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SUNDAY SPECIAL
Pull-out supplement

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Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than arrives Hsihseng of Pa'O Self-Administered Zone to open a dam. **PHOTO: MYANMAR NEWS AGENCY**

Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker opens water supply facility in Hsihseng, Pa'O Self-Administered Zone

Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than attended the opening ceremony for a potable water distribution project for six wards in Hsihseng Town, Pa'O Self-Administered Zone and the neighbouring villages of Phaya Phyu, Haw Taung, Haw Myauk, Panline, Wah Taw, and Ta Khawt Tan.

The ceremony also marked the start of construction work on a dam, which was conducted on the afternoon of 3 March. The works are part of the Shan State (South) region development project being carried out by the Ministry of Border Affairs, Border Areas and National Races Development Department and a Japanese non-government organisation, the Terra People Association (TPA), under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed earlier.

The ceremony was opened by Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than by cutting the ceremonial ribbon, after which the Union Minister for Border Affairs Lt-Gen Ye Aung delivered a speech. Shan State Chief Minister Dr. Lin Htut, Second Secretary Mr. Keita Iwase from the Myanmar Economic and Development Assistance Section of the Japanese Embassy, along with Pa'O Self-Administered Zone Chairman Khun San Lwin then delivered speeches, while TPA Project Manager Shibata explained about the financial assistance provided.

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Myanmar-Bangladesh battalion commander level meeting held Friday

THE Myanmar-Bangladesh battalion commander level meeting was held in Ghumdhum Border Observation Post (BOP) at border post 31/1 in Bangladesh on 2 March.

Matters relating to people remaining illegally near the border, arrangements for joint patrols, and exchanging news and information on occurrences along the border on a real-time basis were discussed during the meeting.

The meeting was attended by a 9-member team led by Police Lt-Col Saw Zayar Lin of No. 1 Border Guard Police and a 6-member team led by Lt-Col Monzurul Hassan Khan, Commanding Officer of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) battalion 34.

Regarding the meeting, Presidential Office spokesperson Director General U Zaw Htay said, "Yesterday afternoon, a battalion commander level meeting was held.

The border is normal. There were no special incidents to report today. About 1,000 people remain at the border."

SEE PAGE-3

New Rakhine Hluttaw building opened

Rakine State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu and officials cut ribbon to open the new Rakhine Hluttaw building yesterday. **PHOTO: WIN MIN SOE (IPRD)**

A CEREMONY to open a new Rakhine Hluttaw building was held yesterday morning.

State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu, State Hluttaw Speaker U San Kyaw Hla and State High Court Chief Judge U Kyauk opened the new Hluttaw building by cutting a ceremonial ribbon. Next, Amyotha Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U Aye Tha Aung unveiled the Hluttaw sign board. Afterwards, State Hluttaw Speaker U San Kyaw Hla and Deputy Speaker U Mya Than presented commemorative gifts on the opening of the new Hluttaw to Amyotha Hluttaw Deputy Speaker, the State Chief Minister, state ministers and departmental heads. This was followed by State Chief Minister and State Hluttaw Speaker planting a Eugenia tree in the lawn of the new building, along with the taking of commemorative photos.

The Amyotha Hluttaw Deputy Speaker, State Chief Minister, State Hluttaw Speaker, State High Court Chief Judge and officials toured the Hluttaw affairs committees' offices and the Hluttaw hall, while officials explained about the building and offices.

The opening ceremony was attended by Amyotha Hluttaw Deputy Speaker, State Chief Minister, state Hluttaw Speaker, State High Court Chief Judge, State Hluttaw Deputy Speaker, State ministers, State Advocate, State Auditor, regional command headquarter (Sittway) regional commander, Pyithu Hluttaw, Amyotha Hluttaw and State Hluttaw representatives, departmental officials, town elders, representatives from civil society groups, news media and invited guests.—Tin Tun (IPRD) ■

Union Minister for SWRR Dr. Win Myat Aye visits Thailand

Union Minister Dr Win Myat Aye looks at the process of weaving fabrics using traditional looms in Bangkok, Thailand yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

UNION Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (SWRR) Dr. Win Myat Aye, who was in Bangkok on an official visit at the invitation of Thailand's Social Development and Human Security Minister General Anantaporn Kanjanarat, met with the host minister on the morning of 2 March.

During the meeting, matters relating to friendly and close cooperation among ASEAN countries were discussed. Also, there was agreement to remain focused on cooperation in the human security and social protection areas, jointly conducted under bilateral agreements. There was also a commitment to continuing bilateral cooperation works on economic development among countries in the ASEAN region, along with social protection matters, as well as the process and arrangement of protection and care provided for people. There was, further, a discussion of the difficulties faced in the actual practice of offering assistance to vulnerable people in Thailand, the status of increased job opportunities in the private sector after setting up economic strategies for handicapped persons, rebuilding the lives of trafficked persons and achieving success in the matter of migrant workers through bilateral diplomatic relations and cooperation.

Afterwards, the Union Minister observed the work conducted in the central management department of the ministry using IT systems and a hotline to provide one stop service for nationals of Thailand, working both in the country and abroad, when they need emergency and social assistance. The Union Minister also observed the products produced by training schools and care centers under the ministry.

Later in the afternoon, the Union Minister visited a care center in Nonthaburi Province for trafficked people from Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, and observed the status of rescue and systematic protection, reintegration with families and rehabilitation works, and then discussed bilateral cooperation and difficulties that need to be resolved. On the morning of 3 March, the Union Minister left Bangkok for Chiang Rai by air and studied the Chiang Rai-based Mae Fah Luang Foundation that is providing sustainable development for legal works in the border area. The Union Minister was greeted by Mae Fah Luang Foundation founder Mr. Khun Chai and officials who explained the foundation's aim, the support provided by the Thai Royal Family and the government, the changing views of the people who are facing economic difficulties from deforestation and opium planting, difficulties faced in performing people-based transformational works, international studies conducted, help provided to farmers to replace opium growing, as well as support provided, and to be provided in the future, to Myanmar's government ministries. The Union Minister, in return, explained about the incumbent government's social protection and people centered works, conducted to seek socio-economic development.

Also discussed was the status of implementing socio-economic development, in conjunction with implementation of peace, as well as conducting short, mid and long term projects and providing humanitarian assistances, the rehabilitation of drug addicts and the status of coordinating and resolving differences. The Union Minister also reviewed and exchanged views on cooperation that is to be continued.

The Union Minister further discussed increasing the development of social protection programs implemented for the people, studied the strength and weakness of government and all strata of those people participating in development works conducted in Thailand. The group also reviewed the conducting of vocational training courses at displaced persons camps along the Myanmar-Thai border and discussed the possibility of rehabilitating ethnic nationals who want to reintegrate back into Myanmar. The Union Minister also studied the successful works performed by the Doi Tung Project for coffee and macadamia production, as well as working with traditional looms, paper, porcelain and earthenware works.—Myanmar News Agency ■

Rakhine issue is not a religious one but a political and economic challenge involving migration, competition over limited resources, poverty and rule of law

Union Minister for International Cooperation participated at the High-Level Segment of the 37th Session of the Human Rights Council held in Geneva.

THE Myanmar delegation led by U Kyaw Tin, Union Minister for International Cooperation arrived back Yangon on 3 March after attending the High-Level Segment of the 37th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council held from 26 to 28 February 2018 in Geneva, Switzerland.

At the High-Level Segment of the Human Rights Council held on 27 February, Union Minister U Kyaw Tin delivered a Statement apprising the meeting of the complexities of Myanmar's democratic transition and the situation in Rakhine State. In his statement, the Union Minister mentioned that despite many daunting challenges facing Myanmar, the international community focused most on the situation in Rakhine State, as the media incessantly portrays it as a religious issue. In fact, the Rakhine issue is not a religious one but a political and economic challenge involving migration, competition over limited resources, poverty and rule of law. But it has recently evolved from the communal conflict into the issues of national security and terrorism. State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has taken immediate proactive steps including setting up of Dr. Kofi Annan Advisory Commission to resolve the complex issue of Rakhine State soon after taking office. The government's efforts are gaining momentum with the international community responding positively when the armed attacks against three police outposts occurred in early October 2016 and changed the situation completely. Again on 25 August 2017, within hours after the release of the final report of Dr. Kofi Annan Advisory Commission, the so-called "ARSA" launched orchestrated attacks on 30 police outposts and the

Union Minister U Kyaw Tin delivers the speech at the High-Level Segment of the 37th Session of the Human Rights Council held in Geneva. **PHOTO: MNA**

Regimental Headquarters leaving multiple deaths and injuries on security personnel and civilians. The security forces have no choice but to suppress terrorism and to restore law and order and protect the innocents. Muslim population in affected areas of Rakhine State crossed the border out of fear of conflict and violence. However, many Muslim villages remained intact. Little is known on reported in the media about many people of Daingnet, Mro, the Mramagyi and Rakhine minority groups and Hindus who have had to flee their homes as a result of violence. Instigation, threats and false hopes given by ARSA also play a role in the mass displacement of people. As the International Crisis Group (ICG) reported, ARSA attacks were intended as a provocation. It was those terrorist attacks that triggered humanitarian crisis. Yet, many conveniently failed to denounce provocative attacks. Any form of terrorist act for whatever cause should not be condoned.

The Union Minister added that as Myanmar government is giving priority for the repatriation of the displaced people, significant progress has been made in the preparation process. Humanitarian assistance has been provided to all affected communities through Red Cross Movement and ASEAN Coordinating Center for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster

> Little is known on reported in the media about many people of Daingnet, Mro, the Mramagyi and Rakhine minority groups and Hindus who have had to flee their homes as a result of violence.

Management (AHA Center). FAO and WFP have also joined in this effort. The government is making progress in implementing the recommendations of Dr. Kofi Annan Commission as a road map, the Ministerial Committee assigned to this task has recently issued its first progress report to the public. With a view to granting more access, Myanmar government has organized day-trips to Rakhine State in three groups for all diplomatic corps including UN agencies to see for themselves the ground situation and its readiness for repatriation. Myanmar government recently invited UNHCR and UNDP to jointly assist the Government's efforts in carrying out livelihood development for all communities in Rakhine State and for repatriation and resettlement of the displaced persons respectively.

The Union Minister then stressed that in suppressing the terrorists who used civilian recruits, it might cause collateral damage and civilian casualties. With regard to alleged human rights violations, the government shall never condone impunity and action will be taken against any perpetrators in accordance with the law if there is concrete evidence. Myanmar strongly objects the use of such words as ethnic cleansing and genocide in reference to the situation in Rakhine State. Myanmar would welcome the international community to play a constructive role in relation to Rakhine State and sought their understanding on the complexity and their support for the government efforts in finding a durable solution. Taking non-constructive measures would be counterproductive, as it will further polarize the communities and undermining the efforts for the long-term objective of reconciliation. The Union Minister concluded by stressing that Myanmar is facing the most challenging time in its history of transition, but the government will turn the challenges into opportunities for national reconciliation and peace leading to further strengthening democracy and expressed its belief that the success of democratic transition will overcome these challenges.

While in Geneva on 26th February, the Union Minister also attended the High-Level Segment of the Committee on Disarmament and delivered a statement sharing Myanmar"s views on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. On 27th February, Union Minister U Kyaw Tin, accompanied by Permanent Representative to the UN / Ambassador U Htin Lynn, met with Mr. Manabu Horii, Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, and Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the UK at the United Nations separately. During the meetings, the Union Minister explained the government's efforts to resolve the situation in Rakhine State.

The Union Minister also held a meeting with Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC), and exchanged views on strengthening of ICRC's assistance on Myanmar government's humanitarian efforts. On 28 February, Union Minister U Kyaw Tin and Mr. Johannes Matyassy Assistant Secretary of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of the Swiss Confederation held the 2nd Meeting of Myanmar-Switzerland Foreign Office Consultations in Bern. During the meeting, matters pertaining to the bilateral, political and economic cooperation, promotion of cooperation projects under the new cooperation strategy of Switzerland on Myanmar (2019-2023), Switzerland's enhanced engagement with ASEAN as well as providing humanitarian assistance and repatriation and development in Rakhine State. —Myanmar News Agency ■

Myanmar-Bangladesh battalion ...

FROM PAGE-1

"We were ready to receive the returnees since 23 January. During a visit to Bangladesh from 15 to 17 January by a Myanmar delegation led by Union Minister for Home Affairs Lt-Gen Kyaw Swe, the Bangladesh side had provided a list of more than 8,000 people from 1,600 households who will be sent back, as a first batch. However, the list is not according to our format and our immigration department is converting the list into our format. As promised, we were ready to receive the returnees since 23 January" said U Zaw Htay. As per the bilateral agreement, Myanmar had kept in readiness the Taung Pyo Letwe and Nga Khu Ya Reception Centres, as well as the Hla Pho Khaung Transit Centre, since 23 January. Arrangements for the board and lodging, water, electricity and health care requirements of the returnees were also made. Diplomats, United Nations organization officials, local and foreign reporters, members of the Committee for Implementation of Recommendations on Rakhine State and the British Foreign Secretary had also visited and reviewed the arrangements.—Myanmar News Agency ■

PHOTO: MNA

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Director U Soe Win Thant of Global World Insurance Company presents crop insurance pilot project

Agricultural workers preparing rice for packing and transport. **PHOTO: SUPPLIED**

Q: What is the pilot project of crop insurance?

