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A woman shields herself against the rain in Yangon yesterday as the depression is crossing northeast of the Bay of Bengal into Bangladesh. **PHOTO: PHOE KHWAR**

Weather bureau warns depression may cause possible landslides, flash floods

ACCORDING to the observations at (18:30)hrs M.S.T yesterday, the low pressure area over Bangladesh coast is crossing the Northeast Bay of Bengal and adjoining Bangladesh coast near Chittagong. It is forecast to further intensify into a depression during next 24 hours.

Meteorology and Hydrology Department forecasts on

Sunday that regionally heavy falls are expected over lower Myanmar, warning the people, especially living in hilly areas and near rivers to be alert to possible landslides and flash floods.

MHD has warned people yesterday to be alert to possible landslides and flashflood these days as heavy rain fall, strong wind and flash floods

are expected over the country due to the depression.

Monsoon is vigorous over the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal. Rain or thundershowers will be widespread in the whole country with regionally heavy falls in Sagaing, Magway, Bago and Ayeyawady regions, Chin and Rakhine states and isolated heavy falls in Nay Pyi Taw, Mandalay, Yangon and

Taninthayi regions, Kachin, Kayin and Mon states. Degree of certainty is (100%).

Occasional squalls with rough seas will be experienced off and along Myanmar Coasts. Surface wind speed in squalls may reach (40) m.p.h. Wave height will be about (10 - 15) feet in off and along Myanmar Coasts. —GNLM ■

Union Ministers U Thaung Tun, Dr. Win Myat Aye attend meeting on Rakhine issue

U Thaung Tun, Union Minister for the Office of the Union Government and National Security Advisor and Dr. Win Myat Aye, Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement attended the high-level roundtable on the Rakhine Advisory Commission Lessons Learned Report held in Copenhagen, Denmark on 8 June 2018 jointly organized by Kofi Annan Foundation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

The meeting was also attended by Dr. Kofi Annan, Former Secretary-General of the United Nations and Ms. Ulla Tornaes, Minister for Development Co-operation of Denmark. Union Ministers U Thaung Tun and Dr. Win Myat Aye updated the meeting on the latest development in Rakhine State.—Myanmar News Agency ■

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Rakhine Chief Minister meets local residents in Gwa Township

Rakhine State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu and state ministers attended the award giving ceremony for students who exceptionally passed the matriculation exams for 2018 held in Basic Education High School in Gwa Township yesterday.

The Chief Minister and State Minister Dr. Chan Tar delivered opening speeches separately followed by State Educational Director U Aung Thant Myint explaining about the awarding process.

Next, the Chief Minister, state ministers and officials conferred the Chief Minister's additional cash certificate and congratulatory certificate to one student with six distinctions, one student with four distinctions, and seven students with three distinctions. They then conferred the State Government and Chief Minister's additional cash certificates and congratulatory certificates to twenty-four students with

two distinctions, and ninety-six students with one distinction in the matriculation exams. They also conferred awards for first in township ranking, the school and teachers for educating a six distinction student.

Next, the Chief Minister and entourage travelled to Settwar Village and met with local residents from all the villages in Gwa Township there.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister said they are working to upgrade the basic infrastructure built in the last two years and called for public cooperation in developing the region while keeping free of bribery and corruption. He asked the local residents to give honest opinions and advice in developing the region.

The local residents from Setthua, Kwaychaing, Sarchet, Madawkyaw, Taingkyo, Zeegone, Kinpon, Laungkyo, and Shweoogwin villages took turns discussing

their needs to which the Chief Minister and officials responded.

The Chief Minister then donated money to the Kwaychaing funeral services to purchase a motor vehicle.

The Chief Minister then arrived at the meeting hall of Kyeintali Town's General Administration Department to meet with its local residents.

During the meeting the Chief Minister said the union government is giving priority to Rakhine State for its development and for its small and medium enterprises. This was followed by Kyeintali Administrator U Tun Aye Khine explaining the progress report of 2018 projects and future projects. The Chief Minister and officials then listened to the local residents' needs and gave advice and explanations. The Chief Minister then donated money to purchase a photocopier for Kyeinthali Basic Education High School. —Myanmar News Agency ■



Rakhine State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu present an award to an outstanding student in Gwa Township, Rakhine State. **PHOTO: MNA**

Booths must improve country's image: Union Minister U Ohn Maung



Union Minister U Ohn Maung addresses the participants at a photo contest in City Mall (St John) in Yangon on 9 June. **PHOTO: MNA**

Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism U Ohn Maung attended a photo contest titled Amyin Thit Photo Contest held by the Myanmar Hotelier Association at City Mall (St John) in Yangon on 9 June.

The Union Minister delivered a speech and received a cash donation from the Myanmar Hotelier Association (Yangon Zone).

Later, the Union Minister attended a coordination meeting at Inya Lake Hotel for the participation of Myanmar's booths

in the JATA Tourism Expo 2018 and delivered a speech.

In his speech, he focused on Myanmar's participation in the JATA Tourism Expo annually and the presentation of Myanmar's existing and emerging destinations; the welcoming of Japanese businessmen, travel writers and bloggers to distribute true information about Myanmar's destinations at the JATA Tourism Expo 2018 and the preparation of Myanmar's booths to improve the country's image.

A general round of discussions followed, and the ministry gave its advice.

Later in the evening, the Union Minister attended and extended greetings at a dinner hosted by World Chefs Without Borders and the Myanmar Chef Association at Pullman Yangon Centrepoint Hotel.

The dinner was hosted by 60 chefs from 24 countries to raise funds for Culinary Education and Community Aid in Myanmar. —Myanmar News Agency ■

NFME programme students achieve success in 2017-2018 academic year

According to Myanmar Scout Association, Under the programme of Non-Formal Middle Education (NFME) of Myanmar Literacy Resource Centre (MLRC) started some 10 years ago, students who overcame hardships have passed with distinctions in the matriculation exam of the 2017-2018 academic year.

One student passed with two distinctions, four students passed with one distinction and nine students passed with no distinction.

The programme was implemented with the help of the Ministry of Education and UNICEF, as well as international donors, starting from 2008-2009 academic year in five townships, and the programme was ongoing with the help of the Ministry of Education and educational departments under the ministry, with the cooperation of UNICEF and donors, in 2010-2011 academic year.

By doing so, school children who were unable to continue their studies got opportunities to do so.

The programme has now

extended to 136 townships through the aid of donors and international organisations, including UNICEF, UNESCO and World Education, in the 2017-2018 academic year.

Of the 7,500 students who pursued education under the programme until the 2017-2018 academic year, some 14 passed the matriculation exam, with Maung Ngwe Yan Soe from Pauk Township Magway Region passing with four distinctions. —GNLM ■



Maung Ngwe Yan Soe.

New buildings for Nationalities Youth Resource Development Degree College opened in Yangon



Cabinet members of Yangon Region and high-level official formally open the Nationalities Youth Resource Development Degree College (Yangon). **PHOTO: MNA**

A three-storey hostel, a two-storey building dining and a two-story library built with the funds allocated for the 2017-2018 financial year for Nationalities Youth Resource Development Degree College (Yangon), Department of Education and Training (DET), Ministry of Border Affairs, were opened at the degree college in Yangon yesterday.

The opening ceremony was attended by Union Minister for Border Affairs Lt Gen Ye Aung, ministers from the Yangon region government, director-general of DET, as well as the principal, professor, faculties

and students from the degree college.

At the ceremony, the Yangon region minister for security and border affairs and the Yangon region minister for Rakhine ethnic affairs and the director-general of DET, principal of the college, and the official in charge of the construction of the buildings cut the ceremonial ribbon.

The construction company handed over to Principal Dr Min Thant the documents related to the buildings. The union minister, guests and ethnic students then took documentary photos. The union minister and his delegation visited the new college

buildings.

The union minister and his delegation met the faculty members and students at the convocation hall and gave cash assistance to the students. Some 1,049 ethnic students from border areas across the nation are attending the degree college. In the afternoon, the union minister and his delegation arrived at the Central Training School and met the principal, lecturers and trainees. The union minister attended to the needs of the principal and lecturers and looked into the construction site at the Central Training School. —Myanmar News Agency ■

President U Win Myint to visit Thailand in near future

AT the invitation of His Excellency General Prayut Chan-ocha (Ret), Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand, U Win Myint, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, and wife Daw Cho Cho will pay an official visit to the Kingdom of Thailand in the near future. In conjunction with the official visit, the President will also attend the 8th Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) Summit and 9th Cambodia-Laos-Myanmar-Viet Nam (CLMV) Summit to be held in Bangkok. —Myanmar News Agency ■

Concrete road, school building put into service in Tada-U

A new concrete road section in a village in Tada-U Township, Mandalay Region was commissioned into service. The ceremony was held in Ngaryar Pyar Village yesterday in conjunction with opening of a new school building. At the ceremony, regional lawmaker U Wunna Aung and township administrator U Hla Win Aung gave speeches.

Then the deputy township education officer and chairman of committee for construction of the concrete road explained arrangements made to build the school facility and concrete road and the village administrator spoke words of thanks. The

new concrete road and school building were formally opened by the regional MP, township administrator, school headmistress and village administrator by cutting a ribbon.

The 2500 ft long, 13 ft wide and 6 inches thick concrete road was constructed at a cost of Ks. 31 million funded by the regional government and donated by local people.

The 60 ft long, 24 ft wide and 12 ft high one-storey school facility was built of bricks using Ks. 1.3 million of which Ks. 5 million was financed by the parliament and Ks. 8 million was contributed by local people. —Ye Tint (IPRD) ■

Myanmar has adopted gender equality as its goal

Myanmar has adopted policies for the successful realisation of the provisions of the UN's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women it has already ratified, said Union Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population U Thein Swe at the plenary meeting of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conference in Geneva, Switzerland, on 4 June.

