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Saturday, 7 April 2018

Dinner to mark President U Win Myint's taking office held

THE dinner to mark President U Win Myint's taking office was held on the lawn at the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

President U Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho welcomed the invited guests, including State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Vice President U Myint Swe and wife Daw Khin Thet Htay, Vice President U Henry Van Thio and wife Dr. Shwe Hlwan, Speaker of Amyotha Hluttaw Mahn Win Khaing Than and wife Nan Kyin Kyi, Chief-Justice of the Union U Htun Htun Oo, Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and wife Daw Kyu Kyu Hla, Chairman of the Constitutional Tribunal of the Union U Myo Nyunt and wife Daw Htay Yi, Chairman of the Union Election Commission U Hla Thein and wife Daw Aye Thida, Deputy Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw U Tun Tun Hein and wife Dr. Sein Sein Thein, Deputy Speaker of Amyotha Hluttaw U Aye Tha Aung and wife Daw Thein Yin Chay, Chairman of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw's Legal Affairs and Special Cases Assessment Commission Thura U Shwe Mann and wife Daw Khin Lay Thet, Union ministers, Union Auditor-General, Chairman of the Union Civil Service Board, Chairman of the



President U Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho welcome State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as she arrives at the dinner to mark President U Win Myint's taking office. **PHOTO: MYANMAR NEWS AGENCY**

of the Peace Commission, Chairman of the Anti-Corruption Commission, Chairman of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission, chief ministers of regions and states, Governor of the Central Bank of Myanmar, Chief-of-Staff (Army, Navy and Air) General Mya Tun Oo, senior military officers from the Office of the Chief of Defence Services, Chairmen of the Hluttaw affairs committees, the Commander of the Nay Pyi Taw Command, deputy ministers and their wives, speakers of the region and state Hluttaws, officials of the Daw Khin Kyi Foundation, members of the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine State, CEC members of the National League for Democracy, permanent secretaries of the ministries, diplomats, representatives from the UN agencies and invited guests.

After the dinner, President U Win Myint, First Lady Daw Cho Cho and attendees enjoyed the performances of artistes from the Fine Arts Department of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, and a concert by musicians and vocalists.

After the performance, President U Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho and State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi greeted the artistes, vocalists, diplomats and guests.—MNA ■

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Foreign Heads of State send congratulatory messages to President U Win Myint

Foreign Heads of State sent congratulatory messages to President U Win Myint for his election as the President of Myanmar.

Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar, says in his message that

“On the occasion of your election as the new President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, I would like to extend to your Excellency, on behalf of the people of the State of Qatar and myself, our cordial greetings and congratulations, coupled with our best wishes for your continued good health and success and further development and progress of your

people, and more enhancement of the bilateral relations between our two countries in the years ahead.”

Sheikh Abdullah Bin Hamad Al-Thani, Deputy Amir of the State of Qatar, says in his message that

“On the occasion of your election to assume Myanmar’s presidency, I take this opportunity to extend to you my sincere greetings and congratulations, coupled with my best wishes of well-being and happiness to your Excellency and wishes of well-being and happiness to your Excellency and continued development and progress to the people of Myanmar,”

Mr. Abdullah Bin Nasser Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Interior of the State of Qatar, says in his message that “It pleases me, on the occasion of your victory in Myanmar’s presidential elections, to convey to you, on behalf of the government of the State of Qatar and my own behalf, our heartfelt greetings and congratulations, coupled with our best wishes of continued well-being and success to your Excellency and further development and progress to the people of Myanmar.”

Mr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, says in his message that

“Please accept my sincere congratulations and those of my fellow Germans on your election as the new President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.”

“The peaceful coexistence of the different groups in your country will require greater efforts and is a matter of special importance to me, too,” said Mr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

“I wish you every success for the tasks that lie ahead of you and can assure you that Germany will continue to stand by your side,” he added.

Mr. Michel Temer, President of the Federative Republic of Brazil, says in his message that “On behalf of

the Brazilian people, I have the honor to congratulate you on your election as President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. Your designation confirms the progress of the democratization process and the efforts to overcome challenges to achieve economic and social development.”

In his message, Mr. Michel Temer also conveyed his sincere wishes of happiness to President U Win Myint, reiterating that his willingness to continue working for the improvement of relations between Brazil and Myanmar, as well as for strengthening ties between my country and ASEAN. — Myanmar News Agency ■

VP U Henry Van Thio : More pragmatic, strategic decisions needed for land use



Vice President U Henry Van Thio addresses the meeting of National Land Use Council. PHOTO: MNA

THE first meeting of the National Land Use Council was held at the Ministry for Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

Speaking at the meeting, Chairman of the Council Vice President U Henry Van Thio said that the time is more important than ever to set down pragmatic and strategic decisions in administering land resources.

“The lack of statistics and accurate maps have led to dire consequences between administrators and local residents and also to the appearance of squatters,” said the Vice President.

He said multiple ministry departments and other organisa-

tions are administering land use in Myanmar and it is important their administration to be in line with existing laws.

He said the laws and administrative framework still being used have not been updated in at least a century and so are in urgent need of reviews and amendments. He also acknowledged the meeting as the first discussion meeting of the council since the National Land Use Policy was enacted on January 2016.

Vice President U Henry Van Thio stressed the need to effectively use the country’s resources to develop the socio-economic levels of society, saying that the broad task of administering the use of land affects all aspects

of the people’s daily lives from transportation and businesses to cultural and environmental conservation. When administering land resources it is important to maintain perspectives from an economic, political, legal, and social point of view, said the Vice President.

A capable system, effective policy, and a stable legal framework are also necessary. He said that for a long time Myanmar has lacked an effective land usage policy and has had weak administration for generations and as a result there have been some problems between the public, the government, and investors or businesses.

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State Counsellor sends condolences to family of fighter plane pilot

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi sent her condolences to Daw Myat Myat Thit, the wife of Maj. Arkar Win, an F-7 fighter jet pilot yesterday who died on Tuesday when his plane crashed in Toungoo.

The following is the full text of the condolence message.

**Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Office of the State Counsellor**

Date: 4 April, 2018

To

Daw Myat Myat Thit,
Wife of Major Arkar Win

Subject: Offering sincere condolences to your bereaved family

1. F-7 fighter pilot Major Arkar Win of the Toungoo Airbase sacrificed his life on Tuesday when his fighter plane crashed due to technical failure, though he controlled his fighter up to the last minute without consideration for his own safety on 3 April, 2018.

2. I extend my most sincere condolences to Daw Myat Myat Thit and her bereaved family for the loss.

*Aung San Suu Kyi
State Counsellor
(Unofficial Translation)*

NMSP to hold meetings at Nyisar Camp at Ye Chaungpyar, Mon State

The New Mon State Party will hold a mass meeting for three days before a race-oriented political dialogue.

The three-day gathering of the people and the party will be held in 9 April through 11 in Mon State’s Ye Chaungphya area, where the Mon National Education Central Committee based. — Ye Khaung Nyunt ■

“

We will abolish the red tape that burdens the people and eradicate corruption and bribery that plagues all levels of society as we work to strengthen the moral fiber of our people. We will draw out from our past experiences as a civilian government overcoming various obstacles and hardships, as we work to the best of our ability for the immediate present and head towards the future of a democratic nation that respects human rights and is free from all stains of corruption.

(Excerpt from the speech by President U Win Myint at the ceremony to take oath of office at Pyidaungsu Hluttaw on 30th March 2018)

“

Let us strive collectively for the emergence of a just and free nation—a nation which will guarantee equal rights and equality, a nation which practices a pure ideology.

(Excerpt from the speech by State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on the 2nd Anniversary of NLD Government on 1st April 2018)

VPs and dignitaries at President's dinner



President U Win Myint, First Lady Daw Cho Cho and honoured guests have their meals at the dinner table together on the lawn at the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw. **PHOTO: MNA**



President U Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho greet guests at the dinner event marking the President's taking of office at the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw. **PHOTO: MNA**



President U Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho greet Vice President U Myint Swe at the dinner event marking the President's taking of office held on the lawn at the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw. **PHOTO: MNA**



President U Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho greet Vice President U Henry Van Thio at the dinner event marking the President's taking of office held on the lawn at the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw. **PHOTO: MNA**



President U Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho greet Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and wife Daw Kyu Kyu Hla at the dinner event marking the President's taking of office held on the lawn at the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw. **PHOTO: MNA**

VP U Henry Van Thio : More pragmatic, ...

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Consequently there have also been some conflicts in the industrial, mining, tourism, agricultural, forestry, and urban sectors regarding use of land such

as environmental damage due to poorly planned development schemes, insufficient land for foreign investors, and unusually high land prices.

The National Land Use Council will draft short-term and

long-term strategies in collaboration with experts. He said this will allow authorities to quickly solve the problems surrounding land use in Myanmar and also strengthen land use administration as well.

The Vice President then urged everyone in attendance to speak out on problems and possible solutions to the various situations surrounding land use across the country.

Afterwards the Council's Vice Chairman, Union Minister of Natural Resources and Envi-

ronmental Conservation U Ohn Win, explained the Council's progress and accomplishments to the attendees. This was followed by the attendees taking turns to talk about and explain the situation in the different regions and states in Myanmar.—Myanmar News Agency ■

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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.

Chindwin River preservation group arrive at Khamti

THE Chindwin River preservation group arrived at Khamti town to investigate a water purification system and whether it should be used for drinking water or not.

