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THE GLOBAL NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR

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Bagan, recreation places draw holiday makers

Pagodas all over Bagan were crowded with locals on the second day of the four-day holiday for civil servants. After Bagan, other places in central Myanmar that were popular destinations for holiday makers included Myathalun Pagoda in Magway, the mud volcano in Minbu, and the Mann Shwe Set Taw Pagoda in Minbu.

PHOTO: YE THUYA AUNG (NYAUNG OO)

in
Picture

16 people trafficked to Thailand sent back

SOME 16 Myanmar nationals, including 14 men and two women, who were trafficked to Thailand were sent back to Myanmar through an arrangement with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and Thailand's Ministry of Social De-

velopment and Human Security on the morning of 28 February 2018 at Myawady temporary reception centre. Furthermore, a trafficked Myanmar man and woman who were returned to Myanmar on 4 August 2014 were paid compensation. The com-

pensation was 600,000 Thai baht for the man and 300,000 baht for the woman, together totalling 900,000 baht.

The transfer of the 16 persons was made in the presence of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, De-

partment of Rehabilitation Director General U Win Naing Tun, Saranapat Anumatrajkit from Thailand's Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Police General Tamasak Wicharaya of the Royal Thai Police and Police Attache Khemmarin

Hasiri, Embassy of Thailand, in Myanmar.

The compensation payments were first accepted by U Win Naing Tun and then immediately handed over directly to the two trafficked persons.

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Ngaliketha Elephant Camp allows the visitors to interact with the elephants in their natural state and also offers elephant rides through the natural forest path.

A visit to Ngaliketha Elephant Camp in Nay Pyi Taw

By Mi Mi Phyo
PHOTO: AYE THAN

Starting from the full moon day of Tabaung, people in the country enjoyed four consecutive holidays.

While many chose to go on trips overseas or within the country with families and friends, many stayed back in Nay Pyi Taw to visit the local attractions, such as Nay Pyi Taw Buddha Gaya, Uppatasanti Pagoda, Water Fountain Park, Ngalike Resort, Ngaliketha Elephant Camp and the zoo.

Many who visited the Ngaliketha Elephant Camp during the long holiday spoke about their experiences.

Daw Nu Wah Hlaing, Khayay Housing, Nay Pyi Taw

I live in Nay Pyi Taw. My aunts had come over from Yangon, and as they wanted to visit the Ngaliketha Elephant Camp, I accompanied them. I have never been here before but have seen it in a television programme. It was a pleasant feeling to enter the camp through the natural forest lane. My mother and son also came along, and we were ecstatic. People with families should visit this place during the summer holidays with their sons and daughters. I assure them they will enjoy the trip.

Daw Tin Tin Htway, retired teacher, Insein Township

My sister lives in Pobbathiri Township. She heard about the Ngaliketha Elephant Camp on a television programme and told me it was a beautiful place. She asked me to accompany her to



Daw Nu Wah Hlaing.



Daw Tin Tin Htway.



U Min Soe.



Ngaliketha Elephant Camp has a mini playground for children and an area nearby for the family to relax.

the camp, and I went along with my friend. I was a government employee for 30 years. I told my other friends that I would scout the place and let them know about it. My friends feel there are not many places to visit in Nay Pyi Taw.

I have visited the elephant camp and all the pagodas here. Next time, I will bring my friends along.

Daw Khin Aye Myint, Pobbathiri Township

bathiri Township

My friends from a rural township had come for a visit, and we visited the camp. We have never been here before. However, once we came here, we really enjoyed the pleasant surroundings and will come along with our other friends again. It is a pleasant place located under the shadow of the mountains and forests. The river bank is like a beach, and it is such a nice place for a holiday. I will encourage

others to come here too.

Ma Wah Wah Lwin, public servant

I am originally from Monywa. I work for the Ministry of Transport and Communication in Nay Pyi Taw. Despite the long holiday, I did not go home (to Monywa), because I wanted to visit the Ngaliketha Elephant Camp. This is my first time here, and once I set foot here, I was glad that I came. I took the elephant ride and fed the

elephants. There are numerous places to visit in Nay Pyi Taw. I want to invite everyone to come and enjoy this place.

Ma Nu Nu Aung, Taungoo

I intended to go to Hpa-an, but due to some work, I could not make it there. Initially, I didn't think the Nay Pyi Taw Ngaliketha Elephant Camp would be this pleasant. However, I am glad I made the trip. It was the correct choice. Whenever there are long holidays, I visit some place or the other. Last time, I went to Pyin Oo Lwin. This time, I came to the elephant camp.

U Min Soe, Driver, Nay Pyi Taw south wood extraction region, Ngaliketha Elephant Camp

The entrance fee to the Ngaliketha Elephant Camp is Ks1,000 per person. There is no car-parking fee. Visitors can enjoy an elephant ride here. The elephant ride costs Ks3,000 per person. The ride goes around the forest once. Today is Peasants Day, so there will be many visitors. Most people come with their families. On weekdays, there are few visitors. The camp opens from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. At 6 a.m., the elephants are rounded up (after being allowed to roam freely overnight). The visitors feed the elephants. A small restaurant has also been opened for visitors. The Ngalike Resort Hotel and elephant camp is separated by water. Visitors from the hotel can cross the water body in a speedboat to visit the elephant camp. All are invited to come and visit the Ngaliketha Elephant Camp. ■

Tourists visit ancient Mrauk-U sites during public holidays



Mrauk-U in Rakhine State is one of the destinations for local and foreign tourists. **PHOTO: MRAUK-U DISTRICT IPRD**

Numerous pilgrims travelled to the ancient city of Mrauk-U during the public holidays to visit pagodas and view the ancient craftsmanship, monoliths and other cultural heritage.

Pilgrims visited historical temples such as the Five Man Pagodas, Ratana Man Aung Pagoda, Sakya Man Aung Pa-

godas, Zina Man Aung Pagoda, Mingala Man Aung Pagoda and Lawka Man Aung Pagoda. They also visited Laksekan Lake, Anumakan Lake, the Shitthaung Pagoda and its 550 Jakata reliefs, the Htukkam Thein temple with its some 140 Buddha statues lined along its corridors and the Archaeological Museum.—District IPRD

16 people trafficked to Thailand sent back

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The 16 Myanmar nationals were then taken to the Mawlamyine youth training school and vocational training school, where travel documents will be issued to those who did not have or had lost their identity cards. They will be interviewed by the Anti-Trafficking Police Force to expose the human trafficker(s), after which they will be sent back to their respective homes. The work of rescuing them and obtaining

compensation for them is being jointly conducted by the Department of Rehabilitation, General Administration Department, Anti-Trafficking Police Force, Immigration Department and National Registration Department, with the cooperation of the Women Affairs Federation, International Organisation for Migration, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund and World Vision. —Myanmar News Agency



An official hands over compensation to a victim trafficked to Thailand. **PHOTO: MYANMAR NEWS AGENCY**

Peasant roundtable talk held in Ayeyawady region's Danubyu Township

A peasant roundtable talk was held in the Ayeyawady region's Danubyu Township, Zigon village tract, Zibyugon junction, yesterday morning. The event was attended by Union Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation Dr. Aung Thu, Ayeyawady Region Chief Minister U Hla Moe Aung, Ayeyawady Region Minister for Agriculture, Livestock, Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation U Tin Aung Win, Bago Region Minister for Agriculture and Livestock U Aung Zaw Naing, Hluttaw representatives elected by the peasants, and more than 15,000 peasants and farmers from states and regions.

Elected peasant representatives were first introduced, after which they discussed their respective topics.

This was followed with a speech by Union Minister Dr. Aung Thu who said that it is the duty of all peasant and farmers, as well as those related to the farming sector, to develop Myan-

mar's farming sector. The ministry has drawn up a policy, strategy and work processes for the development of the farming sector and to enact the protection of the farmers' rights and enhancement of their benefits law to support and help farmers and peasants, said the union minister.

The ministry is striving to uplift the socio-economic situation of peasants with small holdings, as well as farmers and breeders, according to the policy, law, rule and work processes, and the peasants and farmers are urged to cooperate by conducting good agricultural practices.

To overcome the shortage of labour and rising wages in the farming sector, the ministry is pushing towards farm mechanisation and has arranged for farmers to get a loan with low interest and a three-year repayment system in six instalments. As of the end of December 2017, some 1,320 tractors and 57 combine harvesters were being sold under the system, and training

courses were also provided to the farmers to help them operate the machineries.

Training and farmer education works were also being conducted so that the farmers can overcome climate change and produce crops, in accordance with the changing situation.

The union minister concluded by saying that the farming sector will develop only when the entire process of planting, harvesting, processing, packaging and marketing and selling is developed.

The chief minister also discussed matters related to the socio-economic development of peasants and farmers.

A motion on points discussed was submitted, which was then supported and approved by the attendees. After the talk, the union minister, chief minister and event attendees observed the display of farm machineries that would be sold to farmers under an installment system.—Myanmar News Agency ■



Roundtable talk of peasants and officials in Danubyu, Ayeyawady Region. **PHOTO: MNA**

Appointment of Japanese Ambassador agreed

THE Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has agreed to the appointment of Mr. Ichiro MARUYAMA as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

Mr. Ichiro MARUYAMA was born on 25 September 1953. He graduated from Faculty of Economics from Chou University in March 1978. He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in April 1978 and served in various capacities. From 1994 to 2000, he served as First Secretary in Japanese Embassies in Myanmar and the United States of America. He also served as Director of Internationalization Promotion Office of General Affairs Bureau of Kyoto City in 2000.