The country will write its laws from the gender angle, he added. The union minister expressed pleasure at the century-long ILO's efforts to ensure full rights for workers all over the world, and the UN's endeavours for the success of the Sustainable Development Goals. He said the country has adopted gender equality as its goal and accelerated its activities, as the report "The Women at Work Initiative: the Push for Equality," presented by the ILO director-general, is in accordance with the current sit-



Union Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population U Thein Swe delivers address at a meeting in Geneva, Switzerland. **PHOTO: MNA**

uation, and it also highlights the future programmes. The country will write its laws from the gender angle.

He said the country is conducting labour reforms with the technical help of dialogue partners, including the ILO. After holding the national-level tripartite meeting attended by the representatives of the government, employers and employees, the

country laid down an appropriate employment programme and five action plans in the labour sector. It will also overcome the challenges and difficulties.

The union minister also took part in the informal meeting of the ASEAN labour ministers on 5 June.

At the head office of the ILO on the same day, the permanent representative of Myanmar and

representatives of employers and employees explained Myanmar's accomplishments on the observance of the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No.87), during the meeting of the Committee on the Application of Standards.

At his meeting with Executive Director Dr Frank Hoffner of the Action Collaboration Transformation (ACT), the union minister discussed cooperation with international brands for the progress of the garment industry, improvement of worker qualifications and productivity and future negotiations among the employers, employees and the government after the ACT's visit to Myanmar. Later, he met with a delegation led by Mr. Boris Zurcher, State Secretary and Chief of the Labour Division of Switzerland, and held talks on the four-year extension of the Myanmar-Switzerland cooperation pro-

gramme, designation of priority areas, employment opportunities, collection of labour data, worksite safety, health assistance, and the visit of a Swiss tripartite for a closer cooperation with Myanmar in the labour affairs and market.

At his meeting with Associate Deputy Undersecretary Mr. Mark Mittelhauser and delegation, talks centred around the development of the labour sector in Myanmar after the country hosted the 3rd Stakeholder Forum, and amendment of the labour laws, in accordance with the resolutions of the tripartite meeting and international standards.

A Myanmar delegation led by the union minister arrived back home on 9 June. He was accompanied by high-level officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, representatives of employers and employees, and their advisers. —Myanmar News Agency ■

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60,000 acres of monsoon paddy to be grown in Thanlyin Township

THE Thanlyin Township Agriculture Department has targeted to cultivate 60,000 acres of monsoon paddy crops in Thanlyin, a major port city of Myanmar, situated across Bago River from the city of Yangon, in the 2018-2019 financial year.

A spokesperson of the agriculture department said that it will achieve its goal to cultivate the targeted 59,701 acres of marketable species of quality paddy in 52 villages in 28 village-tracts in the township this monsoon.

As a marketable export item, the country is making continuous efforts to boost the productivity of rice on a national scale. Rice is considered the country's most important crop. The country earns foreign currency from the annual overseas export of rice.

Myanmar exports rice to more than 60 countries, with the majority of the crop going to China, Bangladesh, Afri-

Farmers work in monsoon paddy field in Thanlyin. **PHOTO: THET KHAING (THANLYIN)**

can states, Sri Lanka, Senegal, Afghanistan and Poland. Also, Indonesia, Japan and Singapore, as well as some European countries, import rice from Myanmar.

Africa is a particularly important market, accounting for 60 per cent of the rice exports.

The country sends tonnes of rice to overseas traders mainly

via sea. It largely sends rice to China, as a major rice importer, through both border and non-border trade.—Thet Khaing (Thanlyin) ■

Garment exports value increases by \$230 million in past two months

THE value of garment exports from factories working on the cut, make and pack (CMP) basis was US\$482 million in the past two weeks during the six-month interim period for the 2018-2019 fiscal year, up by more than \$230 million compared to the 2017-2018 FY, according to the commerce ministry.

The garment sector is one of the prioritised sectors to drive

exports up. Garments are primarily exported to Japan and the European markets. Additionally, they are also exported to South Korea, China and the United States.

Myanmar's garment industry is running on the CMP basis, and those engaged in this industry are striving to shift the CMP into the free on board (FOB) system. However, it is not easy

owing to the lack of infrastructure, and weak transparency in the banking system and capital injection, said market observers.

In the export sector, natural gas and agricultural products individually made up 25 per cent, while CMP garments accounted for 16 per cent, minerals for eight per cent, fisheries for five per cent and forest,

animal and other products for 21 per cent.

There are over 400 garment factories in Myanmar, with a labour force of over 300,000 workers. Myanmar's cheap labour attracts foreign manufacturers to invest in the country, which sometimes leads to a conflict over wages between the workers and the employers. —Ko Khant ■

Bilateral trade with Philippines hits \$52 million in 2017-18 FY

THE Myanmar-Philippines overseas trade totalled US\$52.432 million at the end of the 2017-18 fiscal year, registering a decrease in value by over \$4 million as against the same period last year, according to the monthly data report of the Ministry of Commerce.

The total bilateral trade value between the two ASEAN

member states included \$19.919 million in exports and \$32.512 million in imports. The 2017-2018 FY saw a significant decrease in the value of Myanmar's exports to the Philippines, with exports declining by more than \$21 million. However, Myanmar's imports increased by over \$17 million during the period.

According to the commerce

ministry, the bilateral trade between Myanmar and the Philippines was valued at \$56.483 million in the 2016-17 FY, \$28.998 million in the 2015-16 FY, \$28.2 billion in the 2014-15 FY, \$33.353 million in the 2013-14 FY, \$44.012 million in the 2012-13 FY and \$48.959 million in the 2011-12 FY.

Myanmar predominantly imports capital goods, consum-

er products and intermediate goods from ASEAN member countries, Southeast Asian nations and African states, European countries and some Western nations. Its exports include agriculture products, animal products, marine products, minerals, forest products and manufactured goods.—Shwe Khine ■



Trucks are seen near the 105-Mile Muse Border Trade Zone in northern Shan State. **PHOTO: PHOE KHWAR**

Sino-Myanmar border trade exceeds \$994 million over two months

THE border trade between China and Myanmar between 1 April and 1 June during the six-month interim period for the 2018-2019 financial year (FY) was valued at US\$994 million, up by \$94 million compared to that of the same period in the 2017-2018 FY, according to the commerce ministry.

The Sino-Myanmar trade in the same period last FY was valued at \$900 million. Myanmar trades with China through the Muse, Lweje, Chinshwehaw, Kanpikete and Keng Tung gates.

Muse is the major border trade gate in Myanmar conduct-

ing the largest trade volume. The Muse gate saw an increase of nearly \$110 million over the past two months against that of last FY.

The Sino-Myanmar border trade was worth \$835 million at Muse, \$41 million at Lweje, \$55 million at Chinshwehaw, \$62.5 million at Kanpikete and \$0.42 million at Keng Tung.

Myanmar's rice, sugar, pulses, sesame seeds, corn, dried tea leaves, fishery products, minerals and animal products are exported to China, while capital goods, intermediate goods and consumer goods flowed into the country.

In a bid to promote bilateral trade, Myanmar's Trade Department, operating under the commerce ministry, the Yunnan Provincial government and the Kunming People's government are preparing to sign a memorandum of understanding soon, according to the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

This agreement will cover the export of rice, sugar, corn and other agro products to China. In turn, agriculture machinery, electrical appliances, iron and steel-related materials of the same value will be imported.

— Mon Mon ■

Inflow of China-made vehicles likely to bring down prices in Mandalay automobile market

THE permit for the import of China-made vehicles through the Muse 105th Mile zone may scale down vehicle prices in the local automobile market, said U Kyaw Kyaw, a car dealer from Mandalay.

Earlier, pick-ups, machinery that cannot be driven on public roads such as excava-

tors and bulldozers and express cars were allowed for import. According to a new policy of the commerce ministry, saloon cars of 2015 model and later ones will be allowed to be imported. The import of China-made domestic and used vehicles needs a document that states the country

of origin and an export certificate issued by China's custom, according to the notice of Myanmar's commerce ministry.

The car import permit required at the Muse gate has reduced Japanese car prices in the Mandalay automobile market. —Thiha Ko Ko (Mandalay) ■

Forest product exports by private sector decrease in current FY

THE country's export of forest products by private exporters in the current six-month interim fiscal year (FY) dropped to US\$26.4 million from \$41.5 million compared to the same period last FY, according to the commerce ministry.

Between 1 April and 1 June this year, the country exported marketable forest products, including bamboo and other non-wood products, which had a value of \$30.62 million, including \$4.23 million from the public sector. The total export value of forest products decreased to \$12.5 million.

Despite a decrease in the exports of the same products by the private sector, the public sector saw a slight increase by

\$2.6 million against the same period last year.

Over the first 62 days of this FY, the overall exports between Myanmar and international traders topped \$2.4 billion, including \$1.9 billion from the private sector and \$519.6 million from the public sector.

The ministry's latest statistics showed that the country exported \$513.7 million worth of agricultural products, \$43.1 million worth of animal products, \$115.5 million worth of marine products, \$209.9 million worth of minerals, \$1.2 billion worth of manufactured goods and miscellaneous products, with an estimated value of \$277.4 million over the two-month period of this FY.—Khine Khant ■

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Private telecom Mytel Myanmar holds Empower My Myanmar Ceremony

THE Empower My Myanmar Ceremony of Telecom International Myanmar Company Limited (Mytel) which is the fourth operator of Myanmar being jointly conducted by Myanmar and Viet Nam took place at Pullman Yangon, Centerpoint Hotel in Yangon on 9 June, attended by Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.

The government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has initiated reforms in the country's telecoms sector in a transparent manner, giving nationwide operator licences in accordance with telecommunication law to two foreign telecom operators Ooredoo Myanmar Co Ltd and Telenor Myanmar Co Ltd in 2014, and local operator MPT and KDDI Summit Global Myanmar Co Ltd in 2015. Telecom International Myanmar Co Ltd (Mytel) is the only public company among these four telecom operators.