"The preservation group will investigate a total of eight villages along the Chindwin River. Residents that live along the Chindwin River depend on the Chindwin River for drinking water.



Chindwin River Photo: MDN

First we will study the needs and careers of the residents and we will do research concerning the needs of people

in the local community" said Director of Chindwin River Preservation Group Daw Khin Ohmar Htwe.

The preservation group will study the biodiversity of the Chindwin River until 7 April.—MDN ■

Yangon Hospital to hire private cleaning companies

THE Yangon General Hospital will hire private cleaning companies to keep the hospital clean, according to a report in Myawady Daily yesterday.

On an average, the hospital usually caters to more than 1,600 patients daily, and the number reaches more than 4,000, including their families.

This is nearly 10-fold of the 460 cleaning staff avail-

able in the hospital.

"We find it difficult to keep the hospital clean because some patients and their family members lack discipline.

However, hospital staff members are trying their best to keep the hospital clean and tidy," said Dr. Khin Theingi Myint, Medical Superintendent of Yangon General Hospital.

"The staff is too small in

number, but the hospital has a large compound.

Therefore, we are coordinating with the Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC) to invite private cleaning companies approved by the Ministry of Health and Sports," she added.

The hospital has 27 departments with more than 1,800 staff, including doctors and nurses.—GNLM ■

Play to be broadcast in new President's honour

A play titled 'Collective Strength' performed in the garden of the Presidential Palace during a dinner event in honour of the new President assuming office will be broadcast today.

The play is a collaboration between the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture and the Movie, Thabin, Music Associations.

The play will be broadcast at 12:30pm and again at night after the 8pm news on 7 April. — Myanmar News Agency ■

80% of Construction of Maha Thingyan Pandal completed

WITH the sponsorship of Kachin State Government, the central pandal for Mahar Thingyan in Kachin State was constructed at Ayar Ward on the Sumprabum Road. The construction has been 80% complete according to an engineer from the City Development Committee.

The pandals for the State Ethnic Affairs Ministry and Construction Industry are being built now. This year 2018 Mahar Thingyan Festival will include a walking Thingyan. The Minyart Ward on the Zawgyun Road has been decorated with traditional Myanma Patheingyi umbrellas for the Walking Thingyan. Water pipes for participants to throw water around have been installed this morning.—Myanmar Digital News ■



The number of the construction of pandals have been 80% completed. PHOTO: MDN

Delivery vans need to pay tax as household car

By May Thet Hnin

THE Commerce Ministry released a directive today stating that delivery vans would not be allowed to carry passengers, said U Aung Than Win, chair of Myanmar Automobile Purchase and Sale Enterprise (Yangon).

Delivery vans are mostly designated to carry only goods, has a roof and usually no seat or windows at the sides.

However, some misuse delivery vans as passenger cars. As a result, the authorities had stopped giving permits for delivery vans in the last two months. Besides this, imported vans arriving at ports were also blocked from being claimed.

On 4 April, the suspension was lifted and the Commerce Ministry changed its rule on tax for household cars and allowed the use of vans as a household car.

Although the Commerce Ministry released a statement noting that delivery vans need to pay tax as a household car, the policy on action to be taken against vehicles imported earlier, as well the per cent of Cost, Insurance and Freight charges are yet to be clarified, said U Min Min Maung, MMM Car Sale Centre and chairman of Yangon Region Automobile Manufacturing and Distribution Entrepreneurs As-

sociation.

"I think the tax rate will be increased when the ministry changes its existing tax rule. However, we have suspended the sale of those vehicles, because we have yet to know the policy. Imported Hi-Jack will not face any problem, but imported Alphard will be a problem," he added.

"We are grateful to the officials for this permit. Those doing business on a manageable scale

mostly use delivery vans, and it will facilitate their business," said U Aung Than Win.

During the nearly two-month suspension, more than 2,000 vehicles were stranded at Myawady gate. Similarly, some 150 cars were banned from being claimed. The Myanmar Automobile Purchase and Sale Enterprise (Yangon) requested the officials concerned to revoke the ban. ■



A worker cleans car at a sales centre in Yangon. PHOTO AYE MIN SOE

Car trade on recovery path

By May Thet Hnin

With the tax policy remaining unchanged, car trade has picked up a bit in the last two weeks, according to the automobile market.

A few tax relief measures were incorporated in the draft of the 2018 Union Tax Law. Therefore, dealers were observing the automobile market in the first three months of the calendar year, thus cooling the market. However, no tax relief was announced in the union tax law, which has shaken up the market a bit.

"The automobile market was cool as people were waiting to see if the tax policy would be changed on 1 April. The market picks up a bit when the policy remains unchanged. However, there is no remarkable change in the market," said Dr Soe Tun,

managing director of Farmer Auto Car showroom and chair of Myanmar Automobile Manufacturers and Distributors Association.

During the Thingyan festival, cars such as the pick-up Hi-jet and those in the price range of Ks10 to Ks50million sell well, said car dealers.

"It is some 10 days since the market has recovered. Cars are highly in demand among buyers from outside Yangon. However, the market for the latest models is cool despite the occasional trading," said U Min Min Maung of MMM Car Sale Centre and chair of Yangon Region Automobile Manufacturers and Distributors Association.

The slip price (import permit) costs the buyer more than Ks11 million, along with the vehicle ownership, while it is worth some Ks10.5 million

without the owner status.

Car prices will not drop remarkably owing to the soaring tax rate for imported cars, said U Aung Than Win, chairman of Myanmar Automobile Purchase and Sale Enterprise (Yangon).

"We want the government to show greater tax transparency," he maintained.

Most of the buyers pay through an installment plan in the automobile market. Some choose new cars, while many still buy second-hand cars.

The Supervisory Committee for Motor Vehicle Import released an official announcement on 16 October that the year 2014 would be set as the limit for the oldest model imported in 2018. Only vehicles with left-hand drive are allowed to be imported under the new policy. The announcement hiked up the slip and car prices. ■

Rubber price, production decline

By May Thet Hnin

Economic tensions between China and the United States has brought down the price of rubber in the Myanmar market, also affecting the production of rubber latex, according to a rubber plantation owner.

"Last year this time, the price of RSS 3 rubber was more than Ks800 per pound, but this year, the price has declined to Ks700 per pound," said U Khine Myint, secretary of Myanmar Rubber Planting and Producing Association (MRPPA).

China's stock share price has also declined, he added.

"The price of rubber has significantly declined this year compared with last year. Rubber is selling at Ks700 per pound. A few rubber owners have even suspended operations in their plantations. However, some of us have to look after our labourers. So, we do not close down operations. We are not earning good profits. If the rubber price does not pick up, we will not be able to continue with our business," said Daw Lin Lin Tun, a rubber plantation owner from Hlaingbwe Township, Kayin State.

The rubber price, as well as its production, has declined due to high temperature, he added.

In the 2016-2017 fiscal year, Myanmar exported more than

140,000 tonnes of rubber. Myanmar has targeted to export 150,000 tonnes of rubber in the 2017-2018 fiscal year. In the 2008-2009 fiscal year, the price of rubber reached a record high in Myanmar. Then, the price of RSS3 rubber was between US\$1,700 and \$1,800 per tonne.

China usually buys some 70 per cent of Myanmar's rubber. The other 20 per cent is shipped to Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Viet Nam, South Korea, India and Japan. Myanmar rubber is produced mainly in Mon State, the Taninthayi Region, Kayin State, the Yangon Region and the Bago Region. Currently, Myanmar has more than 1.6 million acres of rubber plantations, with more than 700,000 acres producing latex rubber. Rubber produced in Myanmar is still of low quality. Therefore, to get a higher price, rubber producers must improve the quality to match international standards, said U Khine Myint.

Currently, a rubber law is being formulated to promote Myanmar's rubber sector. The government, in cooperation with the Myanmar Rubber Planters and Producers Association, is trying to create a central rubber market in Myanmar. The rubber law is expected to be approved by the Hluttaw in 2018. ■

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Dr. Win Myat Aye confers social pensions to elderly over 90 years of age.



Dr. Win Myat Aye confers donations on behalf of the Office of the State Counsellor to Kachin IDPs.

Formulating a human society where fundamental rights, democracy norms and human dignity are ensured

By: Naing Lin Kyi
PHOTO: MNA

Here is an interview with Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Dr Win Myat Aye to present the endeavours of the Ministry of SWRR during the second year of the incumbent government.

Q: Please tell me about the reforms of your ministry during the second year of the present government.

A: The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement could adopt policies and introduced reforms that were new and appropriate during the period. Our main policy ensures fundamental rights for everyone and formulates a perfect human society that meets the democracy norms.

We need amended or new policies, laws and rules if we faithfully implement our new policies in a systematic way. We have coordinated with the parliament or the law-making body to realize this goal. We have also abolished the out-of-dated orders and directives in coordination with other ministries. These are the significant accomplishments of our ministry during the period.



Dr. Win Myat Aye donates cash to mothers and children in Ywar Gyi North Ward in Sittway.

Q: What are your methods to hear the true voices of the people?

A: We make direct contacts with the MPs to know their actual needs. We also open Call Centres which are listening to the public voices round the clock.

We also use mobile phones as a social welfare means to solve problems. We received phone calls for 359 cases including 82 child rape cases and also received 4270 disaster-related cas-

es for help. People ask help from us particularly in disaster-related cases, as we can render effective assistance. Here how much we can help the people is important.

