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State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi arrives back in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday after attending the two-day ASEAN-Australia Special Summit held in Sydney. **PHOTO: MNA**

State Counsellor returns from ASEAN summit in Australia

STATE Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi arrived back in Nay Pyi Taw at 7.30 pm yesterday after attending the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in Australia.

She was welcomed at the Nay Pyi Taw International Airport by Union Minister U Kyaw Tint Swe, Chairman of the Nay Pyi Taw Council Dr. Myo Aung, Deputy Minister U Min Thu and officials.

The State Counsellor left Canberra, Australia, by special

flight yesterday morning and arrived in Sydney at 10:20am.

The delegation led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi left for Singapore and arrived at Changi Airport at 5:05 pm, where they were welcomed by Myanmar Ambassador U Htay Aung and wife, Military Attaché Col. San Nyunt Oo and other officials. The delegation returned home by a special flight of Myanmar National Airlines.—Myanmar News Agency ■

Confirmation of more returnees

AFTER reviewing the names, photos and home villages of 8,032 displaced persons sent by Bangladesh, 193 more persons were identified as having lived in Myanmar as of 19 March, officials said.

A Myanmar-Bangladesh ministerial-level meeting was held at the meeting hall of the Ministry of the Office

of the State Counsellor on 22 November 2017, and the two countries signed an arrangement for the return of displaced persons from Rakhine State.

The first meeting of the Joint Working Group on the repatriation of displaced Myanmar residents from

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'BEST BANK IN MYANMAR'

Awarded by EUROMONEY 2017

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw discusses utilisation of loans

Aye Aye Thant
(MYANMAR NEWS AGENCY)

The 17th-day meeting of the seventh session of the second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw was held at the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw meeting hall in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday morning.

Dr. Myat Nyana Soe, secretary of the Joint Bill Committee, read the report on the committee's follow-up findings and comments on the 2018 Union Tax Bill. Apart from the clauses and sub-clauses that need to be amended, the amendments proposed by the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw representatives were discussed by the Joint Bill Committee, Public Accounts Joint Committee and the related departments and organisations. It was agreed that the Hluttaw should agree to the initial comments made by the Joint Bill Committee.

He said the Joint Bill Committee had discussed in depth and agreed on the 2018 Union Tax Bill, with the Hluttaw representatives, providing suggestions to the Public Accounts Joint Committee, Pyidaungsu Hluttaw's Legal Affairs and Special Cases Assessment Commission, related ministries and organisations. Therefore, the Hluttaw should agree to the initial amendments and the follow-up amendments proposed



Pyidaungsu Hluttaw is being convened in Nay Pyi Taw. PHOTO: MYANMAR NEW AGENCY

by the Joint Bill Committee and approve the bill, he said.

The Joint Bill Committee then submitted a motion for the Hluttaw to approve the bill, section by section, and after the Hluttaw approved the bill, the approval was announced to the Hluttaw.

Next, Deputy Minister for Planning and Finance U Maung Maung Win tabled a motion for the Hluttaw to approve the entire bill, and after the Hluttaw approved the entire bill, the approval being announced by Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than.

Later, 14 Hluttaw representatives discussed the 87.091-billion Japanese yen loan from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to be provided to the Ministry of Agriculture, Live-

stock and Irrigation, Ministry of Construction and Ministry of Transport and Communications.

In his discussion, U Khin Cho of Hlaingbwe constituency said the aim of the loan was to develop the agricultural sector, improve the transport sector, and develop lives and reduce poverty of the people living in rural areas. He sought details about the current utilisation of dam water, plans to upgrade it with the loan, and thus, the resulting increase in agricultural productivity and the GDP.

The Ministry of Construction is building bridges and roads through a contract system, and plans should be in place so that black-listed companies (and people) are not part of the works. On the Ministry of Transport and Communications utilising



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

the loan, he suggested the ministry must study the additional services it can provide and the income it can earn through the upgrade of the railways, coaches and locomotives.

U Tun Wei of Phaungpyin constituency pledged his support, suggesting that the loan utilisation plan of the Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation Ministry for the dam would benefit some 70,000 households. Although he supported the loan for the Ministry of Transport and Communications to upgrade the Yangon-Mandalay rail line, he noted that Myanmar Railways was a state-owned enterprise that was incurring losses every year and, thus, it should ensure the loan is not wasted. In his discussion, U Tin Tun Naing of Seikkyi Khanaungto constituency said he was nei-

ther objecting to the projects nor ignoring the benefits that could be accrued from the projects. However, the calculation and estimation of the benefits should be clearly explained. The return on investment, according to the explanation provided by the Deputy Minister for agriculture, livestock and irrigation, is very good, but it was too good to be true, he noted.

There is no objection to purchasing essential machinery with the loan, but the expenses for the machinery and equipment should be explained in detail, he said.

Similarly Dr. Tin Tin Win of the Bago Region constituency (5), U Aung Thihe of Seikphu constituency, U Kyaw Aung Lwin of Sedoktara constituency, Daw Yin Min Hlaing of Gangaw constituency, Dr. Win Myint of Bago Region constituency (11), U Sein Win of Maubin constituency, Dr. Win Aung of KhinU constituency, U Win Myint Aung of Tabayin constituency, U Tun Win of Kyunhla constituency, U Hla San of Magway Region constituency (1) and U Win Aung of Sagaing Region constituency (3) also discussed the loan.

An announcement will be made later on holding the 18th-day meeting of the seventh session of the second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. ■

MNHRC issues statement on peaceful assembly law

Following is the unofficial translation of the statement released by MNHRC.

THE Myanmar National Human Rights Commission has released a statement concerning the amendment of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law.

The Amyotha Hluttaw, by a majority vote, approved the Bill of Amendment of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law on 7 March 2018, and it will be discussed in the Pyithu Hluttaw soon.

The statement acknowledges that the general public is opposed to the amendments being made, which is said to be in opposition to democracy.

Critics say the amendments would place further restrictions on the right to protest and assemble. Opponents also claim

the changes are overly broad and could be exploited to stifle political dissent

The statement cites the UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights) – Article 19, “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”, Article 20, “Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. No one may be compelled to belong to an association”, and Article 29, second paragraph, “In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such

limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.”

It also cites ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) – Article 19, “Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

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Myanmar Investment Commission Meeting 4/2018

The Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC) meeting 4/2018 was convened in Yangon on 20th March 2018 and reviewed investment proposals consistent with the Myanmar Investment Law.

U Kyaw Win, Chairman of MIC and Union Minister for Planning and Finance and Dr. Than Myint, Vice Chairman of MIC and Union Minister for

Commerce and members of MIC attended the meeting. The submission of proposals and endorsement applications from investors and post-permit activities of MIC-permitted companies were discussed in the meeting. The MIC meeting (4/2018) decided to issue 7 investment permits and 7 endorsements in relation to the investment proposals.—MNA ■

Vice President U Myint Swe meets Crans Montana Forum honorary chairman, founder



Vice President U Myint Swe meets with Ambassador Jean Paul Carteron in Morocco. **PHOTO: MNA**



Deputy Minister U Set Aung and Ambassador U Myint Lwin attend the Crans Montana Forum on Africa and South-South Cooperation maritime transport meeting in Morocco. **PHOTO: MNA**

Vice President U Myint Swe, who was in Morocco to attend the Crans Montana Forum on Africa and South-South Cooperation, met Ambassador Jean Paul Carteron, honorary chairman and founder of the Crans Montana Forum, in the meeting hall of the cruise ship Rhapsody

on 19 March.

At the meeting, they discussed matters related to cooperation between the developing countries in Africa and Myanmar, as well as investment opportunities. They also exchanged views on the work programmes related to the Crans Montana Fo-

rum. Also present at the meeting were Deputy Minister for Planning and Finance U Set Aung, Ambassador U Myint Lwin and other officials.

U Set Aung, who is a member of Vice President U Myint Swe's delegation, attended the Crans Montana Forum on Africa

and South-South Cooperation maritime transport and transport corridors meeting, on the afternoon of 18 March.

Similarly, the Deputy Minister attended the meeting to discuss plans to tackle climate change in small island developing states (SIDS), which

was held on the afternoon of 19 March.

The meetings were attended by ministers, deputy ministers, mayors, experts, technicians, members of parliaments and senior officials from the partner countries of Morocco. —Myanmar News Agency ■

Mayyu Mountain in Rakhine roads upgraded

By Kyaw Thu Htet

SIX miles of dirt roads in the Mayyu Mountains in Rakhine State have been upgraded to a hard surface using rocks, according to an official from the government construction team known as Special Road Group (17).

An earthen road that linked Kyaukpandu, Indin, and Zedipyin villages was built last year, and will soon be accessible to motor traffic because of the hard surfacing, officials said.

"Road axis was already formed and hard surfacing with rocks has been conducted and about six miles had been close to completion. In some places, box culverts will have to be constructed. Of the 46 box culverts that need to be constructed, about 30 were being constructed simultaneously", said Deputy Director U Aye Tun Maw of Special Road Group (17).

In the plains area, the road is 40 feet wide and on the mountains it is 34 feet wide. It will be constructed to a two-lane macadam road first and it will be upgraded to a concrete one



The construction site of the roads in Mayyu Mountains in Rakhine State. **PHOTO: HAN LIN NAING**

next year.

"There'll be 14 bridges that are 50 feet and above and 10 feet and above, which was not included in the initial plan. In this year's budget, 50 feet and above bridges were not included. Funds were also not provided to upgrade the

road up to a concrete one", said U Aye Tun Maw.

The road connects Zedipyin Village in Yathedaung Township with Kyaukpandu Village in Maungtau Township. It will also be the main road that connects the villages in eastern side

of Mayyu Mountain range with villages in the western side.

"The Kyaukpandu-Indin-Zedipyin road is 10 miles and 7 furlong long. As Rural Development Department had already constructed 1 mile 7 furlong, the newly built road is 9 miles long.

The road was being constructed to support regional development and stability. Mayyu Mountain range runs parallel to the Bay of Bengal in Maungtau, Buthidaung and Yathedaung districts of northern Rakhine State. Because of the mountain, it was difficult to travel from villages in the east to villages in the west. It is an obstacle to regional development and administration. That is why this road is being built", said U Aye Tun Maw.

