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Employees monitoring weaving machine in Meikhtila, Mandalay Region. **PHOTO: CHAN THAR (MEIKHTILA)**

Employers, employees voice objections to proposed minimum wage

By May Thet Hnin

SOME employers and employees are expressing strong opposition to the proposed minimum wage of Ks4,800 announced on 2nd January.

“There were objection reports individually or collectively submitted to the Ministry of

Labour, Immigration and Population under the prescribed procedures”, said U Naw Aung, the labour representative of the National Committee on Minimum Wage.

Through respective region and state committees, employers and labourers are allowed to oppose the proposed minimum

wage within 60 days after its announcement. The government will make negotiations with the employers and workers who can give logical reasons for their opposition.

The employers said they will face difficulties if the minimum wage goes above Ks4,000. But labourers requested that

they can do well only with a minimum wage of Ks5,600.

“A bunch of watercress sells for Ks200-300. Additionally, a viss (1.6 kg) of onions fetches over Ks3,000. We can live a normal life only with minimum wages of Ks5,600 on account of increasing commodity prices.

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UEHRD leads preparation to receive displaced persons in Rakhine State

THE Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine (UEHRD) is leading the process of accepting and resettling persons displaced by terrorist activities and development works and has prepared three repatriation and assessment camps to resettle ethnic nationals, Hindus and Muslims.

The UEHRD's construction group and Ministry of Construction have been constructing repatriation and assessment camps in Taungpyoletwe, Ngakhuya and Hla Hpo Khaung transition camps. Houses were built in Oh Htane, Myoma East, Kyeinchaung, Taungpyo, Myomichaung, Shwezar, Myo Oo and Four Miles for Hindus.

Houses as well as schools and a monastery for local ethnic nationals were being built by states and regions governments, the Ministry of Border Affairs, the Tatmadaw, the Daw Khin Kyi Foundation and donors in Thittonenar Gwa Sone (Mro) village, Khontaing (Mro) village, Zawmatet group, Padaka new village, the Aungsitpyin group beside Taungpyo road, Fawtitaung (Maramar) former village, Thet Taing Nya (Thet) former village, Aungthabyay village, Auk Pyuma and near Khamaungseik town.

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‘BANK OF THE YEAR IN MYANMAR 2017’

Awarded by The Banker



Union Minister Dr Pe Myint, Managing Director U Kyaw Soe and CEO U Than Htaik cut ribbon to open ceremony of Online News Portal, Digital Newspaper. **PHOTO: MNA**

MOI launches Online News Portal, Digital Newspaper

THE Ministry of Information launched the Online News Portal and Digital Newspaper yesterday, stepping into the electronic media world.

In his opening address at the ceremony to officially launch Myanmar Digital News (MDN), a joint venture between the Ministry of Information and Megalink Advanced Technologies Co, Union Minister for Information Dr Pe Myint expressed the role of the elected government, saying that the incumbent government is elected by the people and it has a responsibility to inform the people of its works and to inform the people what is happening in the country. "The ministry de-

cided to launch the MDN digital newspaper as digital or online media becomes popular in the country. It is found that today people consume news on mobile phones rather than on paper, and other private media turn to online media in Myanmar," said the Union Minister. Meanwhile, the state-owned media has the responsibility to convey the opinion of the people to the governmental officials, he added. He also invited suggestions from officials and the public to improve the ministry's digital media so that it can benefit the people. The launching ceremony to formally open the digital news operation was led by Dr. Pe Myint, Managing Di-

rector of the News and Periodicals Enterprise U Kyaw Soe and Megalink Advanced Technologies Co Ltd's CEO U Than Htaik at Thingaha Hotel in Nay Pyi Taw. Myanmar Digital News (MDN) offers two state-run print media in the Burmese language, The Kyemon and The Myanmar Alin, and one joint-venture print publication, The Global New Light of Myanmar, on mobile phones with its application. Besides, news and feature articles, there will be stories on the political, economic, educational, social, and editorial topics, in addition to opinion, TV, ethnic affairs, speeches and entertainment. All will be available via the MDN.—MNA ■

Ethnic excursion members visit Pyithu Hluttaw, Amyotha Hluttaw



Ethnic members visit Myanmar Radio and Television office yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

A 100-member delegation, including youths from Kachin and Shan states, the Wa Self-Administered Division and the Pa-O Self-Administered Zone, visited the Pyithu Hluttaw and Amyotha Hluttaw yesterday morning.

At the hluttaws, the delegation was taken on a guided tour by officials. Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than received the excursion

members cordially and treated them to luncheon.

Earlier in the morning, the delegation visited the Myanmar Radio and Television office for another guided tour with officials.

Next, they visited and paid homage to the Uppatasanti Pagoda and Maha That Kya Yan Thi Pagoda. They also visited the Defence Services Museum. — Myanmar News Agency ■

Pre-coordination meeting held for 18th Myanmar Traditional Practitioners' Conference

A pre-coordination meeting for the 18th Myanmar Traditional Medicine Practitioners' Conference was held at the Myanmar International Convention Centre-II in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday morning.

The conference was attended by Director-General of the Department of Traditional Medicine Dr. Ye Ye Myint, officials from Myanmar Traditional Medicine Practitioners' Association (Central), officials from Myanmar Traditional Medicine Council, representatives of the Myanmar traditional practitioner conference and other responsible departmental officials.

During the meeting, Dr. Ye Ye Myint acted as the chairman, while U Thaung Naing from Myanmar Traditional Association (Yangon) and U Sai Soe Thet Naing and U Hla Myint from Myanmar Traditional Association (Shan State) acted as members.

Dr. Ye Ye Myint delivered the opening speech, following which representative groups from the states and regions discussed their proposals and



A meeting for the 18th Myanmar Traditional Medicine Practitioners' Conference held in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

chose two proposal makers and two proposal approvers for each proposal. The chairman of the conference then selected a proposal maker and a proposal from the earlier selections made by the groups of representatives.

In the afternoon, procedures for each proposal were discussed by the group, and these procedures were explained by the representatives who had selected them.

The 18th Traditional Medicine Practitioners' Conference is being held to ensure the

all-round development of Myanmar's traditional medicine practitioners community and to improve the quality of Myanmar's traditional medicine, raise the ethics and dignity of traditional medicine practitioners, provide more public health protection through traditional medicine, and develop and improve Myanmar's traditional medicine offerings. The five proposals for the development of Myanmar's traditional medicine will also be presented during today's meeting.— Myanmar News Agency ■

Mekong-Lancang riverside security cooperation begins in Yangon

THE opening ceremony of the Mekong-Lancang riverside security cooperation was held at the Summit Park View Hotel in Yangon yesterday morning.

At the opening ceremony, Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Maj-Gen Aung Soe said, "Myanmar is making concerted efforts to ensure the rule of law and security along the Mekong-Lancang riverside, which extends along Myanmar, China, Laos and Thailand. Compared with the last 10 years, stability and the rule of law has progressed in this region." He added that it was important for nations to cooperate to crack down on violence, drug-trafficking, money laundering and cyber-crimes.

The leaders then discussed matters related to inter-connectivity, production capacity, cross-border economic cooperation, water resources, illegal trading, gambling and the promotion of relations among their countries.

Attendees at the ceremony were Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Maj-Gen Aung Soe, the chief officer of No. 2 security, police force; the chief officer of maritime police force; the chief officer of Yangon region police force; an officer of the police attaché of the Chinese Embassy; invited guests; and other representatives from Myanmar, China and Laos. — Myanmar News Agency ■

Correction

In a story on Page 2 of the 11 January edition of the Global New Light of Myanmar titled "Union Minister meets MPHA delegation in Nay Pyi Taw", there was a translation error. "Myanmar Physically Handicapped Association" in the story and caption should be read as "Myanmar Federation of the Persons with Disabilities". The GNLM regrets the error. —Ed

Message of Greetings sent by President U Htin Kyaw on the occasion of the 18th Anniversary of the Myanmar Traditional Medicine Practitioners Conference and Seminar (12 January 2018)

On this auspicious occasion when the Annual Conference of the Myanmar Traditional Medicine Practitioners and Seminar is held in a friendly and cordial manner where you will share, exchange ideas and discuss with a view to giving the blessings of health to Myanmar citizens with your knowledge of Myanmar Traditional Medicine, I send these good wishes of “Metta” whole heartedly for your happiness and peace of mind.

With the objective of promoting the knowledge of Myanmar Traditional Medicine and the quality of traditional medicines, improving the code of conduct of Myanmar traditional medicine practitioners and providing more health care service to the public through traditional medical science, the Myanmar Traditional Medicine Practitioners Conference has been held annually with these lofty objectives without fail since 2000 and this year marks the 18th anniversary. Therefore, it is a cause for great

joy and pride.

It is learnt that in conjunction with the 18th Myanmar Traditional Medicine Practitioners Conference, a seminar will also be held. It is required to implement the following objectives of the symposium: to save the treatment methods of traditional practitioners for every disease and to practice them at the traditional medicine hospitals and clinics; to promote cooperation with international organizations to be able to promote the standard of Myanmar traditional medicine; to disseminate health knowledge to the housewives through Myanmar traditional medicine; to preserve the healing practices and methods of Myanmar traditional medicine, which is based on the Four Great Nayar as a national heritage; and to review and test the old Myanmar traditional medicine teaching methods which have been used throughout the ages. To fulfill the above objectives for the devel-

opment and advancement of Myanmar Traditional Medicine, it is necessary for all Myanmar Traditional Medicine Practitioners and related professionals to strive, discuss, coordinate and exert their concerted efforts.

