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History will be the judge

Rebuttal Statement at the Interactive Dialogue on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar during 37th Session of Human Rights Council

AN interactive dialogue on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar was convened on Monday during the ongoing 37th Session of the Human Rights Council being held at the United Nations Office in Geneva from 26 February to 23 March 2018.

During the dialogue, Ms. Yanghee Lee, the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar presented her report followed by the oral report of the Chair of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) on Myanmar to the Human Rights Council. **SEE PAGE-3**



Mothers gather to receive financial aid to be used for supplementary nutrition for their children in Maungtaw, Rakhine State, yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

Maungtaw mothers, infants receive aid

By Kyaw Thu Win,
Aye Min Thu

MAWYAWADI Village, Shwezar Village, and Hindu Aid Camp (2) in Maungtaw, Maungtaw Township held supplementary nutrition programmes for mothers and infants under 5 years, and financial support programmes for mothers and infants under 2 years of age.

Dr. Thar Tun Kyaw, Director-General of the Public Health Department and Medical Treatment Department, and Dr. San San Aye, Director-General of Social Welfare Department conferred Ks90,000 to each of the 122 pregnant mothers present.

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'BEST BANK IN MYANMAR'

Awarded by EUROMONEY 2017

Pyithu Hluttaw discusses power sector

Aye Aye Thant
(MYANMAR NEWS AGENCY)

The seventh regular session of the second Pyithu Hluttaw held its 27th-day meeting at the Pyithu Hluttaw meeting hall yesterday morning.

At the meeting, U Sai Aung Kyaw of Kehsi constituency asked if there was a plan to release to the public the Namt Tone Pond and the catchment area of 31 acres, as well as 165 acres of farmlands to the original owners, after the lands were confiscated by infantry battalion 131 in Kehsi Township. Deputy Minister for Defence Rear Admiral Myint Nwe said the lands were included in the 580 acres of armed force land under infantry battalion 131, and the land was granted to the battalion by the order of the Ministry of Home Affairs dated 15 January 2004. In the question, it was stated that 165 acres are farmlands, but when the infantry battalion took over the land, there



Deputy Minister for Defence Rear Admiral Myint Nwe.
Photo: MNA

were only 15 acres of temporary hillside farmlands without any ownership documents. Some 3.5 acres were a cemetery that had already been relocated when the infantry battalion took over the land.

The Namt Tone Pond fills up through groundwater seepage, and the town people are using it as a source of water supply, as well as for electricity supply by setting up a small mini hy-



Deputy Minister for Electricity and Energy Dr. Tun Naing.
Photo: MNA

dro power plant. Furthermore, it was being learnt that in the 2017-2018 fiscal year (FY) budget, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation has allocated Ks187 million to maintain the pond.

Therefore, Namt Tone Pond and its watershed area of 31 acres will be released to the people according to their demands. The so-called 165 acres of farmlands, however, were granted to the bat-

talion by the Ministry of Home Affairs, and there is no evidence of past ownership. Furthermore, they are close to the battalion buildings and due to security reasons, cannot be released back, said the deputy minister.

Deputy Minister for Electricity and Energy Dr. Tun Naing replied to a question posed by U Toe Thaung of Mongmit constituency on the plan to provide 24 hours of electricity to Mongmit Town. To provide electricity to Mongmit 24 hours per day, electricity has to be transmitted from 132-KV Letpanhla substation to Zayetkwin substation through 24.65 miles of the Mogok-Mongmit 66-KV power line and a 66/11-KV 5 MVA substation constructed in Mongmit Town. These works were conducted with the union fund for the 2014-2015 FY budget. To connect the four wards in Mongmit with the Mongmit substation, 6 miles of 11-KV power line, six 11/0.4-KV transformers and 14.5 miles of

a 400-volt power line were constructed with the State government's fund for the 2014-2015 FY and the 2016-2017 FY. To provide 14 villages in Mongmit Township with electricity, 10.8 miles of 11-KV power line, 21 11/0.4-KV transformers and 21.97 miles of a 400-volt power line were constructed with the State government fund in the 2016-2017 FY and the 2017-2018 FY, said the deputy minister.

At the moment, electricity is being provided to Mogok from Zayetkwin by a 33-KV power line, but the power line's life was long, and it passed through deep forests and mountains causing leakage and resulting in unsatisfactory power supply to Mogok. So, a new 66-KV power line was constructed and completed in early March. The shift from the old to new power line has not yet taken place to avoid disruption during the matriculation examination.

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Amyotha Hluttaw discusses road construction work, corruption

Aung Ye Thwin
(MYANMAR NEWS AGENCY)

The seventh session of the second Amyotha Hluttaw held its 27th-day meeting at the Amyotha Hluttaw meeting hall yesterday morning.

During the day's meeting, asterisk-marked questions were answered by Deputy Minister for Construction U Kyaw Lin.

U Kyaw Kyaw of Rakhine State constituency (4) first asked if there was a plan to upgrade the inter-village road that connects Gonkyun Village, Mrauk U Township, with Panmyaung Village, Minbya Township, in Rakhine State. Deputy Minister for Construction U Kyaw Lin explained that the road was not in the union road list. First, the road must be included in the list prepared by the Ministry of Construction. The Rakhine State government must submit the proposal to the union government's office to include it in the list, according to regulations, and once it becomes a road under the Ministry of Construction, funds will be requested, and depending on the availability of funds, the road will be upgraded accordingly, said the Deputy Minister.

U Myint Naing of Rakhine constituency (5) asked about the plan to upgrade the inter-village road in Kyauktaw Township that connects Yangon-Sittway road and Kansauk village-Kan Thone Sint-Donnar-Nichay-Aukla village and the building of a 120feet-long reinforced concrete bridge crossing a branch of Yoe creek near Kansauk Village. The deputy minister replied that the laying of concrete on the 4-mile and 1.3-furlong portion of Kansauk-Kan Thone Sint road, on which the earth work has already been completed, and the building of a bridge across Yoe creek near Kansauk Village was earmarked to be undertaken with the 2018-2019 fiscal year (FY) union fund, and depending on the funds received, it will be implemented. Once these works are completed, the remaining works to upgrade three miles of the Donner-Nichay-Aukla inter-village connecting road will be allocated with the yearly union fund and state fund and implemented, said the Deputy Minister.

Replying to a question by U Myo Htat @ Salai Myo Htike of Chin State constituency (12) on the plan to build a motor road from Kanan Village tract,



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

Kanpetlet Township, to Hmontanu Village tract, Kanan-Pike Taw-Hmontanu-Chysnugya, the deputy minister replied that after the 2020-2021 FY period, fund requests would be made for the 19-mile-long and 3-foot-wide Htohn-Hmontanu-Chysnu road, and it will be implemented once the funds are made available.

The 20-mile-long and 6-foot-wide road from the Kanan road turnoff to Pike Taw-Htohn road was designated a priority road, and on the demand of locals, a fund request will be made in the 2018-2019 FY period, and the work will be implemented once

the fund is received, said the deputy minister.

The Hluttaw representatives then discussed the bill on the amendment to an anti-corruption law (fourth revision).

Dr. Khun Win Thaung of Kachin State constituency (11) said the bill must be worked on, so that there is no need for further amendments. He spoke of the importance to reduce corruption when the development of Myanmar was being undertaken through new programmes and reforms were being implemented with increasing momentum. The level of corruption and the slow pace of development in the country are directly related, said the Hluttaw representative.

In the 2016 Transparency International Index, Singapore is at number 7 with 84 points, while Myanmar is at 136 with 28 points. In 2017, Myanmar rose to number 130. However, corruption in the country has not declined. Thus, the bill must be enacted to protect the country from corruption, while it is hoped that the Anti-Corruption Commission and the public at all levels can expose corruption, said the Hluttaw representatives.

Naw Chris Tun @ Dr. Arr Kar Moe of Kayin State consti-

tuency (7) said that when the law was enacted in 2013, Myanmar was at 172 out of the 176 countries in the world. During the previous government's tenure, there were 600 complaints, of which only three cases were investigated. In 2014, when the first Anti-Corruption Committee was formed, 4,353 complaints were received of which only 46 cases were investigated. Therefore, in the 2016 Transparency International Index, there was a slight gain for Myanmar at the 136th position. Both the newly formed second Anti-Corruption Commission and the fourth revision to the bill on the amendment to the anti-corruption law are important, said Naw Chris Tun @ Dr. Arr Kar Moe of Kayin State constituency (7).

The bill was also discussed by U Kyi Win of the Ayeyawady region constituency (12), Daw Htu May of Rakhine State constituency (11), Naw Hla Hla Soe of Yangon region constituency (10), U Hla San of Magway region constituency (1) and U Hla Myint @ U Hla Myint Than of Mon State constituency 11.

The 28th-day meeting of the seventh session of the second Amyotha Hluttaw will be held on 14 March. ■

Rebuttal Statement at the Interactive Dialogue on the Situation of Human Rights ...

FROM PAGE-1

After that, U Htin Lynn, Permanent Representative of Myanmar made a rebuttal statement. In his statement, the Permanent Representative said that only two years in office, the present democratic government has been able to make progress in peace process and laying democratic foundations. Implementation of the recommendations of Advisory Commission on Rakhine State for a sustainable solution is also in progress.