In the past there was only one road from Buthidaung to Maungtau that went over the mountain. The present government is planning to build four more roads over the mountain and in fiscal year 2017-2018, Kyaukpandu-Indin-Zedipyin road and Kyeinchaung-Gopi road will be built. Two more roads, U Daung-Nyaung Chaung Road and That Kine Nya-Padaga Road, are being planned, it is learnt.

"The plan is for four roads. This is the plan. Two more roads are earmarked in the Ministry of Construction budget for fiscal year 2018-2019", said U Aye Tun Maw. ■

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able to publish "Letter to the Editor"
that do not exceed 500 words. Should
you submit a text longer than 500 words
please be aware that your letter will be
edited.

Visitors seen at Yangon Zoological Garden. PHOTO: PHOE KHWAR

Plastic-free zone campaign to be launched at Yangon Zoological Garden

A campaign to develop a plastic-free zone will be launched at Yangon Zoological Garden this year, according to a report in the Myawady Daily yesterday.

"Currently, we are planning to create a plastic-free zone at Yangon Zoological Garden. Also, we are optimising the land, decorating the garden, and conducting drawing, 3D board art and street art paint-

ing sessions," said U Pyae Sone Myo, director of the Zoological Gardens Division, Forest Department.

The Forest Department has granted permission to Htoo Company to upgrade the Yangon Zoological Garden.

The public's participation is also important to assure that the plastic-free zone campaign is a success. "Most animals living in

Yangon Zoological Garden are wild. Therefore, we are feeding the animals according to international norms," he added.

More travellers are visiting the Yangon Zoological Garden, which is being upgraded to meet international standards.

"We are planning to provide more recreational services to the public," U Pyae Sone Myo said.—GNLM ■

Myanmar aims for US\$ 700 million from fisheries export

THE Department of Fisheries under the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation set a record for foreign income from fisheries exports over a period of ten years.

Myanmar earned US\$ 561.02 million from exports of 351,652.05 tons of marine products in 2007-2008 FY. 386,981.32 tons of exports from Myanmar's fishery sector amounted to US\$ 653.85 million in the 2011-2012 FY, according to the statistics released by the department.

The department set a target to fetch US\$ 650 million from the fishery sector and exported 522,300.261 tons of marine products, thereby attaining US\$



Exports of Myanmar's fishery sector target to US\$ 700 million in this fiscal year. PHOTO: MYANMAR DIGITAL NEWS

662.973 million and exceeding the set goal before the current fiscal year ends, said an official from the department.

Myanmar's fishery products have been exported to over 30 countries worldwide for the last 10 years. Now Myanmar's marine products mainly go to more than 40 countries

including the European Union due to modern packaging, high quality of the goods and market expansion.

The department is making concerted efforts to earn US\$ 700 million in conjunction with respective organizations and entrepreneurs in the current financial year.—MDN ■

Fewer livestock breeders as cost of feed raw materials goes up

THE number of manageable-scale livestock breeders has reduced owing to the rising cost of feed raw materials.

"Currently, the number of livestock-breeders has decreased. The cost of feed raw materials has risen 16 per cent this year compared with last year. Even pig breeders are not making good profits, because they have to pay Ks800 for a basket of broken rice. For instance, they are selling pigs for Ks200,000, but the cost of pig feed is more than the selling price of the animal. The number of pig breeders has declined considerably," said U Myat Ko, member of Mandalay Region Pig Farm Group.

The main obstacle in the growth of the livestock feed market is the rising cost of important raw materials. The price of poultry feed has risen to Ks900 per basket compared with Ks700 per basket last year, while the price of pig feed has reached Ks650 per basket from Ks500 last year. Sesame oil-cake prices have also risen to between Ks3,500 and Ks4,000 per basket from Ks2,500 per basket last year.

"Myanmar produces only 10 per cent of the oil needed in the country. Oil mills cannot produce more bean and sesame oil-cakes, which are major raw materials used in the production of animal feed. So, the price of bean and sesame oil-cakes is likely to increase in the future," said Dr Thet Hmu, chairman of Myanmar Aqua Feed Association.

Annually, some 580,000 commercial-scale bred pigs and 2.9 million manageable-scale bred pigs enter the market. Consequently, the pig breeding sector in Myanmar requires 0.76 million metric tonnes of feed raw material. The dairy farming and the pig breeding sector together required 1.84 million metric tonnes in 2014, 2.12 million metric tonnes in 2015, 2.54 million metric tonnes in 2016 and 3.17 million metric tonnes in 2017 and 2018.—Myat Thu (AMIA) ■

KBZ Bank, Huawei jointly offer greater financial access to all

KBZ Bank, Myanmar's largest privately-owned bank is proud to announce a partnership with Huawei to create an inclusive digital financial ecosystem, which will give Myanmar citizens across the country greater access to finance and improve their quality of life through banking.

Mike DeNoma, CEO, KBZ Bank, announced the bank's partnership at Huawei Global HQ in Shenzhen, China. "In Myanmar only 10% of the population have a bank account, only 30% have access to on-grid electricity but 90% have a smartphone. Our dream, working with all parties, is virtually 100% financial inclusion through the mobile phone in less than 10 years. We are excited about the opportunity to create an inclusive digital financial ecosystem in Myanmar, with Huawei as our technology partner that will benefit everyone in the country."

The unveiling of this partnership is part of KBZ Bank's drive towards leading innovation and transformation in Myanmar. U Aung Ko Win, Chairman, KBZ Bank, believes that the partnership will further strengthen Myanmar as a whole, "Our coun-



Mike DeNoma, CEO, KBZ Bank, (2nd from Right), Mr. Zhang Liman, CEO, Huawei Myanmar, (2nd from left), exchange notes after signing ceremony of KBZ Bank and Mobile Money Project in Shenzhen, China on 10 March 2018. **PHOTO: SUPPLIED**

try is going through enormous change and this presents exciting opportunities for all of us. We're both proud and eager to be driving this change here at KBZ Bank – improving the quality of life for all in Myanmar through easy, convenient and accessible banking. Myanmar deserves an outstanding bank, and we are going to be that bank."

Mr. Zhang Liman, CEO, Huawei Myanmar, said "Myan-

mar is one of the fastest growing developing countries, and there is a promising prospect for the development of emerging industries. As the largest commercial bank in Myanmar, KBZ Bank is keen on digital transformation, leading the provision of better financial services to Myanmar people. We believe we can together accelerate Myanmar's financial inclusion, and improve the

living standards of Myanmar people through innovation and new financial technologies, as well as boost the development of a digital economy."

Through identifying and leveraging Huawei's strengths in R&D and developing cutting-edge technologies, KBZ Bank looks to create greater value for the people of Myanmar, said the statement released by the KBZ Bank.—GNLM ■

Viet Nam manufacturer to build factory in Myanmar

VIETNAMESE door and facade maker European Plastics Window Company plans to build its first overseas factory in Myanmar next year.

Hanoi-based Eurowindow will invest between \$15 million and \$20 million in the construction of the factory to manufacture doors and windows.

Eurowindow CEO Nguyen Canh Hong said his company opened a representative office and a sales centre in Yangon on 16 March in preparation for building the factory at a suitable location.

"We see huge demand for doors and facade products in the market, while the supply of quality products here is still limited," he said, adding that the Myanmar factory will be able to meet market demand and reduce costs for Eurowindow customers.

The Eurowindow CEO also said his company may build a second factory at a cost of \$80 million to \$100 million in Myanmar to manufacture construction materials, if the first factory is successful. Eurowindow is among 138 Vietnamese companies operating in Myanmar. Viet Nam's foreign direct investment in Myanmar reached \$1.38 billion in 2017.—Kyodo News ■

YSX to increase matching time

By May Thet Hnin

THE Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX) will increase its time trade matching sessions from two to four in the hopes of raising the trade volume and attracting more investors.

The two new hours for time trade matching are 10 am and 12 pm, which will be added to the existing hours of 11 am and 1 pm, once the YSX receives approval from the Securities and Exchange Commission of Myanmar.

U Thet Htun Oo, executive senior manager of YSX, said that increasing the time trade matching to four hours would enable dealers, brokers and other market participants to sell at four different prices. "Customers

will be able to make profits," said U Thet Htun Oo.

"I want to create the kind of environment that will excite customers and encourage more deals," he added.

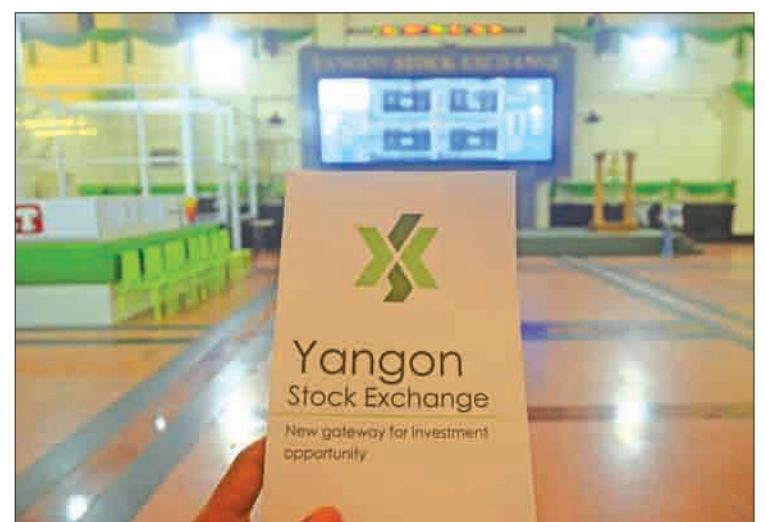
The YSX had conducted surveys and discussions with security companies, and held tests with internal operators before increasing the matching time hours. After gathering results through the first wave of surveys, further discussions were held with the Japan Exchange Group (JPX) and the Daiwa Institute of Research (DIR).

Five companies are currently listed on the YSX. They are First Myanmar Investment Company, Myanmar Thilawa SEZ Holdings Public, Myanmar Citizens Bank, First Pri-

vate Bank and TMH Telecom Company.

The stock market saw more than 20,000 shares being traded daily in the 2016-2017 fiscal year period, at an estimated value of Ks100 million. The stock market in the 2017-2018 FY period has seen only 10,000 shares traded daily, with their estimated value being Ks70 million.

"The attitude of the majority of the general public here is to wait for the annual dividend of a company's profit, instead of trading for capital gain. A large percentage of these people hold on to their shares, instead of trading, and this is one reason the stock market is slow. This is the opposite of what happens in most other countries. People do not care about the compa-



Yangon Stock Exchange-YSX. **Photo: PHOE KHWA**

ny's dividends and trade to earn a profit, instead," said U Thet Htun Oo.