A: The crop insurance system is designed to cover damages to crops due to erratic weather conditions in the country. The government gave the green light to carry out the pilot project of crop insurance on 31 January 2018. This permit is not meant for running a crop insurance business but for research and experimentation.

Q: How long does it take to conduct a pilot project for research? What are your further plans?

A: The pilot project will be undertaken for two years, covering the Yangon, Ayeyawady, Magway and Mandalay regions. If other regions and states also demand a pilot project, we will proceed to those areas. We will undertake the project first for paddy on an experimental basis rather than edible oil crops, industrial crops and garden crops.

Q: How did you come up with the crop insurance scheme?

A: Myanma Insurance was founded in 1952, providing 27 types of insurance. There is no insurance to cover the agricultural sector or crops. This will be a new challenge for the insurance industry. When we conceived this plan in 2016, a pensioner from Myanma Insurance, now working for our company, disagreed with it. However, I submitted a proposal despite the disagreement. Crop insurance will pay for any loss depending on the yield, according to the agreement made by both the parties. This means insurance will cover the loss if the yield is lower than the expected volume owing to erratic weather. Neighbouring countries such as India and Thailand have been providing a crop insurance system for farmers since 1970. We developed the crop insurance scheme for the benefits of the farmers.

Workers harvest rice with the harvester in the field. **PHOTO: SUPPLIED**

Q: What were the challenges in designing a new crop insurance system?

A: As I said above, this new system lacks encouragement from the private and public sectors. Even the pilot project proposal that I had submitted in 2016 was approved only this year. The proposal was submitted to the parliament in June 2017. Another challenge is of setting the premium rate. There is no mathematician in the insurance sector in our country. This being so, we calculate the premium rate by referring to those in other countries. To set a premium rate, the sum insured (maximum amount payable) is calculated on the risk factor and the possible loss. The premium rate may vary depending on crop varieties, growing season and regions. So, we are conducting the pilot project. Some countries took 10 years just to conduct the research.

Q: Do you believe the pilot project will be successful?

A: I do. However, multi-stakeholders, including officials, the insurer, the insurance buyer and related organisations, must make concerted efforts to achieve this.

Q: When will you start this pilot project? What are the further plans?

A: The pilot project will begin during the upcoming paddy season. Also, the Pyithu Hluttaw Agriculture, Livestock and Rural Social Development Committee has urged us to implement this as soon as possible. We are planning to cooperate with related departments: Administrative Department, Agriculture Department, the Myanmar Agricultural Development Bank and the Meteorology and Hydrology Department. We will hold a meeting with related regional government officials. This project will be implemented by forming working committees. A systematic crop insurance system will emerge if those engaged in this sector work well together.

—Hsu Hnin Lae ■

Six Humblodt penguins reach Myanmar via animals exchange programme

SOME six Humboldt penguins have reached the Nay Pyi Taw Zoological Garden through an animal exchange programme on 28 February, according to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation.

The animal exchange programme was jointly conducted by the zoological garden and the forestry department, operating under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, and Japan's Katsurahama Aquarium.

The Nay Pyi Taw Zoological Garden now has 10 penguins. The Humboldt penguins are mostly found in South America, its southeast and along the Pacific coast. They have black heads with a white border that runs from behind the eye, around the black ear-coverts and chin, and joins at the throat. The female penguin lays two eggs, which are incubated by the male while the female returns to the sea to feed. The penguins take turns at foraging in the sea and caring for their chick. Their lifespan is typically between 15 and 20 years in the wild, although observations suggest that some may live to up to 50 years. Humboldt penguins nest on islands and rocky coasts, using scrapes or caves. Most penguins feed on krill, fish, squid and other forms of sea life that are caught while swimming under water. They spend half of their lives on land and the other half in the oceans. Their weight ranges from 45.4kg to 55.9kg.

— GNLM■

Consumer goods imports up over $466 million since last April

An ocean liner carrying containers is seen in the Yangon River. **PHOTO:NYI ZAW MOE**

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 to set up new coconut plantation zone in Mon State

THE Myanmar Fruits, Flower and Vegetable Producer and Exporter Association (MFVP) is planning to set up a new coconut plantation zone in Mudon Township, Mon State, within this year, according to a report in the Myawady Daily's Saturday edition.

U Kyaw Thu, secretary of the MFVP, said the new coconut zone is a part of the project to fulfill the needs of emerging markets. The zone will be established on 2,000 acres of land in the township during this rainy season.

"By establishing a new coconut zone, we can have the bargaining power to buy inputs from suppliers and to sell our products. Moreover, it is expected to boost manufacturing of valued-added products, including coconut oil, handicrafts, soaps and personal goods," U Kyaw Thu said.

The demand for coconut has been on the rise in both domestic and foreign markets. For the time being, coconuts are exported predominantly to neighbouring Thailand, as well as China and India.

The association continues to conduct coconut product manufacturing training to interested individuals to share cultivation techniques, market related information and courses on creating coconut-based shampoo, lotion, make-up, lipstick, facial forms and balm, by using virgin coconut oil and other natural fruit bases. —GNLM

Offshore natural gas extraction to begin this month in Gulf of Mottama

EXTRACTION of natural gas in the Gulf of Mottama (formally Martaban), offshore of Myanmar, will begin this month by the French-based Total E & P Myanmar, said U Win Htay, Ayeyawady Region Minister for Electricity, Energy, Industry and Transport.

The French company already received the government's approval to operate the offshore Yadana gas field in blocks M5 and M6 in the Andaman Sea. Before gas exploration, the company is arranging to hold a public consultation with local fisherman.

The M5 field is expected to produce 780 million cubic feet of natural gas per day, as the project supplies gas to the Yadana gas grid. Total E & P Co also won a tender to operate the YWB fields off the coast of Taninthayi.

The country has four key natural gas production sites, including Yadana, Shwe, Zawtika and Yedagon.

Natural gas is included on the list of major export items from Myanmar. The country's two main export markets for natural gas are Thailand and China.—GNLM

New developments for Sittway General Hospital underway

THE upgrading process of Sittway General Hospital which began in 2016 is targeted to be completed next year, according to Dr. Chan Thar, Rakhine State Social Affairs Minister.

To upgrade the Sittway General Hospital from 200-bed to 500-bed hospital, a new modern four-story building that will hold 300 beds is being constructed, behind the ancient two-story building that hold 200 beds.

"The hospital's upgrading process began in 2016-2007 FY with a budget of Ks 2800 million and was targeted to be completed in FY 2018-2019," said Dr. Chan Thar. A total of 68 hospitals including one 500-bed hospitals, two 200-bed hospitals, four 100-bed hospitals, 25 50-bed hospitals, 16-bed hospitals and station hospitals are providing healthcare service in Rakhine State. Among the hospitals, the Sittway General Hospital plays an important role for Rakhine State.

The hospital is providing health care services to not only the patients in the region but also patients of IDP camps whom the hospital was supplying foods and accommodations. "Government and well-wishers were providing nutrients to the patients in the hospital since six months ago." said Dr Chan Thar. Typhoid, yellow fever, polio, malaria are also treated at the Sittway General Hospital. "As a state hospital, about 10 major diseases are treated at the hospital. Our hospital is treating the major diseases. Due to climate change, the number of Viral Hemorrhagic Fevers (VHFs) is increasing. Last year, over 2500 people suffered from VHFs, but only 26 patients died as the hospital has given special healthcare" he added. As government provided more budgets, we can give high medical supplements, with low cost and free of charges to the patients.

There were only 64 doctors in the hospital which is only 30 per cent of 214 doctors positions permitted at the Sittway General Hospital. Recently, 21 doctors were transferred to our hospital a few days ago. Only 40 per cent of the medical staff including 63 per cent of nurses, 37 per cent of admin staff and 28 per cent of general workers is appointed in the hospital. There is a short fall of staff for the hospital.

"On the staff matter, we are providing the necessary. Rakhine State government also came occasionally to fulfill the requirement of the staff" said the social affair minister. A four-story building was also being constructed for the doctors and medical staff in this FY. Most of the hospitals in Rakhine State were provided with radiography equipment and laboratories. These equipment can be used in hospitals that are connected to the national grid but are difficult to use where there is no electricity. There are 121 rural clinic centers and 500 sub-rural clinic centers in Rakhine State that are provided with necessary medicines by the government.

A construction of new building is seen in Sittway. **PHOTO: THURA ZAW**

Distributing insecticide-treated mosquito nets, organizing medical education talks and testing the blood are also being carried out as preventive work. In places where medical department staff has difficulty to reach, trained volunteer staff and social organizations conducted the works of implementing lavatory project and project to keep water and environment clean.

Not only typhoid and HIV AIDS are being treated by giving medicines and presciptions but also vaccinations for rabies and Japanese Encephalitis (JE) are also being administered.

"The major work for public healthcare service is vaccination process. We are vaccinating the new born children to five years old. We are now conducting 11 type of vaccination. Vaccination for JE was conducted in November and December at the villages and schools to all children under 15 years old. We were able to vaccinate nearly 90 per cent." said Dr Chan Thar. Except for some health care centers in the regions where terrorist attacks occurred, all health care centers are open about three days a week and in the remaining days, healthcare officers and staff are providing healthcare service to the houses.

"Medical teams are also sent on assignment to the reception centers to check and take care the patients there and to transfer the patients who suffers from major diseases to the hospitals. Children aged below five years are also being vaccinated. The repatriation centers will receive 150 people a day, so our medical teams are capable to care for them. We also can provide necessary healthcare service at the Buthidaung and Maungtaw hospitals as there are medical specialists there." said Dr. Chan Thar. —Thura Zaw ■

Union Minister U Kyaw Win attends 24th AEM Retreat and Related meetings

Union Minister for Planning and Finance U Kyaw Win attended the 24th ASEAN Economic Ministers' (AEM) Retreat and related meetings held in the Shangri La Hotel in Singapore from 28 February to 3 March.

The meeting was attended by economic ministers and representative groups of ASEAN member countries and partner countries, the ASEAN Secretary General and staff totalling about 100 persons. The meetings were chaired by Singapore Minister for Trade and Industry Mr. Lim Hng Kiang. Singapore is ASEAN Chairman Country for 2018.

Attendees pose for a documentary photo. **PHOTO: MNA**

At the working dinner held on the evening of 28 February in Dutch Pavilion hall, ASEAN economic ministers confirmed the economic matters to be conducted as a priority in 2018, providing guideline and putting on record the report submitted to economic ministers by the 33rd Meeting of the High Level Task Force on ASEAN Economic Integration and putting on record the status of implementing AEC work processes submitted by ASEAN Secretary General Office.

The 24th AEM Retreat was held in the Tower Ballroom, where implementation of ASEAN commodity trade agreements, status of concessions in the service sector of the ASEAN framework agreement on services and progress status of discussions on the ASEAN framework agreement on services were discussed.

The Union Minister also attended the 24th AEM Retreat related meetings held in Tower Ballroom and Island Ballroom on March 2 and 3, it is learnt. – Myanmar News Agency ■

Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker opens …

FROM PAGE-1

Next, documents related to the donation were handed over to the town water distribution committee by TPA Project Manager Shibata and commemorative gifts were presented.

Afterwards, a stone pillar commemorating the opening ceremony was unveiled by Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than, Union Minister Lt-Gen Ye Aung, Pa'O Self-Administered Zone Chairman Khun San Lwin, Second Secretary Mr. Keita Iwase from the Myanmar Economic and Development Assistance Section of the Japanese Embassy and TPA Project Manager Shibata.

Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than, Union Minister Lt-Gen Ye Aung, Pa'O Self-Administered Zone Chairman Khun San Lwin, Second Secretary Mr. Keita Iwase from the Myanmar Economic and Development Assistance Section of the Japanese Embassy and TPA Project Manager Shibata also planted commemorative trees. — Khun Ye Htway (Hsihseng) ■

EU, SE Asia talk up trade deal amid alarm over Trump tariffs

SINGAPORE — Southeast Asia and Europe pledged on Friday to speed up efforts for an elusive free trade deal, vowing to support open markets in the face of growing US protectionism under Donald Trump.

EU trade chief Cecilia Malmstrom said a deal would "send a strong signal to the world" after Trump's plan to put tariffs on steel and aluminum sparked an outcry among American trade partners, including Europe.

Trump said Thursday he would sign off on the measures next week, sending stock markets into a tailspin.

The 28-member European Union and 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have been discussing a free trade deal for years, first launching talks in 2007 but abandoning them two years later.

The 28-member European Union and 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have been discussing a free trade deal for years. **PHOTO: AFP**

The two sides last year agreed to put the deal back on the agenda and have been hammering out their positions before the process formally begins.

In the interim, the EU has struck a free trade deal with ASEAN member Singapore and has started talks on bilateral pacts with other states in the bloc.

"These agreements are important in their own right but they are also part of a bigger picture. We see them as building blocks on the way to broader integration," EU Trade Commissioner Malmstrom said at a forum of Southeast Asian and European business executives in Singapore.

"A regional agreement between us will send a strong signal to the world, a signal that the EU and ASEAN... will stand shoulder-to-shoulder in support of open trade."