In 2002, he served as Counsellor in Embassy of Japan in Myanmar. He was the Senior Regional Coordinator of Southwest Asia Division and First Southeast Asia Division, Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau and Senior Foreign Policy Coordinator of Policy Coordination Division in Foreign Policy Bureau, in May and August 2006 respectively. He served as Director of Exchange Programs Division and Director of Maritime Security Policy Division of Foreign Policy Bureau in 2008 and 2010 respectively. He has been serving as Minister Counsellor/Deputy Chief of Mission in Embassy of Japan in Myanmar since July 2011.—Myanmar News Agency

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Tourists in Kawthoung walking along a man-made path into the sea that allows a unique perspective of the environment. **PHOTO: KYAW SOE**

Tourists flock to Kawthoung during summer holidays

KAWTHOUNG, a town in the Taninthayi Region of southernmost Myanmar, has become a tourist hotspot following the gradual development of its marine tourism.

Local and foreign visitors are flocking to the town in large numbers during the summer holidays, said a local tour operator.

Kawthoung is an important trading point bordering the Thai

border town of Ranong to the east. Most of the terrain in the area is mountainous. Thanks to the state's new economic policy, investors are eyeing the coastal town with interest, as it has numerous beautiful natural islands for tourism development projects, resulting in an increase in the number of recreation facilities such as resorts and hotels.

The town is expected to

flourish in the current economic climate as the town's smokeless industry ramps up investments.

Tour operators said the arrival of visitors at home and abroad is increasing each month. Most visitors come to the area for eco-tourism, such as fishing, diving, snorkelling on coral reefs and bird-watching, they added.

In anticipation of develop-

ing the country's smokeless industry, community-based tourism projects have been implemented in Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Shan and Chin states, as well as in the Yangon, Mandalay and Magway regions, according to the Hotels and Tourism Ministry.

The ministry is currently promoting cross-border trips as a popular trend, said an official. —Kyaw Soe (Kawthoung)■

Forest Department grants permission to implement community forestry in Kahnyin Chaung Village

THE Taninthayi Region Forest department has granted permission to villagers to implement community forestry in Kahnyin Chuang Village at Thatyetchaung Township. The community forestry is spread over 508 acres.

The Forest Department provided certificates to 269 households of the Kahnyin Chaung Village on 28 February to implement community forestry. "Community forestry is a developing branch of forestry, whereby the local community plays a significant role in forest management and land-use decision-making with the support of the government," said U Kyaw Zayar, Director of Taninthayi Region Forestry Department.

"Community forestry does not focus only on the

Kahnyin Chaung Villagers and Forest Department officials with the notice for the 508-acre community forest. **PHOTO: NYI TU**

individual. We are old now. We have to think about the next generation. We have already received the community forestry certificate and will get involved in forest conservation. We will involve the youngsters too," said U

Saw Pho Thu, a 67-year-old man from Kahnyin Chuang Village.

Community forestry in Kahnyin Chuang Village can help implement region basic tourism, as well as create job opportunities for the local people. —Nyi Tu ■

Man dies, woman injured in car accident

A man was killed while an elderly woman sustained moderate injuries when the car they were travelling in crashed into a stage building following brake failure in KhinU Town, Sagaing Region, on Thursday morning, according to a police report.

Investigators said the car, driven by Thein Zaw Oo, crashed into a stage building built of bamboo and timber near Anyathiha Pagoda.

The accident killed U Myint Wai, a member of a Myanmar Saing Waing (traditional orchestra), while the 65-year-old woman received moderate injuries on her left arm. The survivor is undergoing medical treatment at the nearest hospital's inpatient department.

The police have filed charges of reckless driving against the driver under Section 304 (a)/338 of the Penal Code. —Myo Win Tun (Monywa)■

Myanmar earns over \$700 million from exports of beans, pulses this FY

MYANMAR exported some 1.1 million tonnes of beans and pulses to its trading partners between last April and the second week of this February, earning more than \$700 million, according to a report in Myawady Daily on Friday.

Although the country saw no significant decline in the export volume of beans and pulses, it saw a decline of nearly \$500 million in its export value, compared with the same period last fiscal year (FY).

The export volume of beans and pulses decreased by more than 10,000 tonnes this year against last FY. At the same time,

last FY, the country earned \$1.221 billion through the export of the same products. U Toe Aung Myint, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, said that currently, the prices of beans and pulses, especially pigeon peas and mung beans, have fallen in the domestic market after India announced its new import policy on beans and pulses in the second quarter of this FY.

Despite a decrease in the export of pulses to India this FY, the country saw no significant changes in the export of the same products to other countries. — GNLM



Photo: Supplied

Consumer goods imports up over \$466 million since last April

MYANMAR'S import of consumer goods was valued at US\$3.928 billion in the current fiscal year (FY), which showed an increase of \$466 million compared with the same period last FY, according to the statistical report released by the Ministry of Commerce.

From last April through mid-February this year, the private sector bought \$3.807 billion worth of products from overseas trade partners, while imports by the public sector

amounted to \$121 million.

At the same time last year, the country's imports of consumer goods were valued at \$3.461 billion, including \$53 million from the public sector and \$3.408 billion from the private sector.

When compared with the same period last FY, imports of consumer goods by the private sector increased by \$398 million, whereas imports of the same products by the public sector also rose by \$67 million.

According to the ministry's import figures, as of 16 February, the country earned some \$16.212 billion from the import of capital goods, intermediate goods and consumer products.

The country's imports are always greater than its exports, causing a trade deficit. To reduce the growing trade deficit, the government is seeking the best solutions in collaboration with private businesspersons. — Swe Nyein

Myanmar-Viet Nam trade tops \$538 million in current FY

THE bilateral external trade between Myanmar and Viet Nam reached US\$538 million as of this December, including \$97.902 million in exports and \$440 million in imports, according to a monthly statistical report of the Commerce Ministry.

Usually, Myanmar imports car spare parts, computer parts, construction materials, steel, plastics, pharmaceuticals and other chemical products from Viet Nam and exports mineral, agricultural, forest and ma-

rine products to the ASEAN member state.

Viet Nam's trade and investment with Myanmar have substantially increased each year. The total bilateral trade in the last fiscal year (FY) hit a record high of more than \$494 million during the six consecutive years.

According to the ministry's yearly report, bilateral trade with the socialist republic was \$346 million in the 2015-2016 FY, \$321 million in the 2014-2015 FY, \$281 million in the 2013-2014 FY, \$155

million in the 2012-2013 FY and \$143 million in the 2011-2012 FY.

The ministry's data shows that trade between Myanmar and other ASEAN member countries in the current FY reached \$8.605 billion.

Trade authorities are making continuous efforts to boost exports in the long, medium and short terms, finding new international markets for domestically produced products, said a spokesperson of the ministry. — Shwe Khine

Japan-Thai joint venture opens fertilizer plant in Myanmar

Thailand Central Chemical Public Co., a joint venture between Japanese and Thai firms, has opened a fertilizer processing plant in Myanmar, a major exporter of rice, beans and other agricultural products in the Southeast Asian region.

The plant in the Thilawa Special Economic Zone on the outskirts of Yangon, Myanmar's commercial capital, consists of a discharging facility of bulk fertilizers, two units of high-speed packing machines, two units of high-speed loading docks and a warehouse. TCCC is a joint venture of Japan's Sojitz Corp. and Central Glass Co. and Thailand's Metro Co. and the central government. Ko Tojima, managing director of TCCC's Myanmar

subsidiary, told NNA that the company anticipates a strong opportunity to expand its business in Myanmar, where agriculture is a dominant industry which the UN Food and Agriculture Organization says accounts for about 38 per cent of the nation's gross domestic product.

"Myanmar is an exporting country of agricultural products like rice and beans. But its consumption of chemical fertilizers is very low compared with other countries," he said, adding the new factory will boost demand in the Myanmar market.

TCCC has exported fertilizers to Myanmar from Thailand for over a decade before establishing its Myanmar unit in 2016. — Kyodo News

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Organic, PGS certificates to be issued in June

The Myanmar Fruit, Flower and Vegetable Producer and Exporter Association (MFVP) is planning to issue organic and participatory guarantee systems (PGS) certificates to farmers and entrepreneurs from June 2018, said U Kyaw Thu, secretary of MFVP. "We will issue the organic and PGS certificates when the Asia Development Bank (ADB) resumes its project in June. We have planned to form a national committee with officials from the agricultural department and the ADB. We have already finished discussions to form the committee. After these things are set up, we will issue the PGS

certificates," he added.

The organic and PGS certification will be given out with the support of the ADB. Local farmers who have the PGS certificates can sell their organic products in the region easily.

"The advantage of the PGS certificate is that not only the crops but also the soil gets recognition. Farmers will get the certificate for crops and vegetables cultivated on this soil," he added. Unlike other organic certificates, it is a monitoring system among farmers. Currently, organic crops and vegetables have got market shares to a certain extent. — GNLM ■

Shan State police seize 74 kg of opium in house search

A local anti-drug force confiscated 74 kilograms of opium from a young man during a house search in Hsi Hseng Township, Southern Shan State.