U Thet Htun Oo said there were more than 100,000 shareholders, but only 33,000 were listed. Only 300 to 500 participate in trading each day.

The decline of interest in the

stock market and the fall of share prices can be attributed to the poor general economic climate, as well as the low basic income and lack of motivation among the public. Officials from the YSX said they would raise awareness and conduct workshops to remedy this situation.

Page 1 of approved form to be filled out by
returnees.

Verification Form of Resident of Myanmar

Head OF Family Photo

Sr. No. _____
Date _____

Name Of The Head Of Family _____ 4. Other Name (if any) _____
Gender _____ 6. Age/Date Of Birth (Optional) _____
Place Of Birth _____ 8. Address In Myanmar _____
Father's Name _____ 10. Father's Address In Myanmar _____
Mother's Name _____ 12. Mother's Address In Myanmar _____
Spouse's Name _____ 14. Spouse's Address In Myanmar _____
Visible Mark (Optional) _____ 16. Occupation _____
7. Current Holding Card No. _____ 18. Number Of Family Member _____

Family Photo

Declaration:
I apply to return and live in Myanmar voluntarily without any threat or encouragement.
If permission is granted to me to enter Myanmar, I will abide by the existing laws of Myanmar.

Signature _____ Finger Print of Left Thumb _____ Finger Print of Right Thumb _____
Address In Bangladesh _____
Date For All Entry In Bangladesh _____

Page 2 of approved form to be filled out by
returnees.

List Of Family Member/ Dependents

1. (a) Full Name _____ (b) Father's Name _____ (c) Mother's Name _____ (d) Date Of Birth/Age _____ (e) Place Of Birth _____ (f) Gender _____ (g) Visible Mark (if any) _____ (h) Relationship _____ (i) Current Holding Card No. (if any) _____ (j) Document Information (if any) _____ (k) Other Documents (if any) _____

2. (a) Full Name _____ (b) Father's Name _____ (c) Mother's Name _____ (d) Date Of Birth/Age _____ (e) Place Of Birth _____ (f) Gender _____ (g) Visible Mark (if any) _____ (h) Relationship _____ (i) Current Holding Card No. (if any) _____ (j) Document Information (if any) _____ (k) Other Documents (if any) _____

3. (a) Full Name _____ (b) Father's Name _____ (c) Mother's Name _____ (d) Date Of Birth/Age _____ (e) Place Of Birth _____ (f) Gender _____ (g) Visible Mark (if any) _____ (h) Relationship _____ (i) Current Holding Card No. (if any) _____ (j) Document Information (if any) _____ (k) Other Documents (if any) _____

Page 3 of approved form to be filled out by
returnees.

List Of Family Member/ Dependents

4. (a) Full Name _____ (b) Father's Name _____ (c) Mother's Name _____ (d) Date Of Birth/Age _____ (e) Place Of Birth _____ (f) Gender _____ (g) Visible Mark (if any) _____ (h) Relationship _____ (i) Current Holding Card No. (if any) _____ (j) Document Information (if any) _____ (k) Other Documents (if any) _____

5. (a) Full Name _____ (b) Father's Name _____ (c) Mother's Name _____ (d) Date Of Birth/Age _____ (e) Place Of Birth _____ (f) Gender _____ (g) Visible Mark (if any) _____ (h) Relationship _____ (i) Current Holding Card No. (if any) _____ (j) Document Information (if any) _____ (k) Other Documents (if any) _____

6. (a) Full Name _____ (b) Father's Name _____ (c) Mother's Name _____ (d) Date Of Birth/Age _____ (e) Place Of Birth _____ (f) Gender _____ (g) Visible Mark (if any) _____ (h) Relationship _____ (i) Current Holding Card No. (if any) _____ (j) Document Information (if any) _____ (k) Other Documents (if any) _____

Page 4 of approved form to be filled out by
returnees.

List Of Family Member/ Dependents

7. (a) Full Name _____ (b) Father's Name _____ (c) Mother's Name _____ (d) Date Of Birth/Age _____ (e) Place Of Birth _____ (f) Gender _____ (g) Visible Mark (if any) _____ (h) Relationship _____ (i) Current Holding Card No. (if any) _____ (j) Document Information (if any) _____ (k) Other Documents (if any) _____

8. (a) Full Name _____ (b) Father's Name _____ (c) Mother's Name _____ (d) Date Of Birth/Age _____ (e) Place Of Birth _____ (f) Gender _____ (g) Visible Mark (if any) _____ (h) Relationship _____ (i) Current Holding Card No. (if any) _____ (j) Document Information (if any) _____ (k) Other Documents (if any) _____

9. (a) Full Name _____ (b) Father's Name _____ (c) Mother's Name _____ (d) Date Of Birth/Age _____ (e) Place Of Birth _____ (f) Gender _____ (g) Visible Mark (if any) _____ (h) Relationship _____ (i) Current Holding Card No. (if any) _____ (j) Document Information (if any) _____ (k) Other Documents (if any) _____

Page 5 of approved form to be filled out by
returnees.

10. (a) Full Name _____ **(b) Father's Name** _____ **(c) Mother's Name** _____ **(d) Date Of Birth/Age** _____ **(e) Place Of Birth** _____ **(f) Gender** _____ **(g) Visible Mark (if any)** _____ **(h) Relationship** _____ **(i) Current Holding Card No. (if any)** _____ **(j) Document Information (if any)** _____ **(k) Other Documents (if any)** _____

Board Of Verification In Myanmar

Signature _____ Name _____ Designation _____ Department _____

Signature _____ Name _____ Designation _____ Department _____

Notes _____

The unapproved form with facts sent from
Bangladesh

Family-wise list of Myanmar Residents taking shelter in Bangladesh after 09 October 2016 and 25 August 2017

DIP Reg. No. 1602071212113802

01. Name of the Head of Family: **FATAN MAUNGRAW** 06. Gender: **MALE**
02. Address in Myanmar (a) Township: **SAKES** 07. Camp Name (Number): **LOCHAPPRO**
(b) Village (Local): **KATIR GUMUNBOUN** 08. Date of arrival: **03/08/2017**
03. Place of Birth: **KATIR GUMUNBOUN** 09. Age/Date of Birth: **55**
04. Father's Name: **MAUNGRAW** 10. Number of Family Members: **06**
05. Mother's Name: **BODUJAL** 11. Family Counting Number: **249267**

Sl. No.	Name of family members present in the camp	DIP Registration No.	Father's Name	Relation to Head	Sex	Date/Year of Birth
1	NUKTAHAN	1602071212113802	MAUNGRAW	WIFE	02	45
2	MO: AYUB	1602071212113802	MAUNGRAW	SON	01	25
3	MO: AJAS	1602071212113802	MAUNGRAW	SON	07	17
4	RATJ	1602071212113802	MAUNGRAW	SON	01	16
5	RATIR	1602071212113802	MAUNGRAW	SON	01	14
6						
7						

Confirmation of more returnees from Bangladesh

FROM PAGE-1

Bangladesh was held on 15 January 2018 in the office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the physical arrangement for the repatriation of displaced Myanmar residents from Bangladesh, under the return of displaced persons from Rakhine State agreement, was signed.

According to the agreement, Myanmar will receive returnees arriving through land routes at the Taung Pyo Letwe Reception Centre, and those who return through the river routes will be received at the Nga Khu Ya Reception Centre. The Hla Pho Khaung Transit Centre has also been opened, and each camp will accept returnees five days a week. Bangladesh began sending a list of returnees in the prescribed forms on 23 January 2018.

Initially, some 508 Hindus and 750 Muslims who were already reviewed, totalling 1,258, were sent to Myanmar through Bangladesh. The 508 Hindus included in this list wished to return and the Myanmar government was informed about this by Hindu religious leaders. The Bang-

ladesh side sent a list of the first group of returnees who wanted to return, totalling 8,032, from 1,637 households.

However, through the particulars provided on the list, it could not be verified if the returnees were coming back of their own will, and the proposed returnees had not signed any agreements to follow the existing laws of Myanmar. The forms did not have a signature or a thumb print to validate the information provided about the person mentioned in the form. Serial numbers, form entry dates, and distinguishing marks or thumb prints of the head of households were absent. It did not mention if these persons held Myanmar cards and identities. There was no mention of the parents of the head of the household or their addresses, so it was not possible to verify who they were. A photograph of each household members was taken biometrically when they were in Myanmar, so the assessment could be made easily, but the photographs of the returnees provided were not of the quality required. The family list did not include the

father's name. Therefore, Bangladesh was requested to provide a detailed and complete list of the particulars of the 8,032 people wishing to return on 8 March 2018.

When the particulars of the 8,032 returnees that were sent without the prescribed papers were evaluated, only 363 persons were found to have lived in Myanmar. The assessment was continued, and as of 19 March, 193 more were found to have lived in Myanmar. Of the 8,032 persons in the list, only 556 were found to have lived in Myanmar.

Arrangements were made so that their photographs and thumb prints could be evaluated using computer software. However, the list provided did not have the required particulars, such as the photographs, thumb prints and addresses, and took considerable time to compare the available information.

The 556 who were already reviewed and checked will be accepted when Bangladesh sends them over.—Myanmar News Agency



Defence Services Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing greeting with Tatmadaw members and families from Putao cantonment on 19 March. **PHOTO: MNA**

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing met with officers, soldiers and families from Putao cantonment

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing met with officers, soldiers and families from Putao cantonment at Bandoolla Hall, Putao cantonment, Kachin State, on 19 March.

At the meeting, the Senior General said that soldiers had joined the Tatmadaw out of their own free will to serve the nation. The duty of safeguarding the nation involves sacrificing lives and limbs, and personnel must be ready, whenever there is a requirement.

The political situations in the country have led to actions that created hatred towards the Tatmadaw. While striving to create political stability, attempts are being made to end ethnic armed conflicts. At the time when the Tatmadaw is attempting to achieve eternal peace and is marching towards

democracy, problems cannot be solved with arms. The Tatmadaw personnel must work to defend the country and develop it, said the Senior General.

Also, the Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief and his wife presented the Tatmadaw officers, soldiers and families with images of Buddha, bibles and food. The Senior General's wife also presented the canton's maternal and child welfare association with cash, while the officials distributed books, journals, sports equipment and food.