Malmstrom also slammed the US tariff plan and warned the EU was not ruling out taking "retaliatory measures".

"We must be very careful in using the term trade war. But it is definitely not a good development what happened yesterday," she said.

Cambodia's Minister of Commerce Pan Sorasak told the forum that an EU-ASEAN trade deal would be "more beneficial for all of us, especially Cambodia.

"I believe that the (free-trade deal) negotiations should relaunch as soon as possible."—AFP ■

Health savings outweigh costs of limiting global warming: study

PARIS — The estimated cost of measures to limit Earth-warming greenhouse gas emissions can be more than offset by reductions in deaths and disease from air pollution, researchers said on Saturday. It would cost $22.1 trillion (17.9 trillion euros) to $41.6 trillion between 2020 and 2050 for the world to hold average global warming under two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), a team projected in The Lancet Planetary Health journal. For the lower, aspirational limit of 1.5 C, the cost would be between $39.7 trillion and $56.1 trillion, they estimated. But air pollution deaths could be reduced by 21-27 per cent to about 100 million between 2020 and 2050 under the 2 C scenario, the team estimated, and by 28-32 per cent to about 90 million at 1.5 C. "Depending on the strategy used to mitigate climate change, estimates suggest that the health savings from reduced air pollution could be between 1.4-2.5 times greater than the costs of climate change mitigation, globally," they wrote. Health costs from air pollution include medical treatment, patient care, and lost productivity. The countries likely to see the biggest health savings were air pollution-ridden India and China, said the researchers, who used computer models to project future emissions, the costs of different scenarios for curbing them, and the tally in pollution-related deaths. "The health savings are exclusively those related to curbing air pollution," study co-author Anil Markandya of the Basque Centre for Climate Change in Spain told AFP. "Other health benefits are not included, which of course makes our figures underestimates of the total benefits."

The costs of limiting warming, Markandya explained, included higher taxes on fossil fuels like oil and coal, which in turn raise the costs of production. The world's nations agreed on the 2 C limit in Paris in 2015, and undertook voluntary greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets. These pledges, even if they are met, place the world on a 3 C trajectory, scientists say. To date, the average global temperature is thought to have increased by 1 C since the Industrial Revolution. "We hope that the large health co-benefits we have estimated... might help policymakers move towards adopting more ambitious climate policies and measures to reduce air pollution," said Markandya. Air pollution from fossil fuel emissions, particularly fine particulate matter and ozone, has been linked to lung and heart disease, strokes, and cancer.—AFP ■

Okinawa Governor urges newly appointed minister to reduce US base burden

NAHA, Japan — Okinawa Governor Takeshi Onaga on Saturday urged the newly appointed minister in charge of the prefecture's affairs to make more efforts to reduce the local burden in hosting the bulk of US military facilities in Japan.

The governor handed over a request for the Japanese government to give up a controversial plan to move a key US air base within the southern Japanese island prefecture in a meeting with Teru Fukui, who became minister in charge of Okinawa and Northern Territories affairs on Tuesday. Fukui replaced Tetsuma Esaki due to the latter's health problems.

Onaga called for Okinawa's budget allocation to be increased and cooperation in extending a runway at Naha Airport during their talks.

"I'd like to promote measures to help the people in the prefecture spend better lives," Fukui told the governor.

Okinawa hosts the bulk of US military facilities in Japan. The US presence there has long been a source of tension between the prefectural and central governments.

Okinawa Gov Takeshi Onaga (R) hands over a request paper to Teru Fukui, the newly appointed minister in charge of the prefecture's affairs, in Okinawa on 3 March, 2018, regarding ways to reduce Okinawa's burden in hosting the bulk of US military bases in Japan. **PHOTO: KYODONEWS**

Accidents involving American military aircraft and crimes involving US personnel have angered local residents.

Among the most recent incidents, a window fell from a US military transport helicopter onto the grounds of an elementary school in the prefecture in December.

Onaga remains opposed to the planned relocation of US Marine Corps Air Station Futenma from a crowded residential area of Ginowan to the less-populated Henoko coastal area of Nago.

Fukui did not discuss his views on the issue of the relocation.—Kyodo News ■

Seed production for various crops must be prioritized

THE situation of the seed sector in Myanmar's agricultural industry demands that it produces quality seeds. Good quality seeds are vital for the development of the agricultural sector.

We have seen the dawn of the new era of seed production as the private, public and producers' partnership, known as the PPPP system, has brought success to the sector.

In the paddy seed production sector, farmers and private businesses worked together to produce quality paddies on about 10,000 acres in the 2016-2017 fiscal year. It is targeted to work the pilot programme again on nearly 70,000 acres in the 2017-2018 Fiscal Year.

The Union Government has prioritized quality seed production, but it still cannot produce enough for farmers nationwide.

To reach that goal, we urgently need to encourage seed production in not only paddies, but also a wide range of crops and to deliver quality seeds into the hands of farmers in a timely manner after taking steps for quality control of seeds.

We all have understood the important role of quality seeds to produce quality crops. Regarding production of seeds, it is wrong to emphasize only paddy seed production. In the past, we saw that there was a weakness in production of other kinds of seeds.

Myanmar's vegetable production is still too weak to enter the highly competitive international market. Additionally, the technical requirements and the high cost of input pull the market profits down.

About 12 tonnes of watermelon and muskmelon seeds are required to be planted each year because of a lack of production, according to the Myanmar Fruit, Flower and Vegetable Producers and Exporters Association (MFVP).

The country is incapable of producing the seeds required and is dependent only on imported seeds from foreign countries, the MFVP said. About 600,000 tonnes of watermelon seeds are imported from China annually. Myanmar's vegetable production is still too weak to enter the highly competitive international market. Additionally, the technical requirements and the high cost of input pull the market profits down. The fruits and vegetables imported from neighbouring countries are found to dominate the supermarkets and fruit stalls in Yangon. Myanmar is not able to compete against them due to the lack of production and weakness in quality.

It is believed that there were many businessmen who want to try their hand at seed production, but they have no capital. If the Union Government arranged to provide financial assistance to them as much as they need, this may be workable.

Modern farming methods can reduce expenditure on seeds, but it requires skill and increased labour costs.

Development of the seed production industry is very important, but it needs technology and foreign investment to produce enough seeds for our farmers nationwide.

The Implementation Process of the Union Enterprise for humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine State

Prof. Dr. Nyunt Thein

The first batch of youth volunteers deliver aid to people in Maungtaw. **PHOTO: MMAL**

A COMMITTEE for the Union Enterprise for humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine State (UEHRD) has been established with the aim of implementing the projects in all sectors for the development of Rakhine State. Therefore cooperation is being made with the Union Government, the people, the private sector, local NGOs, INGOs, CSOs, partner nations and UN agencies. The UEHRD is aimed at providing humanitarian assistance, resettlement, rehabilitation and working for development of Rakhine State.

The UEHRD is a Union Enterprise because it is not a Government Ministry, a Government Committee and a Private Company. It is also known as a new mechanism initiated by State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi together with Dr. Win Myat Aye as Vice Chairman, Dr. Aung Tun Thet as Chief Coordinator and U Kyaw Myaing as Information and Communications Director, to solve the immediate problems as well as the mid-term and long-terms problems in Rakhine.

Three Main Tasks

There are three main tasks which will be performed in the plan; (1) Effective provision of proper repatriation of the refugees from Myanmar (2) Relief and resettlement (3) Sustainable development of the region that is free from conflicts.

Arrangements are being made by UEHRD to accept donated funds through the Myanmar Economic Bank and Private Banks. It is important to disseminate the news and communications procedures, and to make cooperation with the businessmen who can make plans for the implementation of certain recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State which are deemed to be beneficial to the future projects. Maungtaw is a region which is greatly in need of basic infrastructures and transportation. People from remote areas, especially villages where the Mro, Thet, Daingnet, Khami races reside are in bad condition of living.

"The whole populace across the nation is giving support wholeheartedly, and there is no discrimination, as alleged by some".

Nine tasks forces of UEHRD

Nine tasks forces of UEHRD, construction and infrastructure; agriculture and livestock breeding, Economic Zones Development, Information and Public Relations, job creation and Vocational Training, Healthcare, Micro-financing, Fund raising through crowd-funding and Tourism promotion. Moreover plans are under way to construct the infrastructure buildings, installing water, electricity access and upgrading roads.

As the development strategy for Rakhine State was already set, UEHRD's tasks forces coordinate with Rakhine State government to carry out the strategy properly. The tasks forces are also planning to conduct the Vocational Trainings for the local residents for the development in their education and livelihood.

Setting Two Goals

In launching the UEHRD programme, there are two goals; the first goal is to provide humanitarian assistance to the needy with the cooperation of youths from across the nation, and the other is to take part in the implementation of resettling villages which were destroyed, under the support of the governments of Regions and States.

In providing assistance, priority should be made to choose from the villages — remote areas and areas within reach of a one-day round-trip journey. Now the villages in Maungtaw, including Ngakhura, are to be done in the second batch, and local Rakhine people, Hindus and Islamists are living together peacefully. Obviously, they share the same market and school in the region.

In implementing the tasks under the UEHRD programme, there are two pieces of news to share — one is eager desire to show that not only local nationals but also the whole populace across the nation are giving support wholeheartedly, and the other is to show that there is no discrimination, as alleged by some.

Transportation

In line with task force's objectives, measures are taken to rapidly organize its resources and donations to contribute its infrastructure and construction resources to this project. After the completion of the main roads, transportation from Sittwe to Maungtaw will take a much shorter time, and this will bring about many benefits to the region.

The new road will significantly cut down the travel time in transporting urgent supplies and materials to the region to aid in current redevelopment efforts.

In addition, the completed road is expected to facilitate smoother and more efficient movement of border trade, particularly since Maungtaw Border Trade Zone is one of the key border trade gateways which actively trade agricultural and industrial products throughout the year. With improved transport and accessibility, this also means the region will also benefit from more potential development, job creation, and greater economic prosperity and improved living standards. AWF is proud to play a role towards the broader macro-economic plans for Rakhine state's development into a special economic and industrial zone in the future.

Sending voluntary and receiving assistance

Under the arrangement of Dr. Win Myat Aye (Vice President of UEHRD), voluntary youths will be sent in order to give humanitarian assistance to Rakhine after careful planning and training. They are just private citizens who wish to give assistance and make donations to the needy.

The UEHRD will implement to provide humanitarian assistance to the refugees who went over to Bangladesh and to arrange resettlement of the ethnic nationals, Hindus and other local ethnic people living in Rakhine. Local people are in desperate need of in better situations such as the housing, the roads, the water supply, the electricity supply, health care, and education sectors. The UEHRD has welcomed positive assistance from all the countries of the world, especially the neighbouring countries and the developed ones. Effective measures are being made to share the necessary assistance via the diplomatic channel or diplomatic missions abroad. The donors can offer in the form of assistance will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Only if the whole populace collectively cooperates will success be gained. Especially now, it is time for the praiseworthy deeds of youths, the future generation, to wholeheartedly contribute their voluntary labours and withstand all the hardships.

Translated by Win Ko Ko Aung

How to spend summer holidays effectively

By Maung Thaung Win (Ex-diplomat)

As the wintry weather is on the wane, the daytime temperature is on the increase. The final exams in schools at the academic year are over, paving the way for schoolchildren to start a long summer holiday across the country. They are expected to be resolute in their demands for leisure and recreation as well as fun and games. But due to the prevailing conditions, they will not be in a position to have chances of leisure and fun to the full. Contrarily, their parents have already made inquiries about various training courses including three-month crash course and others.

Let them take a rest

After taking a rest, schoolchildren should be advised to attend training coursed in which they are greatly interested. If they are sent to one training course after another, these activities might cause health hazard to them. Recreational activities such as study tours and going on a pilgrimage will increase knowledge for them.

Visiting grandparent in far-flung corners of the country will give them some sort of pleasure; after all, paying respect to elders is highly appreciated in Myanmar society.

Many training courses

In summer in Myanmar, many training courses of English, computer, swimming, taekwondo and first aid are open; so are the classes on culture and religion. Parents will have to decide which class is suitable for their children. At the same time their hobby and wish should not be ignored. Parents should send them to cultural and religious classes so that they come to know about the Buddhism and our culture, letting them distinguish from good from bad. From these classes, the children are expected to get acquainted with the Buddha, Dharma,and the Sangha and related attributes, scriptures, precepts and suttas about the Buddhism. Parents want their children to lead a moral life, to show moral courage and responsibility in their daily routines. For example , Myanmar youths are required to serve food to elders as a gesture of respect and make obeisance to their parents before going to bed.

English language classes

As English is becoming the lingua franca of the world, schoolchildren should attend these classes because all the subjects are generally printed in Emglish. People with English language skills could handle latest technological changes in the modern world. English language experts have their passionate belief what they are doing. Contrarily, those who are illiterate in English are surely far left behind. Youths of today will become future leaders in the fields of politics, religion, science and academia and their language skills are indispensable for meeting and discussing with their international counterparts.

A course in computing

These days schoolchildren are required to be computer-literate. Computers are widely used as indispensable tools in offices, science, technology, inventions , industrial and commercial sectors throughout the world. Sending messages and photos through emails are downloaded by using computers which are commonly used for composition and typing.