The ministry also reaches agreements with local and foreign organizations as assistance-providers. Our ministry now has a specific advisory board that ensures public benefits in signing agreements. We also formed a project supervisory body to check whether the helpers in the agreement can do their actual job. The research centre is another important element of our ministry as it provides all necessary data and facts for the success of a project. It is one of the significant changes during the time of the government in office.

Q: What is your method to know whether the people are actually enjoying the benefits of your public welfare services?

A: We distribute publications such as newsletters and ask suggestions and responses from the people. First we increased our staff strength which was only over 2000 nation-wide in the past.

We are responsible for social protection, socio-economic progress and rehabilitation. But we are still weak in rehabilitation. So we opened a new department for this particular matter.

Now we have three departments – Social Welfare Department, Disaster Management Department and Rehabilitation Department. In the past we received 0.09 per cent of the Union budget. But beginning 2017 we are receiving 0.25 per cent annually.

The government is prioritizing the internal peace and national race affairs. We are providing humanitarian aids to ethnic majority states, displaced persons and victims of natural and man-made disasters.

This project is being imple-

mented through UEHRD. The amount of aids has been tripled in conducting vocational courses and providing capital to generate jobs for refugees to ensure a secure live for them when they arrive back home.

Q: What is your social welfare programme?

A: We are presenting rehabilitation aids effectively, ensuring fundamental rights for everyone and providing social protection for each and every one for the whole life.

Q: What is your main action to ensure and protect child rights?

Concerning this matter we launched a programme to reduce the number of abandoned children and to protect them. It is a significant achievement during the two-year period. The increase in the number of abandoned children is a challenge for us. So we are cooperating with welfare organizations and foundations. We want to amend the child law to be in conformity with the advancing era.

We have the programme to nurture children, and we are going to extend it. In our initial programme we conduct medical check on children to give them preventive medicine and cure their disease in its early stage. The government has increased its budget on child nurseries and pre-primary schools. The ministry is nurturing children as a way of shaping the future as it relies on posterity. The government in office has been successfully implementing the nation's first-ever youth policy in regions and states.

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we launched a programme to reduce the number of abandoned children and to protect them. It is a significant achievement during the two-year period.

Formulating a human society where fundamental rights, democracy norms and human dignity are ensured

FROM PAGE-6

Q: What are your plans for children, women and the aged as they are in the vulnerable category?

A: The nation has drafted a law on protecting multi-violence against women. It was a difficult job. CSOs and activists on women affairs earnestly took part in the job. We just need to pass the bill. One Stop Women Support Center is now helping women who are victims of violence. Our social covers the work of providing better alternative jobs for former sex workers to earn their living in proper way. We are launching anti-human trafficking programmes and providing financial assistance for the victims. The SWRR Ministry has reformed the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs with the involvement of social organizations, foundations actively taking part in the women affairs apart from Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation

the public in time. We now have the DAN Mobile Application. Disaster Alert Notification or DAN application will no doubt contribute significantly to our efforts on disaster risk reduction in Myanmar. It enables the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement to communicate risks to the general public through use of mobile technology. We are also using the Myanmar Mobile Application. But we have some weaknesses in using the application. We are inviting public participation in the disaster management as it is of vital importance. Public must be strong and quick in responding the disaster. So we are imparting safety means during disasters of any kind for people of all walks of life. The important thing is to conduct disaster drills so that people will have knowledge on the safety means. In addition we are distributing pamphlets in Bamar and other ethnic languages. There were 103 multiple-use disaster-resistant buildings. We have built



The State Counsellor visits the nursery opened in the Department for Social Welfare.

cooperation of other ministries and the entire country. So we have formed the UEHRD which is also the Union project. The main goal is to accept the returnees, provide humanitarian assistance, rebuild and redevelop the whole Rakhine State. At the same time we are working for long-term peace with public involvement. In addition to the people in the country, overseas Myanmar are also taking part in implementing the Union project. There are investigation teams to find out the root cause of the conflicts in Rakhine State which has many challenges. The team led by Vice-President one presented a 48-point suggestions and the team led by Kofi Annan an 88-point suggestions. The implementation committee is led by me, and we are trying to find the best means to solve the problem depending on the prevailing situation. Our committee has the international experts and advisers. Effective implementation of the task will ensure progress and a constant conflict-free zone.

People who are legally entitled will become citizens and who are not cannot become citizens, but they will have their rights. In this way the region will see more harmony. Peace can be built more quickly if everybody has their own rights. So we are giving priority to it in implementing the recommendations on Rakhine State.

Q: Please elaborate on the repatriation programme in Rakhine State which

is also in the international spotlight.

A: Repatriation is an important challenge. Although we are ready to accept the people who fled to the other country since 23 January, no one come back yet. We have every arrangement for the returnees. We have the Myanmar-Bangladesh Agreement, and the bilateral cooperation committee. Moreover, we have the bilateral agreement and the action committees. There is cooperation among our ministries and there are two reception centres and a transit centre. We have to work to clear the fire-ravaged areas and rebuild villages.

We are ensuring security as they will dare come back only if there is security. They must have the proper documents to freely travel. Any people living in our country must have the documents certifying that he/she can legally live in the country, and that is the National Verification Card. If he/she has the documents he/she can work and travel freely. He/she also has access to education and health. National Verification Card holders can apply for citizenship.

If he/she is legally entitled he/she can become a citizen. But if he/she is not legally entitled he/she cannot. The NVC can provide much opportunity. As they do not understand this they are refusing to hold it. We are launching educative programmes for this matter.

(Translated by TMT)

Repatriation is an important challenge. Although we are ready to accept the people who fled to the other country since 23 January, no one come back yet.

and Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association. The government has implemented the law on the elderly persons. Rule-drafting is now under way. First the government presented social pension to nonagenarians. But the aged limited will be fixed at 85. The age limited will be further reduced depending on the State budget.

Q: What are your plans for natural disasters?

A: We have a rehabilitation plan that ensures a better life for the victims and we are implementing it with the cooperation of the public, local and foreign organizations, civil organization through transparent means. Thanks to the plans we are closer to the public than ever and can apply more transparent actions. It is a success within the two years. The ministry has formed the central management bureau which works together with other countries for gaining greater success in work. Our experience taught us that prevention or taking preventive measures is important in disaster management. So we are disseminating public knowledge on the disasters, safety means and risk reduction, while doing our best to inform

16 new ones and there will be 87 more in 2018. We are making sure that the village roads and dams are in good condition as they are also vital facilities.

Q: What are your services for Rakhine State?

A: The government is working for progress and the rule of law. So the ministry is also striving for peace and progress in the whole nation particularly in Rakhien State in addition to its normal functions.

Because of the age-old and complicated programmes, the state lagged behind in development and has weakness in security. Both communities are filled with misunderstandings, mistrust, doubts and fear. The terrorists are exploiting this situation to penetrate, especially in Maungdaw region. Terrorism has caused a lot of damages. Natives dared not live in their villages anymore. The Muslim community is also leaving their homes. We are responsible for resettlement of the returnees. We are still facing the challenges of terrorist attacks on 25 August 2017 that had repercussions in the whole country and that damaged the country's image. We are working to accept the returnees. But we need the



An official from the Social Welfare Department gives cash donation to a child in Maungdaw.

It's time to increase support for our farmers

RURAL population which makes up 70 per cent of the nation's total population is the “backbone of our agro-based country.

That is why the Union Government has speeded up its efforts for guaranteeing farmer rights, protection and farmers’ interests.

The government has given priority to promoting the socio-economic welfare of farmers in rural areas, with special emphasis on ensuring more job opportunities and increased incomes, as well as easy access to education, health, potable water, and better transportation networks as part of measures designed for rural development and poverty reduction.

The Protecting Rights and Enhancing Economic Welfares of Farmers law is central to speeding up the establishment of rules and regulations needed to carry out the processes.

The law focuses on the provision of agricultural loans, technical assistance for increased productivity, sales of agricultural products at reasonable prices, protection of the rights of small-holder farmers and promotion of their welfare, and assistance for damages caused by natural disasters.

But, the current era demands that the law be amended to be in conformity with the current situation and circumstances.

To implement the provisions prescribed in the farmers’ rights protection and interest promotion law, the government, traders, experts and people need to work together.

To effectively promote the interests of livestock farmers and cultivators in the regions and states, it is important to have short-term and long-term future visions for them.

It is necessary to invite private entrepreneurs for the seed production and quality crop production, and internal and external banks need to be linked in order to acquire the necessary investments.

Five essential aims in the law for protecting the rights and enhancing the economic welfare of farmer are: a) support farmers with suitable loans; b) provide

assistance for production; c) promote investment and technology to increase production; d) ensure prices for their agricultural products in the market; e) and to offer support for the grievances and losses caused by natural disasters as much as possible.

But, it is very important for our country which is weak in performing research for the agriculture sector to do research on climate change and its impacts on the agricultural sector.

To help our farmers, today is the time to find new farming techniques, including crop spacing methods, drought resistant crop selection, water conservation and environmentally sensitive livestock husbandry practices. ■

Development of Myanmar Media

By Shin Min

MYANMA Radio and Television (MRTV) has been making its performance, with the aims of sharing education, information and entertainment. Now that the country is moving on the democratic way, MRTV is making reformation works and collecting news from the public, standing up for the interest of the people and broadcasting news and information people deserve to know, with the changing time.