In the world today, we have noticed that alternative medicine practices which are based on natural fruits, herbs and vines are free from harmful side effects and very potent and effective. Because of this, this type of healing practice has received great attention and widespread support and promotion. Myanmar traditional medicine practitioners should therefore discuss and share their professional skills with each other as part of efforts for preventing extinction of their healing practices and methods. They should collaborate to find new healing methods. Furthermore, they should use the Myanmar Traditional Medicine healing practices which do not have harmful side effects and healing

practices which can prevent diseases to reach the people as widely as possible so that these healing practices will be assimilated and used by them. It is also necessary for all of you to reap the best results by discussing and sharing knowledge among practitioners with different healing methods.

In conclusion, I wish to send this Message of Good Wishes for the successful achievement of the objectives of the 18th Myanmar Traditional Medicine Practitioners Conference, which is held to promote the dignity of Myanmar traditional medicine which is now on the shoulder of all Myanmar traditional practitioners. May you all discuss and share experiences and knowledge in unity in this conference and seminar and may you all be able to provide your health care services to the people with your Myanmar Traditional Medicine healing practices.

(Unofficial Translation)

VP U Myint Swe returns from Cambodia

A delegation led by Vice President U Myint Swe attended the second Mekong-Lancang Cooperation (LMC) Leaders' Meeting, held in the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh, on 10 January, and left Phnom Penh on a special flight yesterday afternoon.

The vice president was seen off at Phnom Penh International Airport by Cambodian Minister for Public Works and Transport Sun Chanthol and other officials.

The Vice President and his delegation returned to Nay Pyi Taw at 3 p.m. and was welcomed by deputy ministers Rear-Admiral Myint Nwe, Maj-Gen Than Htut, U Kyaw Myo, U Win Maw Tun and other officials at the Nay Pyi Taw International Airport.

China, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam are member countries in the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation (MLC), which is a programme for political, security, economic and social cooperation in the Mekong region.

MLC was initiated on 13 November, 2014, at the Asean-China summit meeting held in Nay Pyi Taw for cooperation among the Mekong-Lancang region countries for sustainable develop-



Vice President U Myint Swe arrives at Nay Pyi Taw International Airport after attending 2nd LMC Leader's meeting held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

ment in the Mekong-Lancang region and was fully established in 2016.

The aim of the MLC is to support the socio-economic development of countries in the region, increase the livelihood of the people, reduce development disparities, support the establishment of the Asean

community, increase the implementation of the 2030 United Nations sustainable development goals, and increase cooperation among developing countries and China by setting up a MLC cooperation fund of US\$300 to implement the cooperation projects.

At the second Lan-

cang-Mekong Cooperation Leaders' Meeting, a Phnom Penh proclamation was issued and a five-year action plan (2018-2022) to implement 214 cooperation projects among the Mekong-Lancang countries, including 10 projects in Myanmar, was approved.— Myanmar News Agency ■

UEHRD leads preparation to receive displaced persons in Rakhine State

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Houses for Muslims were also built in villages. Preparation works were completed and responsible personnel from all levels were ensuring that everything is ready for the acceptance and repatriation works, it is learnt.

Meanwhile, authorities have started the land work to construct buildings that will accommodate refugees repatriated from Bangladesh in Hlaphoekhaung Village in Maungdaw District yesterday.

The work was launched on 7 January by pressing into service eight backhoes and four bulldozers.

The refugees will be temporarily housed in the buildings after their citizenship is scrutinised.

“Those who return from Bangladesh will be scrutinised at Ngakhuya and Taungpyolawe, and they will be provided with temporary accommodation here,” said U Ye Htut, Maungdaw district deputy commissioner.— Myanmar News Agency ■

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The architectural design of Korea-Myanmar friendship bridge (Dala).
PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Korea-Myanmar friendship bridge (Dala) project launched

THE Korea-Myanmar friendship bridge (Dala) project, linking downtown Yangon to the under-developed Dala Township, will begin construction in April 2018.

The groundbreaking ceremony is expected to take place in the first week of March, while the project will be completed in the 2020-2021 fiscal year. The government has also paid the rental fees and compensation

for the lands acquired for the bridge construction project from the 2015-2016 to 2016-2017 fiscal years.

The friendship bridge will be a cable-stayed bridge. It will be 1,936 feet long, extending from Phone Gyi Street in Lanmadaw Township on the Yangon side to Bo Min Yaung Street on the other side of the Yangon river. The bridge will be 87 feet wide and 320 feet high to allow large

passenger ships to pass underneath. It will also feature two 500-millimetre water pump lines.

Major construction work will also take place on two other sections: a 2,026-foot-long bridge at one end on the Yangon side and a 25,182-foot-long bridge at the other end on the Dala side.

The Korea-Myanmar Friendship Bridge is estimated to cost \$168.173 million. The Korea Economic Development

Cooperation Fund will provide an Economic Development Cooperation Fund loan of \$137.833 million, while the Union government will fund the remaining \$30.341 million.

Upon completion of the bridge, it will contribute to the socio-economic development of the local people living in the Dala, Twantay, Kawhmu, Kungyangon and Ayeyawady regions.—Naing Lin Kyaw (Dala) ■

Food from hospital eateries pass FDA test

THE Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has found the laboratory test results of food samples collected from stalls inside the Yangon General Hospital compound to be satisfactory, according to a report in the Myawady Daily yesterday.

A combined team, including

an official from the FDA and the west district FDA committee, inspected the food stalls on December 21 and took samples of the food. Laboratory testing uncovered formalin in the noodles, and the complete results are expected to be released soon. Apart from the discovery of for-

malin, the results are otherwise satisfactory, an official said.

Formalin, which is used to preserve human bodies, is often misused to extend the shelf life of bean curd, noodles, seafood, and milk and dairy products. Sustained and excessive consumption of the chemical can

cause stomach cramps, nausea, fainting, renal failure and even death.

The Yangon region has some 83 hospitals, including 14 specialty hospitals, three teaching hospitals, two 500-bed hospitals, four 200-bed hospitals and one 100-bed hospital.—GNLM ■

Ministry to build 4 bridges to aid local commodity flow

THE ministry of construction is planning to build four bridges to facilitate the smooth flow of local commodities in the 2018-2019 fiscal year (FY), according to a report in the Myawady Daily yesterday.

The four bridges are Tha Kan Bridge and Set Hsan Bridge on the Pyapon-Bogale-Am-

ar Road and Saw Kae Bridge and Jyun Pya Thet Bridge on the Mawlamyinegyun-Wake-ma-Myaungmya Road.

The bridges will be more than 240,000 feet long. Each bridge will be 24 feet wide, flanked by 3.3-foot-wide pedestrian walkways, while the clearance will be 40 feet high and

more than 200 feet wide.

Upon completion of the Saw Kae and Jyun Pya Thet bridges, the transport of goods between Labutta District, Mawlamyinegyun, Pyapon District, Bogale, Set Hsan, Amar and Patheingyi will be smoother.

In 2017, the ministry had constructed a temporary bridge

on the Mawlamyinegyun-Bogale road, which had reduced travel time between Yangon and Maubin. Upon completion of these bridges, 26 townships in the Ayeyawady Delta will be accessible by a motor road, making it easier for the local people to transport their products to Yangon.—GNLM ■



Trade via the sea route brought in \$18.1 billion. PHOTO: PHOE KHWAR

External trade income rose by \$3.99 billion this FY

MYANMAR'S external trade with foreign countries between 1 April and 29 December in the current fiscal year (FY) reached US\$24 billion, up by \$3.99 billion compared with the same period last year.

This includes an estimated \$10.4 billion in exports and \$13.6 billion in imports, resulting in a trade deficit of \$3.99 billion.

Agro products, animal products, fisheries, forest products, minerals and finished industrial goods, among other

things, are shipped to foreign countries. The export earnings, as of 29 December, increased by \$1.9 billion this FY.

Capital goods such as auto parts, vehicles, machines, steel and airplane parts are imported. The private sector showed an income decrease of \$147 million against last FY, whereas the public sector saw an increase of \$271 million.

Intermediate goods make up most of the imports, with petroleum products and plastic

raw materials being the main import items. The import value of raw materials is up by \$1.4 billion against last FY.

Consumer products such as pharmaceuticals, cosmetics and palm oil are also flowing into the market, showing an increase of \$511 million against last FY.

Trade via the sea route brought in \$18.1 billion, whereas border trade earned \$5.8 billion, according to statistics from the Commerce Ministry. —Htet Myat ■

Bilateral trade with India hits over \$939 million this FY

MYANMAR'S bilateral trade with the second most populous country, India, in the first seven months of the current fiscal year (FY) reached more than US\$939 million, including \$477 million in exports and \$461 million in imports.

During this period, its trade via the sea route brought in more than \$900 million, while the Indo-Myanmar border trade value was some \$38.5 million.

Myanmar carries out bor-

der trade with India through the Reed and Tamu checkpoints. Myanmar primarily imports pharmaceuticals from India, while it is the main buyer of Myanmar's pulses. Betel nuts, elephant foot yams, spices, cement, footwear, blankets, snack foods, apparel, cigarettes, apples, mangoes, coconuts, beverages, soap and canned fish, among other things, are also exported to India.