He mentioned that while such efforts are well on track, the terrorist attacks in the Rakhine State in August 2017 have abruptly changed the state of affairs in Rakhine State. Restoring law and order to provide security for all is necessitated while the ARSA terrorist attacks and their instigation have impacted on the population. Daily lives and future of all ethnic groups: Rakhine, Daing-net, Mro, Thet, Mramagyi and people belonging to Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu faiths have been adversely affected. It has also led to displacement of people internally in Rakhine State and beyond the border. He highlighted that more of them and their villages still remain intact in Myanmar as witnessed by the diplomatic corps and UN entities in their recent visits. However, less-than-objective approach by some have brought a paradigm shift in the perception and attitude towards Myanmar. Ultimately, history will be the judge.

The Permanent Representative further stressed that State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been striving for freedom, democracy and human rights in Myanmar even before she assumed the responsibility of state. It is unreasonable to assert that Myanmar leadership whose mission has human rights at its core remains indifferent to the allegations of grave human rights violations. The leadership and the government shall never tolerate such crimes. Myanmar is ready to take action where there is clear evidence. Legal action has already been taken against military and police officers and civilians who were found to be in breach of standard operating procedures and rules of engagement following the Inn Din incident. This action is a positive step forward in accountability.

He added Myanmar is prepared to work with any arrangement or mechanism which is in line with its national circumstances, and situation on the ground. However, it must be helpful to finding a lasting solution, not to exacerbate the challenges. Myanmar has been receiving the visits of successive special rapporteurs since 1992. Myanmar has also facilitated six visits of Professor Yanghee Lee to the country. Despite the fullest possible cooperation extended to her, the end-of-mission statement of last July lacks impartiality and objectivity while highlighting sweeping allegations and unverified information. It also failed to mention the terrorist attacks and clarifications provided by the authorities. Her non-compliance with the code of conduct as stipulated in Resolution A/HRC/RES/5/2 has caused public resentment against her. The issue was heatedly debated in Parliament (the Phythu Hluttaw-House of Representatives) on 25 July 2017. Thus, the people and government of Myanmar came to a conclusion that it would no longer be productive to continue to extend cooperation to Ms. Yanghee Lee. In Myanmar's view, there is a clear need to replace her. Meanwhile, the government of Myanmar is ready to extend our cooperation with the mandate of a Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar.

He also explained that in preparing facilities for the repatriation, bulldozing the ground is part of the process. Whatever government does should not be seen with pre-conceived mind and doubtful eyes. Myanmar is prepared to continue to cooperate with the international community and the United Nations. Myanmar is engaging with UNDP and UNHCR with regard to repatriation, resettlement and development in Rakhine State. Myanmar has received a concept note and shall be working further on it. Myanmar hopes that the international community will constructively contribute to our efforts to advance democratization process and to promote and protect human rights in line with the country's circumstances and needs. ■

President U Htin Kyaw receives outgoing Malaysian Ambassador



President U Htin Kyaw bids farewell to outgoing Malaysian Ambassador to Myanmar Mohd Haniff Bin Abd Rahman at the guest hall of the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

PRESIDENT U Htin Kyaw received outgoing Malaysian Ambassador to Myanmar H.E. Mohd Haniff Bin Abd Rahman, who completed his

tour of duty in Myanmar, at the Presidential Palace yesterday afternoon.

Present on the occasion were Union Minister for Inter-

national Cooperation U Kyaw Tin, Permanent Secretary U Khin Latt from the Office of the President and officials. —Myanmar News Agency ■

30th anniversary memorial for Ko Phone Maw, Ko Soe Naing

By Zaw Gyi

The 30th anniversary memorial for Ko Phone Maw and Ko Soe Naing was held at Yangon Institute of Technology in Insein Township, Yangon, yesterday morning.

At 8.30 am in the blood-stained star market place where Ko Phone Maw fell, representatives of the Students' Union, Yangon Institute of Technology

students, former students, families of the deceased and members of political organisations laid a wreath, paid their respects, offered "soon" and offerings to the 30 Sanghas, and then took the five precepts.

The event was led by the Yangon Technology Institute students' union to create an enthusiasm among the youth towards establishing a peaceful country and to remember a true

historical event.

The previous events were led by a committee of former students, and it was held for the first time in the compound of Yangon Institute of Technology on the 29th anniversary. The Yangon Institute of Technology students' union is holding the event for the first time.

U Ko Ko Gyi, who established a political party, spoke about his experience of meeting comrades who fought together 30 years ago. This is an event where the historical baton of the fight against injustice has been passed on to the new generation students, he said. To prevent such a tragic incident from occurring again, a government that can guarantee democracy and a democratic order needs to be established, said U Ko Ko Gyi.

A photographic record of the event, as described in the union news journals and the foreign media at the time, was displayed during the ceremony. ■



People pay tribute to the fallen students in 1988. **PHOTO: ZAW GYI**

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Pigeon pea price drops as fresh supplies flood market

By May Thet Hnin

THE price of pigeon peas continued to decline in the market even as other pulses and beans fetched better prices than last year this harvest season.

"The price of pigeon peas has dropped below the cultivation cost, making it difficult for growers," said U Sein Lwin, secretary of Pakokku Merchants Association.

In the same period last year, pigeon peas fetched some Ks25,000 per basket, but this year, fresh pigeon peas are fetching only between Ks9,500 and Ks10,000 per basket.

In early January, Magway pigeon peas growers were faced with decreasing yield during the harvest period owing to unseasonal rainfall. Consequently, the pulses produced were of low quality, driving the price down. Some growers do not even harvest them, as production cannot cover the labour wages.

"Untimely rain results in



Pigeon pea prices decline in the market due to fresh supplies. **PHOTO: SUPPLIED**

low yield during harvest time.

Pigeon pea growers have been battered by the drastic plunge in pigeon pea prices, which is not enough to cover the cultivation cost," said U Than Tun Aung, a grower from Meethwaykan Village, Pakokku District, Magway Region.

It costs Ks8,500 to Ks9,000 to produce a basket of pigeon peas, including labour charges for the drying and harvesting process.

"The pulses market seems to have come to a halt. Growers and merchants are holding on to the stocks of pulses. It is rare to see a transaction in the market," said U Sein Lwin. The majority of growers cultivate pigeon peas depending on the demand from India.

Nevertheless, the restriction on the importation of pulses by India since April last year will be in effect, as of the end of this month. Therefore, the

prices of pigeon peas have drastically plunged.

To tide over such disastrous consequences, the Commerce Ministry will buy the pigeon peas with an allocated fund of Ks15 billion if the prevailing price is lower than the ministry's prescribed cultivation cost, said Union Minister Dr Than Myint of the Commerce Ministry.

However, the Commerce Ministry has not bought the pulses yet, as the cultivation cost has been set at Ks8,000 per basket. This year, the production of fresh pulses and beans such as butter beans, velvet beans (Sultani), lentils and lablab beans are higher than that of last year.

The prices of pulses have increased by 15 to 40 per cent against last year, said U Sein Lwin, secretary of Pakokku Merchants Association. Butter beans fetch Ks32,000 per basket, which is up from Ks25,000 last year. Similarly, other pulses also saw an increase by Ks5,000 to Ks8,000 per basket compared with last year. ■

Domestic consumption of chillies high

ALTHOUGH the Commerce Ministry has permitted the re-export of chillies, there is no significant export record, U Khin Maung Lwin, Assistant Permanent Secretary of the Commerce Ministry, told Myawady Daily.

Chilli is a major agricultural crop in Myanmar. The ministry gave its nod to the re-export of chillies, but chilli powder producers are unable to supply to foreign markets despite importing raw materials from India. Myanmar has some 400,000 acres of chilli plantations, which produce at least 1 million tonnes of chillies. Domestic consumption is so high that only small volumes are exported to China and Thailand.

Chillies distributed in the domestic market are locally produced. However, businessmen said the locally produced crops contain alpha toxin, which is found in chilli powder. As a result, a few chilli powder enterprises are importing the raw materials from India.



A farmer harvests chillies at the field in Kangyidaik, Ayeyawady Region. **PHOTO: PHOE KHWAR**

Regarding the re-export of chillies, the associations concerned are negotiating with trading partners from China and Thailand. They will also conduct awareness campaigns

concerning the raw materials for chilli powders among the chilli growers, in cooperation with the agricultural department.

In 2014, dried chillies

fetched more than Ks15,000 per viss. Nevertheless, the prevailing prices of dried chillies range from Ks5,000 to Ks7,000, depending on the chilli varieties.—GNLM ■

MFF to establish fish, shrimp farming zones

By May Thet Hnin

THE Myanmar Fishery Federation (MFF) has submitted projects to the union government on establishing fish and prawn farming zones.

The MFF has conducted a feasibility tour of the project areas and will execute the projects in the Yangon, Ayeyawady, Bago, Mandalay and Taninthayi regions, Mon and Rakhine states, and Nay Pyi Taw, when the government gives the green light, said U Win Kyaing, general secretary of MFF.

Saltwater fish will be farmed in the coastal regions, such as the Taninthayi and Ayeyawady regions, and Rakhine State, while freshwater fish breeding zones will be set up in inland areas, such as the Bago and Mandalay regions, Nay Pyi Taw, and Kayin and Mon states.

“On receiving the government’s approval, fish and prawn farming zones will be established, in cooperation with the related regional and state governments,” U Win Kyaing added.

Union Minister for Agricul-



On receiving the government’s approval, fish and prawn farming zones will be established, in cooperation with the related regional and state governments. **PHOTO: PHOE KHWAH**

ture, Livestock and Irrigation Dr Aung Thu said on 8 March that the fishery sector will be given second priority after rice. The agriculture ministry will also establish plantations of export-marketable crops.