The search operation was conducted in the house of Maung Myo, 19 years of age in Narsae-

sauk Village, Hsi Hseng Township on 1 March.

The suspected drug smuggler has been charged with the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law by the local police department.—Myanmar Digital News ■

Myanmar's corn market and its prospect

Myanmar's corn exports is increasing year after year, but it still has to improve its quality and update its agricultural technology in order to be able to compete with international market because it only export 0.1% of the global corn export volume.

After the 12nd meeting of the China-Myanmar Joint Border Trade Cooperating and Coordinating Committee held in China on December 6 last year, Myanmar corn export volume and corn prices has increased.

Myanmar's corn exports have increased from 1,188, 438 tons in the fiscal year 2015-2016 to 1,292,179 tons in the fiscal year 2016-2017. In this fiscal year until January 19, the export volume of corn has reached 1,200,050 tons, meaning the export volume has increased to an amount worth more than US\$ 58 million compared to the same period last year. Meanwhile, the corn price is also increasing.

Last year, it was priced at

80 Chinese Yuan for a 50 Kg bag. But, this month, it rose up to 102 Yuan at the Myanmar/China border market in Shweli.

The Chinese and Myanmar currency exchange rate also helped corn traders to get more profits because the Chinese Yuan increased in value from Ks. 202 last month to Ks.206 this month. The local corn prices are also increasing but it depends on the region the corn is grown and transportation costs to the region they sell the corn.

The price of corn at Lashio wholesale center was Ks.500 for a viss, but this month the price is Ks. 540. Comparing to last year's prices, which is just around Ks.300, it rose nearly double. Myanmar's key export countries this fiscal year are China, Vietnam, Philippine and Malaysia.

Corn is grown in Kayah, Kayin and Northern and Southern Shan States and Mandalay, Sagaing and Ayeyarwady Regions.—Myanmar Digital News ■



Members of Lu Ye Chun give the free health care to local populace in Kyaukphyu. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Lu Ye Chun Thazin in Kyaukphyu

THE Lu Ye Chun (outstanding student) Thazin movement of the Lu Ye Chun (1964-88) Group conducted a free health treatment event for the local populace of Kyaukphyu region yesterday morning and also conducted a talk on education and knowledge.

Doctors led by Nay Pyi Taw 1,000-bed hospital superintendent Dr. Tint Tint Kyi, Vice Chairman of Lu Ye Chun Thazin movement, treated 200 patients undergoing treatment at Kyaukphyu People's Hospital, a 200-

bed facility, until noon.

Retired professors and doctors from universities also conducted a talk on education and knowledge for students and teachers in Kyaukphyu Basic Education High School (1) which was attended by more than 50 students, teachers and parents

"This is the first trip by the Lu Ye Chun Thazin movement. Lu Ye Chun consists of more than 5,000 outstanding students from all sectors of society, out of which more than 1,000 were be-

ing reorganized into a group [Lu Ye Chun Group]. Lu Ye Chuns from all regions were urged to become involved in the movement. This group is here to provide free health treatment and to conduct a talk on education and knowledge", said Dr. Hnin Hnin of Lu Ye Chun Group.

The free health treatment and educative talk on education and knowledge is learnt to be conducted by 30 members of Lu Ye Chun from the Kyaukphyu region.—Phyo Wei Lin (IPRD) ■

Rural people in Mahlaing Township get electricity from National Grid

A ceremony to celebrate the launch of electricity was held near the transformer in Kyaukphue Village, Mahlaing Township in Mandalay Region this morning.

First, Union Minister for Health and Sports Dr. Myint Htwe, Mandalay Region Minister for Security and Border Affairs Col Kyaw Kyaw Min, Mandalay Region Minister for Electricity, Energy and Construction U Zarni Aung, Secretary of Mandalay Region Government U Sai Thaw Win, Pyithu Hluttaw Representative for Mahlaing Constituency U Hla Tun Aung and Regional Lawmakers U Chit Min Thein and Daw Thidar Nyein formally opened the transformer.

Next, Mandalay Region



Mandalay Region Chief Minister Dr. Zaw Myint Maung cuts the ribbon to open the signboard of the transformer in Kyaukphue Village, Mahlaing, Mandalay yesterday. PHOTO: AUNG HTWAY (MAHLAING)

Chief Minister Dr. Zaw Myint Maung cut the ribbon to open the signboard of the transformer.

The speeches of the chief minister and a local followed.

Kyaukphue Village consists of 94 homes with a population of 556. Arrangements have been made to install electricity meter box for 70 houses in the village.—Aung Htway (Mahlaing) ■

Farmer's voices heard on Peasants Day

Zaw Gyi
PHOTO-PE ZAW

In honor of Peasants Day, about 4,000 farmers and basic employees gathered on a football field in Industrial Zone (2), Hlaing Tharyar Township in the western part of Yangon yesterday.

The football field was where the main celebration for Peasants' Day took place. Visitors enjoyed the entertainment and also toured the numerous exhibition booths for agricultural tools, fertilizer, insecticide, pesticides, seed galleries, and local produce. We interviewed some of those who attended yesterday's event, as well as event organisers from the Agriculture and Farmers Federation of Myanmar (AFFM).

Salai Kar Let
(Thaephyu Village, Taungdwingyi Township)

I got a lot of knowledge about agriculture here. It's very rewarding and we're going to use the knowledge from here to turn our shortcomings into our strengths.

U Hla Win
(Kyapan Village, Thaton Township)

I wish there were more commemorative events like this one. We live in a major agricultural country, so events like these allow our voices and lives to be on display for all to see. I think we farmers still lack strong unity, so if there are more events like this one, it will boost our confidence and unite us and that will develop the agricultural sector.



Workers and farmers walk to the event ground in Hlaingthayay to honor Peasants' Day.



Daw Khin Lay Phyu.



U Hla Win.



U Htay Lwin.



Salai Kar Let.



U Tar Naw.



U Than Swe.

U Htay Lwin
(Farmer from Nhotekan-mwe Tike Village, Hlegu Township)

I came here to find out how we farmers can protect our businesses. AFFM is helping to amend some Agricultural Laws and also raising awareness of improved agricultural technologies. Most of the knowledge we gained at the event will be helpful in real

life. I wish for AFFM to be included in the government's plans.

Daw Khin Lay Phyu
(Theinkone Village Tract, Ywangan Township, Southern Shan State)

These kinds of events boost the confidence of farmers and gives farmers from different regions a chance to convene and talk. We get to share different experiences and skills. I want to

display local products from Shan State next time.

U Tar Naw
(Minzigette Village, Tract, Hpa-an Township Kayin State)

I came here to learn what I can to improve the lives of farmers back home. I want to shift to machine-powered farming.

Here we can meet different people sharing experiences in

the same field of work and we can learn new things here, too.

U Than Swe
(AFFM Chairman)

I am a legal advocate so I'm working to make the agricultural laws better. The government and Hluttaw want to know in-depth details of the problems farmers are facing, so they organised this event. It's important for our country to have higher-quality agricultural products. ■

ASEAN trade ministers mull plan to boost e-commerce in region

SINGAPORE — Trade ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations this week discussed Singapore's proposal to develop a digital economy in the region, especially a framework to promote the use of e-commerce in the region, at their meeting in the city-state.

Singapore, which is the most advanced economy in the region, has said in recent months that it would like to help the 10 ASEAN member countries develop a digital economy during its chairmanship this year. The proposal was discussed this week at the first meeting of ASEAN trade ministers this year.

"There was very strong interest in developing the potential of the digital economy in ASEAN," Singapore's Minister for Trade and Industry Lim Hng Kiang told a news conference Friday after the meeting.

"We clearly recognize that this is the way of the future and we have to be better prepared for it, providing the infrastructure, raising the awareness, raising the confidence and facilitating the business processes, so we are working and preparing the groundwork," he said.

"We are getting a lot of feedback from the business community. They are also very keen to

make sure the groundwork that we lay out for facilitating the digital economy and e-commerce is pro-business and helps them in their cross border transactions," he added.

The plan is to sign an agreement that provides a framework to collectively encourage e-commerce and the digital economy in the grouping by the end of this year, an official source said.

The proposal received a positive response from ASEAN members.

"There has been good progress," Malaysian Trade Minister Mustapa Mohamed said in a small group interview this week.

"The excitement is on the digital economy, in e-commerce this year, of course in a way we are preparing for the future, the future about digital, so this meeting here is a lot more futuristic in terms of focus," he said.

In a statement after the meeting, the Singapore Trade and Industry Ministry said all 10 ASEAN economic ministers "endorsed the economic priorities" that Singapore has proposed for ASEAN this year, which include promoting e-commerce.

At the news conference, Lim said that the 16 East Asian countries including Japan that are negotiating a Regional Com-

prehensive Economic Partnership free trade deal are striving to reach a substantial conclusion in their negotiations by this year.

"Our negotiators are telling us that they sense a mood of optimism, renewed vigor and a sense that momentum is building in our favor, so I think what we want to do is try to capture this momentum, make steady progress and try and achieve a significant if not substantial conclusion before the end of this year," he said as RCEP ministers and officials prepare for a one-day ministerial meeting to be held on Saturday. —Kyodo News ■

Endeavours needed for tax reform

THE 2018 Union Tax bill was based on the 2017 Union Tax Law and was drafted to fit the current economic conditions of the country, according to an official of the Ministry of Planning and Finance.