The country's trade value

with India was some \$1.94 billion in FY 2016-2017, \$1.71 billion in FY 2015-16, \$1.34 billion in FY 2014-2015, \$1.63 billion in FY 2012-2013 and \$1.37 billion in FY 2011-2012. The current FY has seen three foreign investment projects from India, with an estimated capital of \$10 million, according to the statistics provided by the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration.—Ko Khant ■

THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

တနင်္ဂနွေနေ့တိုင်း: **"Sunday Special"** အချုပ်ပို (၈)
မျက်နှာပေါင်သော The Global New Light of Myanmar
နေ့စဉ်ထုတ် သတင်းစာကိုအောက်ပါမြို့များတွင်ဖတ်ရှုနိုင်ပါပြီ

"Sunday Special"
အချုပ်ပို (၈) မျက်နှာ
ပေါင်သည့်

နေပြည်တော်
မြန်မာ့အသံနှင့်ရုပ်မြင်သံကြားဌာနမှ ရုံးအမှတ် (၇) နေပြည်တော်၊
သတင်းနှင့်စာနယ်ဇင်းလုပ်ငန်း (ရုံးချုပ်)၊
စီမံရေးရာဌာန၊ ဖုန်း - ၀၆၇၄၁၂၁၁၈

နေပြည်တော်
နေပြည်တော်သတင်းစာတိုက် (တပ်ကုန်း)
လေယာဉ်စီမံခန့်ခွဲရေးဌာန၊ ခရိုင်လမ်းဆုံ၊ နေပြည်တော်၊
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ရန်ကုန်
The Global New Light of Myanmar သတင်းစာတိုက်၊ အမှတ် ၁၅၀၊
ဦးထင်ကြီးဘုရားလမ်း၊ ဗဟန်းမြို့နယ်၊ ရန်ကုန်မြို့၊
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ပုသိမ်
လမ်း (၂၁ x ၂၁) ကြား၊ (၁၂ x ၈၃) လမ်းကြား၊ ပုလဲဇွေ
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တောင်ကြီး
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တနင်္သာရီ
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ကလေး
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မြင်ကြီးနား
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စစ်တွေ
ရထားတံလမ်းနှင့် တက္ကသိုလ်ရိပ်သာလမ်း၊
မိမိကပ်ကြီးအနီး၊ မန်ကျည်မြင်ရပ်ကွက်၊ စစ်တွေမြို့၊
ဖုန်း - ၀၄၃၂၃၀၆၈

လားရှိုး
ဟူးမွန်ကျေးရွာထိပ်၊ ဟူးမွန်ဆည်ဘယ်ဘက်ခြမ်း၊
(၁၂) ရပ်ကွက်၊ မန်ဆူဘုရားရွာ၊ အဝေရာလမ်း၊
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ခြောက်
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Foreign Heads of State send felicitations to President U Htin Kyaw

The following are messages of felicitations from Foreign Heads of State / Government sent to President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar U Htin Kyaw, on the occasion of the 70th Anniversary Independence Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

**From His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck
His Majesty the King of Bhutan
Royal Government of Bhutan
Your Excellency,**

I am pleased to convey the warmest felicitations of the Bhutanese people on the happy occasion of the Independence Day of Myanmar.

I take the opportunity to extend my wishes for the continued peace, progress and prosperity of the people of Myanmar and express the conviction that the relations between our two countries will continue to gain strength in the times to come.

Please accept, Your Excellency my best wishes for your wellbeing and happiness, as well as the assurances of my highest consideration.

**From H.E. Khaltmaagiin Battulga
President of Mongolia
Your Excellency,**

On the occasion of the Independence Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, allow me to extend my sincere congratulations to Your Excellency and to the friendly people of Myanmar.

It would be my great pleasure to continue closely collaborating with Your Excellency in further expanding and strengthening Mongolia-Myanmar relations in accordance with the interests of both peoples and regional development.

I avail myself of this opportunity to extend to Your Excellency my best wishes for your good health and well-being, as well as for the progress and prosperity to the friendly people of Myanmar.

Foreign Heads of State send felicitations to State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

The following are messages of felicitations from Foreign Heads of State / Government sent to State Counsellor and Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, on the occasion of the 70th Anniversary Independence Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

**From H.E. Dasho Tshering Tobgay
Prime Minister of the Royal Government of Bhutan
Your Excellency,**

Thank you for your kind words on the occasion of our National Day conveyed through your message of 14 December 2017. As the people of Myanmar celebrate the joyous occasion of your Independence Day, I would like to extend, on behalf of the Royal Government and on my own behalf, our warmest felicitations to Your Excellency and the people of Myanmar.

I am in agreement with Your Excellency that Bhutan and Myanmar share many similarities and with your leadership and your personal attachment to Bhutan, I am confident that the relations between our two countries will be further strengthened in the years to come.

I also like this opportunity to extend our warm wishes for the New Year and Your Excellency's personal well being and for the continued peace, progress and prosperity of the friendly people of Myanmar.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration and warm personal regards.

**From H.E Mr. Damdin Tsogtbaatar
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia
Your Excellency,**

I would like to extend to you my sincere congratulations on the occasion of the Independence Day of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

It gives me great pleasure to note successful development of Mongolia-Myanmar relations and cooperation based on the common principles of international relations and it is my intention to closely collaborate with Your Excellency to further strengthen these relations in all areas.

Taking this opportunity, I wish to extend to Your Excellency my best wishes for your good health and personal well-being.

Chair of Amyotha Hluttaw Education Promotion Committee meets local teachers in Maungtaw

A meeting led by the Chair of the Amyotha Hluttaw Education Promotion Committee was held on 10 January at the No.1 B.E.H.S in Maungtaw, Rakhine State.

The following are interviews conducted with local teachers in Maungtaw.

Daw Naw Mya Say, Chair of Amyotha Hluttaw Education Promotion Committee

This meeting with local teachers aims at giving them the power of motivation and lifting their spirits, which can promote their teaching profession. Regarding this meeting, we are going to submit a report to Union-level authorities and coordinate with the Ministry for Education on how to fulfil their

requirements.

Daw Soe Soe, a high school teacher from B.E.H.S (1), Maungtaw

I think cooperation is essential for the students, their parents as well as the authorities, in order to promote the standard of education in the region. The authorities can realise the ground situation of Maungtaw by holding this meeting. Local teachers would be appreciative if the authorities arranged an appropriate transportation system, especially school buses, to the schools in Maungtaw.

U Wai Sein Aung, Representative of Sittway Amyotha Hluttaw

Being a representative of



Daw Naw Mya Say.



U Wai Sein Aung.



U Ye Thiha Kyaw.

the Sittway Amyotha Hluttaw, I have requested the chairman to permit me to inspect the educational sectors in Sittway, Buthidaung, Maungtaw and Yathedaung regions, and I went on to meet officials of the Education Department in Sittway. After that, I met and had discussions with the Rector and officials of the Sittway Technological University. Later I went to meet teachers of Sittway Technological University, Computer Science University and No.2 B.E.H.S in Sittway.

After the meeting, I arranged to meet local teachers in Sittway and they explained

the difficulties and challenges they had endured in the region.

U Ye Thiha Kyaw, a school-teacher from Khu Taing

It was such a good meeting to coordinate with the members of the Amyotha Hluttaw Committee. This region suffers a shortage of qualified teachers due to the conflicts and violence. As a result, the ratio of teachers to students is imbalanced. Unlike the situation in city life, there are still many difficulties and challenges which need to be coped with. I also hope that the authorities concerned could be able to fulfil

the basic needs of the region and handle these problems through the Hluttaw and the government.

U Nay Myo Naing, a school-teacher from Khu Taing

As a result of this meeting, I believe that local teachers will be able to be more attentive to their teaching. In former times, they couldn't concentrate on their teaching due to the conflicts and violence. I think time will heal their mental pains and wounds. In order to feel confident and mentally well, the authorities should cure them as quickly as they can.—Aung Ye Thwin

Foreign Minister of Japan, delegation arrive

FOREIGN Minister of Japan Taro Kono and his delegation arrived on a goodwill visit to Myanmar in Yangon yesterday afternoon.

The foreign minister and his delegation were welcomed at Yangon International Airport by Ministry of Foreign Affairs Strategic Studies and Training Department Director-General Daw Kay Thi Soe and ministry officials, Ambassador of Japan to Myanmar Tateshi Higuchi and other officials.

The guests then visited the Japanese Military Cemetery in the Yay Way Cemetery compound.

During the visit, the foreign minister and his delegation are scheduled to meet with State Counsellor and Union Minister



Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono is welcomed at Yangon International Airport by Japanese Ambassador to Myanmar Tateshi Higuchi and other officials. **PHOTO: MNA**

for Foreign Affairs Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.