Similarly, the Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief met with Putao town folks, ethnic nationals, departmental personnel, veterans and people's militia members.

During the meeting, the Senior General said that transport was not difficult in Putao region during peacetime, but

when peace and stability deteriorate, ways and means must be developed to ensure regional food sufficiency. In emergency situations, when road links are disrupted, the Tatmadaw will prioritize assistance. The agricultural land area in the region must be increased, and the yield should also be increased for regional food sufficiency. Emphasis should be placed on making the area free of drugs. Later, the Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief distributed food and clothing.

In the afternoon, the Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief visited the northern command agriculture and livestock breeding station and inspected the Novogen Brown egg-laying chickens, dairy cows and the preparation and usage of natural fertilizers (super bokashi). — Myanmar News Agency ■

MNHRC issues statement on peaceful assembly law

FROM PAGE-2

The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

For respect of the rights or reputations of others;

For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.”

The statement also cites ICCPR-Article 20 subsection 2, “Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.”

The statement urged anyone discussing the Bill of Amendment of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law to consider the aforementioned references to the UDHR and ICCPR. —Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (Unofficial Translation) ■



Union Minister Thura U Aung Ko leaves for Singapore yesterday. **PHOTO: MNA**

Union Minister Thura U Aung Ko attends 19th ASCC meeting in Singapore

Union Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Thura U Aung Ko left for Singapore yesterday to attend the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Council (ASCC) meeting in Singapore.

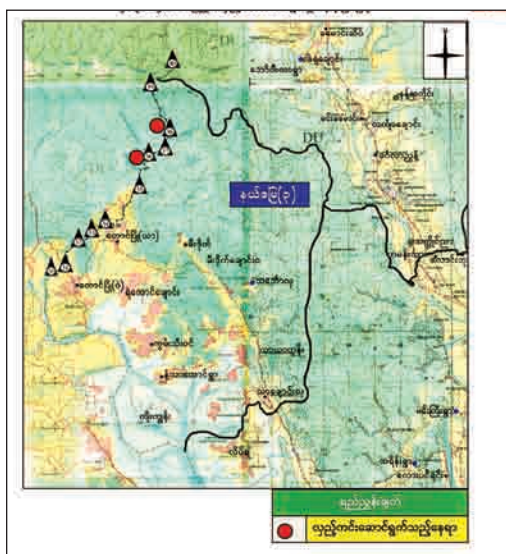
The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) is committed to lifting the quality of life of its peoples through cooperative

activities that are people-oriented, people-centred, environmentally friendly, and geared towards the promotion of sustainable development to face new and emerging challenges in the ASEAN region. The meeting will be held in Singapore from 18-22 March, 2018. —Myanmar News Agency ■

Joint patrols along Myanmar-Bangladesh border

FOLLOWING coordination between the two countries, the Myanmar Border Police and Bangladesh Border Police forces conducted a joint patrol along the Myanmar-Bangladesh border fence, from border post 34 to 38, on the morning of 15 March and 18 March.

The security forces conducted a coordinated patrol 14 times from 4 to 26 February 2018, between border posts 42 to 55. Patrols were conducted on 11 March, 15 March and 18 March from border posts 31 to 34, 34 to 36 and 36 to 38. A total of 17 coordinated patrols were held along the land border, along with a coordinated naval patrol along the Naf River on 5 March. The countries will continue to hold coordinated patrols in the future. —Myanmar News Agency ■



Three Myanmar migrants die in road accident

THREE Myanmar migrant workers were killed, including two women, and nine others injured in a road accident in Sing Buri province, Thailand, on 17 March, according to the Bangkok Post.

The three workers were killed when the van they were travelling in crashed into an 18-wheel truck and caught fire on Asia Highway, between kilometre markers No. 32 and No. 77, in Tambon Ban Poaeng, Promburi district. The two women were

trapped in the front seats. Nine others from Myanmar and the van driver were injured. Eight of the injured were rushed to Sing Buri Hospital, while two were taken to Promburi Hospital. According to Thai police, the Myanmar migrant workers were headed to Chiang Rai from Bangkok after renewing their visas. Others were returning home after working in Bangkok. The Thai police are investigating the cause of the accident. —Kyaw Soe (Kawthoung) ■

Cooperation from INGOs, NGOs welcomed for ecosystem revamp

As part of efforts to conserve Myanmar’s ecosystem, the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry has initiated discussions with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to obtain funds from the Green Climate Fund.

Today we are all fairly clear about the issues facing the long-term sustainable management of Myanmar’s ecosystem, including the country’s coastal resources and the need for coordinated collective action to address them. This is not only for the long-term interests of Myanmar, but for the interests of the global environment as a whole.

With the increasing population, excessive production of resources for short-term benefits, lack of knowledge on the value of the socio economy and weakness in management, there has been a deterioration of the resources of the coastal region and the ecosystem.

Cyclone Nargis in 2008 and the worst flood in decades in 2015 alerted the country to launch conservation of its environment.

During the past decades, mangrove forests, coral reefs and marine grasslands have been destroyed, studies show. With climate change, the sea level is rising, and natural disasters are taking place with more frequency. This causes coastal resources to deteriorate. Due to the rising sea level, housing areas and growing lands will also be ruined.

The coastal areas of Tanintharyi, Ayeyarwady and Rakhine are abundant with coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds, mudflats, estuaries and sand dunes, and they all play an important role in the people’s socio-economic development and environmental diversity. More specifically, they are vital for the development of the agricultural, forestry, fishery and tourism sectors.

Mangroves are an important asset in dealing with global climate change. They are being damaged by people clearing areas of mangrove forests for prawn breeding, using small-scale explosives for catching fish, mining, waste disposal and oil spills. Deforestation and chemicals from pesticides and herbicides also decrease the layers of alluvial soil along the coast.

In carrying out preventive work against climate change, it will be necessary not only to build infrastructure but also to conserve the natural infrastructure - mangrove forests, coastal forests and coral reefs.

To conserve the Myanmar’s ecosystem and to fulfill the basic needs of the people, the Union Government has been implementing a ten-year project for reestablishing the country’s forests from the 2017-2018 Fiscal Year to the 2026-2027 Fiscal Year.

To make the project a success, we need cooperation from international non-governmental organizations and local non-governmental organizations while we overcome the challenges ahead by “learning by doing”. ■

By Tha Hla Shwe

CYCLONE Nargis struck Myanmar on 2 and 3 May 2008, coming into the delta region from the Indian Ocean. It was a cyclone of Category 3 to 4 intensity never before experienced in Myanmar. The full force of the cyclone was felt in Ayeyarwady and Yangon Divisions, with the storm crossing directly over Yangon city. The greatest strength and impact of the cyclone was felt in Ngapudaw, Bogale, Labutta, Mawlamyinegyun townships, while Pyapon, Dedaye, and Kyauiklat townships in Ayeyarwady Division. Kungyangone, Twantay, Kawhmu and Kyauktan townships in Yangon division were also devastated. The damage was the result of wind, water and storm surge coming in together. The storm surge was reported to be as high as 7 meters in some places. The greatest damage and loss of lives were observed in the rural villages, with some small villages of less than 100 households being completely swept away in the storm surge. The loss of lives were less in large villages and urban areas where there were more permanent structures, but the damage to houses and properties remained high, going up to 95% in some areas. The official figures

on 2 July 2008 reported 84,537 people dead, 53,836 people missing, 19,359 injured and 1,064,623 people displaced. According to Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) assessment teams’ reports the number of affected people stood at 2,895,842.

Disaster Preparedness

MRCS received Nargis Cyclone alert on the evening of 29th April 2008 at 8 pm. The Disaster Management (DM) division of MRCS informed Red Cross branches in Rakhine, Ayeyarwady, Yangon and Bago divisions immediately. The instructions given were: to alert local people about the impending cyclone; to respond to cyclone if necessary in cooperation with local health and administrative authorities; to prepare relief supplies as ready-to-send cargo; to keep in contact with MRCS head quarters (HQ) by phone or through designated contact persons.

Starting from 30th April, preparations were made at MRCS HQ to form Assessment Teams (AT), with people who have had training in Regional Disaster Response Team (RDRT) training abroad as team leaders. Relief supplies available in Yangon MRCS warehouses were prepared to be able to send them out to required areas quickly. On 2nd May afternoon Dr Tun Myint, MRCS Executive Committee member in charge of DM, together with Ms Bridget Gardner, Head of Delegation, International Federation of Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), attended a meeting with United Nations (UN) agencies to plan possible responses to the Nargis Cyclone as necessary.

Disaster Response Disaster Assessment

MRCS Executive Committee members and staff, together with delegates from IFRC, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), French Red Cross (FRC) and Danish Red Cross (DRC), started planning from Day 1 of the cyclone (3rd May 2008) to send assessment teams to the affected areas as soon as possible. Five teams were formed with Red Cross (RC) staff and volunteers (RCV), those being trained as Regional Disaster Response Team (RDRT) leading them. They were sent out on 4th May morning – two teams to Ayeyarwady Division, one team to Yangon Division, one team to Bago Division, and, one team to Kayin and Mon States.

The teams met with township local authorities, RC supervisory committee members and community members collecting data relating to number of buildings damaged; number of families/people injured, missing and deaths; status of existing health infrastructure; etc., according to Disaster Assessment and Needs Assessment (DANA) format. They also visited some villages for assessment. The reports were phoned in daily and also in person and were completed by 7th May 2008.

Disaster Monitoring

A monitoring room was set up at the MRCS HQ with the FRC delegate, who have had experi-

ence in disaster management, leading the activities. The team compiled the reports from the field and fed the data to the Operations Management Team (OMT) day to day.

Operations Management

The operation was managed by the MRCS fulltime EC member in charge of Disaster Management (DM) together with the counterpart from IFRC. The OMT initially made plans to assist 30,000 families in the disaster affected area on 6 May 2008. This was revised to 100,000 families on 16 May 2008 after reviewing the assessment reports from the MRCS assessment teams. The operations planned to provide assistance in three phases:

Phase 1 – Short term phase, 0 to 6 months. This phase is concerned with rescue, relief and early recovery activities in the later months for the affected people. The focus will be on meeting survival needs of the affected people, on preventing and controlling outbreaks of communicable diseases and on scaling up to meet the needs of large target population while laying ground for early recovery.