In order to foster Myanmar Media Development, Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV) has signed a cooperation agreement with five private group companies to operate as content providers for digital free-to-air TV channels in a multi-play-out system of MRTV during the second year of the incumbent government.

With the approval of Union Government Meeting (2/2018), MRTV has signed the contract of cooperation agreements with five content providers in 17 February of 2018 which can provide the viewers with broader information views and entertainment programmes in the MRTV Multi Channel Play out System.

With effect from 2016 when the incumbent government took office, MRTV is carrying out the tasks of amending law on television and broadcasting for the development of media sector of the State, implementing the compilation of the laws necessary for changing as PSB, performing transparently for interested persons to launch the five new private media channels which will be expanded by adding to the existing channels being broadcast with the system of DVB—T2 of Multi-Channel Play-out System during the period of amending TV and Broadcasting Law.

MITV channel is broadcasting daily in English language about the ethnic people of Myanmar, short biography of well-known persons, Myanmar's prominent landmarks, news, documentary, travelling sights, social life articles, weather report and other reports.

Moreover, MITV Channel is being broadcast in English language especially for the Myanmar



Myanma Radio and Television in Nay Pyi Taw.

people who live abroad and for foreigners who have arrived in Myanmar to discover the real conditions of Myanmar and her traditional cultures.

For the development of media in Myanmar, media conferences have been held many times; for the first conference in May 27 and 28 of 2016 and the second conference in December 16 of 2016, the third conference in March 7 of 2017 respectively. All the conferences aimed at developing the realm of media in Myanmar and holding frank discussions among members of the media with a view to developing the media sector and to overcome challenges in the media world.

Arrangements for the fourth branch to have access to its related panels and media law are under way. Likewise, laws on television, broadcasting, printing and publishing have been enacted in the country. Some amendments are being made, to be submitted to Hluttaw after completion.

The drafting of the Right to Information Law is under way which is designed for the benefit of the whole populace.

With the extended works, the MRTV telecasts a variety of programmes totalling 17 hours

daily from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m., and plans are being made to reform the broadcasting duration ratio to 45 per cent in information programming, 35 per cent in entertainment programming, and 20 per cent in education programmes respectively.

Besides Stock Exchange news, the MRTV broadcasts local news, international news, Hluttaw news, weather forecast in March 7 of 2017 respectively. All the conferences aimed at

developing the realm of media in Myanmar and holding frank discussions among members of the media with a view to developing the media sector and to overcome challenges in the media world.

There are five TV channels including MRTV, Myawady, MRTV-4, Channel-7 and Sky Net as well as six FM lines broadcasting from Myanma Radio in Myanmar.

As a result, the people will have a chance to enjoy many TV channels due to the extension of additional channels. All content providers are to do self-censorship, have to avoid the matters that may damage national and religious affairs and take responsibility for their programmes.

With the efficient usage of

advanced technology and equipment, The MRTV aims at improving the quality of service and the quantity of channels, promoting the production and transmission quality and quantity of the programmes.

The MRTV broadcasts in Analogue and Digital for both Television and Radio Broadcast which includes the national races programs for majority ethnic groups in different languages for TV and Radio. Moreover MRTV has established the MRTV web portal and created account on social websites to access online video streaming and data.

All the programmes are designated to broadcast the current conditions of local and international affairs from YouTube, Facebook and other website pages.

The Farmers Channel broadcasts modern agricultural methods, research works and educative programs for agriculture sector and development of the country. Also it aims to take educative agriculture TV programs and interviews for farmers.

As for the information sector, political dialogues made at the Union Peace Conference—21st Century Panglong,

on exchange of views between the State Counsellor and youths and peace talks between State Counsellor and ethnic nationals were broadcast live.

Women's Week Forum and business talk between State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and prominent women entrepreneurs was also broadcast live by the MRTV. This helped the culture of negotiating between people with different views, media freedom and media development—the essence of the democracy.

Debate programmes show expertise discussions, ideas of scholars and professionals over the current affairs of the country are also being presented. Likewise, people's voices are also being described with a view to standing up for the people.

Educational talks on health and warning and sharing knowledge on protection of natural disaster, child care services, programs for sharing supportive guides for distant education and matriculation exams are also being presented.

For making farming working on agricultural and animal farms improve their knowledge, the department made programs by combing with professional experts from Australian Broad-

casting Corporation.

Myanma Radio as well managed to broadcast radio plays and stories, radio magazines, and various kinds of programmes. Besides, so as to get rid of discrimination and not to cause depression among the people living with disabilities, the program, “Diary of un-withered flowers,” was being presented every week.

For giving relaxation of the people, MRTV is filming and producing new songs, performing in the ceremonies of the State, to the accompaniment of the national orchestra by combining with foreign technicians.

MRTV's reporter themselves went to many parts of the country to get news and event footage to be able to present live to the whole nation. Due to their effort, regional news and information sent by 11 national ethnic languages' news branches were presented within one-year period, besides news branches in Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon and Mandalay.

National Races Channels depicting actual situations of national ethnics are broadcasting their traditional cultures, regional food and cultural usages and terms.

In accord with the changing times and systems, MRTV is transforming the existing system into PSB/ Private Service Broadcasting System. To be able to do so, laws are being amended and installation of Digital DVB T2 transmitters for the process of Analogue Switch Off is being made. For changing Analogue system into Digital system, to have 750 W Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB+) installed in Yangon as a pilot project, a contract to buy machines and equipment is under way.

As for the Ministry of Information, efforts are being made for the journalists to smoothly collect news and information.

The role of media development and media freedom is very crucial for the country and we need collaborative efforts from all stakeholders in the media industry including the government, the lawmakers and international organizations. The Ministry has done as much as it can for the development of the country's media sector. ■

Translated by Win Ko Ko Aung

UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE (UHC) 2018 WORLD HEALTH DAY MESSAGE

By Dr.Aung Soe @ Aung Kyaw Moe
Retired State Medical Superintendent



MUCH emphasis has been paid to Universal Health Coverage (UHC) for 2018 World Health Day event, which falls on 7 April.

- ❖ World Health Organization is established on 7th April 1948.
- ❖ It is a specialized, non-political, health agency of United Nation with headquarter of Geneva, Switzerland.
- ❖ It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters.
- ❖ Every year 7th April, is celebrated as “World Health Day”

Universal health coverage means that all people have access to the health services they need (prevention, promotion, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care) without the risk of financial hardship when paying for them. This requires a financing system to protect people from financial hardship and impoverishment from health care costs.

Essential health services	Health costs	Extend coverage
Half the world	100 million	1 billion
<small>lacks access</small>	<small>pushed into poverty</small>	<small>more people access services by 2023</small>

It also requires an efficient health system that provides the entire population with access to good quality services, health workers, medicines and technologies. Neither in a developed country nor in Myanmar, Universal Health Coverage is not something that can be achieved overnight, but all countries can take action to move more rapidly towards it, or to maintain the gains they have already made.

Universal health coverage is a critical component of sustainable development and poverty reduction, and a key element to reducing social inequities. Access to health services ensures healthier people; while financial risk protection prevents people from being pushed into poverty.

For a community for example in Chin State, Naga Land on so called superior regions such as Yangon, Nay Pyi Taw, to achieve universal health coverage, several factors must be in place. Key health services (including for tuberculosis, malaria, HIV, non-communicable diseases, and mental health, sexual and reproductive health and child health) should be available to all who need them.

To provide an increasing number of health services overtime while at the same time reducing out of pocket costs to patients should be the goal. In most countries, particularly low-income countries, the state can't provide everyone with all the health services they need at an affordable price, even with the large increase in external donor assistance for health since 2000. Peoples' needs, public opinion and costs lead to decisions about the services that can be guaranteed to the population initially, and which ones should be added over time. To ensure access to the key interventions targeting the health Sustainable Development Goals eg. births attended by a trained health worker, family planning, reducing growing problem of non communicable diseases, prevention and treatment of diseases such as HIV, malaria and tuberculosis, UHC is a necessity.

In all countries, including Myanmar it has been found that governments have to use general budget revenues to meet the health costs of poor and vulnerable people. Ensuring access to health facilities, workers and medicines in remote, rural areas is also important, as is providing special interventions for stigmatized populations.

SEE PAGE 10

UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE (UHC)

2018 WORLD HEALTH DAY MESSAGE

FROM PAGE 8+9

Health for All agenda set by the Alma-Ata declaration in 1978, as well as the WHO Constitution of 1948 declaring health a fundamental human right are the bases of UHC. Regardless of ethnic origin, migrant status, place of residence, sex, age or income level all should be covered. Countries need to track progress in providing access not just across the national population but within different groups, as mentioned above. This means Equity is paramount in UHC. In term of financial protection, the most vulnerable people should have access to the health services they need without restrictions.

According to WHO reports, member countries are succeeding in implementing UHC.

- (1) In Myanmar most of the primary, secondary and tertiary hospitals are providing free medical treatment. Anti Retroviral Therapy Centers for HIV patients are increasing day by day. Union Tuberculosis Institute is actively participating in free investigations and free treatments. Appointment of one mid-wife in each village all over the country for Reproductive Health is proposed. Since birth, each and every new born are eligible of a compact vaccination schedule until school going age. These are only some examples.
- (2) Thailand has just celebrated ten years of its universal coverage scheme which has dramatically reduced impoverishment caused by out-of-pocket payments.
- (3) Countries are moving forward in Africa including Liberia, Gabon, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Rwanda.
- (4) In 2008, the Afghan Government, using considerable donor funding, removed user fees in public health facilities and healthcare utilization more than doubled.
- (5) Nepal, where free universal health care was introduced in 2008, is now on track to achieve its health-related SDGs.
- (6) More recently, El Salvador has launched an ambitious plan to expand health coverage including abolishing

user fees and strengthening primary health care in remote and poor rural areas.