It is of vital importance to adopt systematic tax systems which can be develop the country's economy into a driving force.

Therefore, concerted efforts should be made to create relevant laws to prevent tax evasion and try to make taxpayers follow the rules and regulations of the country.

According to the Internal Revenue Department, there are different kinds of taxes and duties -- income tax, commercial tax, excise duty, customs duty, State lottery tax, stamp duty, land revenue, embankment tax and so on.

The Profit Tax Law, which was enacted in line with the socialist economic system, was revoked with Pyidaungsu Hlut-taw Law No. 1 in 2011. The Internal Revenue Department has been collecting four kinds of taxes and duties, namely income tax, commercial tax, stamp duty and State lottery tax, since the 2011-12 fiscal year.

The Union tax law is applied to money and assets both in and outside the country which were legally obtained. Those who avoided tax are obliged to pay a 3 per cent tax for the first six months, and 5 per cent for the next six months. It doesn't mean that tax evasion automatically implies money laundering.

But some people avoid taxes in a number of ways, including reporting artificially low prices, importing different goods to those on their license applications or illegally transporting goods. Some

traders even evade taxes by smuggling goods along the border. It is important how to adopt reasonable tax measures, and how to streamline tax payments, which will be helpful for tax law.

The ministry has found many different discrepancies between documents and goods, including the model, the country of origin, the number or the type, all in a bid to avoid taxes.

In other countries, authorities try to reduce the tax rate when the country's economy faces a decline. A poor taxation system may lead to more tax evasion. Therefore, effective and sustainable attempts are needed.

With the aim of increasing the country's productivity, the tax system should be agreeable to both the government and taxpayers so that the government can make the tax collection system more effective, while the citizens of the country ought to pay their taxes as dutiful citizens. ■

The Day of Lord Buddha's return to his father's kingdom the 1st waning moon of Tabaung

Maha Saddhamma Joti-kadhaja,
Sithu Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt

TIME and date were Maha Sakarit year 103, in the waning moon of the month of Pyatho [January], in the eighth month of the Enlightenment of Lord Buddha. Six years had passed since Prince Siddhatha the son and crown Prince of the King Sudhodana of Kapilavasu Kingdom renounced his mundane life at the age of 29, leaving behind his beloved wife Yasodaya and baby son Rahula to enter into the forest of Uruvala to become a recluse in quest of Truth [Dhamma].

His royal father, family, relatives and all Sakya clans were longing for him. Lord Buddha was very busy with his Dhamma duta journeys, to other places to give his teachings, and had no plan yet to return to his father's kingdom. Impatient to wait for so long, the royal father sent a minister leading the delegation of one thousand followers to Lord Buddha to request him to return to Kapilavasa Kingdom. But all of them after hearing the teachings of Lord Buddha became Saint monks who never fulfilled their assignment nor returned home. Eight more similar delegations were sent one after another with the same results. They also became saint monks after receiving Lord Buddha's Dhamma.

King Sudhodana became very much dejected. Kaludayi, the youngest minister at the court who was a birth-mate and play mate of Prince Siddhatha promised to carry out the assignment of inviting Lord Buddha to Kapilavasu at all cost if he were sent for that mission. So Kaludayi led the 10th delegation to Lord Buddha.

Upon receiving the Dhamma teachings of Lord Buddha they also became Saint monks. But Saint Monk Kaludayi never forgot his primary assignment and his promise to his King. He knew that Lord Buddha was very busy with his dhamma duta, teaching missions. He



Young Prince Rahula prompted by his mother to ask for his inheritance, left behind by the Buddha after His renunciation.

should wait for favourable time, place and circumstances. In the month of Tabaung, spring time arrived. The entire natural environment was aglow with all its natural beauties. Lord Buddha was resting after months of his teachings.

Saint monk Kaludayi composed the epic poem of 64 stanzas, which described the landscapes, waterscapes, skyscapes of the Himalayan Forests, riots of colours and fragrance of flora, the dancing movements and musical calls of fauna, the graceful falls of withering leaves and peepings of green buds on the branches, the fluttering of bees, and birds reminding the viewers the Law of change, the Law of impermanence.

It was the most opportune time to return to the kingdom of Kapilavasu by land on foot through the glades of the Himalayan forests. Saint monk Kaludayi after composing that 64 Gathar or poetic Stanzas in Pali, chanted them within the hearing of Lord Buddha.

Lord Buddha praised his birth mate and play mate Kaludayi who now became his disciple saint monk but faithfully carried out the assignment given him by King Sudhodana.

Lord Buddha, with ten thousands of Saint monks from Magadha Kingdom and ten thousands of Saint monks from Kapilavasu kingdom totally 20000 saint monks began his home bound journey by land on foot through the glades of the Himalaya Forest on the 1st waning day of Tabaung.

They covered the distance of one yuza a day. Finally they arrived in Kapilavasa Kingdom [which was 60 yuzanas away] on the 1st waning day of the month of Kasone [May].

At the capital of his royal father, was a big gathering to welcome and see long separated "Prince Siddhatha [now Lord Buddha].

They did not understand what Buddha was. They thought that he was a Rishi [Hermit] whom they expected to show miracles, which Lord Buddha did only to subdue them.

Then he gave his truth the dhamma, teachings, telling them to give up the caste system. The impermanence of life and the way to escape from the Samsara — the whirlpool of endless sufferings till they attained Nivirna.

Another religiously important event which took place while Lord Buddha was in Kapilavathu was the establishment of Buddha Sasana by forming a

group of inheritors of Buddha Sasana. At the food offering to Lord Buddha and his saint monk disciples, his ex-wife Princess Yasodhaya and Son Rahula were also present.

The mother told the son pointing to Lord Buddha. "That is your father who had left us. So you must succeed the throne of your grandfather. Go and ask him to give you patri-mony-several posts of gold. The young boy son did as he was told.

When Lord Buddha and his saint monks returned to their Vihara residing monastery Rahula and all his playmates followed Lord Buddha repeated asking for patrimony of gold pots. Lord Buddha said "I have nothing of that sort to give you.

The only patrimony I can give you is my Sasana Dhamma inheritance". So saying he novitiated his son and all his accompanying friends of his age into Samenes young novitiate monks.

The great precedent of "Inheritance of Buddha Sasana was repeated by Emperor Asoka who after becoming a Buddhist was generously supporting Buddha Sasana by building 84000 stupas, temples, monasteries, rest-houses, water tanks, hospi-

tals throughout his kingdom and sending out Buddhist mission to 9 Kingdoms and 9 states to propagate and establish Buddha Sasana.

One day he asked his guru saint monk Mogaliputa if he deserved the status of title of "Inheritor of Buddha Sasana". The garu saint monk replied "No, your Imperial majesty. You are of course most generous in promoting Buddha Sasana. You are only supporter of Buddha Sasana, not interitor of Buddha Sasana. Either you yourself became monk and preach Dhamma or you make your own offsprings monks to preach Dhamma you are rightly entitled to be Inheritor of Buddha Sasana.

Asoka's son Maheinda and daughter Sangamitre hearing the guru saint monk's reply, offered themselves up to become monks. Later Bhikkhu Maheinda and Bhikkhuni Sangamitre went to Lankadipa [Srilanka] bringing with them a branch of Maha Bodhi Tree in Gaya India inclining to the direction of Lankadipa, and introduced and propagated Buddhism there.

Since then 1st waning moon day in the month of Tabaung has been commemorated ceremonially as the Day of Lord Buddha's Return to his royal

father's kingdom by Myanmar Buddhists till today.

Besides, Saint monk Kaludayi's epic poem of 64 stanzas is one of the most valued and appreciated literary pieces in Myanmar literature. This epic poem was translated into Myanmar and English by many writers of repute.

In the golden age of Myanmar literary history that was the first Inwa dynasty two monk poets of high erudition Shin Uttamakyaw and Shin Ohn Nyo composed Pyo-poems. Tawla [Journey through the glades of Forest] by Shin Uttamakyaw and "Gatha Chauk se Pyo by Shin Ohn Nyo are literary pieces par excellence. Dr. Ba Han one eminent scholar in the British Colonial Days literally translated into English of Tawla. The late Saya Gyi U Ko Lay [pen named Zeyya Maung] Professor of Chemistry, Principal of Mandalay University and Instructor of Abhidhamma at the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University, Yangone Township Yangon had laboriously translated into English the original Ashin Kaludayi's Epic Poems of 64 stanzas. In the prose and verse literature of later time, the style and influence of Kaludayi's epic poem of 64 stanzas are evident.

To cite but a few are lay writer Taungdwinyi Saya Kyaw's Verse "Sone Natha Myaing Shar Ponedaw Gyi and Minbu Sayadaw monk U Awbatha's prose work "Vessandara Zat Taw Gyi". We learn from these works not only the Dhamma but also literary skill and style and knowledge of flora, fauna, minerals, astronomy, astrology, geology, archaeology and anthropology of our country. ■

Government Officials explore ways to strengthen Machinery of Government and Policy Development Processes in Myanmar

A professional development programme on Improving the Machinery of Government and Policy Making for Better Service Delivery was conducted from 21 to 28 February in Nay Pyi Taw.