The Deputy Minister of Information and Communications of Viet Nam Mr. Nguyen Minh Hong spoke words of honour while the chairman of the Executive Committee of Telecom International Myanmar Co. Ltd (Mytel) U Khin Maung Soe



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, fourth from right, poses for a documentary photo at Mytel's ceremony held at Centerpoint Hotel in Yangon on 9 June. **PHOTO: MNA**

spoke words of thanks.

Next, the Senior General, the Vietnamese deputy minister Senior Lieutenant General Tran Don and officials pressed the button to unveil the Mytel brand and viewed education, agricultural and health services and other services provided by Mytel in the technological booths.

Telecom International Myanmar Company Limited (Mytel) was established under cooperation between Myanmar and Viet Nam. Mytel provides 2G and 4G systems. Nationwide, 30,000 kilometers of fiber cables have been installed so about 50 per cent of the whole fiber optic infrastructure across Myanmar can be provided. The network

can cover over 300 towns or 80 per cent of the total population.

As VoLTE technology is used, users can use data and voice simultaneously with better quality. A Mytel SIM user will get free 1,500 MB data and 150 minute voice call that can be used in three months. When a voice call is made with the use of charging block 1s+1s, the user will be charged depending on duration. For Myanmar's socio-economic development, a wide variety of services such as modern agriculture, education and health are provided. Now, Mytel 4G SIM cards and top-up cards are available at 50 Mytel brand shops and 50,000 other shops across the country. —Myanmar News Agency ■



Built with western style architecture, the Yaw Min Gyi monastery hosts an array of interesting artefacts including stone figures of a winged man, decorated pillars and L-shaped stairs. **PHOTO: NWAY NADINGE**

Western style monastery

THE Laybyinyat ward in Mandalay hosts a large number of ancient temples built by the kings, queens and court ministers of the Yadanabon and Amarapura periods for Buddhist monks. Some monasteries were built entirely with teak while others serve as museums where sculptures and sophisticated floral patterns, decorations and architectural designs of the Yadanabon period can be seen intact.

Of these, two are unique as they are integrated with the western style architecture. Such kind of ancient edifice is rare in Mandalay, a city famous for its Myanmar traditional culture. They are Thakawun monastery or Kin Wun Mingyi monastery, and Yaw Min Gyi monastery. Both Kin Wun Mingyi and Yaw Min Gyi were famous royal officials of their time. As soon as you see the Yaw Min Gyi monastery, you will notice its western style architecture including stone figures of a winged man, decorated pillars and L-shaped stairs.

The donor, U Po Hlaing, the administrator of Yaw, a town in central west Myanmar, hired masonries from India and added western style architecture to the design.

Built in 1866, with columns made of Ingyin wood,

the monastery was decorated with glassware produced by a factory in Mandalay and bright gems.

The two-storey brick monastery was donated to the monk, famous as "Maha Bo Sayadaw." The monastery cost Ks100,000 to Ks10,000, funded from the royal coffers of King Min Don, and Ks90,000 given by the donor.

It is different from the typical Myanmar monasteries because of the inclusion of a meeting hall with open-air balconies and the western style stairways. Located in the west of Mandalay golf course and the north of a home for the aged at OoPokTaw Ward, Aungmyathazan Township, Mandalay, the monastery is popular with local and foreign tourists eager for a visit to a unique ancient building.

Yaw Min Gyi U Pho Hlaing was a Myanmar noble and civil servant of the king's court, best known for his treatise, Rajadhammasangaha which proposed sweeping reforms to transform the country's monarchy into a constitutional monarchy and an early advocate of indigenous democracy. U Pho Hlaing was an accomplished writer and wrote a number of important treatises throughout his lifetime, on politics, mathematics and Buddhist philosophy.—Nway Nadi Nge ■

RVi draws larges number of students this year

RVi Institute, a premier provider of education and consultancy services in the ASEAN region, hosted the 13th edition of its annual RVi Institute Study Overseas and Career Fair with events in Mandalay on 9 June in Hilton Mandalay Hotel and Yangon on 10 June in Myanmar Plaza. Approximately more than one thousand students attended the events, of whom many submitted applications to further their studies at renowned organisations, universities and institutes in Singapore, Australia, UK, US, Switzerland, Malaysia and China.

This year's RVi Institute Study Overseas and Career Fair events drew the largest amount of students to date, reflecting the growing interest for students to explore educational opportunities overseas.

The fair was targeted at high school graduates or those who recently received their Matriculation examination results, Higher National Diploma (HND) holders,



This year's RVi Institute Study Overseas and Career Fair events prove the growing interest of students to explore educational opportunities overseas. **PHOTO: SUPPLIED**

undergraduate degree holders who plan to do a Master's degree, and those interested in joining the Singapore education system. Attendance to the fair was free of charge.

Mr Argus Ang, CEO of The RVi Group, said, "It is so rewarding for us to organise the RVi Institute Study Overseas and Career Fair each year with back-to-back events in Mandalay and Yangon. Together with our partic-

ipating organisations, overseas universities and institutions, we have provided the platform for many students to explore higher education opportunities in Singapore and internationally. On behalf of RVi Institute and RVi Group, I wish to thank all our participants and partners who helped to make this year's RVi Institute Study Overseas and Career Fair the most successful edition to date."—GNLM ■

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A must-visit place in Mandalay

A 180-year-old wooden monastery with its Buddha statues in different positions and styles, including in the lotus position, is a must-visit place in Mandalay.

The Amarapura-era monastery, whose name roughly means “the unrivaled one,” was built with wood by a son of King Thawaddy as a donation to Buddhist monks.

“Normally, an ancient monastery has four large traditional chambers — KyaungOoPyathat hall, Sanu hall, Zetawun hall and Boga hall. But this one has only three, and instead of the Boga chamber, it has two additional chambers, each lying on either side of Zetawun hall,” said U Ravata, a monk who is in-charge of preserving the whole building.

Built with 146 teak columns, the 89-foot by 69-foot building has doors decorated with figures of celestial beings and floral de-



The 180-year-old wooden monastery has Buddha statues in different positions and styles.

PHOTO: MIN HTET AUNG (MANDALAY SUB-PRINTING HOUSE)

signs. Unlike other ancient monasteries, it has only one wooden stairway linked with a portico.

“In ancient times, whenever a donation ceremony was held at this monastery, a Buddha statue

was donated for it. Buddha images were donated to the monastery for specific purposes. We

are an old monastery, and it is a wooden one. So we have to be aware of the fire hazards aside from the maintenance work we have conducted throughout the successive eras.

Although the government department responsible for archaeological matters told us that we could ask for help when necessary, the department has not done any preservation work yet at our monastery,” said the monk.

In addition to ancient Buddha statues and thrones, the monastery also has teak boxes decorated with embossed figures, ancient palm leaf treatises, bronze bells, and inner decorations of the Amarapura era.

The ancient monastery now sits at Tagontaing ward, Pyigyitagon Township, Mandalay.—Min Htet Aung (Mandalay sub-printing house) ■

Residents want resumption of passenger airlines in Magway Region

RESIDENTS want the passenger airlines in Magway Region to be resumed for regional development, as the Magway airport has been suspended for 12 years.

The airport was used only for some three years.

The construction of the airport started in 2001, and it was put into service on 6 June 2003.

In the beginning, flights ran twice a week. After 2006, no

airplanes landed in the region.

U San Htway, chair of Magway Region Hoteliers Association, said: “Flights do not make a landing saying there are no passengers here.

I would like to urge the airlines to make landings twice a week. I will bear the loss. It is needed for the region, as the aged need to make medical trips and NGOs visit the region frequently.”

A jet with a seating capaci-

ty of more than 100 passengers can make a landing here. The airfield is built on an 818.82-acre land. Its runway is 8,500 feet in length and 200 feet in width.

U Min Aung, a manager from the Magway Airport, said the matter must be officially reported to the Ministry of Transport and Communications through the regional government to resume the aviation services.—Zeyatu (Magway) ■



Photo shows the domestic airport in Magway Township, the capital of Magway Region in central Myanmar.

PHOTO: ZEYATU (MAGWAY)

Fraudster who scammed 97 Myanmar labourers held

AFTER investigating a complaint about fraud recruitment, a team comprising human-trafficking police and members of the Myanmar Police Force arrested Min Tun Aung, identified as Myanmar-Thailand interpreter during a signing event between Thailand agency and Star Pioneer Company in Hlinethaya Township on 7 June 2018.

“Min Tun Aung was charged at our police station under section 26 of the Overseas Employment Agency Act,” said an officer from (North Dagon) police station. He scammed 97 Myanmar labourers promising to send them to their relatives' homes in Thailand. He worked as an interpreter when local Star Pioneer Company and

a Thailand recruitment agency signed a memorandum of understanding to send Myanmar's labourers to SMP enterprises at Pinlon Hall, Yangon, according to an announcement of Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation (MOEAF).

He charged them additional money of 6,000 baht. Myanmar's labourers made a series of complaints against Min Tun Aung to the Myanmar recruitment agency. Star Pioneer agency and Thailand agency discussed matters concerning this complaint and the fraudster was revealed.

Star Pioneer Company took the responsibility and filed a complaint against that scammer with the MOEAF.—Nyein Nyein ■

Police find yaba pills, related objects; two arrested

THE police raided two homes in Htigyaing Township, Katha District, Sagaing Region, and arrested two people early Sunday morning after they found yaba pills and related materials inside their homes, according to a report. The police found 1,186 yaba tablets and related equipment hidden in the bedroom of

Ma Nwet, 35, in Wegyi Village, Chountaung Village-tract. Further, the police recovered 51 yaba pills and related materials from the house of U Aung Win, 55, in the same village. The two suspects have been charged under the existing Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Law.—Win Naing (Kachinmye) ■

International recognition for Myanmar's efforts

THE Union Government, the ethnic people and all the citizens of Myanmar have continuously and steadfastly stood up to the challenge that is the Rakhine situation. However, due to the influence of certain entities, the honest efforts of the government and its people were not brought into the light. But now this is changing as their long hard efforts are penetrating onto the global stage.