So computer literacy is also important for schoolchildren.

Swimming

Schoolchildren are usually booked in Swimming Clubs by their parents before the final exams. After all, swimming is a good exercise as it involves breathing, kicking with your legs and stroking with your arms. It is dependable when your ship happens in rough seas. The writer didn't have a chance to learn about swimming in the Swimming Clubs ;he tried to learn in the flowing Ayeyawady rather than in still water in the swimming pools. Whether the style is systematic or not , he could swim well either in a river or in a pool. I persuaded my kids to go to religious and cultural classes rather to expensive swimming pools.

The writer used to attend to the needs of plots of farmland during his young days. Upon arrival at the farmland, he had to help his parents cut grass and tie up into a bundle, weed out the weakest plnats and pick fruit from tall trees.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our children should be given a chance of having full rest and recreation before them to suitable training courses.

Mathematics and English training courses for them should be prioritized for coming academic year ; other subjects can be regularly studied at schools. Parents should avoid sending them to the above classes without consulting their kids. Sending them in a very ostentatious manner to the training courses is tantamount to a wasteful use of energy for the kids and waste of money for their parents.

Translated by Arakan Sein

Putin promises 'victories' for Russia at star-studded rally

MOSCOW — President Vladimir Putin on Saturday promised "victories" for Russia at a star-studded rally attended by tens of thousands of supporters ahead of a 18 March election he is all but certain to win.

Olympic athletes, celebrities and cosmonauts earlier took to the stage to voice their support for Putin, who has ruled Russia for almost two decades and is seeking to extend his Kremlin term to 2024.

"We want our country to be bright and looking to the future, for our children and grandchildren...we will do everything we can for them to be happy," he told the cheering crowd at Moscow's Luzhniki stadium.

"Nobody else will do this for us. And if we do this, the coming decade and the whole 21st century will be marked by our bright victories," he said.

Organizers said around 100,000 people were expected to attend the event.

An AFP journalist estimated around 80,000 people were in the stadium before the rally began.

Putin on Thursday set the course for a new arms race with Washington as he boasted of a new generation of "invincible" Russian weapons developed in response to recent actions by the United States.

Boosted by a slavish media and foreign military adventures like the annexation of Crimea in 2014, his approval rating remains sky-high and official polls suggest he will take almost 70 per cent of the vote this month.—AFP ■

Putin President Vladimir Putin said the 21st century would be "bright" with Russian victories, at a star-studded election rally. **PHOTO: AFP**

British PM admits 'hard facts' in Brexit trade deal

LONDON — British Prime Minister Theresa May called on Friday for a wide-ranging free trade deal with the EU after Brexit, but admitted it was time to face the "hard facts" about the economic consequences of leaving the bloc.

In a detailed speech just weeks before starting negotiations on the future partnership with Brussels, May confirmed Britain would leave the European Union's single market and customs union after Brexit in March 2019.

In its place she called for the "broadest and deepest possible agreement, covering more sectors and co-operating more fully than any free trade agreement anywhere in the world today".

But she acknowledged for the first time that Britain may suffer new trade barriers by severing its formal ties, a move driven by a desire to end mass migration and throw off EU rules.

"I want to be straight with people because the reality is we all need to face up to some hard facts... In certain ways our access to each other's markets will be different," she said.

The EU's chief negotiator Michel Barnier welcomed the "clarity" on Britain's position, as well as "a recognition of trade-offs".

He said her proposals would inform the bloc's guidelines, which are expected to be drawn up next week before being approved by EU leaders at a summit in three week's time.

British Prime Minister Theresa May has acknowledged for the first time that Britain may suffer new trade barriers after leaving the EU. **PHOTO: AFP**

'Cherry-picking'

In a speech in London, May suggested the new trade deal would include "binding commitments" to agree some regulations such as on state aid and competition.

She repeated that she wanted to end the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, insisting there must be an independent arbiter of the agreement.

But in a bid to maintain "as frictionless as possible" trade in goods, May promised to commit to some regulations and minimum standards, while reserving the option for Britain to diverge.

The EU has previously dismissed the bespoke approach as "cherry-picking", but May pointed out that each of the bloc's existing trade deals with other countries was slightly different.

May's Conservative government is divided on how closely Britain should align with the EU, but a leading eurosceptic, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, was quick to back her speech.

The plan would keep close ties but allow Britain "to innovate, to set our own agenda, to make our own laws and to do ambitious free trade deals around the world", he said on Twitter.

However, opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn accused the government of presiding over "20 wasted months".

"Theresa May has again failed to bring clarity to the negotiations — and worryingly, she admitted that her approach will reduce our access to European markets," he wrote on Twitter.

'Time is short'

EU leaders have been sharply critical of the prime minister's optimistic view of what she could achieve, but had been pressing for details as the start of formal negotiations comes closer.

Talks on the terms of the withdrawal and a transition period are already underway, and Britain hopes a trade deal can be agreed by the end of the year.

John Springford, deputy director of the Centre for European Reform, said May had "advanced a plan that the EU will not accept".

"We are heading for something much more economically damaging — unless she changes her red lines."

May has ruled out staying in the single market or a customs union with the EU because it would stop Britain signing outside trade deals.

Following May's speech, Irish premier Leo Varadkar said he remains "concerned that some of the constraints of leaving the customs union and the single market are still not fully recognised".

Warning "time is short", he urged Britain to present "more detailed and realistic proposals".

Northern Ireland will have Britain's only land border with the EU after Brexit, as the Republic of Ireland is remaining in the bloc, and all parties want to avoid a hard border, over fears it could upset the island's fragile peace.

Earlier this week tensions rose when the EU published a draft treaty suggesting Northern Ireland could stay in a customs union while the rest of Britain remained outside.

The proposal is a fall-back option if London fails to come up with a better solution to avoid new customs checks with EU-member Ireland.

But May reacted with outrage, and repeated Friday that she would "not allow anything that would damage the integrity of our precious Union".

She insisted that it was possible to avoid physical checks through technology and schemes such as trusted trader programmes, although is yet to publish detailed proposals.—AFP ■

Dozens dead in attacks on Burkina military HQ, French embassy

OUAGADOUGOU, (Burkina Faso) — Dozens of people were killed on Friday in twin attacks on the French embassy in Burkina Faso and the country's military headquarters, an assault that coincided with a meeting of regional anti-jihadist forces.

The apparently coordinated attacks underlined the struggle the fragile West African nation faces in containing a bloody and growing jihadist insurgency.

The government said the attack on the military was a suicide car bombing and that a planned meeting of the G5 Sahel regional anti-terrorism force may have been the target.

Officials from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger were at the meeting, representing the G5 Sahel nations who have launched a joint military force to combat jihadists on the southern rim of the Sahara.

Eight members of the armed forces were killed by the blast and the parallel attack on the French embassy, while 80 were wounded, said Security Minister Clement Sawadogo. The minister said eight attackers had been shot dead.

"The vehicle was packed with explosives" and caused "huge damage", Sawadogo said, adding that it was a suicide attack.

Three security sources, two in France and one in West Africa, told AFP that at least 28 people were killed in the attack on the military HQ alone.

French government sources said there were no French casualties and described the situation in Ouagadougou as "under control".

"Our country was once again the target of dark forces," President Roch Marc Christian Kabore said in a statement.

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

The violence began mid-morning when heavy gunfire broke out in the centre of the Burkinabe capital.

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

At the same time, the bomb went off near the headquarters of the Burkinabe armed forces and the French cultural centre, about a kilometre (half a mile) from the site of the first attack, other witnesses said.

Sawadogo said the G5 meeting was supposed to have been held at the headquarters but had been moved to another room.

"Perhaps it was the target. We do not know at the moment. In any case the room was literally destroyed by the explosion," the minister said.

- 'Strengthen our resolve' -

The G5 Sahel's completed force will be composed of 5,000 troops and aims to be fully operational by the end of the month.

It has already carried out operations against jihadist fighters with help from the French army.

Mahamadou Issoufou, Niger's president and the current chair of the group, said Friday's attacks "will only strengthen the resolve of the G5-Sahel and its allies in the fight against terrorism".

French President Emmanuel Macron telephoned his Burkinabe counterpart Kabore to express solidarity and send his condolences to the families of the slain security force members, his office said.

Macron, who made a high-profile visit to Burkina Faso in November, said the attacks "illustrate once more the threat weighing on the entire Sahel region".

French foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said damage to the embassy was minor, and the mission would be able to resume normal operations "in two or three days".

Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is on a visit to neighbouring Mali, "strongly condemned" the attack while UN chief Antonio Guterres called for an "urgent and concerted effort" to improve stability in the Sahel.

An interim UN report seen by AFP warned of a "growing threat" to the Sahel from two groups: the Islamic State in the Great Sahara (ISGS) and Ansar al-Islam.

- 'Overtones of terrorism' -

There was no immediate claim of responsibility but Burkina Information Minister Remis Fulgance Dandjinou said the attack "has strong overtones of terrorism".

Burkina Faso has a history of military-backed coups as well as jihadist attacks.

The insurgency in the region 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 wounding 21. No one has so far claimed responsibility for that attack.

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.

That attack was claimed by the Al-Qaeda-linked Al-Murabitoun group, which was led by the one-eyed Algerian jihadist Mokhtar Belmokhtar.

A group called Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) also said some of its militants were involved.

- Joint Sahel force -

France, the former colonial power in the Sahel region, has deployed 4,000 troops to support the G5 joint force.

On 21 February, two members of the French counter-terrorism force were killed by a landmine near Mali's border with Niger and Burkina Faso. Twelve French soldiers have died since the campaign — called Operation Barkhane — was launched in August 2014.

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.—AFP ■

Turkey arrests two Greek soldiers 'on espionage charges'

ANKARA — A Turkish court on Friday placed two Greek soldiers under arrest on espionage charges after they illegally crossed into Turkey, state media reported, in a move that risks a new flaring of tensions between Ankara and Athens.

The court in the western province of Edirne ordered the pair be charged with "attempted military espionage" and "entering forbidden military territory", state news agency Anadolu said.

The Greek army said the two soldiers lost their way in poor weather while patrolling the area around the Evros river that separates the two countries.

The soldiers also said they got lost because of the weather conditions.

Vassilis Beletsiotis, spokesman for the Greek general staff, told AFP they were not accused of spying.

"The image we have is that the two soldiers are accused of entering the forbidden military zone but are not accused of attempted espionage," he said.

According to Anadolu, Turkish police seized the men's rifles and the two men said in statements to the prosecutor that they took images on their mobile phones to send to senior Greek military officials.

"There was no fighting and (the soldiers) are currently in Edirne," said Greek army spokesman Nikolaos Fanios, adding the pair were in good health.

Greek government spokesperson Dimitris Tzanakopoulos earlier said that the case was one of "illegal entry" and said Athens expected the "imminent return" of the two Greek officers.

- Uneasy allies -

The two soldiers were remanded in custody which means they are to stay in prison ahead of trial, a date for which has yet to be set.

Turkey and Greece are historic foes whose peoples have for centuries battled for supremacy in the Aegean region, and over the last decades have come to the brink of war on several occasions.

But they have also been allies in NATO since 1952 and Athens has over the last years been one of the most enthusiastic supporters of Ankara's bid to join the European Union.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in December made the first visit by a Turkish head of state to Greece in 65 years in a symbol of more cordial ties.

However the visit was overshadowed by a broadside by Erdogan in front of Greek President Prokopis Pavlopoulos as he called for the revision of the post World War I treaty that set Greece and Turkey's modern borders. —AFP ■

Su-57 stealth fighter jet. **PHOTO: TASS**

Su-57 fifth-generation fighter jets successfully tested in Syria

MOSCOW — Two Sukhoi Su-57 stealth fighter jets have successfully completed a two-day programme of tests in Syria, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu told reporters on Thursday.

"Indeed, they were there for a while. Two days. During that time, they completed a programme of trials, including combat ones," Shoigu said. "I can say that the trials were success and the planes returned home a week ago." "There were two planes escorted by flying laboratories and test beds monitoring the parameters of weapons work," the defence minister continued.

Commenting on the satellite images, uploaded on the Internet, allegedly featuring the Su-57 fighter jets, Shoigu said, "As for various satellite photos, I can state that now is not the year of 1995 and such planes are never located side by side." "I am unaware where the released images were taken as the jets were kept in hangars throughout [the mission]," the minister said.

The Su-57 (PAK FA) performed its maiden flight in 2010. On 5 December, it made the first flight with a new engine. Currently, the plane is equipped with the so-called stage-on engine 117C. The new engine has been given no name so far and is conventionally referred to as "stage-two engine." It was reported in August 2017 that Russia's the PAK FA fifth-generation fighter jet had received the serial index of Su-57. The experimental design work on the most advanced fighter jet should be completed in 2019 and its deliveries to the troops should begin at that time.—Tass ■

Int'l cooperation agreed on Lunar, Mars probes at space forum

TOKYO — Ministers and representatives from 45 nations and space organizations agreed on Saturday on international cooperation on their potential joint space probes to the Moon, Mars and other planets in the solar system.

The joint statement, issued after the International Space Exploration Forum held in Tokyo, said the participants confirmed the importance of international cooperation and preserving the space environment for future generations, in the wake of successive developments in space exploration by emerging countries and startups.