The programme targeted executive and senior government officials, and focused on raising awareness in four key areas: machinery of government; core government functions; principles of democratic governance; and parliamentary oversight. It was attended by 90 Deputy Directors General and Directors, who had the opportunity to work in groups on the policy development cycle and identify opportunities to improve the process in Government.

Machinery of government refers to the structures of government, their functions and governance arrangements, and how they work together to deliver results to the public. Machinery of government is therefore the basis of good governance and can be very important in contexts like Myanmar where the whole State and administration is in a state of change and reform.

Engaging the three branches of Government

At its launch last week, H.E Dr Win Thein, the Chairperson of Union Civil Service Board said, "This Professional Development Programme is conducted with the prospect of engaging all of you, representing the three branches of government in enhancing the machinery of government in Myanmar. I do hope that this training will allow you to identify current policy making processes and practices and develop objectives to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of administrative processes, which would ultimately aim at improving performance of the overall public sector."

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Country Director, Peter Batchelor said, "Regulating and improving the interaction between the three branches of government, and within the various levels of government – from Union to Township levels in the case of Myanmar – and ensuring a strong coordination within government institutions and between the government and civil society and the private sector is a pre-requisite of an effective Machinery of Government that allows for public policies to be developed for the good of all people."

Participants increase knowledge

Participants highlighted the relevance of the professional development programme and the importance of evidence-based policy making, cross-agency collaboration leading to a whole of government approach and public and stakeholders' participation, to improve public sector performance and service delivery. One of the participants, U Ba Kaung, Deputy Director-General of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (MONREC) said the programme promoted a more open relationship between the officials.

"The younger generations in the civil service want to change the way we are performing, form very top-down style to an inclusive one. But we need to be assured that the leadership is willing to allow us to implement this change, only then the civil servants can become confident to change. I believe that this Professional Development Programme is one of such initiatives."

Daw Yin Yin Swe, Director in the Union Attorney General's Office joined the civil service in 1979. She appreciated the topics around policy development and effective implementation of policy, especially in relation to the Civil Service Reform Strategic Action Plan, launched in July last year. The Plan is a blueprint for extensive reforms which will ensure the civil service is more ethical, better reflects the diversity of the country, and is effectively able to help address the complex challenges of peace, national reconciliation, and development that confront Myanmar. "I will apply the knowledge about international benchmarks and standards to promote meritocracy in my department," she stated.

The professional development programme was delivered by a number of international experts including Ms. Janelle Saffin, Former Member of Parliament at State and Federal level in Australia, Professor Andrew Podger, Former Public Service Commissioner of Australia, and Mr. Ryan Orange, Former Deputy Commissioner of New Zealand's State Services Commission.

This activity is part of UNDP's Support to Effective and Responsive Institutions Project (SERIP); it was made possible with financial support from Australia, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom.—UNDP ■

Trump stuns by embracing gun control as Florida students return to class

FLORIDA —President Donald Trump has surprised lawmakers by embracing gun control measures that are tougher than usually supported by his party, as students returned to the site of America's latest horrific school shooting.

"We have to do something about it. We have to act," Trump said, voicing support for expanded background checks, more secure schools, curbs on the ability of the mentally ill to buy firearms and raising to 21 the age for buying certain guns.

"We can't wait and play games and nothing gets done," Trump said at a meeting with lawmakers from both parties.

At one point, he turned to a Republican senator and said: "You're afraid of the NRA," referring to the National Rifle Association, the premier and powerful US gun lobby.

"He surprised me," Democratic Senator Chris Murphy later told AFP. "He committed very forcefully and very clearly to comprehensive background checks, raising the age on purchase of assault weapons, and protective orders."

With tears, fears and defiance, students also made an emotional return Wednesday to their Florida high school where a former classmate went on a shooting rampage two weeks ago, killing 17 people.

Students at Marjory Stone-

man Douglas High School in Parkland were greeted by heavy security and scores of well-wishers as they returned to classes.

Dozens of police officers lined the sidewalks saying "Good morning" to each child and retired officers passed out flowers. Former students, neighbors and their children held banners reading "We Love You," "You've Got This" and "We Are With You."

"It's all a little overwhelming," said one 17-year-old student named William, who shared a classroom with two of the young victims, Nicholas Dworet and Meadow Pollack.

"It was just sad to go back there and not have my friends who were in the class with me anymore."

Likewise, for Kimberly Miller, the first day back meant confronting the absence of her geography teacher, 35-year-old Scott Beigel.

Beigel was one of three staff killed, along with 14 teenagers, when former student Nikolas Cruz entered the school on Valentine's Day and opened fire with a semi-automatic rifle.

"It's pretty upsetting," said the 14-year-old Miller. "But it was also refreshing to talk to everyone because people don't really understand how it feels, no matter how much they try to understand."

While there were few open displays of grief, many students looked somber, speaking

in hushed tones with their eyes downcast.

Jonathan Abramchaev, 15, said it was "very emotional" to see his school again.

"Seeing all the flowers by the gate, that really hurt me," he told AFP. "Today we were just discussing and talking out our feelings."

- 'What happens when they go?' -

Some said they felt reassured -- if a little unsettled -- by the heavy police presence.

"I'm not scared," said Stoneman Douglas junior Sean Cummings. "I feel like it's more protected than any other school at this point."

"But it's still weird to see everybody here and all these police officers," said the 16-year-old.

Others -- like senior Carly Novell -- said they were nervous to return.

"I'm really scared to go in," said Novell, who like many others wore a maroon T-shirt, the school colors.

Broward County school superintendent Robert Runcie said grief counselors were on hand for the day.

"We're going to provide as much support as we can," Runcie told CNN. "Students are excited. As a family, they're going to pull through it."

A 15-year-old named Alan said the shooting left him fearful -- even with his school under close watch by police.



Police and well-wishers greet students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School as classes resume, two weeks after a former student killed 17 people in a shooting rampage. **PHOTO: AFP**

"What happens when they go? In a couple of days or weeks when it gets back to normal? It may happen again," he said.

- **'We have to act'** -

Since the shooting, Stoneman Douglas students have been lobbying politicians for stricter gun controls both in their home state of Florida and in Washington.

Republican lawmakers, with majorities in the US Congress and the Florida state legislature, have been cool on bringing in major reforms on the sales of firearms.

But Trump upped the pressure on lawmakers to get to work, hosting the bipartisan meeting at the White House where he raised eyebrows with his tough stance.—AFP

New York banking regulator seeks Kushner Cos. loan details

NEWYORK—New York state has asked three banks to supply information about their relationships

with the real estate business of Jared Kushner, a senior White House advisor and President



Jared Kushner, who is married to the president's daughter Ivanka Trump, has been a key figure in the administration of his father-in-law, entrusted among other things with finding a peace deal between Israelis and Palestinians. **PHOTO: AFP**

Donald Trump's son-in-law, a source said Wednesday.

Maria Vullo, Superintendent of the Department of Financial Services (DFS), sent letters last week to Deutsche Bank, Signature Bank and New York Community Bank asking for details on their financial arrangements as well as loans made to or sought by Kushner Companies, the source told AFP. The lenders were given until 5 March to respond.

The DFS has refused to comment on the matter, as has Deutsche Bank.

But Kushner Companies said the inquiries were politically motivated and amounted to harassment.

"We have not received a copy of any letter from the New York

State Department of Financial Services," a spokesman said.

"Our company is a multi-billion enterprise that is extremely financially strong. Prior to our CEO voluntarily resigning to serve our country, we never had any type of inquiries."

"These type of inquiries appear to be harassment solely for political reasons."

- Conflicts of interest? -

Also on Wednesday, The New York Times reported Kushner Companies received major loans from Apollo Global Management, one of the world's largest private equity firms, and Citigroup, shortly after Kushner held White House meetings with representatives from the two companies.

The paper quoted Don Fox,

the former acting director of the Office of Government Ethics during the Obama administration, as saying the loans raised questions about the appearance of conflicts of interest.

Kushner met Joshua Harris, a founder of Apollo, multiple times over the course of 2017 and even discussed a potential White House position which never materialized, the paper said.

In November 2017, the firm loaned Kushner Companies \$184 million -- triple the size of its average property loan.

He also met Citigroup's chief executive in the spring of 2017, Michael L. Corbat, shortly before Kushner Companies received a \$325 million loan from the firm, the Times reported.—AFP

Attacks target French embassy, military HQ in Burkina capital

OUAGADOUGOU — The capital of Burkina Faso came under multiple attacks on Friday which targeted the French embassy, the French cultural centre and the country's military headquarters, an AFP reporter and witnesses said.

Witnesses said five armed men got out of a car and opened fire on passersby before heading towards the embassy in the centre of the city.

An AFP reporter heard heavy exchanges of gunfire and saw a blazing vehicle, which witnesses said was the car used by the assailants. Police and army units were deployed in the area.

Other witnesses said there was an explosion near the headquarters of the Burkinabe armed forces and the French cultural centre, which are located about a kilometre (half a mile) from the site of the first attack.

There was no early information about any casualties.

The French embassy, on

Facebook, initially said "attack under way at the French embassy and French Institute. Stay indoors."

It later said: "Uncertain at this stage which places are targeted" but maintained its advice for people to stay indoors.

In Paris, President Emmanuel Macron's office said the French leader was "being informed in real time" of the situation.