The Union Government has decided to form an independent commission of enquiry for Rakhine State and has signed an MOU with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for receiving support in accepting the returnees. The MOU was signed between the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, and Population and UN agencies at the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre in Nay Pyi Taw on the same day.

The Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Taro Kono, welcomed the UN signing the MOU with Myanmar. He said, "The initiative is important for both advocating for human rights and promoting humanitarian aid. This is to support the returnees so that they may voluntarily choose to return to their homes with dignity and security." He added that signing the MOU is laying a brick for the foundation to solving the Rakhine situation and Japan will continue to provide aid in this endeavor.

Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's also remarked on the MOU signing. She is quoted to have said, "There is a complex historical, ethnic and religious background to Myanmar's Rakhine State issue, the settlement of which calls for dialogue and consultation between Bangladesh and Myanmar, coupled with constructive help from the international community," during a regular press conference. Her remark is recognition of the root causes of the Rakhine situation. The three-stage solution proposed by China, composed of cessation of violence and maintenance of stability, repatriation and sheltering, and poverty reduction and development is appreciated and welcomed by the government. The spokesperson also added that cooperation between neighbors Myanmar and Bangladesh is key, a nod to the union government's efforts.

The French Ministry's Spokesperson for EU and Foreign Affairs also said the three-step agreement is the first step in ensuring the returnees can voluntarily return to their homes with dignity and safety. The spokesperson also said France will continue their support of the civilian government led by State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in their path to a democratic transition.

I conclude by respectfully pointing out that the aforementioned remarks are proof of the international community's recognition of Myanmar's endeavors. ■

By Eisen Bernardo
(CCAFS Southeast Asia)

TO provide better solutions, various dimensions of El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) preparedness and response in agriculture of five East Asian countries were evaluated.

East Asia remains one of the most severely affected regions in the world by the adverse effects of ENSO. Specifically, the agriculture sector of the region is often the most vulnerable to ENSO's impacts. In 2015–2016, extreme weather events caused by El Niño damaged agricultural production, resulting in lost livelihoods and food insecurity of communities across the region. In Vietnam, nearly 450,000 hectares (ha) of crops have been damaged by drought conditions in the Central Highlands, South Central Coast and Mekong River Delta. In the Philippines, the El Niño event resulted in total agricultural area losses of 556,721 ha, worth USD 325 million.

Aside from agricultural losses, other major challenges brought by ENSO events include a shortage of fresh water, increase in climate-related diseases, and less food, especially affecting children and women. The effects extend from the agricultural sector to livelihoods, food security, and health of the larger population.

In response, the World Bank's Agriculture Global Practice is undertaking an Advisory Services and Analytics (ASA) program on agri-food resilience to ENSO in East Asia. The program aims to increase awareness among policymakers about ENSO and its impacts on agri-

food systems in five selected countries, namely, Cambodia, Myanmar, Lao PDR, Philippines and Vietnam. It also seeks to provide recommendations to these countries to enhance their preparedness for future ENSO events and other climate hazards. It will provide analysis of

past and likely future impacts of ENSO on agricultural production and access to food, high-light relevant good practices, and develop recommendations for improving the agricultural resilience of each country.

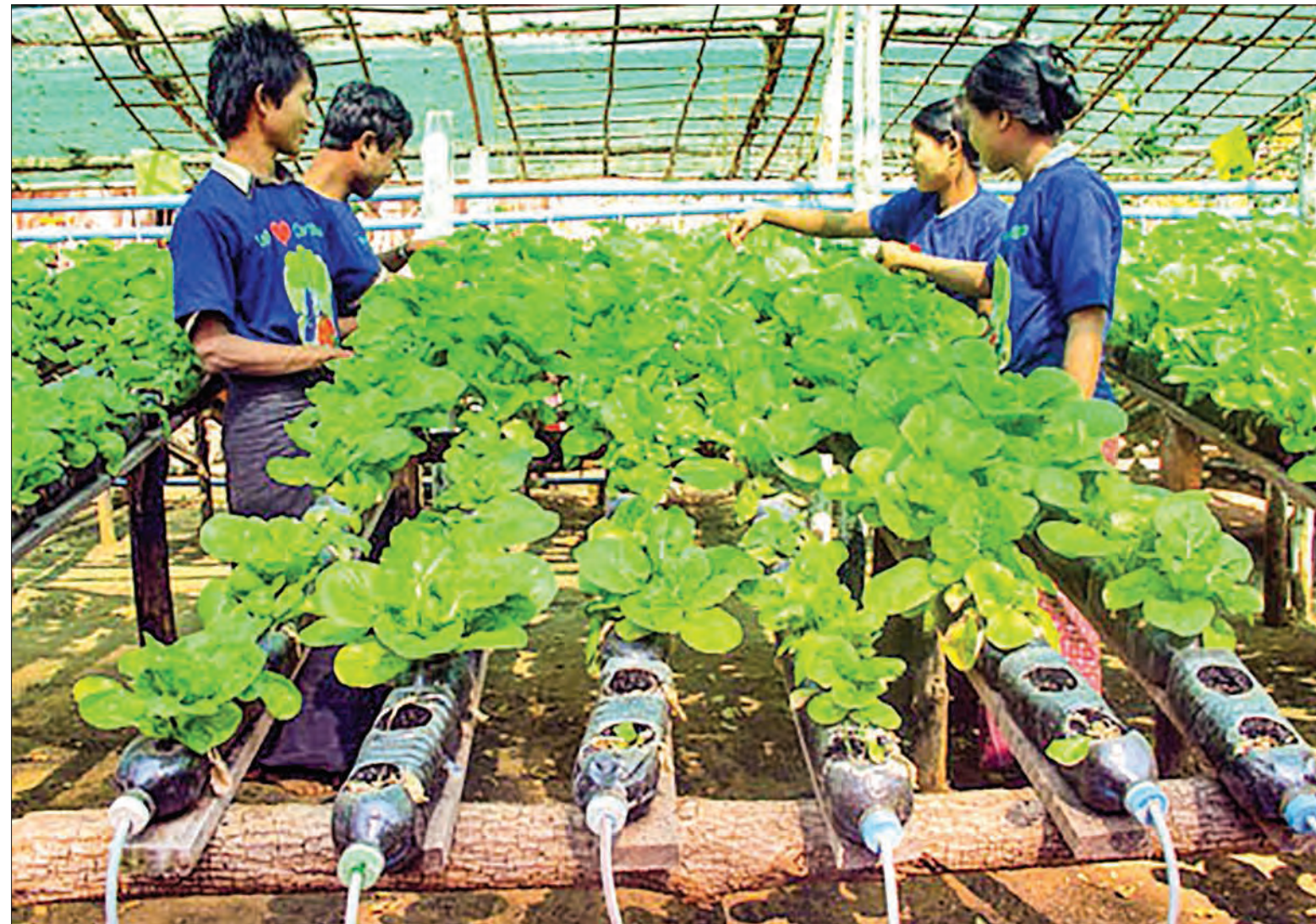
From September to October 2017, the World Bank worked with the CGIAR International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) to conduct bilateral meetings with government agencies and research partners, as well as consultation workshops, in the five countries. Government agencies, donor organizations, non-government organizations (NGOs), and private sector representatives shared their first-hand experiences of ENSO events, and the achievements and challenges in past ENSO responses, during meetings in the respective countries.

The panel discussions organized during the consultation workshops focused on: the evidence of the impacts of El Niño and La Niña on agricultural pro-

duction, domestic agri-food supply chains, international trade, and food prices and consumption; the institutional capacity, policy responses, and international support; and the current knowledge and response gaps, and how to improve agri-food resilience to future ENSO-related climate shocks.

Country notes were also presented to participants to:

- introduce the country's agricultural sector, including its role in the country's economy and how this is influenced by ENSO;
- examine and present new analysis on the impact of ENSO on weather, agricultural production, food security and poverty, and assesses effects on the broader economy;
- present the roles and responses of the government, private sec-



Volunteers learn new farming techniques at a gree house in Magway Region located in Myanmar's dry zone. PHOTO: OILSEEDCROPS.ORG



Building ENSO-resilient agriculture in East Asia

Innovation is Key to a Clean Energy Future in Asia — ADB Forum

MANILA, PHILIPPINES— Technology and innovation can play a significant role in Asia and the Pacific's push towards a low-carbon energy future, with the potential to provide countries in the region with universal access to cleaner and more affordable energy sources, according to participants of an international forum held at Asian Development Bank (ADB) headquarters.

Co-hosted by ADB, the United States Agency for International Development, the Korea Energy Agency, and the ADB Institute, the Asia Clean Energy Forum (ACEF) 2018 is being held from 4–8 June under the theme "Harnessing Innovation to Power the Future." It brings together over 1,000 participants from more than 50 countries, including entrepreneurs, policymakers, financial institutions, NGOs, and academia. ACEF began in 2006 as an annual event to provide a platform for collaboration in promoting clean energy in Asia and the Pacific.

Some of the topics being discussed during the week-long event include future energy innovations such as energy in buildings, renewable energy in urban settings, decentralized power grids, health and environmental benefits of energy efficiency, clean cooking, new business models, and digital transformation and innovations.

Among the notable speakers are International Energy Agency Chief Economist Mr. Laszlo Varro, Co-founder of the Grameen Bank and Founder and Chairman of the Bright Green Energy Foundation Mr. Dipal Chandra Barua, and Founder and Director of Costa Rica Limpia Ms. Monica Araya.

"New technologies such as smart grids, large-scale battery energy storage, renewable energy-based microgrids with storage, waste-to-energy, carbon capture and storage, and artificial intelligence have huge potentials to accelerate the clean energy transformation," said ADB President Mr. Takehiko Nakao. "But technology by itself is not enough. Projects with advanced technologies must be accompanied by viable business models, stable regulation, and smart policies to deploy the technologies."

