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State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi views a rice sample displayed at the Myanmar Rice Federation Stakeholder Forum. **PHOTO: MNA**

A return to rice supremacy

Switch to organic farming, methods based on climate change urged

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has urged farmers and stakeholders in the rice industry to learn and practice new agricultural methods in order to bring the past glory of rice production back to the country.

"We have prospects for regaining our past status as the

top rice export country," said the State Counsellor, calling the country "the world's rice basket".

She made the remark at the Myanmar Rice Federation Stakeholder Forum in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

Myanmar's rice exports

this fiscal year was more than 3 million tons, the most in over 70 years. As part of a return as one of the region's top rice exporters, the State Counsellor urged the country's farmers and stakeholders to turn to organic farming, noting that the world is moving towards health-

ier organic crops.

She pledged to support the farmers, urging them to pass the integrity and value of agriculture to their children, as the agriculture sector continues to play a large part in development of the country.

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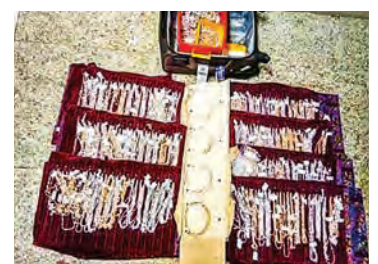
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'BEST BANK IN MYANMAR'

Awarded by FinanceAsia 2017

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw discusses housing scheme

THE 12th-day meeting of the seventh session of the second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw was held yesterday. At the meeting, deputy ministers from the Ministry of Planning and Finance and Ministry of Construction answered questions on the request for a loan of 15 billion Japanese yen (approx. US\$141 million) from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for the Ministry of Construction's residential housing development plan, sent by the President's office.

Deputy Minister U Kyaw Lin said that any property with a value lower than Ks 10 million is considered low-cost housing, and the ministry grants a 15-year instalment plan for people unable to pay upfront. He said the minis-



U Kyaw Lin, Deputy Minister for Construction. **PHOTO: MNA**

try identifies people who cannot afford to buy housing for a period of five years, after which it helps low-income households to buy property.

He said the government was trying to make it possible for middle-income households



U Maung Maung Win, Deputy Minister for Planning and Finance. **PHOTO: MNA**

to own property by adopting the public-private partnership (PPP) model and investing in low-cost housing. He explained that the low-interest loan from JICA would help the government's housing scheme, if the

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw approved it. The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw reviewed the proposal and then approved it.

Later, U Aung Tike from Seikpyu constituency and Daw Htu May from Rakhine constituency (11) led a discussion on a submission from the President's Office to amend the ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement. Daw Htu May said the agreement would enable Myanmar to enter the ASEAN economy and make investments. She said the government needed to create job opportunities, in tandem with carrying out the agreement, so that the public can see the results of the agreement. U Maung Maung Win, Deputy Minister for Planning and Finance,

then explained the plans for the ASEAN agreement.

The Hluttaw then discussed a submission from the President's office to review the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on Illegal Trading and Theft of Cultural Artefacts for Myanmar to sign. U Saw Htun Mya Aung from Papun constituency voted for the signing, as he believed it would help Myanmar recover its losses. Union Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Thura U Aung Ko said he was in favour of the 1995 UNIDROIT, as it would help recover ethnic cultural artefacts that have been smuggled into neighbouring countries through the borders. The Hluttaw approved the submission. —Myo Myint, Aye Aye That ■

Myanmar-China border liaison office opens in Myitkyina

A Myanmar-China border liaison office was opened in Ayeyar Ward, Myitkyina in Kachin State this morning.

The purpose of opening the office is not only to fight against illegal drug trade but also to crack down on transnational crimes such as human trafficking, arms smuggling and making counterfeit money and at the same time, ensure peace, stability and rule of law along the border between the two countries.

"Myanmar shares a border with China and both countries have maintained very good and sustainable bilateral relations for a long time. We have overcome many difficulties for decades. The two governments also cooperated in the areas of peace and stability in border areas, rule of law, anti-drug campaigns and human trafficking based on our existing friendship. Everybody knows we achieved many successes in various sectors.

I would like to urge those present to strengthen existing friendships by protecting each other in order to speed up anti-drug drives

between the two countries in the future," said Maj-Gen Aung Soe, Deputy Minister for Home Affairs at the ceremony.

Mr. Liang Yun, Executive Secretary General and the Director General of the Office of National Narcotics Control Commission (ONNCC) under the Ministry of Public Security of China also gave a speech.

The deputy minister then presented a commemorative gift to the Chinese director general. Officials from both sides pressed the button to open signboard of the office and had a documentary photo taken.

The ceremony was attended by around 50 people including Kachin State Minister for Security and Border Affairs Col Thura Myo Tin, the chief of Kachin State police force Police Col Zaw Khin Aung, Chinese guests, local authorities from the General Administration Department, the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, Correctional Department and Fire Services Department and local people.—Myanmar Digital News ■

Regional government will mediate for Shwenandaw monastery renovation process

THE Mandalay Regional Government is going to mediate between the Department of Archaeology and National Museum (DANM) and foreign experts in conducting a second renovation process of the Shwenandaw monastery in Mandalay.

Myanmar is working together with the USA under the support of the US Ambassador Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP). Foreign experts would like to substitute the old teak pillars with new pillars by focusing on the strength of the building while the DANM would like to renovate it without removing the original materials. So, both sides could not reach a decision regarding the old pillars.

"After listening to what both

sides said, I found that each side holds their own ideas and opinions. The main problem is that cooperation is weak between them. We accept international aid to renovate the ancient monastery in order to show off a positive and productive international image and to have friendly relationships with other countries around the world. As a supervisory committee, we will help them reach a settlement over their disagreement," said U Myat Thu, Minister for Planning and Finance in the Mandalay Region government.

Tampawady U Win Maung, a Myanmar architect, said: "Both sides cannot agree how to move the renovation process forward. If they cannot reach a settlement,

the whole project will be all for naught. Previously, all teak pillars at the back of the monastery were substituted with new pillars. The DANM does not like it. It is good for the strength and structural support of the building, but it is not good if we look from the point of view of the traditional aesthetics of the building."

The renovation of the ancient monastery started in the fiscal year 2014-2015 using funds from the AFCP amounting to US\$ 505,000. In November 2017, the renovation process was conducted with funding of more than US\$ 300,000. The monastery, which is more than 120 years old, is a typical style of wooden architecture from ancient Myanmar. —Myanmar Digital News ■

MCDC accepts permits for Thingyan pandals

PERMITS to build Thingyan pandals around the moat can be applied for as of 5 March, according to the Mandalay City Development Committee.

MCDC allocated 24 pandals with the dimensions of 100 ft by 25 ft to be built around the moat. There are five pandals on 66th street and along the moat from 12th street to 19th street, nine pandals from 19th street to 26th street, and 10 pandals from 66th street to 80th street.

"We will grant permits by open tender system. Applications can be submitted from 5 March to 14 March," said U Kyaw Zaw Aung, a member of MCDC.

The Walking Thingyan festival will be held in the southern part of the moat. The size of the pandal for the area is 30 ft. by 12 ft. MCDC will allocate 51 pandals in total.

There are 16 pandals along the road from 69th street to 71st street and 35 pandals from 73rd

street to 78th street.

The pandal with dimensions of 20 ft by 12 ft will be allocated for 15 places; three pandals along the road from 69th street to 71st street and 12 places from 73rd street to 78th street.

A pandal with dimensions 10 ft by 12 ft will also be allocated for 19 places. They are four pandals along the road from 69th street to 71st street and 15 places from 73rd street to 78th street. —Ei Moh Moh Khaing ■

President honours highest taxpayers

A ceremony to present the President's Honourary Award for outstanding performance in tax payments and certificates of honour to the highest income tax and commercial tax payers for Assessment Year 2016-2017 was held yesterday morning in the guest hall of the Presidential Palace. President U Htin Kyaw attended and presented the award and certificates of honors.

In his speech at the ceremony, President U Htin Kyaw said it is an auspicious occasion to meet with people who are recognised as supporting and assisting the nation consciously and dutifully on their part during the country's transition period.

The President said that due to many reasons, only 10 select persons were invited and honoured, but all the other persons who dutifully paid their taxes are not being ignored. The President said he thanks those who were unable to attend the ceremony and those who were not being invited.

"Paying tax is the duty of each citizen, especially business owners who are in contact with foreign countries, and are believed to be more aware of tax and paying tax. This habit and culture of paying tax is still weak in our country, and thus the taxpayers are being thanked", the President said.

The President said there were some who do not pay out of ignorance and there are some who do not pay deliberately. Some knew and paid a bit, but there



President U Htin Kyaw presents the honorary award to U Aung Ko Win, Chairman of Kanbawza Bank at the ceremony to honour top tax payers in Nay Pyi Taw, yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

were some who know and pay in full. The President said that he was thankful for being able to recognise those who were due for recognition and pray that in the future these people can serve the country through tax payment.

"The world today is such that rich countries do not stay rich on their own. They spread the wealth by helping and developing their neighbour and their society. Successes of big businesses are due to the correct efforts and diligence of the business owner as well as the

efforts and dutifulness of all the employees" U Htin Kyaw said.

The President then presented a the presidential award and a certificate of honour to U Aung Ko Win, Chairman of Kanbawza Bank, who has paid the highest amount of income tax for six consecutive years, from assessment year 2011-2012 to 2016-2017.

The President also gave awards and certificates of honour to the other highest income taxpayers for assessment year 2016-2017. They were presented to Director U Soe Tint on behalf

of Diamond Star Co. Managing Director U Ko Ko Gyi; General Manager U Myint Htoo on behalf of Myawaddy Bank Managing Director U Yu Lwin; Shwe Taung Development Co. Managing Director U Aung Zaw Naing; Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited Head of Department U Min Zaw; Director U Aung Kyi on behalf of Myawaddy Trading Ltd Managing Director U Khin Maung Soe; PT Power Trading Co. Chairman U Aung Shwe; Secretary Dr. Shwe Hein on behalf of Thilawa Special Eco-

nomic Zone Management Committee Managing Director U Set Aung; Jing Hpaw Aung Jade & Jewellery Co., Ltd Managing Director Daw Nan Lang Kham; and Myanmar Awba Group Chairman U Thado Hein.