Deadly insurgency

Burkina Faso is one of a string of fragile countries on the southern rim of the Sahara that are battling jihadist groups.

The insurgency has caused thousands of deaths, prompted tens of thousands to flee their homes and dealt crippling blows to economies that are already among the poorest in the world.

On 13 August last year, two assailants opened fire on a restaurant on Ouagadougou's main avenue, killing 19 people and

wounded 21. The attack remains unclaimed.

On 15 January 2016, 30 people, including six Canadians and five Europeans, were killed in a jihadist attack on a hotel and restaurant in the city centre.

Responsibility was claimed by a group called Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

France, the former colonial power in the Sahel region, has deployed 4,000 troops and is supporting a five-country joint force gathering Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

The United Nations also has a 12,000-strong peacekeeping force in Mali called MINUSMA, which has taken heavy casualties. Four UN peacekeepers were killed by a mine blast on Wednesday in the centre of the country.

In a separate development on Friday, the specialist US website SITE, which monitors jihadist activity, said kidnappers had released a video of



Thick smoke rose from the centre of Ouagadougou as the attacks took place. **PHOTO: AFP**

a 75-year-old French hostage, Sophie Petronin, who had been abducted in northern Mali in late 2016.

Petronin, who had been running an association helping Malian orphans, appears in poor health in the brief video.

Her kidnapping, hitherto unclaimed, was carried out by the "Support Group for Islam and Muslims."

In the background, Macron's voice is heard on a loop, saying "I will protect you." — AFP ■

Europe braced for fresh blizzards as deadly ice blast strands travelers

LONDON— Fresh heavy snowfalls and icy blizzards were expected to lash Europe Thursday as the region shivers in a deadly deep-freeze that has gripped countries from the far north to the Mediterranean south.

Schools are shut and weather agencies predict the brutal cold will continue as the death toll from the freezing snap rose to around 48 since last Friday, with icy conditions causing accidents and endangering vulnerable rough sleepers.

In the latest deaths, a 60-year-old man perished after falling into a lake in London, while an elderly Dutch skater plunged through cracked ice in the western village of Hank.

The victims also include 18 people killed in Poland, six in the Czech Republic, five in Lithuania, four each in France and Slovakia, two each in Italy, Serbia, Romania and Slovenia and one in Spain.

The Siberian cold front — dubbed the "Beast from the East" in Britain, "Siberian bear" by the Dutch and the "snow cannon" by Swedes — has blanketed huge swathes of the region in snow and played havoc with transport networks.

In Scotland, which saw Glasgow airport closed until Thurs-



A winter weather front from Siberia kept most parts of northern Europe below freezing Wednesday. **PHOTO: AFP**

day morning and most flights cancelled from Edinburgh, emergency services struggled to help drivers stranded for hours on a major motorway, with images showing scores of vehicles trapped in the snow late Wednesday.

"This is a very difficult situation but everything possible is being done," Scottish leader Nicola Sturgeon said on Twitter.

Further blasts of wintery

weather are expected, with authorities in Ireland and normally-balmy southern France among those to have issued red alerts late Wednesday.

Homeless people account for many of the dead, and cities across Europe have been racing to open emergency shelters to protect people sleeping rough.

In Germany, the national homeless association urged shelters to open during the day

and not just at night.

"You can die of cold during the day too," its chief Werena Rosenke warned.

Authorities are also urging people to look out for elderly relatives and neighbours after a French woman in her nineties was found frozen to death outside her retirement home.

In Paris, where up to 5cm of snow was expected overnight, some 50 regional lawmakers

were to spend Wednesday night on the streets to protest the "denial of dignity" suffered by those without roofs over their heads.

And in the northern port of Calais, authorities were launching emergency plans to shelter migrants who camp out near the coast hoping to stow away on trucks bound for Britain.

Schools were shut across Kosovo, western Bosnia and much of Albania, as well as in parts of Britain, Italy and Portugal.

Temperatures again plunged below -20 Celsius (-4 Fahrenheit) overnight in numerous parts of Europe — even hitting -36C in Glattpalp, 1,850 metres (6,000 feet) above sea level in the Swiss mountains.

Ahead of a predicted thaw towards the end of the week, both Belgium and Switzerland marked their coldest nights of the winter so far.

And in the south of France, motorists were stuck on icy roads as further flurries fell overnight.

The Hérault area was placed on red alert after a "major" snowfall, while earlier Wednesday residents in Biarritz and Saint-Jean-de-Luz zoomed down streets of the beach resorts on skis. — AFP

Four aid workers killed in Boko Haram attack in Nigeria

KANO, NIGERIA — Four aid workers were killed in a Boko Haram attack in Rann, in north-east Nigeria, the UN said on Friday, in the latest violence to hit the remote town.

The attack happened “after dark” outside a camp housing some 55,000 people displaced by the conflict and appeared to target the military, said UN spokeswoman Samantha Newport.

A civilian militia source in Rann, which is some 175 kilometres (110 miles) from the Borno state capital of Maiduguri, and a senior military source gave an identical death toll.

They also said eight soldiers were killed in the attack but there was no immediate official confirmation.

Newport said: “Four aid workers were killed, one aid



People displaced by Boko Haram violence are heavily dependent on aid. PHOTO: AFP

worker was injured and one aid worker is missing, feared abducted.

“Of the aid workers that

were killed, two worked for the IOM (International Organization for Migration) in camp management; and one was a medical

doctor working as a third party consultant for UNICEF,” the UN children’s agency, she said.

No details were immediate-

ly available for the fourth but Newport said the injured and missing were both women. All those involved were Nigerian, she added.

Boko Haram fighters killed nine people from the Rann internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in September last year, as they worked on farms just outside the town.

In January last year, a botched Nigerian air strike intended to hit jihadist fighters killed at least 112 people as aid workers distributed food.

Commanders at the time called the bombing a mistake and blamed “the fog of war”.

An air force board of inquiry later blamed “lack of appropriate marking of the area” for the bombardment and an unexpected gathering of people at the location. — AFP ■

One killed as Kabul car bomb targets foreign forces

KABUL — A suicide car bomb targeting a foreign forces convoy rocked eastern Kabul Friday, killing at least one civilian and injuring nine just days after Afghanistan unveiled plans for Taliban peace talks, the interior ministry said.

Extensive damage to the facades of nearby houses could be seen with debris scattered on pavements as witnesses reported a strong explosion. Security forces rushed to the scene as passers-by helped move the wounded, with witnesses complaining to AFP that ambulances took around half an hour to arrive.

A horse was also badly in-



No group immediately claimed the attack, which is the latest to hit Kabul this year. PHOTO: AFP

jured in the blast and could be seen stumbling at the scene -- its head, belly and legs burnt

— before it was finally taken pity on and killed on the spot with a knife, an AFP reporter

at the scene said.

“Unfortunately around 9:00 am, a car bombing took place in (the) Qabil Bay area of Kabul. The target of the attack was a foreign forces convoy,” ministry spokesman Najib Danish told AFP, adding that police are investigating.

NATO’s Resolute Support mission in Kabul told AFP it was checking if there had been any foreign casualties in the blast.

A health ministry spokesman confirmed that one person was killed and at least nine injured, all civilians. — AFP ■

24 dead in Azerbaijan drug rehab centre fire

BAKU— Twenty four people died as a result of a fire which tore through a drug rehabilitation clinic in the Azerbaijani capital Baku early Friday, officials said.

“At 06:10 am a fire happened at the Republican Narcological Centre in Baku,” the General Prosecutor’s Office, the health, interior and emergencies ministries said in a joint statement.

“The bodies of 24 people have been found.”

The blaze tore through a one-storey wooden ward, the statement added. It cited a defect of the power grid as the initial cause of the blaze.

Earlier Friday Azerbaijan’s APA news agency reported that at least 30 people had perished in the blaze. It said the fire broke out in a ward for bed-ridden patients.

Firefighters and rescuers of the country’s emergencies ministry have extinguished the blaze and were investigating the causes. The ex-Soviet Caucasus nation has a history of large-scale casualties as a result of fires in residential buildings and elsewhere.

In May 2015, 15 people – including five minors – were killed by a fire in a multi-storey building in Baku.

In October 1995, 289 people died in a metro fire in Baku, in the world’s deadliest subway disaster that was caused by outdated Soviet equipment. — AFP ■

Beijing praises relations with Moscow

BEIJING — Relations with Russia are an example of international cooperation, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson

Hua Chunying said at a briefing on Friday, commenting on the statements Russian President Vladimir Putin made concern-

ing relations between Moscow and Beijing.

“Relations between China and Russia area an example of mutually beneficial bilateral contacts,” the Chinese diplomat said, adding that China’s authorities welcomed Putin’s statement about bilateral ties and were pleased to see Russia developing successfully. “We are pleased to see that the situation in Russia has been constantly improving under Putin’s guidance,” Hua Chunying added.

According to her, the development of equal friendly

relations between China and Russia, will positively affect global peace and stability.

In his March 1 State of the Nation Address to the Federal Assembly, Russian President Vladimir Putin pointed to the country’s success in developing a comprehensive strategic partnership with China.