Despite Asia and the Pacific's rapid growth over the past few decades, there remain large development challenges. In the energy sector, 440 million people still lack access to electricity in developing Asia. Securing energy access for these people, most of whom live in remote rural areas and islands, will depend on innovative technologies.

To showcase creative solutions to these challenges and promote the next generation of clean energy entrepreneurs, ADB launched in 2017 the New Energy Leaders Program. During the opening plenary of ACEF 2018, seven New Energy Leaders received awards for 2018 for their work in businesses ranging from off-grid power solutions to large-scale wind and solar, energy efficiency, and digital customer solutions using big data and analytics.

Support for clean energy forms a cornerstone of ADB's efforts to combat climate change. Clean energy offers a win-win solution of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions while meeting developing Asia's need for new and expanded energy sources. In 2017, ADB invested over \$2 billion in climate mitigation finance in energy. Together with contributions from other sectors, ADB is on track toward doubling annual climate finance to \$6 billion by 2020, out of which \$4 billion will be for mitigation.

In Sri Lanka, ADB is providing \$200 million for a 100-megawatt wind power generation project—the first ever large-scale wind power project in the country. In the Philippines, ADB provided technical assistance and grant funds for a solar-diesel mini-grid to provide 24-hour access to electricity on Cobarador Island. In the People's Republic of China, ADB provided \$250 million in loans to a joint venture of Chinese and Icelandic companies to expand district heating services based on geothermal technology.

ADB, based in Manila, is dedicated to reducing poverty in Asia and the Pacific through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration. Established in 1966, it is owned by 67 members—48 from the region. In 2017, ADB operations totaled \$32.2 billion, including \$11.9 billion in cofinancing.—ADB ■

tor, and NGOs including development partners during extreme events; summarize implications for policy and sustainable ways forward to improve the state of knowledge and enhance policymaking; and recommend practical solutions to reduce the vulnerability of the agri-food systems to ENSO-induced and other climatic shocks.

Based on the feedback to the country notes and on in-depth information gathered during the workshops, IFPRI, together with the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security in Southeast Asia (CCAFS SEA), evaluated institutions, actions, and the political economy of responses of the five countries. In the upcoming report, CCAFS SEA provided detailed discussions on institutions, mechanisms, and past and present actions to build resilience and provide emergency response to ENSO-related shocks, and evaluated the efficacy and efficiency of these responses.

Based on the results of the evaluation, recommendations were enumerated in the report. Recommendations were developed on the ways to: better understand ENSO; improve legal frameworks, institutions and co-ordination for ENSO responses; design and implement ENSO preparedness plans; improve capacity building for ENSO responses/early forecasting; and provide and manage emergency funds.

Attention has also been given to women, children, ethnic minorities, and other marginalized groups who are the most vulnerable to natural disasters. All governments, development agencies, and NGOs are advised to target vulnerable groups in the ENSO preparation activities. ■

Eisen Bernardo is the Senior Communication Specialist for CCAFS Southeast Asia.

Ranch hands drive cattle to a new pasture against the backdrop of hills covered in wildflowers in April 2017 in Taft, California; the farming industry is bolstering outreach efforts amid a surge in suicides across the US. **PHOTO: AFP**



US farm belt tries to head off another surge in suicides

NEW YORK — Responding to signs of rising despair in rural America over a farming downturn exacerbated by the current trade war fears, agricultural leaders are mobilizing to try to prevent another suicide crisis.

Two high profile deaths in the past week, of celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain and fashion designer Kate Spade, have shined a spotlight on the issue of depression and suicide in the United States, where the latest data show rates are rising, especially in rural states.

Farm industry officials are bolstering outreach and counseling programs throughout the American farm belt and calling for more action from Washington.

“Things are tough in the countryside,” said John Sorbello, a vegetable and nursery farmer in upstate New York and a director of the state’s farm bureau, an affiliate of the nation’s biggest farm group.

Dairy farmers are facing especially tough times, he said.

“There’s nothing to do over the pricing of milk, they are worried about NAFTA, about the surplus in dairy products all over the world,” Sorbello said.

“It seems you have no control over it and it’s stressful.”

Earlier this year, one of the large dairy cooperatives took the drastic step of including suicide

prevention information with the monthly check.

“Some people thought it was too extreme,” Sorbello said. “But it got everybody’s attention.”

The outreach push comes amid a big surge in suicides throughout the United States. The suicide rate rose nearly 30 per cent between 1999 and 2016 -- and in many states by more than that -- according to a report this week from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The report did not break out individual industries, but 2016 CDC data showed US farmers have five times the rate of suicide as the broader population.

The US farm belt also has bad memories of the 1980s when a bruising industry downturn saw an explosion of agricultural workers taking their own lives.

- Crisis -

“Farmers and ranchers already have the highest suicide rates of any occupation,” said Matt Perdue, of the National Farmers Union.

Those who work in rural areas point to myriad factors, including commodity price volatility, more extreme weather and worsening isolation as more young people leave for the cities.

And making matters worse, “About 60% of rural residents live in areas that suffer from a mental health professional shortage,”

Perdue said.

The CDC study also pointed to research that suggests chronic exposure to pesticides “might affect the neurologic system and contribute to depressive symptoms.”

Financial stress is one factor that can lead to suicide and farm incomes have fallen around 50 percent since 2013 and revenues are expected in 2018 to come in at the lowest level since 2006. The National Farmers Union, at the urging of members who see growing numbers of growers fearful of losing the family farm, urged the US Department of Agriculture to “proactively address the farm suicide crisis.”

Lawmakers voted in 2008 to bolster mental health services in agricultural communities as part of an omnibus farm bill, but no funds have been allocated to the effort.

There is a chance Congress could provide support in a bill now being considered, but “it’s too early to make a prediction one way or the other,” Perdue said.

The troubles facing farmers extend well beyond the United States.

France in early 2018 boosted its funding for anti-suicide programs following a rise in the number of calls for help.

And India has also suffered a

wave of farm suicides after many in the sector became mired in debt.

‘Not an occupation’

NY FarmNet at Cornell University, which was founded in 1986 amid a rash of suicides, provides free aide to farmers in need.

“We send one financial consultant and one farm family consultant to each case, as we have found that even if the case presents itself as purely a financial matter, there are almost always underlying personal or communication issues that need attention,” said Hal McCabe, outreach director at NY FarmNet.

Hearing of rising concern in rural communities, the group has conducted suicide prevention workshops aimed mainly at agricultural services workers, such as bankers, suppliers or farm maintenance staff.

“While we cannot speak to suicides, as that data is very hard to ever come by, the types of calls we are getting are far more dire than in the past five-10 years,” McCabe said.

Ted Matthews, director of mental health outreach for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and a psychologist by training, will meet or phone any farmer under duress at no charge.—AFP ■

WORLD BRIEFS

Dozens injured as car crashes into supermarket in central Japan

MAEBASHI (JAPAN) — A car driven by a 55-year-old man crashed into a supermarket in Gunma Prefecture in central Japan on Sunday afternoon, injuring 14 people, police said.

Police arrested the driver, Katsuto Yajima, on suspicion of negligence causing injury. Three people were seriously injured, the police said.

The car had been parked in the supermarket’s parking lot before it crashed through the glass entrance doors, according to witnesses.

A store official said that the supermarket in the city of Shibukawa was busy at the time. —Kyodo News ■

Fire breaks out in BMW factory in southern Germany

BERLIN — A fire broke out at BMW plant in southern German state of Bavaria after magnesium parts caught fire on Sunday, local media reported.

Strong smoke is seen in urban area and local residents are asked to keep windows and doors closed. —Xinhua ■

Two killed in firing over land dispute

HATHRAS — Two persons were killed when rival groups opened fire at each other over a land dispute in Balna village, police said today.

Brijmohan (40) and Pratap Singh (50) were killed in the firing yesterday, they said.

One Rajkumar Yadav was seriously injured in the incident.

Heavy police force has been deployed in the village and a probe is underway. —PTI ■

Putin says ready to meet Trump 'as soon as' Washington is ready

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday said he was ready to meet his US counterpart Donald Trump as soon as Washington was ready, adding Vienna could be a possible venue for such a summit.

"As soon as the American side is ready this meeting would take place depending on my working schedule of course," Putin told reporters in the Chinese city of Qingdao.

"The US president himself repeatedly said that he would consider such a meeting helpful. I can confirm this. It's true," Putin said.

He said he did not discuss a possible meeting venue with Trump but "many" countries including Austria were keen to help in organising such a summit.

"But I believe it's a technical issue," he said.

"It's important for such meetings — if they take place — to have concrete contents."

The Wall Street Journal, citing a senior European official, reported that Putin asked Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz on a visit to Vienna earlier this week to help organise such a meeting and that Washington was considering it.



Putin said "many" countries including Austria were keen to help in organising such a US-Russia summit. **PHOTO: AFP**

Under the conservative Kurz, Austria has strived to act as a mediator between Russia and the West.

While the EU-state im-

posed sanctions on Russia over Crimea along with the rest of the bloc, Austria did not expel Russian diplomats like other Western nations following the

March poisoning of a Russian former double agent and his daughter in Britain, an attack London has accused Moscow of being behind. —AFP ■

Knife rampage aboard Japanese bullet train kills one, injures two

YOKOHAMA — A man with a knife went on a rampage aboard a shinkansen bullet train bound for Shin-Osaka Station from Tokyo late Saturday, killing one passenger and severely injuring two others, police said.

The police arrested Ichiro Kojima, a 22-year-old unemployed man, on suspicion of attempted murder when the Nozomi train made an emergency stop near Odawara Station southwest of Tokyo. Kojima told investigators he randomly stabbed the three because he was "feeling frustrated."