Later, the President gave awards and certificates of honour for the highest commercial taxpayers for assessment year 2016-2017 to Dagon Beverages Co. Executive Director U Hla Min Tu; Director U Aung Kyi on behalf of Myawaddy Trading Managing Director U Khin Maung Soe; Denko Trading Co. Director U Wunna Khaing; Director U Win Swe on behalf of PT Power Trading Chairman U Aung Shwe; Shwe Byain Phyu Co. Managing Director U Thein Win Zaw; International Beverages Trading Co. Managing Director U Aung Moe Kyaw; Asia Energy Co. Managing Director U Thet Wei; Royal Myawaddy Distillery Group Managing Director U Zaw Win; City Mart Holding Co. Managing Director Daw Win Win Tint; and Director U Kyaw Myint Oo on behalf of Regency Material Trading Co. Managing Director U Kyaw Tha Oo.

The ceremony was also attended by Union Minister for the Ministry of the State Counsellor's Office U Kyaw Tint Swe, Union Minister for Planning and Finance U Kyaw Win, and Deputy Minister for the President's Office U Min Thu.—Myanmar News Agency ■

A return to rice supremacy

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She also urged the children of peasants to seek opportunities in agriculture, reminding them of the situation in developed countries when youths from rural areas walked away from farms and worked in cities, creating problems in the agricultural sector.

At the ceremony, the Myanmar Rice Federation announced the basic prices for rice this year as part of efforts for providing a guarantee to the rights and interests of the country's peasants.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi also stressed the importance of doing research on climate change,

warning of the country's weaknesses in performing research for the agricultural sector.

"It is very important to do research on a new system of agriculture which is based on climate change," she said.

The ceremony was also attended by Chairman of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Legal Affairs and Special Cases Assessment Commission Thura U Shwe Mann, Union Ministers Dr. Aung Thu, U Thant Sin Maung, U Win Khaing, Dr. Than Myint and Dr. Win Myat Aye, MPs, members of the Nay Pyi Taw Council and responsible personal from organisations and

associations related with the rice industry and farmers.

Following the announcement of the basic index for the price of rice, Union Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation Dr. Aung Thu, Union Minister for Commerce Dr. Than Myint and President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry U Zaw Min Win delivered speeches.

At the forum that followed, local and foreign experts discussed the rice industry sector in Myanmar.—Myanmar News Agency ■



State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi delivers the address at the Myanmar Rice Federation Stakeholder Forum. **PHOTO: MNA**

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Three new elephant camps to be opened by the Myanma Timber Enterprise before the water festival.
PHOTO: MNA

3 new elephant camps to be opened before water festival

The Myanma Timber Enterprise is planning to open three new elephant camps this year before the water festival to boost the tourism industry and conserve the native species, said U Saw Jone Shwe Ba, Director of Myanma Timber Enterprise.

The three new elephant camps are Pulin Kanthayar elephant camp in Nyaung-U, War Nat elephant camp in Pyin-Oo-

Lwin and Shwe Sattaw elephant camp in the Magway region.

The Myanma Timber Enterprise will start the elephant camp with some 19 elephants. Of the 19 elephants, seven will be housed at Pulin Kanthayar elephant camp, six at War Nat elephant camp and another six at Shwe Sattaw elephant camp.

Mahouts at the elephant camps will provide information about elephants to visitors, who

can also feed and ride the elephants.

The Myanma Timber Enterprise started implementing elephant camp-based tourism since 2016. Currently, the enterprise already operates 16 elephant camps, including Ngallight Sakhantha, Wawma, Pyaswe, Natmauk, Wingabaw, Hmawyawgyi, Nathmaw and Mokekha elephant camps. — GNLM ■

Famous French clothier puts Burmese turtle on its shirts

Lacoste, the French clothing company, temporarily replaced its polo shirts' iconic crocodile logo with the images of 10 endangered species, including the Burmese roofed turtle, to help counter the threat of extinction.

The shirts, which are part of a limited run supporting the "Save Our Species" campaign by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) that launched during Paris Fashion Week on 1 March, quickly sold out.

In addition to the Burmese roofed turtle, embroidered logos of the Gulf of California porpoise, the Sumatran tiger, the Anegada ground iguana and the northern sportive lemur replaced the famous crocodile above the left breast of the shirt.

"From this year, Lacoste will support IUCN's SOS – Save Our Species programme to help fight the extinction crisis", the IUCN said in a statement.

Lacoste calibrated the number of shirts produced for each series to the population of the remaining animals in the wild. Of the 1,775 shirts available, the Gulf of California porpoise had the smallest print run, with just 30 shirts available.

The Anegada iguana, by contrast, was the most available, with 450 editions. Proceeds went to International Union for Conservation of Nature, an international advocacy organization working to protect nature that sponsored the campaign.

"Together these rare reptiles, birds and mammals

champion the plight of all known threatened species," IUCN said in a statement.

The US Fish & Wildlife Service has placed 1,459 animals on its threatened and endangered list. The Burmese roofed turtle is native to Myanmar, but was believed to be extinct until re-discovered in 2002. It remains very rare in the wild (only 5 females are known to exist in the wild), but a conservation project has been successful and several hundred are now kept in the Yadanabon Zoological Gardens in Mandalay and a turtle conservation center in Lawkananda Park, Bagan. Wildlife expert Jeff Corwin lauded Lacoste's efforts and said he hoped it would inspire other companies to take on similar projects.—GNLM ■

Sunflower plantations flourish in Saw Township

Sunflower cultivation to derive vegetable oil is flourishing in Saw Township, Gangaw District, together with peanut and onion cultivation.

Saw Township has some 5,336 acres of sunflower plantations. The crop will be harvested in April, said U Khin Maung Kyi from the township Agriculture Department.

Yezin 1 crossbreeding sunflowers are primarily cultivated in Saw Township. Sunflowers are grown separately, as well as with peanuts and onions. Cultivating sunflowers separately yields some 35 baskets per acre, whereas mixed farming gives 18 baskets, said U Thein Tun, a local farmer.

An acre of sunflower cultivation costs Ks850,000, including the input cost of fertilisers, pesticides and other general expenses. A basket of sunflowers produces 4 viss (a viss equals to 1.6 kg) of oil when it is milled. A viss of edible sunflower oil fetches Ks6,000. It is therefore considered a profitable cash crop.—465 ■

Prices of fish, prawn feed raw materials rise

The prices of raw materials used to make fish and prawn feeds have increased since February in anticipation of the water festival, said Dr. Thet Hmu, chairman of Myanmar Fish and Prawn Feed Producer Association.

The price of bran is some Ks90 per pound. Prices of groundnut and sesame expeller cakes have increased to some Ks1,105 this year.

"Last year, the price of corn was between Ks350 and Ks370 per viss. This year, it is above Ks600 per viss. There will be no significant change in the cost of fish feed, but it may impact chicken and pig feeds as they have two bases. We use broken rice when the corn price is high. This year, prices of both broken rice and corn are high," he added.

Entrepreneurs have to rely on bran and soybean cakes, as prices of broken rice and corn are high. The prices of fish and prawn feeds are not as high as the prices of chicken and pig feeds.—GNLM ■

MRF sets floor price for paddy

By May Thet Hnin

THE Myanmar Rice Federation (MRF) set the basic price of paddy (low quality variety) for the upcoming summer and monsoon crop seasons yesterday, according to a press release by MRF Stakeholder Forum 2018.

The price is Ks500,000 per 100 baskets (one basket is equivalent to 46 pounds) of paddy. Rice merchants, rice mills, agents and private companies, and members of MRF will purchase the paddy at the set rate if it is in line with the prescribed criteria, namely having 14 per cent moisture content and a fixed per cent of impurities, such as sand, weed and small stones.

If the market price is above the basic price, the merchants have to purchase the paddy at the prevailing price. However, paddy will be bought at the set price when the cost is lower than the actual market price, the press release mentioned.

The price of the most common variety of paddy usually drops during harvest. To give pri-



A farmer works as she harvests paddy at a field in Kangyidauk, Ayeyawady. PHOTO: GNLM/PHOE KHWAR

ority to the interests of farmers working on a manageable scale, MRF decided to set the rate.

Quality paddies such as Pawsan fetched a good price of Ks700,000 to Ks1 million per 100 baskets. These paddies will be

bought at the prevailing market price.

“An increase in the paddy price accrues healthy profits for farmers. Currently, the shortage of labour in rural areas has led to high labour costs. An acre

of paddy cultivation, including inputs, costs some Ks250,000. Last year, farmers earned only a small profit when the price dropped to some Ks450,000 per 100 baskets. Setting a basic price for paddy greatly benefits farm-

ers,” said U Hla Win, a farmer from Wakema Township.

Summer paddy will be harvested in some regions soon. A 100 baskets now brings in Ks580,000, but the price is likely to be lower than the current market price in mid-March and the end of May, he said.

The press release also noted that MRF would lead the private rice millers and companies to promote the export market and help farmers get a decent price during harvest time.

Additionally, the press release showed that MRF will fix the basic price depending on the production cost and benefits to farmers, as well as the domestic and international market prices in the years to come.

Farmers who have difficulties selling the paddy at the set price can contact the township representatives and MRF.

In 2020, MRF aims to export 4 million tonnes of rice beyond self-sufficiency, boost the production of quality rice and increase earnings through the rice export sector to up to US\$1.5 billion. ■

Japanese sake brewers seek direct deals in Myanmar

A group of Japanese sake manufacturers recently promoted their country's famous rice wine in Myanmar, introducing different flavors of the alcoholic beverage.

About 10 manufacturers exhibited a total of 26 sake brands during the two-day sake promotion event in late February at Chatrium Hotel in Myanmar's commercial city Yangon.