“The Union Minister wants

the MFF to assume responsibility of production and technology, while the related regional and state ministries will take up responsibility of their management,” said U Win Kyaing.

MFF has submitted the project to the Commerce Min-

istry, the Planning and Finance Ministry, and the Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation Ministry. The plan to establish fish and prawn farming zones was unveiled in detail during the 15th regular meeting between Vice President and businessmen on

7 March. If these projects are permitted, the MFF will be able to invite more foreign investors and hire experts.

“In a bid to produce pedigree larvae, international cooperation is a must. Foreign investors can invest in the production process, including in the building of the feedstuff plant, the hatching process, establishing processing plants such as cold storages, providing other farming related machinery and the export market. If they are not interested in investing in this sector, they can provide loan plans,” said U Win Kyaing. These projects will create several job opportunities for the local people and help improve the GDP growth rate. Additionally, these farming zones are likely to not only help achieve self-sufficiency in fish and prawns production but also help earn foreign currency through exports, he maintained.

There are more than 480,000 acres of fish and prawn farming lakes. As of the first week of March in the current fiscal year, fishery exports fetched US\$647 million. ■

Price of dry elephant foot yam rises this year

THE price of dry elephant foot yam has increased this year compared with the same period last year, because of the high demand from foreign countries, according to an elephant foot yam trader.

Elephant foot yam is largely cultivated in Chin State (south). Traders dry the elephant foot yam bought from Chin State and sell it in local markets, as well as foreign markets. In 2017, the price of dry elephant foot yam was Ks7,000 per viss. Now, it has increased to Ks8,500 per viss.

Dry elephant foot yam is exported mainly to China and Japan. The supplies of dry elephant foot yam, which are selling in the local market, will decline in April. Therefore, traders from Yangon, Mandalay and Ye townships are buying elephant foot yam directly from farmers, said U Moe Kyaw Thu, chairman of Chin State (south) Elephant



Workers prepare elephant foot yam to dry at a factory in Kanpetlet township, Chin State. **PHOTO: MNA**

Foot Yam Producer and Seller Association.

There are many difficulties in drying the elephant foot yam. To produce more dry elephant foot yam next year, drying machines have been established with the cooperation of elephant foot yam producer and

seller association from various regions.

Elephant foot yam cannot be cultivated in tropical regions. There are three types of elephant foot yam — white, yellow and red. Yellow and red are popular export items to China and Japan. —GNLM ■

Bilateral trade with UAE exceeds \$120 million this fiscal year

TRADE between Myanmar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was worth US \$122.380 million in the current fiscal year (FY), according to the Ministry of Commerce.

The total bilateral trade between the two countries included \$52 million in exports and nearly \$70 million in imports. In December, trade with the UAE, one of the Middle East’s most important economic centres, was valued at more than \$11 million, including exports worth \$6.438 million and imports worth \$5.053 million.

The value of Myanmar-UAE trade reached a record high of \$209.206 million last FY. The value of trade between the two countries was \$93.426 million in the 2011-2012 FY, \$90.476 million in the 2012-2013 FY, \$141.922 mil-

lion in the 2013-2014 FY, \$195.683 million in the 2014-2015 FY and \$199.509 million in the 2016-2017 FY.

The ministry’s statistics in the first nine months of this FY showed that the value of trade between Myanmar and Middle Eastern countries amounted to \$321.737 million, including \$99.674 million in exports and \$222.063 million in imports.

Normally, Myanmar exports fishery products and agricultural products such as beans and pulses, as well as rice, to the Middle Eastern market.

According to the official report of the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration, as of this January, the UAE’s investment in Myanmar reached more than \$100 million in the current FY. —Shwe Khine ■

Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than receives outgoing Malaysian Ambassador

Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than received outgoing Malaysian Ambassador to Myanmar Mohd Haniff Bin Abd Rahman, who completed his tour of duty in Myanmar, at the guest hall of the Amyotha Hluttaw, Nay Pyi Taw, yesterday afternoon.

During the meeting, matters relating to the growing



Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than meets with Malaysian Ambassador Mohd Haniff Bin Abd Rahman in Nay Pyi Taw. **PHOTO: MNA**

friendship and cooperation between Myanmar and Malaysia, economics and travel were discussed.

The meeting was attended

by Amyotha Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U Aye Tha Aung and officials from the Amyotha Hluttaw office. — Myanmar News Agency ■

Thura U Shwe Mann receives Denmark Ambassador to Myanmar

CHAIRMAN of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw's Legal Affairs and Special Cases Assessment Commission Thura U Shwe Mann received Mr Peter Lysholt Hansen, Ambassador of Denmark to Myanmar, at the Hluttaw affairs building I-11 in Nay Pyi Taw, yesterday



morning. During the meeting, they discussed legal and bilateral

relations between the two countries. — MNA ■

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw holds joint bill committee coordination meeting

A coordination meeting of the joint bill committee on the Union Tax Bill was held in the second-floor meeting hall of building D of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw yesterday afternoon.

The meeting was attended by the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw deputy speaker; Joint Bill Committee and Public Account Joint Committee Chairman U Aye Tha Aung; joint bill committee deputy chairmen, secretaries, joint secretaries

and committee members and public account joint committee members; Deputy Minister for Planning and Finance U Maung Maung Win; 12 Hluttaw representatives who discussed the bill in the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw; Legal Affairs and Special Cases Assessment Commission members; officials from the Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Home Affairs, Union Attorney General's office and the Central Bank

of Myanmar; businesspersons from the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry; businesspersons and officials from the Myanmar Construction Entrepreneur Association, 20 representatives from among businesspersons paying the highest income tax and commercial tax; and officials from the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw's office. — Myanmar News Agency ■

Pyithu Hluttaw discusses power sector

FROM PAGE-2

Once the examination is over, electricity will be transmitted to Mogok via the 66-KV line by 20 to 22 March, explained the Deputy Minister. Replying to a question by U Pe Than of Myebon constituency on the arrangements made to provide electricity to town folks in Myebon Town and villages in the Myebon Township, through which the national grid line passes, Deputy Minister for Electricity and Energy Dr. Tun Naing said that of the 2,600 households in Rakhine State's Myebon

Township, more than half were provided with electricity. To complete power distribution to the remaining wards of the town, a 2,060-foot-long 400-volt power line has been laid in the 2017-2018 FY period with additional funds from the State government.

Arrangements are being made to construct a 11/0.4-KV 200 KVA transformer for Thedan Ward with the 2017-2018 FY State government's excess fund, added the Deputy Minister. To distribute electricity to the six villages of Kyetyegy, Wa Kauk

Gyi, Pyin Chaung, Pyin Ngakhu, Ngamangyi and Lun Lone Pike in Myebon Township, the Rakhine State government's fund will be earmarked in the 2018-2019 FY budget to construct some 11 miles of 11-KV power line, eight 11/0.4-KV transformers and 5.5 miles of a 400-volt power line.

To provide electricity to villages in Myebon Township, where the national grid line passes through, the laying of 27.5 miles of 33-KV power line and the construction of a new 33/11-KV 5 MVA substation has

been planned for the 2021-2022 five-year plan, explained the deputy minister.

Similarly, questions raised by U Aung Thihe of Seikpyu constituency, U Khin Maung Myint of Yaksawk constituency and U Tha Aung of Myothit constituency were answered by Deputy Minister for Electricity and Energy Dr. Tun Naing. Next, the Hluttaw was submitted with a bill on the protection of wildlife and the conservation of natural areas, sent back by the Amyotha Hluttaw with amendments.

An announcement was made on the Hluttaw's agreement and

confirmation of the bill after the Pyithu Hluttaw speaker took the decision. Later, bill committee secretary U Kyaw Soe Lin tabled a motion to obtain the decision of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw by submitting the points of contention between the two Hluttaws on the bill on the protection of wildlife and the conservation of natural areas, to which Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint suggested that the matter be submitted to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. The 28th-day meeting of the seventh regular session of the second Pyithu Hluttaw will be held on 14 March. ■



Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw U Win Myint shakes hands with Malaysian Ambassador Mohd Haniff Bin Abd Rahman in Nay Pyi Taw. **PHOTO: MNA**

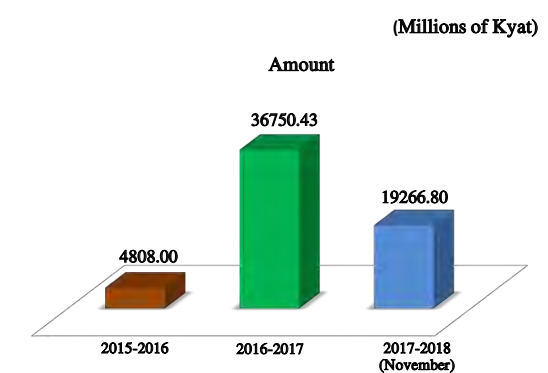
Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint receives outgoing Malaysian Ambassador

PYITHU Hluttaw Speaker U Win Myint received outgoing Malaysian Ambassador to Myanmar Mohd Haniff Bin Abd Rahman, who has completed his tour of duty in Myanmar, at the guest hall of Pyithu Hluttaw in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday afternoon.

During the meeting,

matters relating to enhancing friendly relations and cooperation between Myanmar and Malaysia and investment were discussed. The meeting was attended by Pyithu Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U T Khun Myat and officials from the Pyithu Hluttaw office. — Myanmar News Agency ■

Yearly SMEs Loan Status of JICA Two-Step Loan Project



Source : Myanma Economic Bank
Information Unit : Central Statistical Organization

History, not UN, will be final judge on Rakhine

History, the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations said Monday, will be the ultimate judge of what has occurred in Rakhine State.