As universal health coverage is a combination of whether people obtain the health services they need and financial risk protection, measurement needs to include both components. Coverage of health services can be measured by the percentage of people receiving the services they need: for example women in fertile age group accessing modern methods of family planning or children immunized. On the other hand, financial risk protection can be evaluated by a reduction in the number of families pushed into poverty or placed under severe economic strain due to health costs. The impact of these steps on population health and household financial wellbeing can also be measured, as can many of the factors that make it easier to increase coverage. These include the availability of essential medicines, for example.

The main challenge is that many countries do not have the capacity to measure coverage of all of the many health interventions that their populations needs. So they will need to choose a set of key indicators to track performance in service coverage. A sub-set of these could be used to compare performance between countries.

Universal Health Coverage has direct impact on a population's health and welfare. Access and use of health service enables people to be more productive and active contributors to their families and communities. It also ensures that children can go to school and learn. At the same time, financial risk protection prevents people from being pushed into poverty when they have to pay for health services out of their own pockets.

Universal Health Coverage is thus a critical component of sustainable development and poverty reduction, and a key element of any effort to reduce social inequities. Universal coverage is the hallmark of a government's commitment to improve the wellbeing of all its citizens, ensuring Sustainable Development Goals.

Broadly defined UHC means all people receiving the health services they need including health initiatives de-

signed to promote better health (such as anti-tobacco policies) prevent illness (such as vaccinations) and to provide treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care (such as end of life care) of sufficient quality to be effective while at the same time ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship.

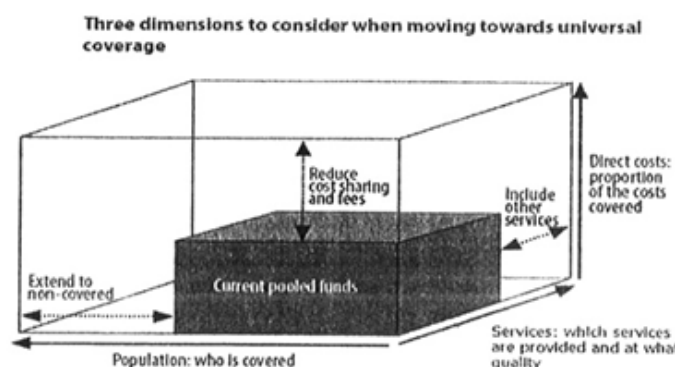
Thus UHC comprises two main components quality, essential health service coverage and financial coverage both extended to the whole population. Three dimensions (effective) health services finance and population – are typically represented in what has come to be known as the coverage cube (See Figure below) All countries struggle to fill the cube including those with long-established health systems which may, for example be fighting to maintain their levels of coverage in the face of rising costs it is for this reason that the UHC endeavor is sometimes referred to as a journey (means to an end) rather than a destination (an end itself), a dynamic process that must be responsive to constantly changing demographic, epidemiological and technological trends.

implemented in the name of expanding coverage, may actually compromise equity. Theory and country experience yield important lessons on both promising directions and pitfalls to avoid.

Interpretation of health financing reform experience requires getting beneath commonly used labels such as “tax-funded systems” or “social health insurance”, or simply even “health insurance.” Such labels hide more than they illuminate, as shown by emerging evidence on reforms that increase access and financial protection but are funded pre-dominantly from general tax revenues (e.g. Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Rwanda, and Thailand). Deriving meaningful lesson from innovative reform experiences requires a deeper understanding of how countries have altered their funding sources, pooling arrangements, purchasing methods, and policies on benefits and patient cost-sharing. All systems, regardless of what they are called, have to address these functions and policy choices.

- ❖ Universal Health Coverage (UHC) implies that all people without discrimination have access to nationally determined sets of the needed

Figure: Universal Health Coverage Cube (WHO)



In its 2010 World Health Report, WHO noted that there is no single, best path for reforming health financing arrangements to move systems closer to universal health coverage, i.e. to improve access to needed, effective services while protecting users from financial ruin. However, this lack of a blueprint for health financing reforms was not meant to convey the message that “anything goes” on the path to universal health coverage. Indeed, concerns have been raised that some reforms, often

promotive, preventive curative and rehabilitative basic health services and essential safe affordable effective and quality medicines.

- ❖ UHC is crucial to Increase healthy life expectancy to reduce poverty to promote equity and to achieve sustainable development all together.
- ❖ UHC also presents an opportunity to improve the performance of the health system and service delivery outputs.

❖ UHC requires resilient and responsive health systems to provide comprehensive primary health-care services, with extensive geographical coverage, including in remote and rural areas, and an adequate number and equitable distribution of skillful and committed health workforce.

❖ Mechanisms to pool risks among the population on the basis of equity and solidarity can bring sustainable resources for strengthening health systems with the view to ensure universal access to essential health services and proven life-saving interventions.

❖ No country has yet been able to guarantee everyone immediate access to all the services that might maintain or improve their health. They all face resource constraints of one type or another, although these are most critical in low-income countries.

❖ Every country could raise additional domestic funds for health or diversify their funding sources if they wished to.

❖ Options include governments giving higher priority to health in their budget allocations, collecting taxes or insurance contributions more efficiently and raising additional funds through various types of innovative financing.

❖ Taxes on harmful products such as tobacco and alcohol are one such option. They reduce consumption, improve health and increase the resources governments can spend on health.

❖ Even with these innovations, increased donor flows will be necessary for most of the poorest countries for a considerable period of time. Donor countries can also raise more funds to channel to poorer countries in innovative ways, but they should also do more to meet their stated international commitments for official development assistance (ODA) and to provide more predictable and long-term aid flows.

May UHC prevail successfully on this planet forever.

Bolivia's jaguars facing threat from Chinese fang craze

LA PAZ — Bolivia's once-thriving jaguar population is loping into the cross-hairs of a growing threat from poachers responding to growing Chinese demand for the animal's teeth and skull.

Researchers believe there are around 7,000 of the speckled big cats in Bolivia, out of a global population of some 64,000, stretching from North America to Argentina. But such is the appetite in China's huge underground market that "if controls are not put in place, it can lead to a serious problem" for their survival, warned Fabiola Suarez of the Environment Ministry.

Considered vulnerable by conservationists, the jaguar's future in the South American country is in the hands of anti-trafficking police only now coming to grips with the potential scale of the problem.

Local authorities began getting reports in 2014 of trade in the animal in the northeastern area of Beni, according to Rodrigo Herrera, an advisor to Bolivia's directorate of Biodiversity at the Environment Ministry.

He says the increased presence of Chinese nationals in the South American country has stimulated demand.

President Evo Morales' leftist government has awarded seven billion dollars' worth of public works contracts to Chi-



A handout photo showing a jaguar, which researchers believe number around 7,000 in Bolivia, but which are threatened by poaching driven by Chinese demand for teeth and skulls. **PHOTO: AFP**

nese groups, sparking an influx of workers from the Asian giant.

Herrera said each of the cat's teeth, which measure between eight and 10 centimeters, can fetch up to \$100 for poachers, but that figure can reach \$5,000 on the Chinese market.

The feline's skull is also prized by traffickers, at rates of up to \$1,000. Traffickers also sell the skin, and even the testicles, which along with the ground-down teeth, are prized by some

Chinese as an aphrodisiac.

While trade in the jaguar or its body parts are prohibited, the big cats have been listed as "near threatened" on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's "Red List".

Herrera said that "from every animal, a poor person can take in up to \$2,000. That's a lot of money." In Bolivia 38 percent of the population lived below the poverty line in 2015, according to the most recent World Bank

figures.

Embassy appeal

Conservationists fear the money is an added incentive to farmers who often shoot jaguars to protect their livestock.

To date, Bolivian police have intercepted 400 jaguar teeth being sent in the mail to addresses in China.

But Suarez, a specialist in the biodiversity department in the Environment Ministry, said this is likely only the tip of the

iceberg and describes as alarming the quantity she believes has already left the country undetected.

The state has belatedly begun to hit back, mounting 15 separate prosecutions, including 11 against Chinese nationals living in Bolivia, according to official data. But the trade continues. On March 19, a trafficker selling jaguar teeth and skulls on social networks was arrested in the Amazon region.

Unusually, the Chinese embassy in La Paz has acted to warn its nationals to steer clear of trafficking, reminding them in a note to "respect and strictly observe the laws and regulations, both Chinese and Bolivian, against the illegal trafficking of wild animals." According to Bolivia's National Statistics Institute, more and more Chinese are coming to live in Bolivia. In 2011, there were only 2,624 Chinese nationals living in the country, but the figure jumped to 12,861 by 2016. Herrera said the growing presence of Chinese has created a market back home in China, where wearing jaguar's teeth in a necklace, or attached to a key ring, is a status symbol.

The largest cat species in the Americas, its habitat extends from the northern United States across South America to Argentina. —AFP ■

China vows to prioritize cooperation with five other Mekong countries

SIEM REAP — Six countries that share the waters of the Mekong River held ministerial-level talks in Cambodia on Wednesday, at which upstream country China vowed to prioritize cooperation in the sub-region.