The direct marketing campaign was organized by Japan's Sake Export Association and Yangon-based Asia Business Solutions Co. with the support of the Japan External Trade Organization, Japan's governmental trade promotion body.

To encourage and support local production, the Myanmar government banned liquor imports in the mid-1990s and

many retailers had acquired the drinks through connections with the hotel industry or on the black market until the government permitted wine imports in 2015.

Haruo Matsuzaki, chairman of the Sake Export Association, told NNA that Japanese sake makers want to grab an opportunity to enter the Myanmar market as the country gradually liberalizes restrictions on liquor imports.

“Japanese cuisine and sake is quite trendy not only in Asia but also worldwide,” Matsuzaki said. “We would like to introduce specific sake (brands) to the Myanmar market as we would like Myanmar people to enjoy and discover the new joy of sake.”

Aiming to increase the presence of Japanese sake

overseas, the association was founded in 1997 by sake brewers nationwide and it has 25 members.

Nay Linn, chairman of the Myanmar Restaurant Association, said he hopes that meeting with sake brewers will bring direct deals with local restaurant owners, and help the latter avoid running out of stock.

“Here, we mostly procure sake from a small number of individual importers or indirect import through neighboring countries like Thailand and Singapore. So, it's a great opportunity for us to meet directly with the Japanese sake manufacturers,” he said.

According to the data from the restaurant association, there are about 150 to 200 Japanese restaurants throughout the country.—Kyodo News ■

No.15 Heavy Industry (Thagaya) to make 55 ambulances this year

The No. 15 Heavy Industry (Thagaya), operating under the Ministry of Industry, will manufacture 55 ambulances this year, according to a meeting held yesterday at the Industry Ministry's Office.

The No. 15 Heavy Industry (Thagaya) successfully manufactured four ambulances in co-operation with foreign experts. To meet international operations and road safety standards, the vehicles will be produced in compliance with the standards and guidelines set by the Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services (CAAS).

The negotiation meeting was held at the Ministry of Industry's office yesterday to form the Myanmar National Ambulance Guidelines and Ambulance Inspection Commission.

At the meeting, U Khin Maung Cho from the industry ministry said they manufactured

four ambulances to fulfil the requirements of the Ministry of Health and Sports and support the public health sector. The negotiation meeting aims to form an inspection commission to ensure the quality of ambulances manufactured by the industry ministry and to check if the vehicles are in line with the operations safety standards of international ambulances. He urged the attendees from various fields to share their ideas.

Officials from related departments and other experts discussed the ongoing matter concerning the standards and guidelines and the process of seeking certification from CAAS. The meeting decided to organise a seven-member group for inspection and certification, in compliance with international ambulance operation service standards.—MNA ■

19th ASEAN COCI Subcommittee on Information meeting opened

THE opening ceremony of the 19th ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information (COCI) Subcommittee on Information (SCI) meeting was held at Sky Star Hotel, Tamway Township, Yangon.

Union Minister for Information Dr. Pe Myint attended and addressed the meeting.

The meeting was attended by information subcommittee chairmen and members from ASEAN member countries, departmental heads and officials.

The opening ceremony started with the ASEAN anthem, and Dr. Pe Myint then addressed the ceremony.

In his address, the union minister said Myanmar, especially the Ministry of Information, was honoured to host the 19th SCI meeting. He warmly welcomed the ASEAN delegates and said it will further accelerate cooperation and promotion of ASEAN awareness in building the ASEAN identity and a sense of community.

The ASEAN declaration on Culture of Prevention for a peaceful, inclusive, resilient, healthy and harmonious society was adopted by ASEAN leaders at the 31st ASEAN Summit on 13 November 2017. In this regard,



Union Minister Dr. Pe Myint (7th from left) and delegates to 19th ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information (COCI) Subcommittee on Information (SCI) meeting pose for documentary photo. **PHOTO: MNA**

the union minister said development of programmes and dissemination of information on the benefits and opportunities offered by the ASEAN community must be encouraged, in addition to promotion of mutual respect and appreciation of diversity, in line with the ASEAN Strategic Plan for Information and Media (2016-2025).

A culture of media pluralism and socially responsible media in creating a peaceful, people-centered, dynamic and outward looking community,

with the collaboration of government-to-government (G2G), government-to-business (G2B) and ASEAN dialogue partners, must be promoted, added the union minister.

Due to the rapid spread of social media, every country is concerned about fake news threatening the peace and stability of diverse communities, and thus programmes must be implemented to enhance media literacy, especially among the youth, to enable them to develop multimedia materials to promote

cyber-wellness, said the union minister.

The union minister also expressed his confidence in the delegates' views and recommendations that would invigorate and strengthen the information sector of ASEAN. He added that to achieve this, all member states need to support each other in implementing the respective national communication plans, as well as the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025 and the ASEAN Strategic Plan for Information and Media 2016-

2025. In conclusion, on behalf of the government and the people of Myanmar, the union minister thanked the ASEAN secretariat and the organising committee and all the delegates for ensuring the 19th ASEAN SCI meeting was a great success.

Next, students from Yangon National University of Arts and Culture, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, performed songs and dances.

Later, Union Minister Dr. Pe Myint presented the song and dance troupes with flower baskets and took commemorative group photographs with the representatives attending the meeting.

The 19th ASEAN SCI meeting will review and discuss decisions of the ASEAN Summit meetings and sector-wise meetings and present works of the information sector; the budget allocated for future works, the procedures for utilising the ASEAN Cultural Fund and conduct the selection and approval of a host country for the 20th SCI meeting.

The 18th ASEAN SCI meeting was held in Malaysia last year and the 19th ASEAN SCI meeting hosted by Myanmar is being held from 6 to 7 March. — Myanmar News Agency ■

Interviewing participants at the 19th ASEAN COCI SCI meeting

Interview by: Thadin Lulin, Yi Yi Myint, Myat Sandi
PHOTO BY: ZAWMINLATT, YEHTUT

The 19th ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information (COCI) Subcommittee on Information (SCI) meeting was held at Sky Star Hotel, Tamway Township, Yangon, yesterday.

The meeting, hosted by Myanmar, is being held from 6 to 7 March, and following are the interviews with the participants at the meeting.

Dr. Pe Myint, Union Minister for Information

The 19th ASEAN SCI meeting will primarily discuss how to distribute information and news for cooperation among ASEAN countries in the information and other related sectors, for ASEAN countries and countries outside of the ASEAN region to be aware of each other, find better ways to increase cooperation and to achieve better outcomes and



Dr. Pe Myint, Union Minister for Information.

results. Delegates from 10 ASEAN countries will discuss the implementation of the ASEAN Strategic Plan for Information and Media. Later, they will also issue a press release. ASEAN countries will mainly cooperate and conduct matters related to the exchange of news and information. They will discuss and find solutions on media-related



U Myint Htway, 19th SCI meeting chairman and Myanmar Radio and Television Director General.

problems occurring in many countries. For example, the problem of fake news that came to the foreground last year will be discussed. This problem exists in ASEAN countries, as well as other countries. Information and experience will be shared and exchanged among ASEAN countries to determine how to handle and resolve this issue.

Many benefits will be achieved through this.

U Myint Htway, 19th SCI meeting chairman and Myanmar Radio and Television Director General

Several matters being discussed at this meeting will support the information sector. This includes cooperation among ASEAN countries in the information sector and exchange of news and programmes to develop human resources. Today's meeting will review the projects completed in the past. Incomplete projects will be completed. Projects that are still underway will be discussed. Discussions will also be held on how to implement these projects successfully. Projects to be conducted in 2019 will also be discussed at the meeting.

Discussions will be held during the SCI working-level meeting. After the discussion, some projects will be approved. Those

with high expenditures will be submitted to the COCI meeting, where they will be discussed. The COCI minister-level meeting will confirm and approve these expenditures. In future, cooperation will be enhanced for development. This will also be discussed as a sector at the meeting.

ASEAN countries will engage in the exchange of television programmes. Facts and cultural information related to a country will be uploaded onto the designated ASEAN website, where it will be shared. It will be shared in the respective country's language and literature. By doing this, a country will know about other countries. Myanmar will upload three or four programmes a month. Programmes posted by other countries can also be viewed by Myanmar. The main point of discussion is for the private media to connect with us. This is also being considered.

SEE PAGE-10

Dutiful citizens take pride in paying taxes

By Myo Thu Hein
Photo: Ko Ko Soe Nyunt

Tax plays a crucial role in the development of a country and every citizen has a duty to shoulder the tax burden. As such, the government is striving toward establishing a practice of paying tax and setting up a tax culture.

On the morning of 6 March the President personally honoured the top income tax and commercial tax payers in the assessment year 2016-2017. An interview was conducted with the top income tax and commercial tax payers.

U Aung Ko Win, Chairman, Kanbawza Bank Limited

I received three awards including the honorary award from the President as well as two awards for the top ten income tax payers. When I was awarded the top income tax payer prize for three consecutive years, I was also awarded as the top business person who shouldered the highest amount of tax burden award



U Aung Ko Win, Chairman, Kanbawza Bank Limited.

for three consecutive years too. Paying the exact tax amount is supporting the development and modernizing of a nation.

Daw Win Win Tint, Managing Director, City Mart Holding Co., Ltd

As for our City Mart Holding Company, our company paid income tax and was listed in the highest income tax category, securing the No. 9 ranking. By doing so, I am very pleased and



Daw Win Win Tint, Managing Director, City Mart Holding Co., Ltd.

honoured to have been rewarded by President U Htin Kyaw as a dutiful tax payer. This award has encouraged me to keep moving forward with my future endeavours in my career. Moreover we all are duty-bound to pay our country taxes. And I would like to urge everyone who resides in the country to pay income tax for the interest of our country.

U Aung Zaw Naing, Managing Director, Shwe Taung Company



U Aung Zaw Naing, Managing Director, Shwe Taung Company

Company

Our Shwe Taung Company was listed as No.4 ranking among top 50 companies in Myanmar. As a result, we secured No.4 ranking in the highest income tax category. I am very glad to receive this reward from our President U Htin Kyaw. It encouraged me a lot to carry on my business. If everyone pays income tax to the state regularly, our country can make progress in the nation-building process.