The incident occurred around 10 p.m. on the No. 12 car of the shinkansen train of 16 coaches, when it was traveling between Shin-Yokohama and Odawara stations. There were around 880 passengers aboard the Nozomi 265, the day's last train bound for Shin-Osaka, according to Central Japan Railway Co., also known as JR Central. The rampage on the Tokaido Shinkansen Line killed one man in his 30s, believed to be an employee of a company in Osaka. Two women, aged 26 and 27, sustained severe injuries but are not in life-threatening conditions, the police said.

Witnesses spoke of 20 to 30 passengers including many

young women panicking and escaping from the direction of the No. 12 car. The train was crowded with women thought to have attended an event.

Some of the women were crying as they were running to other coaches, shouting "Just keep going ahead" and "(the suspect) has a knife." One woman was holding a removed seat, apparently to protect herself.

The operators of shinkansen, often praised for its speed and punctuality, also boast its safety, with no fatalities having occurred due to derailments or malfunctions in its more than 50 years of service since 1964.

However, the high-speed trains have not been immune to crime. A few serious crimes have been committed on the trains, most recently in June 2015 when a 71-year-old man set himself on fire on a train, killing himself and another passenger.

The fire, which also occurred on the Tokaido Shinkansen Line, prompted shinkansen operators to increase patrols at stations and install security cameras on trains.

However, it is difficult to check passengers' baggage considering the huge numbers of people using shinkansen.—Kyodo News ■

Despite Trump deal, China's ZTE, Huawei to face closed doors in US market

WASHINGTON — Chinese telecoms companies like ZTE and Huawei face severely tightened access to the US market despite the Trump administration's deal this week to give ZTE a lifeline after it agreed to a steep fine.

Amid persistent worries that their phones, routers and other products will open a path for Beijing's spying on the United States, analysts say the US government will remain broadly closed to products of the two companies and that the US telecoms industry will remain under pressure to avoid their equipment.

Indeed, four Democratic and Republican senators, criticizing the deal that will permit ZTE to resume purchasing US electronics components, proposed legislation Thursday for an outright ban on the government buying products and services from both ZTE and Huawei. "Huawei and ZTE pose a serious threat to America's national security. These companies have direct links to the Chinese government and Communist Party," said Republican senator Marco Rubio. "Their products and services are used for espionage and intellectual property theft, and they have been putting the American people and economy at risk without consequence for far too long."

But experts say the move could hinder the growth of

next-generation 5G wireless networks in the United States. The two Chinese companies are poised to become global leaders in the 5G rollout, just beginning this year in several countries.

"The overall concern is that these companies are close to the Chinese government," said Paul Triolo, a China security specialist at the Eurasia Group. With fifth-generation mobile technology, he said, "the concern becomes magnified" because the technology is heavily cloud-based, potentially leaving sensitive data accessible by the service provider.

No proof of security threat

Indeed, US officials have repeatedly suggested that the two companies could design their

equipment to allow Chinese intelligence to hack into American networks and siphon off personal data and communications from cellphones. A 2012 congressional report said the use of Huawei and ZTE equipment in US critical infrastructure "could undermine core US national-security interests." In February, six top intelligence and security chiefs told a Senate panel they would not use equipment from either company.

"We are deeply concerned about the risks of allowing any company or entity that is beholden to foreign governments that don't share our values to gain positions of power inside our telecommunications networks," said FBI Director Christopher Wray.—AFP ■



US officials say China's telecoms giant ZTE poses an espionage threat to the United States. **PHOTO: AFP**

Find the leader: Kim's cat-and-mouse journey to Singapore

SINGAPORE—North Korea's capacity for distraction and sleight of hand was on show Sunday as leader Kim Jong Un flew to Singapore for his summit with US President Donald Trump.

No fewer than three aircraft made their way to Singapore from Pyongyang airport, a facility that frequently sees fewer than three international flights a day.

One of them was the ageing Soviet-made Ilyushin-62 that is Kim's personal jet — officially known as "Chammae-1", or Goshawk-1, after the North's national bird but perhaps more memorably dubbed "Air Force Un".

But while Singapore is well within its range, questions have been raised about its reliability and Kim, it turned out, was not on board.

Instead he flew on an Air China Boeing 747. According to flight tracking website Flightra-



Kim is welcomed by Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan (center-R) upon his arrival at Singapore International airport. **PHOTO: AFP**

dar24, it took off using flight number CA122, a standard designation for the airline's route from Pyongyang to Beijing.

In midair it changed its call-sign to CA061 and headed south.

In Singapore its high-profile passenger was met by Foreign

Minister Vivian Balakrishnan, who tweeted a picture of himself shaking hands with Kim, who wore a dark lapel-less suit.

Kim was driven into the city-state in a convoy of more than 20 vehicles, including an ambulance, with North Korean television cameramen filming his progress through the sunroofs.

Hundreds of Singaporeans lined the streets to capture images of their own of his black Mercedes Benz stretch limousine with tinted windows — not normally allowed in Singapore, even for the country's prime minister.

Reporters and photographers packed the pavements outside the St Regis hotel where Kim was to stay. Covers had been hung over the driveway and hotel security brought out additional potted plants to obstruct the view of the lobby.

Aside from three official photographs released by the Singapore government, there had been no public sighting of Kim nearly two hours after he landed.—AFP

Nicaragua violence rages as prospect of crisis talks hangs in limbo

MASAYA (NICARAGUA)—Masaya, a city battling at the front lines of Nicaragua's heated anti-government protests, once again became the scene of fierce street battles that a rights group said saw one man die of a bullet wound to the heart.

Firearm bursts rang out on Saturday in the city home to 100,000 people, where riots that started midday grew increasingly violent as masked demonstrators wielding homemade mortars and slingshots fought to fend off armed security forces.

Alvaro Leiva, head of the Nicaraguan Association for the Protection of Human Rights (ANPDH), said at least one sexagenarian had died after a bullet struck his heart.

Leiva said the gunman was a sniper — implying a member of Ortega's security forces or government-backed vigilantes.

The mortal wound came hours after the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH) had raised to 137 the death toll in the Central American country, where demonstrations demanding President Daniel Ortega's ouster have raged since 18 April.

At least two people had died in violent protests overnight, the CENIDH told AFP, one in the northern city of Jinotega and another in Managua.

Leiva said conditions were growing increasingly grave "because we are talking about crossfire, not tear gas or rubber bullets."

"The situation in this moment in Nicaragua is a crisis," he said. "We are asking the world to pay attention to Masaya."

The city just outside of the capital— known before for its

tree-lined streets, traditional crafts and nearby volcano of the same name — has taken on the appearance of a war zone.

Demonstrators, many of them young men, huddled Saturday behind barricades constructed from cobblestones, felled trees and sheet metal, the ground littered with broken glass and spikes to further guarantee

no cars would pass.

"We are fighting here because of the massacre of many people, the death of many children," one protestor told AFP, saying he's been actively demonstrating in Masaya for 15 days.

"We can say that between the government and the police, the police are supposed to protect the people," he said. "They're the

ones who are shooting bullets at us."

No political will

The young man who died in Jinotega was killed during an armed attack on protesters who were guarding a road barricade intended to keep security forces back, according to student organizers.

"Paramilitaries linked to the government gunned down boys who were fighting in the streets for liberty and democracy," said a statement from the city's student movement, calling it "a night of terror."

In Managua, a young motorcyclist died from a bullet to the neck after two armed men aboard motorcycles chased and shot him, according to local press.

Demonstrators continued to block roads throughout Nicaragua as part of the mass protests demanding the removal of Ortega, a former guerrilla who has held office for 11 years but who faces increasing opposition, even from onetime allies.

"Unfortunately they still aren't showing political will — they continue to kill people," one student leader, Victor Cuadras, told journalists upon landing in Managua after a trip to Washington. "They shed blood yesterday and early today," he said of Ortega's ruling Sandinista party.—AFP



An anti-government demonstrator holding a homemade mortar uses a slingshot during clashes with riot police at a barricade in the town of Masaya, a flashpoint city of anti-government protests demanding President Ortega's ouster. **PHOTO: AFP**

As G7 feuds, Xi and Putin play up their own club

SHANGHAI—The leaders of China and Russia Sunday praised the expansion of their regional security bloc at a summit which put on a show of unity in stark contrast to the acrimonious G7 meeting.

President Xi Jinping gave the leaders of Pakistan and India a "special welcome" to their first summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), in the eastern Chinese city of Qingdao, since their countries joined the group last year. Founded in 2001, the SCO also includes the former Central Asian Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani, whose country is an observer member, also attended the meeting as he seeks Chinese and Russian support following the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Tehran.

Warning that "unilateralism, trade protectionism and a backlash against globalisation are taking new forms", Xi spoke up for the "pursuit of cooperation for mutual benefit". While never mentioning the United States by name, he added: "We should reject the Cold War mentality and confrontation between blocs, and oppose the practice of seeking absolute security of oneself at the expense of others, so as to obtain security of all." Xi, whose government is locked in tough negotiations with the United States to avoid a trade war, said World Trade



A large video screen shows Chinese President Xi Jinping shaking hands with Russia's President Vladimir Putin before the summit. PHOTO: AFP

Organisation rules and the multilateral trading system should be upheld to build an open world economy.

"We should reject self-centred, shortsighted and closed-door policies," said Xi, whose own country has been accused of restricting broad access

by foreign firms to its huge market. Addressing the SCO leaders, Russian President Vladimir Putin said the addition of Pakistan and India means that the organisation "has become even stronger".

The show of unity was in marked contrast to the calamitous end to the Group of Seven meeting in Quebec City, after US President Donald Trump disowned a joint summit statement and lambasted Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as "dishonest" and "weak".

Responding to criticism of Russia in the G7 statement, Putin told reporters that the group should "stop this creative babbling and shift to concrete issues related to real cooperation".

The G7 text made no mention of Russia being invited back into the group despite Trump's support for such a move. Russia was

expelled in response to its 2014 annexation of Crimea.