Phase 2 – Medium term phase, 6 to 12 months. This phase will put emphasis upon providing recovery support to strengthen the resilience of the most vulnerable people in the cyclone affected areas while enhancing the operational efficiency and effectiveness of MRCS public services, volunteer base and branch structures.

Phase 3 – Long term phase, 12 to 36 months. There will be inputs to strengthen rehabilitation and Disaster Risk Reduction through the development and expansion of community-based programmes and activities while conducting ongoing assessment to identify and support households not achieving recovery.

The operation is being carried out by 258 MRCS staff together with 21 – 30 expatriate delegates from IFRC, DRC, FRC, Malaysian Red Cross, Singapore Red Cross, Indonesian Red Cross, American Red Cross, British Red Cross, German Red Cross, Austrian Red Cross, Australian Red Cross, Korean Red Cross,

Japanese Red Cross, among others. They are helped in the

field by over 2000 Red Cross Volunteers (RCV), including volunteers from Kachin, Mon, Mandalay, Magway, Shan (South) branches and also from non-affected townships in Ayeyarwady Division.

Rescue & Relief work

Rescue work started from the very first day of the cyclone with the RCVs out on the streets of Yangon in the rain and winds helping the victims. The RCVs were removing fallen trees blocking the roads, helped disaster affected people to find appropriate shelters, helped injured persons, giving first aid and referring them to hospitals or nearest health centres. They were not only recruiting blood donors but also donating blood as the need arises.

The RCVs were also instrumental in providing relief supplies to all of the affected areas. These volunteers have tried to reach the most remote villages, sometimes at their own peril and had to be told not to take risks. Up to middle of September 2008, 56 relief items, including tarpaulins, shelter tool kits, kitchen sets, hygiene kits, etc., were distributed to 236,100 families or over 1 million vulnerable people in the affected areas.

A total of 8 water purification equipment, producing 5000 - 20000 litres per hour, were established in Bogale, Labutta, Mawlamyinggyun and Dedaye townships. Two 1000 litre water tanks were also set up in Kyauiklat township, while a total of 8 ponds were cleaned of salt water in Kyauiklat and Dedaye townships. These units were donated by German, Australian, Austrian, French and British Red Cross Societies together with technicians and experts who set up these machines and help train MRCS staff and RCVs.

In the later part of the relief phase, Psycho-social Support Programmes (PSP) and Restoring Family Link (RFL) activities were included in the work of RCV teams. The activities are now planned and implemented by MRCS staff stationed at 9 “Hubs” or MRCS Nargis Rehabilitation Offices set up in the most affected townships assisted by local RCVs. These “Hubs” are required to

collaborate and coordinate their activities with the local authorities, other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), International NGO and United Nations agencies working in the areas.

Challenges met by the MRCS

1. Difficulty in reaching villages especially in remote areas (boats required to gain access to many villages).

2. Difficulty in communicating, sending/ sharing information between townships and HQ.

3. Need for more water purification (WATSAN) facilities especially in village tracts and villages.

4. Developing human resources for disaster risk reduction, especially among local RCVs and retaining them.

5. Meeting needs for livelihood and emergency financial needs of affected people.

Future Plans of MRCS for Cyclone Nargis Recovery and Rehabilitation phases

MRCS have identified 13 priority townships from the affected townships in the Ayeyarwady and Yangon Divisions based upon criteria specified for worst hit areas. MRCS is now in the process of assessing and selecting approximately 150 most vulnerable village tracts out of 1912 village tracts in the affected areas. Each village tract, on the average, consists of 5 – 15 villages bringing the total to approximately 1000 villages. The following Recovery and Rehabilitation work will be carried out in all villages of the selected village tracts.

Activities to be carried out for the selected villages/households after needs assessment will include:

1. Distribution of relief items will continue for families not receiving any items as yet or to those families which have not achieved satisfactory recovery.

2. Setting up communication facilities like early warning system together with other telecommunication facilities.

3. Capacities building of local RCVs in towns and villages for disaster risk reduction have been carried out with the aim of these RCVs helping local population acquire knowledge and skills in disaster risk reduction activities.

4. Continue providing

WATSAN facilities up to village tract levels.

5. Provide or help in primary health care services, especially those fitting the capacity of RCVs.

6. Continue and expand PSP and RFL activities with Partner National Societies (PNS) and, or, international and local organizations.

7. Provide support for food security and livelihoods of the identified affected families which may include supply of livestock, grains, seeds, fertilizers, fishing boats, nets, basic equipment for cottage industries and household jobs like tailoring, hair dressing, etc.

8. Consideration for small financial loans if possible.

9. Renovate or build and equip some Rural Health Centres, the numbers to be based upon available resources.

10. Strengthen some existing buildings which can be used as ‘safe havens’ in time of disasters or build RC training centres cum disaster shelter, based upon available resources.

Conclusion

MRCS has responded to its fullest capacity during the relief phase of the operation with help from many PNS, IFRC, and ICRC, the three components of the Red Cross Movement, together with the participation and involvement of the local Red Cross Volunteers (RCVs). MRCS will also carry out the recovery and rehabilitation activities together with these partners. All of the activities would not be possible without the RCVs who really are the “Heroes” of MRCS response. These RCVs are the sons and daughters of people in the communities and they should take pride in producing such humanitarian workers. The author would like to pay tribute to them through this article.

Thank you RCVs for all of your selfless humanitarian work in responding to the cyclone.

MY WISH II

If can foster the Volunteering Spirit in a person And show the merits he/she can gain If I can prevent that Spirit from fading I would not have been a Red Cross President in vain

ThaHlaShwe President Myanmar Red Cross Society 2014 September. ■

Water Shortages: Losing Battle in Every Summer?

By San Shwe Aung

Everybody in Myanmar forgets once the rain comes in late May or June every year about severe water shortages suffered in many parts of Myanmar just one or two months ago. We are good at short term solutions. Never think of sustainability let alone long term actions. We hardly want to know and practice about maintenance of anything. Those are some of our attitude towards everything. I vividly remember attending, 7 years ago during the beginning of dry season, a water thematic group meeting in Yangon.

The meeting was attended by representatives of UN, INGO and national NGOs and water experts working in Myanmar. Those organizations have been implementing many humanitarian as well as development projects in many parts of the country for years. One of the popular projects is water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) activity.

The chair of the meeting, a very well-known personality, warned the group to sue and hold responsible if anyone dies in any part of the country, due to shortage of drinking water in summer, by banging the table with his fist! He was not a government official though. All participants solemnly understood about his frustration for lack of any sustainable policy, programmes, implementation and actions to solve persistent summer water shortages in many parts of the country, particularly in dry zone rural areas. Yet another year comes, now, 2018 summer. The severe water shortages is knocking at our doors. We will see short term measures, such as trucking water to the affected villages and towns by many donors, well-wishers, international and national NGOs, local government bodies, religious organizations and individuals.

Very good commendable deeds. But these are short term immediate relief measures. We need to ask ourselves that annual summer water shortages around the country is a regular disaster? Perhaps some will agree and some will say “No”. If it is an annual predictable disaster, it is about time to take the issue to the highest decision making body of the country “Pyithu Hluttaw” and work out the most feasible actions.

We all are aware of global climate change processes which have created bizarre climate and weather patterns such as cyclones, floods, droughts, depletion of water sources, dried up rivers in many parts of the world. Several experts are warning already that there could be “water wars” between countries out of argument in sharing water sources in not so distant future. Perhaps in next century, our children and grandchildren could experience water conflicts & wars between nations. It is our responsibility to give the most sustainable solutions for adequate, safe and fresh water for all current and future generations in the country and beyond. ■





Union Minister Dr Pe Myint visits book stalls where the festival to be held. PHOTO: MNA

Information Ministry to hold ethnic literature and cultural festival

The Ministry of Information has speeded up efforts for holding a festival of literature and culture of ethnic people in the country from the 21st to the 25th of March.

Union Minister for Information Dr. Pe Myint held a meeting with relevant at the Shan State Information and Public Relations Department in Taunggyi yesterday over preparations for holding the festival.

Dr. Pe Myint expressed his hope that members of the country's ethnic groups would have opportunities to exchange literature and culture through

the festival, and that the unity of the indigenous peoples would be strengthened.

The festival is aimed at playing a part in making the peace process a success, and for emergence of a democratic federal republic, said the Union Minister.

At the meeting, Shan State Minister for Bamar Ethnic Affairs Dr. Aung Than Maung, in his capacity as chairman of the committee for holding a festival of literature and culture of ethnic peoples, reported to the Union Minister on arrange-

ments for holding the festival, as did secretaries of the work committees on preparations for the festival.

Also present at the meeting were Director-General of the Information and Public Relations Department U Ye Naing, Managing-Director of the News and Periodicals Enterprise U Kyaw Soe and other officials.

Following the meeting, Union Minister Dr. Pe Myint and his entourage visited the Awaityar Konmyinthath grounds where the festival will be held.—Shan State IPRD ■

Independent media tour Maungtaw for 15th time



Independent journalists take photos in Maungtaw, Rakhine State. PHOTO: MNA

THE Union Government arranged media trips to Maungtaw, Rakhine State for local and foreign independent media to cover

the peace and development in Maungtaw following the armed attacks on 9th October 2016.

Members of the independ-

ent media visited Maungtaw once in 2016, eight times in 2017 and six times in 2018.—Myanmar News Agency ■

Netherlands experts to train SME entrepreneurs

HANMSAHUB Company has invited experts from the Netherlands to conduct a training course for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), in cooperation with the Ministry of Industry, according to a report in the Myawady Daily yesterday.

“We are planning to provide the training course for the development of small- and medium-sized enterprises. We have already invited experts from the Netherlands Pun group to lead the training,” said U Thuta Aung, CEO of Hanmsahub Company.

The course syllabus will include the value of business and future business plans. Moreover, the company is planning to provide the training course to women entrepreneurs. Also, arrangements will be made for foreign investors to meet My-

anmar entrepreneurs.

Some 62,000 SMEs have registered for SME member cards with the Directorate of Industrial Supervision and Inspection. Recently, the Yangon region government issued smart cards to the SMEs.

“By registering for an SME member card, they can access technology, awareness programmes and training from us. In our country, most of the SMEs are not registered. Some do not get loans, as they do not have government recognition,” said Daw Aye Aye Win, Director General of the Directorate of Industrial Supervision and Inspection.