U Aung Moe Kyaw, Managing Director, International Beverages Trading Co., Ltd.

U Aung Moe Kyaw, Managing Director, International Beverages Trading Co., Ltd

Our company was rewarded as we paid income tax regularly to the state. We always perform our duties conscientiously and obey the rules and regulations prescribed by the state.

I am sure that rich or high income earning people have to give more taxes which can contribute to the development of the state. ■

*Congratulations
to
U Aung Ko Win
Chairman of KBZ Bank
for No. 1 Tax Payer in the whole country for
(6) consecutive years
(From 2011-12 to 2016 -17)*

Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation Yangon Branch



SMBC SUMITOMO MITSUI
BANKING CORPORATION

Investments pouring into Thilawa SEZ (B)

THE second step of development for Thilawa SEZ (B) has started and investment prospects are very encouraging.

Myanmar-Japan Thilawa Development Ltd. (MJTD) began the second step, the construction phase, in December 2017 and plans to finish construction on 66.44 hectares by 2019. A representative from MJTD said that around 90 companies are involved in Phase 1 of Thilawa SEZ Zone (A) and (B) and they were granted permission based on their compliance to environmental conservation standards and job creation potential.

After the completion of Zone (A), work on 100 hectares of Zone (B) started in February 2017 and the construction of basic infrastructure is slated to be finished by August 2018. Half of the process for foreign companies leasing land in Zone (B) is completed, said an MJTD representative.

On 1 March JFE Meranti Myanmar Co., one of the first investing companies, began construction of their factory, which is scheduled for completion by 2020. The factory will provide

about 300 jobs to local residents. JFE Steel Corporation is the second-largest steel company in Japan and is currently the biggest investor in the Thilawa SEZ.

In its current state, Thilawa SEZ is not as successful as SEZs in Myanmar's neighbouring countries, but the basic infrastructure of Zone (B) will have the first step completed in 2018 and the second step in 2019.

Work on Zone (A) began in 2014 and investment permits were issued to companies. By September 2015 around 79 companies had been operating on 400 hectares of Zone (A). This year after most basic infrastructure in Zone (B) is finished, and an additional five companies have begun operating, raising the number to 84 companies currently working in Thilawa SEZ.

The Myanmar Government holds 51 per cent of Thilawa SEZ and the Japan Government holds 49 per cent. From Myanmar's side, a lot of public companies and individual businesses are involved in the SEZ. From Japan's side, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and other Japanese companies have invested in the SEZ. The MJTD is working on electricity and energy, roads, water pipelines, and wastewater disposal systems in Thilawa SEZ.

By Zayar (MRTV)

MYANMAR is being hosted the 19th meeting of the ASEAN Subcommittee on Information (SCI) which commences from March 5 to 8, and leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are attending the meeting.

The SCI meeting aims at reviewing the resolutions related to the information sector in ASEAN summits and other meetings, presenting new project proposals for the next fiscal year; negotiating for the ASEAN Cultural Fund, making financial rules and selecting a host country for the next meeting.

Cooperation with three main pillars

As for Ministry for Information, the preparatory work is being carried out actively in order to disseminate the information and news of ASEAN Political-Security Community-APSC, ASEAN Economic Community_AEC, ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community_ASCC and Subcommittee on Information_SCI to the public.

ASEAN Committee for Culture and Information (ASEAN COCI)

The ASEAN Committee for Culture and Information (ASEAN COCI) was set up in October 1978 with the aim of promoting effective cooperation in the fields of culture and information for the purpose of enhancing mutual understanding and solidarity among the peoples of ASEAN. Moreover, various projects and activities, ranging from an ASEAN Youth Camp to news exchanges among ASEAN media, are conducted each year.

There also are workshops and other activities to nurture talent and promote interaction among ASEAN scholars, writers, artists and journalists.

Activities in the area of culture include the protection, conservation and preservation of cultural heritage, cultural promotion and the production of cultural showcases.

More recently, ASEAN cul-

tural officials have been working on issues such as human resource development in the culture sector and small and medium-sized cultural industries. Activities in the information sector involves implementing communications projects aimed at raising ASEAN awareness and to generate a positive perception of ASEAN.

The ASEAN-COCI has two sub-committees, one dealing with culture and the other with information. These subcommittees plan, implement and monitor projects approved and funded by the ASEAN-COCI.

At the same time, there is in each ASEAN Member State an ASEAN National COCI that oversees the coordination and implementation of ASEAN-COCI projects and activities. The ASEAN National COCI comprises representatives from the foreign ministries and ministries of culture and information, national radio and television networks, heritage boards, museums, archives and libraries.

The COCI has ushered in the new phase in radio and television

cooperation through such projects as the ASEAN Television News: Informs, Integrates and Inspires and the Voice of ASEAN: Beyond Boundaries to further strengthen ASEAN awareness through the sharing of media resources.

The COCI supports for the dissemination of public service announcements for the launching of the ASEAN Community and encourages the ASEAN Member States' broadcasting companies to use these multimedia materials, both via traditional and new media throughout the region.

With the aims of involving the youths, the COCI will launch many programmes for young bloggers and the ASEAN Virtual Learning Resource Centre website which can engage the youths in heritage conservation and culture.

Besides this programme, the COCI will push for collaboration with non-government cultural organisations to implement the process successfully.

The following are SCI meetings which held in the previous

five years.

- (1) 14th SCI, Brunei, 2013
- (2) 15th SCI, Cambodia, 2014
- (3) 16th SCI, Indonesia, 2015
- (4) 17th SCI, Laos, 2016
- (5) 18th SCI, Malaysia, 2017
- (6) 19th SCI, Myanmar, 2018

The ASEAN Strategic Plan for Information and Media

ASEAN's information and media sector has affirmed its commitment to continue its efforts, to raise ASEAN awareness, to support other community pillars and sectors with their communication needs through the adoption of the ASEAN Strategic Plan for Information and Media. The Strategic Plan will advance cooperation in promoting access to information about ASEAN, promote a sense of regional identity and community, harness the use of information and communication technologies to reach wider audiences, and develop ASEAN-relevant multi-media content.

The key strategies of the ASEAN Strategic Plan for Information and Media include;

1. Advancing cooperation

and ASEAN-level agreements to provide regional mechanisms to promote access to information;

2. Encouraging the development of programs and dissemination of information on the benefits and opportunities offered by the ASEAN community and promote mutual respect, appreciation of diversity and a sense of belonging in this integrated region;

3. Harnessing the use of information and communication technologies across different groups as a means to connect with the regional and global community; and

4. Engaging media professionals, research, business and other entities in collaborative development of ASEAN-relevant content.

Using different types of Media

The information sector continues to promote ASEAN awareness and communicating to the people on the benefits and opportunities of regional integration and ASEAN community building

Hosting the 19th meeting of the ASEAN Subcommittee on Information (SCI) in Yangon



Dance troupe performs at the opening ceremony of 19th meeting of the ASEAN Sub-Committee of Information (SCI) in Yangon. PHOTO: MNA

process, through the use of different types of media including traditional, mainstream and new media.

The ASEAN information and media sector is continuing with its efforts to strengthening engagement with the private sector and other non-government media organisations through the Government-to-Business Dialogue and the ASEAN Information and Media Dialogue.

COCI Contribution to ASEAN Strategic Area considerable economic sector in its own right. It has the potential to be a significant domestic sector and contribute to exports through the development of new cultural product and through tourism. COCI projects can directly contribute to economic growth by fostering a strong cultural sector.

COCI Long Term Goal

Monitor the economic contribution of the cultural industry by incorporating cultural industry measures into the existing micro-economic monitoring mechanisms. Once the cultural industry is recognized as a significant economic sector, microeconomic policy can contribute to its management.

COCI Contribution to ASEAN Strategic Area

Cultural uniqueness is a major driver of tourism. The diversity of cultures across ASEAN can support a strong internal and external tourism industry which can improve the mechanism for engaging with the media and promoting the importance of ASEAN's cultural heritage and the work of COCI. The protection and utilization of ASEAN's cultural heritage will only occur if there is widespread awareness of the importance of this heritage, the opportunities that exist for the economic and social benefit this heritage can provide and the threats to this heritage from unsustainable exploitation. The work of COCI, in focusing on sustainability, is a key message which should be widely disseminated.

Translated by
Win Ko Ko Aung



Benefits of Taking a Walk

By Kyaw Kyaw (Set-hmu Takkatho)

PHYSICAL exercise is great for your health.

Today, the government is giving effective encouragement to sports activities to raise the health standard of the people. There is a saying in Pali, "Arogiam Paramam Labham", which means good health is the greatest blessing. Good health can be defined as physical and mental wellbeing without diseases. Of all the types of sports and activities we can do, walking is the simplest and most cost-effective form but with great contribution to your overall health.

While walking, you can view green and lush vegetation and breathe in fresh air and the fragrant smell of flowering plants along the route. Everyone, irrespective of age, should cultivate a good habit of walking as an exercise.

The benefits of walking are many and various, such as fitness, being free from diseases, being in great shape with fair complexion, mental well-being, being in the pink of health with

youthfulness, having good stamina, improvement of flexibility and muscle tone, gaining new friends along the way, helpful to your digestion, activeness, and getting sound sleep. Inactivity can make your internal organs stiff and if so, you are more likely to suffer diseases or existing diseases may persist, and you will appear older than you actually are.

We tend to appreciate the value of good health only when we are ill. Walking helps sickly persons recover from their bad health and healthy persons can maintain their fitness too. So, you should take a walk regularly.

To walk, you do not need any sports equipment and you can walk at any place, in most weathers, and everyone young or old, can participate. The distance of walking depends on your age and health conditions. You should walk excessively and after walking, stop to take a breathing exercise for 10 minutes and then drink about two glasses of water. With such a great method of staying in health, I would like to urge everyone to take it up and keep in shape.