The guests are also scheduled to visit Thilawa Special Economic Zone in Yangon, meet with Japanese busi-

nessmen in Myanmar in Meilia Hotel and visit Maungta, Rakhine State. — Myanmar News Agency ■

Prime Minister of Laos to visit Myanmar

AT the invitation of President U Htin Kyaw and wife Daw Su Su Lwin, His Excellency Mr. Thongloun Sisoulith, Prime Minister of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Mrs. Naly Sisoulith will pay an official visit to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar in the near future.— Myanmar News Agency ■

Situation schools which were closed following terrorist attacks on 25th August in 2017

No	Content	Maungta Tsp	Buthidaung Tsp	Yathedaung Tsp	Total	Remark
1	List	183	221	246	650	
	(A) High School	16	10	13	39	
	(B) Middle School	109	107	59	275	
	(C) Primary School	58	104	174	336	
2	Schools which have been reopened	98	175	10	283	
	(A) High School	14	10	2	26	
	(B) Middle School	41	72	7	120	
	(C) Primary School	43	93	1	137	
3	Schools to be opened	7	39	-	46	
	(A) High School	-	-	-	-	
	(B) Middle School	6	29	-	35	
	(C) Primary School	1	10	-	11	
4	Schools which have not yet been reopened	78	7	10	95	
	(A) High School	2	-	-	2	
	(B) Middle School	62	6	3	71	
	(C) Primary School	14	1	7	22	

Source : Rakhine State Government

Kaung Yar Village in Hpakant Township celebrates 70th Kachin State Day



Kachin ethnic people celebrate their 70th Kachin State Day in Hpakant Township in Mohnyin District, Kachin State. **PHOTO: WIN NAING (KACHIN LAND)**

TO celebrate the 70th Kachin State Day, a Manaw festival was held at Kaung Yar Village, Karmine Town, Hpakant Township, in the Mohnyin District, Kachin State, on Wednesday.

Led by the Kachin traditional literature and cultural committee of Karmine Town, the festival opened with a Manaw dance.

Hpakhat's hluttaw representatives, township heads, departmental officials, teachers, students, invited guests and members of the Kachin traditional literature and cultural committee also took part

in the Manaw dance, along with the ethnic people, who joined the event wearing their traditional costumes.

More than 3,000 people, including Kachin racial groups such as Manmaw, Khaku, Maru, Zaiwa, Rawang and Lisu and others such as Bamar, Shan, Rakhine, Kayin and the Gurkha people also participated in the Manaw festival.

The 70th Kachin State Day of Karmine Town is expected to strengthen peace among the ethnic people in Kachin State, said a local ethnic resident. —Win Naing (Kachin Land) ■

Youth, all-round development and national interest

CHILDREN'S literature festival, exhibition and book fair held in Yangon for three days has come to a close. Similar festivals were held in many places in the country simultaneously. The first day event held in Yangon saw nearly 80000 visitors coming to the festival, with over 90000 visitors coming in the following two days, it was learnt.

Those present at the Yangon Children's Literature Festival amounted to nearly 300000 consisting of students, school children and other interested persons. Over 56000 children in all were seen taking part in various kinds of competitions included in the festival. Generally speaking, at such a time when patterns of social life are changing in accord with advanced technology, people including children are becoming less interested in books and literature. At such a time when children need to achieve all-round development in 5 kinds of strengths it will be of great use for fulfillment of the need to hold children's literature festivals.

These days, most of the people are using social media pages such as Facebook all the time. Thus, habits of reading books and literature are decreasing and most seldom buy literature books. Scenes of enthusiastic visitors coming to the children's literature festival held currently highlights that creation of such events and literary environments can lead children to become more inclined towards literature again.

Being the jewel-like citizens of the future, arrangements for all-round development of today's children had been implemented more than ever; in the administration of the current NLD government. Those who will shoulder the great burden of the nation will be the developed youths. With a view to gaining access to the advanced

learning needed for upgrading the leadership capacity of youths in all sectors of the nation in future, the Union Government has already introduced the youth policy for Myanmar.

In implementing the youth policy successfully, it is of great importance to make children read books on literature and cultivate habits of acquiring knowledge. Holding such a kind of children's literature festival is a good support for the success of the youth policy, hence the need to make collective efforts for the emergence of such events.

Literary festivals and children's literature festivals which can arouse habits of reading are the driving force for producing well-qualified people, adults and youths. Generally, it may be assumed that such events are just literary moments held across the nation. Now, we have known that this is the strengthened foundation of great firmness. Accordingly, the youths taking active participation in the children's literature festivals will definitely be the ones who are required to shoulder the national burden, hence the need to build up their skills, knowledge and leadership capacities through literature. ■

Invitation to young writers for Sunday section

The Global New Light of Myanmar is accepting submissions of poetry, opinion, articles, essays and short stories from young people for its weekly Sunday Next Generation Platform. Interested candidates can send their works to the **Global New Light of Myanmar** at No. 150, Nga Htat Kyee Pagoda Road, Bahan Township, Yangon or by email to **dce@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com** with the following information: (1) Sector you wish to be included in (poetry, opinion, etc.), (2) Real name and (if different) your penname, (3) Your level of education, (4) Name of your School/College/University, (5) A written note of declaration that the submitted piece is your original work and has not been submitted to any other news or magazine publishing houses, (6) A color photo of the submitter, (7) Copy of your NRC card, (8) Contact information (email address, mobile number, etc.).— Editorial Department, The Global New Light of Myanmar news office

Performances of Myanmar National Human Rights Commission

By Su Thet Hmu
[Mayangone]

ALL human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Every individual can enjoy equal rights and freedom, without segregation. No one shall be subjected torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. These are all described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Formation of MNHRC

With a view to upgrading fundamental rights of Myanmar citizens and protecting human rights, MNHRC was formed in September, 2014, consisting of 11 members whereas the commission started to run its operation with the chairman, vice-chairman and five other members, 7 in all, starting from 6th October 2016. The commission is made up of 5 departments—department of up-gradation and education of human rights, department of protection of human rights, legislative department, administration department and management and finance department. Performances of the MNHRC include making trips across the nation for educational sharing, dealing with letters of complaints and issues, making surveys on the ground, if there happened in the areas, important matters and inspecting penitentiaries and custodies.

Upgrading education and process of protection

In the year 2017, MNHRC made talk shows on sharing educational knowledge in 15 townships including Puta-O, Machanbaw, Kawlin, Wuntho, Maiyaung and Maisat. In the National Defense University as well, subjects on human rights had already been conducted to high-ranking Tatmadaw officials for four times. Similarly,



Members of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) meet ethnic Mro people in Aungthabyay Village in Maungdaw Township, Rakhine State yesterday. PHOTO: MNA

trainings on human rights were conducted in other military institutes and camps. In the year 2017 similar trainings were conducted to police officers in Yangon and Magwe Regions and Kachin State.

Educational talk shows were held in the Ministries, 40 ministries in 2015 and 34 ministries in 2017. In the Central Institute of Civil Services as well, a total of over 30000 staff were given trainings for 72 times. Workshops for region and state-level officials were also held in 7 states in 2014, 7 regions and Union Region [Nay Pyi Taw] in 2015 and 4 districts in 2017.

Village and ward-based workshops

In 2015 village or ward based workshops were held for 14 times, with 2 workshops held for officers of penitentiaries. In 2017, 2 workshops were held for women's organizations, one workshop on human rights on children in co-sponsorship with the Education Ministry and similar workshop for City Development Police Forces.

In 2016 8 penitentiaries and 5 inmate labor camps—13 in all were inspected, with 28 prisons and 24 inmate labor camps inspected in 2017. In inspecting penitentiaries, Buthidaung prison was inspected for three times.

Inspection of penitentiaries

While inspecting the prisons, inmates were allowed to frankly submit their difficulties and violations of human rights in the back of prison staff. As a result, 320 from prisons and 133 from labor camps—453 reports had been tendered. In 2017 48 police custodies, 45 custodies of courts of justice and 12 custodies in hospital were inspected.

Investigation on the ground situation

According to complaints as well as information from news media and posted in social media such as face-book the commission made surveys on the ground for investigation. In 2017 23 on-the-ground-investigations were made, with 16 complaints included. Very recently, the commission managed to rescue two children tortured by the victim's father in Danubyu, just upon receipt of the news posted in face-book.

Making trips to Rakhine State for investigation

MNHRC made 16 trips to Rakhine State for investigations on the ground due to the complaints, inspecting two more times in Maungdaw region, Rakhine State in 2017 according to

the needs. During the first trip, the commission studied as to whether national ethnic people or Bengalis were being violated of human rights, finding out that Mro, Khami, Daingnet and Hindus were atrociously slaughtered by terrorists. Concerning this, news and information were made known to the people.

During the second trip to Sit-twe, Buthidaung and Maungdaw in December, 2017 the commission studied situations on the arrangement of accepting Bengalis who would return from the neighboring country and refugee camps accommodating Hindu nationals who did not yet go back to their original locations. In addition to this, the commission visited the safer sites for building new housing estates for Mro, Daingnet and Khami nationals whose house were burnt down by terrorists.

Cases mostly complained to the MNHRC

In 2016, a total of 611 letters of complaints were received by MNHRC, with 414 letters of complaints received in 2017. Out of them, 276 complaints were to be submitted to the respective Ministries. 112 letters included letters with unclear descriptions of the cases, some to be dealt

with through judicial channels and some involved with personal matters only. 3 cases were found to do nothing with human rights, with 3 others drawn from suing in courts of justice.

Cases mostly complained to the MNHRC were cases of land ownership. Some cases were cases of trespassing on land as residence without permission, cases of being removed from lands and confiscation of lands in Kayin State. One case was that an injured inmate at the labor camp complained to the commission over the failure to give medical treatment concerning his injury from the authority concerned at the camp. As regards this, the Ministry arrested the authority concerned, it was learnt. The commission managed to hospitalize the victim.