U Htin Lynn, the Permanent Representative of Myanmar, said during the Interactive Dialogue on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar that it is “unreasonable to assert that Myanmar leadership, whose mission has human rights at its core, remains indifferent to the allegations of grave human rights violations”.

The dialogue was part of the 37th Session of the Human Rights Council being held in Geneva from 26 February to 23 March. During the dialogue, Ms. Yanghee Lee, the Special Rapporteur on

the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, presented her report, followed by the oral report of the Chair of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) on Myanmar to the Human Rights Council.

Ms. Lee said actions against members of the Muslim community “bear the hallmarks of genocide”. Marzuki Darusman, chairman of a fact-finding mission on Myanmar, said: “All the information collected by the Fact-Finding Mission so far further points to violence of an extremely cruel nature, including against women”.

In a rebuttal, U Htin Lynn rejected the allegations and called for Ms. Lee to be replaced.

Myanmar has received special rapporteurs since 1992, and has facilitated six visits of Ms. Lee to Myanmar.

“The leadership and the government shall never tolerate such crimes. Myanmar is ready to take action when there is clear evidence. Legal action has already been taken against military and police officers and civilians who were found to be in breach of standard operating procedures and rules of engagement following the Inn Din incident”, he said.

U Htin Lynn said the terrorist attacks by the ARSA terrorist group in Rakhine State in August 2017 abruptly changed the state of affairs in northern Rakhine

and made restoration of law and order a priority, which has led to the displacement of people internally in Rakhine State and across the border. The Permanent Representative noted that many ethnic groups, including Rakhine, Daing-net,

Mro, Thet, Mramagyi and those belonging to Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu faiths have remained in their villages, as witnessed by members of the diplomatic corps and UN entities in their recent visits.

But over the past year or so, a paradigm shift has occurred in the perception and attitude toward Myanmar, U Htin Lynn said, the latest of which manifested itself in reports about mil-

itary installations being built on sites that once were the homes of members of the Muslim community. The Permanent Representative explained that in preparing facilities for repatriation of refugees, bulldozing the ground and building new structures is part of the process.

“What the government does should not be viewed with a pre-conceived mind and doubtful eyes”, U Htin Lynn said. “Myanmar hopes the the international community will constructively contribute to our efforts to advance the democratisation process and promote and protect human rights in line with the country’s circumstances and needs”.—GNLM

Maungtaw mothers, infants receive aid

FROM PAGE-1

Dr. Thar Tun Kyaw spoke at the event and said that their health staffs routinely carry out supplementation programmes for mothers and infants in Mawyawadi and Shwezar villages. They carry out routine measurements for height and weight and see if the children are growing in proportion to their age. They mark the children’s arm with different colors to indicate their nutritional intake. A green mark means the child is receiving sufficient nutrition, yellow means the child is receiving only minimal nutrition, and red means the child is lacking proper nutrition and needs immediate support.

Dr. Thar Tun Kyaw said that

if mothers received healthcare during pregnancy and followed nutritional guidelines then their babies will grow up healthy. He said that they provide 200,000 units of Vitamin A and oral medicine for ringworm once every six months. They also provide workshops on nutrition in Buthidaung and Maungtaw and provide counseling to parents of children less than 2 years of age concerning their diet.

Dr. San San Aye said these supplementation programs and financial support programmes are done under the social welfare programme. Since the new government took office, the Ministry for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement has been working to ensure every person receives

proper social welfare. The overall strategic plan includes eight phases and providing financial support to mothers and infants is part of the first phase to ensure that infants receive proper nutrition for brain development in their first 1,000 days. She said that Chin and Rakhine states, and Naga Self-Administration Zone need these programmes, as their children have very low levels of nutritional support. She said that children have four basic rights as humans which will need to be recognised from an early age so that it carries on into adulthood.

Officials have provided financial support to 1,158 pregnant mothers and 1,026 infants under 2 years of age in Maungtaw District.



Mothers gather to receive aid for nutrition and health care. PHOTO: MNA

Myanmar, Japan hold economic conference



Deputy Minister U Aung Htoo reads the message sent from President U Htin Kyaw to Myanmar-Japan Joint Economic Conference. PHOTO: MNA

MYANMAR-Japan Joint Economic Conference was held at the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Yangon yesterday.

The conference began with opening remarks by U Thein Han, Vice-Chairman of the UM-FCCI, and Mr. Ken Kobayashi, Chairman of the Myanmar-Japan Economic Commission.

At the opening ceremony, Deputy Minister for Commerce U Aung Htoo, read out a message sent from President U Htin Kyaw to the conference.

Similarly, Japanese Ambassador to Myanmar Mr. Tateshi Higuchi, read out a message sent from Prime Minister of Japan Mr. Shinzo Abe to the conference.—Myanmar News Agency

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Objective, balanced approach needed for challenges in Rakhine

MYANMAR continues its efforts at putting Rakhine State back on the road to development and stability while still facing terrorism, funded and inspired from abroad.

In Rakhine, the country's efforts to bring peace and development were on track until August 2017, when violence was triggered by the attacks on security forces by terrorists.

The terrorist attacks and the mass displacement of people changed the situation and negatively affected the perception and attitude of the international community on the situation in Myanmar.

To effectively carry out resettlement and rehabilitation and to develop Rakhine State, the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine (UEHRD), led by State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, was formed.

There have been many accusations that there is ethnic cleansing or even genocide in Myanmar. There were tensions and there was fighting in Rakhine State, but there was no genocide.

Seeing through a narrow lens of human rights of one particular community alone is not helpful to understand the challenges in Rakhine State.

The Government has initiated a number of programmes to find a sustainable solution to the issues in Rakhine. We are currently implementing the recommendations of the Annan Commission. A Ministerial-level implementation committee and an Advisory Board, made up of eminent personalities from home and abroad, have been set up to help us find lasting solutions.

Following the agreement reached between Myanmar and Bangladesh, we have made preparations for the repatriation of the displaced persons.

We have strengthened our border guard police capacity to ensure the safety of the returnees as well as all communities – Rakhine, Muslim, Daingnet, Mro, Thet, Maramagyi and Hindu. They are all victims of violence and terrorism. Security needs to be ensured for all.

But, international media has portrayed the mass displacement as happening because of persecution.

Recently, officials asked those fleeing their homes why they wanted to cross over to Bangladesh. They also asked what difficulties they were currently facing and their needs and requirements.

Officials discovered that initially a total of 666 residents from 15 villages in Buthidaung and two villages in Yathedaung had taken up temporary shelter in the border area.

They claimed that scarcity of jobs, food, and threats from the terrorist organization of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) were the reasons for crossing over to Bangladesh.

Seeing through a narrow lens of human rights of one particular community alone is not helpful to understand the challenges in Rakhine State.

We are ready to continue to work with the international community.

At the same time, we earnestly hope that the international community would pursue a more objective and balanced approach to help overcome the challenges in Rakhine.

Myanmar is an agricultural country, and the agriculture sector is the driving force of the country's economy. According to reports, the agricultural sector contributes to some 30 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with abundant natural resources and a large working age population in the South-east Asia Region.

Boosting productivity in the agricultural sector

By Myint Swe (Kyay/ Myay)

Agro-based Economy

The government has laid down many economic and social objectives in its efforts to establish a developed country based on agriculture. Among them, one of the major economic objectives is to boost the all-round development of the economy based on agriculture sectors.

Myanmar's agricultural performance offers opportunities for successful agricultural development in the country where rapid gains can be made by better inputs, better seeds and improvement of logistical and marketing arrangements. Therefore it is paramount that improvement of agriculture is urgently needed to capitalise this emerging demand.

High yields of productivity

Smallholder paddy production dominates the agricultural economy of the country, in terms of both land area and production value. Paddy production has increased considerably since the introduction of new varieties and the growth of dry season paddy. However, overall rice productivity is still high and has considerable room for improvement through combination of better seeds and better agronomic factors. Other exports are tobacco, sugar, groundnut, sunflower, maize, jute, wheat, pulses and beans.

Moreover Myanmar is among the largest global exporters of pulses and the range of exported beans includes mung bean (green gram), black gram pigeon pea, soybean, cow peas, butter beans and kidney beans.

The fishery and livestock sectors are considered the most important and plans are underway to meet the protein needs of the population, enhance food security and provide employment for rural areas.

The livestock and fisheries sectors account for more than seven percent of the national GDP. The Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development aims to develop rural areas, to improve the socioeconomic situation for rural areas and to close the development gap between urban and rural areas.

Boosting of agricultural produces

Modernisation and expansion of agriculture require large capital requirement and modern technology. It is necessary to provide incentives, relax regulations to attract the investment.

It is of vital importance to raise the quality of life and standard of living of the farmers in order to increase GDP of the country, the agricultural sector plays an important role for the boosting of agricultural produces both quantities and qualities.

In order to formulate the sound economic development of the country, small productive industries can increase per capita income of the country.



Photo: Aye Min Soe

Modernisation and expansion of agriculture require large capital requirement and modern technology.

Moreover the private sector is essentially needed to be done while building up the economic enterprises. It is essential to constantly monitor conditions of small businesses from the public economic sector and simultaneously to encourage them. It is because a nation's economic development is directly proportional to the development of SMEs.

The requirement for the betterment of economy is for export products to become strong and imported goods to be reduced. The country is still relying upon imports of commodities of small value, not to mention heavy commodities. As it is, products of SMEs are finding it difficult to penetrate promising markets.