Putin did not miss an opportunity to thumb his nose at the club of leading industrialised democracies, saying that the combined purchasing power of the SCO outstripped the G7. The People's Daily newspaper, the ruling Chinese Communist party mouthpiece, also took a jab at the group by tweeting two pictures side by side.

The first was the now famous photo of German Chancellor Angela Merkel flanked by leaders such as a furrow-browed French President Emmanuel Macron, all tensely facing off against Trump – the only one seated, with his arms crossed. The second depicted Xi at the centre of the SCO leaders striding forward together in smiling unison, a grinning Putin by his side. "G7 vs. SCO: two meetings on the same day," it taunted.—AFP ■

15 militants killed in airstrike, ground assault in Southern Philippines

MANILA — Philippine security forces launched on Sunday airstrikes and ground assault on Islamist militants' lair in Maguindanao province in southern Philippines, killing 15 militants and wounding eight others.

Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, an army commander in charge of the operations, said the pre-dawn assaults on Liguan marsh destroyed a bomb-making "factory" of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), a splinter group of the larger Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Sobejana said in an interview with a local media that 15 BIFF fighters were killed and eight others wounded in the offensive. The strikes also forced 1,700 families in the area to flee.—Xinhua ■

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(11/ 2018)

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Bollywood star Chopra apologises over 'Quantico' Hindu terror plot

NEW DELHI — Bollywood superstar Priyanka Chopra apologised Sunday after a furore over a US TV series that showed her uncovering a terror plot hatched by Indian Hindu nationalists.

The episode of spy thriller "Quantico" showed Chopra's character, an FBI agent named Alex Parrish, thwarting the plan and noticing one of the terrorists wearing a Hindu rosary.

The terrorists had tried to frame Pakistanis for the attack planned ahead of a summit on Kashmir, a disputed Himalayan territory that arch-rivals India and Pakistan claim as their own.

Kashmir has been a source of historical tension between the nuclear-armed neighbours who have fought two wars over it.

The episode, aired on June 1, triggered outrage in India with many fans taking to social media to "shame" the Indian-born actress and calling her a "traitor".

Chopra, a former Miss World, said she was "a proud Indian and that will never change".

"I'm extremely saddened and sorry that some sentiments have been hurt by a recent episode of Quantico," Chopra, 35, wrote on Twitter.

"That was not and would never be my intention. I sincerely apologise."

ABC Studios, the producers of the crime drama, have also offered an apology while defending Chopra who is the lead actor of the show.

"The episode has stirred a lot of emotion, much of which is unfairly aimed at Priyanka Chopra, who didn't create the show, nor does she write or direct it,"



Bollywood star Priyanka Chopra, who plays an FBI agent in 'Quantico', is the first Indian to headline a US network series. **PHOTO: AFP**

US media quoted the studio as saying in a statement.

"The show has featured antagonists of many different ethnicities and backgrounds, but in this case we inadvertently and regrettably stepped into a complex political issue. It was certainly not our intention to offend anyone."

Chopra has been trolled on Twitter since the telecast and a street protest was also held in New Delhi on Saturday by a fringe Hindu outfit that demanded she be sent to Pakistan as a punishment.

"Sell outs like her are an insult to India. She consciously consented for the act. Shame," tweeted Jagriti Shukla, a journalist. The government "should cancel @priyankachopra passport & should not allow her to enter our nation... Let her stay in Hollywood & lick Pakistan boots. Traitor," Sumit Kadel,

a film critic, said on the micro-blogging site.

Chopra, the first Indian to headline a US network series, is hugely popular among Indian fans and feted for having made it in the Western entertainment industry.

But recently she was criticised by Hindu hardliners for visiting Rohingya Muslims and ignoring persecuted Hindus during her visit to Bangladesh as a UNICEF goodwill ambassador.

She was also accused of disrespecting Indian sensibilities by wearing a dress that exposed her legs during a meeting with Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Berlin last year.

Chopra, who is one of the highest-paid Indian actors, featured last year in "Baywatch", based on the television series of the same name. — AFP ■

Dance star Akram Khan returns to roots in last solo show

LONDON — Britain's best-known choreographer Akram Khan has drawn on his roots for the final solo dance performance of his career, with a show that pays tribute to Indian soldiers who fought in World War I.

"Xenos" — which means stranger in Greek — opens with two musicians on stage, playing an interpretation of Indian music in a festive atmosphere.

Dressed for a performance, a dancer arrives, stumbling. The lights flicker; the music stalls and the dancer, a former soldier, is overcome by memories of war.

For the show, which he choreographed and stars in, the 43-year-old Khan returns to the traditional Indian classical dance kathak that he learned as a boy, and which has been present throughout his career.

"That is my home if you like — the most amount of time I spent in my life in one form was in kathak," he told AFP.

But in place of the elegant grace of that dance, Khan's movements are disrupted. His clothes and accessories become chains that tie his hands to his feet.

The musicians leave the stage, parts of the set disappear, as if sucked away into the darkness, and the dancer finds himself in the middle of no man's land.

"This is not war — it is the ending of the world," a voice says from offstage.

The performance was commissioned by 14-18 Now, the British organisation tasked with a programme of cultural events

to mark the anniversary of the 1914-1918 war.

Almost 1.2 million Indians took part in the war, fighting for the British empire.

"I wanted to focus on them because their stories were never truly told," said Khan, who was born in London to Bangladeshi parents.

"When I studied history, they were never there. I was pretty frustrated by that fact, that their story was omitted and they sacrificed their lives."

Physical battle

Khan, who in 2012 snapped his Achilles tendon and feared his dance career was over, admits the show has tested him.

"It was a very tough process, physically. I am in a good place now, but through the process of creating I was really uninspired from my body," he said.

"I know my body doesn't respond the way it used to, so that's a fight, in itself, and that has to do with time."

Since he created his company in 2000, Khan has become a leading figure on the contemporary dance scene, and was awarded an MBE in 2005.

He has worked with world-class artists from ballerina Sylvie Guillem to visual artist Anish Kapoor, composer Steve Reich and singer Kylie Minogue.

He won an Olivier Award in 2012 for DESH, a highly personal solo show about being a child of immigrants. One of the highlights of his career remains choreographing a section of the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games. — AFP ■

Banderas: Hayek stayed mum on abuse 'to protect us' from Weinstein

LOS ANGELES — Salma Hayek never told Antonio Banderas about the abuse to which she says Harvey Weinstein subjected her, according to the Spanish actor, who classes her a close friend.

When he learned about it years after the pair had filmed the Weinstein-produced movie "Frida," Banderas picked up the phone and called to ask her why she had never said anything.

She said she was "trying to protect us." Hayek was one of the many alleged victims of the disgraced film producer, who had the power to make — or break — a

career. She said he had harassed her for sexual favors and forced her to do a lesbian sex scene in "Frida." "I've worked with Harvey Weinstein, he has produced films I have been in, but I was not aware" of the allegations, Banderas told AFP in a telephone interview. "When the issue of Salma came up, the first thing I did was call her to ask, 'Why didn't you tell me anything?'"

She told Banderas she was trying to protect herself and her friends, because she "knew he was a very powerful character and that if she said something to us

and we confronted him, we would pay a very high price."

Mexican-born Hayek, writing in The New York Times last December, described Weinstein as a "monster" and detailed the tortuous filming of a movie that won her a best-actress Oscar.

They would go on to work together in other films, including "Once Upon a Time in Mexico" and "Puss in Boots." The Weinstein scandal first erupted last October, drawing in other big names in the entertainment industry and leading to movements like #MeToo and Time's Up. — AFP ■



Antonio Banderas says Salma Hayek never said anything about the abuse she had suffered at the hands of Harvey Weinstein. **PHOTO: AFP**

OPPO launches F7, F7 Youth with new brand ambassadors

OPPO launched two new smart phones, the F7 and F7 Youth, at Meliá Hotel in Yangon on 30 May alongside its brand ambassadors actress Wutt Hmone Shwe Yi and singer Shwe Htoo, customer relations ambassadors actress Paing Phyo Thu, model and actor Paing Ta Khon, singer Myo Gyi, and other celebrities.—GNLM



Brand Ambassadors Wutt Hmone Shwe Yi and Shwe Htoo on stage at the launch event of OPPO's new line of smartphones. **PHOTO: OPPO**

Polish folk instrument revival brings lost music to life

KAMINSKO (POLAND) —Dancing couples spin, whirl and pirouette on their heels transported by the lively tempo of traditional Polish folk dances brought to life on rustic instruments, some plucked straight out of the Middle Ages.

The spirited rhythms of dances like mazurkas, obereks or owijoks played at a popular annual folk music festival in the Polish capital, Warsaw, emerge from the belly of the Kalisz bass.

The distant cousin of Renaissance and Baroque-era bass viols, it was made by peasants living near the eponymous small central town until the early 20th century and then all but forgotten.

Musician and instrument-maker Mateusz Raszewski is reviving the art of designing, building, stringing and playing this unique bass, traditionally carved by hand out of a single block of softwood like poplar or willow.

Its design was “only officially documented in the 1950s and it exists only in a small region near the river Prosna,” the bearded 38-year-old, dressed in a thick flannel shirt and leather apron, told AFP, in his workshop in the village of Kaminsko, just north of

the western Polish city of Poznan.

It is reminiscent of a cello, but with a shorter, thick neck and just two, or sometimes three, strings.

One foot of its bridge pierces its front panel to act as a sound post sending vibrations to the back panel of the sound box.

“This is a very old design that one finds in the Welsh crwth,” Raszewski says, referring to an archaic type of bowed lyre, a string instrument, popular in medieval Europe.

“God only knows how these Kalisz peasants managed to find this design,” he added.