Speaking at the Mekong River Commission meeting in Siem Reap, Chinese delegation leader Li Hong said China views the five downstream countries -- Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam -- as "long-standing friends, natural partners and close neighbors."

He said China has established "comprehensive strategic partnerships" with all five Southeast Asian countries "and views the cooperation in the sub-region as the priority and pilot region for building a community of shared future and for a new type

of international relations

Last year, China's total trade with them reached \$220 billion, an increase of 16 per cent compared with the previous year's figure, while Chinese investment has reached \$42 billion in total, according to figures released at the meeting.

Li said China attaches great importance to the utilization and protection of water resources of the Mekong River "not only for the interests of our own people, but also for interests of people from all riparian countries."

For many years, downstream countries have been concerned about the impacts of hydropower, navigation, irrigation, fisheries and flood control projects being carried out on the river and its tributaries by upstream countries, especially

China.

Li said, "We understand and respect the reasonable concern of the Mekong countries on hydropower development. Huge efforts have been made to respond to the demands and expectation of the downstream countries."

The two-day meeting that began Wednesday is aimed at strengthening joint efforts for sustainable management and development of water and related resources in the Mekong River Basin, taking into account the growing pressures caused by population rise, infrastructure development and the impacts of climate change.

It is the third meeting of its kind, the previous ones having been held in Viet Nam in 2014 and in Thailand in 2010. —Kyodo News ■



Photo taken in October 2013 shows a forest along the Mekong River in the suburbs of Stung Treng, Cambodia. **PHOTO: KYODO NEWS**

Fears of fresh violence ahead of new Gaza protest

THOUSANDS of Palestinians are expected to rally at Gaza's border Friday despite warnings from Israel that its open-fire rules will not change, raising fears of fresh violence after the the bloodiest day for Gazans in years.

The planned demonstration comes a week after Israeli troops killed 18 Palestinians during a protest at the heavily fortified Gaza border in what was the bloodiest day since a 2014 war.

The protests are in support of refugees, including those in the Palestinian enclave who want to return to their former homes in what is now Israel.

Tens of thousands demonstrated peacefully last Friday. But small groups of Palestinians approached the border, threw stones and rolled burning tyres towards Israeli troops who responded with live fire and tear gas. The Israeli response generated significant international anger, with critics accusing troops



A Palestinian protestor uses a slingshot to throw a stone during clashes with Israeli forces at the Israel-Gaza border east of Gaza City on 4 April, 2018. **PHOTO: AFP**

of using disproportionate force.

But Israel has remained adamant such steps were needed to protect troops from an alleged gun attack by militants and stop attempts to infiltrate the border.

Ahead of Friday's planned protests Israeli Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman vowed that open-fire rules would not change.

"If there are provocations, there will be a reaction of the

harshes kind like last week," Lieberman told public radio.

Israel received support from the White House late Thursday, which called for Palestinians to engage in peaceful protest and

stay 500 meters from Gaza's border with Israel.

"The United States strongly urges protest leaders to communicate loudly and clearly that protestors should march peacefully; should abstain from all forms of violence," Donald Trump's envoy Jason Greenblatt said, putting the onus squarely on Palestinians.

- Peace process? -

The latest White House statement would appear to put Trump's claimed aim of reaching a peace deal between Palestinians and Israelis even further out of reach. Palestinians have already been infuriated by Trump's decision to upend decades of US policy and recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

The current protests at Gaza's border are slated to last six week, coinciding with the expected opening of the new US embassy in Jerusalem in mid-May.—AFP ■

'Bullet won't kill movement': 50 years on, US honors Martin Luther King Jr

KHARTOUM - Bells rang out Wednesday to mark the moment Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated 50 years ago, as Americans paid tribute to the civil rights leader and reflected on how to carry forward his legacy.

In a country still torn by racial and class divisions, thousands of demonstrators rallied in Memphis, Tennessee where the pastor and Nobel Peace Prize winner was slain aged 39 on a motel balcony by a white supremacist sniper on 4 April 1968.

Bells tolled 39 times at 6:01 pm (2301 GMT), the moment King was shot, in Memphis and around the nation to honor the icon whose moral courage helped bring lasting changes to American life.

Prominent civil rights activist Reverend Jesse Jackson, a member of King's entourage, spoke from the Lorraine Motel balcony where King was gunned down and said "the sore is still raw" from the fatal shooting.

Addressing thousands of dignitaries and everyday Americans who gathered for an anniversary ceremony at the motel, which has been transformed into the National Civil Rights Museum, Jackson recalled the "pow!" of the gunshot that slew his movement's leader.



A woman holds an image of Martin Luther King Jr. on the 50th anniversary of his assassination 4 April 2018 in Memphis, Tennessee. **PHOTO: AFP**

But he insisted that civil rights freedom fighters "never stopped fighting, we never gave up" on bending American society closer to justice.

"From this balcony," the 76-year-old Jackson told the crowd, "we decided we would not let one bullet kill a movement."

Lionized today for his heroic campaigns against racism and segregation, King was a controversial, radical activist who, with a mantra of non-violence, ardently campaigned against poverty and economic injustice, including what he called the continued "exploitation of the poor;" and US wars

abroad.

His birthday is a national holiday, and a 30-foot (nine-meter) statue in his likeness towers in Washington as a tribute to his life and work.

But despite the reverence for the iconic King, there was broad acknowledgement that his dream has been only partially realized.

"When we look at the state of race relations, we've made dramatic progress in 50 years — but we're nowhere near where we need to be," King's activist son, Martin Luther King III, told ABC from Memphis, where he took part in a symbolic march.—AFP ■

Tearful reunion highlights plight of China's missing children

BEIJING - A tearful reunion between parents and their missing daughter after an agonising 24-year search has put a spotlight on the vexed issue of child trafficking and disappearances in China.

Wang Mingqing and his wife Liu Dengying, from southwest Sichuan province, lost their three-year-old daughter in 1994 when she vanished after being momentarily left alone at the family's fruit stand. "I looked up and down the street, crossed the bridge, looked everywhere. She was nowhere to be found," Wang told the official Xinhua news agency.

The couple gave up their fruit business for several years to focus on their search, soliciting

the help of local police and welfare organisations. But the efforts were in vain and their daughter became one of the thousands of children that go missing in China every year, often kidnapped and trafficked by illegal adoption rings. Refusing to give up, Wang became a taxi driver in 2015 in the forlorn hope of one day picking up a passenger who might miraculously turn out to be his daughter.

And then a breakthrough. Earlier this year, a woman living thousands of kilometres away in Jilin province contacted Wang after spotting a sketch of what his daughter may look like today along with the family's story on the internet.—AFP ■



Wang Mingqing and his wife Liu Dengying, from southwest Sichuan province, lost their three-year-old daughter in 1994 when she vanished after being momentarily left alone at the family's fruit stand. **PHOTO: AFP**



Even before the ban was announced, its shadow had hit some businesses hard in Boracay. PHOTO: AFP

Philippines to close Boracay island to tourists for six months

MANILA — The Philippines is closing its best-known holiday island Boracay to tourists for up to six months over concerns that the once idyllic white-sand resort has become a “cesspool” tainted by dumped sewage, authorities said on Thursday.

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has ordered the shutdown to start on 26 April for a maximum period of half a year, his spokesman Harry Roque said.

“Boracay is known as a paradise in our

nation and this temporary closure is (meant) to ensure that the next generations will also experience that,” Roque told reporters.

The decision jeopardises the livelihood of thousands employed as part of a bustling tourist trade on the island that each year serves two million guests and pumps roughly \$1 billion in revenue into the Philippine economy.

Experts said the measure also appeared to contradict the government’s own pro-de-

velopment policy for the island, including the recent approval of a planned \$500-million casino and resort on Boracay.

The threat of closure first emerged in February when Duterte blasted the tiny island’s 500 tourism-related hotels, restaurants and other businesses, accusing them of dumping sewage directly into the sea and turning it into a “cesspool”.

Authorities said Thursday some businesses were using the island’s

drainage system to send untreated sewage into its surrounding turquoise waters.

The environment ministry says 195 businesses, along with more than 4,000 residential customers, are not connected to sewer lines.

But within weeks of Duterte lashing out at the local businesses, the Philippines gave the green light for Macau casino giant Galaxy Entertainment to begin construction next year of the casino and resort complex.—AFP ■

YouTube shooting shows how fake news spirals on social media

PARIS — Within minutes of the shooting at YouTube offices in California, social media was awash with conspiracy theories and images of the supposed “shooter” wearing a Muslim headscarf.

Some Facebook videos were quick to claim that it was a “false flag” attack, carried out to discredit the powerful US gun lobby in the wake of the Parkland high school massacre in Florida.

With wildly exagger-

ated accounts of the death toll circulating, several pictures of the purported attacker and some of the “victims” posted to Twitter Tuesday turned out to be of well-known YouTubers.

Other widely-shared posts speculated that the attacker had been provoked by YouTube censoring political content, and one Twitter user posted a picture of the suspect as Hillary Clinton in a headscarf.

His account was later suspended.

Hoaxers too took advantage of the situation to post several pictures of the US comic Sam Hyde, who is known for internet pranks.

None of which came as any surprise to researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, whose report last month found that false news spreads far faster on Twitter than real news — and by a substantial

margin.