Advantages and disadvantages among 2016-2017 performances

Compared to previous years, progress had been made to consider extent. Inspections of penitentiaries in 2017 were made three times of what was done in 2016. Inspections of inmate labor camps were made nearly five times, with inspections of custodies at courts of justice nine times and inspec-

tions of custodies at hospitals two times made respectively.

In 2016 the commission had chances to meet 115 inmates only whereas it could meet 453 inmates in 2017. Regarding surveys the amounts of trips increased up to four times—6 trips in 2016 and 23 trips in 2017. In answer to the announcements in radios, TVs and newspapers that complaints can be sent to the commission, people trust in the commission more than ever; acquiring cooperation from Union Ministries and Region and State Governments.

Complaints can be sent

If any became a victim of human rights violation he can tender a letter of complaint to MNHRC. If a citizen became a victim of civilian rights entrusted by the Constitution or a victim of human rights described in the universal declaration of human rights or a victim of human rights included in the agreement of women's rights on sex segregation, agreement of human rights on children and agreement of human rights on the disabled persons, the person in question or by proxy can send a letter of complaint to the following address—chairman, MNHRC, NO/27, Pyay Road 6 ½ mile, Hlaing township, Yangon in person or email address—protection@mnhrc.org.mm describing the following facts:

- 1/ complainant's name, address and contact numbers [line ph or mobile ph]
 - 2/ complainant by proxy [describing in detail about the victim [if needed- photos, video file or audio file and other evidences attached]
 - 3/ affidavit letter and signature
- Complaints not to be investigated by the Commission
- Cases sued in a court of justice
 - Cases under trial/appeal in a court of justice
 - Cases in which final decrees had been decided by a court of justice.

Characteristics of human rights

Human rights are concerned with every individual, being inborn rights of people. Human rights can neither be divided nor separated. And, human rights are co-related with each other. ■

(Translated by Khin Maung Oo)

Republic of the Union of Myanmar
President's Office
Order 4/2018

10th Waning of Pyatho, 1379 ME
11th January, 2018

Resignation of Bago Region Ministers approved

In accordance with the provisions stated in article 264 (a) of the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Section 52 (b) of Region or State Government Law, following Bago Region Ministers have been permitted to resign of his own volition from the positions.

- (1) U Kyaw Min San, Bago Region Minister for Natural Resources, Forests and Environmental Conservation
- (2) U Maung Maung Lwin, Bago Region Minister for Development and Social Affairs

Sd/ Htin Kyaw
President
Republic of the Union of Myanmar

Public Announcement for remonstrations

PEOPLE Life for Development Party that had been allowed to set up as a political party headquartered at No. 23, first floor, at the corner of U Aung Myat Street and 123th Street, Golden View Tower in Mingalartaungnyunt Township, Yangon Region, has submitted its application for the registration as a political party to the Union Election Commission on 16 November 2017, along with the following party's name, flag and emblem.

In their application they mention that they will use the name, the flag and the emblem as described hereunder.

In accord with Section 14 (d) of the Political Parties Registration Rules, it is hereby announced that those who want to remonstrate with the UEC about the party's name, flag and emblem may submit a complaint along with the supporting evidence within seven days starting from issuance of this announcement. — Union Election Commission

Flag of People Life for Development Party, Emblem of People



Life for Development Party



Employers, employees voice objections to proposed minimum wages

FROM PAGE-1

This rate is only for individual survival, not including family expenditure. Those migrant workers from towns other than Yangon have to spend their money on accommodations and other charges”, said Ma Hla Hla, a member of the labour union of the Hlainethaya Industrial Zone.

Disapproval letters can be submitted to the respective committees by 16th January, bearing the signatures of the workers. They also request that a minimum wage of Ks5,600 should also have impact on enterprises with more than five workers instead of those businesses with ten.

“Despite 60-days due date, we received directives that disagreement letters have to be sent within two weeks. This is another question which comes out”, said Ma Hla Hla.

U Aye Thaung, chairman of Shwelinpan Industrial Park, said that this set rate cannot affect all sectors but employers engaged in garment enterprises using the Cutting, Making and Packaging (CMP) system will be faced with difficulties. Factories making branded products will not matter even if they have to offer more than the set rate. Employers as well as employees have their own difficulties.

The government called on feedback from the employers regarding business operation in industrial zones. There is still no response received from them, said U Aye Thaung.

“Some employers are not strongly disapproving of the proposed minimum wage, but they want the government to tackle problems of high transportation, insufficient electric supply, delays in working with

the cabinets, and tax imposition”, he continued.

“If minimum labour wages are set at a high rate, it will slow the country’s economy, making the foreign investors hesitate over investment. If the rate is too low, it will force local workers to migrate to foreign countries and this will also hurt the country’s economy. The government needs to handle this carefully while endeavouring to improve the ease of doing business ranking that is observed by the World Bank. A moderate rate needs to be set”, said U Win Zaw, a member of the National Committee on Minimum Wage.

U Thein Swe, Union Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population, said at a recent regular meeting between Vice President 1 and businessmen that this proposed rate is decided on commodity price, exchange

rate, Gross Domestic Product and inflation, along with wages set in neighbouring countries. They listened to the employers and employees from regions and states.

“We do not want to hurt any of them due to this proposed rate”, he said.

“We want the businessmen to do well and have the labourers in a happy work environment”, said he added.

Daw Khine Khine Nwe, the joint general secretary of Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry reported that SMEs play a vital role in driving Myanmar’s economy. Most of the SMEs do not earn foreign currency. The current prevailing exchange rate increases by 12 per cent against 2015’s FX. Meanwhile, the minimum wages is up by 33 per cent compared to that of 2015. If min-

imum wages exceed Ks4,000, it might triggers changes in labor force and work environment.

Previously, opposition and objection between employers and employees came out when a minimum wage of Ks3,600 was set. The government explained the economic climate of the country and they finally accepted the set rate.

“We hope the government will handle it well this time”, said some members of National Committee on Minimum Wage.

After this proposed minimum wage is approved, workers will be paid at the set rate. New, inexperienced workers during a three-month training period (before the probation period) will be paid not less than 50 per cent of minimum wages. Those labourers during the three-month probation period will receive 75 per cent of minimum wages.

Phase 1 of JICA SME two-step loan project implemented

SMALL and medium enterprises (SMEs) are responsible for 99 per cent of the country’s development. With the development of SMEs, people will have more job opportunities and individual incomes will also increase.

The Myanmar Economic Bank has implemented phase 1 of the two-step loan project for SMEs. Earlier, it obtained an official development assistance loan from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to provide financial assistance to SMEs in the country.

SMEs involved in JICA SME two-step loan project

SMEs described in section-2 (A), (B) of the 2015 SME Development Law are entitled to the loan.

- (a) Manufacturing businesses
- (b) Worker-based businesses
- (c) Retail businesses
- (d) Wholesale businesses
- (e) Service businesses
- (f) Others

Businesses not entitled to JICA SME two-step loan project

- (a) Farmers qualified to take loans from Myanmar Agricultural Development Bank
- (b) Real estate businesses
- (c) Banking and insurance businesses
- (d) Precious metal trading businesses
- (e) Liquor houses and restaurants
- (f) Entertainment, show (not including foreign travel businesses) businesses
- (g) Arms and ammunition manufacturing and trading businesses

Sr.	Conditions for JICA SME two-step loan	
1	Loan amount permitted for SME businesses	Maximum Ks500 million
2	Limitations on using the loan	80% for fixed assets 20% for working capital
3	Interest	8.5% per annum
4	Loan period	3 to 5 years

Banks permitted to disburse JICA SME two-step loans

- (1) Small & Medium Industrial Development Bank
- (2) Myanma Apex Bank
- (3) Myanmar Citizens Bank
- (4) Ayeyarwaddy Bank
- (5) Kanbawza Bank
- (6) Co-operative Bank

Status of JICA SME two-step loans (phase 1)

Some 269 SME businesses were provided with loans up to Ks57,634 billion through six private banks that are the participating financial institutions (PFIs) of JICA.

Loan repayments are kept in a revolving fund account, and a total of Ks61,146.98 billion was loaned back to some 292 SME businesses, while more loans will be granted to new SME businesses.

Status of JICA SME two-step loans (phase 1) made by state/region

Sr.	States/Regions	Loan quantity	Loan amount Ks Million
1	Nay Pyi Taw Council	-	-
2	Kachin State	1	80.00
3	Kayah State	-	-
4	Kayin State	1	30.00
5	Chin State	-	-
6	Sagaing Region	6	1,691.00
7	Taninthayi Region	1	300.00
8	Bago Region	26	2,741.75
9	Magway Region	10	1,575.00
10	Mandalay Region	50	11,338.00
11	Mon State	2	145.00
12	Rakhine State	3	470.00
13	Yangon Region	113	29,812.48
14	Shan State	17	3,033.00
15	Ayeyawady Region	42	9,930.75
Total		292	61,146.98

Loans provided to each sector in JICA SME two-step loan project (phase 1)

Details of the loans provided to each sector from 2015-2016 to 2017-2018 (up to December) are outlined below.