The agreement said sustainable probes, regardless of whether they are manned or not, should be aimed at curbing disorderly developments while encouraging the expansion of space exploration.

The participants in the ministerial-level forum also shared the view that investment in space probes will further develop pioneering technology and boost business opportunities, vowing to use outer space for peaceful purposes and share scientific data obtained by their respective probes.

"Developed technology, experience and creditability should further enhance international (space) cooperation. It will be so great that astronauts of every country land on the Moon," Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said in a video message.

"We made a big achievement, heralding a new era of international (space) probes," said Yoshimasa Hayashi, Japanese minister of education, culture, sports, science and technology at the closing.

The next international forum on space exploration is scheduled to be held in Italy in 2021.—Kyodo News ■

Italian election campaign enters home straight

ROME — Italy's rival political parties made a final bid for votes on Friday ahead of an election in which former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi is gunning for a leading role in shaping any new government. The anti-establishment Five Star Movement, the anti-immigration League party — allied with the 81-year-old Berlusconi — and the ruling centre-left Democratic Party held their final rallies before Sunday's election.

The campaign has been dominated by concerns about immigration and the far-right is expected to make major gains, while the populist Five Star Movement is also likely to score well. "Tonight the era of opposition finishes, and the era of Five Star Movement government begins!" said leader Luigi Di Maio at their rally in Rome's Piazza del Popolo on Friday. The Five Star Movement's fiery rhetoric has earned them followers among the many in Italy who feel alienated from politics. "I did not vote for a long time but I started to follow the movement from the beginning," says party activist Marco Becchi, who is 31 and from Rome.

"They gave me hope, a reason to vote again and believe in this country." However despite their supporters' enthusiasm the final polls in the election indicate that Berlusconi's four-party right-wing alliance will win the most votes after his promises to expel 600,000 "irregular" migrants and slash taxes. The 81-year-old Berlusconi, whose career has been shadowed by sex scandals and court cases, cannot himself hold elected office because of a fraud conviction. But on Thursday he unveiled European Parliament President Antonio Tajani, a close ally since the tycoon first entered politics in the early 1990s, as his choice for prime minister if he wins.

'The League will govern'

Berlusconi's coalition on Thursday held its first and last joint campaign event in a bid to dispel rumours of severe divisions between Berlusconi and eurosceptic League leader Matteo Salvini. Salvini has prime ministerial ambitions of his own and has indicated that he should receive the nomination if his party wins more votes than Berlusconi's Forza Italia (Go Italy). "From Monday, the League will govern this country!", Salvini said at his final campaign rally in Milan.

The slow recovery has been another major issue in the campaign and Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni of the centre-left Democratic Party got a welcome boost on Thursday from some positive results. Economic growth for last year was revised up to 1.5 per cent from a previous estimate of 1.4 per cent and the public deficit fell to 1.9 per cent of GDP — its lowest level in a decade. But many Italians say they are not feeling the effects of economic recovery and gross domestic product is still 5.7 per cent lower than at the start of the global financial crisis in 2008. "Whatever the election outcome, I don't believe anything will change," said Imma Arco, a 28-year-old pharmacy graduate from Naples who is moving to Britain to further her career. All the main parties have promised to tackle a sharp growth in poverty in what is one of Europe's most unequal societies.

Their proposed measures range from a universal basic income put forward by the Five Star Movement, to promises of an official minimum wage from the Democratic Party which has warned of the need to maintain budgetary discipline.

Campaign clashes

Italy has a new complex electoral system in place — a mixture of proportional representation and first-past-the-post — which makes the outcome of this vote particularly difficult to predict.

Analysts have said the three main possible scenarios are an outright victory by Berlusconi's grouping, a grand coalition between him and the Democratic Party or a more temporary government formed with the guidance of President Sergio Mattarella.

Commentators have warned over the harsh anti-immigration tone of the campaign, which has seen numerous clashes between anti-fascist and far-right activists across the country.

The atmosphere soured particularly after a racially motivated attack on 3 February by a far-right gunman in the central city of Macerata that left six African migrants injured.—AFP ■

China's top political advisory body starts annual session

BEIJING — China's top political advisory body started its annual session on Saturday afternoon in Beijing, vowing to take on new mission for the country's goal toward a "great modern socialist country."

Yu Zhengsheng, chairman of the 12th Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) National Committee, delivered a work report to 2,149 political advisors who gathered to discuss major political, economic and social issues in the world's most populous nation and second largest economy.

"We will focus our advice and efforts on the main issues in securing a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and embarking on a journey to fully build a modern socialist China," Yu said. Xi Jinping and other Chinese leaders attended the opening meeting at the Great Hall of the People. Summarizing the work and experience over the past five years, Yu said the CPPCC should remain committed to its nature as "an important platform for all Chinese political parties, social organizations, and people from all ethnic groups and all sectors of society to work together and participate in the deliberation of state affairs in a democratic manner."

He stressed that the top political advisory body shall uphold the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC). In regards to its future work, the CPPCC would give top priority to studying and applying Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, and earnestly study the new thinking on and requirements for the patriotic united front and the CPPCC, Yu said. "We will promote the ready acceptance of the leadership of the CPC among all political parties, social groups, and people of all ethnic groups and from all social sectors that participate in the CPPCC, and firmly uphold the core position of General Secretary Xi Jinping," he noted. The CPPCC would consolidate a shared political foundation for concerted efforts, sharpen the political advisors' skills across the board, and improve the institutions, standards and procedures for the performance of its functions, he said.

The first session of the 13th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) opens at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, capital of China on 3 March, 2018. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

In a report on proposals, Wan Gang, vice chairperson of the 12th CPPCC National Committee, said over the past five years, a total of 29,378 proposals had been submitted by the CPPCC National Committee members, and 99 per cent of them had been handled up to 20 February this year. "Most of the proposals have either been taken up or put into practice gradually," Wan said.—Xinhua ■

India, Viet Nam sign pacts on atomic energy, trade, agriculture

NEW DELHI — India and Viet Nam on Saturday signed three key memorandums of understanding (MoUs) in areas like economic and trade cooperation, agricultural exchanges, and atomic energy for peaceful purposes.

The pacts were inked between the two sides in the presence of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and visiting Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang. Quang is in India on a three-day state visit from March 2-4. He held bilateral and delegation level talks with the Indian premier here on Saturday.

According to an official release issued by India's external affairs ministry, the two sides signed an MoU on cooperation between India's Global Centre of Nuclear Energy Partnership and the Viet Nam Atomic Energy Institute.

The purpose of this MoU is to strengthen the technical cooperation in the field of atomic energy for peaceful purposes between the two nations.

The purpose of the MoU on economic and trade cooperation is to establish a framework for trade and economic relations between the two sides.

The two countries also signed a work plan for the years 2018-2022 between the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and Viet Nam's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

The work plan is to promote cooperation in transfer of technology and exchange of visits of technical experts in the fields of agriculture. —Xinhua ■

Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang (L) shakes hands with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi before their meeting at Hyderabad House in New Delhi, capital of India on 3 March, 2018. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

Cambodia's ruling party wins all seats in Senate: official result

PHNOM PENH — Cambodia's ruling party won all the seats at stake in a Senate election held last month, according to the official results announced on Saturday by the National Election Committee. The results showed that the Cambodian People's Party of Prime Minister Hun Sen won all 58 seats up for grabs.

Two seats in the 62-seat chamber will be filled through appointments by King Norodom Sihamoni and another two by the lower house.

Four parties that fielded candidates — the CPP, the royalist FUNCINPEC party, the Cambodian Youth Party, and the National Unity for Khmer Party — are mostly supporters of Hun Sen, who has been in power since 1985. No opposition party took part in the 25 February election following the government-engineered dissolution of the Cambodia National Rescue Party, the country's second most powerful party, last November.

In the previous Senate election in 2012, the CPP won 46 seats and the opposition Sam Rainsy Party won 11 seats.

The CNRP has protested the election and appealed to all foreign friends of Cambodia not to recognize the elec — results and to help restore democracy in Cambodia. Senate members sit for six-year terms. The more powerful lower house holds elections every five years, with the next expected to be held this summer. —Kyodo News ■

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Five things to watch on Oscars night

HOLLYWOOD, United States — l eyes will be on the battle for Oscars supremacy between "The Shape of Water" and "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri" on Sunday.

But if there's one thing previous ceremonies have demonstrated, it's that it's a good idea never to expect the expected on Hollywood's biggest night.

Here are five things to watch for:

The specter of 'Envelopegate'

It may have been the most embarrassing flub in Oscars history, but don't expect host Jimmy Kimmel to shy away from mining "Envelopegate" for comedy gold at the Academy's expense.

The embarrassing mix-up at last year's show saw the best picture Oscar incorrectly given to musical "La La Land" before the actual winner, coming-of-age drama "Moonlight," was finally handed the prize.

Accountants for PricewaterhouseCoopers, the firm responsible for tabulating Oscar ballots, had handed Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway the wrong envelope.

Oscar watchers expect the mistake, which made for a chaotic end to the film industry's biggest night, to be fodder for both Kimmel's opening monologue and jokes from the presenters.

Faye Dunaway and Warren Beatty walked out at the 2017 Oscars to present the award for best picture – and chaos ensued when it emerged they had the wrong envelope – and announced the wrong winner. **PHOTO: AFP**

Fantasy romance "The Shape of Water" and dark crime comedy "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri" are expected to compete for top honors at the Oscars on Sunday. **PHOTO: AFP**

Filmmakers Guillermo del Toro (L) and Martin McDonagh (R) – shown here at the Golden Globes after party in January – are expected to battle for Oscars glory with their films "The Shape of Water" and "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri". **PHOTO: AFP**

Singer Mary J Blige is one of several Oscars trailblazers, becoming the first person nominated for acting and songwriting in the same film. **PHOTO: AFP**

E! News personality Ryan Seacrest – shown here at the 60th Grammy Awards in January in New York – has denied allegations of sexual harassment made by his former stylist, but A-listers may avoid him on the Oscars red carpet. **PHOTO: AFP**

Best picture photo finish

"The Shape of Water," Guillermo del Toro's much-admired Cold War-era fairy tale love story, goes into the Oscars with the most nominations — 13 — compared to just seven for its main rival, "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri."

But Martin McDonagh's "Three Billboards," an early favorite in the prestigious best picture race, has weathered a backlash against its treatment of race issues to launch a late assault on the statuette.

It has regained its status as the narrow frontrunner at odds of 13/10 against 2/1 for "The Shape of Water," according to awards prediction website Gold Derby.

Every Oscars ceremony serves up some shocks, however, so don't count out "Get Out," the third favorite ahead of outsiders "Lady Bird" and "Dunkirk."

#MeToo and Time's Up

The #MeToo and Time's Up movements — against sexual misconduct and gender inequality, respectively — have featured prominently in the awards season, inspiring many powerful speeches and turning the red carpet into a sea of symbolic black dresses at the Golden Globes and the Baftas.

While there is no official repeat planned, some actresses have indicated they will again wear black in support of #MeToo on Sunday.

Ryan Seacrest, an Academy Awards mainstay interviewing the rich and famous on the red carpet for E! News, is facing his own backlash following allegations of repeated sexual harassment from a former stylist.

The channel is standing by Seacrest, host of ABC's "American Idol" and "Live With Kelly and Ryan," and says he'll be on the red carpet as usual.

Oscar rarities and firsts

Don't be alarmed if you hear glass ceilings shattering at this year's Oscars, with numerous breakthroughs to cheer among the nominees.

"Mudbound" director Dee Rees is the first black woman nominated for best adapted screenplay, while her director of photography Rachel Morrison is the first woman to be nominated for best cinematography.

"Mudbound" scored another first, with soul diva Mary J Blige the first person nominated for acting and best original song in the same film.

Yance Ford ("Strong Island") is the first openly transgender director ever nominated, and Jordan Peele ("Get Out") is the first black filmmaker nominated for directing, writing, and producing.

He is also only the fifth black person ever nominated for best director — after John Singleton, Lee Daniels, Steve McQueen and Barry Jenkins — and could be the first to win.

Greta Gerwig ("Lady Bird") is the fifth woman in history nominated for best director" and the first to land the nod for a directorial debut.

Other firsts include a superhero film nominated for best adapted screenplay ("Logan") and the first person over the age of 87 to be nominated for an acting award — Christopher Plummer in "All the Money in the World."

Hosting test for Kimmel

Comedian and late-night host Jimmy Kimmel will preside over the Oscars for the second consecutive time, with critics tuning in to see how he navigates the tricky balancing act of being funny without making light of the #MeToo victims.

Keeping the more than three-hour show — usually the most-watched non-sports telecast each year in the United States — upbeat in a year overshadowed by allegations of sexual assault will also be a tough challenge. The "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" host was presenting last year when Beatty and Dunaway wrongly gave best picture to "La La Land" instead of rightful winner "Moonlight" after being handed the wrong envelope.

"We were like, we have 10 seconds to say goodbye, we don't know how long the speech is going to be, and it affects your rating in a very negative way if you go on past midnight," Kimmel recalled in an interview with news portal AZ Central.