The registration fee for small enterprises is Ks5,000 and Ks10,000 for medium enterprises. SMEs need to renew their member cards every two years.—GNLM ■

Onion prices drop due to bulk supply

Onion prices have plunged in the market following a glut in supplies.

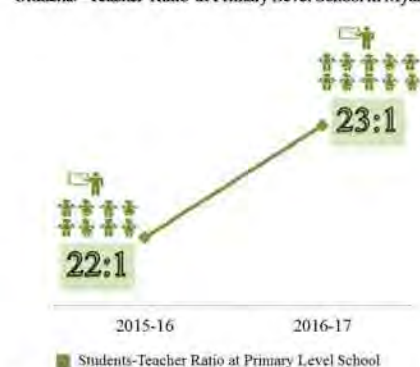
The prevailing prices of onions range from Ks550 to Ks1,350 per viss (1.6 kg), according to Bayintnaung market. Onion prices started soaring in July 2017. The prices, however, declined slightly in February this year. But with

the fresh supply of summer onions, prices dropped by half.

Onion prices hit a nine-month low of some Ks550 per viss this month. Earlier, the lowest registered price was Ks650 in July last year.

Onions are primarily cultivated in Pakokku, Myittha, Myingyan and Taungdwingyi townships.—Ko Khant ■

Students-Teacher Ratio at Primary Level School in Myanmar



Source: Ministry of Education
Information Unit: Central Statistical Organization

Correction

An article on Page 3 in the 19 March edition of The Global New Light of Myanmar contained some errors. In the story headlined “Dr Shwe Hlwan attends Myanmar-Japan scouts fund raising bazaar”, the headline should read, “Dr Shwe Hlwan attends Osaka scout and Myanmar Girl Guides fund raising bazaar.” Also in the article please read “Myanmar Scouts” as “Myanmar Girl Guides,” and Dr. Tin Hla Kyi’s title should be “Chief Commissioner of Myanmar Girl Guide Association.”—Ed

Syria forces battle to secure Damascus

DAMASCUS — Syrian regime and allied forces battled to suppress the last pockets of resistance in and around Damascus on Tuesday while the beleaguered Kurds in the north braced for further Turkish advances.

The simultaneous assaults have sparked one of the worst humanitarian emergencies since the start of the Syrian conflict seven years ago, with aid groups struggling to gain access to the masses of displaced civilians.

Washington has voiced concern that the chaos in Syria could allow a revival of the Islamic State group, whose “caliphate” collapsed late last year after three years of international military operations.

The jihadists launched a surprise nighttime attack in a southern neighbourhood of Damascus, moving into the vacuum left by a deal that saw another armed group pull out exactly a week ago.

“IS took full control of Qadam, and 36 government troops and loyalist fighters have been killed,” the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported.

There was no immediate comment from the regime, nor could the Britain-based monitoring group provide casualty figures for the jihadists.

Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said the regime was sending reinforcements to retake

Qadam, which was attacked from the adjacent IS-controlled neighbourhood of Hajar al-Aswad.

The jihadists also have a presence in the nearby Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmuk.

Douma under attack

Assad has in recent months brought swathes of territory back under his control thanks to heavy Russian involvement, as well as support from other forces such as the Iran-backed Lebanese Hezbollah militia.

He has recently focused his efforts on flushing out the last pockets that escape government control in and around the capital, the largest of them being Eastern Ghouta.

A month-long air and ground assault on the area, which was home to around 400,000 residents, has left more than 1,400 dead.

Regime and allied forces have retaken more 80 percent of the enclave and splintered its rump into three pockets, each controlled by a different armed group.

Tens of thousands of civilians have fled both the intense bombardment and the deprivations of a siege that lasted five years.

Eastern Ghouta’s main town of Douma remains under rebel control but even as a trickle of emergency medical evacuations was scheduled to continue



Civilians walk past Syrian army tanks on the main square of the Eastern Ghouta town of Kfar Batna on 19 March, 2018 following its recapture from rebel fighters. **PHOTO: AFP**

Tuesday, the regime continued to pound the enclave.

An AFP correspondent reported heavy bombardment through the night, adding that ambulances were struggling to reach the wounded so intense was the shelling.

At the town’s main hospital, exhausted staff worked on extracting a palm-sized shard of wood from the head of a 10-year-old girl.

The local civil defence group known as the “White Helmets” said they were able to retrieve only two bodies and that several others remained trapped under the rubble.

Clashes broke out between the Jaish al-Islam rebel group and the regime on the outskirts of Douma, the correspondent said.

The Observatory said 16 children were among 20 civilians killed overnight when an air strike on the town of Arbin levelled the school above the basement they

were sheltering in.

Another humanitarian catastrophe was unfolding hundreds of kilometres (miles) to the north near Syria’s border with Turkey, whose forces have pressed a devastating offensive.

IS ‘reconstituting’

The United Nations said close to 100,000 people have been displaced by fighting in Afrin district, a Kurdish-majority enclave against which Turkey launched an assault on 20 January.

The Turkish army and its Syrian proxies — a motley assortment of jihadists, former rebels and members of other armed groups — seized Afrin on Sunday.

On Tuesday, Turkish military police deployed across the city, as a small number of civilians tried to return to homes and shops that had been looted by Turkey’s Syrian proxies after their entry into the city, the Observatory said.

The capture of Afrin, one the

cantons in the self-proclaimed autonomous administration run by Syria’s Kurds, is a huge blow to the minority.

Resentment runs high among the Kurds over the lack of Western support for their fighters, who spearheaded the US-led coalition’s efforts against IS for more than three years. The People’s Protection Units (YPG) Kurdish militia redeployed some of its fighters from desert areas in the east where they had been battling remnant jihadists to join the defence of Afrin and the rest of their heartland. The US has voiced concern over the humanitarian consequences of the Afrin assault by its NATO ally Turkey.

US State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert warned Monday that it was also distracting from the fight against IS, which she said had begun “re-constituting in some areas.”

“This is a serious and growing concern,” she added.—AFP ■



39 Indians, abducted by ISIS in Iraq in 2015, were killed, Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said on Tuesday. **PHOTO: PTI**

Bodies of 39 Indians, abducted by ISIS in Iraq, found: Swaraj

NEW DELHI — All the 39 Indians, who were abducted by ISIS in Iraq nearly three years back, were killed and their bodies have been recovered, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said on Tuesday.

As many as 40 Indians were originally abducted by terrorist organization ISIS in June 2015 from Mosul in Iraq but one of them escaped by posing as a Muslim from Bangladesh, Swaraj said in a suo motu statement in Rajya Sabha.

The remaining 39 Indians were taken to Badoosh and killed.

Search operations led to a mound in Badoosh where locals said some bodies were buried by the ISIS. Deep penetration radars were used to establish that the mound indeed was a mass grave, she said, adding the Indian authorities requested their Iraqi counterpart to exhume the bodies.

Swaraj said the mass grave had exactly 39 bodies, with dis-

tinctive features like long hair, non-Iraqi shoes and IDs.

The bodies were then sent to Baghdad for DNA testing.

DNA testing by Martyrs Foundation has established identity of 38 Indians while there has been 70 per cent matching of the DNA for the 39th person, she said.

Minister of State for External Affairs V K Singh will be flying to Iraq to bring back the bodies on a special flight.—PTI ■

French ex-president Sarkozy held in Libya financing probe

PARIS — French ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy was taken into police custody on Tuesday and questioned over allegations that late Libyan dictator Moamer Kadhafi financed his 2007 election campaign via suitcases stuffed with cash, a source close to the inquiry told AFP.

Sarkozy was detained early on Tuesday morning and was being questioned by prosecutors specialising in corruption, money laundering and tax evasion at their office in the Parisian suburb of Nanterre.

The 63-year-old had until now refused to respond to a summons for questioning in the case, one of several legal probes that have dogged the right-winger since he left office after one term in 2012.

Sarkozy's detention was first reported by the Mediapart investigative news site and French daily Le Monde.

AFP's source said that Brice Hortefeux, a top government minister during Sarkozy's presidency, was also questioned on Tuesday as part of the inquiry.

Sarkozy has been a focus of the inquiry opened in 2013 by magistrates investigating earlier claims by late Libyan ruler Moamer Kadhafi and his son Seif al-Islam that they provided funds for Sarkozy's election effort.



Prosecutors are probing claims that Moamer Khadafi financed the presidential election campaign of Nicolas Sarkozy, pictured here, right, with the late Libya leader in July 2007. **PHOTO: AFP**

Sarkozy has dismissed the allegations as the claims of vindictive Libyan regime members furious over his participation in the US-led military intervention that ended Kadhafi's 41-year rule and led to his death.

But the case drew heightened scrutiny in November 2016 when a Franco-Lebanese businessman admitted delivering three cash-stuffed suitcases from the Libyan leader as contributions towards Sarkozy's first presidential run.

In an interview with the investigative website

Mediapart, Ziad Takieddine said he had made three trips from Tripoli to Paris in late 2006 and early 2007 with cash for Sarkozy's campaign.

Each time he carried a suitcase containing 1.5-2 million euros (1.8-2.5 million dollars) in 200-euro and 500-euro notes, Takieddine claimed, saying he was given the money by Kadhafi's military intelligence chief Abdallah Senussi.

Legal woes

Sarkozy, the son of a Hungarian immigrant father who takes a hard line

on Islam and French identity, was nicknamed the "bling-bling" president during his time in office for his flashy displays of wealth.

He was taken into custody after a former associate, Alexandre Djouhri, was arrested in London in January.

Djouhri was released temporarily on bail but returned to pre-trial detention in February after France issued a second warrant for his arrest, ahead of a hearing scheduled for 28 March.

Djouhri, a 59-year-old Swiss businessman,

was well known among France's rightwing political establishment, and had also refused to respond to a summons for questioning in Paris.

Sarkozy failed with a bid to run again for president in November 2016 and has stepped back from frontline politics, although he remains a powerful figure behind the scenes at the right-wing Republicans party.

His failed attempt to clinch the presidential nomination for the Republicans in 2016 was partly down to the several legal cases against him.

When asked about the allegations by Takieddine during a televised debate, Sarkozy called the question "disgraceful" and said the businessman was a "liar" who had been convicted "countless times for defamation".

Investigating magistrates have recommended Sarkozy face trial on separate charges of illegal campaign financing over his failed 2012 re-election bid.