“We found that falsehood diffuses significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth, in all categories of information,” said Sinan Aral, a professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management.

They found that false political news reached more people faster and went deeper into their social networks than any other category of false information.—AFP ■



Request for Proposal (RFP)
for Renting Vehicle for all UN agencies
on Long Term Agreement
Reference No.:LRFP-2018-9138821

UNICEF is inviting sealed Request for Proposal(RFP) to enter into Long Term Agreement with one or more qualified suppliers for Renting vehicle for all UN agencies in Myanmar.

Interested companies who have valid business registration and a minimum of two years’ experience with reputable clients are invited to collect RFP document at UNICEF Office, 23-A, InyaMyaing Road, Yangon. Companies are requested to bring the copy of business registration certificate when they collect the RFP at the UNICEF office. Last date for collection of RFP is **24 April 2018**.

Moreover, interested companies are invited for the Pre Bid Meeting at UNICEF Office on **24 April 2018 (2:00 PM)**. Please register to Mr. Ye Htut, yhtut@unicef.org in advance before mentioned date for confirmation.

The deadline for submission of bid to UNICEF is **2:30 pm, 2 May 2018**. For any clarification, please contact Ye Htut, Procurement Assistant, Supply & Logistics Section, UNICEF Myanmar. Tel: +95 1 2305960-69 (Ext. 1568). E-mail yhtut@unicef.org.

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M.V SIMA PERFECT VOY. NO. (036 N/S)

Consignees of cargo carried on M.V SIMA PERFECT VOY. NO. (036 N/S) are hereby notified that the vessel will be arriving on 7-4-2018 and cargo will be discharged into the premises of HPT where it will lie at the consignee’s risk and expenses and subject to the byelaws and conditions of the Port of Yangon.

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

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

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ABC's 'The Last Defense' shines light on death row

LOS ANGELES — Julius Jones, an African American former high school honor student and star college athlete, was 21 when he was convicted of murder by a predominantly white jury and sentenced to death.

Now 37, Jones's fight to overturn the ruling following what his lawyers describe as "pervasive and highly racialized pre-trial media coverage" is the subject of a new ABC show on death row.

Jones was convicted in April 2002 of shooting dead 45-year-old father-of-two Paul Howell, an Edmond, Oklahoma insurance executive, on 28 July, 1999. The victim's car was stolen after he was shot in the head at point blank range.

ABC's seven-episode documentary series "The Last Defense" opens with an hour-long episode on Jones's legal battle as lawyers race against the clock to get him a new trial before his execution date is set.

Executive produced by Oscar, Emmy and Tony Award-winning actress Viola Davis with her husband Julius Tennon, the seven-episode show aims to expose flaws in the American justice system through in-depth examinations of multiple death row cases.

The series, which debuts the



Award-winning actress Viola Davis is an executive producer for ABC's seven episode documentary series "The Last Defense". PHOTO: AFP

Jones episode at the Tribeca Film Festival on 27 April, returns to the scene of the crime in each case, re-interviewing witnesses and delving beyond the details of the court proceedings. The idea, said a spokeswoman for ABC, was to take "a deep look into the personal stories of the subjects, seeking to trace the path that led them to their place on death row."

"With incisive, compelling storytelling, 'The Last Defense' gives voice to those who can no longer be heard," she added.

- **'Deserved to die'** -

Jones has always maintained that his co-defendant Christopher O. Jordan fired the gun, but Jordan testified against

Jones in exchange for a 30-year to life sentence and was released in 2014.

Prosecutor Sandra Elliott told jurors during her opening statement in the 2002 trial that Jones and Jordan were looking for a sport utility vehicle with keys because they thought they could sell it for \$5,000.

"Paul Howell was murdered simply because he had a car they wanted," Elliott said.

The Denver-based 10th US Circuit Court of Appeals let the death sentence stand in 2014, rejecting Jones's claim that his attorney was ineffective for failing to seek evidence that someone else had committed the crime.

One of three appellate judges who upheld his sentence, Jerome Holmes, had written a newspaper opinion piece in 2002 while he was still a federal prosecutor, stating that Jones "deserved to die."

Jones, a former University of Oklahoma freshman on a "presidential leadership" scholarship, was refused a review of the appeal rejection in 2016 by the US Supreme Court.

Oklahoma's attorney general at the time, Scott Pruitt -- now the controversial head of the Environmental Protection Agency -- had submitted that Jones's attorneys had failed to demonstrate the judge's personal bias or prejudice. Then potentially explosive new evidence emerged in a 2017 report from The Oklahoma Death Penalty Review Commission highlighting systemic flaws in the state's capital sentencing, prompting a fresh petition from Jones's legal team, which argues that his sentence is unconstitutional.

Jones's attorneys also note that no physical evidence connected him to the scene of the shooting, the murder weapon or the stolen car.

- **'White victim effect'** -

A study appended to the report stated that defendants

accused and convicted of killing white victims were nearly two times more likely to receive a death sentence than if the victim was non-white.

"Not only does this study illustrate that Julius faced a greater risk of execution by the mere happenstance that the victim who he was accused and convicted of killing was white," attorneys for Jones contend, "but we also argue that race operated invidiously throughout Julius's case from the very earliest stages."

A study published in 2015 in the North Carolina Law Review in 2016 by Catherine Grosso and Barbara O'Brien, associate law professors at Michigan State University, came to a similar conclusion. "The white victim effect was the clearest and strongest finding in this study analysis," Grosso says.

"Race still matters in the criminal justice system, and it shouldn't."

The Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals rejected Jones's petition, however, and he is now asking the US Supreme Court to review that decision and to direct the lower court to give Jones's constitutional claims consideration before rubber-stamping his execution.—AFP ■

Joaquin Phoenix plumbs depths of PTSD in dark hitman role

LOS ANGELES — Lynne Ramsay's high school massacre movie "We Need to Talk About Kevin" was a shocking portrait of a mother's deteriorating mind in the wake her son's unimaginable atrocity.

Seven years later the sporadic but acclaimed Scottish filmmaker returns with "You Were Never Really Here," a study of post-traumatic stress disorder that is every bit as visceral.

The ultraviolent, pulpy, vigilante thriller is a disorientating journey into the collapsing psyche of Joe (Joaquin Phoenix), a tightly-coiled war veteran who makes a living finding girls who have been kidnapped by sex traffickers.

Based on a 2013 novella by Jonathan Ames and financed in part by Amazon, the movie boasts an award-winning performance by Phoenix ("Gladiator," "The Master") as a man broken by years of brutal violence, his PTSD sparking suicidal urges as darkness descends.

The hammer-wielding hitman's next mission sends him in search of Nina (Ekaterina Samsonov), the 13-year-old daughter of a New York state senator, who is being held by a Manhattan-based pedophile ring.

He ends up being co-opted into a political conspiracy that forces him to confront his own demons -- an abusive father and atrocities he witnessed as a soldier -- as he suffocates himself with plastic bags to shut out the memories of his childhood and the Iraq war.

The iconoclastic Ramsay, who grew up in Glasgow, rushed a rough version of her magnum opus into competition -- it didn't even have end credits at that point -- at last year's Cannes film festival.

- **'Childhood terror'** -

The movie earned a seven-minute standing ovation, a best actor prize for three-time Oscar nominee Phoenix and best screenplay for Ramsay, who made her name with the much-admired "Ratcatcher"



Joaquin Phoenix (L) attended the New York screening of Amazon Studios' "You Were Never Really Here" along with actress Rooney Mara (C). PHOTO: AFP

(1999) and "Morvern Callar" (2002)

Britain's Daily Telegraph noted approvingly that the noir thriller was the "best kind of feel-bad movie" at Cannes, handing Ramsay a five-star review for her "bleak psychological artistry."

"The immensity of Ramsay's film lies in the scalpel surgery of her image-making, distilling and

triple-distilling the stuff she shot to make every second count," said Tim Robey of Britain's Daily Telegraph, giving it a maximum five stars.

"Ramsay has made something extraordinary," said Jessica Kiang of entertainment website The Playlist, "a film that's both cruel and compassionate, composed of quick, stabbing slivers of insight about how child-

hood terror can be twisted up with adult compulsion."

Radiohead guitarist Jonny Greenwood, a recent Oscar nominee for "Phantom Thread" and the composer on Ramsay's last film, delivers a mournful yet pulsating score that some critics have said is among his best.

Ramsay, who studied photography in Edinburgh before going to Britain's National Film and Television School, describes the 29-day summer shoot in New York as "the most exciting creative experience I think I've ever had." "It's quite a short novella. It was a real page-turner; it had a feeling of one of those movies from the 1940s or 50s," the 48-year-old said in an interview at the Athens International Film Festival in September.

"There's something about it, but really it was the character I loved -- the hitman that lives with his mother, the post-traumatic stress. He's been through this cycle of violence and every day he thinks about suicide."—AFP ■

Girls allowed: Monaco wants grid girls back at 2018 F1 race

PARIS — The boss of the Monaco Grand Prix is planning to reverse Formula One's recent modernisation of some traditions by retaining 'grid girls' at the glamorous Mediterranean race weekend in May.

The sport announced it was replacing 'grid girls' with 'grid kids' before the start of the 2018 season in a move that was well received despite misgivings from older traditionalists.

The new 'grid kids' who accompanied the F1 drivers on the grid were karting and junior racing drivers at last month's season-opening Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne.

But the chief organizer of this year's Monaco race to take place on 27 May has insisted on retaining the grid girls.

