luke Skywalker who tells her that it's time for the Jedi to end.

Ridley was brought into the franchise in the seventh movie, "The Force Awakens", as a lead character. Fans have been expecting Lucasfilm to add more females to the cast.

The movie poster shows Rey on an intense red background pointing her light saber skyward, the beam dividing images of Skywalker and Kylo Ren. The poster harkens back to the poster for the first Star Wars film in 1977 in which Skywalker similarly pointed the beam up.

The movie stars were on hand during the 2017 Star Wars Celebration at the Orange County Convention Centre.

Star Wars products are lined up at the annual Star Wars Celebration where Walt Disney Co licensees are selling a new Luke Skywalker action figure, limited-edition Stormtrooper helmets and other coveted merchandise, in Orlando, Florida, US on 14 April, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

The popular 40-year-old Star Wars franchise in recent times has been criticized for a lack of recognizably female characters. Carrie Fisher was beloved for her role as Princess Leia, a character who was part of the original cast. Fisher died in December, but filmed scenes in The Last Jedi before her death.

The movie franchise is popular equally with male and female fans. Disney bought the franchise from creator George Lucas in 2012 for $4 billion. Three years later, the company announced plans for new 14-acre Star Wars "lands" at both its Orlando and Anaheim, California, parks, capitalizing on the lucrative brand much as Universal Studios did at its Orlando parks with the Harry Potter phenomenon.

The Star Wars attraction will dwarf Disney's other themed lands and feature two new rides, including one in which guests can captain the Millennium Falcon spaceship.—*Reuters*

Warren Beatty recalls 'chaos' of Oscars Best Picture goof-up

LOS ANGELES — Actor Warren Beatty once again shared what it was like on stage when his co-presenter Faye Dunaway mistakenly announced "La La Land" as the best picture instead of "Moonlight" at the 89th Academy Awards this year.

The 80-year-old veteran star was on 'The Graham Norton Show', where its host called the incident "the TV moment of if not the year, the decade," which Beatty quipped, "Not the century?" reported Deadline.

Recalling the moment, Beatty said, "I thought well, maybe this is a misprint. And then, I shouldn't foul up the show just because someone made a little error."

Norton then intervened, saying it appeared as if Beatty deliberately handed over the card to Dunaway so that he would not be responsible for the gaffe, which Beatty denounced.

"No, no. My instructions were take the envelope when I walked out. I couldn't have it before that. And then I go out, and then I say something, and then I open the envelope and then I give it to Faye and she then says what it says," the actor said.

After a long conversation over the embarrassing goof-up, Beatty called the whole incident a "chaos".—*PTI*

Environment, politics and 'The Godfather' on Tribeca film fest menu

NEW YORK — After a turbulent US presidential election and a rollercoaster start to President Donald Trump's administration, this year's Tribeca film festival will come with a statement.

Environmental, political and social issues all feature strongly in the 200-strong selection of feature films, documentaries, television shows and immersive installations on offer during the 19-30 April festival.

Co-founder Jane Rosenthal said choices for the 16th festival included themes of the environment "and the fact we are an open society and everyone is welcome here."

"Artists can express things sometimes that no politician can," Rosenthal told Reuters Television.

Films about food waste, the protests over the Dakota Access Pipeline and the endangered white rhino are among a dozen projects linked to Earth Day, which falls in the middle of the festival on 22 April.

A retrospective documentary about Cuban boy Elian Gonzalez, who was at the centre of a 2000 custody and immigration battle; a documentary on maverick political operative Roger Stone; and "Copwatch," about the US citizens who film police activity and arrests, are just some of the offerings tackling social and political issues.

On a lighter note, the festival will open next Wednesday with a documentary about record producer Clive Davis — the man behind the success of singers like Whitney Houston, Kelly Clarkson and Jennifer Hudson.—*Reuters*

Hollywood's Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner file for divorce

LOS ANGELES — Actors Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner officially filed for divorce nearly two years after the Hollywood A-list couple split, the Los Angeles Times reported.

Irreconcilable differences were cited in the paperwork filed in Los Angeles Superior Court, where Garner filed the divorce petition and Affleck filed his response, the newspaper reported late on Thursday.

Garner and Affleck, both 44, are seeking joint custody of their three children: daughters Violet, 11, and Seraphina, 9.

Affleck and Garner costarred in the 2003 superhero film "Daredevil" and were married in 2005. They announced plans to divorce a day after their 10th wedding anniversary in 2015.—*Reuters*

Actor Ben Affleck and his wife, actress Jennifer Garner arrive at the 2014 Vanity Fair Oscars Party in West Hollywood, California on 2 March, 2014. PHOTO: REUTERS

Thousands flock to traditional Easter procession in German town

FRANKFURT — Thousands gathered in the southwestern German town of Bensheim on Friday to watch a procession that seeks to remind locals of the meaning of Easter — an important festival in the Christian calendar — by re-enacting Jesus Christ's crucifixion.