Sr.	Sector	Amount (Ks million)
1	Manufacturing businesses	40,068.25
2	Worker-based businesses	550.00
3	Wholesale trading businesses	1,395.00
4	Retail trading businesses	3,434.93
5	Service businesses	14,523.80
6	Others	1,175.00

Programme for JICA SME two-step loan project (phase 2)

Arrangements are being made to obtain 14,949 million Japanese yen in loans from the JICA SME two-step loan project (phase 2). New PFIs will be selected from among the banks, and plans are afoot to disburse the loans widely in the Nay Pyi Taw Council area, as well as in the states and regions.

Myanma Economic Bank

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Emergency PPST meeting held to resolve disagreements in national-level political dialogue preparation process stages

By Ye Gaung Nyunt

An emergency meeting of the Peace Process Steering Team (PPST), including eight ethnic armed organisations that have signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), was held in Khumphucome Hotel, Chiang Mai, Thailand, yesterday morning.

Kayin Nation Union Chairperson Saw Mutu Sae Poe said the emergency meeting was held to resolve differences among the ethnic armed organisations and the government on the national-level political dialogue preparation process stages conducted for the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong 3rd Session.

In his opening remarks, Saw Mutu Sae Poe said, “All the stakeholders had agreed to participate in the out-of-parliament path, a political dialogue path based on NCA to reconstruct the country. This is a new political culture called implementation, based on finding solutions through dialogue. Meetings with the public and national-level political discussions are the backbone of the new political culture. This will help in the implementation of national reconciliation. The



Emergency meeting of the Peace Process Steering Team held in Chiang Mai, Thailand yesterday. **PHOTO: AUNG AUNG (CHIANG MAI)**

peace process cannot be implemented through the system of orders and obedience but by building trust, based on mutual respect and recognition. Thus stakeholders need to discuss to obtain a common understanding. The meeting will be significant only when solutions are found after discussing the fears of both sides about the other.”

The day's PPST emergen-

cy meeting was attended by top PPST leaders, as well as members of the group for security and political discussions, and officials from the Joint Monitoring Committee.

Based on the experience of armed conflict, the highest level of confrontation in a political situation, it is undeniable that mistrust, suspicion and concerns between the main stakeholders

participating in the peace process are deeply rooted. This causes friction when political dialogues are held. It can be concluded that they do not view the terms of the NCA in the same way. As such, a solution needs to be found through meetings and discussions, said Saw Mutu Sae Poe.

The PPST emergency meeting will be held over two days on January 11 and 12. ■

Kayin State receives more visitors

THE number of visitors to Kayin State increased in the 2016-2017 fiscal year. Residents of Kayin State, located in southeastern Myanmar, are primarily descended from the Kayin race and other minority ethnic groups.

Tourist arrivals in Kayin State have increased annually. Authorities have upgraded the roads and bridges in the state, which are now open 24 hours. Tourists can visit Hpa-an from Yangon and return in a day.

In 2016, Kayin State received some 159,749 visitors. As of December 2017, some 225,311 visitors visited Kayin State. Most of the foreigners who visited Kayin State were from France, Germany, the Netherlands and China, according to the Hpa-an branch office of the hotels and tourism department.

During peak season, many tourists visit Hpa-an, the capital of Kayin State. Mount Zwegabun, Kyauk Kalap, Paddamya Cave, Saddan Cave, Kawt Gun Cave, Bayit Nyi Naung Cave, Kawkath-aung Cave and Hot Spring are famous tourist spots in the state.—Min Thu ■

Dredging Chindwin River to be launched in February

SAGAING Region Government is planning to dredge the Chindwin River clearing debris including trees and big roots that were brought by the river to its floor in the rainy season.

“The move is aimed at preventing dangers to ships in summer when the water level decreases,” said U Tin Aung Tun, Assistant Director of the Sagaing Region Department for Water

Resource and Development of River System. The work would be carried out between Homelin and Monywa in February, he added. In 2016, about 35 trees and roots weighing 55 tons in total were removed from the floor of the river between Homelin and Monywa from January to March in 2016, and 35 trees and roots in the same area last year.—Win Oo (Zeya Taing) ■



Mandalay traffic accidents kill over 700 people in 2017

TRAFFIC accidents have killed more than 700 people in the Mandalay region in 2017, the traffic police from No. 14 Mandalay branch office have stated, according to a report in City News yesterday.

The traffic police announced that some 2,233 traffic accidents occurred in 2017, killing 789 persons and injuring 3,565 others.

“Motorbikes are widely

used in Mandalay. Therefore, most of the cases involve motorbikes crashing into people or colliding with each other. Some people ride motorbikes after consuming alcohol. Even a small amount of alcohol can lead to harmful situations,” said U Lon Maung, a resident in the Chanmyathasi township.

“Traffic accidents can be reduced if traffic rules are obeyed,” he added.

The Mandalay region has recorded some 2,233 cases of traffic accidents, including 559 cases in Pyin Oo Lwin District and 421 cases in Kyaukse District. To reduce road accidents, the traffic police are conducting regular awareness talks and distributing pamphlets. The traffic police have filed charges against suspected reckless drivers under sections 279, 337, 338 and 304 (A) of the Penal Code.—GNLM

Yaba worth Ks20 million seized in Katha

Acting on a tip, police apprehended a Myanmar citizen, Min Set, for alleged contact with drug dealers, in Indaw Township, Katha, yesterday.

A combined team of officers and other staff searched the suspect's tent

near Shwebo-Myikyina Road, Kyin Chaung Village, Indaw Township, and found four soap boxes filled with heroin, weighing 29 grams, and 3,407 Yaba tablets, worth more than Ks19 million.

The team also apprehend-

ed a 27-year-old man, identified as Tun Win Aung, along with his host. The police have filed charges against the suspects under sections 15, 19-A, 21 of the Anti-Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law.—Aye Lwin (Katha) ■

Death toll rises to 17 in California mudslides, 17 missing

SANTA BARBARA, (Calif.) — The death toll from devastating mudslides in affluent communities along a stretch of Southern California coastline rose to 17 on Wednesday after two more bodies were recovered, the local sheriff said, and the number of people missing also climbed to 17.

The two additional fatalities were discovered as some 500 rescuers using search dogs, helicopters and thermal-imaging equipment dug through waist-deep mud for victims or survivors of the mudslides, which were triggered by a heavy downpour early on Tuesday.

Three more people were rescued from the path of debris on Wednesday. None of the dead have been publicly identified.

“We realize that this



A home on Glen Oaks Road damaged by mudslides in Montecito, California, US, on 10 January 2018. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

is going to be a long and difficult journey for all of us and our community,” Santa Barbara County Sheriff Bill Brown told reporters at a late afternoon news conference.

The walls of mud that

roared through foothills and valleys sandwiched between the Pacific Ocean and the sprawling Los Padres National Forest also destroyed 100 single-family homes, damaged hundreds of other buildings

and injured 28 people, said Amber Anderson, a spokeswoman for the Santa Barbara County Fire Department.

A major north-south highway along the coast, US Route 101, was closed

in both directions and not expected to reopen until next week.

Among the damaged properties were historic hotels and the homes of celebrities including television personality Oprah Winfrey and talk-show host Ellen DeGeneres, who both live in the upscale hillside community of Montecito, known for its natural beauty and proximity to Los Angeles.

Verdant hillsides that had provided estates with a sense of seclusion were largely denuded by last month’s historic wildfires, making them vulnerable to the massive mud and debris slides that sent boulders crashing into homes, turned highways into raging rivers and shredded cars into tangles of metal.—Reuters ■

Beijing winning pollution battle as other Chinese cities fall behind

BEIJING — As Beijing and the surrounding region reported big improvements in air quality last year, nationwide gains were much more muted as industrial activity shifted further away from the capital, a report by Greenpeace shows.

Strict restrictions on coal use and industrial activity led to a dramatic improvement in air quality in Beijing and across northern China, helped also by favorable weather conditions.

China as a whole, however, cut air pollution levels by just 4.5 percent last year, according to the most often-cited measure, which was the smallest decline since 2013 as industry ramped up coal, cement and steel production, Greenpeace said in a report on China air pollution published on Thursday.

A separate Reuters analysis of official government readings of concentrations of small, breathable particles known as PM2.5 also showed a disparity between Beijing and 27 nearby cities included in a pollution action plan and those just outside the zone.—Reuters ■

Regulator urges release of treated Fukushima radioactive water into sea

NARAHA, (Japan) — The chief of Japan’s nuclear regulator said Thursday water at the crisis-hit Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant that contains radioactive tritium even after being treated should be released into the sea after dilution.

“We will face a new challenge if a decision (about the release) is not made within this year,” Nuclear Regulation Authority Chairman Toyoshi Fuketa told a local mayor, referring

to the more than 1 million tons of coolant water and groundwater that has accumulated at the facility crippled by the 2011 disaster triggered by a devastating quake and tsunami.

As local fishermen are worried about the negative impact from the water discharge, the Japanese government and Fukushima plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. have not made a final decision on the treated

water, which is currently stored in tanks.

In his meeting with Yukiei Matsumoto, mayor of Naraha town near the Fukushima plant, Fuketa said, “It is scientifically clear that there will be no influence to marine products or to the environment” following the water release.

The nuclear regulator chief underlined the need for the government and Tepco to quickly make a decision, saying, “It will

take two or three years to prepare for the water release into the sea.”

At the Fukushima plant, toxic water is building up partly because groundwater is seeping into the reactor buildings to mix with water made radioactive in the process of cooling the damaged reactors.