Interviewing participants at the 19th ASEAN COCI SCI meeting

FROM PAGE-6

U Zeya, director, Myanmar Radio and Television

These meetings were held annually according to the alphabetical order of the ASEAN countries. This year, it is being hosted by Myanmar. In the ASEAN, there are political and social communities, the economic community and the ASEAN socio-cultural community. Of the three, to implement the processes of the ASEAN socio-cultural community, a cultural subcommittee and information subcommittee were formed.

The information subcommittee will be chaired by Myanmar in 2018. Next year, according to alphabetical order, it will be the Philippines. At the information subcommittee meetings, the means of cooperation in media will be conducted for the people to provide them with



U Zeya, director, Myanmar Radio and Television.

knowledge about the ASEAN and to make them proud citizens of the ASEAN.

Discussions will be held on how to have more video/audio programmes that raise the ASEAN family spirit. Later, a discussion will be conducted on how to utilise the ASEAN cultural fund, and how to select the projects and the country.

A discussion will be held on the future work processes of the



Mr Has Sam Ath, deputy director general, Cambodia Ministry of Information.

ASEAN information subcommittee. It will continue for one-and-a-half day — a full-day today and up until noon tomorrow.

During the period when Myanmar is the chair of the information subcommittee, a concept paper was drawn and submitted about women business owners in the ASEAN for the 10 countries to discuss. As an ASEAN+3 (China, Japan, Korea) project, a concept pa-



Ms Mufidah Binti Abdul Hakim, information officer, Brunei Darussalam.

per needs to be implemented to conduct a youth radio producer workshop. Regular programmes on the ASEAN will be translated and broadcast.

There will be cooperation in the joint production of radio programmes, exchange and broadcasting of television programmes, holding of ASEAN quiz programmes and the exchange of ASEAN journalists.

Mr. Has Sam Ath, Deputy Director General, Cambodia Ministry of Information

There is no memorandum of understanding on media cooperation between Cambodia and Myanmar. However, in the last few years, bilateral cooperation has increased.

At the moment, Myanmar and Cambodia lag behind in sharing and distributing news and information with each other. However, more news will be broadcast and bilateral media cooperation will be increased.

Ms. Mufidah Binti Abdul Hakim, information officer, Brunei Darussalam

Increasing cooperation in the information sector by the ASEAN countries will be discussed at the meeting. It will be beneficial to the people and will help countries in the ASEAN community understand each other. ■

Preparations to receive returnees to Rakhine State

TAUNG Pyo Letwe Reception Centre, Nga Khu Ya Reception Centre and Hla Pho Khaung Transit Centre were being opened to receive returnees back to Rakhine State Maungdaw region.

An Arrangement on Return of Displaced Persons from Rakhine State was signed on 23 November 2017 between Myanmar and Bangladesh and a Joint Working Group on the Repatriation of Displaced Myanmar Residents from Bangladesh was formed to implement the agreement.

The first meeting of Joint Working Group on the Repatriation of Displaced Myanmar Residents from Bangladesh was held on 15 January in Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Physical Arrangement for Repatriation of Displaced Myanmar Residents From Bangladesh was signed.

In the first meeting of Joint Working Group on the Repatriation of Displaced Myanmar Residents from Bangladesh the forms that voluntary returnees need to fill in were discussed thoroughly by the two sides.

Myanmar-Bangladesh Home Affairs Ministers second meeting for cooperation on bi-

lateral security and law enforcement was held in Bangladesh from 15 to 17 February.

At the meeting particulars of 8,032 persons from 1,673 households were handed over to Myanmar by Bangladesh for assessment prior to returning them.

The form that describes these persons was not according to the agreed format and was in a format made by the Bangladesh side. As it is not in the agreed format, it was difficult to clarify where these people actually lived. Additional difficulties were

- impossible to assess whether they return on their free will
- no undertaking to obey and follow the existing laws of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar
- no signature or finger print to guarantee that the information provided are true
- no from number and no date of entry on filling the form
- no finger print and distinct sign of head of household included
- no indication of whether the person previously hold document(s) issued by Myanmar government and no Myanmar address of the parents of the head

of household

- modern methods of comparing the photo by household and documents issued for each family with the photo of the voluntary returnees were in place but the photo sent was of low quality and could not be checked

- father and mother names of each individual in the household lists were not included and non-related person can be included in it

- the numbers of the cards held were not shown making it difficult to compare it with the records

- despite space provided for finger print and photo, no photo and finger print included

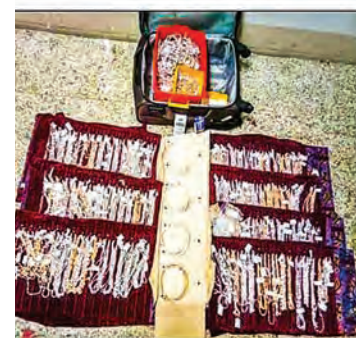
- a family photo was included but was not clear

- no signature of assessment group included that could cause confusion

As such, Bangladesh side was informed through diplomatic channel to send the forms in the agreed format it is learnt.

Discussions and coordinations were being conducted with Bangladesh in order to quickly assess and accept the returnees it is learnt. — Myanmar News Agency ■

Undeclared jewelry seized at Yangon International Airport



Two Myanmar citizens, who arrived in Myanmar from Hong Kong by a Dragon Air flight, were intercepted by a combined team which consists of anti-drug force, police force and immigration officials on 4 March.

They were stopped when they were crossing the green channel at the Yangon International Airport at around 5:10 pm local standard time Sunday and found suspected items made of white gold. A personal search and baggage examination led to the recovery of 941 necklaces, 220 bracelets, 115 hand chains, 163 rings, 137 pairs of earrings and 137 lockets worth US\$ 71,290 of undeclared jewellery in their

baggage.

The couple was identified as Zaw Min Thu, 35 years of age and his wife Ma Mai Win Chin. They confessed that the jewellery was purchased in Hong Kong in order to resell the items in Myanmar. They tried to smuggle the jewellery into Myanmar without payment of customs duty. The owners will be allowed to take back their jewellery if they pay the customs duty and supply documents that prove the jewellery belongs to the owners.

They must do this at the Customs Department within two weeks. If not, the jewellery will be confiscated as public property.—Myanmar Digital News ■

UK police probe feared poisoning of ex-Russian spy

LONDON — British police raced on Tuesday to identify an unknown substance that left a former Russian double agent fighting for his life, as Moscow said it had no information about the “tragic” incident.

Specialist officers from the counter-terrorism squad are helping the investigation into the collapse of Sergei Skripal on Sunday, which has sparked fears of a poison plot.

Media reports named the 66-year-old, a former colonel in Russian military intelligence, as the man found unconscious on a bench in a shopping centre in the southwestern English city of Salisbury.

Police said a man in his 60s and a woman in her 30s found with him are being treated for “suspected exposure to an unknown substance” and are in critical condition in intensive care in hospital.

A “major incident” was declared and the area remained cordoned off on Tuesday, while a restaurant on a street nearby, Zizzi, was also closed in a “precaution”.

Britain’s chief counter-terrorism officer, Mark Rowley of London’s Metropolitan Police, said specialist members of his team were supporting the investigation.

“Clearly it’s a very unusual case and the critical thing is to get to the bottom of what has caused



The area remained cordoned off on Tuesday, while a restaurant on a street nearby, Zizzi, was also closed as a precaution. **PHOTO: AFP**

this incident as quickly as possible,” he told BBC radio.

Local police say they are keeping “an open mind”.

- Echoes of Litvinenko -

Skripal was sentenced to 13 years in jail in Russia in 2006 for betraying Russian intelligence agents to Britain’s MI6 secret service.

He was pardoned before being flown to Britain as part of a high-profile spy swap between Russia and the United States in 2010.

His mysterious collapse has

revived memories of the death of Alexander Litvinenko, an ex-Russian spy and Kremlin critic who was poisoned in 2006 with radioactive polonium in London.

A British inquiry ruled in 2016 that Russian President Vladimir Putin “probably approved” the killing and identified two Russians, Andrei Lugovoi and Dmitri Kovtun, as the prime suspects.

Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Tuesday that it had no information on the Salisbury incident.

“We see that such a tragic

situation happened,” he said, adding: “But we don’t have information about what could be the cause, what this person did.”

He said London had not made any requests for assistance in the investigation, but added: “Moscow is always ready for co-operation.”

- ‘Traitor to Russia’ -

The incident made the front pages of almost all Britain’s newspapers on Tuesday, with the Daily Mail speculating that Skripal may have been the target of a revenge “hit” by former colleagues.

Litvinenko’s widow, Marina, told The Times newspaper that watching footage of emergency responders in hazardous material suits “was kind of deja vu”.

William Browder, a British hedge fund manager who has campaigned against the Kremlin over the death in custody of his former employee Sergei Magnitsky, said his “first suspicion” was that Moscow was involved.

“This man was considered by the Kremlin to be a traitor to Russia,” he told AFP.

“They have a history of doing assassinations in Russia and abroad. And they have a history of using poisons including in Britain.

“And therefore that should be the first theory of what happened.”

However Lugovoi, who is an MP in the Russian parliament, responded to the British media reports by saying that Britain “suffers from phobias”.

“Because of the presidential elections (on 18 March), our actions in Syria, the situation with Skripal could be spun into an anti-Russian provocation,” he told Interfax news agency.

Rowley noted that “Russian exiles are not immortal, they do all die and there can be a tendency for some conspiracy theories.

“But likewise we have to be alive to the fact of state threats as illustrated by the Litvinenko case,” he said.—AFP ■

Shear success: women being drawn to sheep farms in Australia

TRANGIE (Australia) — In a sweltering shed on an Australian farm near the rural town of Trangie, Emma Billet drags a nervous sheep from a waiting pen to her shearing station.

She is the only female in her crew of five shearers, but attitudes on Australian farms are changing and training approaches are encouraging a gender rethink, with more women entering the profession Down Under.

“It is a physical job which I enjoy. I like to work hard,” 28-year-old Billet, who can fleece 130 sheep daily, told AFP during her break.

“It is like a sense of accomplishment at the end of the day.”