‘Like in the forest’

Each instrument was unique, depending on the technical know-how, materials and tools available to the peasants. “Some used a candle to cast a shadow of a bass on the wall so they could copy its design,” Raszewski told AFP, recounting an old trick of the folk instrument trade. Raszewski uses axes, saws and chisels similar to those that would have been used centuries ago. He also uses metal nails to build the basses, saying that this would be “unthinkable to modern luthiers” who use pegs and glue.—AFP ■

Tourism keeps Viet Nam’s ancient water puppets afloat

HANOI — In a darkened theatre in central Hanoi, a wooden dragon emerges from a pool to the sound of cymbals crashing in a traditional water puppet show that lures hundreds of tourists daily but is largely shunned by locals.

Backstage behind a thin bamboo screen, around 20 puppeteers slosh around waist-deep in rubber overalls wielding the marionettes with long rods.

“The puppets are pretty heavy... and the water also creates resistance,” said puppeteer Nguyen Thu Hoai, who swapped her galoshes for flip-flops between sold-out shows.

“But our years of training and experience helps us control them,” added Hoai, who like many of her colleagues graduated from Hanoi’s College of Theatre and Cinema.

Some of the puppets weigh as much as 10 kilogrammes (22 pounds) and the largest ones, like the one-metre-tall (three-foot) fairy, require four people to manipulate.

The shows at Hanoi’s Thang Long theatre have become a staple on the well-trodden tourist circuit and draw thousands every week, including many first-time viewers.

“I’ve never seen a puppet show that way with the water,” American tourist Caroline Thomoff told AFP after a show.

“I could really see people fishing, dancing and all the

different performances that happened.”

Viet Nam is the birthplace of the centuries-old art form that emerged in the northern rice paddies as entertainment for farmers.

The earliest record of the performances is on a 12th century stele that still stands at a pagoda in northern Ha Nam province, but historians say water puppetry likely originated even earlier.

The shows traditionally featured age-old fables and mythical lore, like the famous Hanoi parable about a Viet Nameese king’s treasured sword that was used to fight off Chinese invaders.

Overseas appeal

The tropes haven’t changed much, and neither have the hand-carved wooden figures of animals, boats, farmers or fish painted in brilliant golds, reds and greens, according to Chu Luong, the director of Thang Long theatre.

“When our children and later generations see performances they will be just like the original versions,” he told AFP.

Despite its ancient roots — or perhaps because of them — the shows draw little attention from local Viet Nameese viewers, especially millennials.

More than half of Viet Nam’s 93 million people are under 30 and often prefer their entertainment in digital form.

“There are new types of entertainment now, electronic devices and the internet, so apart from festivals we can’t perform all the time because (local) people don’t watch a lot,” said Pham Dinh Viem, a third-generation puppet carver from a craft village in Thai Binh province.

Like other puppet craftsmen in the village, Viem doesn’t earn enough to support his family making the marionettes so he picks up work on the side as a manual labourer.

But he perseveres, hopeful the next generation might pick up a passion he says runs in his blood.

Yet as interest wanes at home, there are signs water puppetry may be gaining traction abroad.

Canadian Director Robert Lepage returned to Toronto this year with an adaptation of Stravinsky’s opera “The Nightingale”, in which the orchestra pit was transformed into a pool of water for singers-come-puppeteers commanding marionettes.

For puppetmaker Viem, such innovative approaches may be the secret to reviving the centuries-old tradition among locals.

“If the script and the performance don’t change, it’s impossible to serve the audience in the long-term,” he said.

—AFP ■



Viet Nam is the birthplace of the centuries-old art of water puppets, which emerged in the northern rice paddies as entertainment for farmers. **PHOTO: AFP**

AFC fitness coaching course concludes in Yangon

A conclusion ceremony of the AFC Fitness Coaching Certificate course (Level 1B) was held at the conference hall of the Myanmar Football Federation (MFF) in Yangon on Saturday.

The ceremony was attended by MFF's CEO U Bhone Naing Zaw, Instructor from AFC Mr. Abdolohssein Parnow and offi-

cials from the MFF and trainees.

As it was an AFC Fitness Coaching Certificate course (Level 1B), all the trainees were those who had passed the Level 1A course. "After the course, they need to undergo sustainable study. The MFF is also arranging to launch such courses again. We aim to have many talented fit-

ness coaches in Myanmar, and we want them to try their best," said U Bhone Naing Zaw in his speech at the ceremony. The ceremony concluded with the certificate being given to each and every trainee who had passed the course by Mr. Abdolohssein Parnow, followed by his words of greeting.—Lynn Thit(Tgi) ■

Myanmar to attend 68th FIFA Congress in Russia

OFFICIALS from the Myanmar Football Federation (MFF), led by MFF's President U Zaw Zaw, will attend the 68th FIFA Congress in Moscow, Russia, which will be hosted on 12 and 13 June, according to a statement on the MFF website.

FIFA's governing body will hold its congress meeting ahead of the men's World Cup in Russia.

The 68th Congress of FIFA in Moscow will be launched before the first match of the FIFA World Cup. Russia and Qatar are hosting the 2018 and 2022 editions, respectively. The United States, Mexico and Canada have submitted a unified bid for the 2026 tournament, and FIFA has invited countries from its member associations to bid on hosting,

according to football officials from Russia.

The congress will decide on hosting for the 2026 tournament.

The FIFA congress has been held annually since 1998. It was previously held every two years. Congresses were not held between 1915 and 1922 and 1939 and 1945 due to the first and second world wars.—Lynn Thit(Tgi) ■

Neymar set for start as Spain, France labour in warm-ups

MOSCOW — Neymar is set to make his first start since February in Brazil's final World Cup warm-up on Sunday as he battles for full fitness after Cristiano Ronaldo touched down in Russia with European champions Portugal.

And as the clock ticks down to Thursday's World Cup opener in Moscow between hosts Russia and Saudi Arabia, fancied teams France and Spain failed to impress in their final friendlies.

Neymar, who broke a bone in his foot in February, made an explosive return to action against Croatia in Liverpool last weekend, scoring a stunning goal in a 2-0 win for the five-time world champions after coming on as a substitute.

The Paris Saint-Germain star declared himself "80 per cent" fit and Sunday's run-out in Vienna should leave him fully primed for Brazil's opener

against Switzerland on 17 June.

Brazil coach Tite is approaching Sunday's game with a certain amount of trepidation.

"Emotionally, this match could be the most difficult," he said. "That's because it falls one week before our first World Cup game, and there's a risk of injury, of a loss of confidence."

Although Neymar has trained normally this week, he may not play the full 90 minutes in Vienna, according to the Selecao's doctor, Rodrigo Lasmar.

Drawn in Group E, Brazil, who are second behind defending world champions Germany in the FIFA rankings, will face Costa Rica and Serbia after Switzerland.

Ronaldo's Portugal arrived on Saturday to begin final preparations for a campaign that pits them against arch-rivals Spain in Group B.—AFP ■

Salah joins Egypt training, but doesn't take part

CAIRO — Liverpool star Mohamed Salah turned up for Egypt training in Cairo on Saturday ahead of the Pharaohs' departure for the World Cup in Russia but didn't take part, AFP witnessed. Thousands of supporters turned up to watch Egypt's final, late night training session before taking flight for Russia, cheering wildly.

The training session began just before 10pm.

Although dressed in kit, Salah stood around in the middle of the pitch chatting to back-room staff while his team-mates trained.

The record seven-time African champions have qualified for the World Cup for only the third time and first since 1990.

They begin their Russian campaign on 15 June against twice former winners Uruguay.

Salah has been picked in the Egypt squad despite suffering from a shoulder injury picked up in Liverpool's 3-1 Champions League final defeat to Real



Mohamed Salah carries the weight of Egyptian expectations on his shoulders at the World Cup. **PHOTO: AFP**

Madrid that many fans feared would keep him out of the global football showpiece.

After scoring 44 goals for Liverpool last season following his move from Roma, Salah is vital to Egyptian hopes in Russia.

The Egyptian football federation said after his injury that he could be out for three weeks, meaning he would miss their opening Group A match

but could then subsequently be available against Russia and Saudi Arabia.

The national team's doctor, Mohamed Abou al-Ela told ON Sport TV that they would soon know when Salah will be fit to play and to what extent he'll be available in Russia. "We won't be able to tell until after two days," he said, declining to give any more details.—AFP ■

Santa Cruz wins rematch to hold onto WBA featherweight title

LOS ANGELES — Mexican boxer Leo Santa Cruz retained his WBA belt by earning a unanimous decision victory over Abner Mares on Saturday in a rematch of a 2015 featherweight title fight. Santa Cruz improved to 34-1-1 with 19 career knockouts by winning on all three judges scorecards, 115-113, 116-112, 117-111 at the Staples Center arena. "I did what I had to do to win the fight," Santa Cruz said. "Mares is a tough fighter. Thank God I got the victory."

Santa Cruz won despite suffering a cut over his left eye which was the result of a head butt from Mares in the eighth round. The cut bled for the remainder of the fight but didn't appear to bother Santa Cruz much. The pair fought once before on 29 August, 2015 as Santa Cruz also won that one but by a majority decision.

After that victory, Santa Cruz actually lost the title to Carl Frampton in July 2016, but

regained it back in January 2017.

Santa Cruz said he wasn't going to be slowed down by the cut over his eye.

"A cut is a cut. It is just blood. It wasn't bothering my eyes. It just gives me more motivation," he said.

Santa Cruz also said that he wants his next fight to be against Gary Russell for the WBC featherweight title. Mares, also of Mexico, drops to 31-3-1 (15 KOs) as he pushed for a third fight between the two. "I am sorry I came out short," said Mares. "It is always a problem trying to get inside on him. I fought my heart out but at the end of the day I did my best. 'Let's do a third fight.'"

On the undercard, WBC super welterweight champ Jermell Charlo successfully defended his belt for the third time, by flooring Austin Trout twice en route to a 12-round majority decision. Charlo improved to 31-0 overall, while Trout fell to 31-5.—AFP ■