Actors decked out as Roman soldiers in shiny armor and red gowns accompanied the actor playing Jesus, who sported a beard and crown made of twigs and carried a large wooden cross through the picturesque town center in a tradition that spans decades.

The procession, which depicts scenes from the Bible, is known for its elaborate props and costumes and is performed in Bensheim every year on Good Friday — when Christians believe Jesus was crucified. The tradition was started there by Italian migrants in the 1980s.

"They do it in such a life-like way, it is so believable — it hits the mark," said Joachim Klenk, one of the spectators.

Edith Lorek, another spectator, enjoyed watching the procession with her friends: "I'm a believer and for me it's important because it reminds me of Good Friday, the whole story."

According to the Christian faith, Jesus rose from the dead on Easter Sunday, symbolizing death is not the end but rather a new beginning.—*Reuters*

Members of the Italian community take part in a re-enactment of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on Good Friday in Bensheim, southwest of Frankfurt, Germany on 14 April, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

PICTURE OF THE DAY

Participants in the Royal Greenwich Tall Ships Festival embark on a journey to Portugal, as they sail down the river Thames, in London, Britain, on 16 April, 2017. PHOTO: REUTERS

World's oldest person, last one of 19th century, dies in Italy at 117

ROME — Emma Morano, who at 117 was believed to be the world's oldest person and the last surviving child of the 19th century, died on Saturday, swearing to the end on her diet of two raw eggs a day.

"She reached an incredible finish line," said Silvia Marchionini, mayor of the town of Verbania in northern Italy where Morano lived on the shores of Lake Maggiore.

Morano, who lived 117 years and 137 days, was born on 29 November, 1899, four years before the Wright brothers first took to the air. Her life spanned three centuries, two World Wars and more than 90 Italian governments.

"My life wasn't so nice," she told Reuters last November on her 117th birthday.

"I worked in a factory until I was 65, then that was that," she said as she sat in an armchair by her window, a white shawl over her shoulders.

Emma Morano, thought to be the world's oldest person and the last to be born in the 1800s, sits on her bed during her 117th birthday in Verbania, northern Italy on 29 November, 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS

In an interview with La Stampa newspaper five years ago she said her fiance had died in World War One and that she had then been forced to marry a man she did not love.

"'Either you agree to marry me or I will kill you'," Morano said, recalling his proposal. "I was 26. We got married."

It was not a happy marriage. They had a son in 1937, but the baby died after just six months and the following year Morano kicked out her abusive husband.

"I separated from him in 1938. I think I was one of the first in Italy to do that."

Morano outlived all her eight brothers and sisters, including one who died at 102. She thrived on an unorthodox, unbalanced diet.

"When I first knew her she used to eat three eggs a day. Two raw, and one fried. Today she has slowed down a bit, reducing the number to two some days because she says three can be too much," her doctor, Carlo Bava, said last year.

"She has never eaten much fruit or vegetables. Her characteristic is that she always eats the same thing, every day, every week, every month and every year."

Marchionini, the mayor of Verbania, told the Italian news agency AGI that her city has more than 20 people aged over 100. —*Reuters*

mitv Myanmar International
Programme Schedule

(18-4-2017 07:00am ~ 19-4-2017 07:00am) MST

07:03 Am News
07:26 Am Yoga & Health
07:47 Am Civic Duty
08:03 Am News
08:26 Am A Snake Catcher
08:38 Am The Crocodiles of Meinmahla Island (Part-1)
08:52 Am Myanmar Harpist
09:03 Am News
09:26 Am Archery Session (from Ramayana Play)
09:48 Am Today Myanmar: CBT in Myaing Township
10:03 Am News
10:25 Am Unique Pattern of Myanma...A Trend of Chin Traditional Dress)
10:56 Am Kid's Home

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

Prime Time
07:03 Pm News
07:25 Pm A Day Out With Sarah (EP-6)
07:56 Pm Independent Filmmaker
08:03 Pm News
08:25 Pm Discovering Tribes PmRvwang" Their Life and Customs (Part-1)
08:51 Pm Lady Pilot

(09:00 Pm ~ 11:00 Pm) - Today Repeat (09:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(11:00 Pm ~ 03:00 Am) - Monday Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)
(03:00 Am ~ 07:00 Am) - Today Repeat (07:00 Am ~ 11:00 Am)

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

No yolk! Bosnian villagers shoe eggs to keep age-old craft alive

KRESEVO, (Bosnia) — Centuries ago when Saxons developed mining and blacksmithing in Bosnia's Kresevo, the ability to shoe an egg was regarded as the sign an apprentice was fit to start his own business and family.

Now only a handful of men in the village are still practising the art of fitting miniature horseshoes to eggshells, including 69-year-old Stjepan Biletic who trained to do so when he retired from schoolteaching after the 1992-95 Bosnian war.