Myanmar's agriculture is heavily dependent upon the monsoon rains and rice production has increased due to supportive policies of the government as well as favorable market forces.

As for the ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation, efforts are being made to increase the productivity, market access and competitiveness of the agricultural sector by improving the provision of quality inputs to farmers.

In order to assure quality seeds, fertilizer and farming machinery play a key role to drive the economic growth of the country. Moreover efficient regulations and markets can strengthen quality standards of agricultural products.

Key Export Commodities

The ministry will help to raise quality standards for key export commodities, such as rice, and local food processing, while helping farmers to develop skills related to the use of agricultural inputs and improved quality standards.

Educative talks should be held for them in order to reduce excessive use of chemical fertilizers and to discuss good agricultural practices and the importance of improving and reducing the use of chemicals on their farms.

The ministry will help create potential markets for agricultural products through exports and to increase the production of good-quality crop protection products and improve access to agri-lending products for farmers.

Imports from foreign countries are attributed to their quality, reasonable prices and availability of adequate amount as much as what the people demand. In any economic, political or administrative system, only a solid foundation can support the emergence of strong infrastructures.

There are still many challenges in various sectors on the path of economic development in the country and some positive signs such as a gradual ease of doing business in Myanmar and consequently the attention given to the private sector, which can boost economic development. Even though Myanmar has numerous challenges, private sector development is the main driving force behind national economic growth.

Translated by Win Ko Ko Aung

Using financial services reduces poverty, experts say

INCREASING access to affordable financial services such as credit, insurance, and banking is key to lifting Myanmar out of poverty, an official from the finance ministry said yesterday.

His comments were made at the Myanmar Financial Inclusion Forum that started yesterday in Nay Pyi Taw to discuss and review progress on financial inclusion in Myanmar and to launch an update of the Making Access to Financial Services Possible project.

"There is growing evidence that financial inclusion directly contributes to poverty reduction and sustainable livelihoods among the lower economic sectors of society", said U Maung Maung Win, Deputy Minister for Planning and Finance. "Alleviating economic hardships among Myanmar's grass roots and, mostly rural population, is central to our collective financial inclusion aims".

A significant percentage of Myanmar's population, especially in rural areas, does not have a bank account nor access to financial services, a serious handicap when it comes to competing regionally or globally, experts said.

"One of the keys to unlocking the full potential of Myanmar and all communities within it is to increase individuals access to appropriate, competitive and well regulated financial products and services. Good financial services can be one of the tools that free people from the cycle of poverty. They allow families plan their finances, individuals to plan for their future and give real resilience to people and communities", Liz Patterson, Private Sector Development Advisor at DFID Myanmar, said yesterday at the forum.

Another financial expert who spoke yesterday agreed.

"Financial inclusion is one of the main drivers of sustainable economic growth, with a real impact on reducing the inequalities between urban and rural areas, and between men and women. The financial environment and technology have changed in Myanmar since we started our work in 2012, bringing the opportunity to reach more people than ever before. We will ensure that UNCDF in Myanmar leverage's these opportunities and demonstrates the potential of financial inclusion in the country for low-income people", said Paul Luchtenburg, Country Coordinator for UNCDF in Myanmar.

Access to a transaction account is a first step toward broader financial inclusion since it allows people to store money, and send and receive payments. A transaction account can also serve as a gateway to other financial services.

The Myanmar Financial Inclusion Forum that convened in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday discussed and reviewed progress on financial inclusion in Myanmar and launched an update of the Making Access to Financial Services Possible project. The MAP diagnostic exercise aims to provide service providers, development agencies, and government stakeholders with a deeper understanding of the Myanmar financial sector and a measurement of exclusion at a country level.

Yesterday's forum was an opportunity to present the role played by the Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee (IMSC) in guiding the Financial Inclusion process and engaging a broad range of stakeholders in the implementation process and in promoting an inclusive financial sector in Myanmar. Moreover, the key drivers of greater financial inclusion, including the role of digital financial services, fintech, financial literacy, and responsible finance will be explored.

The Financial Inclusion Forum is organised and led by the Myanmar Government's Financial Regulatory Department and supported by UNCDF (United Nations Capital Development Fund) and the UK Government's DaNa Facility. The Central Bank of Myanmar played a key role in the forum, while the private sector was represented by the Myanmar Bankers Association, Myanmar Insurance Association, Private Insurance Companies, the Myanmar Micro-Finance Association, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, mobile network operators, digital payment providers, and other contributors to financial inclusion within the marketplace.—GNLM

Nepal's first female president wins second term

KATHMANDU — Nepal's lawmakers on Tuesday elected President Bidya Bhandari for a second term, extending the tenure of the Himalayan nation's first female head of state for another five years.

Bhandari took nearly two-thirds of the vote to retain her position as ceremonial head of state, the election commission confirmed.

Bhandari, who was backed by the ruling Communist bloc, was widely expected to defeat her sole opponent.

Her first five years in office have been largely uncontroversial.

Critics say she has not done enough to advance women's rights in deeply patriarchal Nepal — though her role is largely ceremonial.

Late last year she signed into law a revamp of the country's ancient penal code, which criminalises the dowry system and bans an old Hindu practice that banishes women from the home while menstruating.

The 56-year-old took up politics in her teens, joining the fight to overturn the monarchy's centuries-long rule and later marrying a fellow communist, Madan Bhandari.

It was after her husband's



President Bidya Bhandari (C, pictured on a visit to India), Nepal's first female head of state, has won a second five-year term. **PHOTO: AFP**

death in a mysterious car accident in 1993 that the mother of two became a prominent voice, riding a wave of sympathy to win a seat in parliament.

As Nepal's political map was being redrawn after the end of the brutal Maoist insurgency in 2006 and overthrow of the king two years later, Bhandari campaigned hard to bring women's voices to parliament. She was first elected president in 2015, shortly after Nepal's post-war constitution was passed, which

carves out one-third of seats in parliament for women and mandates that either the president or vice president must be a woman.

Bhandari is not the only woman at the top of Nepal's government. House speaker Onsari Gharti Magar has presided over the often raucous parliament with an iron fist since 2015, the first woman to hold the position.

Meanwhile, Sushila Karki served as the country's first female chief justice until her retirement in 2017, shocking

her political backers when she took a tough stance on Nepal's endemic corruption.

Bhandari is a close ally of the ruling Communist bloc that has a strong majority in parliament as well as six of the seven provincial assemblies.

The Communists rode to a thumping victory late last year in local, provincial and national elections that capped Nepal's tumultuous 11 year transition from monarchy to federal democracy.—AFP ■

Court hears Tube bomb suspect said it was 'his duty' to hate UK

LONDON — Jurors in the trial of a teenager accused of an attempted London Underground bombing on Monday heard that he had said it was his "duty to hate Britain" well before the botched attack in September. Ahmed Hassan, an 18-year-old Iraqi asylum seeker, arrived in Britain in October 2015, two years before he allegedly left a bucket of explosives that partially exploded on a Tube train at Parsons Green station, injuring 30 people.

Katie Cable, a lecturer and mentor at a suburban college where Hassan studied media, told London's Old Bailey court that he had said he blamed Britain for the death of his parents in Iraq.



Ahmed Hassan has denied the charge of attempted murder and causing an explosion on a packed train on 15 September. **PHOTO: AFP**

"It's my duty to hate Britain," she said he had told her.

Cable testified that she believed his father was blown up and his mother had been shot.

When Hassan came to Britain, he told authorities he was in fear of the Islamic State group and that it had taken him by force and trained him "how

to kill" when he was in Iraq. But the court also heard that the lecturer had even alerted a government terrorism prevention scheme of her concerns after she saw a message in August 2016 on his phone reading: "IS has accepted your donation".

Cable testified that Hassan talked about Tony Blair and expressed "anger" at events in Iraq, telling her "the British" were responsible for his parents' death.

Hassan has denied the charge of attempted murder and causing an explosion on a packed train on 15 September.

The attack, claimed by IS, was the fifth time Britain had been targeted in a six-month period.—AFP ■

WORLD BRIEFS

Lavrov refutes claims about Russia's alleged involvement in ex-spy's case

MOSCOW — Russia has nothing to do with the poisoning of former GRU Colonel Sergey Skripal and his daughter Yulia in Britain, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Tuesday.

"We've made a statement to dismiss this as nonsense. We have nothing to do with this," he said.

The UK refused to give Russia access to facts related to the Skripal case investigation, Lavrov has pointed out.—Tass ■

Eight paramilitary troopers killed in Naxal attack in India

NEW DELHI — At least eight paramilitary troopers belonging to Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) were killed in a Naxal attack on Tuesday in central Indian state of Chhattisgarh, local media reports said.—Xinhua

Japan's key bond untraded all day for 1st time in 8 months

TOKYO — The benchmark 10-year Japanese government bond ended on Tuesday untraded for the first time since 29 June, mainly as investors refrained from making bold moves amid political uncertainty over cronyism allegations leveled at Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

The price of the June futures contract — changing from March futures from Tuesday as the key contract — declined 0.02 point to 150.67 on the Osaka Exchange.—Kyodo News ■

US planning missile and bombing raid against Damascus — top brass

MOSOCW — Militants are preparing a provocation with the use of chemical agents in Syria to justify a massive US strike against Damascus' government neighbourhoods, Chief of Russia's General Staff Valery Gerasimov said on Tuesday.

According to Gerasimov, Russia has hard facts about preparations for staging the use of chemical weapons against civilians by the government forces.