The prosecution claims Sarkozy spent nearly double the legal limit of 22.5 million euros (\$24 million) on his lavish campaign, using false billing from a public relations firm called Bygmalion.

He faces up to a year in prison and a fine of 3,750 euros if convicted, but he is appealing the decision to send him to trial, claiming he knew nothing about the fraudulent practices that Bygmalion executives have admitted.

After a long investigation, Sarkozy was cleared in October 2013 of accepting campaign donations in 2007 from France's richest woman, L'Oreal heiress Liliane Bettencourt, when she was too frail to know what she was doing.

Only one other French president — Jacques Chirac — has been tried in France's Fifth Republic, which was founded in 1958. He was given a two-year suspended jail term in 2011 over a fake jobs scandal.—AFP ■

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China's national legislature concludes annual session

BELJING — The first session of the 13th National People's Congress (NPC) concluded on Tuesday morning.

President Xi Jinping and NPC Standing Committee Chairman Li Zhanshu addressed the closing meeting. Other Chinese leaders including Li Keqiang, Wang Yang, Wang Huning, Zhao Leji, Han Zheng and Wang Qishan attended the meeting. Zhang Dejiang, Yu Zhengsheng and Zhang Gaoli were also present.

Lawmakers adopted the supervision law and resolutions on the government work report, and the work reports of the 12th NPC Standing Committee, the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate.

They also passed resolutions on the reports of the national economic and social development plan as well as the central and local budgets.

President Xi signed a presidential decree to promulgate the supervision law.



Deputies to the 13th National People's Congress (NPC) sing the national anthem at the closing meeting of the first session of the 13th NPC at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, capital of China on 20 March, 2018. **PHOTO: XINHUA**

China's development poses no threat to others

Chinese President Xi Jinping said China's development does not pose a threat to any other country.

"China will never seek hegemony or engage in expansion," he said at the closing meeting of the first session of the 13th National People's Congress. "Only those who are accustomed to threatening others see everyone as a threat."

"The Chinese people's sincere wish and practical action to contribute to the peace and development of humanity should not be misinterpreted, nor should they be distorted," Xi said. "Justice will prevail!" Xi said China will stay on the path of peaceful development, and continue to pursue a mutually beneficial strategy of opening up.

Xi said China endeavors to uphold international fairness and justice. China advocates that all issues in the world should be settled through consultations with people around the world. China will not impose its will on others, Xi added.

He said China will contribute more Chinese wisdom, Chinese solutions and Chinese strength to the world, to push for building an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity.

"Let the sunshine of a community with a shared future for humanity illuminate the world!" Xi said. — Xinhua ■

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"Let the sunshine of a community with a shared future for humanity illuminate the world!" Xi said. — Xinhua ■

Last male northern white rhino dies in Kenya: keepers

NAIROBI — The last male northern white rhino has died in Kenya at the age of 45, his keepers announced on Tuesday, leaving only two females of his subspecies alive.

The rhino, named Sudan, "was being treated for age-related complications that led to degenerative changes in muscles and bones combined with extensive skin wounds," according to a statement from the Ol Pejeta Conservancy where he lived under armed guard to prevent poaching.

"His condition worsened significantly in the last 24 hours; he was unable to stand up and was suffering a great deal. The veterinary team... made the decision to eu-



scientists have gathered his genetic material and are working on developing in-vitro fertilisation techniques to preserve the subspecies. **PHOTO: AFP**

thanize him."

Theoretically, the death of Sudan assures the extinction of this subspecies of rhino.

However scientists have gathered his genetic material and are working on developing in-vitro fertilization (IVF) techniques to preserve the

subspecies.

The northern white rhino population in Uganda, Central African Republic, Sudan and Chad was largely wiped out during the poaching crisis of the 1970s and 80s, fueled by demand for rhino horn in traditional Chinese medicine in Asia and

dagger handles in Yemen.

A final remaining wild population of about 20-30 rhinos in the Democratic Republic of Congo was killed in fighting in the late nineties and early 2000s, and by 2008 the northern white rhino was considered extinct in the wild.

Four fertile rhinos, two males and females, were moved from the Dvur Kralove Zoo in the Czech Republic to Ol Pejeta in Kenya, with high hopes that conditions similar to their native habitat would encourage breeding.

However, despite the fact that they were seen mating, there were no successful pregnancies. — AFP ■

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British designer Kim Jones takes over at Dior Homme

LONDON — British designer Kim Jones said on Monday that he was taking the reins at Dior Homme two months after quitting Louis Vuitton.

The 38-year-old wunderkind — who insists that he wants to retire by the time he is 45 — brought a buzz and a galaxy of star fans to the Vuitton catwalk in his seven years at the label.

“I am deeply honoured to join the house of Dior, a symbol of the ultimate elegance,” he said in a statement.

“I am committed to create a modern and innovative male silhouette built upon the unique legacy of the house.”

He will replace Kris Van Assche, who said he was leaving Dior Homme after 11 years at the head of the French menswear label.

Jones made headlines with a series of eye-catching hook-ups

with hip New York streetwear brand Supreme and the iconoclastic British artists Jake and Dinos Chapman during his time at Vuitton.

The fashion label had poached him from British heritage house Dunhill in 2011, which he had dusted down and given a new lease of life.

At Vuitton he brought his passion for wildlife and for exotic travel to his ultra luxurious collections, mixing a lingering nostalgia for British colonial chic with a streetwise edge.

The creator, who had a globetrotting childhood that took in Africa and the Amazon, said in November that he planned to retire in five years, or at least by the time he was 45.

Van Assche’s departure comes only weeks after the arrival of new Christian Dior Couture chairman Pietro Beccari,



Kris Van Assche brought a punkish street style influence to Dior’s fine tailoring. **PHOTO: AFP**

who had worked with Jones at Louis Vuitton. Dior said in a statement that the 41-year-old Belgian, who added a punkish street style influence to Dior’s fine tailoring, would be staying

on with the luxury giant LVMH, which owns the label.

Women’s Wear Daily, the fashion industry bible, had reported that Jones was in talks with Versace in September.

It said the Briton was one of the “small clutch of marquee designers who can straddle the luxury and streetwear worlds, which is why Versace might have come knocking”.—AFP ■

Steven Spielberg to start filming ‘Indiana Jones 5’ next year

LOS ANGELES — Veteran filmmaker Steven Spielberg is planning to start shooting the untitled fifth “Indiana Jones” movie some time around next year.

He made the revelation at the Rakuten TV Empire Awards, where he was on stage to receive a Legend of Our Lifetime award and spoke about his collaborators from the British film industry. The event was held at the Roundhouse in London, reported Variety.

“It’s always worth the trip when I get to work with this deep bench of talent coming out of the UK. The actors, and the crew, the chippies, the sparks, the drivers everybody who has helped me make my movies here, and will continue helping me make my movies here when I come back in April 2019 to make the fifth Indiana Jones movie right here,” Spielberg said.

During his speech, Spielberg also praised the Time’s Up initiative.

“Thank you Time’s Up.

We were very much on board from the very beginning, my wife Kate and I. This is more important than any of us can ever really realise. I think in 10 years we’ll look back and realise what a watershed moment we are all experiencing together, 2017 to 2018.

“It’s extraordinary what’s happening right now. The fact that women who have had no representation and have not been able to find the support or the courage to step forward, now they will have representation and they will have the support. Time’s Up means it’s time up. This is it. This is the end of the way things were, it will never be that way again hopefully,” he said.

Disney announced in 2016 that Spielberg would be returning to direct the next installment with Harrison Ford on board to reprise his role of the adventure-seeking archaeologist.

The film has been scheduled to release on 10 July, 2020.—PTI ■

‘Sex and the City’ star joins New York governor race

NEW YORK — Cynthia Nixon, the US actress who shot to fame as workaholic lawyer Miranda on “Sex and the City,” jumped into the race for New York governor on Monday, unveiling a progressive platform championing economic equality and eschewing big business.

The 51-year-old declared her candidacy with a two-minute campaign video posted on Twitter that showed her at home with her wife and children, riding the subway, taking one of her children to school and speaking at liberal political causes.

The move confirmed speculation that Nixon would challenge incumbent Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo. If elected, Nixon — who is a vocal opponent of President Donald Trump — would be New York state’s first woman and first openly gay governor.

The actress and liberal activist, who has campaigned for gay marriage, public schools and access to women’s health care, announced that she was “sick of politicians who care more about headlines and power than they do about us.”



Actress Cynthia Nixon — shown here at rally outside Trump Tower in 2017 — is running for the New York governorship. **PHOTO: AFP**

“Our leaders are letting us down. We are now the most unequal state in the entire country with both incredible wealth and extreme poverty. Half the kids in our upstate cities live below the poverty line. How did we let this happen?” she said in the video.

“Something has to change. We want our government to work again — on health care, ending mass incarceration, fixing our broken subway.

“Together we can win this fight,” finished the New York-born and raised Nixon, who said

she grew up with her mother in what she called “a one-bedroom, fifth-floor walkup.”

The Trump presidency has seen a surge in women — particularly Democratic women — running for office. Only eight of the current 50 US state governors are women. In 2004, Nixon accepted an Emmy award — the highest accolade in US television — for her role as Miranda Hobbes from Trump, the fellow celebrity-turned-politician whose current presidency she publicly opposes.—AFP ■

Tokyo hotel teams up with Airbnb-style private lodging operator

TOKYO — If you can't beat them, join them.

That is exactly what a Tokyo hotel has decided to do by agreeing to work with the operators of budding Airbnb-styled Japanese home-share accommodation called "minpaku."

In the partnership, Hotel Suehiro in Tokyo's Ota Ward has started performing check-in, check-out and front desk services for guests of minpaku, which are currently permitted in limited areas across Japan but will become more widespread in June when a new law comes into force.

So, despite helping a local rival's business, Hotel Suehiro is reaping manifold benefits, such as getting more customers to use the hotel's spa.

"There are many foreign travelers who wish to share a single room as part of a large group," said a representative of minpaku operator Hyakusenrenma Inc., which provides about 20 private rooms in the area around Hotel Suehiro.

"One option to meet the demand is that hotels operate minpaku businesses in their neighborhood and let large groups stay in rooms provided," the official said.

Ota Ward is one of a number of special government-designated areas where, since January 2016, property owners have been

permitted to offer accommodation to tourists for profit.