"The egg is a symbol of creation of new life and new beginning and the horseshoe a symbol of happiness," he said in his tiny workshop, where he takes at least an hour to shoe an egg, selling each at up to 5 euros ($5). —*Reuters*

THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

7th Waning of Tagu 1379 ME

Tuesday, 18 April 2017

Singapore Home United vs Yadanabon today

SINGAPORE Club Home United will play against Myanmar Club Yandanabon United in a group match at the Jalan Besar Stadium at 6:30 pm Myanmar Standard Time today.

The match is an important one because the winner will reach ASEAN Zone Semi-final before all the matches are played. Their group has only three teams and each has to play only four matches. Home United top the group with 6 points, two points ahead of Yandanabon United, which has played only two games.

If Yandanabon United defeat Singapore's Home United, Yadanabon will reach the semifinal without needing to wait for the results of the last game against the Viet Nam team.—*Nyi Myat Thawda*

Under-fire Arsenal defender Bellerin gets Wenger's backing

LONDON — Defender Hector Bellerin has struggled to return to his best due to ankle problems and did not deserve the criticism he received after Arsenal's 3-0 loss at Crystal Palace in the Premier League last week, manager Arsene Wenger has said.

Arsenal, who are seventh in the table, trail fourth-placed Manchester City by 10 points with two games in hand and have been heavily criticised in recent weeks after just two wins in their last eight league games.

Bellerin was sidelined for a month in November due to an ankle injury that resurfaced in January causing him to miss Arsenal's FA Cup win over Preston North End and league win over Swansea City.

"I think it's unfair... I agree that for a while he was not the Hector Bellerin we had seen at the start of the season. He has not come back to his level since he has been injured," Wenger told the club's website (www.arsenal.com).

"I think now he is trying to focus on again what is important, to defend well. After he can give us the extra bit (going forward) that is important as well."

Wenger urged his team to respond to the Palace defeat and called for unity between the fans and the club.

"The fans want to be behind the team and the way we respond on the football pitch will decide the attitude of the fans," Wenger said.—*Reuters*

Firmino on target as Liverpool climb to third

LONDON — Liverpool reclaimed third spot in the Premier League after Roberto Firmino's header sealed a hard-fought 1-0 victory against West Bromwich Albion on Sunday.

West Brom created the best chances in a largely uneventful first half before Firmino nodded home Lucas' flick on to register his 11th league goal of the season just before the break.

The visitors could have extended their lead after halftime but James Milner blazed a glorious opportunity over the bar and Divock Origi had a goal ruled out for offside. Simon Mignolet made a crucial late save to deny Matt Phillips but, as West Brom piled on the pressure in the closing stages, Alberto Moreno missed an open goal after Ben Foster had come up for a corner. Liverpool have 66 points from 33 games, although they have played one more game than Manchester City who sit two points adrift in fourth. West Brom, meanwhile, lie eighth with 44 points.—*Reuters*

Liverpool's Roberto Firmino celebrates scoring their first goal. PHOTO: REUTERS

Mourinho hails Herrera and Darmian after sinking Chelsea

MANCHESTER — Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho hailed his defensive midfielders, Ander Herrera and Matteo Darmian, for a "special performance" after the 2-0 Premier League win over his former club Chelsea on Sunday opened up the title race.

"I think it was a special performance because it was a special opponent, the leaders, the way they play. I think we played really well, a very solid performance," said Mourinho.

"We gave them double problems — problems when we had the ball and problems when we recovered the ball because we were really sharp and fast and aggressive in our transitions. I am very happy," he said after the victory at Old Trafford.

Mourinho added that the key to beating Chelsea, whose lead over second-placed London rivals Tottenham Hotspur is just four points, was eliminating the threat they posed through Eden Hazard and Pedro working behind Diego Costa and also their effectiveness in wide positions on the counter-attack.

Spanaird Herrera did a masterful job man-marking Hazard while Italian Darmian kept Pedro quiet, with the result that Chelsea did not manage a single shot on target.

PHOTO: REUTERS

"Maybe it is difficult for some managers to find Ander Herrera to do the job he did today. Maybe it is difficult for some to find Matteo Darmian to play the role he played.

"I want to say I was convinced even before (the defeat by Chelsea in February's FA) Cup match that controlling the two players that play behind Diego (Costa) and controlling the full-backs, because they go really deep with two wide men, would create lots of problems and I repeat the same," said Mourinho.

"They are phenomenal in (the) counter-attack. When they tried to play counter-attack we were always in control of these two link positions," he added.

The win extends fifth-placed United's unbeaten league run to 22 games and keeps them in the hunt for a Champions league spot with Mourinho seeing signs of progress from his squad.

"Normally you win the title if you are 22 matches unbeaten and we are struggling to finish top four," he said, with United four points behind fourth-placed Manchester City with a game in hand.

"Everybody knows why - it is because we drew too many matches at home and we are paying the price. But it is a great feeling to know it is difficult for us to lose a match. We fight until the end.

"We need a little more quality and different qualities in some positions to make the squad stronger, but in terms of character and the human side I have one of the best groups ever," said the former Real Madrid and Inter Milan manager.—*Reuters*

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