"And then all of a sudden it was like, 'Forget midnight. This might go on into 'Good Morning America.'"—AFP ■

Railway operators use local attractions to draw foreign tourists

TOKYO — Japanese railway operators are making the most of local sightseeing spots along their routes to attract more foreign tourists, with social media proving an excellent promotional tool.

At Gotokuji Temple located on Tokyu Corp's Setagaya Line in Tokyo, foreign tourists snapped shots of a cluster of "Maneki-neko" beckoning-cat dolls. The temple is known for its extensive collection of the beckoning cats, a good-luck charm believed to bring prosperity to shop owners in Japan.

After visiting the Setagaya-Hachimangu shrine near the temple, the tourists appeared to have enjoyed their time in the residential area of the capital, some saying they felt like they got a taste of "ordinary Japan."

Tokyu has promoted local sightseeing spots in cooperation with Huber Inc, a tech venture offering a service that matches tourists with Japanese guides.

"I thought there are few sightseeing spots, but there was some buried treasure," said a Tokyu official about the area around the 5-kilometre Setagaya line tram that is mainly used by local commuters and students.

Seeing social media posts by foreigners, Japanese tourists to the area also increased, raising the overall number of Setagaya Line passengers, the operator said. "Visits to quiet areas reminiscent of old Japan have been catching on as tourists appreciate the contrast between those locations and the popular scramble crossing in the bustling Shibuya district, reachable within 30 minutes," the official said.

Railway companies in western Japan are also making a pitch to foreign travelers.

Hankyu Hanshin Holdings Inc, a train operator in the Kansai region, has been selling one-day and two-day passes for foreign tourists since 2012, offering unlimited travel on all lines operating in the Kyoto, Osaka and Kobe areas. Sales soared from about 20,000 passes in fiscal 2012 to some 440,000 in fiscal 2016.

Leisure facilities in Mt Rokko in Kobe, easily accessible from downtown, are anticipated to draw more inbound travelers. "A ski slope with artificial snow near Kyoto and Osaka is a popular choice for enjoying a bit of snow, in addition to a cable car service which is rare in other Asian countries," said a Hankyu Hanshin official. Nankai Electric Railway Co, which runs trains between Osaka and its neighboring prefecture of Wakayama, will open a new hotel and shopping mall adjacent to its Wakayama City Station in 2020. "We want to increase demand from inbound visitors," said a Nankai official, as Kansai International Airport, the leading gateway to western Japan, is closer to Wakayama city than the Umeda district in Osaka's city center. An open-air bath will be built on the top floor of the planned hotel, offering visitors a view of a local river while they relax. English — and Chinese-speaking staff will also be on hand at the hotel.—Kyodo News ■

Photo taken on 16 September, 2017, shows foreign tourists taking pictures of a cluster of "Maneki-neko" beckoning-cat figurines at Gotokuji Temple located on Tokyu Corp.'s Setagaya Line in Tokyo. The Temple is known for its extensive collection of the beckoning cats, a good-luck charm believed to bring prosperity to shop owners in Japan. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

Photo exhibition highlights decades of Japanese Antarctic expeditions

TOKYO — A large-scale photo exhibition on six decades of Japanese Antarctic expeditions opened at Tokyo International Forum on Saturday, detailing wonders such as the discovery of an ozone hole in the Earth's southernmost continent.

On display at the exhibition are more than 120 photos, including the opening of Syowa (spelled as Showa today) Station on East Ongul Island in 1957, the miraculous survival of two Karafuto dogs (Siberian huskies) — Taro and Jiro — in 1959 after being left behind a year before at the unmanned station and the initial discovery of meteorites in 1969.

Other photos show the arrival of Japanese explorers at the South Pole in 1968 and the tip of Shirase Glacier in 2017, as well as Adelie penguins.

The two-week exhibition, titled "60 Years of Japanese Antarctic Research Expedition — A news agency as eyewitness," traces the history of Japanese Antarctic research expeditions, divided into six chapters — challenges, base, life, nature, creatures and observation.

Chapter 6 titled "Observation: Window to Past and Future" says in part, "There have been many discoveries about the Earth's past in Antarctica. It is a time capsule of the Earth, so to speak."

"The ice sheets that cover the Antarctic Continent preserve seamless data about past climate changes such as temperatures and carbon dioxide density in the last hundreds of thousands of years." The nonprofit Japan Press Research Institute organized the exhibition in cooperation with the National Institute of Polar Research and Kyodo News. —Kyodo News ■

Foreign tourists look at photos of Adelie penguins and other scenes on the opening day of a photo exhibition on Japanese Antarctic expeditions at Tokyo International Forum on 3 March, 2018. **PHOTO: KYODO**

Panama's tourism award in China shows growing Chinese interest in Panama

PANAMA CITY — The government of Panama on Friday said it was taking a tourism prize it won in China, during the Guangzhou International Travel Fair, as a sign of growing Chinese interest to discover the country.

The award was received by Panama's tourism minister, Gustavo Him, and its ambassador to China, Francisco Carlo Escobar.

Him is leading a Panamanian mission to China which started last Monday to seek to increase the country's profile among Chinese travellers, as well as to continue working on the deals signed between both sides since diplomatic relations were established in June 2017.

Nine Panamanian companies are taking part in the fair in Guangzhou while the Panama National Folkloric Dance Company performed at its inauguration.

"It is being shown that the Chinese market has an interest in discovering Panama and its folklore, history, nature, gastronomy, shopping and one of the most important engineering works in the world: the Canal," said Him.

The Panamanian ambassador to China said that the tourism links between the two countries were developing and that the opening in April of the first Air China flight from Beijing to Panama City would facilitate multi-destination tourism.

Escobar added that the status of approved destination given by China to Panama "is evidence of our deep cooperation with the Chinese people and a lasting friendship."

Escobar said that Chinese citizens with valid visas for the US, Australia and Canada could enter Panama. "This measure is applied by other countries in the region with the opportunity to develop multi-destination packages with tour operators," he said. —Xinhua ■

Summer sport training course opened in Nay Pyi Taw

AN opening ceremony for summer sports training courses was held yesterday in Nay Pyi Taw Union Territory.

The training courses are jointly organized by the Ministry of Health and Sports and the Ministry of Education.

The summer course is aimed at grooming new young athletes in order for them to improve their physical skills at different sports so they can ultimately achieve success for their country, U Myo Hlaing, director general of the Sports and Physical Education Department said in his opening speech.

The summer sport training courses occur annually in each township throughout Myanmar as a national level sport movement, he said.

The summer course in Nay Pyi Taw features eight kinds of sports: Sepak Takraw, Taekwondo, track and field events, volleyball, football, Myanmar martial arts, Karate and Wushu. More than 4000 students will participate in the training programs that are taking place at the schools and township athlete fields.

The first group of courses opened on 23 February and run until 6 March while the second group opened on 27 February and run until to 12 March. —Myanmar Digital News ■

A girl shows her slow motion martial arts performance at the summer sport training course in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. **PHOTO: KYI SOE LIN**

Yangon United suffers first 2018 defeat to Magwe

YANGON United lost their first match of the year yesterday, coming up short against Magwe by a score of 0-1 at Thuwanna Stadium in Yangon.

Magwe deserved the win, with all its Myanmar players executing and tackling well. Throughout most of the match, Magwe controlled the ball and passed crisply.

Magwe FC lined up with goalkeeper KyawZinPhyo, Win Moe Kyaw, SwanHtetAung, Nanda Kyaw, SoeLwinLwin, Mg MgSoe, ZeyarNaing, KyawSwar Lin, LwinMyoAung, NaingNaingKyaw and AungMyint Tun.

Yangon lined up with goalie KyawZinHtet, PyaePhyoZaw, David Htan,Kyi Lin, Mg MgLwin, SekouSylla, KyawZinOo, Kosuke Yamazaki, AeeSoe, Kekere-Moukailou and Kyaw Min Oo.

Although Yangon used speedy play at the beginning, its strikers could neither penetrate their opponents defence line. Though there were goal chances, neither team scored in the first half.

Magwe's strikers seemed intimidated at first in competing against Yangon's better-known players. But a few minutes into the match, Magwe's play improved.

The young defenders of Magwe proved to be too strong in their defenceline, blocking the ball well against Yangon's strikers. In the second half, Magwe played better and Yangon's defence worsened. Adding to Yangon's woes was an injury to their main goalkeeper in the first half that required a substitute goalie to replace him during the second half. The substitute goalie, Min Thu, who came in at the 37-minute mark, did his best, but could not stop a shot by Magwe star Cho Tun at the 86-minute mark.

The winning goal was a beauty, set up by a slow ground-pass that was kicked by Cho Tun under Yangon's new keeper.

Yangon had a chance to tie the score, but Yangon's Mg MgLwin could not find the net with his kick far from the goal just before the final whistle.

Even with the loss, Yangon retains in first place in the MNL with six wins, one draw and one loss for 19 points, while Magwe jumps to second place with five wins, two draws and one loss with 17 points.—Kyaw Zin Lin ■

Players form Yangon and Magwe FC vie for the ball in yesterday's MNL match at Thuwunna Stadium. **PHOTO:MNL**

Traditional Lethwei courses to be offered in Yangon

WITH the aim of preserving Myanmar Traditional Lethwei, Lethwei courses will be launched in Yangon Region starting from 12 March to 6 April, according to the statement on the Myanmar Traditional Boxing Federation website.

Lethwei courses will be conducted during the summer holidays because the programme is looking not only for adults but also for teenagers to pursue the sport, said an official from Myanmar Lethwei.

The coordination meeting for launching the lethwei courses was made on 21 February at Theinphyu Indoor Stadium in Yangon, where officials set the agreement and planned for the launch of the courses.

Locations for the courses has also been decided.

There will be seven separate places for conducting the lethwei courses — Dagon Township, Mayangone Township, Kunchan Gone Township, Dawpone Township, Taketha Township, South Dagon and North Dagon.

The courses are under the supervision of Ministry of Health and Sports and Department of Sports and Physical Education. —Kyaw Zin Lin ■

Neymar's golden foot to go under the knife

BELO HORIZONTE — Brazil and Paris Saint-Germain superstar Neymar was to undergo surgery for a broken right foot on Saturday, putting the planet's most expensive footballer out of action until the eve of the World Cup.

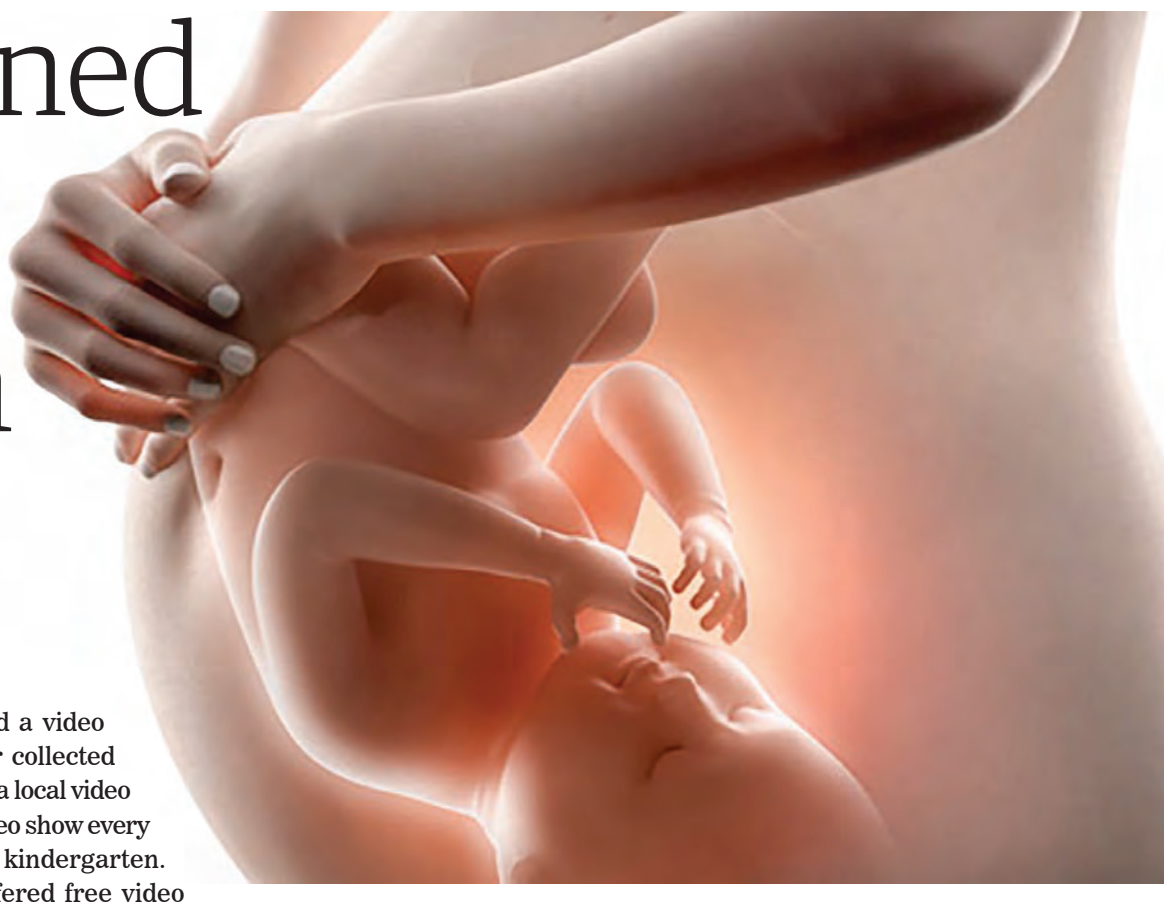
The operation, performed by national team surgeon Rodrigo Lasmar, was expected early morning in the Mater Dei hospital in Belo Horizonte, where Neymar checked in the previous night.