The number of skilled women working with farm animals — including animal trainers, veterinary nurses and shearers and shearing hands — has grown from close to 11,700 in 2006 to almost 19,200 a decade later, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

“It comes back to women being on the land as well,” Billet said of the rise of women in the industry.

“It has become more and more common now just to see women owning farms and running businesses and I guess times have just changed. It is good to see.”

Although there are still fewer

than 100 female shearers, experts say there has been significant growth in the past few years.

“There have been women in the shed for a long time, that have just been roustabouts (shed hands that collect the wool from the ground),” Glenn Haynes, a shearing programme coordinator at TAFE South Australia, a leading vocational training school, told AFP.

There was resistance in past, however, with a “pretty negative attitude towards women” from the older generation when it came to their ability to shear, Haynes added.

But this is changing and new approaches to training are being



Emma Billet can fleece 130 sheep a day. **PHOTO: AFP**

introduced, including female-only programmes, as demand among women grows, he said.

- ‘Not for faint hearted’ -

Haynes held a workshop in 2016 targeting women, in which just a few pursued a shearing career, but the annual event has

recently seen close to 25 enter the trade.

Australia is one of the world’s largest wool exporters, producing around 25 percent of greasy wool sold on the global market, in a multi-billion dollar industry. More than 70 million sheep are shorn each year.—AFP ■

Italian left mulls Five Star deal to end deadlock

ROME — Senior members of Italy's vanquished Democratic Party on Tuesday were defying outgoing leader Matteo Renzi and eyeing a possible deal with the triumphant Five Star Movement after an election that ended in deadlock.

Anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) leader Luigi Di Maio declared his party "the winners" after obtaining nearly 33 percent of the vote, but they need to form alliances in parliament if they are to govern.

Renzi ruled out the prospect as he announced his resignation on Monday, following disaster at the polls that saw his party's centre-left coalition slump to third place with 23 per cent of the vote.

"During the campaign, we said we would not do a government with extremists. We have not changed our mind," Renzi said, adding that the Democratic Party (PD) would "not be

a crutch for anti-system forces".

Political expert Giovanni Orsina said Renzi's departure meant "a convergence between the PD and the M5S is much more probable because Renzi was an obstacle to this."

But Renzi on Tuesday said he would only step down once a new government is formed, and would act as a "guarantor" that his party made no compromise with what he called the "wind of extremism" that swept Italy in Sunday's election.

However other leading voices in his party disagree and he now faces pressure to bring forward his resignation.

Michele Emiliano, governor of the Puglia region and a leading PD member said his party could offer "external support" to a M5S government.

In an interview with Il Fatto Quotidiano daily, Emiliano berated Renzi for not stepping down imme-



Anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) leader Luigi Di Maio declared his party "the winners" after obtaining nearly 33 per cent of the vote in Italy. PHOTO: AFP

diately. "In order to cling on, he is willing to stall the political system," Emiliano said.

-Euro 'failed currency' -

With almost all ballots counted, the main right-wing alliance was in the lead with 37 per cent, followed by the M5S and the centre-left alliance led by the PD.

The vote has drawn comparisons with the Brexit referendum in Brit-

ain and the election of US President Donald Trump because of the anti-immigration and anti-establishment rhetoric, raising concern in European capitals about instability.

Far-right leader Matteo Salvini of the League party, the biggest grouping in the right-wing coalition after Sunday's election, has claimed his right to govern.

Salvini campaigned on an anti-immigration platform, promising to deport

hundreds of thousands of "irregular" migrants, and has called the euro a "failed currency".

Media mogul Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia (Go Italy) party came second in the coalition — a humiliating setback for the three-time former prime minister.

With no party or alliance commanding an overall majority, M5S leader Luigi Di Maio also wants the prime ministerial nomination after his party hoovered up votes from Italians fed up with a slow economic recovery.

- 'Nothing will be as before' -

Di Maio, who is due to visit his hometown of Pomigliano d'Arco, an industrial base near Naples later Tuesday, will now face a difficult balancing act.

Any perception of cosy deals with other parties following the election risks alienating his core support from Italians angered by traditional politics.

A deal with the Five Star Movement could also divide the PD, where many are smarting from the movement's victories in traditional leftist heartlands.

"The key question for the coming days is what the PD will do," said Orsina.

"Neither the right-wing alliance nor M5S are able to form a government alone. The question is therefore what the third bloc will do," he said.

Commentators said any compromise would be far from easy and would take time, at least until newly-elected lawmakers meet for the first time on 23 March. "The world of Italian politics as we have known it for the last 25 years is over," wrote Corriere della Sera's editor Luciano Fontana. "Nothing will be as before. The players, and the political landscape of the country have changed," he said. —AFP ■

Russia's Aerospace Force to get most advanced attack helicopters by yearend

ROSTOV-ON-DON — Two most advanced Mil Mi-28NM serial-produced attack helicopters will arrive for Russian troops by the end of 2018, Russian Helicopters Group CEO Andrei Boginsky said on Tuesday.

"Now a pre-production batch is underway and the contract is due to be completed in November this year. Correspondingly, we are complying with the schedule. So far, two helicopters are stipulated in the contract," the rotorcraft manufacturer's chief executive said, responding to the corresponding question from TASS.

Russia started developing the Mi-28NM helicopter in 2009. Its modernized version considerably differs from its



Now a pre-production batch is underway. PHOTO: TASS

prototype. The Mi-28NM will feature an innovative helmet-mounted target designation and display system as part of its on-board radar equipment.

The helicopter is furnished with the N025 all-round surveillance radar and a new electronic warfare system. The gunship is designed to search for and destroy low-speed air targets, tanks, armoured and non-armoured hardware and enemy manpower day and night and in any weather conditions.—Tass ■

DPRK willing to talk with US for denuclearization, agreeing on summit with South Korea: Blue House

SEOUL — The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has showed willingness to hold talks with the United States about issues including the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, and agreed on the third summit meeting with South Korea in late April, the Blue House of South Korea said on Tuesday.

Chung Eui-yong, top national security adviser for South Korean President Moon Jae-in, told a televised press briefing that the DPRK side had expressed its willingness to talk candidly with the United States on the denuclearization issue and to normalize ties between Pyongyang and Washington.

Chung returned home earlier in the day after making a two-day visit to Pyongyang, where he met with top DPRK leader Kim Jong Un on Monday together with four other envoys, including Suh Hoon, director of the National Intelligence Service (NIS), South Korea's spy agency. —Xinhua ■

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION MYANMA RAILWAYS				
Extension of Tender Closing Date				
Myanma Railways Extends the Tender Closing Date as follows:				
Sr No	Tender No	Description	Initial Closing Date & Time	Extension Closing Date & Times
1	16/MR/INDIA (E) 2017-2018	Track Recording Car EM 80 and Small Track Maintenance Machineries	22.3.2018 (14:30) Hr	22.5.2018 (14:30) Hr

Managing Director, Myanma Railways
Ministry of Transport and Communications, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar

BJP win in Tripura an ideological victory: Modi

NEW DELHI — Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday dubbed the BJP's win over the Left in Tripura a "victory of ideology" and said the party needs to work hard to maintain its winning electoral streak, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ananth Kumar told reporters.

Modi was addressing the BJP Parliamentary Party meeting, where he was greeted with the slogan, 'Jeet hamari jari hai, ab Karnataka ki bari hai' (Our winning run continues, now is the turn of Karnataka).

The prime minister spoke about the BJP's impressive performance in the the three north-east states of Tripura, Nagaland and Meghalaya.

According to party leaders at the meeting,



Prime Minister Narendra Modi. PHOTO: PTI

Modi referred to comments from some critics that Tripura was a small state with only two Lok Sabha seats and underlined the significance of the BJP's win.

He said the state had long been yearning for change and people embraced it by ousting the Left which was in power for over 25 years.

The BJP won only

one assembly seat in Kerala before it went on to trounce the Left in its bastion of Tripura, the prime minister said.

"Tripura was considered a bastion of Marxism

for the last 25 years. This is an ideological victory," party leaders quoted Modi as saying.

The Left's politics was underpinned by violence and hate, he said, adding that people have rejected it everywhere.

It is finished across the world and is on the verge of oblivion in India as it is now in power only in Kerala, Kumar said, quoting Modi.

All three states are very important, the prime minister said, referring to Tripura, Meghalaya and Nagaland, adding that the central government will give priority to their development.

For development, all states are equal, he said.

An alliance of several parties, including the BJP, was sworn in Meghalaya on Tuesday and Modi ex-

tended his greetings to new Chief Minister Conrad Sangma.

With the Karnataka Assembly polls round the corner, Modi told the gathering that the party will need to work hard to maintain its winning streak and asserted that there was an atmosphere of hope and expectation in the country, Kumar said.

The prime minister asserted that the party should endeavour to live up to people's expectations as it rejoices in its electoral win and asked MPs to take to the masses details of the Union Budget that was aimed at building a new India.

Modi also paid tribute to nine BJP workers, who were killed in alleged political violence in Tripura during the run up to the state polls.—PTI ■

Powerful eruption observed at Mt Shinmoe in southwestern Japan

MIYAZAKI, Japan — A powerful volcanic eruption was observed on Tuesday at Mt Shinmoe on the southwestern Japanese main island of Kyushu after smaller eruptions were detected earlier in the month, the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

It was the first time in about seven years such an explosive eruption occurred at the 1,421-meter-high volcano straddling Kagoshima and Miyazaki prefectures, according to the agency. No injuries were reported, local authorities said. The agency has al-

ready been restricting access to the mountain, while expanding the area that may be possibly affected by eruptions to within 3 kilometres of the crater from Thursday.

The latest eruption was detected at around 2:30 pm Volcanic smoke was seen rising to as high

as 2,300 metres from the crater, the agency said. Prior to the latest events, the volcano erupted in January 2011 and last October.