After the provocation, the US plans to accuse Syria's government forces of using chemical weapons. He added that the United States plans to "furnish

the so-called 'evidence' of the alleged mass civilian deaths through the fault of the Syrian government and the Russian leadership supporting it."

"As a countermeasure, Washington plans to deliver a missile and bomb strike against Damascus' government districts," Gerasimov said.

He stressed that there are Russian military officials in Damascus in the Syrian Defence Ministry's facilities, and "in the event of a threat to our military servicemen's lives, Russia's Armed Forces will take retaliatory measures to target both

the missiles and their delivery vehicles."

Retaliation

The Russian Defence Ministry is ready to take retaliatory measures against US' possible strike over Damascus if there is any danger to the Russian military, head of the Russian General Staff added.

"At the same time, Russian military advisors, members of the Russian Reconciliation Centre for the Conflicting Sides and military policemen are staying in the Syrian Defence Ministry's facilities in Damascus. In case there is a threat to the lives of



Chief of Russia's General Staff Valery Gerasimov. PHOTO: TASS

our military, the Russian Armed Force will take retaliatory measures both over the missiles and carriers that will use them," he said.

According to Gerasimov, "events to further normalize the situation in Syria's capital

are going on."

According to earlier reports, illegal armed groups are shelling with mortars both positions of the Syrian government forces and the residential quarters of Damascus and its suburbs. —Tass ■

Mattis in Kabul, says elements in Taliban open to peace talks

KABUL — Elements of the Taliban are open to talks with the Afghan government, US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis said on Tuesday as he arrived in Kabul on an unannounced visit.

Mattis flew into the war-torn city two weeks after Afghan President Ashraf Ghani unveiled a plan to open peace talks with the Taliban, Afghanistan's biggest militant group.

The insurgents have so far given no formal response to Kabul's offer for negotiations, but Mattis said some Taliban leaders have expressed an interest in the discussions.

"It may not be that the whole Taliban comes over in one fell swoop, that would be a bridge too far, but there are elements of the Taliban clearly interested in talking to the Afghan government," he told reporters aboard a military jet.

Ghani's peace plan includes eventually recognising the Taliban as a political party.

The group has said it is prepared to negotiate, but only with the United States and not with the Kabul government.

The Taliban last week described the Afghan government as "illegitimate" and its peace process efforts as "deceptive", in a statement calling for a boycott of an Islamic scholars' conference in Jakarta.

"Right now we want the Afghans to lead and to provide the substance of the reconciliation effort," Mattis said.

- US looks to 'victory' -

Thanks to the political pro-

cess, Mattis said America is now looking towards victory in Afghanistan after more than 16 years of conflict.

"What does that victory look like? It's a country whose own people and their own security forces handle law enforcement and any threats... certainly with international support for some years to come," he said.

The US has renewed its focus on Afghanistan after years of drawdowns under former president Barack Obama and talk by top US generals of "not winning" and of a "stalemate" in the seemingly intractable conflict.

"It's all working to achieve a political reconciliation, not a military victory," Mattis said.

"The victory will be a political reconciliation."

As part of the so-called South Asia Strategy, President Donald Trump last year

ordered the increased bombing of Taliban targets — including drug-making labs and training camps.

More than 3,000 additional US forces have also arrived in Afghanistan to boost the training and advising of local troops.

Approximately 14,000 American forces are currently in Afghanistan, up from a low of about 8,500 when Obama left office.

Trump's strategy has been a "game changer" for Afghanistan, Ghani told Mattis in a meeting at the presidential palace that also involved Afghan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah and Defence Minister Tariq Shah Bahrami.

"It has forced every actor to re-examine their assumptions. Some of that re-examination is likely to lead to the intensification of conflict in the short term but the re-exam-

ination is what the people of Afghanistan have been waiting for 40 years," he said.

Ghani's offer of peace talks comes as civilian casualties have soared in recent months, with the Taliban increasingly targeting towns and cities in response to Trump's more aggressive military policy.

The Taliban claimed 472 attacks in January alone, the Washington-based terrorism research group TRAC said — an astonishing number given that the traditional fighting season does not usually start until freezing temperatures have subsided in the spring.

Mattis said the jump in attacks on civilians was an indication that a pressured Taliban is unable to conduct broader, ground-taking operations.

The Afghan security forces were able to stop some attacks, Mattis said, though he noted he wanted to see them shift to a more "offensive mindset" in the coming months.

Mattis's surprise Afghan visit, his third as Pentagon chief, was kept under tight wraps after a security incident during his last trip in September, when insurgents shelled Kabul's airport hours after he arrived.

Mattis also said he had seen some changes in Pakistan's behaviour since Trump blasted the country last year for harbouring the Taliban.

"There are operations by the Pakistan military that are helping right now, ongoing as we speak," he said.—AFP ■

Blast targets Palestinian PM's convoy during rare Gaza visit

GAZA CITY (Palestinian Territories) — An explosion targeted Palestinian prime minister Rami Hamdallah's convoy as he arrived in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday for a rare visit, lightly wounding seven people, officials and witnesses said.

Hamdallah was not injured in the explosion, which occurred shortly after his convoy entered the territory run by Islamist movement Hamas, a security source in the convoy said.

Palestinian intelligence chief Majid Faraj was part of the convoy but was not hurt either, the security source said.

A statement on official Palestinian media said president Mahmud Abbas considered it a "cowardly targeting" of Hamdallah's convoy and held his rivals Hamas responsible. There was no immediate claim of responsibility. Radical Islamists opposed to Hamas also operate within the Gaza Strip and have regularly been behind unrest there. The Hamas interior ministry confirmed there had been an explosion and said security forces were investigating the incident. It said it would not derail Hamdallah's visit, which comes as reconciliation agreement between Hamas and Abbas's Fatah party falters.

The two major Palestinian factions signed a reconciliation agreement in October that was supposed to see the Islamists hand over power, but it has all but collapsed.—AFP ■



Palestinian prime minister Rami Hamdallah arrives in Gaza City on 13 March, 2018 for a rare visit that was cut short after an explosion near his convoy. PHOTO: AFP

Russia getting ready for more tests of newest intercontinental ballistic missile Sarmat

MOSCOW — Preparations for more pop-up tests of Russia's newest inter-continental ballistic missile Sarmat are underway at the Plesetsk cosmodrome, the chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov told the media on Tuesday.

"The first launch of this missile took place at the end of December last year. At the moment preparations are in full swing at

the Plesetsk cosmodrome for another pop-up test." He recalled that Sarmat's parameters surpassed those of all existing types of inter-continental ballistic missiles. "With a mass of more than 200 tonnes it has a shorter active phase of flight and better ability to penetrate missile defences and can carry warheads of larger mass and enormous yield," he said.—Tass ■



Plesetsk cosmodrome. PHOTO: TASS

Trump says top diplomat Tillerson out, names Pompeo successor

WASHINGTON — US President Donald Trump has replaced Rex Tillerson as secretary of state with Mike Pompeo, who has led the CIA since January 2017

US President Donald Trump on Tuesday announced the departure of his top diplomat Rex Tillerson, to be succeeded by the current CIA chief Mike Pompeo.

A senior US official said the president wanted to reshuffle his team ahead of talks with North Korea.

"Mike Pompeo, Director of the CIA, will become our new Secretary of State. He will do a fantastic job!" Trump tweeted.

"Thank you to Rex Tillerson for his service!" he added.

The US president announced the appointment of Gina Haspel, a career intelligence officer, to head the Central Intelligence Agency — the first woman tapped for the post.

Trump praised Pompeo, a former US army officer and congressman who led the CIA for nearly 14 months, as "the right person for the job at this critical juncture."

"He will continue our program of restoring America's standing in the world, strengthening our alliances, confronting our adversaries, and seeking the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," Trump added.

The reshuffle comes days after the spectacular announcement of a meeting between

Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, whose date and details have yet to be determined.

Trump called for Pompeo to be swiftly confirmed in the role — as his administration heads into the high-stakes talks.

He had scant words of praise for Tillerson, who was traveling in Africa when Trump made the snap decision last week to accept an invitation to meet Kim.

After the announcement, Tillerson suspended his schedule on grounds he was "unwell" and eventually cut short his trip to fly back to Washington.

"I want to thank Rex Tillerson for his service," Trump said. "A great deal has been accomplished over the last fourteen months, and I wish him and his family well."

The former Exxon CEO has had a rocky tenure as the top US diplomat, and had long been rumored to be about to be pushed out.

Tillerson was repeatedly forced to deny he had fallen out with Trump — vowing to remain in post despite a sensational report that he once dubbed the president a "moron."

A respected figure in the oil business, the 65-year-old Texan's tenure at the State Department drew scorn from Trump's opponents, from former diplomats and from the Washington policy elite.—AFP ■

Time to turn Brexit speeches into treaties, Juncker tells May

LONDON — Britain must "translate speeches into treaties" and come up with a detailed plan for its post-Brexit ties with the EU, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said on Tuesday.

EU leaders have been pressing British Prime Minister Theresa May to clarify what she wants before they agree their position on the future economic partnership at a summit later this month.

A series of speeches by May and her senior ministers have done little to satisfy Brussels, and Juncker warned it was particularly crucial for London to clarify its plans for the sensitive issue of the Irish border.

"As the clock counts down with one year to go, it is now time to translate speeches into treaties, to turn commitments into agreements, broad suggestions and wishes on the future relationship into specific workable solutions," Juncker told the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

He said it was "especially important" that Britain comes up with concrete proposals for the border between British-ruled Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, which is staying in the EU.