Jose Luiz Runco, a former chief medical officer for the Brazilian team, told AFP that the surgery to mend the broken fifth metatarsal "is not difficult" and should take between one hour and 90 minutes. What concerns Brazil and PSG is how long it will take Neymar to get back on the field, scoring goals. Lasmar describes the break as serious and says that recovery will take from two and a half to three months. That leaves PSG without the striker — whose transfer from Barcelona cost the club a record 222 million-euro ($264 million) last August — when they face Real Madrid in a make-or-break Champions League clash next Tuesday.—AFP ■

SUNDAY SPECIAL

The Global New Light of Myanmar

The unexplained memory of my own birth



Min Lwin

MY earliest memory is pretty remarkable because it occurred the night I was born.

I was watching a big-screen TV from the other side of the road with a group of people in the evening. We were sitting across the main road and my mother and I were behind a gathering of people. I was laying on my mother's knees and the backs of some people were blocking my view. I barely saw the screen as a bright white board. So I slowly raised my head to see the screen more clearly. That was the earliest memory of life. I can remember this scene as if it happened yesterday. Do you find something weird with my memory?

That night was October 20, 1994 when I was born in the upstairs of my grandma's house. Televisions were such an expensive luxury for most families at that time, and a video station in my quarter collected five kyats a person for a local video and 10 for a foreign video show every night when I was in kindergarten. Some rich people offered free video shows for their neighbours on some religious holidays using a white bedsheet as a screen. I was born the night after the full moon day of Thadingyut, a famous religious month for Buddhists. One of our wealthy religious neighbours prepared such a free video show that night, and the show was only about a five-minute walk from our house. My mother was very pregnant but also a huge fan of video shows. She didn't let anything to make her miss such an opportunity, in spite of the fact that the due date of her third son was very close.

In the middle of the movie, her unborn son wanted to see the show with her, and thus she had to be brought to the nearest hospital in a hurry. But the little guy apparently didn't want to miss the end of the show, so she gave birth right there at the upstairs of the house. A kind, warm-hearted Karen nurse who lived on the same street helped with the flawless birth.

The first time I noticed the miracle of my memory shortly after leaving my mother's womb was when I was in third grade. Once, my aunt told me about my birth night and she said that my grandma even scolded my mom for her carelessness. As soon as she started to recall that night, I suddenly remembered exactly what had happened in the show. After revealing my recollection, she couldn't believe her ears. Before that, although I could remember the show, I couldn't figure out if it was a dream or some unforgettable childhood memory. I myself even wondered how this memory could still remain in my mind for years. I can't explain or prove the reasons behind my birth memory biologically or scientifically. I also questioned myself if I had watched a similar video show with my mom, and I may be confusing this memory as my birth memory. But many neighbours and my family could easily prove it wrong because that night's video show was the last show they had ever enjoyed in our quarter.

I wrote a lot about this memory in my diary because it was the most challenging question in my childhood and it was far beyond the limits of my imagination. Some people gave me their explanations for that memory, but some didn't even pay any attention to it.

Nevertheless, I considered all their answers and added my own ideas to them to get a satisfactory explanation. People usually approach a problem based on their understandings and when a solution is against their beliefs or norms, they will easily reject it regardless of the solution's quality. So, my dear reader, do you have any logical and critical explanation for my memory?

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

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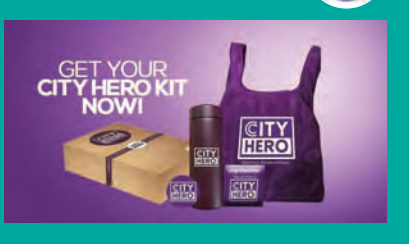

Basic English Grammar for Basic Students

Lesson 42: Different Kinds of Sentences (2)
Compound and Complex Sentences

Hello Class !

Last week , we have discussed about Simple Sentences and Compound Sentences .

Let's review some ideas today .

A Sentences is a group of words which has complete sense.

There are also other groups of words called "Phrases" and "Clauses" , which do not make complete sense.

The difference between "a Phrase" and "a Clause" is that "a Phrase has NO VERBS in it" , but "a Clause has".

A Simple Sentence is a sentence which has only one main Verb.

When these two Simple Sentences are joined together to form a new sentence , it is called "a Compound Sentence" .

We have already done some exercises on these in the last week's Lesson.

Today , let's study about "Complex Sentences".

If we join "one Simple Sentence" and "one Clause which has not complete sense" , we get a "Complex Sentence".

e.g . I met the man who had no money to buy food.

He pitied the child whom the teacher asked so many difficult questions.

She went home which is in a small village.

I cannot go home when it is very near to the Final Examination.

The author is going to a place where there are so many fishermen.

I have done my research in the villages where there are many small-scale fishermen.

I do not know why he respond like this.

All these above sentences are Complex Sentences , because the Clauses in these sentences (the underlined portion) has no complete sense by itself , although they have Verbs.

The main part of the sentences are Simple Sentences . (those which are not underlined .)

So , we come to the Conclusion that when we join two Simple Sentences , we get a "Compound Sentence" .

(If we join one Simple Sentence and a phrase, which has No Verbs , we get only a Simple Sentence .

e.g. I saw the book on my table.

The boy ran into the house.

He will come to dinner tonight.)

And when we join one Simple Sentence and a Clause, which has a Verb, but not a complete sense , we get a Complex Sentence.

These Clauses are in different Clause , such as Adjectival Clause or Adjective Clause , Adverbial Clause or Adverb Clause and Noun Clause , which is the Subject or the Object of the sentence.

But , all these will be discussed and studied next week.

And here comes the exercises for today's lesson.

Exercise 42 .

I. State which are Simple, Compound or Complex Sentences from the followings.

(a) The boy stands at the entrance to the hall.
(b) The boy stands at the entrance to the hall where there is a very grand exhibition.
(c) The boy stands at the entrance of the hall , for he wants to meet his friends first.
(d) The boy stands at the entrance of the hall, which is one a grand ballroom.
(e) The boy stands at the entrance of the hall when he sees his girl friend coming up the stairs.
(f) I will go to town this weekend.
(g) Neither my friend nor me will go to town this weekend.
(h) I will go to town this weekend , to buy some new clothes.
(i) I will go to town this weekend if the headmaster gives me leave.
(j) I will go to town which is not far away from our village.

II. Make 5 Complex Sentence of your own.

That's all for today , Class .

Hope that you can do all the exercises very well !

Bye Bye Class ! See you next week !

Your English Teacher (GNLM).
Email: <dr.nunuwintin.rose.dawn@gmail.com>

Here are the answers to the last week exercise .

Exercise 42

I. Examples of Simple Sentences.

(1) You can come back home on weekends.
(2) She can read very well.
(3) I write a letter to him.
(4) We do not want to go home.
(5) He sits quietly in the room.

II. Examples of Compound Sentences.

(1) She will go to school and he will go to the theatre.
(2) You can go back , but your brother cannot.
(3) Neither the father or the son had no responsibility.
(4) Either you or I will go to solve this problem.
(5) He cannot come home this week , for there is an important meeting.

III. Connect the following sentences into Compound Sentences.

(a) She will wake up early for she will cook the rice.
(b) Maung Maung can do the Maths , but Hla Hla cannot.
(c) You can go home now, but your brother cannot.
(d) Neither she nor her sister can sing sweetly.
(e) Both Mother and Father will come back home.
(f) She will not go out today, because she has a fever.
(g) He tried a lot , but he failed.
(h) The rich man has to pay the ransom money or they will kill his only son.
(i) Both cats and dogs are noisy.
(j) Will you bring the money or bring back the longyi ?

Hope that you all have done well !

That's all for today Class.

Bye Bye !

See you next week !

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Introduction to Cybernetics in Education

By Dr. Khin Zaw
Retired Rector, Yangon University of Education

(CONTINUED FROM THE LAST WEEK)

Since the original work by Wiener's group the word "Cybernetics" has become associated with the solution of problems dealing with the purposive activities for the computers, necessitating consideration of providing computers with perception, synthesis and flexibility of approach . Of such, the discipline must rely on the skills and knowledge of the practitioners of the the exact science as well as life sciences such as biology, psychology, biochemistry, biophysics, neurophysiology, and anatomy.

The contributions of the life scientists to the progress of cybernetics consists in the evaluation, measurement and description of the capabilities and of the structural and functional attributes of living organisms. Such studies involve the methods communication, feedback and control in the living entity. Hence an important aspect of the work in cybernetics in the province of mathematicians deal with the mathematical theory of communication.

In terms of computer development, cybernetics is concerned with the design and construction of electrical or electronic analogs capable of performing processes carried out within living entity, including the selection and evaluation, as well as the storage of information, and resulting in appropriate activity based on the information in accordance with assigned purpose.

In terms of understanding the operation of the human nervous system , cybernetics is expected to contribute new insights into a wide range of processes such as learning , discrimination, regulation, physiological and psychological malfunction, and the emotional behaviour of individual human beings as well as whole societies.

Specifically, the problems of decision making , thinking and synthesis, imagination and creative endeavour of people both en masse and individually comes under the scrutiny of cybernetics.

It is anticipated that the future development of societal functions, of which education or pedagogy holds a major part, will be based on the theorems developed from cybernetics which thus far has made extremely significant contributions to the technology of guided missiles , business and computer applications, active prosthetics, communication and automatic control.

Basic Issues

Cybernetics is regarded by some scientists as the design of self-regulating control mechanisms such as the automatic pilot which will adjust the speed and direction of a plane in response to wind variations, in order to stay on a plotted course and by others, as the new supreme science embracing all self-regulating behaviour , from mechanical devices to biological organisms.

Cybernetics is generally thought of as a design theory of control and communication applied to any self-adjusting or self-regulating mechanisms or large-scale systems, be they in engineering, cell-biology, the brain, or economics . The basic principle is the concept of negative feedback, or the idea that the energy released from part of a system returns or is used to regulate and control the further release and direction of energy in the systems.

The common or industrial application of cybernetics is in the creation of servo-mechanisms or self-adjusting rely or feedback devices which control machines independently of any human machine tender .

With servo- mechanisms, which in French leads to the apt pun of "cerveau electronique" or "electronic brain" , one extends the range of automatic devices . But all this, in principle , only follows the basic mechanistic concepts of the nineteenth century.

Cybernetics , however , adds to this a theory of "information", for any mechanism or system which has to adjust to variations of information taken in from the environment . What information theory seeks to do is to work out a precise set of answers as to how many channels of information a mechanism can have , its ability to receive and utilize information a mechanisms can have , its ability to receive and utilize information, the effect of disturbance or noise , the intelligibility of information, etc.

Thus, the further definition of cybernetics is "control under the guidance of information". With information or communication theory, Cybernetics seek to deal with all kinds of networks, from closed electrical circuits to social systems where the flow of information regulates the operation of the system.

Cybernetics is defined by Myanmar scientists as the scientific analysis and control of animate or inanimate systems of organization, based upon their methods of communication.

Emphasizing the essential unity of all systems, from the functional angle of view , cybernetics generally disregards apparent differences in the construction of men and machines, and stresses such obvious functional paralells such as neural networks and electronic circuits.

The basic thesis of Cybernetics is the assumption that man, machine and society are very similar in structure and can best be understood and controlled through the study of their control / communication or informational exchange facilities. A second assumption is that messages of control between man and machine, machine and machine, will play increasingly larger roles in society. Cyberneticians consider as parallel not only the nervous system and communication machines, but also all forms of behaviour to the extent that they are regular, determinate or reproducible.

It is probably the newer computation machines , with their ability to calculate, compute, retain in memory , react to environment , and select from alternatives on the basis of experience, in short , to duplicate to a great degree the human system, which provide the background and basis for all current Cybernetic activities.

But , it would be far from truth to suppose that Cybernetics deals exclusively with computers or any other similar hardware, for , as mentioned earlier , it is the science of controlling any complex dynamic system, be it man or machine .

Cybernetics is concerned not only with the development of sophisticated electronic computers and ultra-modern "thinking" machine , but also with the general theories and universal laws of governing , management and optimum control of all systems of organization , animate and inanimate.

Concerning Cybernetics as a unifying science, a general system theory that provides a model by which all kinds of systems can be ordered and understood, Cyberneticians come to grip with any existing philosophy which must hold that it alone examines the most general laws and regulationships of all being and of every development .