A series of explosive eruptions were seen between January and March in 2011.—Kyodo News ■



PHOTO: KYODO NEWS

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Consignees of cargo carried on M.V SIMA PERFECT VOY. NO. () are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 7-3-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of HPT where it will lie at the consignee's risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

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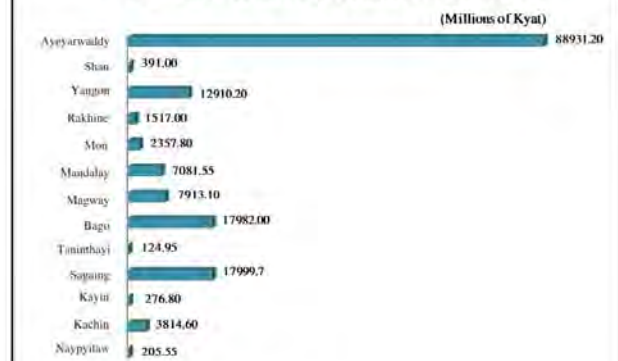
Damaged cargo will be surveyed daily from 8 am to 11:20 am and 12 noon to 4 pm to Claim's Day now declared as the third day after final discharge of cargo from the Vessel.

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

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Phone No: 2301185

Disbursement of 2017 Winter Crop Production Loan



Source : Myanmar Agriculture Development Bank
Information Unit : Central Statistical Organization

marketing@globalnewlightofmyanmar.com

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Frances McDormand, 60, won best actress for her role as a rage-filled mother seeking justice for her murdered daughter in Martin McDonagh's "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri". **PHOTO: AFP**

Man suspected of stealing Frances McDormand's Oscar arrested

LOS ANGELES — Hours after winning her second Best Actress Oscar, Frances McDormand almost lost her gold statue, when the trophy went missing at the annual Governors Ball party.

The actor went to attend the party after the award ceremony with her filmmaker husband, Joel Coen.

The security was soon able to recover the trophy and returned it to her.

"I can confirm that after a brief time apart, Frances and her Oscar were happily reunited last night. They celebrated their reunion with a double cheeseburger from In-N-Out,"

McDormand's representative told People magazine.

According to the Los Angeles Police Department, a man was later arrested for allegedly stealing the Oscar.

"Best Actress winner Frances McDormand and her Oscar were happily reunited after a brief separation at last night's Governors Ball. The alleged thief was quickly apprehended by a photographer and members of our fast-acting Academy and security teams. The 'Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri' star resumed her celebrations," a spokesperson for the Academy said.—PTI ■

Tiffany Haddish joins Tyler Perry comedy 'The List'

LOS ANGELES — Tiffany Haddish is set to star in Tyler Perry's comedy film "The List."

The movie also features Tika Sumpter and Omari Hardwick, reported Variety.

Perry is directing from his own script and producing. Paramount Players has already

set a 2 November release date for the film.

Haddish will play a wild woman who gets released from prison and reunites with her sister, played by Sumpter.

Sumpter's character is in an online relationship with a man that may be "catfishing" her.—PTI ■



Tiffany Haddish. **PHOTO: PTI**

Beth Behrs to star in comedy pilot 'Our People'

LOS ANGELES — "2 Broke Girls" alum Beth Behrs has been roped in to play the lead in Fox comedy pilot 'Our People'.

Based on the Endemol Shine Israeli format "Nevsu: A Young Multi-Cultural Couple," the project follows Abel, a man from a

bombastic African family who does not have a world in their native language for "privacy," and his fiancée Jenny (Behrs), who hails from a mid-western family, as they try to build a normal life together.

The show also stars Lea

Thompson, who will play Jenny's mother, Lisa, reported Variety.

"Our People" received a pilot commitment at the network in September. Vali Chandrasekaran will write in addition to executive producing. Trent O'Donnell is set to direct the pilot.—PTI ■

Chinese pianist to perform solo to celebrate American composer Bernstein's 100th birthday

NEW YORK — Acclaimed Chinese pianist Warren Lee will present a solo piano recital early next month at Carnegie Hall, New York City, celebrating the artistry and 100th anniversary of the US legendary composer Leonard Bernstein's birthday.

The performance, scheduled for 8 pm on 2 April at Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall, will feature a selection of Bernstein's Anniversaries with readings of personal letters of the maestro by

the Hong Kong-born pianist, etc.

The event is part of the Artist Series staged by Distinguished Concerts International New York (DCINY), a music entertainment production company with headquarters in New York.

A first-prize winner of the 1995 Stravinsky Awards International Piano Competition and the Grand Prix Ivo Pogorelich, Lee is a Steinway and Naxos Recording Artist. His discography includes multiple acclaimed al-

bums of solo and chamber music repertoire. The American Records Guide calls him a "first-rate artist." In recognition of his significant contributions to the music profession, Lee received the Ten Outstanding Young Persons Award in Hong Kong in 2012, an Associateship from the Royal Academy of Music in 2015, and the Ian Mininberg Distinguished Alumni Award from the Yale School of Music in 2017.—Xinhua ■



Kobe Bryant (L), seen here with actor Danny Glover at the Oscars, says his win for "Dear Basketball" means more to him than his five NBA titles. **PHOTO: AFP**

Walton surprised to hear Kobe rate Oscar above championships

LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles Lakers coach Luke Walton isn't ready to believe that Kobe Bryant's Oscar means more to the Lakers legend than his five NBA titles. "He said that? With a straight face?" Walton said on Monday when quizzed by reporters about Bryant's comments. "I didn't see it but I would imagine there was some sarcasm in there. But hey, I don't know. That's his call." Bryant, 39, won the Academy Award for best animated short Sunday for "Dear Basketball," a collaboration with artist Glen Keane and legendary composer John Williams. "It feels better than winning a championship, to be honest," Bryant told reporters backstage after collecting his statuette. "As a kid, I grew up dreaming of winning a championship, but to have something

like this coming out of left field... people asked, 'What do you want to do when you retire?' and I said, 'writer.'

"And they were like, 'That's cute,'" Bryant said. "But to be here right now, to have a sense of validation — it's crazy, man."

Bryant was already a Los Angeles icon, but in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein sexual abuse scandal, his honour created some consternation from those who remembered his arrest over the suspected rape of a 19-year-old hotel worker in Colorado in 2003. Bryant admitted to a sexual encounter, but insisted it was consensual. The criminal case was dropped when the accuser refused to testify, but Bryant faced a civil suit that was settled out of court with no admission of guilt from the NBA star.—AFP ■

Wreckage found of WWII aircraft carrier USS Lexington

SYDNEY— Wreckage from the USS Lexington, a US aircraft carrier which sank during World War II, has been found in the Coral Sea, a search team led by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen announced on Monday.

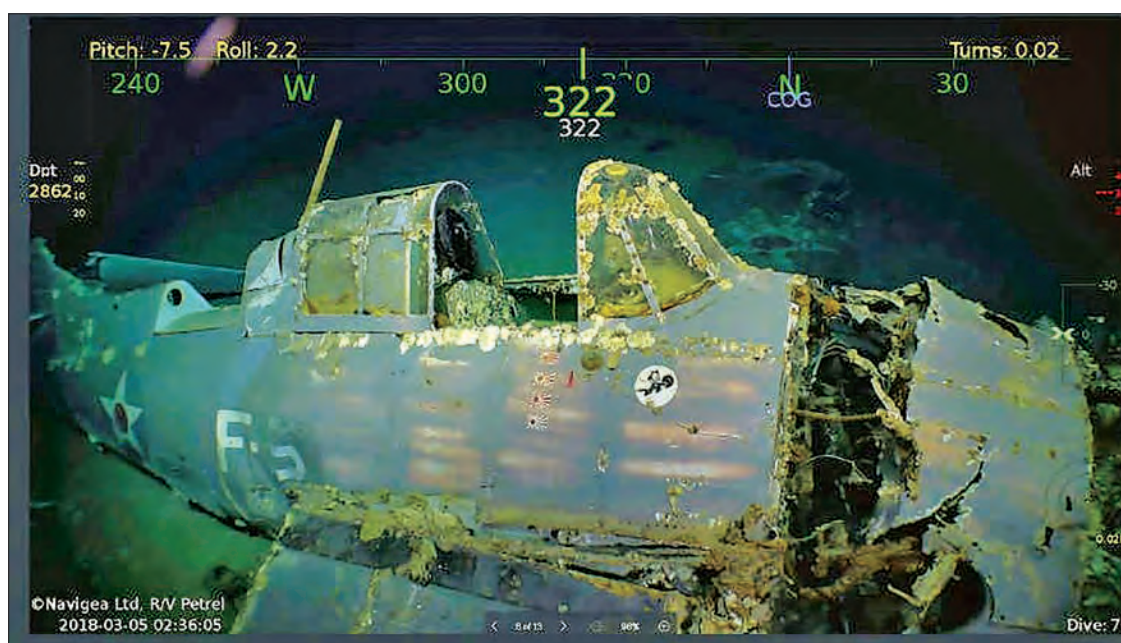
The wreckage was found on Sunday by the team's research vessel, the R/V Petrel, some 3,000 metres (two miles) below the surface more than 500 miles (800 kilometres) off the eastern coast of Australia.

The search team released pictures and video of the wreckage of the Lexington, one of the first ever US aircraft carriers, and some of the planes which went down with the ship.

Remarkably preserved aircraft could be seen on the seabed bearing the five-pointed star insignia of the US Army Air Forces on their wings and fuselage.

On one aircraft, an emblem of the cartoon character Felix the Cat can be seen along with four miniature Japanese flags presumably depicting "kills."

The search team also re-



This handout photograph obtained on 5 March, 2018 shows wreckage from the USS Lexington, a US aircraft carrier which sank during World War II, that has been found in the Coral Sea. **PHOTO: AFP**

leased pictures and video of parts of the ship, including a nameplate, and anti-aircraft guns covered in decades of slime.

The USS Lexington and another US aircraft carrier, the USS Yorktown, fought against three Japanese aircraft carriers from

4-8 May, 1942 in the Battle of the Coral Sea, the first ever between carriers. The badly damaged Lexington, nicknamed "Lady Lex," was deliberately sunk by another US warship at the conclusion of the battle.