Such contaminated water is treated to remove radioactive materials but tritium, a radioactive sub-

stance considered relatively harmless to humans, remains in the filtered water as it is difficult to separate even after passing through a treatment process.

At other nuclear power plants, tritium-containing water is routinely dumped into the sea after it is diluted. The regulator has been calling for the release of the water after diluting it to a density lower than standards set by law.—Kyodo News ■

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China air force stages real combat training

BEIJING — Air Force of the People’s Liberation Army of China has carried out real combat training, with the involvement of the J-20 stealth fighter and the Y-20 military transport aircraft, according to a military statement.

The J-20, China’s fourth-generation medium and long-range fighter jet, made its maiden flight in 2011 and was officially commissioned into military service in September 2017.

Several new fighter

jets including the J-16, J-10C and H-6K bombers were also included in the training, the statement said.

The training is aimed at improving the air force’s capability to win battles, it said.—Xinhua ■

Japan reports 1st suspected bird flu case in livestock this winter

TAKAMATSU, (Japan) — Highly pathogenic avian influenza is suspected to have hit chickens at a poultry farm in western Japan's Kagawa Prefecture, according to the prefectural government, possibly making it the first bird flu case affecting livestock in Japan this season.

If the chickens test positive in ongoing genetic tests, the Kagawa prefectural government will call for the deployment of the Self-Defense Forces to cull around 51,000 chickens in the farm in the city of Sanuki.

The farm notified the prefectural government of a suspected bird flu case Wednesday morning, saying 55 chickens in one of its 15 poultry houses had died.

The facility has been raising about 51,000 chickens for meat in eight of the poultry houses. The other seven houses had no chick-



Officials clad in protective wear prepare to conduct further tests on 11 January 2018, at a poultry farm in Sanuki in southwestern Japan's Kagawa Prefecture where chickens are suspected to have been hit by highly pathogenic avian influenza. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

ens. In preliminary tests, three of 11 chickens tested positive and detailed genetic exams are being conducted.

If a pathogenic virus is confirmed, any move-

ment of poultry and eggs will be restricted in a radius of 3 kilometers from the infected site and farms within its 10-km radius will be banned from transporting birds and eggs out of

the area.

The farm has stopped shipping chickens elsewhere and the prefectural government has cleaned the area with disinfectants.—Kyodo News ■

Australia's Port Hedland clearing out ships as Cyclone Joyce intensifies

SYDNEY — Australia's Port Hedland iron ore terminal expects to clear all remaining vessels from its harbor by 1030 GMT as a safety measure after a tropical cyclone intensified off the nation's western coast on Thursday, Pilbara Ports Authority said.

The port's biggest user, global mining giant BHP, said it was monitoring the progress of Cyclone Joyce amid forecasts it will reach Category 3 strength by early Friday morning, packing wind gusts of 165-224 km per hour.

"All vessels are expected to be cleared from the port by 6.30 p.m (1030 GMT) tonight, at which time the port will be officially closed," the authority said. The port accounts for over half of Australia's

iron ore exports, handling more than a million tonnes a day from the Pilbara iron belt, the majority bound for Chinese steel mills.

The Bureau of Meteorology said earlier a tropical low had reached cyclone strength and would intensify overnight, affecting the Pilbara region on Friday or early Saturday.

The port is used by three of Australia's top four iron ore miners, BHP, Fortescue Metals Group and Gina Rinehart's Hancock Prospecting.

"The safety of our people is our highest priority and we are closely monitoring conditions relating to the cyclone," Fortescue Chief Executive Nev Power said in a statement emailed to Reuters.—Reuters ■

China supports DPRK, South Korea in promoting inter-Korean dialogue, exchanges — Xi

BEIJING — Chinese President Xi Jinping said Thursday that China has always supported the improvement of relations between South Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), as well as their reconciliation and cooperation. In a telephone conversation with his South Korean counterpart Moon Jae-in, Xi said China supports the two sides in promoting inter-Korean dialogue and exchanges to gradually advance the settlement of the Korean Peninsula issue.

Currently, challenges and opportunities co-exist on the Korean Peninsula, Xi said, expressing the hope that the Pyeong-Chang Winter Olympics will not only bring about opportunities for inter-Korean dialogue, but also help improve the situation on the peninsula.

Xi said China is willing to enhance communication and cooperation with all sides concerned,

including South Korea, to pursue a positive outcome of the situation.

For his part, Moon said his country attaches great importance to China's important role in solving the dilemma on the Korean Peninsula, and appreciates China's support for inter-Korean dialogue and efforts to push for settlement through dialogue and safeguard peace and stability on the peninsula.

In their conversation, Xi recalled that Moon has paid a successful state visit to China not long ago, during which both sides reached important consensus on developing the China-South Korea strategic cooperative partnership and enhancing coordination on major regional and international issues.

Noting that the two countries have also strengthened mutual trust and cooperation during Moon's visit, Xi said China is pleased with the improvement of bilateral ties.—Xinhua ■

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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.

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Fans shake, rattle and roll at Australia's Elvis festival

SYDNEY — Hundreds of hip-shaking and wig-wearing Elvis Presley lookalikes and fans of the late King of Rock and Roll took trains from Sydney bound for Australia's annual Elvis festival on Thursday.

Strains of "I Was The One" rang out along the platforms of Sydney's Central railway terminal as jumpsuited, coiffed and guitar-wielding passengers boarded the "Elvis Express" and "Blue Suede Express" bound for the country town of Parkes, some 357 km (222 miles) westward.

"Elvis is close to my heart because we grew up with Elvis in India," Alfred Vaz, who dressed in a blue flared jumpsuit and also goes by his stage name of Bollywood Elvis, or Raja, told Reuters television beside the locomotive.

"From a very little kid, we always used to gyrate and try singing Elvis like: One for the mon-



Elvis Presley impersonator and Mayor of the town of Parkes, Ken Keith, stands aboard the Elvis Express train at Sydney's Central station before it departs for the 26th annual Elvis Festival being held in the New South Wales town of Parkes in Australia, on 11 January 2018. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

ey, two for the show," he said, "Blue Suede Shoes".

During the six-hour train

trip over mountains and through wheatfields and grazing pas-

tures, Elvis tribute artists will entertain the passengers.

The festival, in its 26th year, is expected to attract about 25,000 people to Parkes, more than doubling its population for the duration of the four-day event.

The focus this year is on celebrating 50 years since Presley's 1968 "comeback special," an intimate and unplugged show credited with reviving his then-flagging recording career.

Street markets, lookalike contests, parades, a car show, displays of Presley artefacts and tribute performances are planned. "It's a must for all Elvis fans," said tribute artist Kingsley Rock, whose website promises: "If you want the King to sing at your thing, give me a ring."

"It's just one big party and everyone there loves Elvis, why wouldn't you not come back year after year," he told Reuters. — Reuters ■

Donatella Versace says won't be watching US TV series on brother's murder

MILAN — When a long-awaited US television series about the murder of Gianni Versace hits the small screen in a week's time, one key character will not be watching — the fashion designer's sister Donatella.

Now artistic director and vice-president of the Milan-based Versace fashion group, Donatella said in an interview published by Italian daily *la Repubblica* on Wednesday that the series and a book it draws on contain gossip and contradictions.

"I haven't seen (the series) nor will I see it, because after all this time it still hurts to see Gianni represented untruthfully," Donatella told the paper.

The nine-episode series "The Assassination of Gianni Versace: American Crime Story" stars Edgar Ramirez as Gianni, Spanish actress Penelope Cruz as his sister and Puerto Rican singer Ricky Martin as Gianni's boyfriend.

It was produced by 21st Century Fox and drew inspiration from Maureen Orth's 1999 book "Vulgar Favours". It will start broadcasting on 17 January.

In a statement sent by the company, the Versace family said "in the attempt to create



Italian fashion designer Donatella Versace arrives for the Franca Sozzani Award ceremony at the 74th Venice Film Festival in Venice, Italy, on 1 September 2017. **PHOTO: REUTERS**

a sensational story, (the TV drama) presents gossip full of contradictions".

"It saddens (us) to see that among all possible portraits of (Gianni's) life and story, the producers chose to present the false and distorted version created by Maureen Orth," it added. The statement said Orth's book was full of speculation, adding the author had never sought information directly from the family and did not have the knowledge to tell the

story, including suppositions on Gianni's medical conditions.

Donatella also said in the interview that among the mistakes in the book was the assertion that Gianni had been weak at the time of his murder because he had AIDS. The family distanced itself from the series on Monday, saying it had not authorised it and was not involved. On Tuesday the producer defended the show, saying the family has been treated with respect in it.—Reuters ■

Spiders and fleas pack Albert Hall as Cirque du Soleil's Ovo hits London

LONDON — London's Royal Albert Hall was crawling with spiders, crickets, ants and fleas on Wednesday as Cirque du Soleil brought its insect-themed show Ovo to the famous venue for the first time.

'Ovo', which means egg in Portuguese, is about a day in the life of a community of 17 insects - portrayed by humans, not by insects - and how they cope with the arrival of a mysterious egg and the foreigner inside.

The show features eye-catching aerial displays to vibrant South American mu-

sical rhythms and is the 25th live production from Cirque du Soleil, the one-time Canadian street performer troupe that grew into a global circus and entertainment colossus.