Both Britain and the EU have vowed to avoid the return of customs checks to the border and an interim deal in December left some flexibility on the

issue, but an EU text putting the agreement into law has sparked a fresh row with London.

- Irish border 'a European issue' -

The draft EU text published last month says Northern Ireland must stay in a customs union with the rest of the bloc if no better way is found to avoid a hard Irish border — which Britain rejects.

Juncker told MEPs the draft text simply translated the December accord into legal language and "should not come as a shock".

And the former Luxembourg PM warned London the EU institutions and member states stood squarely in support of Ireland on the issue.

"For us this is not an Irish issue, it is a European issue. It is all for one and one for all — that is what it means to be part of this union," he said.

EU Council President Donald Tusk warned last week that the Irish border issue must be solved before negotiations can move on to other issues.

Britain hopes to begin talks on the future trading relationship with Brussels next month, and May set out her proposals for a new wide-ranging free trade agreement in a speech on 2 March. In the speech May suggested Britain would commit to keeping some EU regulations and standards while reserving

the option to diverge in others.

The bloc has repeatedly dismissed such an idea as "cherry-picking" and EU chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier once again rejected on Tuesday.

"It's a rather surprising idea to think the EU 27... could accept convergence when the UK wants it and at the same time leave the possibility for divergence where there is a comparative advantage to be had," Barnier told MEPs.

He also dismissed British suggestions they could take part in EU agencies after Brexit without submitting to rulings by the European Court of Justice.

- EU 'open for business' -

The European Parliament — which will have the final veto on any Brexit deal — will vote on Wednesday on a proposal to offer Britain an "association agreement" which it says would be broader than a trade deal.

The agreement would be based around four "pillars" — trade, foreign policy and security cooperation, internal security and "thematic" cooperation, which includes education and research programmes.

The European Parliament's Brexit coordinator Guy Verhofstadt said talks he held with May and her Brexit minister David Davis last week had left him confident London would "see the advantages of such an approach".—AFP ■

Moscow, Jakarta embark on strategic partnership in their relations, Lavrov says

MOSCOW — Russian-Indonesian relations have reached the level of strategic partnership, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said at a meeting with his Indonesian counterpart Retno Marsudi on Tuesday.

“Our countries are co-operating in the trade-economic, military-technical and humanitarian spheres. In general, we believe that our relations have entered the level of strategic partnership,” he said, stressing that dialogue is regularly conducted at the high and top levels.

“This is a good chance to hold such negotiations on all bilateral issues and the issues of the bilateral agenda that may become the theme of joint activity in the United Nations and in the Pacific Rim with regard to Russia’s active participation in the events organized by ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations),” Lavrov noted. Retno Marsudi, for whom the current visit to Russia is the first one as a foreign minister, noted, for her part, that she expects the negotiations with the Russian counterpart

to be productive. “Today, I hope very much to discuss the issues of bilateral relations, as well as of the international agenda,” Marsudi said.

She said that the main goal of these negotiations is discussion of economic cooperation. “We are very happy because relations are developing, and this visit is chiefly aimed at bolstering economic relations between our countries, because our country is one of the largest economies in the East Asian region,” the Indonesian foreign minister said.—Tass ■



Indonesian and Russian Foreign Ministers, Retno Marsudi and Sergey Lavrov. PHOTO: TASS

China unveils cabinet reshuffle plan

BEIJING — China on Tuesday unveiled a massive cabinet reshuffle plan to make the government better-structured, more efficient, and service-oriented.

The institutional reform plan of the State Council was submitted to the on-going first session of the 13th National People’s Congress for deliberations.

State Councilor Wang Yong briefed the lawmakers on the plan.

There will be 26 ministries and commissions of the State Council after the reshuffle. Among the new entities are a ministry of natural resources, a ministry of veterans affairs, and a ministry of emergency

management.

There will also be new administrations, such as an international development cooperation agency, a state immigration administration, and a banking and insurance regulatory commission. Compared with the current setup of cabinet administrations, the number of ministerial-level entities is reduced by eight and that of vice-ministerial-level entities by seven.

Wang said the reform, focusing on institutional restructuring in key areas, will strengthen the government’s functions on economic management, market supervision, so-

cial management, public service, and ecological and environmental protection.

“It focuses on the needs of development and meets the people’s expectations,” Wang said, adding that the restructuring forms part of a broader plan by the Communist Party of China to deepen the reform of the Party and state institutions.

He said the cabinet reshuffle deals with the institutional obstacles to help the market play a decisive role in resource allocation. The reshuffle will also help China build a modern economy with high quality growth. —Xinhua ■

Former Australian FM calls for immigration to be cut in half

CANBERRA — Former Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Bob Carr called for the nation to cut its immigration rate in half on Monday night. Carr, who served as Premier of New South Wales (NSW) from 1995 to 2005 and Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs from 2012 to 2013, said that the growing pains associated with Australia’s population boom could be eased if migration was reduced.

“Immigration is our character, 37 per cent of the population of Sydney was born overseas. We celebrate it, but even those people, those born overseas are still asking whether we can achieve the same benefits at a less

dramatic pace,” he said on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s Q&A on Monday night.

“74 percent of Australians think there is enough of us already. “I think politicians and business leaders ought to be acknowledging that it has finally sunk in — I thought it was a lonely voice for the long time.”

Carr, who famously declared that “Sydney was full” during his time as Premier of NSW, went on to say that Australia’s skilled migrant system, whereby priority was given to potential migrants who could fill a need in the local workforce, had failed. His comments came several weeks after former Prime

Minister Tony Abbott made headlines by suggesting in a speech that the annual immigration intake be reduced from 190,000 to 110,000, a suggestion that was shot down by his successor as Prime Minister and political rival Malcolm Turnbull. Despite drawing criticism, Abbott wrote on social media ahead of the Q&A on Monday night “that more supply means downward pressure on prices and more demand means upward pressure.” “Very high immigration means stagnant wages and unaffordable housing. That’s why the numbers need to be scaled back now. We shouldn’t be afraid of the debate,” he said.—Xinhua ■

CLAIM’S DAY NOTICE

M.V MCC MERGUI VOY. NO. ()

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V MCC MERGUI VOY. NO. () are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 14-3-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of M.I.T.T where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

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

Phone No: 2301185

CLAIM’S DAY NOTICE

M.V CAPE FLORES VOY. NO. ()

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V CAPE FLORES VOY. NO. () are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 14-3-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of H.P.T where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S NEW GOLDEN SEA
SHIPPING LINES

Phone No: 2301185

CLAIM’S DAY NOTICE

M.V YUANG JING V.0057

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V YUANG JING V.0057 are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 12-3-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of AWPT where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

SHIPPING AGENCY DEPARTMENT
MYANMA PORT AUTHORITY
AGENT FOR: M/S COSCO SHIPPING
PROJECT LOGISTICS (GUANG ZHOU).

Phone No: 2301928

Meghan Markle in first official outing with Queen

LONDON — US actress Meghan Markle took part in her first official event with Queen Elizabeth II on Monday, accompanying her fiancé Prince Harry to a service at London's Westminster Abbey.

Markle arrived at the Commonwealth Day Service with Harry, his elder brother Prince William, the second in line to the throne, and his wife Kate, Duchess of Cambridge.

The service is Britain's largest annual inter-faith gathering and during the event Markle joined members of the royal

family in greeting attendees.

Since announcing their engagement in November, Markle and Harry have made regular public appearances together, but Monday's service was the first official outing with the queen.

The couple will marry at St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle on 19 May.

In preparation for the ceremony Markle was reportedly baptised last week by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, leader of the Church of England.—AFP ■



US actress Meghan Markle is due to marry Prince Harry at St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle on 19 May. **PHOTO: AFP**

Cameron Diaz has retired from acting: Selma Blair

LOS ANGELES — Hollywood star Cameron Diaz has retired from acting in order to spend more time at home, according to Selma Blair. Blair said Diaz had told her that she did not plan to make any more movies, as she wants to be with husband Benji Madden, reported Metro. Recalling a conversation they had about their 2002 movie "The Sweetest Thing," Blair said, "I had lunch with Cameron the other day. We were reminiscing about the film. I would have liked to do a sequel but Cameron's retired from acting. She's like 'I'm done.' 'I mean, she doesn't need to make any more films.

She has a pretty great life, I don't know what it would take to bring her back. She's happy." Diaz's last movie was 2014's "Annie".

—PTI ■



French singer Bertrand Cantat. **PHOTO: AFP**

French killer rocker pulls out of festivals

PARIS — French singer Bertrand Cantat, who beat his girlfriend to death, on Monday announced he would not be performing at any summer festivals after an uproar amongst women's rights activists. More than 70,000 people had signed an online petition urging Normandy's Papillons de Nuit festival to pull Cantat from its line-up, saying organizers were "normalizing violence against women" by putting him in the spotlight.

Since then there has been pressure on Cantat to cancel a string of upcoming shows, not least as anger over violence against women has ricocheted around the world after the Harvey Weinstein scandal.

Two other festivals had decided already moved to cancel performances by the 54-year-old singer, once the idolized front-

man of rock band Noir Desir.

Cantat told AFP that while he would continue with tour dates to promote his solo album, he was calling off all festival appearances "to bring an end to this controversy and end pressure on organizers".

The rock star killed his girlfriend Marie Trintignant, a well-known actress, in a hotel room while on tour in Lithuania in 2003.