The enforcement of the new law in June will allow property owners in Japan to rent out vacant homes or rooms to tourists for up to 180 days per year after registering with their local municipality.

With Japan's current tourism boom bringing a record number of foreign visitors, hotels in large cities like Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka have seen accommodation shortages, contributing to a spike in businesses offering private lodging.

The identity of guests must be confirmed in person, according to guidelines for the specially designated minpaku areas.

Front desk clerks at Hotel Suehiro check passports and provide room keys to minpaku guests staying nearby. Customers checking in or out will often pay for services offered by the hotel as well, making it a mutually-beneficial arrangement.

Hotel Suehiro President Mitsuharu Nishizawa, 48, was initially an opponent of minpaku, due partly to safety concerns as some unscrupulous operators failed to obtain approval from municipal authorities.

In such cases, customers may be unaware about who is running the minpaku and whether rooms are adequate-



Photo taken in Tokyo in February 2018 shows Hotel Suehiro President Mitsuharu Nishizawa (L). The hotel has agreed to work with the operators of budding Airbnb-style Japanese home-share accommodation called "minpaku." **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

ly equipped to protect against hazards such as fires. "It's dangerous when you don't know the actual state of things," said Nishizawa.

At the same time, he acknowledged that people are becoming more accepting of a wider range of accommodation types. Women, for example, are increasingly using Japan's unique one-person capsule rooms, with some providing female-focused services. More people are also

staying overnight at internet cafes which provide showers.

Nishizawa said that he came to understand that meeting the increased tourist demand by running minpaku out of Japan's growing number of vacant homes is a change that suits the times. Not only that, but hotels and Japanese inns can take advantage of a new business opportunity, he said.

He believes having local hotels confirm the identities of min-

paku guests also contributes to improved safety for residents of the surrounding neighborhoods, and for building owners.

Minpaku operator Hyakusenrenma, based in Sendai in northeastern Japan, is encouraged. The company is looking to expand similar arrangements in which hotels and Japanese inns near its properties provide services such as room key management and cleaning work. —Kyodo News ■

Au revoir, baguette! France goes burger-mad

PARIS — Baguette lovers may be horrified to learn that in 2017, for the first time ever, hamburger sales were higher in France than the classic jambon-beurre sandwich.

American-style burgers were on the menu at 85 per cent of restaurants in France last year, with a whopping 1.5 billion units sold, according to Paris-based restaurant consult-

ants Gira Conseil.

The silver lining for foodies was the gradual demise of junk food, with good-quality, fresh alternatives on the rise.

Interestingly, fast food joints sold just 30 per cent of burgers in France, with the majority sold at restaurants with full table service. This is all big news for a country that takes great pride in its national culinary culture,

and which for years resisted the global burger onslaught.

"We've been talking about a burger frenzy for three years. This year, we don't know how to describe the phenomenon. It's just crazy," Gira Conseil director Bernard Boutboul told AFP.

There was a nine percent jump in burger sales last year. "That's phenomenal growth," Boutboul said.

In 2016, hamburger sales were on a par with the jambon-beurre, or ham-and-butter baguette — which is still the most popular sandwich in France.

"But in 2017, for the first time, (burgers) overtook (the French classic) by a long way," Boutboul said, with jambon-beurre sales at 1.2 billion units.

"One wonders whether the burger might even overtake our famous steak frites in France," he said.—AFP ■



Is this the beginning of the end for the jambon-beurre? **PHOTO: AFP**

Missing giant yellow duck found in Australia

PERTH — A giant yellow inflatable duck named Daphne that made a break from its moorings in Australia has been located after a week on the lam, its swimming club owners said Monday.

Daphne — the oversized mascot of the Cockburn Masters Swimming Club in Perth — made a bid for freedom on 11 March, drifting out into the Indian Ocean and sparking an appeal for help along Australia's west coast.

Reports of sightings flooded in, including one from 440 kilometres (270 miles) away.

But on Monday a local fisherman revealed that he had spotted the escaping bath toy on the day of its disappearance — just 30 kilometres off shore.

"No-one knew about a missing duck at that point, we didn't know where did it come from," Tony Gibb told the Australian

Broadcasting Corporation.

"It looked perfect. It was fully inflated, there was no damage to (it) whatsoever."

The fisherman towed Daphne back to shore, and said he would return the inflatable soon.

Swimming club president Peter Marr, who made a daring — but ultimately fruitless — dash to catch the duck after it blew away, quipped that he was in "delicate negotiations, and we want Daphne back".

Giant inflatable rubber ducks drew international attention in 2007 when Dutchman Florentijn Hofman created one as an artwork.

Hofman's 18-metre-tall (59-feet) bath toy travelled to different cities around the world, ranging from Brazil to Australia, and spawned many replicas. —AFP ■



Ronald Koeman. PHOTO: AFP

Dutch great Koeman prepared for 'big and difficult' challenge

LONDON — Ronald Koeman says he is over the disappointment of being sacked by Everton and anticipating a "great game" against England on Friday in what will be his first match as Netherlands coach.

The 54-year-old European Cup and Euro 1988 winner — who lost his job in October after his £140 million (159 million euros, \$196 million) spending spree backfired spectacularly — accepts returning the Dutch to their status as one of world football's heavyweights is going to take time.

Koeman replaced the veteran Dick Advocaat, who had been one in a raft of unsuccessful appointments for the Oranje since Louis van Gaal stepped down after finishing third in the 2014 World Cup, in February.

The size of the task facing Koeman is a massive one as the Dutch — who were World Cup finalists in 2010 — have failed to reach either Euro 2016 or this year's World Cup.

"We are here," Koeman told the Daily Mail.

"It is a new challenge. It is one I couldn't say no to.

"It is an honour to be the Holland coach and I am looking forward with all I have to trying to get the country moving forward again.

"I want to take us to the next big tournament in 2020. That is the aim. "It is a big and difficult challenge. Everybody knows this. We have not qualified for the last two big tournaments and, OK, it is going to take time."

Koeman — who failed to persuade Bayern Munich striker Arjen Robben to revoke his decision to retire from international football — faces an England side that will be going to the World Cup.

The English are also a team Koeman will forever be associated with because of his professional foul on David Platt in the 1994 World Cup qualifier for which he escaped with just a booking.

He scored a few minutes later to rub salt into the wounds and the Dutch went on to win 2-0, which was to prove decisive in them going to the finals as group runners-up instead of the English.

"It is going to be a great game," said Koeman of Friday's friendly.

Koeman, who was capped 78 times between 1982-94, scoring 14 goals, said he had had enough time to rediscover his managerial vim since the shattering disappointment of losing the Everton job.

"After Everton, where everyone knew it was really difficult towards the end, I needed time to focus again," said Koeman.

"I needed to recover. I have had a good time to relax. I work because I want to work.

"Even after that decision (his sacking), I was still crazy about football. "I wanted to be involved as a coach, I wanted to be with the national team and this was the right time to try the challenge — for me and the national team."—AFP ■

Ronaldo seeks to avoid prison for tax fraud

MADRID — Real Madrid striker Cristiano Ronaldo is not willing to admit he has committed any criminal offense, but will pay the quantity of money the Spanish Treasury demands if the Treasury withdraws its request for him to be given a prison sentence for an alleged tax fraud of 14.7 million euros, according to reports in the Spanish media on Monday.

The same sources report the Treasury's petition last week for an eight year prison sentence for another former Real Madrid player, Xabi Alonso,

so, for three cases of alleged fraud, totaling eight million euros, provoked Ronaldo and his advisors to attempt to find a negotiated solution to the charges against him, rather than continuing to fight the case through the courts.

Until now Ronaldo, like Alonso, has strongly denied he committed fraud to avoid paying tax on earnings from image rights, but his idea now is to offer the Treasury a "blank cheque" to avoid a prison term.

Meanwhile he continues to insist that despite earnings

from image rights being paid to societies in various tax havens, such as the Virgin Islands, he never intended to avoid paying taxes in Spain and that he always gave orders to his advisors to pay what corresponded to him, for which reason he refuses to accept any criminal responsibility. The media informs that Ronaldo hopes the case can be resolved administratively, adding that after Madrid President, spoke in his defense on a public radio station, he is more confident this will be the case.—Xinhua ■

Things have to change if trophies are to come, says Benitez

LONDON — Rafael Benitez says things have to change at English giants Newcastle United if they are to reward their devoted fans with trophies after decades without silverware.

The 57-year-old Champions League-winning coach has stuck with the Magpies even though his demands for new blood has constantly been ignored by controversial owner Mike Ashley.

Newcastle's mid-table position is not as comfortable as it appears as they are only four points above the relegation zone with their next match a six-pointer against fellow strugglers Huddersfield on 31 March.

"We have to change things," Benitez told The Times in Alicante where his squad are on a training camp during the international break.

"I came here with the idea to compete and to create a strong team and a strong club, to compete every year.

"What we have to do if we stay up is improve.

"The way Newcastle were doing things before I arrived doesn't mean they were right, because they were going down.

"Now we have had the chance to go up we cannot make the same mistakes again."

Despite hovering near the relegation zone, Newcastle attract the seventh highest average crowd in the Premier League with attendances of over 51,000. Benitez, who has twice been named UEFA's coach of the year, said he had stayed in his post despite misgivings because of the club's enormous potential even if they have not

won a trophy since 1955.

"When I said I wanted to stay I could see the potential for this club to be in the top 10 or even higher, but it depends on consistency," said Benitez.

"You have to have a structure. Everybody has to be organised. "Can we win trophies? We would need time, but you never know in the cups.

"To compete and be capable of winning something, you need to have the plan and the process. Everything has to be... not settled down, that's not the right phrase, but more clear."

Benitez, who was bemused by the timing of an offer to extend his contract in January when he wanted Ashley to spend money on players instead, says this season has been a trial rather than a pleasure ride.

"Have I enjoyed being Newcastle manager? I enjoy it when we are winning," said Benitez, whose family have remained in Liverpool. "I like to do things well and when you see something is right, I'm really proud.

"But it's difficult to enjoy it when you are suffering all the time because you have to win and then you lose. "Have I enjoyed this season? No, but maybe the word 'enjoyment' is different in English. "I'm really pleased with my job. I like it. But enjoyment is when you score eight goals in the Champions League against Besiktas."—AFP ■



Rafa Benitez says Newcastle United's achievement fail to match the support of their loyal fans. PHOTO: AFP