The head of state noted that Russia also had privileged strategic ties with India. At the same time, in Putin’s words, Russia’s relations with many countries were about to gain a new momentum. — Tass ■



Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying. PHOTO: TASS

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ဖေဖော်ဝါရီလ ၂၁ ရက်နေ့က လားရှိုးမြို့တွင် ဖြစ်ပွားခဲ့သော ဗုံးပေါက်ကွဲမှုတွင် ရိုးမဘက်ဝန်ထမ်းနှစ်ဦး သေဆုံးခဲ့ပြီး ထိခိုက်ဒဏ်ရာရရှိသူ အများအပြား ရှိခဲ့ပါသည်။ အသက်ဆုံးရှုံးသွားသူများ၊ ထိခိုက်နစ်နာသူများနှင့် ၎င်းတို့၏ မိသားစုဝင်များအတွက် စိတ်မကောင်းခြင်းများစွာဖြင့် အထူးဝမ်းနည်းကြေကွဲရပါသည်။ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ၏ ငြိမ်းချမ်းရေးနှင့်အေးချမ်းသာယာရေးကို ခြိမ်းခြောက်သော ယခုကဲ့သို့ ရက်စက်ကြမ်းကြုတ်သည့် လုပ်ရပ်များကို ကျွန်ုပ်တို့အားလုံးအနေဖြင့် တစ်ညီတစ်ညွတ်တည်း ပြင်းထန်စွာ ကန့်ကွက် ရှုတ်ချပါသည်။

Declaration Against Violence

On 21st February 2018, a bomb was set off in downtown Lashio, killing two staff of Yoma Bank while injuring many others. We extend our heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims. In the wake of this atrocious act, we voice in unison our strongest condemnation of this barbaric act of violence, which threatens the peace and tranquility of Myanmar.

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|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| • A1 Construction Co.,Ltd. | • Embassy of Israel, | • McKinsey & Company | • Oway |
| • ABC Convenience Stores | Yangon | • METRO AG | • Parami Energy |
| • Access Spectrum Co.,Ltd. | • Finastra | • MGR Consulting | Group of |
| • Akhuka | • First Private Bank | Co.,Ltd. | Companies |
| • Apollo Towers | • First Myanmar Investment | • MIBS | • Phibious Myanmar |
| Myanmar Ltd. | Co.,Ltd. (FMI) | • MPT | • Pixel Directs |
| • AYA Bank | • FMIDecaux | • Myan Shwe Pyi | • PwC |
| • Beca | • Frontier Myanmar | Tractors Ltd. | • RMA Myanmar |
| • Black Knight Media | • Global Pharma | • Myanmar Apex Bank | • Shwe Printing |
| • Bridging Capital | • Global Technology | • Myanmar Awba | • SPA Group of |
| • CCI France Myanmar | Group | Group | Companies |
| • CDC Group | • GRAB Myanmar | • Myanmar Banks | • The Hongkong & |
| • Cisco Myanmar | • Havas Riverorchid | Association (MBA) | Shanghai Hotels, |
| • City Mart Holding | Co.,Ltd. | • Myanmar Payment | Limited |
| Co.,Ltd. | • International Finance | Union (MPU) | • Thiha Group |
| • Coca-Cola Myanmar | Corporation (IFC) | • Myanmar Strategic | • Tin Htay |
| • Comin Asia | • Irrawaddy Green Towers | Holdings Ltd. | International |
| • Construction and | • JCB | • Myanmar V-Pile | • T-Star |
| Housing Development | • JJ-PUN | Group of Companies | • VMware, Inc. |
| Bank | • KBZ Group of Companies | • Nexlabs | • Xenon |
| • Embassy of Canada, | • Legrand | • NorFund | • Yoma Bank |
| Yangon | • Livelihoods and Food | • Ooredoo | • Yoma Strategic |
| • Embassy of Denmark, | Security Trust Fund | • Oracle Myanmar | Holdings |
| Yangon | (LIFT) | • Organico World | • Zware Group |

#unitedagainstviolence

Veil lifts on Martin Margiela, fashion's invisible man

PARIS — He is the “Greta Garbo of fashion”, a brilliant and reclusive genius who walked away from his own label when he became the most talked-about designer in the world.

Two new Paris exhibitions lift a little of the mystery that surrounds Martin Margiela, arguably the most influential designer of the last 30 years.

The Belgian blew away the sexed-up, money-obsessed extravagance of 1980s fashion by scandalously recutting second-hand clothes for the catwalk.

He turned a butcher's apron into an evening gown, black leather gloves into a breathtaking corset dress and made a now iconic blouse from several pairs of white socks in his first Paris shows.

More revolutionary still, argue both exhibitions — which open this month in the French capital — he “challenged the system” by questioning if clothes should ever go out of fashion.

They simply could be deconstructed and rethought again and again, he said.

While the big luxury brands



Margiela invented the oversized look in the 2000s, which is still one of fashion's most dominant looks.

PHOTO: AFP

were outdoing each other in the decadence of their shows, Margiela staged his in an abandoned metro station, a Salvation Army hall, and most notoriously in 1989 on a piece of waste ground in one of Paris' roughest districts.

Laughing local children

pushed in beside critics in the front row and ran after his models down the bumpy “runway”, with some being lifted onto their shoulders.

‘I started to cry’

Raf Simons, the former Dior

designer now leading Ralph Lauren, said that Margiela changed fashion forever that night in 17 joyous and shambolic minutes.

The “bleak fairyland” Margiela had created was “so angelic and alien”, Simons said, that “I started to cry”.

“I thought, ‘How stupid to be crying at a fashion show.’ Then I looked around, and half the audience was crying.”

This was a full-on rebellion against the “star system of the time which he really disliked,” said Alexandre Samson, director of the Palais Galliera exhibition, which opens Friday.

The 1980s body beautiful aesthetic also went out the window. Instead, Margiela cast his friends — the more odd and original the better — in his shows.

In the age of the supermodel, he covered his models' faces to better see the clothes, and designed with an eye also for “women of a certain age”.

“He turned his back on the ways things were supposed to be done,” Samson told AFP.

And in the case of the clothes Margiela made from coat and dress linings, he literally turned fashion inside out.

But his biggest transgression was thumbing his nose at designer labels.

His own was simply a numbered square of white cotton.—AFP ■

Stage set for Oscars to mark year eclipsed by #MeToo

HOLLYWOOD — Hollywood's awards season reaches its glittering climax on Sunday at the Oscars, with fairy tale romance “The Shape of Water” and dark crime comedy “Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri” neck-and-neck in the race for the major statuettes.

The ceremony caps a difficult few months during which the industry has declared war on the pervasive culture of sexual misconduct brought to light by the downfall of movie mogul and alleged serial sex attacker Harvey Weinstein.

As with the Golden Globes in January, the mood in Tinseltown on Sunday is expected to be celebratory but defiant as the film world's A-listers speak out against dozens of showbiz people called out for predatory behavior since October. Peter Debruge, the chief film critic for Hollywood trade publication Variety, told AFP he expected this year's celebrations would place front and center an issue acknowledged for a long time as an “open secret” — but never before handled.



Frances McDormand — shown here in January accepting her Screen Actors Guild award for Best Actress for “Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri” — is a favorite to win an Oscar on Sunday. PHOTO: AFP

“This year, now that the case has blown open, it's a totally different situation,” he told AFP of the Weinstein scandal, ahead of Sunday's gala.

“I think we can expect jokes, we can expect political statements, we can expect any of the women who win to take that opportunity to kind of speak their minds.”

The 90th Academy Awards

— hosted by late night funnyman Jimmy Kimmel — will be beamed live around the world by ABC from Hollywood's Dolby Theatre.

With voting among the Academy's 8,500 members closed since Tuesday, the frenzied and at times schmaltzy campaigning that perennially marks the awards merry-go-round can no longer impact the results.

Organizers are looking to rebound after last year's flubbed announcement of the best picture winner — the trophy was initially given to “La La Land,” when the actual winner was “Moonlight.” “The Academy is certainly going to be on high alert to make sure that the people from PriceWaterhouse are not backstage tweeting and distracted, that you know the right envelopes go out,” said Debruge.

“But at the same time, every once in a while, some human error like that can make a show really exciting.”

‘Emotional ointment’

With the #MeToo and Time's Up campaigns against sexual misconduct and gender inequality dominating the 2018 awards circuit, this year's Oscars is seen as an opportunity for the industry to support female filmmaking. Greta Gerwig is only the fifth woman in Oscars history to be nominated for best director, but faces tough competition from Guillermo Del Toro, the favorite for “The Shape of Water,” Christopher Nolan (“Dunkirk”), Jor-

dan Peele (“Get Out”) and Paul Thomas Anderson (“Phantom Thread”). There was also the first nod in history for a female cinematographer, Rachel Morrison, who shot Dee Rees's racial drama “Mudbound.”

“The Shape of Water,” a Cold War-set story of love between a mute cleaning woman and a mystery merman-like creature, tops the nominations with 13, one shy of the record. It is vying for best picture, best director and best actress for its star Sally Hawkins, while Richard Jenkins and Octavia Spencer are in the running for supporting actor and actress.

“The most beautiful thing which I've heard... is that the movie has healed someone emotionally or has given someone an emotional ointment for the soul,” Del Toro told AFP at a recent luncheon for Oscar nominees in Beverly Hills.