Artistic director Tim Bennett said the show, which has been seen by over 5 million people since its premiere in Montreal eight years ago also carried an important message about social inclusion. "It's an insular colony of insects into which walks a foreigner, and he's initially rejected because he's different," Bennett told Reuters.—Reuters ■

Jennifer Lopez to guest star on 'Will and Grace'

LOS ANGELES — Singer-actor Jennifer Lopez has been roped in to feature as a guest star on the popular sitcom "Will and Grace". The 48-year-old artiste will appear in one episode of the revived comedy show as both herself and her "Shades of Blue" character detective Harlee San-

tos, Variety reported.

The airing date of the episode is yet to be announced.

The show, which had its original run from 1998-2006, was rebooted last year.

The ABC's revival series has been renewed for a 13-episode second season.—PTI ■

Lisu traditional Khawshi New Year Festival to be held

THE Lisu traditional Khawshi New Year festival and the 60th anniversary of the Lisu literature and culture committee will be celebrated in Putao Town, Kachin State, for three days from January 16 to 18.

“The Lisu literature and culture committee was established in Waingmaw in 1953-1954 but was formed in Putao only in 1957. As it was legally formed in the country 60 years ago, we are holding this celebration to praise God. Union and state-level guests, as well as foreign guests, are expected to attend the festival,” said U Arr T Yaw Han, Lisu ethnic affairs minister. “This traditional dance represents the whole Putao region. There are some 40 members per dance troupe. A total of eight or nine dance troupes will entertain and compete in the festival,” said

Ko Yaw Shu, leader of a traditional dance troupe. “I have never competed before. I am very happy as I am competing on behalf of the Lisu ethnic people in Putao. I am excited and nervous. We are rehearsing now to compete in the festival,” said Ma Ngwar Sardu, a member of a traditional dance troupe. Sports activities such as volleyball, Sepak Takraw, shot put, golf, traditional crossbow matches and horse riding will be included, besides traditional cultural performances and modern music entertainment. Some 180 beauty queens from across the country will participate in the beauty contest.

Traditional culture booths and other booths will be displayed at the festival and a lucky draw programme will also be organised.—District IPRD (Putao) ■



People performing traditional dance. Lisu traditional Khawshi New Year festival will be held in Putao, Kachin. **PHOTO: DISTRICT IPRD**

Sedona Hotel Yangon hosts First Myanmar Food Festival



First Myanmar Food Festival hosted by Sedona Hotel in Yangon till 31 January. **PHOTO: SUPPLIED**

SEDONA Hotel Yangon is hosting its first ever Myanmar Food Festival at its D'Cuisine restaurant, offering a buffet spread of more than 40 popular Myanmar dishes.

Available daily for lunch and dinner, from now till 31 January 2018, the event aims to attract local food enthusiasts, members of the public and hotel guests who wish to experience Myanmar local delights at their best.

The menu was curated by Mr Edmund Ng, Executive Chef of Sedona Hotel Yangon and his talented culinary team of local chefs.

Foodies can look forward to dishes with locally-sourced ingredients and cooked to perfection in a variation of styles. Guests can enjoy the Salad Station to create their own Myanmar salad using a wide mix of ingredients; a Fried Station with local favourites such as

tempura-style, Shan-styled; a Soup Station with local soup specialties, and lentil with glass noodles; and hot dishes which include Myanmar curries, satay and sautéed vegetables.

The Myanmar Food Festival buffet is available alongside other food stations that Sedona Hotel Yangon typically serves during its buffets including international and dessert dishes.—GNLM ■

100 youths receive retail service skills

ONE hundred trainees received retail service and social skills at the 3rd Basic Retail Training Course (3/2017) which concluded last month, according to City Mart Holding Co Ltd which conducted the training joining hands with City Love & Hope Foundation and NLD education Network. The training course started from 6 November 2017 and concluded on 9th December conferring certificates on qualified 100 trainees.

A total of 128 attended the course. It taught basic training in retail, product knowledge and how to do the products promotion with good personal relationship along with theoretical and practical way. Another training course will be held in March.—CMHL ■

Samsung launches new Galaxy A8 Smartphone with Dual Front Camera and Large Infinity Display

SAMSUNG Myanmar on Tuesday announced the latest addition to the Galaxy A series: the Galaxy A8(2018) which features a Dual Front Camera, a large Infinity Display and stunning ergonomic design that draws on Samsung's flagship design heritage and experience. With additional everyday features, the Galaxy A8 (2018) has become more stylish, practical and convenient than ever before.

Snap bright, clear selfies with the 16MP F1.7 rear camera and 16MP+8MP F1.9 Dual Front Camera, no matter where you are or what you're doing. The Dual Front Camera is made up of two separate cameras so you can switch between the two to take the type of selfie you want—from close-ups with the background to portrait shots with a clear and



Visitors look at the Samsung smartphone during a media event. **PHOTO: SUPPLIED**

crisp background. And with the advanced Live Focus feature, you can easily adjust the bokeh effect before or after you take the picture to create high-quality images even in low-light conditions.

“With the release of the Galaxy A8(2018), we're bringing our customers' favorite features from our flagship smartphones, such as the Infinity Display and our first Dual Front Camera

with Live Focus, to our Galaxy A8 (2018), which is already known for its premium design”, said Ko Zarni Win Htet, Head of IT and Mobile from Samsung Myanmar. “The Galaxy A8 (2018) exemplifies our continued dedication to meeting the needs of our consumers by providing them with greater choice and convenience.”

When watching movies or playing games, the latest Galaxy A8 (2018) sets a new standard for uninterrupted, immersive viewing experiences. The Infinity Display goes beyond the bezel with an immersive 18.5:9 display ratio and is supported with ergonomic curved glass on the back and front. Its sleek glass and metal frame, smooth curves and comfortable grip make it even easier to watch or interact with content on your phone. ■

Sagaing United ties Rakhine United in opening match of MNL



Sagaing player poised to shoot the ball at yesterday's match in Monywa Stadium. PHOTO:MNL

In the opening match of MPT Myanmar National League 2018, Sagaing United played to a scoreless draw yesterday against Rakhine United at Monywa stadium, Sagaing's home Stadium.

The 0-0 result gives each team one point in the standings.

Both teams used their main players including not only local stars but also skillful expatriate footballers in yesterday's match.

With tremendous support by Sagaing fans, Sagaing United made repeated efforts to score goals from the beginning of the match.

But the efforts of Sagaing's strikers were for naught, as Rakhine defenders and midfielders were too strong, making it difficult to pass the ball further than midfield. In the second half, both teams changed tactics in an effort to get on the scoreboard. Sagaing United, formerly Ma-

har United, was promoted from MNL-2 to the Myanmar National League this year. Rakhine United, based in Rakhine State, had used Waytharli Yinpyin in Sittwe Township as their home stadium. Now they call the Thuwunna Youth Training Centre Stadium home.—KyawZin Lin ■

Yangon revels in win over Shan United

Yangon United secured the title of champion after beating Shan United by a score of 6-4 on 7 January, the first Champions Title for Yangon United in the 2018 season and the first title victory for head coach U Myo Min Tun in his coaching career.

Yangon United head coach U Myo Min Tun revealed that the victory over Shan United to become Champions of the 2017 MNL League and 2017 General Aung San Shield was a most satisfying achievement for him and his team. "In the previous year, we unfortunately missed both of titles when Shan United won both. Now I am really proud for this victory as Shan is a strong team. And I appreciate what my lads have done in the match from whistle to whistle, with full of concentration, which led us to be crowned champions", U Myo Min Tun said. Yangon United placed second in MNL 2017 and the General Aung San Shield tournament as Shan United won both titles. "I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to all my boys, my coach members giving their best on the pitch. Moreover, my big thanks to people who are behind the scenes such as our club owner, club president, CEO and our hard core fans," he added.—KyawZin Lin ■

Serena absence gives chance for a new superstar to emerge

SINGAPORE — Women's tennis starts its 2018 campaign with the usual early focus on the Australian Open and a huge question mark over who can fill the yawning gap left by the absence of Serena Williams.

No one was able to get anywhere close last year, not just in terms of consistently winning the biggest tournaments but also when it comes to charisma.

Williams left Melbourne a year ago with a 23rd grand slam title under her belt but soon hung up her racket for the remainder of 2017 upon discovering she was

eight weeks pregnant at the time of her triumph.

Her forced hiatus will extend past this year's tournament after she decided last week that she was not fully match-ready, giving the chasing pack more opportunities to stamp their authority on the women's game.



Boris Becker, who knows a bit about both winning grand slams and star appeal, believes the landscape at the top of the women's game is just too confused at the moment.

"I think there is a real opportunity for the next superstar. It's not clear cut," he told Reuters. "Simona Halep is number one at the moment but we have four

Australian Open, that's good and that's bad. I think the sport needs a strong rivalry because that's good for fans. But the women's game doesn't have that at the moment." The remaining 2017 majors were shared by three rising stars of the game, with Latvian teen Jelena Ostapenko storming to the French Open title, Garbine Muguruza

or five different girls. It's just that there is no one dominating, but it's up to them.

"I could mention 10 names who could win the

winning Wimbledon and Sloane Stephens returning from injury to lift the US Open crown. The world rankings saw three new names ascend to the top last season with big-serving Czech Karolina Pliskova's two-month reign ended by Spain's Muguruza in September; before Romania's Halep took over to end the year in pole position. —Reuters ■