The killing sent shockwaves through France, where Cantat was known as a champion of social causes. He was sentenced to eight years in prison of which he served four years before being released on parole in 2007.—AFP ■



Cameron Diaz. **PHOTO: PTI**

Pastry festival in Istanbul creates a world of artistic pieces

ISTANBUL — Pastry festival in Istanbul has displayed a colourful world of pastries and cakes, mostly in the forms of human figures, animals, flowers, and social lives.

They are works of pastry chefs from 40 countries who are attending Master of Cake pastry festival in Istanbul, a two-day event that ends on Sunday evening, and all the pieces are edible.

With wild imagination and deft hands, the chefs turned pastries into impressive artistic pieces, from busts of different figures to images of monsters, lovely little elephants and two flying eagles sharing a fish.

The iconic Trevi Fountain in Rome is here, and there is a soldier driving two monsters toward a prisoner chained to a stone pole, and a mounted general fighting hard against enemies.

In a small workshop, pastry chefs are doing their jobs. In front of a house, an old man was cutting firewood, while his wife with apron on was greeting him.

In a market with different kinds of vegetables and fruits, about three dozens of traders and customers were busy with business, no different from real



Pastry chefs make pastry work "Beauty and the Beast" in Istanbul, Turkey on 10 March, 2018. Pastry festival in Istanbul has displayed a colorful world of pastries and cakes, mostly in the forms of human figures, animals, flowers, and social lives. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

life in all aspects.

Eda Dartepe is the maker of "Flowers in the vase." It took her three weeks to present such a visual feast featuring long-stem peonies, roses and chrysanthemum with fresh foliage.

"I worked day and night to

make every single detail truthful," she told Xinhua.

Yasemin Benli joined the contest for top-rate cake by making a traditional Turkish dessert known as baklava. "It is a special dessert having numerous shapes, sizes and flavours," she

explained.

Baklava mainly consists of 35 layers of phyllo dough and is stacked and brushed with butter and sugar syrup, and then cut into rectangles. Walnut or pistachio nuts can be used interchangeably.

According to elderly Turks, it takes years to learn how to make baklava.

Among the works that drew the attention are miniatures of well-known art pieces and architectural masterpieces as well as protagonists from movies like *The Little Prince*, *Finding Nemo* and *Beauty and the Beast*.

Daniel Dieguez from Spain was working on life-size *Beauty and the Beast* with Turkey's distinguished chef Tugba Gecgil in front of visitors for them to monitor every step of making such an installation.

"We have been working on this real-size installation, made of chocolate and dough with cherry syrup, since last week," Dieguez told Xinhua.

For Turks, pastries are an indispensable part of their daily lives.

"This passion of Turkish people dated back to the Ottoman era, which was famous for its rich and creamy desserts," said Ayse Celep, the owner of a small coffeehouse in Istanbul.

The winner of the pastry contest is set to be announced on Sunday evening and awarded a prize of 2,000 US dollars. —Xinhua ■

Aussies plunge into river in DIY gliders for charity

MELBOURNE — Decked out in brightly-coloured costumes and watched on by thousands of cheering spectators, competitors carrying homemade flying devices leapt off a platform above an Australian river in a quirky annual competition on Sunday.

The Birdman Rally, which raises funds for charities, is held at Melbourne's Yarra River and involves participants flying homemade gliders without mechanical assistance.

Contestants jump off a four-metre (13-foot) platform above the river, staying in the

air for as long as possible before crashing into the water.

They are judged for their costumes, pre-jump performances and how far they fly and fall.

The amount the contestants raise for charities before their flights also contribute to their total distance.

While past contestants have turned up in bizarre costumes, including 2017's winner whose parachute was made out of bras, this year's entrants arrived with more traditional-looking contraptions shaped as planes and gliders.

Winner Daniel Mazzei, who

called himself the Red Baron after the ace World War I German fighter pilot, plunged into the Yarra with a bright red plane on his back.

"No, I didn't think I would jump as far as I did that's for sure," Mazzei, a builder by trade, said after claiming the trophy.

Mazzei raised money for Bravehearts, a charity that supports victims of child sex assault.

The contestants collected a total of almost Aus\$100,000 (US\$78,500) for nominated charities, organizer the City of Melbourne said. —AFP ■



A contestant takes part in the annual Birdman Rally in Australia. **PHOTO: AFP**

Ancient giant shark tooth goes missing in Australia

SYDNEY — A giant fossilised tooth from a prehistoric shark has gone missing from a supposedly secret location at a remote Australian World Heritage site, and wildlife officials want it back.

The well-preserved tooth, which could be valuable to collectors, is an estimated 2-2.5 million years old and belonged to a Megalodon, regarded as one of the largest and most powerful fish to have ever lived.

"It had quite defined features on it, so you could see the serrated edge of the shark's tooth, it was probably one of the better specimens we knew of," said Arvid Hogstrom from Parks and Wildlife in Western Australia.

One of just a few Megalodon specimens in the Ningaloo Coast World Heritage Area, "very few people" knew of its location, he added, without elaborating on exactly how many.

"It is not something someone would have stumbled across and they have been required to put a bit of effort in to get it out of the rock as well," he said.

"We presume... an amateur collector (has taken it) or someone that just wants to have a fossil sitting on their mantelpiece."

Hogstrom said that his team had been working on protecting the fossil, which is some 10 centimetres long (3.93 inches), by concealing it with rocks while considering a range of options for its longer-term preservation.

"But unfortunately someone has beaten us to it," he said.

"It is in such a remote location and we just don't check the site every day, we are not exactly sure when it disappeared but we got a report on Friday."

Megalodon, which can grow up to 15 metres long, are believed to have become extinct 1.6 million years ago. —AFP ■

Guardiola plays down hopes of clinching title in derby

MANCHESTER — Pep Guardiola tried to play down growing excitement among Manchester City supporters over the possibility of winning the Premier League title when they face bitter rivals United in the derby early next month.

Jose Mourinho's side visit the Etihad Stadium on 7 April for a game which could see City make mathematically certain of being crowned champions following their 2-0 victory at Stoke on Monday.

First, City must win their visit to mid-table Everton but, should they do so, Guardiola will win his first league title in English football with victory over his old rival Mourinho at the Etihad.



Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola. PHOTO: AFP

"Everybody is always asking this question," said Guardiola. "But the important thing is on 12 March, we have 81 points, that is

a lot of points.

"We want to be champions. We need three wins, but we are able to do it with two (if City beat

United).

"But before and after United, we have the (Champions League) quarter-finals, and at the moment that is the most important thing to focus on.

"I understand for the fans, okay, but the important thing is to be champions. When and where it doesn't matter."

The in-form English team are also in with a strong chance of winning Europe's premier prize for the first time in their history. The draw for the Champions League last eight takes place on Friday and Guardiola will watch it live, along with his first-team squad, at their warm weather training camp in Abu Dhabi, where City flew immediately following the Stoke win.

City's shock exit from the FA Cup, at the hands of third-tier Wigan, leaves them without a game until the clash with Everton on the final day of the month.

"We are going to be together and make three training sessions in five days," said the City manager. "We are going to have lunch together, dinner, some people are playing golf. But the weather conditions are better than here — the forecast in Manchester is rain, rain, rain!"

"So we are going to go there and do the training we should be doing here. Last season we were there and it was good and that's why we're going to the airport now."—AFP ■

Serena Williams ousted from Indian Wells by sister Venus

INDIAN WELLS — Serena Williams' return to tournament tennis came to an abrupt end on Monday as she crashed out of Indian Wells with a 6-3, 6-4 loss to her sister Venus.

Venus closed out the 29th career meeting between the two on her second match point as Serena sailed a forehand long to end the third round match in front of a main stadium crowd of about 13,000.

It was the first meeting between the sisters since they clashed in the final of the 2017 Australian Open, which Serena won before taking a 15-month hiatus due to her pregnancy.

Serena said she is still easing her way back into match fitness. "It wasn't very easy, obviously," she said. "It was good to play and try to get in the rhythm and get into the swing again.

"I can't really replicate the situation no matter how much I do in practice. I make those



Venus Williams. PHOTO: AFP

shots 10 times out of 10 in practice.

Sevastova, who defeated 12th seeded Julia Georges 6-3, 6-3. It is rare for the Williams sisters to play this early in a tournament. It is the earliest they have faced each other since their first encounter at the Australian Open in 1998.

They arrived outside the stadium together on a golf cart then walked through the tunnel with Serena entering the court first, as many in the crowd stood and cheered.—AFP ■

Venus blasted six

Serena Williams. PHOTO: AFP



Roger Federer of Switzerland hits a backhand in his match against Filip Krajinovic of Serbia during the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden. PHOTO: AFP

Federer rolls into Indian Wells fourth round

INDIAN WELLS — World number one Roger Federer booked his spot in the fourth round of the ATP Indian Wells Masters by steaming past Filip Krajinovic 6-2, 6-1 on Monday.

The 36-year-old Federer needed just 58 minutes as he overpowered the Serb with a brilliant display of serving and tended his perfect record this season to 14-0.

He blasted six aces had one double fault and won 89 percent of his first serve points, losing just three points on his serve the entire match.

Federer, who is the de-

fending champion and trying to win a record sixth title in the California desert, was on the centre stadium for the third day in a row.

His opening match on Saturday night against Federico Delbonis carried over into Sunday afternoon after heavy rains forced a postponement of several night matches.

Federer has already won two titles in 2018, claiming his 20th Grand Slam crown by winning the Australian Open in January.

In the next round he faces Jeremy Chardy who beat fellow Frenchman Adrian Mannarino 7-5, 4-6, 6-1.—AFP ■