However, in a wide open race, it is expected to fall far short of the record 11 statuettes achieved by “Ben-Hur” (1959), “Titanic” (1997) and “The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King” (2003).—AFP ■

David Bowie exhibition comes home to New York

NEW YORK — A globe-trotting, crowd-packing exhibition exploring the many sides of David Bowie opens this weekend in its final venue of New York, also the last home of the late rock legend.

“David Bowie is” — the show’s title keeps the answer ambiguous — presents Bowie not only as a rock pioneer but as a skilled actor, fashion icon, LGBT hero, inquisitive visual artist and even as a mime.

The exhibition, which opened five years ago at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, opens Friday at the Brooklyn Museum where it will close on 15 July.

Curators at the Victoria and Albert said that the exhibition has already drawn nearly 1.8 million visitors in the 11 cities where it has been presented including Barcelona, Berlin, Chicago, Melbourne, Paris, Tokyo, Toronto and Sao Paulo.

The trajectory of “David Bowie is” mirrors the path of the artist himself, who was born in London and settled in the early 1990s in New York, where he died in 2016 from a secret battle with cancer.

“When Bowie first visited New York in 1971 in his 20s he described it as a city like I fantasized over since by teens,” Tim Reeve, deputy director of the Vic-



File Photo of Angela Weiss. PHOTO: AFP

toria and Albert Museum, said at a preview.

“So it is fitting indeed that a place that David Bowie came to know as home should be the final stop on an incredible journey,” he said.

The Brooklyn Museum said it added some 100 objects to the exhibition to reflect Bowie’s time in the United States.

They include a clip from his praised Broadway performance in “The Elephant Man,” collaborative drawings with the exper-

imental artist Laurie Anderson and a section on his 1970s soul phase that took him to Philadelphia.

Visitors are guided by interactive headphones that play Bowie’s songs from his 1969 breakthrough “Space Oddity” to his last album “Blackstar,” interspersed with interviews and footage of Bowie.

Highlights include costumes designed for Bowie by Kansai Yamamoto and Freddie Burretti, including the spacey quilted suit

that Bowie wore on his landmark 1972 performance on the BBC’s “Top of the Pops.”

The exhibition could become a major money-maker. The Brooklyn Museum is dropping its pay-as-you-wish admission for “David Bowie is,” requiring timed tickets that start at \$20. Special tickets go up to \$2,500 for a private, guided tour — a package that entertainment guide Time Out New York described as “perfect for, say, a visiting Russian oligarch.”—AFP ■

‘Stolen works’ sentence of Picasso’s electrician overturned

NEW YORK — France’s highest appeal court has overturned the conviction of Pablo Picasso’s former electrician and his wife, who were given suspended sentences for keeping 271 of his works in their garage for four decades.

Pierre and Danielle Le Guennec were given two-year suspended jail sentences in 2015 for possession of stolen goods, in a case that made headlines worldwide. A higher court upheld the verdict in 2016 but the Cour de Cassation, in a ruling seen by AFP Thursday, overturned it. Ruling there was insufficient evidence that “the goods held by the suspects had been stolen” the court ordered a retrial. The couple’s lawyer Antoine Vey hailed the ruling.

“It’s a great decision which reinforces the line that Le Guennecs have always upheld — that there was no theft whatsoever.” The retrial will offer them “a huge opportunity to finally establish the truth”, Vey said. The collection, whose value has not been assessed, includes drawings of women and horses, nine rare Cubist collages from the time Picasso was working with fellow French artist Georges Braque and a work from his famous “blue period”. At his original trial Le Guennec, who is in his late seventies, claimed that Picasso had presented him with the artworks towards the end of his life to reward him for his loyal service.

But he later changed his account, telling the appeal court that the works were part of a huge trove of art that Picasso’s widow Jacqueline asked him to conceal after the artist’s death in 1973.

Le Guennec said he stored more than a dozen garbage bags of unsigned works which Jacqueline later retrieved, except for one which she left him saying: “Keep this, it’s for you.”

The affair came to light when Pierre Le Guennec attempted to get the works authenticated by Picasso’s son Claude Ruiz-Picasso in 2010.

The artist’s heirs promptly filed a complaint against him, triggering an investigation.—AFP ■

Land and fire: Chinese villagers celebrate pagan festival

LONGXIAN — Villagers in northern China wake up before dawn to paint their faces with pinkish make-up, don colourful robes and wield swords to represent legendary figures for a unique festival capping Chinese New Year celebrations.

Art troupes gather at a plaza in Longxian county, Shanxi province, to sing, beat drums, dance, and perform traditional Chinese drama and martial arts during the pagan She Huo celebration for the gods of land and fire.

They then hold a lively parade, some wearing long fake beards, others riding real horses or fake decorative stallions around their waist as onlookers follow them. For this important regional tradition, performers get up as early as 4:00 am to paint



The She Huo festival is listed as an intangible cultural heritage in China. PHOTO: AFP

their faces and prepare stage props like swords and spears.

China marked its New Year on February 16 to enter the Year of the Dog, but celebrations last

for days and include regional traditions. The She Huo festival dates back to ancient China, when people performed to pray to their gods for a bumper har-

vest and good weather. Now it is listed as an intangible cultural heritage in China, where local governments are making efforts to make more people participate and enjoy the activity. Government workers typically walk in front of the parade, leading it to new construction sites and shops as the art troupes perform blessing rituals.

But concerned villagers still worry about the fading of the tradition, saying the festival is getting shorter every year and the schedule is becoming increasingly unpredictable. “It’s not as lively as it used to be when I was young,” Chen Liping, a She Huo performer in her 40s, told AFP. “I hope it can be as boisterous forever, so we can have new performances every year.”—AFP ■

Myanmar U-15 footballers picked to compete in Hong Kong tourney

FORTY-SEVEN talented young players were recently chosen to be part of the Myanmar U-15 national team, it was announced at the National Football Academy yesterday, according to a statement from the Myanmar Football Federation.

Football officials had already selected some players for the U-15 team from different States and Regions last month.

The most recent additions to the U-15 team were mainly from the Myanmar Football Federation (MFF) and three different football academies including the Tatmad-

aw Football Academy. The young players are being trained in their respective camps. The aim of assembling players for a Myanmar U-15 national football team is to compete in the Jockey Club International Youth Football Invitational Tournament that will be held in Hong Kong starting from 23 March, said an official from Myanmar Football Federation.

It would be the very first time for a Myanmar youth team to compete in that kind of football tournament, an official added.

The selection of players will continue today.—Kyaw Zin Lin ■



Myanmar youth footballers seen at the training field of National Football Academy in Yangon yesterday. **PHOTO:MFF**

More woe for Wenger as Man City cruise past Arsenal again

MANCHESTER—Beleaguered Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger called on his players to show they can meet the club's standards after a second humbling 3-0 defeat at the hands of Manchester City in five days on Thursday. City moved 16 points clear at the top of the Premier League as fresh from claiming their first silverware of the Pep Guardiola era in the League Cup final on Sunday, the visitors scored three times in the opening 33 minutes as Arsenal disintegrated once more in front of a sparse crowd at the Emirates.

Bernardo Silva, David Silva and Leroy Sane were on target to inflict a third straight defeat on Arsenal and leave them 10 points adrift of the Premier League top four in sixth place.

And a night to forget for the Gunners was complete when £56 million (\$79 million) club record signing Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang saw his second-half penalty saved by Ederson.

"You go up by stairs and come down by the lift, that is what happens with confidence," said Wenger. "We have to show



That's my boy: Manchester City coach Pep Guardiola and striker Sergio Aguero. **PHOTO: AFP**

we have the level to be at Arsenal football club." However, the Frenchman again refused to accept it is inevitable that his 22-year stay as boss is coming to a sad end. "I am confident that nothing is permanent in life," added Wenger. "It is down to how you respond and the focus and effort you show to turn things around." Sub-zero tempera-

tures and the apathy caused by Arsenal's display at Wembley on Sunday saw thousands of seats go unoccupied at the Emirates. The lines around the pitch were painted blue ahead of kick-off in case an expected snow shower covered the field.

Unfortunately for the home fans that did brave the cold, that was the only novelty on a night

of familiar failings from Wenger's men, who have now lost seven times in 12 games this year.

"Do you want the fans to be happy when you are 3-0 down? I am surprised you are surprised," continued Wenger.

"It was combination of the weather conditions and the fact we had a big disappointment on Sunday."—AFP ■

U Myo Hlaing Win named head coach of Myanmar U-19 team

U Myo Hlaing Win, a former star player for Myanmar, was named a head coach for the Myanmar U-19 national football team on Wednesday, according to a statement from the Myanmar Football Federation (MFF) on their website. He was assigned as a head coach of the U-19 Myanmar national football team at the headquarters of the MFF in front of MFF officials. His contract begins immediately, starting from 1st March, and will extend until December 2019. U Myo Hlaing Win acted as a manager for Nay Pyi Taw FC, one of the former Myanmar National League football teams. U Myo Hlaing Win was an Myanmar footballer with international experience. As a forward, he was the top goal scorer at the 1998 Tiger Cup. He was also a member of the silver medal-winning Myanmar team at the 1993 Southeast Asian Games in Singapore. "It is very good to hear that Myo Hlaing Win will be heading the U-19 Myanmar National football team, and we are hoping for a gold medal in every competition that includes Myanmar", said U Phoe Sein, 75, a Myanmar football fan from Yangon.—KyawZin Lin ■