More than 200 members of

the crew died in the battle but most were rescued by other US vessels before the Lexington sank.

Admiral Harry Harris, who heads up the US military's Pacific Command (PACOM) — and whose father was one of the sail-

ors evacuated — paid tribute to the successful research effort.

"As the son of a survivor of the USS Lexington, I offer my congratulations to Paul Allen and the expedition crew of Research Vessel (R/V) Petrel for locating the 'Lady Lex,' sunk nearly 76 years ago at the Battle of Coral Sea," Harris said in a statement.

"We honor the valor and sacrifice of the 'Lady Lex's' Sailors — and all those Americans who fought in World War II — by continuing to secure the freedoms they won for all of us," he said.

The USS Lexington was carrying 35 aircraft when it went down. The search team said that 11 planes had been found including Douglas TBD-1 Devastators, Douglas SBD-3 Dauntlesses and Grumman F4F-3 Wildcats.

Search teams led by Allen have discovered the wreckage of a number of historic warships including the USS Indianapolis, a US heavy cruiser which sank in the Philippine Sea in July 1945 after being torpedoed by a Japanese submarine.—AFP ■

Louvre brings 'unprecedented' show to Tehran

TEHRAN — Journalists flooded Iran's National Museum on Monday for the arrival of more than 50 artworks from the Louvre — the first major show by a Western museum in the country's history.

The show reflects France's determined use of cultural diplomacy as it seeks to rebuild traditional ties with Iran, even as their officials hold tense talks over political and security issues.

The doors were unsealed for journalists at the National Museum in central Tehran, which is currently celebrating its 80th anniversary, a day ahead of the public opening.

Among the items shipped over by cargo plane were a 2,400-year-old Egyptian sphinx, a bust of Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius and drawings by Rembrandt and Delacroix.

"Some were definitely easier to transport than others," said Judith Henon, one of the experts sent by the Louvre.

"Our Iranian partners really liked the sphinx, but it weighs close to a tonne and was extremely complicated to put in place." The show marks the culmination of two years of work since a cultural exchange agree-

ment was signed during a visit by President Hassan Rouhani to Paris in January 2016.

"Relations between France and Iran are old and profound because France was a pioneer of archaeological exploration here," Jean-Luc Martinez, president of the Louvre, told AFP.

"This completely unprecedented exhibition... allows us to make the link between this glorious moment and relations that date back to the 19th century."

- Cultural ties -

France has deep cultural ties with pre-revolutionary Iran, and the National Museum itself was built by a Frenchman, Andre Godard, in 1938.

While Britain and Russia battled for political influence in 19th century Persia, it was the French who led the way in archaeological affairs.

"France had priority on cultural questions in the late 19th century and was the only one doing digs in Iran," said Julien Cuny, one of the Louvre's curators for the Tehran show, and an expert on Iran. So as not to hand over everything to Britain and Russia, the Persian monarchs handed control of certain



Louvre museum President Jean-Luc Martinez (L), French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian (C) and Vice President of Iran Head of Cultural Heritage Ali Asghar Mounesan tour an unprecedented exhibition of artworks from the Louvre in Tehran on 5 March, 2018. **PHOTO: AFP**

issues to other countries, and cultural affairs ended up largely with France. "As a result of that, it was the French that set up the antiquities service here in 1930," said Cuny.

That helped preserve France's reputation among Iranians even as that of Britain, the United States and Russia plummeted in the years ahead of the 1979 Islamic revolution.

"Back in the day, the British were looking for oil while we were doing archaeology, so our relations have focused on positive things. It's an image that has

stuck," said a French diplomat.

The irony is that the show opens just as France and Iran find themselves in a tense diplomatic moment.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian was in Tehran to inaugurate the Louvre show, but more importantly to hold difficult talks over ballistic missiles and interventions in the region. Iran's conservative press accused him of insulting the Iranian people with his criticisms of the missile programme and labelled him a "lackey" of US President Donald Trump.

The cultural domain offers a chance to focus on the positive re-engagement between France and Iran, which has also been seen in a number of trade and investment deals involving car-makers Peugeot and Renault as well as energy giant Total since the 2015 nuclear accord.

University links are another branch, with some 1,700 Iranians currently studying in France.

"In the tumultuous ocean of international relations, cultural diplomacy is a flare that we should maintain together," said Le Drian.—AFP ■

Mourinho blast triggered United fightback

LONDON — Jose Mourinho revealed his expletive-filled half-time rant inspired Manchester United's dramatic 3-2 win over Crystal Palace.

Mourinho's side fought back from two goals down at Selhurst Park to snatch the points thanks to Nemanja Matic's blistering long-range strike in stoppage-time.

United trailed to goals from Andros Townsend and Patrick van Aanholt before Chris Smalling gave the visitors a lifeline.

Romelu Lukaku equalised with 14 minutes remaining, setting the stage for Serbia midfielder Matic to notch his first goal for United since his move from Chelsea last year.

Mourinho admitted he was furious with his players' lethargic first half performance and he tore into them, while demanding they show more tactical discipline.

"I cannot tell you half of the things I told my team at half-time because there would be lots of bleeping on television," Mourinho said.

"There were a few strong words relating to their attitude and the intensity of the game.

"What I can say was all about the tactical positioning. That second goal was a goal to show kids in academies around the country, to show that top



Manchester United's Nemanja Matic celebrates scoring the winner against Crystal Palace and his first goal for United since his move from Chelsea last year. **PHOTO: AFP**

players can concede silly goals.

"David De Gea had to do better. He is the best, no doubt, but he had to do better.

"But the intensity and character was fantastic. We got a bit of luck in the last minute but it was deserved.

"The urgency in that last half hour was huge."

It was the first time United had come from 2-0 down to win a Premier League game since December 2013 at Hull.

After hitting back from a goal down to beat Chelsea last weekend, Mourinho insisted this was another demonstration that United have the spirit and desire to overcome perilous predicaments.

- Keep the faith -

"We were losing to Chelsea last week, then we were losing away from home against a Palace team that needs points," he said.

"It's very hard but we kept faith and belief.

"I always believe we can win. I will be like that until my last day.

"Some days more than others but after Smalling's goal, I always thought it was possible.

"Matic scored amazing goals like this when he was with me at Chelsea, at Goodison Park, against Benfica."

United's stirring revival moved them back above Liv-

erpool into second place in the Premier League.

They trail runaway leaders Manchester City by 16 points, but Mourinho is more concerned with securing the top four finish that guarantees qualification for next season's Champions League.

"We want to finish second, but it is huge pressure for us to finish in the top four. Now we have a little pillow," he said.

Palace remain in the relegation zone, one point from safety, but Eagles boss Roy Hodgson urged his players not to let the heartbreaking defeat influence their fight for survival.

"We took the game to Manchester United. If we had drawn the game — I don't think anyone, Jose included — would have said it was a scandal," he said.

"We once again go away with no points and, like the game against Tottenham, I thought we deserved something.

"But you always know the quality they possess and the strength and depth they have. They can cause problems.

"Where we are in the table doesn't enter my mind. It would have been nice to have two more points, but we still would have been very much in a relegation battle.

"It could well go down to the wire."—AFP ■

Serena has high expectations heading into Indian Wells

NEW YORK — Serena Williams said on Monday that she "can't wait for the future" as she warmed up for her return to the WTA Tour at the Tie Break Tens exhibition at Madison Square Garden.

The 23-time Grand Slam champion is competing at the elite Indian Wells hardcourt tournament this week, her first tour action since her 2017 Australian Open triumph.

Williams was pregnant when she lifted the trophy in Melbourne last year, and missed the rest of 2017 awaiting the birth of her daughter in September.

Monday's event, which featured eight players facing off in 10-point "super tie breaks" as they vied for a 250,000 winner's prize, was a chance to sharpen her skills. Williams bowed out in

the second round, gaining a 9-7 lead over China's Zhang Shuai but eventually falling 13-11.

"It was good," she said of the experience. "I wish I would have made a few more shots."

Williams opened the laid-back event with a 10-5 victory over Marion Bartoli, the 2013 Wimbledon champion who announced in December she was planning to return to the court more than four years after retiring in the wake of her only Grand Slam triumph. After correcting the protocol for the "rock-paper-scissors" game used to determine who served first, Williams fell behind 4-2, but a double-fault from Bartoli followed by two aces from Serena saw the American great ahead 5-4. A couple of forehand winners and a service winner saw Williams take an 8-4 lead, and she finally finished

it off with another winning serve.

"It feels different, it feels good," said Williams, who returned to competition with a Fed Cup doubles loss alongside her sister Venus last month.

The birth of Williams's daughter, Alexis Olympia, was followed by complications that scuppered the player's plans to defend her title in Melbourne.

But Williams says she's aiming to be back at her best — apparently more than comfortable with coach Patrick Mouratoglou's comments to wtatennis.com that her goal for this season "will be to win Grand Slams." "I think everyone should have high expectations," said Williams, who will be unseeded at Indian Wells and open her campaign against 53rd-ranked Zarina Diyas of Kazakhstan.—AFP ■

Japan women drop to 5th place playoff at Algarve Cup

PARCHAL, Portugal — Ninth-ranked Japan finished second in their group in the Algarve Cup pool stage with a 2-0 win over Denmark on Monday, setting up a clash against world No 5 Canada in the playoff for fifth place at the 12-team invitational women's soccer tournament.

A second-half goal by Yui Hasegawa and Mana Iwabuchi's stoppage time penalty lifted Japan to their second win but the Netherlands finished first in Group C with seven points to advance to the final, where they will play Group B leaders Sweden.

Japan, who also beat Iceland 2-1 on Saturday af-

ter their opening 6-2 loss to the Netherlands on 1 March, finished on six points. Their final match against Canada will be on Wednesday.

"It was a game that required perseverance," Japan coach Asako Takakura said.

"The players' skills have reached the same level so the team plays well regardless of who's on the pitch.

There's room for improvement when it comes to follow-throughs, and the only thing we can do about that is continue shooting drills."

Australia and Portugal face each other in the third-place playoff.—Kyodo News ■