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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Big holidays equal big crowds

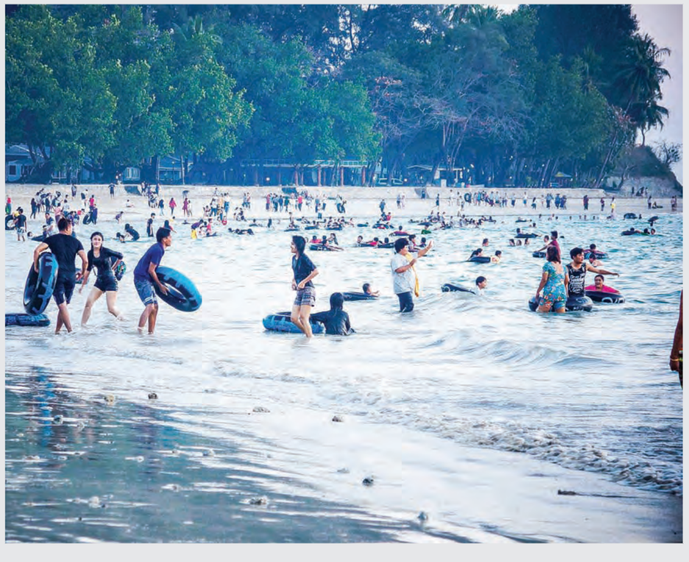
Pilgrims visit Dhammayangyi Pagoda in Bagan. **PHOTO: YE THURA AUNG (NYAUNG U)**

Pilgrims visit Dhammayangyi Pagoda in Bagan. **PHOTO: ZAW GYI**

Ancient pagodas in Mrauk-U Rakhine is also popular destination for holiday makers. **PHOTO: MRAUK-U DISTRICT IPRD**

Holiday makers buy soveniors at the Shwesaryan Pagoda festival. **PHOTO: MIN HTET AUNG**

People hiking to reach the top of Zwekabin Mountain in Hpa-an. **PHOTO: IPRD**



Holiday makers enjoy leasure time at the Ngapali Beach. **PHOTO: THANT ZIN**

BEACHES, mountains and caves, pagoda festivals and recreation centers across Myanmar are crowded with local visitors from all social strata during this holiday.

The Full Moon day of Tabaung on February 28 and the Peasant Day on March 1 are government holidays in Myanmar. So, people get two back to back holidays this time including the regular weekend.

In Mandalay, famous pagodas and recreation centers are crowded with people who come from different parts of the country during this holiday time.

Mahamuni Pagoda, Mt Mandalay, Kyauk Taw Gyi and Ku Thol Daw Pagodas are the most crowded this year.

"The Ku Thol Daw Pagoda is listed as a world heritage site, and the majority of the visitors are foreigners, but, during the holiday, local people visit the pagoda. So, we could sell more flowers these days," a Lotus flower seller at the pagoda said.

During the holiday, the Shwe Sar Yan pagoda festival is celebrated at the banks of Dotetawady river in Mandalay. So, the festival is teeming with visitors, said U Pyay Nyein, chairman of the trustee board of the pagoda.

"Since the pagoda festival is a great festivity in which all national races in Myanmar participate, it is crowded every year. But, people get four days to travel around this year. That's why it is so crowded for 24 hours and roads are filled with cars and motor cycles," he added.

A group of friends, who are colleagues from a company in Naung Cho town in Shan State, said why they visited the pagoda festival. "I am interested in the history of the Shan Princess Saw Mon Hla who built the pagoda. Also, I like the toddy palm leaf necklaces vendors sells during the festival. We are going to visit U Bein Bridge wearing our necklaces," a visitor said.

The staff from a forest department in Yangon said "We've got four days this holiday time. That's why we took our vacation and visited here. We traveled around parks and recreation centers in Pyin Oo Lwin."

For the holiday this year, hoards of people flocked to the Kyaik Ka Lun Boon pagoda and Ohnmar Danti beach in Danuphyu Township, Ayeyarwady Region. A person from Yangon who visited Danuphyu with family members said that he found the beach is better than he expected and they decided to visit the next time they have holidays because the beach is close to the pagoda.

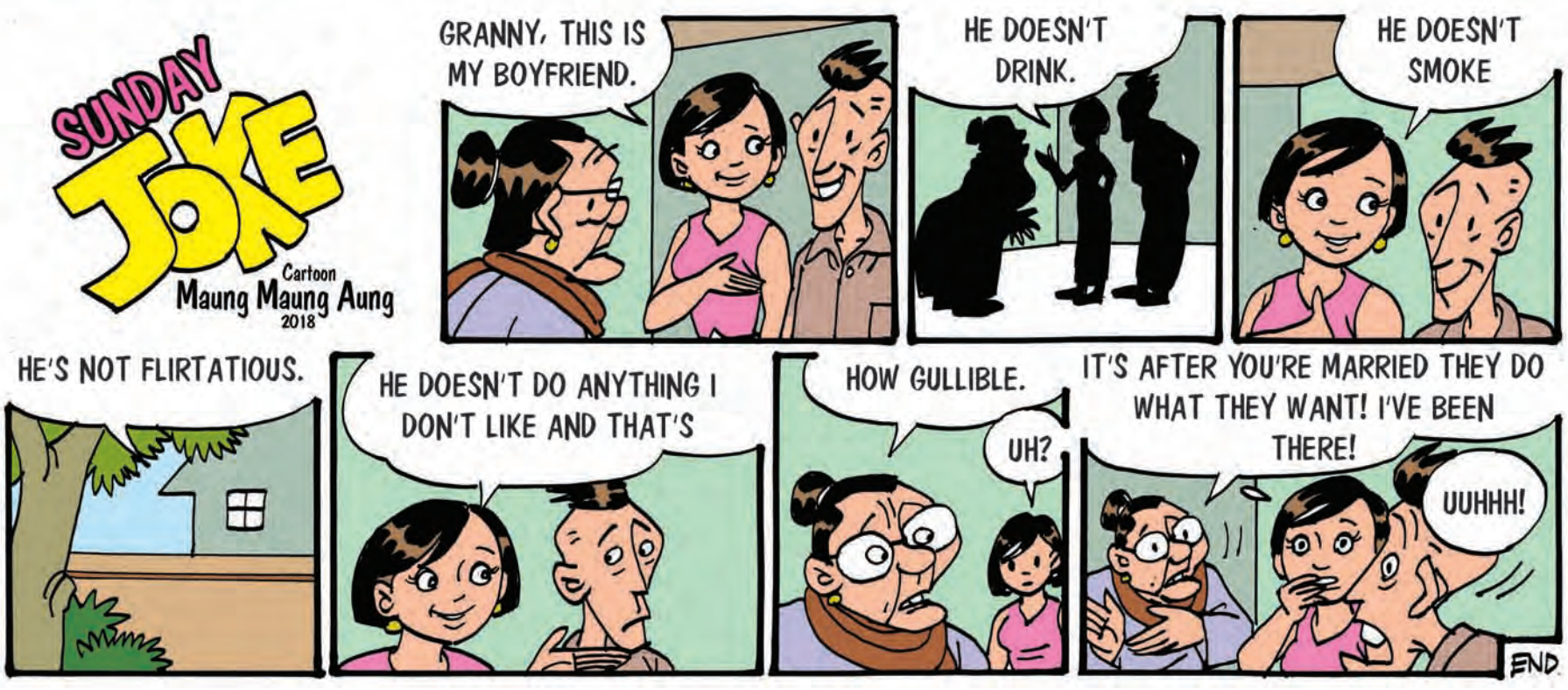
The pagoda festival, which is annually held at the Lombani Garden at the foot of the Mt. Zwegabin in Kayin State's Hpa-An Township, drew massive crowds this year also.

The mountain is at an elevation of 2734 ft and located seven miles south of Hpa-An, the city of Kayin State. It takes two hours to reach the top of the mountain on foot. There is a cable car project that is 50 percent complete so in the future people will be able to use it to travel to the top of the mountain, according to the monk from the Mt. Zwegabin.

In Kayin State, there are many beautiful locations to visit .Some of them are Kawgun natural cave, Bayint Nyi cave, Sadan cave, hot spring, Htamin Sote Taung and Kan Thar Yar lake.—Myanmar Digital News

(Translated by Thiri Min Htun)

SUNDAY COMICS



Voices of people enjoying the long holiday

By Aung Ye Thwin
PHOTO: KO AYE THAN

DUE to the four days of consecutive holidays, the volume of people going on a holiday has risen sharply. The following is the voice of the people – public servants, private sector personnel and members of the public who passed through the toll gate at the entrance to Nay Pyi Taw on their way to a holiday with families and friends.

Daw Khin San.

Daw Yin Yin Myint.

Maung Kyaw Min Khant.

U Thant Zaw Tun.

Ma Kyu Kyu Khaing.

Ma Lin Htat Zaw.

Daw Khin San, Bago

We are going on a holiday with the family during the long break. We just visited around Nay Pyi Taw. We are stopping for a while at the Nay Pyi Taw toll gate and then will continue on to Mandalay, Bagan, Taunggyi, Inlay and Pindaya on a pilgrimage. It's a happy occasion for us to go on a holiday with the family. It is rare to have four straight days of holidays. I'm happy that we are able to go on a pilgrimage and gain merit.

Daw Yin Yin Myint, Yangon

We have come to visit Nay Pyi Taw. This is the third time. After having a meal at the toll gate, we'll pay homage to Nay Pyi Taw Buddha Gaya and Uppatasanti Pagoda. We will also visit the Water Fountain and other well-known places. The weather is becoming hot, but it is great to have a holiday with friends. If there are similar long holidays in the future, we'll come again.

Maung Kyaw Min Khant, Yangon

I'm from Yangon and I came with my friends to visit Nay Pyi Taw. It has been a long time since I went to visit Nay Pyi Taw.

Due to the long holiday and the fact that all our friends are together, we were able to come. I've seen Water Fountain only on television, and it is great to go there finally. I always go on a trip with family or friends whenever there is a long holiday.

U Thant Zaw Tun, Yangon

I'm always coming to Nay Pyi Taw, but I never made it to all the pagodas and places to visit. I have relatives here and there is a four-day holiday, so I came to visit with my family. We will pay homage to Buddha Gaya.

We also plan to visit the zoo and the ethnic national village. During the last holiday, we went on a pilgrimage to Mandalay, Sagaing and Monywa.

Ma Kyu Kyu Khaing, Ministry of Health and Sports

I'm happy to be on a holiday with my family. As an employee, I can go on a trip only during long holidays. We are returning from visiting pagodas in Bagan, Nyaung U, Poppa, Mann Shwe Sat Taw and Magway.

Nay Pyi Taw is the final leg of our trip. We will visit distinguished places, such as Uppatasanti Pagoda, Maha Thatkya Ranthi and Buddha Gaya. Afterward, as I'm working in Nay Pyi Taw, I'll remain behind while my family will go back.

Ma Lin Htat Zaw, teacher

I'm going on a trip during the summer holiday. It is great to go on a trip during the holiday. I gain experiences as I visit new places.

I went to Alaungtaw Katthapa, and I visited well-known pagodas in Mandalay, Monywa and Sagaing. Now, we are resting while having a meal at the toll gate. I'll then visit Nay Pyi Taw Buddha Gaya and go back home.

Express cars passing through the rest area on the Yangon-Mandalay express way.

Myanmar's sidecars: three-wheeled thrills

A trishaw is used not only to transport humans, but also cargo. Here a trishaw driver carefully wheels a load of eggs on Za Lun Street in Sanchaung. **PHOTO: MARK ANGELES**

By Mark Angeles

I HAVE seen as many as five people piled onto one, a feat of human engineering that could only occur in Myanmar.

The phenomenon occurred on a trishaw, also known as a sidecar, a three-wheeled, human-powered vehicle that is basically a bicycle outfitted with an additional wheel and two more seats that face away from each other.

The sidecar is perhaps the most efficient and economical way to travel on short trips in Yangon. The fare depends on distance, but rarely costs more than Ks1,000, usually closer to Ks500. Longer trips require a taxi or a bus ride. In addition to the low cost, what makes trishaw rides ideal is their ability to navigate the narrow streets of Yangon that are often clogged with automobile traffic.

Trishaws are so unique and necessary to Myanmar that State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi honoured sidecar drivers in 2016 at an event in Bahan shortly after the National League for Democracy scored landslide victories in the November 2015 elections. The vast majority of sidecar drivers had proudly flown the NLD flag on their vehicles prior to the election.

Sidecars can be found all over the city, so much so that several downtown townships banned them a couple of years ago because it was thought that they contributed to traffic jams. The ban was at first strictly enforced, resulting in fines and seizures of the trishaws. The new law resulted in a paucity of trishaws in townships such as Botahtaung, Pazandaung and Lanmadaw, but some say the rule is now only sporadically enforced.

In townships in central and northern Yangon, there are no such statutes. In places such as Sanchaung, trishaws are readily available and their handlebar-mounted bells can be heard continuously as they cruise the main roads or park in small clusters on street corners.

There are some physical limitations, however. The aforementioned scene I encountered involved two women occupying two seats, each carrying a toddler, and a young man riding side-saddle on the rear fender platform. But these were small, slender people. For those who are of a certain girth, it will be almost impossible to squeeze into one of the narrow seats. Suffice to say that, only after shedding a few pounds can I now confidently hail and ride one of these three-wheeled wonders.

Party of four on a trishaw

Three passengers, one umbrella and the driver were spotted on a trishaw on Sanchaung Street in Myaynigone yesterday on a picture-perfect day in Yangon. Clear, sunny weather is expected for the next several days in Yangon. **PHOTO: MARK ANGELES**

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