President of the Automobile Club de Monaco Michel Boeri told Monaco Matin newspaper that he had a good relationship with F1's new American owners Liberty Media.

"They understand that Monaco is not Spa, or Monza," he said. "We've had no problems with Liberty Media. Except for the grid girls issue."

"They'll be there on the grid, but they won't be holding any name-boards. They're pretty – and the cameras will be on them



Girl power: Grid girls at the Monaco Grand Prix in 2015. PHOTO: AFP

once again." Russian news agency Interfax has reported that the Russian Grand Prix at Sochi in September may also feature the

use of grid girls.

It reported that deputy prime minister Dmitry Kozak supported the tradition, adding

that it will continue 'if we can reach an agreement....Moreover, our girls are the most beautiful.' —AFP ■

Prince Charles backs 'blue economy' to save Barrier Reef

SYDNEY — Prince Charles has called for a "blue economy" to promote the sustainable use of ocean resources and save Australia's Great Barrier Reef, as he visits the World Heritage-listed ecosystem Friday.

The 2,300-kilometre (1,429-mile) long biodiverse site off the Queensland state coast is reeling from significant coral bleaching due to warming sea temperatures linked to climate change.

The world's largest living structure is also under pressure from farming runoff, development and predatory crown-of-thorns starfish, with experts warning it could be suffering irreparable damage.

Britain's heir to the throne, who is passionate about the environment and promoting sustainability, said society was "truly at a crossroads" in its ability to protect the world's reefs.

"This will need to be a central aspect of the rapidly emerging concept of a sustainable 'blue economy', through which sustainable economic development is achieved via the wise use of ocean resources," he told the Australian Financial

Review in a rare interview.

"Within the blue economy it would be helpful to think of coral reef ecosystems as natural capital assets, assets that require the kind of prudent and wise management that will yield dividends long into the future."

The prince said investment in projects promoting coral reef health and their resilience against global and ocean warming were needed.

But he admitted it was "no simple matter" and would require widespread support including from the private sector.

Prince Charles is visiting Lady Elliot Island, a coral cay at the southern tip of the Barrier Reef, for a roundtable discussion with business leaders on the role they can play in conservation. His visit has prompted Aus\$10 million (US\$7.7 million) in donations for conservation efforts, with Australian property giant Lendlease donating Aus\$5 million and Canberra matching the amount.

Other companies involved in the roundtable include mining giant BHP, airline Qantas, aerospace titan Boeing and the Walt Disney Company.—AFP ■

Chinese double amputee to climb Everest after ban revoked

BHAKTAPUR — A Chinese climber who lost both legs to frostbite on Everest four decades ago is hoping to finally reach the summit after Nepal's top court overruled a controversial government ban on blind and double amputee climbers.

Xia Boyu is the first double amputee to be given a permit to climb the world's highest mountain after the ban was revoked.

The 69-year-old said the measure, introduced in December to much criticism, was "discriminating against the disabled".

"I panicked after I heard the news because it meant I couldn't fulfil my dream. I thought, 'How can I now get a climbing permit?'" Xia told AFP.

But last month, disability advocacy groups successfully overturned the ban in Nepal's highest court, arguing it contravened the UN convention on the rights of people with disabilities.

Xia's bid to summit the 8,848-metre (29,029-foot) mountain will be his fifth.

He was part of a Chinese national team in 1975 when the group encountered bad weather just below the summit.

Oxygen-starved and exposed to frigid temperatures, Xia suffered severe frostbite and lost both his feet.

In 1996, his legs were amputated just below the knee after he was diagnosed with lymphoma, a form of blood cancer.

The tenacious climber returned to Everest in 2014 but an avalanche killed 16 sherpa guides early in the season, forcing most expeditions to call off their summit bids.

Xia was back the following year, but the climbing season was again cut short when a powerful earthquake struck Nepal, killing around 9,000 people -- including 22 on Everest.

His last attempt was in 2016 when bad weather again forced him to turn back just 200 metres from the summit.

'Challenge fate'

"Climbing Mount Everest is my dream. I have to realise it. It also represents a personal challenge, a challenge of fate," Xia said.

Xia's guide, Dawa Gyalje Sherpa -- who has summited Everest eight times -- is hopeful the plucky Chinese climber will finally make it to the top this time.

"He has been training and has climbed above 8,000 metres before," Sherpa said.

"I am hopeful he will fulfil his dream." The legal wrangling over disabled climbers did scupper



"Climbing Mount Everest is my dream", says Xia, who first attempted the summit in 1975. PHOTO: AFP

ex-soldier Hari Budha Magar's bid to become the first above-the-knee double amputee to scale Everest. Magar -- a 38-year-old former Gurkha soldier who lost both his legs in Afghanistan -- postponed his attempt and said he will return in 2019.

The only double amputee to summit Everest is New Zealander Mark Inglis, who achieved the feat in 2006. Hundreds of climbers flock to Everest every year during the brief spring climbing season starting April, when winds and temperatures are more forgiving than other times of the year.—AFP ■

Myanmar kid to play in Moscow global football event

Kyaw Zin Lin

MIN Khant Thu, a 12-year-old footballer from Myanmar, will debut play in the 2018 Football for Friendship event in Moscow, which will unite 12 year olds from across the world.

This is the sixth season of the event hosted by the Gazprom Company, an official partner of FIFA and World Cup Russia 2018.

The Football for Friendship (F4F) Open Draw was held in Moscow recently.

As per the Open Draw, the young ambassador from Myanmar will play as a "defender" in the International Team of Friendship.



Myanmar youth Min Khant Thu.

Thirty-two International Teams of Friendship were formed during the Open Draw, as well as the positions for each

young player from each country (either goalkeeper, defender, midfielder or forward) were determined.

These 32 teams will compete at the Football for Friendship World Championship on 12 June.

Myanmar's Min Khant Thu will participate as a defender in the Gharial Group, which is comprised of a goalkeeper from Moldova, defenders from Samoa and Myanmar, midfielders from Pakistan and Spain and forwards from Peru.

The teams are organised using the "Football for Friendship" principle - athletes of different nationalities, different genders

and different physical abilities playing on one team.

The goal of the programme is to involve young people from throughout the world in promoting the most important human values among their peers - friendship, equality, peace and respect for different cultures and nationalities. 211 countries and regions joined the Football for Friendship in 2018. The final events of the season will be held in Moscow from 8-15 June.

Each international mixed team will be trained by young coaches and football players between the ages of 14 and 16 from different countries. ■



U Tin Myint Aung.

U Tin Myint Aung assigned as a AFC Instructor, representative of Myanmar

U Tin MyintAung, a technical director and Joint General Secretary of the Myanmar Football Federation, will be assigned as a ASEAN Football Confederation (AFC) Instructor, according to MFF.

He will give lessons and training courses in AFC (C) courses that will be conducted by the AFC. U Tin MyintAung managed the Myanmar national football team from October 2010 to February 2011. The MFF appointed him as a technical director in 2012. His playing career was established as a member of the Yangon University Football Team from 1984 to 1994. In 1987, he was a key player for the Finance & Revenue Football Team, perhaps the most successful football club in Myanmar football history.

He moved to the Armed Forces Football Club (Malaysia) for a two-years contract along with MyoHlaingWin and Than Toe Aung in 1989, and he returned to Myanmar in 1991.

His football playing career ended in 2000.—Kyaw Zin Lin ■



Children under 13 year of age from different countries participate in the Football Federation's activity (F4F) annually. **PHOTO: FOOTBALL FOR FRIENDSHIP**

AC Milan reward 'hard-working' Gattuso with new, improved deal

ROME — AC Milan have rewarded coach Gennaro Gattuso for an upturn in the club's fortunes with a contract that will see him remain at the helm until 2021.

"Gennaro Gattuso and AC Milan: the alliance continues! The Rossoneri coach has renewed his contract and will continue to lead the team until 2021," said a statement on the club's official website Thursday.

The appointment of Gattuso on a seven-month contract was met with general surprise when

he succeeded the experienced Vincenzo Montella last November — due mainly to the fact he had failed to impress in previous coaching roles with lower league sides.

But the 40-year-old Gattuso, who earned a reputation as a tenacious midfielder in 468 appearances for the San Siro giants, has stubbornly kept Milan challenging for a place in Europe this season as the seven-times European champions, taken over by a Chinese consortium last year,

look to return to the heights of European football.

Thanks to a run of 10 games without defeat —only ended in a 3-1 loss at Juventus last week — Milan sit sixth in Serie A, 27 points behind leaders Juventus and eight behind city rivals Inter in the fourth Champions League qualifying spot.

Without a league title since 2011, Milan's aim this season is to reach the Champions League and the Italian Cup final.

The statement added: "The

management decided to anticipate Gattuso's contract renewal to reward his hard work the best way before the end of the season, even if there are still plenty of goals to achieve: from qualifying to the Champions League, to the Italian Cup final.

"This important gesture reflects the total harmony and empathy between the club management and the coach.

This way, AC Milan give continuity and confidence to the project, assuring the serenity of

the Rossoneri players and the happiness of our fans.

"The Red and Blacks are (and remain) in Rino's hands!"

Gattuso said: "I have to thank the players who have really committed themselves to me and my staff.

"We hope to continue as we did in these past four months. Forza Milan, and I do hope to get things right to bring back AC Milan where they are used to be. Thank you very much." —AFP ■